Forty Lessons on Breath

by

Murshid Samuel L. Lewis

(Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti)

edited by Murshid Moineddin Jablonski

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Toward the One, the Perfection of Love, Harmony, and Beauty,
the Only Being, United with All the Illuminated Souls
Who Form the Embodiment of the Master, the Spirit of Guidance.

1. Breath controls all aspects of life from the seen to the unseen. When breath is in the body, life is in the body; and when breath is not in the body, life is not in the body.

Ryazat (Esotericism): Take a thought, inhale, hold the thought. Exhale and try to hold the thought; there will be a difference. Thus we can learn there is an association between breath and thought, breath and life.

2. Exhalation does not always remove all noxious gases. When it does not, some poisons are left in the body. Therefore, disciples learn to breathe with the whole body and so control inhalation and exhalation.

3. Breath is not to be confused with air. It is something like the relation between magnetism and iron. There is magnetism apart from iron, that is to say there is energy apart from matter. The energy connected with breath is called prana. The science of breath is called pranavada in Sanskrit and pasi anfas in the language of Sufis.

4. What are called spirit and matter in English correspond in some respects to what are called Shiva and Shakti in Sanskrit. The body, being the temple of the Holy Spirit, has accommodation for both Shiva and Shakti.

5. What is called the neck center in Indian esoterics corresponds more or less to the glottis. This organ or gland sends material into the digestive tract, and spirit with air to the lungs. All bodily functions are therefore of the Shiva or Shakti varieties.

6. Ryazat: Breathe, identifying yourself with breath. Breathe, holding Darood, i.e., “Toward the One,” with each inhalation and exhalation. Identify yourself with the breath; identify with the Darood. This helps to free you from identification with the body.

7. Practice meditation by repeating the Darood (“Toward the One”) either a prescribed number of times or at least 5 minutes daily. Learn to feel the life-force entering the body. Identify yourself with the breath; identify yourself with the life-force. Do not identify yourself with the body. Thus you will learn to actualize: “This is not my body, this is the temple of God.” This is used as a disciplinary practice for beginners; for more advanced students it is used as a method of identification (fana or yoga).

8. The degree of a person’s spiritual evolution can be measured by the breath—its power, its sweetness, its rhythm, and its tonicity. Spirit and breath become one, and one’s spiritual evolution is measured by the breath.

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9. Christ is born when breath enters the body, and Christ is crucified when one thinks of oneself.

Ryazat: Practice thinking of the breath; practice thinking of the breath with Darood; practice concentrating on Love; practice thinking of oneself. One will notice a great change. This self-thought is called nufs by Sufis and is the greatest obstacle to life and happiness.

10. Breathing in unison helps bring harmony. Breathing with Darood helps increase that harmony. Breathing in Darood with a common concentration, e.g., the Sufi symbol, brings a still greater harmony.

Ryazat: Try each of these alone or with others and experience the results.

11. There is a difference in the breath of each kingdom: mineral, vegetable, animal and human.

Ryazat: Try concentrating in turn on a rock or mineral, a precious stone, grass, a tree, an insect and a four-legged animal. Notice the difference in your breathing. (This subject is continued in the Commentary on *The Inner Life*.)

12. Disharmonies arise because of clashes in the rhythm of breath. These disharmonies can be removed by singing, dancing, devotion and esotericism. Therefore, Sufis use Wazifas and practice Zikr, not only to bring peace and harmony to each person, but also to each group.

13. Both inhalation and exhalation have an effect upon the atmosphere, and it can be harmonious or inharmonious in relation to the atmosphere of another. But when the Etheric element is present, it transmutes the nufs (ego-mind) and prevents inharmony. The Etheric breath is developed through training and Grace.

14. Inhalation and exhalation affect and are affected by every form of thought, speech and action. The details of this are taught to Sufis in the science of Mysticism.

15. Life-force enters with the breath and leaves with the breath. This life-force is stored in the body. It is not the result of caloric intake through food. A stout person may obtain many calories from food without being able to utilize this in action. If the caloric theory alone were true, the stout would always be superior to the thin. The energy in an electric battery is derived from the chemicals introduced and not from the material of the battery. In a similar way, the life-force vitalizes the body, and the body utilizes the life-force. Therefore, the body is an accommodation and not a person.

16. Shiva is breath-energy and Shakti is body material. In Jewish mysticism they are called Mi (meaning who) and Ma (meaning what). It is the interaction between Shiva and Shakti, between Mi and Ma, which accounts for all of life.

17. In some Hindu philosophies such as Samkhya, one is disciplined to identify with Purusha

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(Shiva) and become free from Prakriti (Shakti). For this, mental instruction does not suffice. Esotericism (Ryazat) must be practiced.

18. The goddess Kali represents the divinization of material forces apart from spirit. This can only be relatively true. There is no Purusha without a trace of Prakriti; there is no Prakriti without a trace of Purusha. The body is not entirely dead because of the absence of life-breath; it is then only an accommodation for sub-human forces.

19. Thus the breath makes the mortal out of the animal. Thus the breath makes the immortal out of the mortal.

20. The Sufi does not force any type of development or unduly activate any gland or center. It is mastery and control of the breath which spiritualizes the whole personality. When the breath and bloodstream and mind are purified by yoga exercises and meditation, the flower of the heart and soul open through the combined efforts of the sun, rain and earth within.

21. Purification may come through the repetition of sacred phrases. In Sufism Wazifas are so used.

22. Given a problem: Meditate on the problem. Given a problem: Meditate on “Toward the One.”

Ryazat: Fikr—concentrate on “La Illaha” with each exhalation, and on “El Il Allah” with each inhalation. Do this 20, 33 or 101 times, according to the intensity of the problem. There should be an influx of Kashf or insight that will help throw light on the problem, perhaps solve the problem. This is generally true of headaches, small pains and personal disturbances with loved ones.

23. Practice of Darood (“Toward the One”) will generally give one more strength than another. Practice of Fikr will counterbalance any strength from another. It is therefore not necessary to hold inimical thoughts. By these methods of practicing the presence of God, one assures oneself of self-firmness and helps build a proper atmosphere in relation to others. We all breathe the same atmosphere, and therefore are in communion whether we are aware of it or not.

24. Self-consciousness and self-thinking (manas) are the obstacles to knowledge. No doubt we must and should use our minds. But mental utilization apart from universal harmony is beneficial neither to oneself nor to the generality.

25. The Hindu repeats, “Neti, neti” (Not this, not this). The Sufi has the positive practices of Darood, Zikr and Fikr.

26. The small self is not overcome by any attention to the self. The small self becomes of even less importance when one practices the praise of God or repeats the Divine Attributes (Wazifas).

27. Praise of God is the Right Path. Then there is no room for ego. The ego is not effaced, but is

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transmuted by joining in the praise.

28. Light and sound have a direct action upon consciousness and so affect breath. Inhalation and exhalation both have their sounds and also their colors. Each of these has its significance.

29. In a purified body, the Etheric element helps to clarify the tone and beautify the expression. Mild breathing brings about that condition of which Jesus spoke: “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Thus, mild breathing may increase the scope for magnetism and bliss.

30. The breath sciences enable one to understand Sufi mysticism in all its aspects.

31. The prayer Nayaz proposes that there are three ways toward health: Through the rays of the sun, through the waves of the air, and through the all-pervading life in space. By space is meant the akasha, which is the accommodation for the life-power. Solar radiance, the magnetisms contained in the Air element, and the life-power in space (prana) all enter the body through the channels of breath.

32. If oxygen were the sole supporter of life, one could breathe contentedly in an atmosphere of pure oxygen. But pure oxygen could also consume. Shiva is not only the divinity in life, he is the destroyer and transformer.

33. The Earth itself breathes. The Mother requires prana for her life. Only deserts remain practically without it. After a rain the air is purified. No doubt this increases the level of ozone in the atmosphere. Ozone is not only physically activated oxygen, it is also a carrier for the all-pervading life in space. Yogis and ascetics often live in high mountain areas where there is less denseness and oxygen, but where the ozone is comparatively higher.

34. Adepts who are able to control the breath and draw the blessings of Nayaz can adapt themselves to any environment.

35. Breath is light. It carries light; it carries color. It invigorates the whole body or any portion of it to which it is directed. Breath carries health. It also carries immortality.

36. Concentrating on the heart, one can purify the breath. Concentrating on the breath and blowing “Hu” one can purify the heart.

37. The breath is the channel for many kinds of magnetism, including what is called baraka—which means blessing. The Murshid blowing on the disciple can help and bless the disciple. The Shafayat (healer) blowing on the patient can help the patient. The adept blowing on food and drink can help anybody.

38. Practice of Fikr with consciousness of breath develops what may be called the ark—which carries the soul symbolically in the next world. More important, the ark of breath carries the soul

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actually in all worlds.

39. Identifying oneself with breath is a form of self-effacement which takes one from mortality to immortality. Material things are left behind; spiritual “things” are carried to the next world—carry one to and through the next world.

40. All the denseness of the Earth is left behind when one has this breath realization.

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