

Becoming a Sustainable Practitioner: A Historical View

By Peter Kane

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I have often been asked why so many rebirthers/breathworkers don't succeed, quit practicing or burn out. Even among the original US Certified Rebirthers very few of us are still teaching breathwork or seeing individual clients. I hope to offer some historical perspectives on the sustainability of a breathworkers practice and describe some of the changes I have made.

I was rebirthed for the first time in 1978 at Esalen Institute in Big Sur California. Rebirthing was the tool I was looking for. It provided lasting release, and it was blissful and empowering. Later that year I took a One-Year-Seminar with Leonard Orr and began my rebirther training at Theta House. It was San Francisco and the personal growth movement of the seventies. We lingered between the free love of the sixties and the emerging me decade of the eighties. We were breaking the mold of our pasts, of social conditioning, and of the therapy world. We didn't just talk in our sessions, we breathed. We didn't just analyze our family history we analyzed our births. We didn't just emote; we choose a new direction with affirmations that shifted our core way of thinking and being.

Breathwork today is still amazing and deep work; we still address birth traumas and other core issues of existence. But, over the years we have struggled to sustain this gift and many practitioners have had difficulty continuing to make breathwork available. Breathwork has had both physical and philosophical difficulties fitting into the world. There are still conflicts between breaking the mold of our pasts and fitting into the world by creating sustainable philosophies and structures.

I view many breathworkers as having a conflict between their need for individuality (which has resulted in rebellion) and their need for success in the world (which results in the need for approval and agreement from the outside world). The need for independence conflicts with the need to become more professional. In my 24 years as a breathworker I have experienced practitioners from various fields encouraging breathworkers to become more professional, more research oriented, and more interested in recognition from academia, the traditional therapy world, and from governments. Breathworkers have resisted this. Most of us are just too busy enjoying witnessing miracles to bother to document them for someone else's approval. This rebellion has a wide range of results, rang-

ing from unethical behavior to a lack of research.

In 1981, when I was certified by the original group of Certified Rebirthers in the United States there were 15 of us. For rebirthers/breathworkers who were trained outside of the U. S. it is valuable to realize that your trainer was either one of these original certified rebirthers or more likely was trained by one of us. The original certified rebirthers were a group of brilliant and charismatic people. I have much love, appreciation, and gratitude for what I received from them and Leonard Orr and from the tremendous scrutiny the process of certification put me through. It would take a whole book to describe the situation and history in detail. Here I need to be brief but want to describe a couple of our limits.

Rebellion and chaos were dominant among the original certified rebirthers in the United States. Looking back at the dysfunction within our brilliance I would suggest that about half of us were active addicts of some kind. It is my view that our addictive nature created unpredictability where we were often changing the rules and rebelling from structure. Our certification process was also overly perfectionistic and resulted in certification being an elite click, based on special relationships. To our credit we saw this and it was part why we disbanded certification in 1983.

I stopped smoking marijuana in 1985 and then quit drinking in 1987 and looked back at how my addictions may have altered my philosophies and business structures. I came to feel that I/We had become overly metaphysical as a means of denying suppressed emotion. The picture I would give is this: The original rebirthers were coming from a free and relaxed place with our beliefs about substances, as well as diet, exercise, sex, and money. Secondly, we had gone through many of our own catharsis's and resolved a great deal of our emotional issues, so we felt we were in less need of the emotional value of continuing our own breathing process. It is my feeling that we moved too far away from emotional release and too close to the quick fix of affirmations and metaphysics as a means of keeping rebirthing lighter. This enabled us to feel less pushed to resolve the emotional issues and addictions that we were still personally holding on too.

In 1989 I made a big leap and went back to include the roots of emotional release therapies that I had studied at Esalen and in rebirthing in the seventies. I still believe that "you don't have to sift through the garbage to drive it to the dump" and "cellular release" is still a beautiful

aspect of what I favor about breathwork. I still teach affirmations and feel that understanding core beliefs that originate from birth is one of breathwork's greatest contributions. But I also feel that denial is so big and dominant that it is important to teach emotional expression, and give time for it. Today the sessions I facilitate are usually pretty quiet and blissful, but I also teach a variety of Gestalt based emotional release tools so that the emotional body is also honored, and so that the client has those tools available for themselves.

Intensity, Time and Money: Additional Areas of Sustainability

In the past I feel we focused on intensity when we tried to understand any limits on the success or sustainability of a breathworker. While breathwork is pleasurable, rewarding, and quite easy, it can also be quite intense on an energetic level. We have said things like "if you don't process your case you'll burn out" or "you won't create clients until you have been cleared more of your issues." I believe these statements to be true. Our greatest asset is our own personal clarity and self-care. Our training never ends and we should always continue our own breathing process and be in some form of therapy.

There are also changes that have limited sustainability of a breathworker's practice in the areas of time and money. When I was first rebirthed, a session was three-hours long. By 1980 most practitioners switched the length of sessions to two hours because we found it was enough time, and makes for a more viable career. It is my feeling that a two-hour session still makes for an inherent challenge in creating a profitable career because most of us charge significantly less per hour than other therapists. Most therapists of any kind consider full time to be 25-30 hours per week because of the intensity. This coupled with the fact that in most economies therapy rates have not kept up with inflation has resulted in breathworker's standard of living being further stressed. I think these problems have encouraged breathworkers to use in-home offices to keep expenses down which has further kept breathworkers in a less professional position.

One solution is to charge more money. Although I have raised my rates it also helps if I realize that I deserve to receive more than what I charge. I have continued to offer relatively low rates because I love my work and I want it to be more easily available. However, in the long run I think that any breathwork community would benefit from raising their rates.

Limiting a client to ten sessions has also created some problems. If a breathworker sees 10 clients a week and only sees each client 10 times they need to create over 52 committed clients per year. If clients determine the length of therapy practitioners may only need to create 10-20 committed clients per year.

I stopped limiting how long a client sees me in about 1989. I did this not because of money and sustainability issues but because I actually discovered that to tell a client that they could only see me ten times resulted in less depth to the work. It is as if by telling them they can only see us ten times we tell them we are going to leave them. This results in less depth and clients may quit early in anticipation of abandonment. In the past when a client stopped prior to 10 sessions we often said this occurred because they were running away from intimacy. I have come to feel that the opposite is true; they stop because a ten-session model is too superficial and does not offer as much emotional safety as a therapist who will see them as long as they want. Money and sustainability are practical byproducts of this, though not my core motive. Keep in mind that the teachers who created the ten-session model were making money teaching and not by seeing clients individually. I have never known a teacher to limit the number of seminars or trainings their students took. In fact teachers are known for creating new courses for their students to take.

Limiting which gender a client sees has also compounded this. I have found that by healing my own sexual issues and phobias that I can serve men and women equally. There are pros and cons to having a male facilitator and pros and cons to having a woman. I have come to feel that the most important variable is the to create emotional safety with one practitioner and to work with them for an indefinite period. When people ask how many breathing sessions to have I say from one session to several years. I also explain the history of the session guideline, which is that the first 10-20 sessions are more physically intense and are felt to be the biggest initial layers. Also, most people will begin to benefit from doing breathwork sessions on their own after 5-20 sessions.

Embracing the emotional body and incorporating more traditional therapeutic values has given me the ability to become more sustainable professionally. By expanding our models we become better at serving a greater number of people for longer periods of time and our career becomes more sustainable. I think of it as diversification. By diversifying my skills I offer better services and this also serves me. Remember that to have spiritual teachers we need to feed them. No one benefits if breathwork is not sustainable.

Peter Kane is the co-founder of Relationship Transformations, a Seattle-based organization that is dedicated to breathwork, counseling, workshops, healing, and publishing. He was the director of Theta House, the first rebirthing/breathwork center from 1979-1981, one of the original Certified Rebirthers, and a trainer for the Loving Relationships Training. He has been teaching breathwork and relationship seminars internationally since 1979.