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About the Cover

"Learning to Breathe" by Dr. Libby Byrne. Within this image I am exploring and integrating my embodied knowing about what it means to breathe deeply into my present life, through gesture, posture, and presence. The rhythm of divine desire invites us to hear her voice and open our hearts to all that draws us together and then releases us into life.

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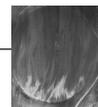
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Editorial



Birthing and Sharing Empowering Breath

“Breath is symbol of life, deeper the breath, greater the victory of life over threatening irritants” ~ Tasneem Hameed¹

“Sometimes it's the same moments that take your breath away that breathe purpose and love back into your life” ~ Steve Maraboli²

The terms “Breath,” “Breathing,” “Breathlessness,” have taken on new significance and meaning during these times with increased attention to issues arising from COVID, climate change and the *Black Lives Matter* movement. COVID restrictions of physical distancing and masks are in place to slow the spread of the virus and to ensure that we do not breathe on one another. Pollution, deforestation, and resource extraction in the name of development and “economic recovery” is impacting our air quality and stifling the earth and its creatures. But this is also a watershed moment where the cry, “I can’t breathe” by George Floyd and long before him, that of David Dungay⁴ of Australia has drawn attention to the systemic and deeply ingrained racism in many parts of the globe.



“Hongi”³

The importance of “breath” or “breathing” need not be emphasized. Breathing kick starts our body’s metabolism. Our bodies derive energy from breathing, and need this energy to do everything from moving to thinking to growing. Breathing therefore supports and maintains life. “But breath as ‘pneuma’ is also the spirit or soul. We live in an ocean of air like fish in a body of water. By our breathing we are attuned to our atmosphere. If we inhibit our breathing, we isolate ourselves from the medium in which we exist.”⁵ It is also important to remember that we do not breathe with our lungs alone, that the work of breathing is done by the whole body.⁶

1. Tasneem Hameed, Twitter post, October 2013, <https://twitter.com/taseed/status/393448666658127872>, accessed 17 May 2021.

2. Steve Maraboli, *Unapologetically You: Reflections on Life and the Human Experience* (Port Washington, NY: Better Today Publishing, 2013), 19.

3. Courtesy of Talitha Fraser. *Hongi* literally translated as “Sharing of breath” is a significant gesture in the Maori culture.

4. *David Dungay Jr.* was a 26-year-old Dunghutti man who died in the custody of Corrective Services at the Long Bay Correctional Facility on 29 December 2015. His last words, now made into a poster are, “I can’t breathe please! Let me up! I can’t breathe! I can’t breathe! I can’t breathe! I can’t breathe, please don’t! Let me up, please! Help Please! I can’t breathe! I can’t breathe! I can’t breathe! I can’t breathe! I can’t! I can’t!”

5. Alexander Lowen, *The Voice of the Body: Selected Public Lectures 1962-1982*, (Hinesburg, VT: Alexander Lowen Foundation, 2005), Kindle Edition. Location: 1340-41.

6. Lowen, *The Voice of the Body*, Location 1329.



Image from Pexels

Breathing is therefore a fundamental rhythmic process crucial to life that determines movement, feeling, imagining, emotion, mood.

This feels like a critical moment to pay attention to “the breath” of the earth and the breath of humanity. As I write this, I am reminded of a Tamil movie, *Citizen*, in which a fictitious fishing village named Attipatti, home to about 700 inhabitants, is promised a sea

wall to shelter them from rising sea levels. The political “powers that be” squander the funding received for this purpose. The tensions that arise, result in the villagers being chained to one another, taken in a boat, and pushed overboard into the sea. In the scene that follows, the very young son of the village chief is passed on under water from one individual to another and they keep him alive with their “last breath.” He survives and grows up to tell the story of his people and acquires justice.

What do air, breath, and breathing have to do with the contents of this issue of *iGi*? Many of the reflections in this issue do not address “breath” or “breathing,” directly. Yet, these essays, poems, artistic depictions, and liturgies are reflections that are birthed out of feeling, out of observation, out of experience and out of struggle and desire for meaning. These writers are women and a man, living, breathing human beings, and they reflect on experiences both individual and communal – experiences of joy, of pain, of struggle, of humiliation, of anger, of frustration, of hopelessness, but also of wonder, of awe, of excitement, of respect, of acceptance to name a few. To breathe and continue to breathe from within the area of women’s restricted lives within a patriarchal culture and worldview, is to offer a critical intervention. These meditations are generated out of such a desire to intervene; to resist; borne out of the search to find oneself, to discover and understand God and to arrive at meanings and conclusions that are respectful of one’s being, one’s identity, one’s dignity, and one’s humanity.

Putting these down in writing and painting required air. Breathing air is fundamental to performance be it thinking, writing, or movement. We as readers are invited to hear and feel the “breath” that is being shared in and through these reflections. Woman’s wisdom shared is essential to the empowerment and liberation of women, for “women give birth with other women,” says the Alur proverb.⁷ This sharing of wisdom and experience is to enable the making and remaking the life-giving connections between women, between communities and between people and the Earth.

The cover page painted by Libby Byrne, is an expression of the beauty and the vulnerability

7. George Pirwoth Atido, “Sep. 2011: ‘Women Give Birth with Other Women’ – Alur (Democratic Republic of Congo – DRC and Uganda) Proverb,” *African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories*, September 2011, <https://afriproverb.org/apotmsept2011/>, accessed May 30, 2021.

of the Earth which shares in the struggles for breath along with all marginalized communities. To defend and care for those and that which is most vulnerable is to show love – this is to pay attention to the breath of the Creator and of all creation. In light of the restrictions posed by theological, ecclesial and cultural reasoning on many women's lives, these reflections – narratives, poems, liturgies, and sermons – seen as performances of breathing are critical interventions because they are resistant, subversive acts and ultimately hopeful, liberative, and transformative. In and through these varied contemplations is the attempt to transfer the “breath,” of power, of energy, of wisdom, of creativity, of healing – to awaken, to give life, to empower, to encourage and transform those whose breath is currently stifled by tradition, culture, theology, and more.

In closing, I acknowledge the immense help rendered by dear friend, colleague, and fellow feminist, Talitha Fraser, in receiving these submissions and taking care of the preliminaries and assisting me with bringing this volume together.

Monica Jyotsna Melanchthon
Guest Editor

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Lowen, Alexander. *The Voice of the Body: Selected Public Lectures 1962-1982*. Hinesburg, VT: Alexander Lowen Foundation, 2005. Kindle Edition.

Maraboli, Steve. *Unapologetically You: Reflections on Life and the Human Experience*. Port Washington, NY: Better Today Publishing, 2013.

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The national edition on Australia has been made possible through the leadership of Monica Melanchthon. She is a founding and lifelong member of AWRC, a Lutheran minister and a feminist scholar from India. Monica is currently teaching Hebrew Bible and Old Testament studies at the Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity in Melbourne, Australia.

On behalf of the Editorial Advisory Committee, we are grateful for Monica's hard work and leadership. We thank all the writers for sharing their thought-provoking concerns and reflections in this issue.

Hsiu-Yin Chan
AWRC Coordinator