



Eight Lessons on Breath

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Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
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1: Inhalation

Inhalation is called **Urouj** by the Sufis. Inhalation is the first act of life and without inhalation life cannot exist in the body. At the same time inhalation helps to produce the ego and every act of inhalation builds up ego in some way.

A coarse person will have a coarse inhalation and a refined person will have a refined inhalation. The coarser and heavier inhalations may be needed in the performance of physical work but only up to a certain extent. When the breath becomes or remains heavy the consciousness of the person is pulled downward and outward and the emotions become stronger than the will. Therefore conscious practice in the refinement of the inhalation helps in spiritual development but sometimes it also helps in material things. For the coarse breath may be associated with what is called "friction" and every kind of friction produces disharmony and obstacles.

Inhalation is needed for all action, speech and thought. It is association with every act of accumulation, receiving, tension, gain of a material kind. It is needed for lifting, carrying, throwing, jumping upward, lifting the arms, etc. One may also observe the inhalation by sitting and concentration on different thoughts and actions and see which of these tends to draw the breath upward and inward. Generally concentrations on the acts above mentioned will tend to draw the breath in. Also one can hold the breath in longer by keeping the mind and attention on such things. Sit and concentrate on receiving and the breath may be drawn inwardly and held for a longer time.

Inhalation may be studied from the standpoint of physical culture in all acts like muscle tensions, weight lifting, receiving a thrown ball, jumping, etc. The opposite may be seen in dropping, throwing, relaxing—these are of the opposite nature of inhalation.

There are different ways in which one may overcome the tendency toward too much **Urouj**. One is by such means as prayer, meditation, devotion and love, which have the tendency to refine it. Of course all action, speech and thought of the opposite nature work against **Urouj** entirely. But if life is to be preserved in the body, and in the mind, breath is to be received. It is only an adept who can live without resorting to **Urouj**.

Of course the best way to live is to have the breath in rhythm which means that all inhalations during a period are equal to all other inhalations and also exhalations are equal to all inhalations. The whole cycle of breathing: inhalation, retention, exhalation and expulsion should be equal to other breaths during a cycle. This can sometimes be cultivated by counting and sometimes by mere watching. When there is variation in the breath man does not benefit from the living magnetism which enters his personality with each inhalation.

It is refinement rather than weakening **Urouj** which is the best. In those schools which require a teacher, concentration upon the teacher and love for the teacher helps to bring about this refinement. The better the attunement the more advantageous the life without attempt to interfere with the breath, or the ego.

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2: Exhalation

Exhalation is known as **Nasoul** in the Sufic language. It is of the opposite nature of **Urouj** or inhalation. It is therefore associated with the opposite principles. Such things as expansion, relaxation, giving, throwing, moving downward and release from ego belong to its realm. It is necessary to expel breath in order to speak, think or act. **Urouj** may promote concentration but **Nasoul** is positively needed for action.

At the same time **Nasoul** is associated with release of life from the body. It is, so to speak, that life consisted of inhalation and exhalation with the whole life as a single breath of God and with every inhalation and exhalation as a breath of man. But because **Nasoul** releases life from the body, it is unwise to overstress exhalation as this also puts a weight on the bloodstream.

Exhalation therefore has as its purpose the balance to inhalation and the emphasis upon giving and bestowing. In this way, in a sense, it is a release from ego. The principle that it is more blessed to give than to receive should teach us that divine blessings are only possible when we do not hold on to the accumulations of life, be they things, thoughts, pleasures or even breaths. But at the same time the thought that there should be release can become just as much an egotistic motive as the principles of accumulation.

The Sufi therefore surrenders to God and does not overstress either accumulation or giving. There is a purpose in life which involves possessions to some extent and the wise use of accumulation is preferable to the unwise use of distribution. The whole creation was made for the sake of man and man is permitted to enjoy life. But there is some question as to whether joy and **Urouj** are compatible. The result is often an intoxication of life which blinds one to the divine bliss.

The proper course is that of balance, to use **Nasoul** to balance **Urouj**; to indulge in giving and bestowing to the degree that one can control such actions and they do not control him.

It is also beneficial to concentrate a little on exhalation and see what principles, ideas, actions and motives are associated with it. It becomes obvious that giving, throwing, releasing and all such things belong to **Nasoul**. One should, of course, perform such disciplinary exercise of the breath beforehand in order to control it. Therefore mysticism should not be divorced from devotion and the feeling of the presence of God is most beneficial in learning the laws of the breath.

As is taught in *The Soul, Whence and Whither*, the soul is the divine breath which purifies, revivifies and heals the bodies through which it functions. The breath in the physical body takes its coarsest or densest path, but it is not one devoid of wisdom or purpose. The careful study of it and the wise use of breath enables one to live a more complete life.

At the same time if one is in doubt as to which method is best for him, **Urouj** or **Nasoul**, by proper preparatory exercises and then watching the breath, the breath will inform him how to act.

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3: The Nostrils

We breathe all our lives and have little knowledge of what breath really is. In the physical world there is a dependence upon oxygen and a good deal of biological functioning is associated with processes of oxidation. But few have observed the possibility that vital energy may be linked with oxygen as physical magnetism is with iron or electrical conduction with metals in general. The energy-functions, though associated with some phenomena, are not of themselves based on such phenomena. In other words life is more than oxidation-reduction processes, more than the physical functions of breath.

If we remain quiet and observe the breath we may notice that it is sometimes in one nostril, sometimes in the other, very seldom in both. Or again sometimes we take long breaths, sometimes short breaths, sometimes heavy breaths, sometimes light breaths. Most people, however, are unable to control these occurrences, and observation of itself does not bring power-knowledge.

The lower forms of life took the oxygen out of the water. In the course of evolution plants and animals became adapted to the land and "breathed" directly from the atmosphere. Birds were able to fly high and now the next step in evolution seems to indicate that man also is becoming able to breathe in rarefied atmospheres.

There is also the aspect of the nose. People with flat and small noses do not seem to be so intelligent. Those called Armenoids have large and long noses and had to take deep and long breaths because they were originally highlanders. This means that at least in some instances they are more apt to show intellectual ability and even intelligence. Intelligence itself is not dependent upon the breath for its development but can benefit from it for its expression.

Therefore the existence of short and long breaths, of deep and shallow breaths, of breath being in the left nostril or the right nostril or both nostrils, the ability to retain the breath in, or to expel it out and all combinations and variations of these things have their significance. It is already indicated that material affairs are likely to be associated with surface breath and mental matters with deeper breaths. The life in the heart which is still deeper may bring about long, slow and very refined breath. This brings more life and raises the consciousness from the denseness of the earth.

Long, slow and refined breaths are not developed among the Sufis by mechanical exercises. Rather they come through practices in self-effacement (called **fana**), in attunement with the spiritual teacher who has this development, in esoteric practices some of which promote rhythm and refinement and some of which bring mastery. By mastery this means that one is not controlled by the breath being in either nostril or both, but that one can control respiration. Then he can both become more receptive, to watch the breath and learn from it; and also more powerful in that he can consciously direct the breath so that it can be of greater use to him in whatsoever he does in speech, thought and action.

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4: Jelal

Breath in the right nostril is called **Jelal** by the Sufis. This word means majesty or power. All the attributes of God are divided into three classes which are called **Jelali** (power or majesty), **Jemali** (beauty or wisdom) and **Kemali** (perfection).

There are practices by which the breath can be retained in the right nostril. Sometimes these have for their purpose the training in mastery so one can control the breath. Sometimes they are valuable for building up the faculties of power or majesty; and sometimes they help assimilate the faculties of the divine spirit while man is still conscious of his body of flesh.

All actions connected with the use of force or power of whatsoever nature, all athletic and gymnastic movements, fighting, aiming at a target, using the muscles or will-power, striving and effort and all such matters are associated with the activity of the breath being in the right nostril. When it is not so, one is apt to fail. Gentleness has its own usages and mercy is regarded as a highest moral, but wisdom indicates there is a place for every attribute in the universe.

The **Jelal** breath has been called the solar breath by the Hindus. This would indicate that activities of positivity are connected with it. However there is a difference between the positivity of **Nasoul**, such as teaching, giving, etc. and **Jelal** because **Jelal** is always associated with power, force, energy and such matters. The right side of the body, in a sense, is the side of power.

When one is listless, when one finds that the breath is not in the right nostril, there are practices of control, or one can wait until the right time. Often there are obstacles, such as sluggishness or personal problems that prevent the free flow of breath in the right nostril. When one is conscious of it he should not indulge in **Jelal** activities. The simplest difficulty is that which leads to hernia. But there are mental correspondences to it also. Some kinds of thinking are not pursued to any advantage when the breath is not in **Jelal**.

One can concentrate on **Jelal** and then think on a number of subjects and when there is no change in the breath—that is, in the free flow of it through the right nostril, one will be able to know intellectually many types of action, speech and thought which are in harmony with **Jelal** as well as those not in harmony with **Jelal**. This is a good exercise but as the intuitive faculty develops one will know instantly those things which are in harmony with **Jelal**, and those which are not.

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5: **Jemal**

The breath in the left nostril is known as **Jemal** and it is associated with all activities and functions of beauty and wisdom. All light delicate tasks, such as weaving, taking care of infants, mixing of foods, acts of mercy and kindness are associated with it. Whenever one has to be gentle it is easier when the breath is in **Jemal**.

The breath in the left nostril is called the Moon breath by the Hindus. This would indicate receptivity, but it rather means those types of activities which do not draw upon the power of the universe. God is said to have these two sides of power and beauty and it is for the sake of separating them in the world of action that a two-fold current is set up.

If one has to lift a block of stone it is best done when the breath is in **Jelal**. But if one has to polish that stone it is better when the breath is in **Jemal**. Some soft, gentle people have not the capacity for power and are liable to look askance upon it. This is a short-sighted view.

The **Jelal** breath and the **Jelali** activities are needed for the life of the Master, but the **Jemal** breath and the **Jemali** activities are needed for the life of the saint. Actually there must be mastery in both before one can function completely in either. For the **Jemali** is, in some sense, exposed. He therefore tends to practice non-violence and benevolence, but if one regards those as the goal and not the means, there is a short understanding of Divine Wisdom.

Wisdom functions better in the **Jemali** and this is also helpful in the promotion of the intuitive faculty. Because intuition works better when the breath is softer and lighter. But there are short and light breaths which are uncontrolled. There can be a light breath in the right nostril and a heavy breath in the left nostril. These show that different faculties are at work, sometimes beneficial, sometimes harmful. Ultimately all faculties and functions are beneficial when one knows how to coordinate the inner and outer life.

It is also well to concentrate upon **Jemal** and then upon lines of activity and thought to ascertain which are in harmony with it. When one knows that all functions of beauty and wisdom are so associated it becomes easier. When one notices that the breath is in the left nostril, one will often accept the status and not try to change it. But when immediate necessity requires an activity of another kind, then one should resort to some form of discipline, always in the name of God and wait until the breath changes. This is equally true of the left to the right as the right to the left.

The wise, however, accepting breath as a communication from God, learn to coordinate their life's activities to it.

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6: Kemal

The breath in both nostrils is called **Kemal** by the Sufis. It is the meeting place of the **Jelal** and **Jemal** forces, the point where the two arms of the cross intersect. It may not occur very often during the day and may remain momentarily or it may persist.

When the breath is in **Kemal**, any type of activity, whether of the nature of power or beauty will fail. For **Kemal** signifies destruction and at the same time **Kemal** signifies perfection. It is the destruction of all that is personal and immediate. But it is not the destruction of what is eternal and persistent. It is the breath of God through man and in one sense may be called the Holy Spirit, which is the Divine Breath.

There are prayers that affirm that the destruction connected with the Kemal breath does not take the Holy Spirit from us, but because so few know what the Divine Breath is, the prayer is not realized. For at such moments it is best to pray, meditate and rely in general upon the presence of God. That is to say, when one is aware that the breath is in both nostrils that is the time to turn from self to God. At the same time it is true that the more one practices prayer, meditation and spiritual exercises the more he becomes aware of this divine breath in himself.

The prophet, who takes the line mediate between that of the saint and the master, has to become perfect in the **Kemalic** development. The only way this can be done is to die to self, which is to say, experience **fanā**. The acceptance of the Murshid enables the disciple to die in himself and live in the Murshid. This is a safe course when the breath is in **Kemal** and at the same time the assimilation of the spirit of the teacher develops the breath in **Kemal**. When the breath is developed in **Kemal** complete mastery of breath becomes possible.

The persistence of the **Kemal** breath, whether it comes “naturally” or through effort has the tendency to refine the body. It is valuable in throwing off poisons of all sorts, physical, psychic and mental. It can also bring about renewal of personality. But it should not be indulged in for its own sake for then one cannot do one’s immediate work in the world. There is thus a warning, for those in **Kemal** can otherwise do nothing but bring destruction to themselves and others.

There are instances in the lives of Sufis who have destroyed armies or removed plagues because of their perfection in this line.

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7: Rhythms and Movements

If one could keep very quiet and observe the breath as it is, as a natural phenomenon, he would find that it takes different movements and has different rhythms. These seem to follow a natural course. The mystics say that this course is one of akasha, air, fire, water and earth, each, in a sense, proceeding from the others.

The breath will appear at one time in the right nostril, at another time in the left nostril and occasionally in both nostrils. Often there is a dominant, or most but not all of the breath will be in one nostril. There will be short movements and long movements. There is a difference between a long movement and a deep movement: the long breath seems to penetrate deeply but its rhythm is comparatively rapid. The deep breath may be coarse or fine, but the deeper the breath, the more likely it is to be refined.

This is because the deep breath penetrates deeply into the personality. The breath in thought is deeper than the breath in action; the breath in feeling is still deeper. The breath in meditation is much more refined than the breath in action, or the breath concerned with egoistic tendencies. The ego tends to turn the breath in a circular course and this, naturally, means karmic activity. It shows that one is under the law of reciprocity. To rise above this many methods are used by mystics of various schools, although they all have the same goal.

One should not try to lengthen or deepen the breath without the guidance of a teacher. The methods by which breath or energy is sent to one particular center is not regarded as important by the Sufis. The bloodstream naturally feeds the whole body; every cell is a depository of life. If there is any center which is more important than other centers it is the heart; the heart has been created to be the immediate depository of the blood. Therefore in Zikr and other practices the forces are directed toward and also away from the heart.

But it is not noticed that breath and spirit are one, not two. The refined breath may mean the refined spirit and spiritual persons often have refined breaths. There are some mystics who do nothing but watch the breath to see that it is refined. This is done both by watching the breath and by walking and seeing that one's tread is light. When one develops this refinement he also attains to more control over the breath. When that is reached one can both observe and at the same time master the movements associated with **Jelal, Jemal, Kemal, Urouj** and **Nasoul**, and gain the knowledge of the mystical elements, earth, water, air, fire and ether.

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8: Colors

If one keeps his eyes closed and watches for different colors, one will also notice that colors seem associated with certain movements. The colors that appear are yellow, red, green, blue and a smoky or grayish color. These colors do not always appear in any fixed order, because by temperament, nature and immediate conditions, one may be predominating more or less in the personality. Astrologers and occultists have classified people in earth, air, fire and water temperaments and there seems to be some truth in it. Naturally one may seem to see that color which is immediately predominant in the personality.

Under spiritual development, whether one has training in breath control or meditation or any other method one begins to discover the kingdom within himself and this makes him conscious of all the colors, movements and other associations of the breath.

Thus the earth movement is comparatively on the surface and takes a crescent shape. But in essence it is flattened and spreading. The water movement is downward and greenish, although it also appears as white. The air movement is zigzag and blue. The fire movement is upward and red and its symbol is the triangle.

One finds these symbols in Tibetan art and elsewhere, where the shapes have been preserved. Generally the earth is pictured as a cube and the water as a reversed truncated cone; above these are fire which is pyramidal. The air is placed above these and is sometimes pictured as a sphere and again as a crescent holding a small ball or sphere which is the ether or **akasha**. But while the Tibetans have preserved the symbology, they have not always paid much attention to the simplest aspects of breath.

The breath colors may mingle, just as the gases mingle in the atmosphere, but do not mix. You may see red or blue or green or yellow. The eyes of man have also been constructed that the rods and cones respond naturally to these four colors. Mixtures and the colors one sees in dreams and visions show a lowering of the plane of activity. The pure colors are above the mixed colors and the pure light is above the mixed colors.

Those schools which associate thought or love or activity with certain colors have not derived such knowledge from mastery of breath. Thought may embrace all colors and love may embrace all light and there are different forms of activity which best operate under the attunement to earth, water, fire and air respectively, or the combinations thereof.

When one masters the breaths one produces his own colors. When one is subject to the breath one can see various colors by looking at the sun, or by closing the eyes after turning the lights out at night, or by keeping them open and glancing at a wall. When one is ill the colors appear in the aura, but sometimes these are the result of the absence of one or more pure colors. That is why secondary and tertiary colors appear in the aura of ill or undeveloped persons. And even when an apparently pure color appears, this is not so—it is the resultant of the absence of one or more elements, not due to their presence in purity.