

Honoring My Soma With Breath As A Powerful Ally by Isabelle Jubert

From the Outer to the Inner

Dance has always been part of me. As a child I danced to express myself and translate to the outer world my inner impulses and my joy to be a living body on our planet Earth. I realized that Dance enabled me to establish a strong relationship with my body and to build powerful internal supports in my physical and emotional body. I was building my own foundations without being conscious of how these foundations would lead me forward on my lifepath.

Moving with grace, fluidity and physicality brought me to a balance. Movement and dance supported me to open up and be in a more fulfilling relationship with the entirety of the world. Exploring the Body and Movement became my primary focus and passion. I became a dancer, choreographer and teacher. My interest in Somatic Movement Exploration naturally grew deeper and I happened to come across Body- Mind Centering®. I began studying this fascinating approach to body movement. I was surprised, delighted, and intrigued to experience how re-embodiment early movement patterns could give support and clarity to posture, movement expression, emotional life and the psychological development of a sense of self, as well as essential grounding and inspiration for spiritual opening and creative work. And yet, I was considering that I hadn't reached the ultimate core of myself. Something was missing.

I met Jamie McHugh during my training at The Tamalpa Institute in the summer of 2014. Jamie's approach to somatics was a revolution of thought and experience for me. Sitting practices with Jamie led me to encounter my body as a brand new territory full of exciting and profound experiences. I became eager to explore more as this somatic approach appeared to be what I had been searching for for a long time. I immediately felt thrilled to embark on this inner journey and I signed up for Jamie's trainings in Europe and attended his Embodiment Nature retreat program in Sea Ranch, California. I continued to study with Jamie and completed my training in Embodied Mindfulness online.

Embarking On A Lifetime Journey, Breath Going Along For The Ride

« Breathing is a gift to the body and to the being in and around the body. We don't earn our life breath ; it is given to us freely. What we take into ourselves as we breathe is invisible and yet through the nourishment it brings, we're sustained. An unseen nourishment quietly upholds our lives. » Stephen R Schwartz

What was so fascinating to me when I first worked with Jamie is the way breath became the center and the starting point of a huge exploratory field of awareness and beingness. Very quickly, breath became a powerful ally to me as I continued on this «Archeological Dig » of Body and Mind.

Breath As A Deep Transformative Tool For The Long Run

Breath is the underlying track of all life. It is fundamental to the life of the body as it nourishes every cell and because it shapes and informs every movement. We all have our unique way to breathe and diving into the practice enables us to be more aware of our breathing patterns and make active choices in how we breathe.

As my practice became a daily ritual, I was amazed to learn that I could participate with my breath to energize or soothe my nervous system and my soma.

Jamie's approach is simple and progressive, joyful and liberating. I quickly became empowered to play with my breath; to modulate and experiment with different sounds and varieties of vocalization. There's always a kind of joy arising from playing with all the shapings of the mouth and the different qualities of sounds. From the ethereal exhale; silent, soft and soothing, to the rich vibratory tones that activate and stimulate energy from within, awakening the bones, bringing spontaneity to the river of our breath. What a huge range of exploration! It is stunning to notice how the various shapings of the mouth on the exhales impact the core through the movement of the diaphragm. As I became more acquainted with my breath, I began to interject some little explorations here and there in my daily life. A bridge was built between my solitary practice and all of life. I felt the flow of embodiment underway in my cells and throughout my whole body and mind. More and more of the time, I felt content, complete, vibrant and alive, in a way that no one person or event could take away from me.

Breath is automatic and yet we can use our breath to self regulate. By collaborating with it, we have the possibility to change our state of mind and the quality of tone in our tissues. In my daily morning practices, I find that connecting to my breath at the very beginning is a simple and quick way to become more grounded and to be deeply nurtured.

This practice has become a way to honor and celebrate my Soma. It helps me to acknowledge the skills and resources I already have in my body to experience my highest sense of self. It is a way to make peace and unify inner and outer ; a way to put back together my scattered pieces that have come apart. I have become my own Sanctuary, my own safe place in a tough world.

Spreading The Word

« At this point I could feel my breath as the adventurer that would explore these new landscapes within my body. Concentrating on the simple and pure movement of the breath, I could put a light into darkness and spot the crevices or fissures that lay hidden in the dome of my inner space. I was able to caress areas in my inner body and massage spots that had remained untouched for years » Giovanni (a student)

As I became more familiar with the practice, I decided that it was time to spread the work by infusing it into my movement classes, which had always been oriented to somatic movement exploration. I realized that over time, I was eager to share the treasures I had discovered and that I had gained a strong confidence in my posture as a movement teacher. I also infused it into my movement classes for people whose lives have been impacted by Parkinson's Disease.

Students in my movement improvisation classes share that the practice helps them to start from the inside and more easily find their own unique way of moving for the rest of the class. They also share that they are quicker to more authentically and naturally get in touch with what is alive for them in Life /Art classes. They always mention that it opens up for them vast spaces of freedom, together with a renewed curiosity to venture into new paths of exploration and to the Unknown.

As for the Parkinsons class, the explorations with a specific focus on their breath at the beginning of the class help them reconnect to their bodies in a gentle, soothing way ; releasing their diaphragm, loosening their spine, discovering unknown territories with awareness and freedom from judgment.

Some people in this class also notice that by focusing gently on the belly breathing and the diaphragmatic breathing at the beginning of the class helps them feel less stiffness and less tightness in their body and that movement becomes freer and more spontaneous. They feel more expansion and space in their chest as well. It enables them to find a kind of easy and deep relaxed state right away.

The Ripples of the Work in My Everyday Life

Breath gives me direct access to my essential sense of beingness. Belly breathing is the source, the origin of this powerful breathing process. Breath can heal, calm down but also strengthen and help me perceive the world in a different way. Settling into my body when I practice every morning gives me a sense of belonging, of genuinely feeling at home in myself, and ultimately finding my place in the world. When I sit and I'm mindful of my breath, I can easily find a place where I am happy to linger in my own company. It is probably what Will Johnson refers to in his book "Breathing through the whole body" when he mentions the place *"where breath and body start merging into a unified phenomenon, where you breathe through the whole body."*

When we take time to access the parasympathetic nervous system through slowing down the breath, it sets the tone for ease and generates more and more comfort and ease in any moment. We can genuinely change our perception of the world. It helps us to reconnect to the intensity of Life, to our essential Joy. It helps us be with all that is happening and changing in our world.

With the support of this embodied work, we can travel together with compassion, care for ourselves, each other, and the Earth, so that the fruits of our practice can be fully reaped in the end. So that we may emerge reborn into a world that is more sustainable, fair, compassionate and kind.

Harvest

I went into the woods and encountered an old stone, a very mossy one.
It had been there for quite a long time obviously.
It kindly offered its benevolent presence to me.
I rested and lingered there for a few hours.
Until I was taught some of the secrets of its ancient wisdom.

Yielding into its hollowed carved shapes and protected by high trees that were surrounding it, I was lucky enough to attend the graceful dance they were having with the wind as I began to respond to them with the sound of my breath.

A delicious breeze stroked my skin

A soft sun kissed my face through the dancing branches.

The delicate song of the little river below enchanted my ears.

There I was in the Realm of the « floating skull » such a delightful sensation to experience again.

So content with this welcoming environment, I felt ready to engage deeper into my inner world.

My breath took me to unknown, unexplored territories, some were vast, open and wide others narrow and shallow.

Steep slopes, hollows, meandering curves, a whole world of textures, colors, pulsations and shapes as extraordinary and diversified as the Nature that was surrounding me.

I savored every minute of my journey when the utmost secret of the stone was revealed to me: The Power of The Pause

Isabelle Jubert Chartreuse, May 2019