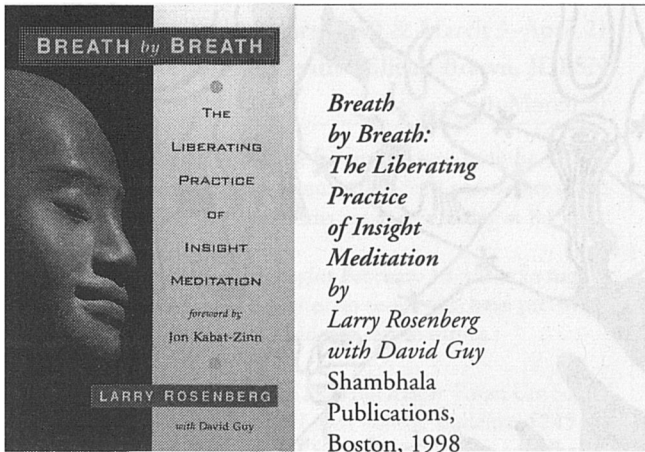


# BOOK REVIEW

~~~~~ Tony Somlai



Larry Rosenberg, author of *Breath by Breath*, is a meditation teacher who draws a clear practice map for students on the path of insight meditation. He uses the four tetrads (body, feelings, mind, and wisdom groups) of the Buddha's Anapanasati Sutra as the compass to aid meditation students in their practice. The book is drawn from a series of forty talks given over a three year period and is particularly flavored with stories and insights for western students. Larry Rosenberg acknowledges the influences of his spiritual teachers: J. Krishnamurti, Vimala Thakar, Zen Master Seung Sahn, Ajahn Buddhadasa, and Thich Nhat Hanh. This acknowledgment of the teachers who influenced him is a strength of *Breath by Breath*. Larry Rosenberg is an honest teacher who has deep respect for his "roots."

The "Breathing with the Body" tetrad investigates the relationship of the breath with the four postures of sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. He instructs his students to "disappear into the breathing and leave all the bones behind, all the preoccupations, worries, plans, fears, all the stuff that makes up the mind." He likens this mind to a "yenta" that gossips about others, berates itself, and continuously makes things. Breath meditation helps us to accept life as it is. What is more important, Rosenberg has students "use that calm mind, even the joy that comes from it, to look deeply into ourselves." He points to a direction that is always toward knowing.

"Breathing with Feelings" was the one section of the book where I made very few notes for this review. Perhaps it comes from my prejudice and biases as a psychologist against a culture that spends way too much time investigating (read becoming attached to) emotions and feelings. Rosenberg clears this up best when he says, "You can learn everything

I've said just as well by cleaning the toilet." His "daily life" teaching is presented as a way to break through the ethereal theories of highly educated and intellectual students found in the West. So, no matter what the feeling, when it's time to clean the toilet— clean the toilet. That takes care of feelings!

The tetrad of "Breathing with the Mind" is focused on the Buddha's teaching that "everything is right where you are right now: your suffering, and the end to your suffering." Everything in "Breath by Breath" has been building to this chapter on studying the mind as the source from which everything comes. Rosenberg points to thoroughly experiencing the mind, moment by moment. He says, "What you need to do is look into your mind, which is itself a space, in fact an infinite space."

The final tetrad, "Breathing with Wisdom" is best expressed from Zen Master Lin Chi's term "true person of no rank." Very simply, there is no meaning. Rosenberg describes this wisdom and no meaning as practicing with emptiness. "The mind gets silent, with effortless alertness. The observer falls away. There is no separation from the object. You're not trying to pay attention; you're just doing it." He sees human problems as not some exercise in problem-solving but simply dissolving through the awareness that comes from practice. "We stop suffering because we have stopped grasping."

The final portion of *Breath by Breath* brings all the tetrads to functioning in our daily lives. Rosenberg gives respect to Zen Master Seung Sahn as his first Buddhist teacher who introduced him to this way of practice. The teaching was that at sitting time, 100% sit, and at washing dishes time, 100% wash dishes. The activities were not to be separated and life was to be treated as one "seamless web."

Rosenberg provides a helpful guide in making Buddhist teachings and practice our own, a part of our everyday lives. But don't let him fool you. He is always pointing at practice. The package is exquisite, but the message is straightforward. "It is important to sit even on days when you don't feel like it. If you sit only when you want to, you will know only the mind that likes to sit." It doesn't matter if, during this life, you have been practicing only one week or twenty years. *Breath by Breath* conveys the clear teaching of making this breath function moment-to-moment.

PERCEIVE WORLD SOUND ZEN CHANTING



Now available on Compact Disc  
\$23 postpaid (\$28 international)  
Primary Point Press  
99 Pound Road  
Cumberland, RI 02864  
kwanumzen@aol.com

Fall 1998 PRIMARY POINT 23