

# First holotropic breathwork experience

For a while now I have been fascinated by the subconscious mind and the deliberate ways we have of exploring it. This fascination led me to encounter breathwork of the kind that makes you “lose yourself”.

The first time it came across me was in a [“Yes Theory” video where they experienced the Wim Hof](#) breathing technique. I found it extremely fascinating that you could enter such states of mind simply by... breathing (???). Anyway, I did absolutely nothing about it for 3 years.

This week, as I was reading about psychedelic studies the idea of entering altered states of mind through breathing techniques reappeared in my head. The thing that stuck with me the most this time is that because the only requirement for these techniques to work are breathing and concentration, you can literally do them all the time with no excuses! So as I rewatched the Yes theory video, I simply slides my chair back and started doing a sort of DIY breathing meditation.

I had NO IDEA of what I was doing, but my intuition told me that two fast deep breaths in and one slow breath out would work. And it sort of did! I lost track of time, (no idea how long I did it for) my whole body started tingling and I could focus solely on my breaths and nothing else.



Follow  
a guide

DIY your  
way into very  
specific topics  
following  
nothing but intuition

So that was a cute first experience and it left me hungry enough to try to do it properly, but first I needed to know a little bit more about wtf I was doing. (not much, just enough to start in the right way)

Step 1, get MVTN (Minimum viable theoretical knowledge) on the topic (startup metaphors don't leave my mind):

Googled “trance breath meditation” because the part that was interesting to me about the whole thing was accessing the subconscious and quickly got to [a pretty cool article that overviewed the different kinds of breathwork](#) and what they were used for. Just what I needed!

1. Learned that this is called “Psychedelic breathing” or “Holotropic breathwork”;
2. It can be used for multiple things, from healing to well-being, trance, or trauma healing;

Holotropic breathwork was created by Stan Grof in the 60s when LSD started to become illegal worldwide as a way to allow people to access the same trips without the substance. It drew upon the work developed by Buddhism and yoga for centuries.

Step 2, find video that would guide my meditation session:

For these sorts of “not totally normie domains” I usually resort to Reddit to get my info.

Took me no time to find [this post](#) and decided to be guided by [this video](#). (Why this video? Because it was the first one I clicked on and it looked more than good enough) (I am not much of a theorist as you can probably tell)

Ok, now I had all I needed to give it a shot.

## The actual experience

I laid a blanket on the floor of my bedroom, put a pillow on the floor, a blanket over me, and just laid there comfortable with very dim lights on.

This meditation was 30 minutes, composed of 4 breathing cycles. In each of them, I repeatedly inhaled and exhaled both as fast and as deep as I could through the mouth until, at the end of each cycle, the voice told me to fully exhale, hold my breath for a long while, and then fully relax with a deep breath. At each cycle the number and speed of breaths increased and as well as the time I held my breath at the end. (I did not know any of this before starting) I HELD MY BREATH FOR 3 FUCKING MINUTES AND IT WAS NOT PAINFUL!

### **Cycle 1:**

At the start I had no idea of what I was doing and so did the first few breaths through the nose but quickly realized that I could not fill my lungs fast enough that way. Breathing in and out so deep and fast for the first few times felt like I was opening parts of the lungs I had not used in a long time. Unpleasant but good.

By the end the tips of my fingers were already tingling and in the “holding breath phase” I failed to complete the 2 minutes that I was supposed to hold it for. In the later cycles I discovered that

the failure happened because I was applying too much force in closing my throat instead of just letting it rest.

### **Cycle 2:**

Cycle 2 was for me what I imagine cycle 1 is for someone experienced. Now I was in tune with my body, actually knew how to fill my lungs properly, and could hold my breath for 2 minutes. The relaxation breath also felt much better at the end of the holding period. I was truly relaxed and could feel that mainly on my shoulders. Because I was now filling my lungs correctly, the tingling intensified and I started feeling it on my cheeks.

### **Cycles 3 and 4:**

Intensification of the whole thing. I kept on doing the deep breaths at greater speeds and holding my breath for 3 minutes at a time (the voice on the video said 3 minutes, but it really felt like 30 seconds). The tingling was now everywhere and parts of my body were completely dormant by the end. I could not feel not control my fingers, my lips, or my cheeks. My head was also tingling like crazy all around, but especially in the temporal and occipital zones!

During cycle 4 an intense purple circle appeared in my vision (I kept my eyes closed throughout the whole thing). At first, I thought it was just another one of those vision artifacts that occasionally show up when you have your eyes closed, and maybe it was, but this purple circle did not leave then I looked directly at him, as the others did. Instead, it became more intense as I tried to make sense of it. Eventually I saw a wolf head barking, but I might be just trying to make sense out of common visual artifacts, so take this with a massive grain of salt.

Another interesting observation made during the breath-holding periods: I felt a vacuum in my stomach and abb region in general that I don't think had ever felt before. It was like my stomach was truly empty even though I had literally eaten dinner before meditating. (I now know that these exercises should be done on an empty stomach).

## **Plot twist**

By the end of the meditation session, I was so relaxed, so focused on breathing, that I didn't notice that the video had ended and a new one had started. Add this to the fact that I had completely lost track of time. The new video had no voice, it was just someone breathing with "mystical sounds" in the background so I just kept on going.

I now was being guided by [this video](#) without noticing it and what was supposed to be a 30-minute experiment turned into a 1-hour-long session. AND I AM REALLY HAPPY IT DID.

I noticed all of this only after stopping and going through my browser history.

## The new video

This shit was powerful wtfffff

The new video had roughly the same pattern as the first one (fast breaths and long hold periods) but had no voice, the sounds were different and it was MUCH MORE FAST-PACED. Add that to the fact that my whole body was already dormant when I started and it gets pretty crazy.

By the second holding period I could literally not control my head nor my forearms and hands. I was doing all kinds of weird facial expressions and slowly bending my neck from side to side without any chance of controlling it. My hands were completely crooked, started involuntarily raising in the air (I imagine 10 cm from the ground) and I undertook that I no longer had control over them as I tried to uncrook my fingers because they were so bent over each other that I thought they could break or something lmao.

Shortly after losing control over my facial expressions, I stopped being able to fully open my throat to let air pass freely and so started making snoring-like noises. Not fully controlling the throat scared me a bit, not gonna lie.

My legs started moving a bit as my body became dormant, my forearms rose with crooked hands and my facial expressions became increasingly pronounced.

I have no idea how long I held my breath for, but I know it was a very long time that felt completely effortless.

## Thoughts on the experience

- Holy hell the physical side of it was way more intense than I was expecting;
- It was much harder than I anticipated to restrict my thought to breathing. My mind kept drifting to random things and my indeed voice would not shut up;
- Maybe because of the poor mind control, the psychological side of the experience left a lot to be desired. I don't know what I was expecting, but pretty much nothing happened mentally;
- If a 1-hour session drives me this crazy physically, I cannot imagine what the 3-hour guided sessions do to a mf;
- I definitely feel more relaxed.

My main takeaway from the experience is the fact that such control, or lack of it, is possible on command. Lately I have been trying to immerse myself in the knowledge that our body offers us - embodied knowledge - and this experience left me even more certain that I have absolutely no idea of the things this meat sack is capable of and more eager to start discovering the tip of the iceberg.

Also, it kind of felt like a momentary pleasurable experience that cannot give me much outside of the experience itself, but I'll have to repeat it multiple times to confirm that.

## For future practice

- Have at least 1h sessions;
- Explore the objective of the session beforehand (or maybe not, just vibe with it);