

HOT WATER BREATHWORK

by
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It is good to remember that we are not able to integrate huge amounts of traumatic material or extremely heavy emotions in too short a period of time: If we were able to do that, we would not have suppressed and denied them in the first place.

SOME HISTORY

In the seventies, when Leonard Orr started to do breathwork, it was always conducted in warm water. He immersed clients in a hot tub using a nose clip and a snorkel. In those early days Leonard even considered it was the warm water that produced the results. And the results were quite remarkable. People had memories of birth and early childhood, which was one of the reasons he called the process “rebirthing”. Their breathing rhythm would change and they would experience all kind of energy patterns running wild in their bodies. Afterwards, the clients felt elated -though nobody really understood what had happened to them- just that the whole process made them feel tremendously well.¹

It took some time to understand that it was not so much the warm water, which caused these interesting and sometimes beautiful experiences. Rather it was the breathing that had the tendency to become connected specifically while breathing through a snorkel.² So the idea of “dry” rebirthing was born.

HOLISTIC INTEGRATIVE BREATHWORK

My colleague, Hans Mensink and I, have been teaching breathwork since 1979. Our vision was to put together a three-year training program for breathwork therapists. In 1987 we had reached our goal: From a five months course in '79 the work had evolved organically into the three-year training program we had been aiming for.

After many years of working with the breath, Hans and I decided to rename our work into Holistic Integrative Breathwork Therapy ®. By doing so we disassociated ourselves from “Rebirthing” as we intend to focus specifically on integration of thoughts and feelings, using breathwork as our primary tool. This enabled us to really set a quality standard for our work, ensuring that our students become qualified people who have had a thorough training and working experience.

PHILOSOPHY

Life wants to be lived and experienced fully but many people live their lives as if they are half-asleep, and do not experience life’s fullness at all. Most of us are marked by the deep sense of separation that we suffered at birth. People have things happen to them in their lives that are so painful and/or frightening that they cannot deal with them, and they become repressed. These repressed experiences are, however, stored up in our unconscious, waiting for an opportunity to be experienced to their conclusion and integrated. We all have repressed a lot of past sadness, fear, anger and other unpleasant experiences. This can have a tremendous impact on our energy system and our feeling of well being. In some people it may

¹ Leonard Orr & Sondra Ray: *“Rebirthing in the new Age”* 1977, p.41-42

² Leonard Orr: *Lecture in Bussum, Holland, May 1979*

manifest as a very low energy level that eventually can lead to a depression. Others, in order not to feel their repressed emotions, will experience a very high level of energy, which produces an urge to go into action, like i.e. a workaholic. In one way or the other, repressing our feelings often without us being aware of it, may diminish our true sense of being alive,

The way we can use breathing to help us integrate suppressed thoughts and feelings is by connecting the inhale with the exhale in a rather gentle and relaxed rhythm. By doing this, our attention is guided into the body and therefore into the present moment, the here and now. When the breathing starts to become round and “circular”, it brings those thoughts and feelings to our consciousness that were previously repressed. One could say; thoughts and feelings that are not “rounded off” get the chances they have been waiting for to be re-examined and integrated.

As Leonard & Laut wrote: “Every thought in the mind has a corresponding feeling in the body, and, when you are experiencing any kind of emotion or feeling, you can “tune in” to exactly what it feels like and you can notice exactly where you are feeling it in your body.”³ Breathing supports us in a very gentle and subtle way to achieve just that. It easily accesses these hidden memories.

WARM WATER BREATHWORK

Warm water breathwork is the breathwork technique done in the way Leonard Orr started to do Rebirthing in the beginning. People breathe immersed in warm water, usually in a hot tub, large enough to accommodate 3 to 9 people. It can also be done in a bathtub, accompanied by someone sitting next to the tub.

It generally happens in the following way: Accompanied by one or preferably two other people, a person puts on a nose clip, immerses her/himself in water at about 37°C, then turns onto his/her stomach and breathes rhythmically through a snorkel. This is a rather rudimentary description of an beautiful and profound process, on which I will expand extensively below.

Having people breathe in warm water -while the facilitators carry and support them carefully and lovingly- will often bring womb and birth-memories co consciousness. For example, blissful feelings of floating, a feeling of being trapped in too narrow a space, feeling the urge to push hard with the head and feelings of separation.

Because this powerful method brings up such deep issues, it has to be used with wisdom and care, and requires both personal experience and a proper knowledge of technique. Let me mention here that it is necessary to give our clients between seven to ten “dry” breathwork sessions to prepare them for this deeper form of breathwork. This preparation enables them to be at ease with their breathing, their emotions and with experiencing larger amounts of energy than they are accustomed to in ordinary daily life.

We use the warm water breathwork for several reasons:

- *It can be a wonderful experience of relaxation, pleasure and bliss.
- *It may help to bring hidden, traumatic memories of birth to the surface, which need to be integrated.
- *It helps us to regain a feeling of innocence with the closeness of other people’s bodies.
- *It helps to regain a sense of appreciation for our bodies.

³ Jim Leonard & Phil Laut: „*Rebirthing, the science of enjoying all of your life*“ 1983,. Page23

These are the most essential elements that must be taken into account in order to do this kind of breathwork well.

Physical preparation

- *The body
- *Cleaning in and around the tub
- *The area for integration

Naked or not?

- *How people feel about their bodies
- *Careful and respectful holding

Psychological preparation

- *Deciding upon a theme
- *Fear of water and how to go into the water

Being in the tub

- *Temperature of the water
- *The amount of time spent in the water
- *Positions in the water
- *Going beyond boundaries

Getting out of the tub

- *The way to the mattress
- *Completion of the session and integration
- *Being received
- *Dealing with large amounts of life energy

HOW TO PREPARE PHYSICALLY

The body and the cleaning in and around the tub

It seems obvious, but it needs nevertheless to be said, that before we get into the water we have to wash and clean ourselves thoroughly, and if our hair is longer than about 15 centimetres or four inches we need to bind it in some way. After a day of using the hot tub, even with a small group of people, we leave “physical stuff” behind (little particles of skin, hair, tears, and snot) as well as “psychic stuff” (non-physical energies such as emotions) that pollutes both the water in, as the air around the tub. This makes it necessary to use a fine fishing net to clean the surface of the water regularly, and to clean the atmosphere with crystals, incense or whatever you prefer to use for that purpose.

Preparing the area for integration

The experience of warm water breathwork is very powerful. People often feel very vulnerable after having been in the hot water and therefore need a safe and cosy space to lie down in to recover and complete their session. This place must be prepared before the session begins. A mattress or a couple of blankets to lie on, covered with towels to absorb the water, will provide sufficient softness and comfort. It is also useful to have some cushions at hand, not just to support the client’s head but his/her knees as well, so they can relax their stomach when they lie on their back. As in any breathwork session it is fine to experiment- if necessary- with different positions, be it on the back, on the side or sitting up. Lying on the side will help the clients to feel more secure, especially when birth memories come up and they want to move into a foetal position.

NAKED OR NOT?

There are several issues around nudity in hot water breathwork that need thorough consideration. How people feel about their bodies and the way we hold them are themes that influence each other very much.

How people feel about their bodies

People vary a lot in how they feel about their bodies. Some are totally comfortable being nude, whereas others feel extremely awkward and shy. Although it is rather common to do this kind of work in the nude, it is not a must and should therefore not be imposed upon a client. People who, for a variety of reasons, do not want to be naked can simply put on a bathing suit and, in respect for their feelings I will do so myself, so they are not confronted with too much nakedness. This is both a question of respect and also of having the right professional attitude. Trying to go further than a client is ready to go only slows down the process instead of supporting it.

Warm water breathwork reconciles people with their bodies. I have observed several clients who had many judgements about their bodies in the beginning of their process and did not want to be naked at all. Without exception, these clients, after a period of time, became so much more self confident and comfortable about themselves – and their bodies- that being nude was no longer an item.

Careful and respectful holding

Holding and carrying clients in the water is a very delicate matter. It requires that we are conscious and highly careful and sensitive about where we touch them and where our bodies touch, whether they are clothed or naked. If you had a child sitting on your lap you would not touch his/her genitals nor, for example would you touch a girl's just-budding breasts. In the hot water we are working with the inner child, a part of us that is usually very timid. This part of us longs to be respected just the way it is.

However much we, as grown up people, might think we are longing for sexual relationship, deep down our first need is safety, connectedness, being held, loved and cared for- it is not for being directly sexually touched. Many people have suffered abuse in one form or another. We would not want such experience to be repeated “unconsciously” and cause further retraumatisation instead of healing.

Case History

I receive a hot water session from a male colleague. Through the issues that come up I feel a lot of vulnerability and hurt. I lift my head out of the water because I want to cuddle and be held and he supports my process by doing just that. After some time and a lot of connected breathing I start to notice that he is very careful to not let my genitals touch his leg as I am sitting on his lap. I feel deeply respected and safe because of his carefulness. I become conscious that in other sessions my facilitator has not always been as precise and careful with me in his or her behaviour.

HOW TO PREPARE PSYCHOLOGICALLY AND HOW TO GO INTO THE WATER

Deciding upon a theme

The first time a client does hot water breathing, it is usually not necessary to decide upon a theme for the session. Just discuss whatever feeling and/or fears the client has and help him/her to relax. Later on in the process you may well work with a certain theme. Often this will turn out to be connected to some very early psychological material that the hot water will help to become conscious of.

Fear of water and how to go into the water

Many of us are unconsciously frightened of water. Even if, as adults we know how to swim and dive, the act of going into the hot water with the intention of experiencing ourselves on a deeper level can make old fears resurface. It is obvious that we can not force our clients to just go into the water; put on a nose clip, immerse themselves and start to breathe through a snorkel. (Although I still see that happen sometimes during a training when someone inexperienced is facilitating the session.) We have to talk and “play” a little to help the client adjust to these different circumstances, just as we would with a child who is anxious.

Case history

Mary is already trembling with fear as we go towards the tub for her first hot water session. She is a good swimmer and does not understand her own fear. I reassure her that we will not do anything she feels too uncomfortable with and that we will move into the water slowly. In exactly that moment Paul, who is already breathing under water, starts to kick and scream which makes her fear even worse. I make her laugh a little, saying how exceptional it is that he is able to scream under water like a whale. Together we sit on the edge of the tub while I coax her to move her feet, her lower legs and then even her upper legs inch by inch into the water. Finally we are in, waist deep, I ask her to bend her legs and let the water rise up to her chin while I do the same. I keep making little jokes that make her laugh and when I see she starts to enjoy it we put our snorkels in and sink even deeper into the water so that our mouths are just under the surface. We keep eye contact, breathing calmly through our snorkels making faces to each other. It feels like two children playing together, trying out how far we can go. Suddenly she reaches towards the edge of the tub, picks up her nose clip and puts it on. I do the same. Our noses are in the water now too. She starts to really trust the process and I ask her if it is OK to turn her over so she can rest with her stomach on my knee and her head in the water. When she does, the session is well on its way and we have already worked through a lot of fears, which she has handled well. The way her breathing has relaxed and deepened, the way she finally has been able to turn onto her stomach with her head under water and her humour about the situation is a good indication that she has integrated her fears.

IN THE TUB

Temperature of the water

The temperature of the water in the tub should be close to the temperature as we experienced in our mother’s womb: 37 to 38 degrees. When the water is cooler than this, the process slows down, which is not very helpful. When it is warmer the process sometimes speeds up so much that the client is not able to integrate the experience fully. Another reason that the temperature of the water should not be too high is to avoid taking risks with people who have any form of physical weakness, e.g. unknown heart conditions, etc. The right temperature of the water is also important for the facilitators, who need to keep a clear head in order to guide their clients skilfully through their process.

Because the water is warm, the same temperature as inside a human body, and because we are carried with caring and loving attention, once we are in the water we usually start to relax. We seem to float the way we floated in the womb. In some cases, this may last throughout the period we spend in the water. But it is quite likely that through this relaxation we also become aware of those areas where we have tensions. Sondra Ray mentions in her book “Loving relationships”⁴, which is a key book on Rebirthing, a mechanism, which she

⁴ Sondra Ray: “Loving Relationships” 1980, p.34.

calls a law, “Love brings up anything unlike itself”. In the same way the mechanism “Relaxation brings up anything unlike itself” is at work here. These tensions may be physical and/or emotional, and sometimes very vivid images and memories may accompany them.

Sometimes an amazing thing happens when there are “co-incidental circumstances”, that start to bring up exactly those memories that are important and relevant for the client: Circumstances such as some other people moving wildly in the water or making sounds.

When we are able to keep breathing in a connected way and relaxing into whatever sensations come up, we will “breathe through” them. Through doing so, we stop suppressing the hidden thoughts and feelings and instead become conscious of them. This process leads inevitably to integration. The body relaxes, the emotions calm down and the mind will often come up with new insights just by itself.

As I said above, when the water is a lot warmer than 38 degrees, the sensations we experience are more likely to become unpleasant and the amount of material being activated, i.e. brought to consciousness, in a short period of time may become too overwhelming. It thus becomes hard to relax into whatever is coming up and to bring it to integration. We then tend to go into acting out our feelings, instead of feeling them and relaxing into them. Sometimes, like in any kind of therapeutic work, it is OK to act out for a while and to go into our little drama. But in my experience real integration takes place in relaxation and not in acting out the trauma or the drama.

It is good to remember that we are not able to integrate huge amounts of material or extremely strong emotions in too short a period of time. If we were able to that, we would not have suppressed and denied them in the first place.

This leads us to the point where we can see how very important it is to be precise about the amount of time someone stays in the water.

The amount of time spent in the water

It is important to be precise about the length of time someone spends in the water. In the past we let people stay as long in the water as it took for the session to come to its natural conclusion. The result was that the sessions often took a very long time. In the end, people did reach some kind of integration but they often felt groggy and ungrounded. This did not help them much to get a clear mind and moreover, during a training it was hard to lead the students on into the next part of the program.

Besides that, even when the water was the right temperature, facilitators sometimes became so light-headed through the steam and the heat of the water that they lost their overview and sometimes nearly fainted. This is not really helpful when you want to be full of attention for your client.

We decided to experiment with the time that clients should stay in the water. We found that in most cases about 20 minutes is sufficient to bring up a manageable amount of material for integration after the person has left the water. Of course we do not sit by the hot tub with a stopwatch, but we advise those giving the session in general to take their client out after about 20 minutes. We also consider that when a facilitator no longer feels good in the water it is as good an indication as the feelings of a client to get out of the water and complete the session on a mattress.

Being in the warm water for about 20 minutes gives the therapist ample opportunity to correct the breathing rhythm (if necessary) and get tuned into and connected with the client on a deep level. Similarly the client has enough time to get the breathing rhythm well started, to get into the feeling of being carried and held, and to experience whatever is there for him/her to experience.

Positions in the water

If people are not yet very experienced in warm water breathwork, working in a team with two people, one leading the session & the other assisting, gives the client a wonderful feeling of safety and being abundantly cared for.

During the time in the water, the facilitator together with the client may choose various positions. One possibility is to carry our client face down, supporting his/her stomach on our knees or with our hand. Our free hand can keep the snorkel from slipping under the water and thus prevent water from getting into it. No one wants to choke their client! In this position you will notice that the more the client relaxes the more her/his body will bend over, with the head as well as the lower back sinking deeper into the water. Indeed, it is a good idea to help clients to relax that way by softly touching their neck and lower back.

If, however, clients remain fearful and we don't succeed in "persuading" them to put their head under the water, we can simply carry them, lying on their back, supporting their head and eventually their knees in our arms. Sometimes it will be necessary, in order to give them a greater feeling of safety, that they are allowed to breathe in a sitting position. In both positions it is easy to communicate with them or to have them open their eyes if there is emotion or fear coming up. Having their eyes open may increase the clients' sense of security because they can see that they are not alone with what they are going through.

Case history

A young man, Tom, is breathing under water. After a rather long period he suddenly starts to cough and gets very agitated. He struggles to get his head out of the water. I hold him in my arms and he clings to me with all his might. I tell him that I will support him and that it is safe for him to have these physical memories about his birth. He relaxes a little and goes back to his breathing rhythm. His breathing becomes very strenuous. He opens his mouth wide and his breathing nearly stops. Around his neck a red mark appears and looking into his throat, I see how from deep down fluid starts to fill his mouth. He is very frightened and obviously feels as if he is suffocating. I ask him to look into my eyes, and I guide his breath by breathing together with him in a rather fast and shallow way. Focusing on this breathing rhythm, helps him to stay aware of his feelings instead of being subjected to them. Suddenly he shakes his head wildly back and forth, breathes in and lets out one loud scream. Then his breath comes in long, deep and free draughts. He looks very relaxed and happy. He then tells me that he was born with the umbilical cord twice around his neck and how the midwife had to 'unwind' it. He had an enormous amount of amniotic fluid in his lungs and nearly suffocated.

A few weeks later he reports that he feels much less 'trapped' in certain life situations and that his feeling of inner safety has grown enormously.

In various positions we can easily guide our clients' breathing rhythm with our hands, softly pressing on the chest and the back in the rhythm we want them to go into and breathe with. Even with their heads under water, clients can understand an instruction when it is slowly spoken into the snorkel. In fact, when people become experienced in breathing through a snorkel they are even able to laugh, cry, scream or talk without lifting their head out of the water.

Going beyond boundaries

It may be clear that I consciously choose sometimes to work towards the point where clients will go a little bit beyond their well-known boundaries; boundaries that are determined by their fears and beliefs. However, we have all put up boundaries for a particular reason, and

forcing someone to go beyond them would be “bad manners” in therapy and not really helpful. There is another moment in which going beyond our boundaries is important. It is the moment the facilitator begins to lead the client out of the water. We often observe how another very interesting process starts to occur just then – an element of the clients past is recreated. The moment for the client to come out of the water may seem to be determined by objective factors such as the temperature of the water, the time limit set by the trainers, or the grogginess of the facilitator(s). *Throughout 20 years of experience with warm water breathwork I have observed that the moment of emergence is practically always the recreation of an aspect of the clients birth.* We so regularly notice the synchronicity in these events that there seems to be a law at work here.

This brings us directly to the next item.

Getting out of the tub

I have heard many times from a client, when I told a facilitator to take her/him out of the water, the words; “I don’t want to come out”, “I can’t”, “I am not ready yet”, “I want to stay in”. Other times there were comments like “I can do it all by myself”, “Let me out now, I can’t stand it anymore”, “It is too narrow in here”. The skill here is always to get the clients out, even if they do not yet want to leave the water. This obvious recreation of an essential element of a past experience is often just what we need to help the client to integrate that specific experience.

How often have we needed to *carry* a person out of the water! How often has the experience of this moment of getting out of the water appeared to be exactly what these clients felt so often in their lives before having to take a huge decision! How often, after asking their mothers, has it appeared to be exactly like the story of their births!

“Coming out of the water” normally starts a whole new process in the session. The transition from being carried, held and taken care of, to having to move on our own and to stand on our own feet seems to recreate the experience of having to start life and breathing on our own, in all its detail and with all the conclusions we came to and the decisions we made at that moment.

Frederic Leboyer and Michel Odent, gynaecologists in France, have done detailed research on how birth affects a new-born baby.⁵ They found that every baby suffers a high grade of inconvenience, discomfort and aggravation during and after birth. The baby is exposed to the forces of the contractions, to a large change of temperature and light, is physically examined, washed and dressed, and –most important of all – it gets separated from its mother.

It is this form of inconvenience that is often recreated when clients are coming out of the tub. The client has to go from the warmth into the cold and walk somewhere to lie down. The facilitators sometimes, unconsciously, will become rather clumsy, fumbling around with towels and bathrobes, giving verbal advice as to where to put their feet and not slip on the wet floor, while all the clients want is just to be supported and rest.

Case history

Account of a session I had in 1982: I am in the water. Two people are carrying me. I feel wonderfully light, happy and at ease. The sensation of floating is very pleasant. All of a sudden a tremendous urge to hurry up comes over me. “I have to get out, immediately”. My

⁵ Frederic Leboyer, “*Pour une Naissance sans Violence*” 1973, p.1-24

Michel Odent, Prof. Harrie Biemans, Saskia van Rees, *Congres “Lichaamstaal van de Geboorte” April 1983.*

breathing moves faster and faster. I feel very hurried and as if I don't have time enough. I struggle myself free from the two pair of hands that hold me. My head comes out of the water. Suddenly I feel a deep conflict, I need to get out now and on the other hand I do want to stay in, to take my time. I ignore this need to take more time and I climb out of the water by myself avoiding the helping hands, and ... I feel betrayed. The thought is: "People want me to hurry. No, it's my mother who wants me to hurry." I see in my mind's eye, how many times in my life I did something faster than I really wanted.

Account of a session I had in 1984: I am in the water, held by someone I trust very deeply. I feel delicious, floating while breathing softly through my snorkel. Suddenly I get the same urge I know so well to go into action. My facilitator tells me to take as much time as I need. I relax into the urge to get out. I breathe slowly and comfortably. After a couple of minutes I come up from under the water very slowly, I turn over and I am supported so that I float on my back. Two hands are around my head and I feel like I am being 'received' into life, just the way I always wanted it to happen.

I start to go into an internal dialogue with my mother. I tell her that I now know that something inside of me was urging me to move that fast. I tell her that I will stop blaming her for being in a hurry. I now have the choice to move slowly or faster.

The way to the mattress

The way from the hot tub to the place that we have prepared to complete the session has to be taken slowly and carefully. Sometimes people have "weak legs" from the energy they experienced and may feel like small children or babies who are not able to walk yet. It may sometimes be necessary to physically carry them out, although this rarely happens. Furthermore, walking normally will help them to become more grounded.

Case history

I have been breathing in the water for some time and my facilitator wants me to get out. Slowly I stand up, get onto the edge of the tub and climb out. Again I feel the well-known feeling of wanting to hurry. My facilitator tells me to move really slowly and to take it one step at the time. The mattress I am led to is about 20 meters away and it takes me 15 minutes to get there! I have already had memories in previous sessions about situations in my life when I went faster than I actually wanted to. Now I have the chance to really experience the pain and frustration, which this has caused me. With the help of my facilitator, guiding my breathing rhythm while slowly walking towards my mattress, I can stay with the feelings. When I finally reach my mattress I feel as if this is the first time my walking has been exactly as slowly as I wanted it to be. My walking feels as a substitute for my way of life. In the weeks after this session I notice that I feel less stressed and hurried and that I have conscious choice about my tempo in life.

Completion of the session and integration

In the second part of the session, the lying (or sitting) down on a mattress gives the facilitator an easier opportunity than in the water to guide the breath and work towards the integration of all the material that has come up. This phase of the session may take between one and one and one-half hours. It may be necessary to go deeper into the content of some of the thoughts that came up, to do some visualisation work, or to use whatever other technique it may take to come to integration.

It is very important to keep the client breathing in a relaxed and circular rhythm so that s/he stays conscious during the integration process. As the body relaxes clients often have the

tendency to drift off into a kind of sleep which might feel wonderful to them. What they miss out on, however, is the ecstasy of the integration process.

To facilitate a client's process well, the facilitator must have an inner attitude that there is an abundance of time for the client.

Personal example

Although the issue about "unconsciously running through life" has been largely resolved, it still can happen -when I feel upset or stressed- that I slip back into this old behaviour. When I need to give a session this would be very unpractical, to say the least. To handle this eventuality, I have developed a small "ritual". Before I begin to work I sit down, close my eyes, breathe for a couple of minutes, tune into my client and ask for guidance, patience and healing. I often do this together with my client while holding hands. This helps us both to "relax" into the session.

I hope the examples above show clearly what a wonderful experience it is for clients to be "received" by the facilitator in just the way they would have wanted to be received at birth by their parents.

Being received

As I have said before, almost everyone comes into this life in a way that is not particularly welcoming. Most hospital-born babies are taken away from their mothers, washed – sometimes even with cold water- and put in a crib alone in another room. After having been in the womb for nine months, enclosed by warmth and fluid, such treatment is not exactly a "warm welcome".

The result is that as adults these people often have great difficulty receiving the loving care that they long for deep in their hearts. It seems to embarrass them to be treated lovingly and in a welcoming way. However, if we as therapists treat our clients in a truly loving way, in time their resistance will melt. My observation is that, apart from a good technique in order to produce good therapeutic results, it is essential to treat clients with authentic, loving and caring attention. Our therapeutic technique may be the very best, but if our heart is not truly with our clients none of our technique will be of real help to them.

In a warm water session, we take our time to just *be* with the clients. We move slowly when we help them out of the water, even when they have the tendency to do it all alone. We support them physically: we dry them off carefully without bustle, help them to lie down, and cover them nicely. We also support them psychologically to integrate the emotions they have just experienced. If warm water sessions are done in this way, people easily integrate the material that comes up. After the session they will be well grounded and their heads will be clear. They will be relaxed and happy, although they will feel a bit tired because being with our emotions can be hard work.

This kind of work frequently brings our energy up to a high level, which is very intense to experience. People have to learn to deal with that.

Dealing with large amounts of life energy

"Normal" breathwork often brings the client to feel/experience large amounts of energy. During warm- (and also during cold water) breathwork, this effect can become even more intense. It is up to the facilitator to guide the client's breath in such a way that s/he can handle the high amount of energy.

Young children usually feel a lot of energy in their bodies because their vitality is still intact. While growing up we all experience – some more than others – how our enthusiasm is controlled by our surroundings, and how, too, our feeling of being free and alive is diminishing over time. Finally, we get used to living in a more confined energy body. Later in life, on those occasions that we open up to more energy, something in us stays alert and on guard to check if it is OK to feel that way. We have become so used to keeping our vitality in check, that it becomes very unusual for us to allow a lot of energy to flow freely through our bodies.

When our body starts to throb with energy, when we tingle and feel radiantly alive, breathing with rather short, connected breaths that are of mid-depth and fill the upper chest helps us to be with the energy. This breathing rhythm is also used when there is a lot of fear, sadness or anger moving through the body. The moment we start to feel at ease with all the energy that is there, our breath will slow down and become wider and deeper by itself. Then the breath fills the chest completely and moves like “waves of energy” through the body. We feel elated and our breathing happens without any effort. It is as if we are “being breathed”.

Basically, everything we feel is a form of energy, whether happiness or sorrow, fearlessness or anxiety, love or hate. We may not be there yet but I have noticed both with myself and with my clients that it is not only within our potential to integrate the so-called negative emotions, but also to experience fully that beautiful feeling of aliveness that is our birthright.

**Breath releases repressed emotions.
Connected breath integrates them.
Liberated breath enables us to live life to its full potential.
This is our natural birthright.**