

# The Haven Come Alive Models & Breathing

THE THREE MODELS IN THIS DOCUMENT are presented at Come Alive and other courses at The Haven Institute. They were originally formulated by The Haven's founders, Bennet Wong and Jock McKeen, who drew on their own experience in relationships and the workshops they led blended with ideas from many sources.

The versions included here are intended as summaries, tasters or reminders. We have aimed to provide concise, clear accounts of the central ideas contained in the models and to convey something of their implications and potential for individual health and wellbeing, relationships, families and the societies we live in.

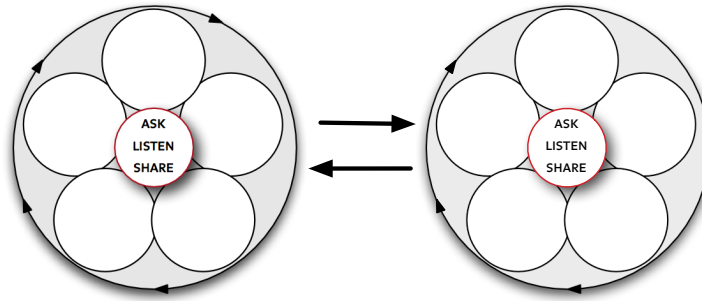
When the models are taught in Haven courses they are explained and developed in various ways, depending on the needs of the group and the styles of the leaders. Some details or perspectives may differ from what is presented here, and participants may appreciate different aspects of the models at different times. Most importantly, the courses provide opportunities to *learn by doing*. These are not only theoretical models – they have practical, down-to-earth implications for the way we live, with ourselves and with others.

There is also an article about breathing, which is a central tool in the work that these models describe.

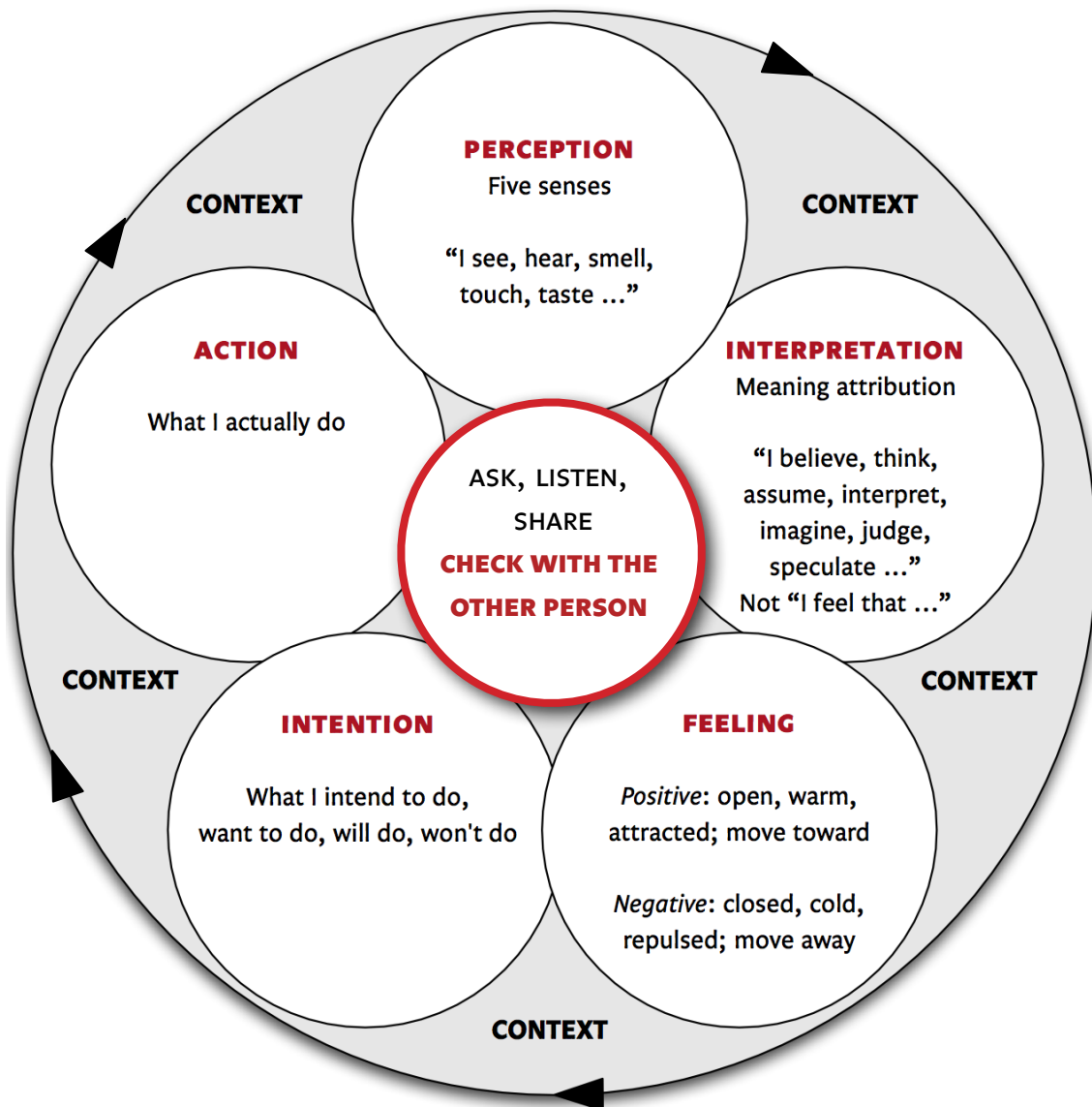


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## The Haven Communication Model



In using this model think in terms of *agreeing or disagreeing* with one another, rather than *being right or wrong*. Be curious about each other's realities. Also be clear with one another about your *intentions* as you communicate.



# The Haven Communication Model



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COMMUNICATION IS CENTRAL to what we teach at The Haven. Our Communication Model is a tool that people can use to be in relationship with one another and to learn about themselves and each other. The Haven's focus on self-responsibility, curiosity, embodiment and relationship is exemplified in this model.

Before The Haven itself existed, its founders, Bennet Wong and Jock McKeen, embarked on what they described as a 'relationship project', in which they set out to know one another and themselves as best and as honestly as they possibly could. The communication model they developed out of ideas they encountered at that time became the principal means through which they did this. Thirty years later they describe it as their 'spiritual practice' and continue to experience it as thoroughly practical and deeply meaningful.

On one level, The Haven Communication Model is simply a description of what goes on when people try to communicate. The idea we emphasize in our courses is that by understanding this process, we can move through it more consciously, more self-responsibly, and with more awareness of our choices. In so doing we can immeasurably deepen and enrich our relationships.

One of the circles in the diagram above contains the word *perceptions*. Every moment, we take in through our senses – sight, sound, smell, touch, taste – thousands of items of 'data'. In themselves, these have no meaning at all. It is through *interpretation* that we make sense of all this information. Based on our interpretations we experience body *feelings*, which are broadly either 'positive' or 'negative'.

For example, if I see that my partner's eyes are red and sore-looking, I will interpret that perception (based in part on my *context*, as shown in the diagram). Perhaps I will decide that my partner has been crying because he or she is upset about something I said or did, maybe a fight we had the day before. Believing that, I might feel 'bad' in some way, maybe about how I have behaved, or

maybe with my partner for not 'getting over it'! The way our whole evening together develops may have its roots in my interpretation of what I perceived.

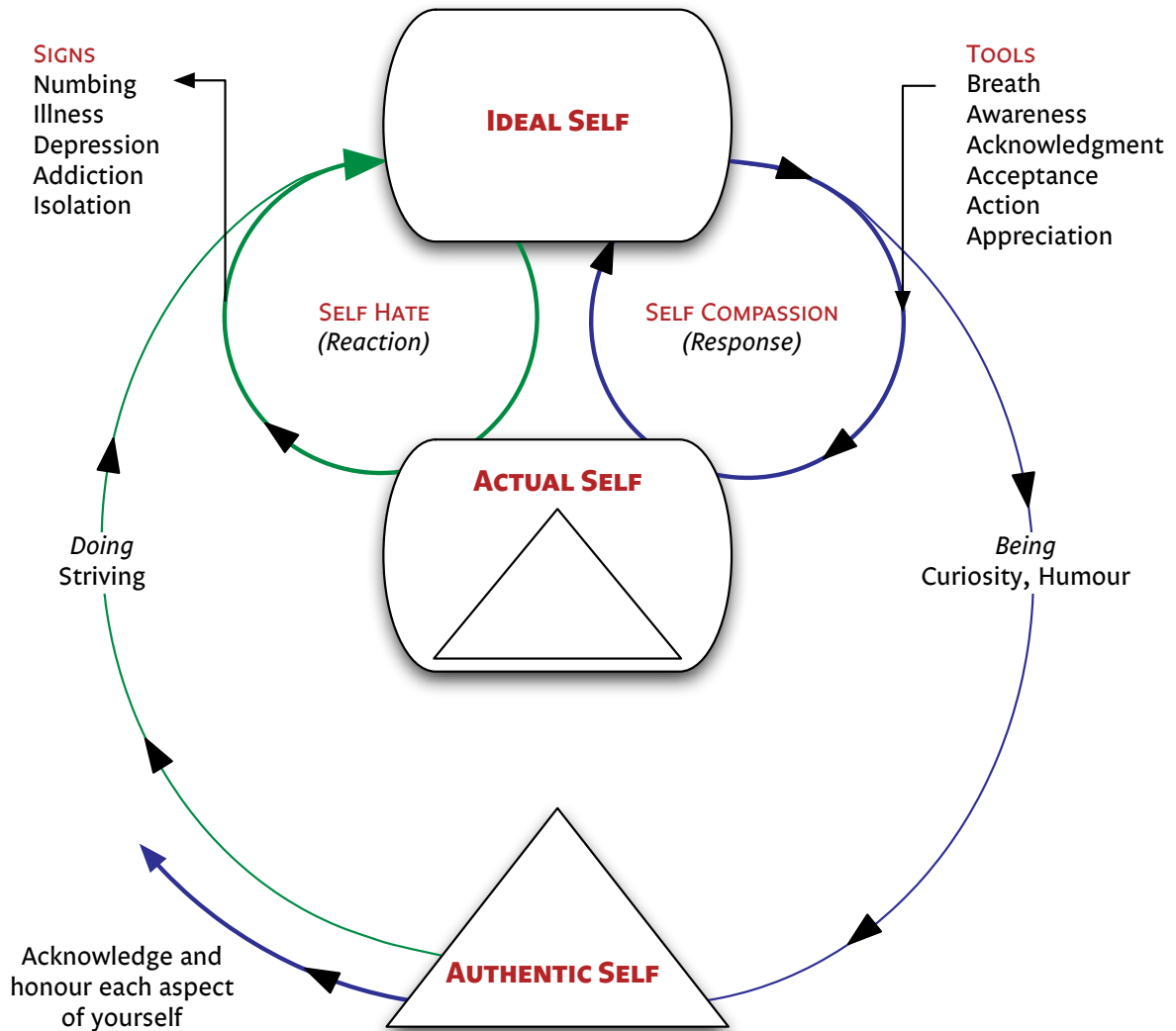
But what if, rather than being sad, my partner has been having contact lens problems? Or, more subtly, perhaps he or she really is sad, but about something unrelated to me. My interpretation – a reasonable one based on my context and the information I had at the time – may not agree with my partner's reality at all. If I don't ask and check my interpretation, however, I may never know. (And of course, all this time my partner will be making interpretations of things he or she perceives about me!)

Now, one evening turning out a particular way because of an unchecked interpretation is one thing; but it is quite easy to have most of our life work this way! Something that many people realize when they come to The Haven and practice this model is how profoundly and subtly our unchecked interpretations of the things we perceive about another person dictate the course of our relationship. Relationships based on such assumptions quickly run into difficulty. The key is to check our interpretations with the other person. If we do not, we will miss out on getting to know and understand the important people in our lives, and on learning about ourselves and how we see the world.

By learning to check out our interpretations – without getting caught up in arguments about who's 'right' and who's 'wrong' – we take a huge step in understanding and expressing ourselves and expanding our worlds to include others' realities. We will also be better able to accept and express our thoughts and feelings – and understand those of others – without letting these dictate how we live. We will be able to formulate our *intentions* more clearly and take *actions* that are congruent, self-responsible and sensitive to others.

The Haven Communication Model has huge implications for personal growth, relationships, and the societies we live in.

# The Haven Selves Model



# The Haven Selves Model



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THE HAVEN SELVES MODEL *offers a way of understanding ourselves and an opportunity to live our lives with more awareness and choice. It traces an individual's development from an original Authentic Self towards an Ideal Self, derived at first from external sources such as family and society, and then internalized. As people consistently fail to match up to their internalized Ideal, and are confronted instead with the reality of their Actual Self, they fall into a cycle of self-hate which has a wide range of consequences for the health and well being of the person. The Haven model offers another option, which we call the cycle of self-compassion.*

The Selves model begins with the assumption that every person is born as an Authentic Self, with a basic nature that is unique to each individual. This 'essence' contains the entire potential of what the person might in time become.

As children grow, they gradually become aware of their parents' or guardians' expectations of them. Through daily experience they form an image of how they must be in order to please those upon whom they are dependent for their survival. This developing image is the kernel of a child's Ideal Self. Though its source is originally external, it is soon internalized and incorporated into a self-regulating system of behaviour in the maturing person. This system is further strengthened as the person encounters other sources of authority, at school and more widely in society. Frequently, the *demands* of the Ideal Self are in opposition to the *desires* of the Authentic Self, and most often the Authentic Self is surrendered in some form of compromise. This reality is a person's Actual Self.

This process is a normal and necessary part of growing up and being part of society. Each person must live as all three Selves, attempting to satisfy them all in order to maintain some emotional balance and ease. Sadly however, as we strive but consistently fail to match up to the perfect requirements of the Ideal Self, while at the same

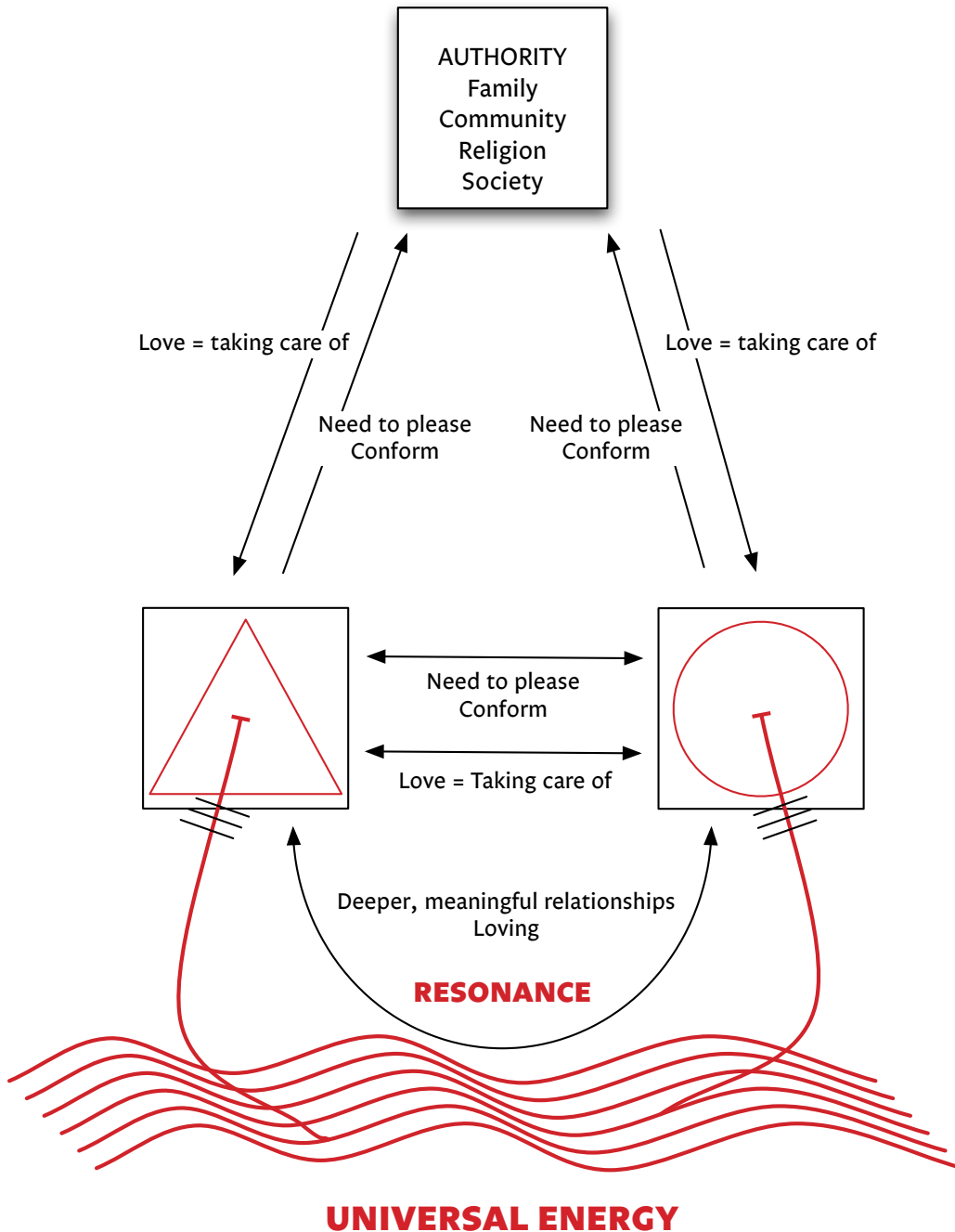
time progressively abandoning our Authentic Self, we react with self-hate. We may achieve a great deal in the process of doing and striving, but there is a price to pay. In order to carry on working against our deepest natures, we become numb or frozen. In particular we constrain our breathing in an attempt to still our feelings. In so doing we deny ourselves the full pleasure of being alive. As we lose touch with our feelings, our bodies begin to manifest symptoms. The consequences of self-hate include physical illness, addictions, depression, and a sense of isolation.

It is possible, however, to choose another option, the cycle of self-compassion. There are tools available to help us on this path. The first step is to *breathe*; by doing this we can begin to 'unfreeze' and experience again our own aliveness. We can then become increasingly *aware* of our patterns of striving towards our Ideal, of our Actual Self, and of the desires of our Authentic Self. In *acknowledging* this, to others as well as ourselves, we begin to *accept* our selves; and we can take *action* to further the cycle of self-compassion. As we continue, we progressively develop a fifth 'a', *appreciation* of ourselves

Thus we have an acronym for this cycle of self-compassion: BAAAAA – Breath, Awareness, Acknowledgment, Acceptance, Action, Appreciation.

Many people who come to The Haven know the cycle of self-hate very well, and are all too aware of both the emotional and physical symptoms that can result from it. For many, the realization that there is a powerful alternative to this marks a turning point in their lives. Awareness gives us the opportunity increasingly to *respond* to the events and circumstances of our lives with self-compassion, curiosity and humour, rather than simply *reacting* with self-hate. There is enormous potential in this for growth and increased wellbeing. The challenge is to acknowledge and honour each aspect of ourselves and to move through our lives with choice and responsibility.

# The Haven Resonance Model



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THE HAVEN RESONANCE MODEL *describes how people commonly relate to one another in families and society, and with friends and partners, through a basic dynamic of caretaking, pleasing, and conforming. It also offers the possibility of relating on a deeper, more satisfying level, through the revelation to one another of our inner selves.*

The model begins with the idea that each one of us is a unique expression of a sea of ‘universal energy’, which might be called God, or Ch’i, or Love. We are born into this world, individuated but still connected to this sea, as unique, pulsating patterns of free-flowing energy. Two such individuals are represented in the diagram, as a circle and a triangle.

As we enter this world, however, we are dependent on others for our survival. Our parents are the first people we encounter in this caretaking role, and we soon learn how best to win their attention, by pleasing them and conforming to their expectations. This first experience is replicated in many different arenas as we grow up and move through life. The square in the diagram therefore represents our parents, and also, more generally, the norms and demands of the society we grow up in, expressed through the authority of family, community, education, religion, and so on.

Our response to the demands of this caretaking square is to surrender much of our individual difference, in order to please, to conform, to fit in – ultimately, to become square ourselves. Even if we ‘rebel’ against the demands of society, we still tie ourselves to it by living in reaction against it. As we continue along this path the free flow of our energy begins to contract and freeze. This is represented in the diagram by the boxes around the circle and the triangle. As these boxes rigidify, we begin to lose our connection with universal energy (shown in the diagram with three small lines below the boxes).

We then set out to recover a sense of connection

through seeking love and relationships. In place of our original connection to one another through universal energy, we learn to ‘take care of’ and ‘look after’ one another (as represented in the diagram by the arrows between the circle and the triangle). This, after all, is society’s paradigm of what ‘love’ is; and it is what we have most experienced in our upbringing. In developing our primary relationships, we look for people we can caretake and who will take care of us. Again we surrender our individuality and strive to please. The cost of this is that we further abandon our authentic selves and often remain with a sense of loneliness, isolation, and meaninglessness. As we experience dissatisfaction in our relationships, we may become locked instead in unproductive conflict or in hopelessness and apathy.

This model offers another way to connect, through a process of self-revelation and sharing. We believe this is the process that so often begins in Come Alive and other courses at The Haven. As people begin to breathe and experience their own feelings and share these with one another, other members of the group experience *their* own feelings in *resonance*. A kind of ‘thawing’ takes place and the rigidified boxes around each of us begin to melt and soften. We then become able to reconnect with the universal energy of which we all are a part and begin to relate to one another through that energy rather than through the roles we had previously constructed.

The two other models described in this document, as well as the breathing exercises, are intended in the service of this kind of connection through self-revelation, sharing and resonance. Breathing, the Communication Model, and the self-compassion cycle are tools we can use to gradually loosen the boxes we have constructed around ourselves and learn to relate to one another in a deeper and more satisfying way. In relationships of this sort we can experience real loving and connection.

# Breathing



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*This article is adapted from*

*A Book about Health & Happiness by Bennet Wong and Jock McKeen*

*The Haven Institute Press, 2005 and 2008*

THROUGH THE ACT OF BREATHING, oxygen is brought to the lungs, where it is absorbed into the blood stream and then delivered to all the body's tissues for the important energy-creating function of metabolism. Since this is such an automatic life function, people generally pay little heed to the important effects of breathing. It is a major issue that deserves some close attention.

When we are in a resting state, our bodies require little energy, so our oxygen requirement is low. Thus, our breathing level is slow and shallow. If we were to get up and begin to be active, the demand for oxygen would increase, and we would automatically begin to breathe more frequently and deeply. In simple and straightforward situations, the breathing system is remarkably sensitive and responsive, based on need. If the demand and supply of oxygen are not 'in sync,' the body experiences distress, which can ultimately influence a person's state of health and happiness.

Besides providing for changing levels of activity, breathing has a close relationship to our feelings, which in turn have a remarkably strong influence on our health. For example, if we find ourselves in a situation that we interpret as dangerous, we automatically prepare ourselves for either fight or flight by breathing quickly and deeply. The necessary oxygen level is thus provided. When the danger has subsided, the body should automatically return to the resting state. But what if it does not? Even though the individual's breathing pattern slows down, and the heart rate diminishes, there is a tendency to hold on in the tissues of the body. The result is chronic muscle tension, elevated blood pressure and the general experience of stress.

After being caught up in a series of dangerous or unpleasant situations (for example, at work or in a dysfunctional family) many people are afraid to let go of their preparedness to protect themselves. This is especially

dramatic in emotionally trying situations that result in post-traumatic syndromes. The entire body of such a person becomes chronically tight and rigid, maintained by shallow, ineffective breathing. If an individual continues this pattern of holding over an extended period of time (through a process referred to as a 'fixation'), this can contribute to the development of stress, and sometimes can lead to serious physical or emotional illness.

Many people are afraid to 'let go' because they believe that the expression of feelings is unacceptable. They maintain their holding by shallow breathing, and are afraid to breathe more deeply for fear of the possible release of pent-up tears, or feelings such as anger or sadness. Because of childhood and cultural training, they routinely hold their breath, swallow their feelings and soldier on. A lifetime habit of doing this creates unhealthy and unhappy patterns of dealing with stress. Undoing such habits is aided by a dedication to practicing some deep breathing techniques. With serious, chronic conditions, the help of a breath-work practitioner may be necessary, but most people can do a lot to help themselves. Here we describe the basic method taught in Come Alive courses at The Haven. This can be done alone or with a partner, to explore together. One person could observe the other, and provide encouragement and assistance when needed; then the partners could switch roles. Please note that this is only one of many different approaches to breathing. What is most important is your exploration of your own body and breath in your own way, so that you can learn for yourself what suits you.

To begin, choose a pleasant environment, preferably one offering fresh air; wear loose fitting, comfortable clothes. Lie on any firm surface (your living room rug, a firm bed) with your feet flat and hip distance apart, knees up and slightly apart, preferably without a pillow under your head. If you are uncomfortable lying down, try the



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process sitting up in a comfortable chair or on a pillow. You can have your eyes open or closed, whatever is best for you. Open your mouth, wide and relaxed, and breathe. Breathe in deeply and let the air fall out. Let the breath flow gently like a river, without holding at either the top or the bottom. You might place your hands on your chest just below your clavicles on both sides and feel how much movement you can detect there. Concentrate your attention to breathing more deeply by expanding the range of movement of your upper chest.

Once you have succeeded in increasing the range of movement in your upper chest, place your hands on the sides of your chest and breathe in such a fashion that expands your chest to the sides and front. If you have accomplished this, you have taken a most important step towards breaking through some of your fixations. For a few minutes, let yourself go and relax. Check out how you feel throughout your body. Take note that this simple breathing exercise is handy for you to use whenever you are suffering from stress of any sort. Practice it several times a day, starting with maybe 8 or 10 minutes, all the while increasing your experience of 'letting go.'

Should feelings rise up within you during your practice, express them openly. You might have feelings of sadness, possibly without any apparent reason. Or you might experience some anger. Perhaps you will feel a sudden surge of well-being or joy. Whatever the emotion that occurs, feel it, experience it, and express it safely and responsibly by crying or shouting or laughing, or striking a pillow with your hand. Let it out! If you are with a partner, share the feeling and talk about it with your partner. Take note of whatever memories are stimulated; perhaps keep a journal for reference as you progress. Notice how many times that you tend to 'catch' or 'hold' your breath and each time, practice 'letting go.'

Sometimes, deep breathing will result in tingling feelings and sometimes numbness in various parts of your body. These tingling sensations are not dangerous; they

are a signal that your body is 'waking up' and the energy is flowing. If you are not too uncomfortable with these sensations, there is no problem with continuing with them. You might experience tension in your hands, or your lips might feel rigid and tense; this is evidence that you are reducing the carbon dioxide level in the blood. This is not dangerous either, but may be uncomfortable; quiet your breathing to reverse this process. If necessary breathe into and from a paper bag (not a plastic bag) and slow your breath down for a few minutes. You can restart your deep breathing when the discomfort passes. Sometimes there will be some minor discomfort (e.g., a dry mouth) associated with mouth breathing; in spite of this, we encourage people to continue on with deep breathing in order to increase their energy level.

Over a period of time of breathing exercises (varying with each person), you will likely begin to notice that your five senses (sight, touch, smell, taste and hearing) will feel fuller, sharper and more alive. While you are breathing deeply, try to feel how much more expansive your inner world can become. Enjoy whatever experiences are offered to you by Mother Nature.

Should you become interested in furthering and deepening your experience of yourself through breathing, we would advise you to seek the professional help of a body worker or someone trained in Reichian breathing. We also recommend that you investigate books written by Alexander Lowen on the subject of bioenergetics. There are also numerous books on techniques of breathing; one we like is Nancy Zi's helpful book, *The Art of Breathing*. You might also explore some of the courses offered by The Haven Institute, many of which incorporate the principles and practices explained above.

Through breathing work, you can expect not only to feel more of yourself, but also more connected with yourself and others. In breathing sessions, your fixations and physical tightnesses can let go. You can expect to feel freer, growing as you did when you were a child!