

What Does the Experience of Breathing Reveal to Us About the Fundamental Nature of Life, Environment and People?

By Alan Rayner

Find yourself somewhere comfortable to sit or lie down. Relax into it. Close your eyes. Focus your attention inwardly, into the dark receptive hollowness of your living body. Feel the rhythmic movements of your body as it alternately expands to receive air inside from outside and contracts to return air outside from inside. Feel the sense of your body climbing energetically to a summit of maximum volume and descending effortlessly to a valley of minimum volume in recurrent cycles of inspiration and expiration with pauses of relative stillness in between. Feel the suffocating discomfort of suppressing this process. Know that this process is keeping you alive and that it signifies your aliveness.

Ask yourself: what makes this process possible and why is it so vital to your living existence? It wouldn't be possible, would it, if air was solid and your body was rigid? There must be some presence in the air and in your body that enables the necessary movement inwards and outwards to take place. This presence can't be 'all the same stuff' because then there'd be no distinction between your body and the air that you are breathing in and out. At the very least there must be *two* kinds of presence, which *combine* to enable your living body *both* to take material form *and* to breathe in and out from its environmental surround.

Your embodied life depends on the 'each-in-the-other', mutually inclusive relationship between these two kinds of presence. To exclude one from the other renders the life and very existence of your material body impossible. It's rather surprising, then, to realize that most of us human beings in modern culture have become accustomed to think in an *abstract* way that *does* treat these two kinds of presence *as if* they exclude each other or are 'all the same stuff'. We have become *entrapped* in a paradoxical way of thinking that regards the reality of Nature as *either* 'dual' *or* 'non-dual' instead of recognising the mutually inclusive co-existence of these two kinds of presence, one of which occurs eternally everywhere, without limit, and the other of which provides the *timely movement* needed locally to give rise to material form. This entrapment has had dreadful consequences for human understanding and flourishing, lying as it does at the root of needless distress, conflict and environmental devastation. Wouldn't it be good if we could free our selves from it? Well, actually, we can – given what our everyday experience of breathing reveals to us about the fundamental nature of life, environment and people.

So, what are these two distinct but mutually inclusive kinds of presence that combine to bring living material bodies into being? What, *most fundamentally*, is the 'something in the air' that we breathe that *enlivens* us? And what is it that enables this to move and circulate around our bodies?

I could get very technically scientific in response to these questions and talk about the complexities of photosynthesis, aerobic respiration and the global carbon cycle. But, in broad outline, in photosynthesis, the *energy of light* from the sun is *absorbed* by chlorophyll-containing plants and bacteria and used to generate organic (carbon-containing) compounds and oxygen from carbon dioxide and water. In aerobic respiration, organic compounds are *burned* in the presence of oxygen to generate carbon dioxide, water and the chemical *energy* needed to sustain life and enable growth. Death of living bodies provides the organic fuel supply needed for respiration.

The bottom line is that *energy*, in the form of *light*, is the ultimate source of the *movement* needed to bring living material form into *being*. In fact it is ultimately the source of *becoming* of all material bodies, from sub-atomic scale upwards, as is evident from the findings (if not the current theoretical models, which are based on abstract thought) of quantum mechanics.

So, energy is one of the two fundamental kinds of presence needed to bring material bodies to life. What is the other kind of presence – the one needed for movement to be possible in the first place? This is where abstract thought has caused us to exclude the ‘obvious’ from consideration.

Ask yourself: what kind of presence exists eternally and everywhere, without limit and, being ‘infinitely slippery’ (i.e. frictionless or ‘intangible’ - unable to be grasped), offers absolutely no resistance to movement whatsoever? What is this ‘presence’ that is not a ‘substance’, but which *in combination* with circulating energy makes the very existence of substance possible? What is this ‘no-thingness’? It is known by many names, but perhaps the simplest is ‘space’. By which I mean the infinite, *receptive* space of Nature, not the *distancing* space of abstract mathematical models.

So, now we have it! Our everyday living experience of breathing reveals the fundamental nature of life, environment and people to be sourced in the receptive-responsive relationship between spatial stillness and energetic circulation from which all material bodies come into being and evolve. With this awareness we can liberate our selves from the paradoxes of abstract thought and learn to live in natural companionship with one another and our common neighbourhood in a more loving, creative and sustainable way than we currently do.

In summary, Nature breathes the light of life into and out from material form. This is the essence of the evolutionary process I call ‘natural inclusion’. For more detailed explanations, discussion and illustration, please refer to <http://www.spanglefish.com/exploringnaturalinclusion>

To Live is to Burn

To live is to burn
In the consuming passion of the fire
That takes in and gives out
Through the transparency of space
The light around the dark
Within its receptive heart
Which calls into itself
What it needs to be free
From the harness of stillness
For a while before returning
To that infinite Grace
From which it emerged
In a momentary spark

Form and Formlessness *And the Natural Inclusion of Each in the Other*

It's All so very Simple
Really

There is Form
&
There is Formlessness

Split Apart
Neither Alone can make Sense of Life
But Each included in the Other
Falls naturally into Place

Form Flows into and out
From Formless Existence
Formlessness Flows into Life
In Form

Form pulls its own Weight
While Formlessness is Weightless
Until its two Great Architects -
Space & Light
Come Together
In Silent Stillness & Lively Motion
Every Night & Every Day
In Every Body
Every Now & Every Then
Everywhere

