



alt.therapies

Waiting to Inhale

REBIRTHING. IT has an ominous ring, suggesting dark rituals and cult indoctrinations. But actually, it's just another new-age healing experience, one in which a practitioner guides you through deep-breathing exercises, allowing you to gulp down hallucinogenic amounts of oxygen. The heavy breathing is supposed to enable you to reexperience memories and shed

emotional tensions. Sounds bogus, doesn't it?

My rebirther is Shila (which is Sanskrit—she's really a Janet) Wilson. Wilson worked in more conventional preventive medicine but was drawn to yoga, meditation, and this, the center of her practice. After we chat awhile, I lie down shoeless on a futon. Wilson gives me some water and warns me that rebirthing may engender odd sensations, such as twitching,

tingling, or feeling smaller—or bigger—than I am.

Why do I start thinking of cakes labeled EAT ME?

The trick to a good rebirthing: "It's about the breath," Wilson explains. "Most people don't breathe with a connected breath. Breathe in and out, in and out, like the waves of the ocean. . . ."

So I begin breathing deeply, without pause, all the while suspecting I'm about to go down a rabbit hole. Within a few minutes, I'm fighting off sleep. Then my feet start to chill and twitch violently. Shila's voice, which had seemed banal, is now reassuring. I feel high. Weird stuff is happening. I break into a sweat. I'm hungry.

Meanwhile, Shila encourages me to "be with the discomfort," which I certainly am. I'm flashing back to childhood and seeing disturbing images of my family.

Finally, I calm down, and my two hours are up—we're talking serious time warp here.

I'm suspicious that Shila spiked the water, but she insists that my experience is normal; when we breathe intensively, she says, we increase our awareness of suppressed memories. If we were to continue, we would talk more about the tensions that emerged so I could accept and integrate them.

At home, I wolf down two big sandwiches and put

in a call to writer Tom Robbins, who's been rebirthed thirty times. "Isn't it something?" he says. "It's a great way to get stoned without side effects."

Robbins is skeptical about the actual psychological benefits of rebirthing and warns me that there are a lot of charlatans in the business. But I'm so taken with it that I go back for a second round. Whatever it is—Shila's gift, the oxygen binge, something intangible—it works again. I get another weird high. Just breathing! After all those hours I spent in talk therapy, who'd have thought that simply by breathing twice as fast and twice as deeply, I would have twice as much to talk about?

—GENE STONE

TREATMENTS

Cyber-Analysis

Is something bugging you? Now you have the option of hunching over your computer keyboard and pecking out what's preying on your mind, then E-mailing it to a psychoanalyst instead of a psychic hot line. Yes, the august members of the Psychoanalytic Consulting Group in New York are offering analysis on the Internet. An inquiry posted to analyst@interport.net sets in motion an on-line "interchange." Once you've registered (for \$125) and filled out a questionnaire, a board-certified analyst will post you some comments and questions and invite the longest-winded reply you can muster. You'll get a suitably psychoanalytic response, along with another set of questions (further sets are \$100 a pop) should your transference take.