

Michael Roesselin:

And we are live with another episode of Rebel Health Spotlight. I'm your host, Michael. I am joined by a special guest today who is one of my teachers and the founder of Biodynamic Breathwork and trauma release system, Mr. Giten Tonkov. Giten, thank you for being here.

Giten Tonkov:

Thanks for having me, Michael.

Michael Roesselin:

Yeah, it's going to be an interesting conversation. I'm excited for the people to learn more about you, what you do, and the work that you're now teaching others to do, including myself, so it has been an enlightening experience for me to go through the BBTRS training, to read your book, and learn a little bit about your story and how it all came to be, but let's go backwards a minute and just share in your own words what you're doing in the world. Who are you, what are you doing, and how did you come to be doing it?

Giten Tonkov:

All right, so I am the creator of Biodynamic Breathwork Trauma Release System, and that's a system that's been around for, I'd say, the past close to 20 years already, and it's a modality that works with the six elements. It's including breath, movement, touch, sound, emotional expression, and meditation to support people to release trauma. So I developed this modality over the course of many years. I started as a massage therapist in New York City, and was a massage therapist for since 1994. It's been almost 30 years already. For the past, I would say, 15 to 20 years, I was fully engaged as a massage therapist and working a lot with the body. That brought me, actually, to develop biodynamic breath work, because I was watching how people were responding to body work when I was bringing the component of breath into it.

That's how Biodynamic Breathwork was born. It's really from my background as a massage therapist and working closely with the physical body, working closely with various physical traumas. Actually, my specialty was sports massage and sports injury rehabilitation, and bringing breath really changed the way that I work with people, and that took me deeper into exploring, working with breathing, for sure. So I took many trainings, learned myself, read many books, and sat with many teachers, and over the course of time, but also with experimenting and working with the countless clients and groups, the Biodynamic Breathwork came to life, and it's still very dynamic modality. It's not that it's fully formed and nothing new comes into it. As long as I'm alive, I'm going to keep bringing new elements into it when I see how they work and how they impact people in their healing.

Michael Roesselin:

It's interesting, you started as a body worker, and so did Nisarga, who's another of the teaching facilitators at Biodynamic Breath work who I just recorded an interview with. And there's a very strong influence of body work in the modality itself. Where I've done, I don't know, four or five different breath work modalities as a participant, this is the first one that I've trained to facilitate, but it's the only one that involves touch, either body work by the facilitator or an online self body work and touch, and I think that I've witnessed it in seeing how the touch and the body work influences the breathing, where you said you notice that the breathing influenced the results you were getting with the body work. I'm curious what you noticed when you started incorporating breathing with your body work and massage. What was different? What did you notice with people they would be able to move better? What was the thing where you're like, "Hey, this is onto something. This is a good addition to what I'm doing"? What was the sign?

Giten Tonkov:

As you were talking about what comes first, the massage or breath work, it's kind of like what comes first, the chicken or the egg? They work so closely together, because first of all, our tension held in our muscles, in our connective tissue, and the stronger the tension, most of the tension, of course, is trauma related, whether it's developmental trauma, shock trauma, or developmental disruption, this physical tension restricts the volume of breath that we can take. So when we begin to work with the body, releasing that tension, we of course open up to the depth of breath, which of course brings the release of emotional charge, which is stored in that tension.

Breath, itself, can support the release of emotional material that's stuck in this tension, which actually causes for the tension to begin to relax. When we come into crying, for example, and after a good cry, we feel relaxed, our muscles relaxed, our body relaxes, and the same thing happened for any emotions. But when we actually consciously go into the body work, into the breath, and connect that body work with the felt sensation, with emotional expression, that what supports the deeper breath to come in and the deeper layers of tension begin to relax, and of course, we cannot access through touch all of the deep layers of our connective tissue and muscular tissue. So the breath and movement actually take care of that, as the breath is kind of the movement that happens from the inside.

Michael Roesselin:

Interesting. Yeah, that all makes sense. And I want to go back to something you said on shock trauma, developmental trauma, physical trauma. So shock trauma is what a lot of people think about when they hear the word trauma. It's somebody dies, you witness something horrific, like some abuse or violence, something like that. Developmental traumas, things that happen as a child over time. It can be neglect. It can be things that are subtle, that we wouldn't necessarily think of, like, "Oh. I experienced a lot of trauma," and then I think everybody understands what physical trauma would be. It was like the injuries you were working with, with your sports massage, and I believe your story started with a car accident and physical trauma.

So it would be, I want to point out that you mentioned that it doesn't matter what type of trauma necessarily, that all of these things, whether it's emotional, it's something you witness that's traumatic, or it's physical, create this tension, this tightness, this stuckness in the body. Can you speak to that just a little bit, and what you might see when, in addition to being able to move better if something is released, this community often has a lot of chronic disease states, a lot of chronic pain, a lot of chronic disease, so what I'm trying to get at is that this tension that can be created from any of these types of trauma, when it's released, aside from just being able to be like, "Oh. My shoulder doesn't hurt as much," what else have you seen with people?

Giten Tonkov:

Yeah, so in essence, what trauma is, is arrested energy. So the energy was released into the body. It may be over the course of one traumatic event. It could be over the course of a series of events, just a situation that people find themselves living in, or even daily commute to work in traffic and aggravation.

Michael Roesselin:

That's enough for me.

Giten Tonkov:

Yeah, it's enough. Exactly, so energy constantly is being released into the body, but the movement of that energy, the full cycle of release and expression is interrupted, so the energy is released and it has no

direction, so that energy settles in the nervous system. And of course this impacts our muscular system, so it becomes chronic muscular tension. So when we begin to work with trauma, what we're doing, we're actually completing that interrupted response. The cycle of activation, charge/discharge. If this happens, our nervous system relaxes, it releases the charge. There's no trauma, and majority of people, actually, are going through that pretty normally.

But when the nervous system goes into the state of overwhelm, there's simply not enough time between the stimulation and discharge, and so it condenses. Every day we go through the cycle of this activation, or whether it's a traumatic relationship, whether it is a stressful job or a stressful lifestyle, all of that accumulates. So the body is prevented to go through this activation and discharge cycle, so that accumulates in the physical body as tension, as well as the nervous system as charge. So what we do when we go through that process of releasing, we release the charge from the nervous system. Within that charge are held emotions, held arrested expression, arrested movement. And so, once we go through that, our system gets a signal, first of all, that we can relax.

After the charge is released, we can exhale, we can deeply breathe in. The activation starts to lower. So the things that were triggering us very easily before, don't. So pretty much we expand our resilience. Our nervous system resilience grows. It's like you have a cup which is full, and you keep adding water to it, and it's going to eventually spill over the sides over the top, but when we are emptying that cup and we can add more water to it and wait, and maybe some will evaporate, maybe some will pour out. So the same thing happens in our physical body. We constantly need to take care of ourselves to do some sort of practice to discharge the tension, the physical activation, the nervous activation that's stuck in our system. This way, if this is done consciously with awareness, our body builds resilience.

Michael Roesselin:

Yeah. Thank you for that explanation. I love the analogies. It really helps demystify some of it and make it make sense. In integrative medicine, that there's a big evolution happening right now where they're understanding that it's this chronic nervous system activation that's keeping people in disease states that aren't. If somebody tries this protocol or this treatment or this thing that helps all these other people, but it doesn't help them, you can usually trace it back to their body as stuck in this state of nervous system activation, and so I've witnessed as a-

Giten Tonkov:

A sympathetic activation, so it's kind of a constant state of fight or flight.

Michael Roesselin:

Danger, yeah. And I've witnessed quite a profound shift in myself, but in others, going through the BBTRS training, and this can be a very powerful tool for people who are looking to regulate their nervous system more and release some of that danger stuckness, and that you mentioned after you incorporated the breath with the touch and after a cry or after an emotional expression, your body feels relaxed, but there's really no separation there between your mental state and the physical state, so what I've noticed is, halfway through, it was only two or three days into the eight days in Poland. Poland is where I went to do one of the in-person trainings with BBTRS, is within three days and two sessions, I think I'd received, my range of motion in my hips was radically improved, to the point where it couldn't have been done with if I went and got some body work and it wasn't from stretching.

This was from release in the sessions, and I moved my hip in a way. I said, "I can't move like this," but then what I also noticed is that I had come there from a very stressful period of my life, and that I was really

wound up. By Tuesday or Wednesday, it coincided with my loosened hip, that my emotional and mental state was also relaxed, and I don't even know if there's a question in there, but I'd love to just hear you speak a little bit on that correlation between our physical tension, tightness, and pain, and how we feel mentally, emotionally, when those things move, that it's kind of tied together.

Giten Tonkov:

Yes, absolutely. We hold this body armoring. Sometimes the body armoring could be in place for many years. Sometimes it could be recent that we, for example, were involved in an accident, and then the energy was released into the body. We didn't have a chance to express it, so it results in pain. Usually what happens, you feel pain in the body, the tightest area will hurt first. That's kind of like a no-brainer. We feel the pain. We touch it. It's inflamed, it's contracted, and that produces pain. So when we begin to work with that pain, usually any kind of tension is connected to emotional charge, or emotional charge can produce tension in the body. The more aggravated you feel, the more your body will produce this nerve impulses to contract, to run away, to fight, dissociate, or just get numb. What happens with people that feel numb, disconnected? It's simply a layer that we go into, because it's too much to feel, too much to process. It's not that we make this decision to disconnect or to numb, because we don't feel like feeling anymore. Our body chooses it for us.

Michael Roesselin:

Very wisely too.

Giten Tonkov:

Yes, absolutely. Because otherwise, you'll feel completely overwhelmed at all times, and many people do. So underneath that, whether you are holding this physical charge, which actually holds emotional charge, or if you are numb and can't feel, underneath that, there's still fight or flight running. So when we provide this experience, like you found out for yourself in the course, that you've gone into a physical release, which goes almost simultaneously with emotional release.

Michael Roesselin:

It was for me. It was very heavy. It was very profound in both at the same time.

Giten Tonkov:

Exactly. You go into a session. Something begins to open up. Immediately the emotion starts to flow, so when we release that physical slash emotional connection, that tension in the body, right away, you felt, "Woo. Something opened up. Something relaxed." It's about, like I was giving the knowledge of a glass being full. You emptied your glass, so there's this tension. The energy, the energetic flow, which was blocked in the area that holds the tension, now can actually flow there, and that what supports people to heal from disease. The majority of disease is blocked energetic flow. If you look at it from the standpoint of Chinese medicine, for example, why does medicine use acupuncture? It is to restore the energetic flow, pretty much, so the body can heal itself. So the same thing happens when we work with breath, which is very closely connected to movement. Breath and movement are separable.

Then, of course, we release the physical tension through the touch and breath and movements, so touch helps us to open up the flow of energy. It works with the tissues. It can also be brought in as a resource. In a very soft way, we can touch ourselves, so we can touch our clients in the session. So this way, this is kind of the seamless flow of the elements, and sometimes all of the elements can be present there at once; the breath, the movement, the touch, the emotional expression, the sound, which is an important part of it too,

is using a voice that's expression, opening up our channel of expression, our throat, and so much is held here in the jaw, in the throat. Since we're very young, we're not allowed to fully speak up to fully find our voice. So this is pretty much, in a nutshell, of what we do, which you have experienced, very clearly, for yourself.

Michael Roesselin:

Yeah, yeah. Thank you for that very clear explanation. So if somebody is curious about how they can learn more, either to try, well, by the time this airs, I'm going to be offering online experiential sessions. But also if somebody wants to go learn more about BBTRS, if we have some coaches, practitioners, and those types out there listening to this, where's the best place for people to go to learn about learning this modality for themselves?

Giten Tonkov:

So the modality is taught online/in-person. The full practitioner training is online and in-person combination, so people can see the schedule of all of our upcoming workshops and training. It takes place in the world, in Europe, in North America, in Australia, in many other countries.

Michael Roesselin:

What's the website?

Giten Tonkov:

Website is [biodynamicbreath.com](http://biodynamicbreath.com).

Michael Roesselin:

Okay. And we'll put the link right below on this, where the video is hosted here. You can go there, and if you wanted to give somebody something they can try to do, related to either breath, movement, self body work, or any aspects of BBTRS, a practice they could start tomorrow, that might give them a little taste or experience, something, what would that be?

Giten Tonkov:

The most powerful tool that I use on daily basis, and I love to bring to people, is working with our felt sense, which is very simple. It's just about bringing your attention to your physical body, and sensing your physical body without attaching any meaning to it. So finding a place, we call this place a resource, finding a place in your physical body that feels better than the rest. Identifying the felt sensation, why this place feels better. Maybe it feels warmer, or it has more space or connection to yourself. Then, just visually reading into this place, visualizing that, as you breathe, you're inflating this place with your breath on the inside. Stay with that. That gives you possibility to actually remain present to your physical body for a period of time, which takes you away from the mind, takes away energy from the mind, and the thought process back into the body. This could be done anywhere, anytime, for as long as you want. You can be present with that technique, and it really works.

Michael Roesselin:

Perfect. Yeah, I can vouch for it. That is one of the techniques I've started implementing since going through training there, and it's pretty amazing what happens sometimes to the rest of your body when you do focus your awareness on, you find that point where, "I feel kind of agitated," and I've seen this with clients already. "I feel agitated today," or "I'm stressed," or "I'm frustrated," or "My body doesn't feel good," or "I feel shaky,"

or whatever. If I can help them find one spot that doesn't, even if it's neutral, sometimes neutral is that spot. There is no spot that they identify as like, "Oh. That feels good," but something that doesn't feel agitated or negative, they find that. We stay there for a minute. They focus their awareness there. They take some breaths there. It tends to spread.

Then, you can cue them. "Where's the boundary around this place? Where can you feel the boundary around this nice feeling place?" I've noticed, not all the time, but often, the boundary will grow, and so the body will react to your awareness being on that place that feels good, in a way that has a positive impact on the rest of your physiology. So play around with that, I think, is a really good practice. So Giten, thank you so much for sharing your work and your expertise. Thank you for creating this training that I've found very beneficial, and I look forward to doing further training, and then sharing this with people myself, so thank you for all of the above.

Giten Tonkov:

Thank you so much, Michael.