

# Breathing with Awareness

Breathing is one of the most simple and basic of human functions. It is completely automatic like the beating of the heart, yet it is easily taken from auto-pilot to manual as we bring our awareness to it. Although breathing automatically serves us very well, breathing with awareness has many additional benefits.

## **Benefits of Breathing with Awareness**

Breathing gives us access to a life giving substance in an abundant and unlimited supply. Our atmosphere is huge and there is always enough air for us to all breath -- you could say there is an abundance of air. When we breathe deeply, we can experience this abundance. As we bring our awareness to our breath and we know that the air supply is limitless, we can glimpse infinity.

Our world is full of the fear of scarcity. It fuels our economy and keeps us all running. When we breathe in a shallow way, we reinforce to our bodies that there isn't enough air for them and they will have to make do with what they have. We set our bodies up for restrictions and scarcity becomes normal.

The opportunity to experience the opposite of this by breathing deeply with awareness, is indeed a gift. It sets our bodies up for freedom and abundance. As we breathe, we bring in oxygen, which we need to live and release carbon dioxide, which we no longer need. In fact, plants and trees need it and readily breath in our "waste", converting it once again to oxygen in a wonderful exchange.

## **Letting Go and Bringing In**

The cycle of breathing out what we do not need and breathing in what will bring life is automatic. We live it every moment. By paying attention to our breath, we can thereby experience abundance, an unlimited supply of energy, letting go and bringing in. And these basic principles of life can make a huge difference when applied to the other areas of our lives. Knowing when to let go of things, patterns, beliefs and when to bring in the new enables one to grow, develop and stay healthy.

## **Being in the Moment**

Another benefit to paying attention to our breath is that it brings us totally into the present moment. We can only breath now, therefore the past and the future disappear when we focus on our breathing. This is often helpful when we are trapped in an anxiety cycle about something that has happened or something that may happen.

Stress tends to make us breath in a shallow way. When we are tense, we may tighten our abdomens, thereby preventing our diaphragms from descending. Then we have to use the muscles between our ribs and at our necks to breathe. This takes more energy and causes tight neck muscles as well. When we are frightened or feel strong emotions, we may actually stop breathing.

Notice what you do the next time you feel this way. Without the breath, our natural way of dealing with emotions which is to experience, acknowledge and let go, is impaired. Emotions can then get locked into the body and eventually cause physical changes.

## **Conscious Breathing**

When you become conscious of your normal breathing pattern and consciously do something to alter it, such as holding your breath or changing the rate, the body wakes up so to speak and tries to return itself to homeostasis or “normal”. It does this by releasing information substances throughout the body and many of these are endorphins -- the body’s natural opiates, which make you feel good.

As you can see, the basic body function of breathing can be used to alter basic chemistry, release and deal with emotions, challenge beliefs of scarcity vs. abundance and bring us into the moment. And there is no charge for the basic materials (air)!

Even one minute of paying attention to your breath can have results. With practice you will soon be able to do longer periods and use them when you have breaks, feel stressed out, sit in traffic jams, before you start your day and when “drinking in” a beautiful sunset. I invite you to take a moment now and notice your breathing.

### **Patterns**

Clear and concentrated breathing can give you insights into your patterns. Do you hold onto your breath or struggle to push the exhalation. Do you breathe into your belly or mostly up in your chest? Does your mind wander to the past or the future? Does your mind race or do you feel sleepy? What feelings come up? What happens to your breath when painful or sad feelings arise?

### **Breathing Exercises or Meditations**

Here are two ways to become aware of your breath. You will see that these exercises become a meditation and are very simple to do.

Dr. Joan Borysenko talks about a very easy breathing meditation on one of her audio tapes. She instructs us to begin by letting out a deep sigh to re-set the diaphragm, which may be tight and not moving very well.

Then, placing one hand on your belly, gently blow out all the air in your lungs through your lips and allow the air to come back in through your nose. You will probably feel your belly rising as the air pushes the diaphragm into your abdomen. This is called abdominal breathing and is the kind of breathing to be used in this meditation. Breathe naturally for a few moments with your hand on your belly and feel it rise and fall as you breathe into that area.

Now you can begin the meditation part. On the first breath, breathe into your abdomen slowly and gently and as you breathe out, focus on the number 4. Just let yourself experience 4. Breathe in again and as you breathe out this time, focus on the number 3. With the next breath focus on the number 2 and with the following one, the number 1. Then begin again starting at 4 and going to 1.

Try doing this for a few minutes at first. With some practice, you will soon be able to do longer and longer periods of time and you will be meditating.

Dr. Deepak Chopra recommends this breathing meditation in “Perfect Digestion”.

“ Set aside some time when you’re free from work or family responsibilities. Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Sit quietly on the floor or in a straight-backed chair. Close your eyes.

Begin by simply exhaling and inhaling as you normally do, but gradually focus your awareness on the process of breathing. But don’t try to control or influence it in any way. Just be aware of the coming and going of your breath. If you notice your breath speeding up or slowing down -- even stopping for a moment -- simply observe this. Don’t try to resist it or encourage it; rather allow it to pass. Similarly, if your attention wanders or you become distracted in any way, don’t resist. Just allow your attention to gradually and naturally return to your breathing. Continue this Breathing Meditation for fifteen minutes. Allow yourself another few minutes for withdrawal from the

technique, still sitting with your eyes closed. Then open your eyes and resume your normal activities.”

Chopra writes that this kind of meditation takes some practise but that after awhile of doing this, it will begin to have positive effects on your stress level and on your general state of mind throughout the day.

### **Too Simple?**

These techniques may sound too simple to make any difference. However many things that can help us are simple. The hard part is actually doing them for ourselves.

I invite you to start noticing your breathing at different times of the day. Try one of these exercises and notice how it effects you. Give yourself the gift of breathing with awareness.

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