

Meditation and Healing Through Deep Breathing: An Africentric Perspective

By Bill Green

Abstract

This article describes the use of meditation and breath work to facilitate healing, wellness, and recovery among African Americans with chemical or process addictions.

This narrative is intended to address the importance of developing a model of recovery, healing and wellness for the cultural addiction that plagues most Americans of African decent. Addiction to alcohol, other drugs, food, sex, Black on Black violence, or any of the others are merely the symptoms.

Americans of African decent are the remnants of a forgotten past that are living in a reactionary consciousness of social commentary. It is a *no-exit constellation* that redefines itself every few generations.

Without its own rites of passage, the culture of Americans of African decent cannot rise above the racial category that it has been identified with. Consequently, the rhetorical question, *Just who are we this generation?*, is once again being asked by this tribe of nomads that have been called *African, slave, colored, Negro, Black, Afro, and African* since evolving in America.

As I became an addict, I completely lost a sense of identity. As I sought to free myself from the clutches of drug addiction I realized I had developed a *functional schizophrenia* – the result of living in a society that refused to acknowledge my issues with racial identity.

While in treatment my counselors seemed to ignore the importance of identity for me, and were content to hammer away at convincing me that I would be either an *addict* or a *recovering addict* for the rest of my life.

When I became a drug counselor, my unresolved issues with identity constantly confronted me whenever I counseled clients of color, male or female, and I could not understand why.

Then I read something that revolutionized my views of addictive behavior from a cultural perspective. It was from the text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, which stated, *We, of Alcoholics Anonymous, are more than one hundred men and women who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body. To show other alcoholics precisely how we have recovered is the main purpose of this book.*

If the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous could be created from the stories of over 100 *like minds* that shared a singular vision of hope, then surely a model of wellness could be developed by those who, like myself, have decided to rise above the addictive behavior associated with cultural survival – never better, never worse, just always surviving.

To live a life free of addiction is by necessity to seek a life that is full of purpose. Although the *will to survive* must have been tremendous for those early American Africans (for they survived in an environment that was not conducive of their survival), the unhealed wounds of slavery produced a pseudo-identity for Africans held in bondage, and resulted in a legacy of hopelessness, with no promise of change, for their American descendants.

But with no accurate records of the ancestors of early American Africans, the identity of the *free* African died as the myths of slavery materialized. The stories that were passed on from one slave generation to the next, telling of the dehumanization of an entire race that was being bred to do the burden of beasts, became the legacy that helped to produce the present-day identity crisis of the Black man.

The Influence of Myth

Where do myths come from, and how do they become rooted in the psyche of a culture?

Mythology is born from a collection of stories about the origin and history of a people, their ancestors, heroes, and gods. All cultures have some form of mythology that explains its *mores* – the traditions and customs of a particular social group.

The myths regarding the African's evolution in America could fill volumes. In fact, it has! While Africans held in bondage on the islands off the eastern shores of America were being conditioned for slavery, their culture as they knew it ceased to exist. As they were transformed into a culture of *mixed cultures*, a consciousness of servitude was being born.

A myth of victimism – the result of the sexual abuse of African females held in bondage, was the foundation for this newly developing culture.

The ensuing melodrama of post-slavery victimism has continued to gain strength from generation to generation, and they have identified themselves with many descriptive labels – *African, Colored, Negro, Black, Afro, and African*, once again. And have been thrown into one collective melting pot of convenience today – *minority*.

Regardless of what the endeavor may be, the climb toward self-actualization for Black people must first be manifested in the evolutionary process of their psychological and psychosexual development. Americans of African lineage must overcome the psychological damage from feelings of inferiority before any adventure in self-discovery can begin. Anything less creates a psychosis that eventually develops into addictive behavior.

Addictive Behavior and Traditional Therapy

Although addictive behavior starts with the individual, it can eventually encompass an entire culture. Addictive behavior results from the pursuit of pleasure at the expense of freedom.

When a culture exhibits addictive behavior all rites of passage cease to exist. Everyone lives within self-imposed boundaries, with no hopes or dreams. For one to dream, one must first feel secure enough to have a dream. As hopes vanish dreams remain unfulfilled, and the culture becomes stuck on a cycle of recurrence.

Just as relapse can be an ongoing consequence of addictive behavior, recurrence can become the consequence of the addictive behavior exhibited by a culture. Whereas the behavior is the by-product of a *conditioned existence*, after a couple of generations it becomes a misinterpretation of a *universal truth*. The people of the culture begin living and acting as others expect them to live and act.

Freud felt that society's influence in establishing the standards of appropriate behavior can block the development of a healthy personality. *Fixation* – halted psychological development, and a host of defense mechanisms would have to be utilized to help one caught in a *no-exit* existence contend with life's many challenges.

Freud further claimed that if basic nurturing needs are not met during the first year of life various oral fixations develop, creating addictive patterns of behavior such as excessive eating, smoking, drinking and drugging, as well as difficulty in forming trusting relationships.

Jung emphasized the biological aspect of personality development, as was most noted for his concept of the *collective unconscious*. He contended that the collective unconscious is an accumulation of the historical and evolutionary development of humankind, referring to this as an *archetype* – or inherent model, that influences one's unfolding consciousness.

Erickson expanded on Freud's psychosexual stages of human development with his theory on the psychological stages of personality development. He stressed that at the various stages of our lives, we are confronted with crisis, and the decisions that are made at each stage influence the direction of our lives.

According to Erickson, it is in the first year of life that an attitude of mistrust toward the world can develop if basic needs are not met.

Maslow developed a model of achievement-motivation, called the *hierarchy of needs*, which outlines three levels that lead to self-actualization.

And there are the theories of Adler, Rogers, Lazarus, Perls, Ellis, Glasser, and Berne, just to name a few. The concepts offered by these stalwarts have provided the research necessary to develop the strategies for the traditional treatment of the behavioral, emotional, and mental problems that exist today. But these strategies offer little, if any insight on methods of care for those born into a culture of *minority consciousness*.

The Journey Inward

I had been trained professionally to believe it was not healthy to be personally affected by client's issues. Yet, after several years of being a counselor continued to see my unresolved issues with self-identity through the issues of those who sought my counsel. The more clients discussed their ongoing difficulties with relationships with others, with themselves, and with God, the more I recognized similar issues.

I sought the counsel of one of my very first mentors, who I referred to as my *Earth Mother*, to help me sort through the seeds of my confusion. She invited me attend a workshop that could help me expand my *consciousness*. I had no idea what I was getting myself into, but I trusted my *Earth Mother*.

During the first day of the workshop participants were introduced to a method of inner work that allows access to the subconscious. The process requires a willingness to be rendered quite vulnerable when surrendering to the method.

The method is a very ancient ritual that utilizes deep breathing to produce a powerfully enlightening exploration into the unconscious mind. It is done without any mood-altering drugs, and the individual is in complete control of the experience at all times (although it doesn't always feel that way).

The facilitator further explained that the model was designed to reach into levels of inner consciousness by tapping into a system of energy fields that exist within the human body. When activated, the bands of energy can accelerate the inner healing of psychic wounds that traditional methods of talk therapy cannot reach.

I had only been exposed to the traditional Western models of psychoanalysis, and knew nothing about Eastern concepts. I learned about non-linear growth, the process of birth-death-rebirth, and personal transformation. I was learning about a non-traditional concept of healing, a model that had the potential of helping me to grasp the true depth of the psychic wounds of slavery.

However, I was petrified by the thought of accessing my unconscious mind. I was fearful of uncovering the garbage of my past that the Grace of God, and a few timely blackouts, had spared me from.

Yet, I knew that the time had come for me to release the many demons that festered in my mind. Besides, my recovery from drug addiction had taught me that spiritual strength is born from conquering fear.

Most of us fear suffering. We would rather remain ignorant to the truth of our being. But it is through acknowledging our ignorance that the *Divine Truth* is discovered. And whenever one surrenders to Divine Truth, ignorance is transformed into enlightenment.

So –

I became willing to surrender . . . After a few preliminary instructions, I began the deep-breathing method that seemed to draw me deeper and deeper into the gradual unfolding of a profound spiritual awakening.

I separated from my outer-self as I let go to the Inner-Self, and was shown another side of the evolution of the Soul. As my heart began to open to the Truth of the Cosmos, I was overwhelmed by feelings of unconditional love for me. And I knew that I was standing in the presence of my Creator.

The barriers that had shielded my heart from the pain of the past began to dissolve. And as the ego of my addicted past was dying, the Soul of my spiritual essence was forming.

For the first time during my quest for wellness, I was forgiving myself for what I had become—and for the first time I felt reconnected with the Self that I had always been. I felt the fragility of the human condition, and could understand why I had chosen addiction as a means of coping with failure.

The want to be human, and the will to be spiritual were merging to heal the wounds inflicted by my addicted way of life. And I knew that something from deep within was being healed; but because I had very little knowledge about my Creator, I feared the Power that dwelled from within.

I knew that if I surrendered to this Power, I would have to relinquish self-will. And from deep within, amid all of the wonder of it all, I found myself struggling with the decision to let go.

So, I asked for Divine Intervention, and I immediately felt a rush of tears explode from deep within the chasm of my heart. It was as if a blinding flame of love had ignited

as my heart opened to receive the cosmic energy of Divine Truth. And the tears washed away the wall that had existed for so long between my self and my Soul.

Peace had been restored, and I was freed from the bondage of my addicted past. For the first time I felt the indescribable joy of being whole. I spent the remainder of my "trance" basking in the warm glow that emanated from my heart . . .

The remainder of the workshop was spent discussing our inner work experiences. Having assumed that a workshop of this nature was a one-shot deal, I thought my newly acquired cosmic awareness would never leave me. I was sure that I would stroll through life thoroughly enlightened. I figured that my pursuit of identity was resolved. I just *knew* I was healed. *Magic . . .*

But I soon realized that the work of transforming my psychic wounds from slavery had only begun. I realized how deeply my spiritual roots were tied to an ancient recovery of addictive patterns of behavior. It was as if the ghosts of slavery were clamoring for me to break the chains of societal dysfunction so that those who came after me would not have to inherit the work of inner healing that I had left undone.

Personal Transformation

When I entered treatment for my substance abuse issues, I was in search of a cultural identity. But the traditional models of therapy only dealt with the *biographical stages* psychosexual and psychosocial development.

Since traditional methods of counseling only access the biographical themes of recurring issues, how are the wounds of slavery addressed, treated, and healed? The anthropological linkage to slavery cannot be accessed through biographical assessments. It must be accessed through the realm of the unconscious that lies beyond the biographical layer.

My first inner journey experience exposed me to a *transpersonal model* of psychology that integrated my ego and soul by taking me beyond my biographical stages of development, because a transpersonal approach delves into various levels of the subconscious to promote *psychic healing*.

This transpersonal method needs to be developed for Americans of African decent because the traditional models of treatment have never studied the impact of slavery on African American clients. Otherwise, the descendants of slavery who succumb to addictive patterns of behavior will remain stuck on the cycle of recurring issues.

Jung may not have been far from an underlying truth regarding the initial stages of the evolutionary development of *the Negro* when he stated that *Negroes had a historical layer less than whites*. As racist as that statement may sound today, it was in all probability a safe statement to make because Jung was addressing an audience of his peers who most likely shared the same belief.

Nevertheless, it was a stereotypical statement regarding a race of people that were being treated as perpetrators of their own misery in America. Jung's statement further reflected his ignorance about a culture of nomads that was neither African nor American at that time.

Furthermore, Jung did not grasp that the *layer* he referred to was the budding consciousness of a culture that was in a regenerative metamorphosis. It was a culture

born from slavery, a culture that psychotherapy had not studied, and a culture that had become indigenous only to North America.

The Transformation Model For Recovery

A Substance Abuse Treatment Perspective

TRAINING MANUAL

(Brief Outline Description– May, 2004)

Prepared by Bill Green, CSADC

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A Substance Abuse Treatment Perspective
(Brief Outline description)

I. INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of the transformation model for recovery is to create a program of wellness for clients who enter treatment. The transformation model for recovery assumes that the goal of the treatment plan is to reconnect the client with the spiritual healing (e.g.

– conversion experience, psychic change, spiritual awakening) precipitated by continuous adherence to the principles of the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

II. A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Holotropic Breathwork Model

Dr. Stanislov Grof developed the *Holotropic Breathwork* model that has influenced the breathwork model developed for use in traditional treatment settings. Dr. Grof has facilitated holotropic workshops throughout the U.S. and Canada since the mid-1970's.

The Integrative Breathwork Model

The holotropic model of psychotherapy is the precursor to *Integrative Breathwork* that was developed by Jacquelyn Small in the late 1980's. Ms. Small was trained by Dr. Grof, and co-lead the holotropic model with him from the mid-1970's until 1987. In 1988, Small founded Eupsychia, Inc., which evolved into a training program on the principles of psycho-spiritual integration, from which the modified strategy of breathwork in traditional substance abuse treatment programs is derived.

III. THE TRANSFORMATION MODEL FOR RECOVERY

In the mid – 1930's, the fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous developed a *program of action* that resulted in a conversion experience, psychic change, or a spiritual awakening; in effect it was a *transformation* at a deep psychological and spiritual level which helped alcoholics to overcome conditions that had previously been deemed *hopeless*.

The core functions of the transformation model for recovery will provide for those who facilitate breathwork information that will aid clients in the development of a program of action that can promote a life of healing and wellness.

IV. CORE FUNCTIONS

Core Functions:

Counselors are required to be knowledgeable in nine core functions to facilitate breathwork:

1. Introduction to breathwork
2. Relaxation
3. Invocation
4. Map of the unconscious
5. Levels of consciousness
6. Group facilitation
7. Mandala symbol interpretation (artwork)
8. Music theory
9. Medical concerns (contraindications)

V. HANDOUTS

1. Preparation and Invocation

Offers information on how to present the breathwork session to participants, and how to do the invocation to participants at the onset of the breathwork session.

2. The True Self

A handout for clients and/or participants on the topic of the True Self, the Higher Self, and the 7 negative selves

3. The Shadow

A handout for clients and/or participants on the *shadow* as an aspect of our True Self (the extension of the God of our understanding) that starts out as a *symbol* of our recognized issues or struggles in life.

4. Opening the Heart

A handout for clients and/or participants on the Heart as the fourth level of consciousness that shifts one into a completely different way of being.

5. The Observer Self

A handout for clients and/or participants on the Observer Self that aids in awakening our spiritual essence.

6. Using Guided Imagery

A handout for facilitators who use guided imagery to help clients and/or participants access the creative imagination.

VI. CLIENT EVALUATION.

An example of an evaluation that can be used by clients and/or participants as a measuring tool of breathwork effectiveness.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

References that relate to breathwork.