My Gratitude to Leonard Orr

Jim Morningstar

Leonard, who died this first week of September 2019, was my “older brother.” As such he was for me a pioneer in opening the doors of consciousness, an innovator who questioned controlling or repressive standards and a teacher who attracted thousands of students in search of inner empowerment. He was also an individualist who eschewed many social standards, an iconoclast who would shake up expectations of spiritual leadership with statements such as “I made my first million dollars selling air,” and a rebel who delighted in challenging time encrusted beliefs with concepts such as “physical immortality.”*

My introduction to Leonard came through my Tai Chi teacher, Fred Lehrman, in 1976 who later became one of the first certified rebirthers. Joan and I had been on our spiritual path for several years, living in an urban spiritual community, doing monthly Enlightenment Intensives and learning from many quality teachers, some of whom were great proponents of healthy breathing. So when Fred, who was commuting from New York to teach TaiChi in Milwaukee where we lived, said he had learned rebirthing from Leonard and recommended we bring rebirthing to our community, it was perfectly ordained timing. Joan and I had just purchased our first house, a hundred year old three story Dutch Colonial which had more rooms than we knew what to do with. So we justified it in our minds by inviting other to live there and dedicating space for traveling gurus who might come to town. The third floor became the first rebirthing center in our city.

Dianne Hinterman and Marcia Harper were the first rebirthers to come and do sessions there. They blew the roof off with sessions that defied any logical explanations. For example, I came home one day to a pungent oder in the house and was told that during a rebirthing session with a woman earlier that day, almost every one attending her nearly passed out while she was breathing and releasing a peculiar smell. She later informed the rebirthers that during her actual birth a bottle of chloroform was dropped and broke in the delivery room and almost all the medical staff was overcome with the fumes. A cellular birth trauma release.

It was my own breathing, however, that convinced me I wanted to be trained asap in this work. That happened before I knew it. During my regular Monday night Bio-energetics class an attendee fell to the floor and started hyperventilating. I had to either stop her or become an instant rebirther and lead her through a session. After that we put our two children on a plane and went off to do our first rebirthing training in New Orleans during Marti Gras with Leonard Orr. He was welcoming to our children being there as the child in him was always open to children. It was a magical time and set me on a mission to get as much training as I could and become a certified rebirther. That happened within two years at the Rebirthing Jubilee in Sun Valley, ID, a convention of breathers from around the world. At that time the certification process involved standing up in front of every person in the room and stating you were a certified rebirther. If one person objected you were done for the year. It also required an interview with all the current certified rebirthers each of whom had to give their signature to you. There were nine certified at the time and Sondra Ray was the last to give her approval to me at the

induction ceremony concluding the jubilee. A perfect test for me, because as Leonard taught, in spite of this process we can only truly certify ourselves. I had to certify that I was a rebirther in my own heart regardless of public approval before I got outside validation. I was the 12th certified rebirther. This certification process ended the next year as a number of us rebelled, as good students should, because it was at a point where it was slowing down the worldwide spread of the breathing movement.

I then became the co-director of Leonard's Theta International and organized the seminar circuit for One Year Seminar teachers in cities across the US and Canada. This was Leonard's community building organization which fostered local organizers for twice a month seminars and rebirthings. Community building is still a major focus for me and has gotten renewed vigor in the next chapter of my life.

Meanwhile, back in our third floor rebirthing room while Diane and Fred were in town doing seminars and sessions, Fred suddenly went to sleep and a strange man appeared to Diane and told her to come to India. This must have been one of those invitations that were very compelling, because she did. Upon disembarking in India she was met by someone who bade her to come with him up into the foothills of the Himalayas. After some travel they arrived at Babaji's ashram. Diane recognized him instantly as the man who had appeared to her. Subsequently a series of continuously mind blowing occurrences happened for Diane who then persuaded Leonard to come to Haidakhan where Babaji's ashram is. Now the most frequent circumstance for those coming to the ashram was that Babaji would allow visitors to stay a few days and then send them home to live their life, hopefully with some transformation of spirit. As it turned out he allowed Diane to stay seven months. Many stories came back from her to me that were transformative in my life. The presence of Babaji grew stronger for me from then on. He is still a major teacher and influence in my life. He was recognized by Leonard and Sondra, who came with him, as major teachers in their lives and a central inspiration in the breathwork movement. Leonard's devotion to the teachings and inspiration of Babaji continued throughout his life. Babaji teaches with "leela," divine play.

Diane recounted that whatever she was thinking, Babaji seemed to know. One day she was questioning the validity of rebirthing in her mind when she looked up and saw Babaji laying on the ground doing rebirthing breathing. She then had the thought that rebirthing was obviously the answer to everything, upon which Babaji immediately proceeded to stop breathing completely for a long time and then wink and smile at her. There, now you have gotten the teaching and will interpret it as you will.

Leonard continued his tireless work in spreading the healing agency and spiritual transformations of the Spirit of Breath throughout the world. He has inspired countless others to take up their calling be pioneers in their own communities. See his writings on what makes democracy work. He has passed the torch of leadership on to so many who have in turn passed it on to others. I know because that is how it has and continues to work for me. A grassroots revolution of empowerment rather than an empire building model of top down leadership. This is Leonard's legacy for us all. A legacy for which I am eternally grateful and carry with every conscious breath I breathe.

Om Namah Shivaya.

* A note on the concept of *Physical Immortality* which, I believe, is often misunderstood. Leonard had a passion for this concept and spent good deal of time finding people who were 300+ years old. It is not about who can live the longest. It is about living consciously such that the beliefs about death are not running your life. It is experiencing the immortal nature of who you essentially are such that your body is an extension of that consciousness and its destiny follows from that, not outside sources like illness, family belief systems, “accidents” nor planned obsolescence. Babaji himself left his body consciously as part of his leela. Fully integrating physical immortality can lead to your life becoming more leela and less struggle.

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