



The Power of Breath

It is difficult to define breath in a few words. Breath is the very life in beings, and what holds all the particles of the body together is the power of the breath, and when this power becomes less then the will loses its control over the body. As the power of the sun holds all the planets so the power of the breath holds every organ. Besides this the breath purifies the body by taking in new and fresh life and by giving out all gases that should be put out. It nourishes the body by absorbing from the space the spirit and substance that are necessary, and more necessary than all that man eats and drinks. The whole mechanism of the body works by the power of the breath, and every disorder in the working of the mechanism is caused by some irregularity in the breath. Therefore physicians feel disorder in the health of a patient by feeling his pulse or the beats of his heart. The physician will say that it is the physical illness of the body, which has caused the change in the pulsation and in the beats of the heart, but the mystic knows that it is caused by the breath.

The breath in its different aspects acts differently; in every direction the breath does a special work. The breath has a special work with every organ of the body, and it has its particular influence upon every element of which the physical body consists. Every movement that one makes is directed by the power of breath at the same time the breath alone has the power to stop any motion. For instance, walking, running, sitting, and standing are actions done by the power of breath, and trembling, shivering, or waving the hands or feet without control show lack of power in the breath. Diseases, especially such diseases as nervousness, palpitation of the heart, and paralysis come from lack of power of the breath. All lung diseases are caused by uncleanness of the breath. Troubles in the brain and troubles in the intestines are also caused by lack of regularity of the breath. This shows that breath is the key to health, which is all happiness in life.

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The Culture of the Breath

Breath has various works to do in the mechanism of the body. Hunger and thirst, the power of eating and drinking, is given by the breath; the closing and opening of the eyes, and the activity of all the organs is directed by the power of the breath; the expelling of all gases and excrements also is directed by the breath. Therefore every activity of the body, outward and inward, is directed by the breath. Therefore it is disorder of the breath, which causes illness, and its order regulates the health. Many physicians now point out reasons for diseases, where mystics think of the breath and point out reasons in breathing. According to the point of view of the mystic a natural full breath gives perfect health, and to a mystic's view in a hundred people



not one breathes rightly. Every Brahmin teaches his child a way of breathing when he is nine years old. As it is a common thing that everybody breathes incorrectly it rarely occurs to the mind that one's breath is incorrect.

The air taken in and sent out that one feels through the nostrils or lungs is what we ordinarily call breath. In reality, however, that is as the stem of a tree whose branches are many. According to the physician the lungs are the channel of the breath, but to the mystic the lungs are the branches of the tree, and other branches reach all parts of the body. This tree has a root in the body, and has centers where the branches meet the stem. There are five such centers in the body of man. The breath has its particular work in every center. By the study of mysticism one finds that man's life depends upon the working of the centers. Generally the centers are blocked up on the inner side of the body. Therefore they give but a dim light, if the breath be pictured as a gas and centers as lanterns. When the centers are not in a fit condition they are wasted; not only this, but man is deprived of the full experience of life.

Powers that are considered supernatural become natural when man leads a natural life. The first lesson of a natural life is right breathing. Many people breathe a half breath, many a quarter and many still less. Many diseases such as lung diseases, and nervous diseases, can be avoided by right breathing. It is a certain direction that the breath takes that brings about sleep, and it is the direction of the breath that brings vigor or fatigue. A man may, by the help of the breath, become stronger by doing physical exercises, and another by physical labor may become exhausted and worn out. The laborers in India who have to lift heavy weights have a certain way of breathing, and by understanding this they can lift a great deal and work a great deal and yet feel little fatigue. There are many reasons why people in general do not breathe rightly, but one among them is a lack of education in this. As health is more important than anything else on earth, and as health depends entirely upon the breath, which is the very life, it is necessary that the culture of the breath should be considered as of the highest importance.

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Prana

Breath in the Sufic term is called *Nafas*. The breath spreads through the whole body like a tree, and its stem is felt by man, and it is this stem which man in his everyday language calls breath. All the branches of this tree the mystic calls by different names. A mystic sees the whole body as a plant of the breath. Therefore in the Sanskrit language breath is called Prana, which means the very life. It spreads life and magnetism in all parts of the body, for breath in itself is life, and is magnetism. Deformity of form and feature is often caused by disorder of the breath. Lack of proportion of the body, in form and strength, is also caused by lack of order in the



breath. By exercises for physical culture and exercises of voice production, breath can be developed in different parts of the body. It can especially be noticed in the fingers of the violinist that by constant practice on the violin he puts a sort of magnetism, of life, into the strings his fingers touch. This example is a plain proof that it is not the fingers that play nor the violin that sounds, but that they are instruments of life.

The importance of breath is only now becoming known to the scientific world, and there is much of this mystical subject which is unexplored. But mysticism has been founded on the science of breath. There is no mystic, whether Buddhist, Vedantist, or Sufi, who makes use of another process than that of the breath. Breath is the first lesson and it is also the last.

A mystic becomes capable of sending breath to any part of his body; thus he is able to send life, radiance and magnetism to any particle of his body. The question, 'Does he send the breath by his power of will?' can be simply answered by 'Yes,' and yet that is not enough. If there are no strings on the violin, you cannot play on it by will power. So long as the adept has not balanced his breath, and controlled it, and purified it, and mastered it, it cannot bring about the proper result. Therefore it is of no use to try to make use of breath for psychical or occult attainments until one has caused the breath to be in such a condition that it can work properly in the body. Many therefore, are not successful in spiritual attainments because before making use of the breath in the body, they want to produce psychical phenomena. You cannot play Beethoven perfectly on a piano which is out of tune. The body is the instrument for every experience, worldly or spiritual, and it is not right to say that the body does not matter, only the spirit counts. It is just like saying that it does not matter whether the instrument is tuned, it is the music that counts. The mechanism of the body is so made that in each direction breath accomplishes a certain work, even to such an extent that the degree of its strength differs on the right and left. By a deep study of breath a seeker after truth will find that, as every particle of his body is formed and nourished by breath, so from that and according to that his character is formed.

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The Channel of the Breath

Breath is a channel through which all the expression of the innermost life can be given. Breath is an electric current that runs between the everlasting life and the mortal frame.

Those who have attained any intuition or miraculous power or any power have achieved it by the help of the breath. But the first essential thing is a pure channel for the breath, and that channel is the human body. If the channel is blocked, there



is no possibility for the breath to flow freely. Air in itself is not bad, but when it touches the earth, it partakes the influence of the earth, and therefore can become polluted. So it is with the breath; breath in itself is pure, but if the channel through which it works is not right, it becomes impure.

The breath makes a circuit through the body, and the channel through which it makes the circuit is the spine. The mystics give this channel great importance; they call it the serpent. They picture it as a serpent holding its tail in its mouth. In almost all symbols the serpent represents the channel of the breath. In the terms of the Yogis it is called Kundalini. When this channel is made clear by the method of breathing then this is not only a help to the physical health but it also opens up the faculties of intuition and the doors that are within, where lies the real happiness of man. In order to clear this channel of all that blocks the way one must follow the rules of mystical ablutions and of rhythmic breathing. People who cannot understand the subject and who hear and read things by halves say that some chakras, centers, are opened by breathing exercises and that many kinds of distress may be the consequence. But looking at it from another point of view, one might as well say that the eyes of a child should never be opened, because he will thereby be exposed to temptations of all sorts. All virtue is in self-control; there is no virtue in being dead. Life is worthwhile only when a person leads it fully. People look for phenomena, but there is no better phenomena than breath itself, because breath is life and light, and in the breath is the source of life and light. In the mastery of breath the secret of both worlds is hidden.

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Kasif and Latif

Breath is termed by Sufis Kasif and Latif ; Kasif means dense and Latif means fine. Dense breath is that which is noisy and labored, which strains the nerves and the lungs. The exercises of dense breath are useful for developing the muscles and for gaining control over the nerves; they are helpful also to the lungs and useful to the physical health. But in spiritual development unless the breath be made fine it cannot penetrate through the important centers in the body and it cannot reach far enough into the innermost parts of one's life.

Breath, to a Sufi, is a bridge between himself and God; it is a rope for him, hanging down to earth, attached to the heavens. The Sufi climbs up by the help of this rope. In the Quranic language it is called Buraq, a steed which was sent to the Prophet for his journey to the heavens. Hindus call it Prana, which means life, but they picture it symbolically as a bird which is named in Sanskrit, Garuda, on which rode Narayana, the godhead.



There is no mystical cult in which the breath is not given the greatest importance in spiritual progress. Once man has touched the depths of his own being by the help of the breath then it becomes easy for him to become at one with all that exists on earth and in heaven.

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Breath - The Vehicle of the Self

Breath is the mystery; in it is hidden the secret of life. Breath proves the existence of the life unseen. Breath is audible, at the same time inaudible. Breath is visible and at the same time invisible. It is a certain degree of the activity of the breath and the capacity through which it is acting which makes the breath audible. This shows that there exists something of which we are conscious, the source of which no one knows, which is active every moment of the day, on the model of which the mechanism of nature and art is made.

No one can explain whence it came into this mortal body, and no one can say whither it goes when it leaves this body of clay. One can only say that something living came and kept this mortal body alive and then left it, proving that the same body, which once was thought to be alive, was not really alive, but itself was the life. This proves to the intellect, even to that which is void of faith, that there is some source whence life comes, and that it returns again to the same source. Man's true self is the part of his being which knows itself to exist, which is conscious of itself. When that self takes breath as its vehicle instead of the body then it soars upward toward the utmost heights, toward that goal which is the source and origin of all beings.

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The Mysticism of Breath

Breath is audible and visible, and when a spiritual person, by spiritual exercises, strengthens and purifies the breath, it becomes more intelligible, as a light and a sound. Life and light, in truth, are one; the breath is the life, and it is the same breath which is light. Breath in fact is the light of all senses; the senses of sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch perceive all things by the light of the breath. When the breath is absent from the body, the body with all its perfect mechanism becomes useless. It is natural, therefore, that every sense must become powerful and keen if the breath be developed and purified.

The reason why the ill and weak and people physically delicate generally see visions is that by the lack of flesh, fat and blood the veins and tubes of the body and



the organs of all the senses are free and not blocked as they are in a muscular person. Therefore, naturally, the senses become keen and man perceives more than what is within the ordinary range of perception. Also such a person, when asleep, perceives the impressions from the inner world, because during sleep the inner sense, which may be called the root of the senses, turns its back, so to speak, on the external world and so begins to see the world within.

The mystic, by the help of exercises, develops and purifies the breath. Therefore to him, after a certain time, all things become clear in the outer and inner world. There are some who see light before them, there are some who notice colors before their view, also there are some who see forms before their sight. When they talk about it to others, who cannot observe the phenomena, they are considered imaginative; people often laugh at them. The Sufi, therefore, does not speak of any such experience to others; he thinks it is not their world and they will not be able to understand unless they also rise to that sphere. There is no motive for speaking about one's experiences to others except pride, and if someone does this out of vanity his next step will be exaggeration. If something makes anyone feel himself above others it is natural for him to feel inclined to make it still more impressive. Besides, it is in human nature to wish to interest one's friends in one's pleasure, and if someone is pleased with something he sees he will surely try to make it more interesting by a little added exaggeration. Therefore there are these two dangers on the spiritual path, of which the adept must be aware before making the journey. It is for this reason that mysticism has been made a secret cult, that it may not be for everybody to play with.

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Full Breath

The importance of the breath in the body is like the influence of the weather in the world. As the body and mind act and react on one another, so the influence of the breath takes the chief place in directing mind and body both. Every emotion is caused by the breath flowing in a certain direction, also the degree of the force of the breath. There are three different rhythms of breath which have influence upon the mind. Slow breath gives tranquility to the mind, and all the creative faculties of mind have scope of work given by this rhythm. Moderate breath helps the mind to continue its activities. If one wanted to make out a plan of work, or wished to accomplish a certain work, the slow activity of breath spoken of above would not be helpful; though for poetry or music the activity of breath which is slow is more helpful. But quickness in the rhythm of breath produces confusion, although it gives a force to physical activities. One can run better or swim well when the breath is in fairly quick rhythm. When the rhythm of the breath is too quick, it brings confusion to the mind and exhaustion to the body.



One who does not breathe fully, in other words freely and deeply, can neither be well physically nor make use of his mental faculties. Very often one finds most learned and intelligent people unable to work as they wish and incapable of finishing a work which they have taken up. Sometimes a person thinks it a bodily weakness or mental weakness or lack of enthusiasm or loss of memory, not knowing that it is very often a matter of regularizing the breath. Most often people think that it is the external senses being tired or exhausted that prevents their thinking, but in reality it is the absence of right breathing, for right breathing can make the mental faculties clearer and the outer organs of the senses more capable of perceiving. This shows that the mind can live a fuller life by what I call full breath. For a Sufi, therefore, breath is a key to concentration. The Sufi, so to speak, covers his thought under the breath. This expression of Rumi's I would interpret that the Sufi lays his beloved ideal in the swing of the breath. I remember my Murshid's saying that every breath, which is inhaled with the consciousness of the Divine Beloved, is the only gain and every breath inhaled without this consciousness is the only loss there is.

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Be Conscious of Every Breath

It is by the power of breath that the animals search for their food, through breath they perceive what they must eat, what they must not eat, through breath the carnivorous animals search for their prey. It is through breath that certain animals receive warning of dangers and again it is through the breath that some animals, when ill, find their remedy. If the lower creation can do so much by the power of breath, how much more can man do, if he only knows the right way of the development of breath! It is through the breath that birds receive warnings of the changes of the weather, and accordingly they migrate in flocks from one place to another. Through the breath the herds of deer perceive approaching storms or changes of weather or the approach of a lion or a tiger. Man, who is more capable of perceiving by breath still deeper things, warnings and calls from the earth and from heaven, which places are meant for him to dwell in or to settle in, of discriminating between friend and foe and discerning their pleasure and displeasure, owing to his interest in the superficial things of life cannot fully benefit by the power of breath.

Yogis and Sufis, therefore, and all students of the inner cult, believe that breath is the means of receiving all intuitive knowledge from every direction of life. Absorbed in a thousand things of daily life man gives very little thought to breath. Therefore he keeps his heart closed to all the revelation that can be received by the help of breath. Man as a rule is never conscious of his breath, of its rhythm, of its development, except at the time when he is so tired that he is breathless, or when he is so excited that he feels choked up, or when something keeps the breath from flowing. For a Sufi it is desirable to be conscious of every breath. In the schools of



the Sufis in the East the members of a certain association take up as their duty to remind the whole assembly of the same. So one after another, in turn, takes it up as a duty. They call aloud 'Hosh bar dam,' meaning 'Keep conscious of the breath,' 'Nazar bar qadam'; this sentence is added when the Sufis are walking, and means, 'Look down and see whose feet are these that are walking.'

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The Length and Breadth of Breath

Mind is creative and thought is living, but out of what does mind create a thought? Out of the atoms of the mental sphere. But the current, which attracts the desired atoms to complete a thought, is the breath, not that breath which is outwardly manifest, but that part of breath the action of which is not felt by every man. The more length and breadth the breath has the more scope it gives for the creation of thought. It is therefore that the thoughts of the sages and mystics, who have gained mastery over breath, are more substantial and complete in themselves, and besides they prove to be more expressive and impressive.

The breadth of the breath is in its volume. This comes by the facility one has of breathing through wide nostrils and open lungs. The secret of the power of voice is also to be found in this. The voice of a commander of an army, which carries through the army and impresses the soldiers, thus encouraging them to fight, has breath as its secret behind it. Ali by his invocation of the sacred word, which he sometimes used to cry aloud on the battlefield, used to cause the enemies to tremble.

The length of the breath shows the length of life; lengthy breath is the sign of long life. This comes not only by wide nostrils and open lungs, but also by the accommodation that the body has for the breath, not only the nose and the chest but also the head and the abdomen.

There are some, whose breath has volume, or breadth, but not much length, and there are others who have length and no breadth. But it is the balance of the length and breadth of the breath, which gives balance to the mind.

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Inspiration

Inspiration comes from the light thrown upon a certain idea. This comes from the radiance of the breath falling upon the mind. There are two shadows, one that is projected upon the sky, and another which falls upon the ground; the former



known to the mystic and the latter to everyone. When the breath which is developed, is thrown outward its radiance produces light, and it is the different shades and grades of this light, which manifest in various colors, suggesting to the mystic the different elements, which the particular colors denote. The same breath has a different action when it is thrown within. It falls upon the mind like a searchlight and shows to the intelligence the object of its search as things seen in daylight. Thus man knows without any effort on the part of the brain all he wishes to know and expresses in the way each individual is qualified to express.

Inspiration, therefore, is one thing, qualification another thing. The inspiration is perfect when expressed by the qualified soul. Nevertheless inspiration is independent of qualification. The light that the breath throws upon the mind is in every case different in its radiance. When far-reaching it illuminates the deepest corners of the heart, where the light has never reached, and if breath reaches further the light is thrown upon the mind of God, the store of all the knowledge there is.

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Breathing and Meditation

Why is breath called Prana by the Hindus? It is because it brings on the surface the essence from within. It is a current, which is running from the outer spheres to the inner spirit. What it brings from the outer spheres to the inner spirit is not nearly so great as that which it brings from the inner spheres of life.

This being the condition, breath is vitalizing. Naturally, therefore, the breath of a man in sound health must give health to another in his presence; the breath of a mastermind must vitalize the thought of another; and the breath of a spiritual person must illuminate those in his presence. By breath a spiritually developed person can impart his physical energy, his thought-power and his spiritual influence to the others with whom he may come in contact. It is natural, no doubt, that if the one who wishes to impart has not sufficient power to impart he becomes broken if there is a greater demand on his power and if there is little left with him. Sufis, therefore, consider breathing connected with meditation much more important than anything else in the world: their food, sleep, or comfort.

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Breath Is Likened to Water

Breath is likened to water. The flowing of the breath is like the flowing of a stream. Inhalation and exhalation show ebb and flow. Parts of the earth which water does not touch remain barren; so the centers in the body, with all their intuitive, innate



capacities, remain unproductive if the breath does not reach them. Besides various diseases, in spite of all their apparent causes, often have one principal cause, and that is the lack of free flow of the breath. Many operations could be avoided and several diseases could be cured by the knowledge of the phenomena of breath.

The Hindu sacred rivers, Ganga and Yamuna, are outward symbols of Jalal and Jamal, the two directions of the flow of the breath. And the place where they meet is called Sangam, the meeting or unity, which is considered most sacred by the Hindus. That Sangam is the meeting of these two opposite flows. It is like the meeting of the two directions in the center, which is called Kamal by the Sufis.

The water rises, passes, falls, and runs zigzag, and stands if held. So is breath. Every above-said action of breath has a meaning and has a peculiar effect, as even water varies in its power and magnetism while going through the above-said directions. Water is a tonic, and breath is life itself. No tonic can be greater and better than breath. A spiritually evolved person's presence, therefore, brings about a cure in cases where all remedies fail. Water is the necessity of life, and breath the only condition for living. Without it life is impossible. Water falls as a rain from above; so breath is from above also, though from another dimension. Water rises as vapors; so breath rises with gases, also with joys or depressions. Pure water is health-giving, pure breath gives life. Water partakes of all things mixing with it; so does breath.

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Breath and Magnetism

The mechanism of the human body shows the nervous system as its principal battery in which magnetism is prepared by the action of breath. It is when the nervous system cannot function that this battery gets out of order and does not work properly. Many in order to make this battery of the nervous system work properly take drugs and other medicines, which stimulate the nervous system. But instead of giving power to it they take away power from it, and in the end the nervous system becomes accustomed to all such medicines one takes.

The nourishment of the nervous system is what breath attracts from the space. As far as science goes, it says one gets into one's system oxygen. The mystic goes further in saying, not only oxygen, but also that life and intelligence, that power and radiance which makes the nervous system in perfect order. The result of which is not only good health but ever-increasing magnetism, which comes forth from the person in his thought, speech, movement and action, charging his atmosphere with magnetism which surrounds him as a fortification and protection against all influences, physical and mental; thus making man live a fuller life.

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The Subtle Waves of Breath

Inhaling shows the power of absorption, which is manifest in all living beings and in all objects. Little germs, worms, trees and plants all absorb, and in that way they breathe. Also in all living beings and in all things there is a tendency to put out an element which does not belong to them, in other words an element which their system will not assimilate. It is not only the inhaling and exhaling by the nostrils which accomplishes these two functions, absorption and rejection, but there are minute waves of the breath working in different directions of the body, which perform the above-said two acts in their own way and in their own rhythm of speed; for instance the tendency of stretching and contracting, the tendency of blinking the eyes, of expelling water and refuse from the body. When any of these subtle waves of the breath working in any direction of the body get out of order, then an illness originates in that particular part of the body, spreading its influence gradually to other parts.

Balance in man's life and being is maintained by the evenness of inhaling and exhaling. The compass of man's being is as large as the reaching point of his breath. One lives a fuller life, another does not live a fuller life; because the former breathes fuller, the latter does not breathe fuller. Very often the reason why a child is a dwarf is that his breathing capacity does not allow him to breathe fully; and often the reason why a youth does not develop fully is that he does not breathe properly. A person ages sooner, also, because his breathing is not right. Very often people who have no particular illness feel tired and lifeless, because their breathing is not as it ought to be.

The spirit produces this physical body out of itself; so the body in spite of all the physical nourishment, entirely depends upon the spirit to live. One can live for some time without food and water, but one cannot live without breathing. The reason is that as the physical body is made of the spirit, it needs to breathe spirit in, in order to exist. Breath therefore does not only nourish the physical body but it gives subsistence to all planes of man's existence.

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The Mystery of Breath

Breath penetrates, breath permeates, breath strikes, breath absorbs, breath invigorates, and breath heals. It is therefore that souls with great powers make their thought and feeling penetrate into the mind and the hearts of others. As breath creates an atmosphere it permeates the bodies of others, also the sphere, charging the whole atmosphere with its particular magnetism.



The hearts of men are likened to gongs in the temple. Every spoken word strikes them, but by the power of breath one strikes them without a word. It is by the breath that one contracts illnesses, but also one absorbs defects and the depression of others, as well as joy and happiness. The breath of personalities healthy in mind and body is vitalizing. The breath of the spiritual beings, whose love and sympathy goes out to others, is naturally healing.

It is no exaggeration that the whole phenomenon of life has breath as its mystery, and once the knowledge of breath is attained and breath is mastered by practice, one beholds a most wonderful phenomenon within and without. There are many whom remain skeptical till they have fathomed the mystery of breath. Once they know it, they call it, as Hindus have called it for ages, Breath-Life.

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The Secret of Breath

It is clear even to those who do not know medical science that the whole mechanism of the body stops when the breath has departed. That means that however perfect the mechanism of the body may be, in the absence of breath the body is a corpse. In other words, what is living in the body, or what makes it living, is breath. And how few of us realize this fact. We go on day after day, working, busy with everyday life, absorbed in the thoughts we have, occupied with business, pursuing motives, and yet ignoring the principle upon which the whole of life is based. If someone says, 'Prayer is a very important thing,' people may think, 'Yes, perhaps.' If one says, 'Meditation is a great thing,' people may say: 'Yes, it is something.' But when one says, 'Breathing is a great secret,' the reaction is: 'Why, I have never thought about it. What is it really?'

As far as science goes, breathing is known to be air breathed in and breathed out. When it is breathed in one gets oxygen from space, and when it is breathed out one throws carbonic acid into space. When one goes still further one knows that breathing keeps the lungs and the organs of breath going, that digestive gases are drawn in, and that one gets a greater digestive power. On the basis of that principle people are beginning to use breathing in physical exercises to make the body healthier. For some years now voice-producers have given greater importance to breath. In reality the breathing itself is voice, and the whole voice-construction depends upon breathing. Then again some physicians are beginning to see that many illnesses of the nerves, of the lungs, or of different nervous centers, can often be helped by breathing. There seems to be a general awakening to the science of breath. And those who have practiced breathing in connection with physical culture or for the improvement of their particular condition, illness, or weakness, have found wonderful results. It is thus far that the science of breath has reached.



But when we come to the mystery of breath, it is another domain altogether. The perceptible breath, which the nostrils can feel as air drawn in and air going out, is only an effect of breathing. It is not breath. For the mystic breath is that current, which carries the air out and brings the air in. The air is perceptible, not the current; the current is imperceptible. It is a kind of ethereal magnetism, a finer kind of electricity, the current of which goes in and comes out, putting the air into action. This is what the mystic calls Nafs, which means the self. Breath is the self, the very self of man. Also Atman means the soul, and in German the same word is used for breath. This shows that if there is any trace of the soul, it is to be found in breath.

Naturally, breath, being the self, it is not only the air which one exhales, but it is a current, which, according to mystics, runs from the physical plane into the innermost plane. It is a current, which runs through the body, mind, and soul, touching the innermost part of life and also coming back, a continual current perpetually moving in and out. This gives quite a different explanation of the breath. It shows the importance of something which very few people consider important; and it makes one understand that the most important part of being is breath, which reaches the innermost part of life and also reaches outwards to the surface, which means touching the physical plane. But the direction of breath is in a dimension which the science of today does not recognize, a dimension that is recognized by mystics as being the dimension 'within.'

One day I was lecturing in England and among the audience was a well-known scientist. After the lecture he came to me and said, 'I am very interested, but there is one thing that puzzles me. I cannot understand the word 'within.' What do you mean? Within the body? We can only understand inside the body.' This shows the difficulty of reaching a common understanding between science and mysticism. One day it will be overcome. It is only a temporary difficulty.

To give a philosophical explanation of this dimension, one can take as an example the simile of the eyes: what is it in these eyes of ours that can accommodate a horizon of so many miles? The size of the eyes is so small, and they can accommodate such a large horizon. Where is it accommodated? It is accommodated within. That is the only example one can give. It is a dimension, which cannot be measured, but which is accommodating, which is an accommodation. The accommodation of the eye is not a recognized dimension, yet it is a dimension. In the same way there is a dimension of mind. One can think deeply and feel profoundly; one can be conscious of life and be more deeply conscious still; but one cannot point to it, because this dimension is abstract. If there is any word, it can only be called 'within'. And through that dimension a current runs from the innermost plane to the physical plane and there it keeps life living. That is why one can say that breath is the soul and soul is the breath. It is important to understand that one does not inhale like a straight line going in and coming out the same way, as one imagines it to be. The real action is that of a wheel, a circle; from the nostrils it makes a circle and the end of the circle is again in the nostrils.



The third point to understand about breath is that: just like an electric wire, it shows a glow. As the heat and light are not confined to that glow, but are around it too, in the same way the radiance of this circle of breath which goes on through the body, touches every part of the body.

Another rule to be observed is that with every direction in which the current of breath goes, it causes a different action and a different result. For instance, contracting, stretching, blinking, all these actions are the play of the breath going in different directions. So it is with every natural action one does during the day. Also coughing, yawning, heaving a deep sigh, all these are different actions of breath. Besides, the ability to eat and drink, the ability to expel all that one has in the body, are all results of different directions through which breath works. And if the breath does not work in one direction, then that particular activity of the body is stopped. It is a science that has yet to be explored by scientists and physicians. And the more it is explored the less necessity there will be for operations and many other dreadful things that doctors have to do or to give to their patients. Also the tendency to lung diseases, the pain of child-birth, and early death, all these will be avoided when the science of breath is well understood by the scientists of the day, and practiced by the generality.

The picture of God and of souls is that of the sun and its rays. The rays are not different from the sun; the sun is not different from the rays. Yet there is one sun and many rays. The rays have no existence of their own; they are only an action of the sun. They are not separate from the sun, and yet the rays appear to be many different rays. The one sun gives the idea of one center. So it is with God and man. What is God? The Spirit which projects different rays; each ray is a soul. Therefore the breath is that current which is a ray, a ray which comes from that Sun which is the spirit of God. And this ray is the sign of life. What is the body? The body is only a cover over this ray. When this ray has withdrawn itself from this cover, the body becomes a corpse.

Then there is another cover, which is the mind. The difference between mind and heart is like the surface and the bottom. It is the surface of the heart which is mind, and it is the depth of the mind which is heart. The mind expresses the faculty of thinking, the heart of feeling. This is an inner garb; a garb worn by the same thing which is called breath. Therefore, if the ray which is the breath has withdrawn itself from the body, it still exists, for it has another garb, it has a garb within. The outer garb was the body; the inner garb is the mind. The breath continues to exist, and if it is lost in that garb which is called mind, then there is another garb finer still, called the soul. Because breath runs through all three: body, mind, and soul.

Seen from this point of view one will realize that man has never been separated from God; that with every breath man touches God. He is linked with God by the current of breath. Just like people drawing water from a well, the rope in their hands and the jug of water in the well. The jug has the water, but the rope is in the hand. In so far as our soul is in the spirit of God, it is the ray of the divine sun, while



the other end of it is what we call breath. We only see it reaching so far and no further, because it is only the higher part of the physical body that touches different planes. The breath goes there, but we do not see the action of breath. The action of breath in our body is limited; but in reality this current, this breath, connects the body with the divine Spirit, connecting God and man in one current.

The central current of our mind is also breath. That is why we do not only breathe through the body, but also through the mind, and through the soul too. Furthermore, death is only the departing of the body from this main current which we call breath. But when the body has departed the mind still adheres to it, and if the mind is living, the person is living also. This is what gives us the proof of the hereafter. Many will say, 'How uninteresting to live after death not as an individual, a body; but as a mind!' But it is the mind, which has made this body; the mind is more self-sufficient than we can imagine. The mind is in a sphere in which it has its own body, just as this physical body belongs to the physical sphere. The body of the mind is as sufficient and even more concrete than the body we have in the physical world, for the reason that the physical body is very limited and subject to death and decay. The body of the mind, which is ethereal, lasts long, being less dependent upon food and water; it is maintained more by breath than by anything else. We are maintained even in this physical world chiefly by breath, although we recognize bread and water and other food as our sustenance. If we only knew that bread and water are not even a hundredth part of our sustenance compared with what breath does in our life! We cannot exist five minutes without breath; we can be without food for some days.

Since breath has such great importance, the greatest possible importance, it is clear that the way to bring order and harmony to our body, to bring order and harmony to our mind, to harmonize mind with body, and to harmonize body and mind with soul, is by the breath. It is the development of breath, knowledge of breath, practice of breath which help us to get ourselves straightened out, to put ourselves in tune, to bring order into our being. There are many who without proper guidance and knowledge practice breath. Year after year they go on and very little result is achieved. Many go out of their minds, and very often the little veins of the brain and chest are ruptured by wrong breathing. There are many who have experienced this by not knowing how to breathe. One has to be extremely careful; one must do breathing practices rightly or not do them at all.

One cannot speak fully of all that can be accomplished with the help of breath. If there are men living in the world today who while standing on the earth witness the inner planes of existence, if there are any who really can communicate with the higher spheres, if there are any who can convince themselves of the life in the hereafter and of what it will be like, it is the masters of breath. It is not the students of intellectual books.

The Yogis have learnt very much about the secret of breath from the serpent; that is why they regard the serpent as the symbol of wisdom. Shiva, the Lord of Yogis, has



a serpent around his neck as a necklace. It is the sign of mystery, of wisdom. There are cobras in the forests of tropical countries, especially in India, which sleep for six weeks; and then one day the cobra awakens, and it breathes because it is hungry; it wants to eat. And its thoughts attract food from wherever it may be; food is attracted from miles away by its thoughts. The breath of the cobra is so magnetic that the food is helplessly drawn; a fowl, or a deer or some other animal is drawn closer. It is so strongly drawn that it even comes down from the air, and falls into its mouth. The snake makes no effort. It just breathes; it opens its mouth, and its food comes into its mouth. And then it rests again for six weeks.

The serpent, too, is so strongly built that without wings it flies and without feet it walks. Also if there is any animal which can be called the healthiest animal of all, it is the serpent. It is never ill. Before it becomes ill it dies, yet it lives a very long time. It is said by those living in tropical countries that the cobras can take revenge after as much as twelve years. If you once hit a cobra, it will always remember. That shows its memory, its mind. Music also appeals to the cobra as music appeals to intelligent men. The more unintelligent the man, the less music appeals to him; music is closely related to intelligence. This shows that every sign of intelligence, of wisdom, and of power is to be seen in the cobra.

The mystics have studied the life of the cobra and they have found two wonderful things. One is that it does not waste energy. Birds fly until they are tired; animals run here and there. The cobra does not do so. It makes a hole where it lives and rests. It knows the best way of repose, a repose which it can continue as long as it wishes. We cannot do this. We human beings, of all creatures, know least about repose. We only know about work, not about repose. We attach every importance to work, but never to rest; this is because we do not find anything in rest but everything in work. The work of rest we do not see.

Besides, the natural breathing capacity of the cobra is such as no other creature shows. That capacity goes as a straight line throughout its body. The current which it gets from space and which runs through it, gives it lightness and energy and radiance and power. Compared with the cobra all other creatures are awkwardly built. The skin of the cobra is so very soft and of such silky texture, and in a moment's time it can shed its skin and be new, just as if born anew. The mystics have learnt from it. They say, 'We must go out of our body just as the cobra goes out of its skin; we must go out of our thoughts, ideas, feelings, just as the cobra does with its skin.' They say, 'We must be able to breathe as rhythmically, to control our breath as the cobra does. We must be able to repose and relax in the same way as the cobra can. And then it will be possible to attain all we desire.' As Christ has said, 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God... and all things shall be added unto you.' The same things that are added to the cobra, all that it needs, could be added to man also if only he did not worry about them. As Sadi has said, 'My self, you worry so much over things that you need, but know that the One who works for your needs is continually working for them. Yet you worry over them because it is your disease, your passion that makes you worry all the time!'



When we look at life more keenly, we see it is the same. Our worry about things seems to be our nature, our character; we cannot help it. It becomes such a part of our nature to worry that if we had no worry we would doubt if we were really living! Mystics, therefore, for thousands of years have practiced control of the breath, its balance, its rhythm, the expanding, lengthening, broadening, and centralizing of the breath. By this great phenomena have been accomplished. All the Sufis in Persia, in Egypt, in India, have been great masters of breathing. And there are some masters who are conscious of their spiritual realization with every breath they inhale and exhale. With every breath comes the consciousness of their plane of realization.

For a person who really knows how to work with breath, if he is not lazy, there is nothing he cannot accomplish; he cannot say of anything that it is impossible. Only it requires work; it is not only a matter of knowing the theory, but it requires the understanding of it. That is why the adepts, the mystics, do not consider breathing only as a science or as an exercise; they consider it as the most sacred thing, as sacred as religion. And in order to accomplish this breathing a discipline is given by a teacher.

But there is a great difficulty. I have found sometimes in my travels, when I have been speaking about these things, that people come with preconceived ideas. They are willing to learn, but they do not want discipline. But in the army there is discipline; in the factory, in the office there is a certain discipline; in study at the university, everywhere there is discipline; yet in spiritual things people do not want it; when it comes to spiritual things they make difficulties. They think so little of it that they do not want to make any sacrifice. Because they do not know where it leads to, they have no belief. Besides there are false methods which are taught here and there, and people are commercializing that which is most sacred. In that way the highest ideal is brought down to the lowest depth; and it is time that the real thing should be introduced, seriously studied, experienced, and realized by practice.

*Hazrat Inayat Khan Volume IV - Mental Purification and Healing,
Part III: Mental Purification, Chapter XV*

Healing by Breathing

A healer must know in the first place that breath is the very life, that breath is the giver of life, and that breath is the bringer of life. One can live without food for some time, but one cannot live without breath even for a few minutes. This shows that the sustenance that breath brings to man's life is much greater and much more important than any nourishment upon earth. Every atom of man's body is radiant. But if the body is the flame, the breath is the fire, and as the flame belongs to the fire, so the body belongs to the breath. As long as breath dwells in it, it lives, and when breath leaves it, it is dead, for all its beauty, strength, and complicated



mechanism. That is why the effect of the breath of a holy person can magnetize water, bread, milk, or wine, fruit, or flower.

The breath that is developed spiritually will have a healing effect upon any painful part that it falls upon. If one knows how to direct the breath there is no better process than healing with breath; and in all the different methods of healing breath is the main thing, since in breath is hidden the current of life.

*Hazrat Inayat Khan Volume IV - Mental Purification and Healing,
Part II: Healing, Chapter IV - The Application of Healing Power*

The Breath

The breath is the principal power needed in healing. All the various manifestations of the magnetic current which come from the tips of the fingers, from the glance, and from the pores of the skin are indirect manifestations of the breath. It is the strength of breath, which gives magnetic power in all its different aspects. Weakness of breath causes weakness of mind and body, and strength of breath is strength to both. One can not lack energy and magnetism if one's breath is full of energy. Therefore before developing any other means of healing the power of the breath should first be developed...

*Hazrat Inayat Khan Volume IV - Mental Purification and Healing,
Part II: Healing, Chapter III - The Development of Healing Power*

Breath

Breath is the principal and essential power that can help in healing. There is a silent healing, and a healing by focusing the glance, by holding the painful part with the fingers, by rubbing it, by waving the hand over the painful part, by touching and by not touching it. But behind these different ways there is one power working, and that is the power of the breath. This power can be developed by breathing practices, and when the breath is so developed that it creates an atmosphere around the healer, then the very presence of the healer heals. The power of the breath can be developed by physical exercises, by rhythmic exercises of the breath, by pure living and by concentration...

*Hazrat Inayat Khan Volume IV - Mental Purification and Healing,
Part II: Healing, Chapter I - The Main Aspects of Healing*