

Letter to the Editor

The Quality of Breath Expresses Our Inner Health

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"Life is the period between one breath and the next; a person who only half breathes, only half lives. He, who breathes correctly, acquires control of the whole being".

This statement from the classical yoga text, 'Hatha Yoga Pradipika' says it all. Any disruption in this natural tempo of our breath can lead to disastrous results. In most cases, this wreckage of the periodicity of our breathing pattern is not even discerned till it starts affecting our living. A new born is the epitome of what a human is meant to be - from the perspective of maintaining perfect alkalinity, being in the moment, being with self, being with nature, and also, most importantly, having the best quality of breath – a reflection of its sound wholesome health. The flow of our breath has divine power to secure wholesome wellbeing for us.

Unfortunately, our advent into adulthood results in minor transgressions, which have the ability to play havoc with the rhythm of our breath and consequently disrupts the rhyme of our life. Herewith commences our lifelong struggle with being healthy and dealing with multiple life interrupting psycho somatic ailments. These issues have its origin at Manomaya Kosha, which then gets manifested on the gross level through Pranamaya Kosha. It is a vicious circle, the imbalance at the emotional level directly disturbs the rhythm of the breath and vice versa. Gaining control over one of these two aspects leads to an automatic control over the other. However, working directly on the mental plane (Manomaya Kosha) might prove to be challenging for many whereas working on it through 'Breath regulation' is achievable.

Quality of breath consists of the following prime constituents:

1. *The depth of respiration*
2. *The speed of respiration*
3. *The ratio of inhalation & exhalation*
4. *Passage of respiration (Nasal / Mouth)*

Once one sync with the four above mentioned aspect, one naturally slips into the 'Kumbhak' - the Pranayam, which transforms you into a 'Purified YOU'.

The Depth and the Speed of Respiration

'The depth of respiration' and 'The speed of respiration' are interconnected. With the passage of time, as the stress level increases, one's respiration become either rapid or restricted, deviating away from its origin. As a result, breathing becomes shallow. The exchange of oxygen with carbon dioxide is less than optimal. To optimize breath, one needs to inhale as much as possible – to intake maximum oxygen, and exhale as much as possible – to eliminate maximum carbon dioxide. To start off on this journey, one should inhale and exhale as per one's current capacity while constantly maintaining being in the comfort zone.

The depth of breath will allow you to reach the lower lobes of your lungs where the exchange takes place. It will activate and massage

the important respiratory muscles- the intercostal as well as the diaphragm. Only when the muscles are used to its best, they perform well otherwise, they end up becoming sluggish and fail to support their designated functions appropriately. Having reached the lower lobes of your lungs, one gains mastery over the expulsion of maximum carbon dioxide, which results in oxygen (which has increased in volume too) being circulated in its purest form and without being mixed with carbon dioxide. That area is now infused with life giving oxygen, which rejuvenates all the cells of our body. The cells are nourished and the functioning of each cell is enhanced.

The Ratio of Inhalation & Exhalation

Once the speed and the depth of respiration is within one's control, it is easy as well as important to train the breath to flow in a proper ratio i.e. taking the application of your inhalation and exhalation onto a higher state. Inhalation and exhalation when focused on independently, are two extremes in themselves. First is directly connected with Sympathetic Nervous System, the fight and flight mode, which keeps one on one's toes; the latter is dominated by the Parasympathetic Nervous System, the relaxing and the cooling mode which induces lethargy and sluggishness. Yoga talks about 'Balance'. Hence, learning to balance these two components of respiration is a must for overall wellness.

A ratio of 1:2 is critical in maintaining the homeostasis. And this ratio needs to be attained gradually. Many have unknowingly trained their inhalation to remain much more active than their exhalation. Hence, hypertension and associated complications have become common place problem of today. As we start mastering the ratio, we start mastering our breath and thereby, our mind and our thoughts, which can be then directed in the direction of positivity and assist us in responding to any situation with Vivekkhyati.

Passage of Respiration (Nasal / Mouth)

Breathing through the mouth should happen only when specified. Otherwise, it happens as a response to stress. The more you use your mouth as a passage of breath, the more stressed you are. Further, you are adding to the stress by injecting more toxins in the body as the filtration system of our mouth is not as adequately equipped for this work as the nose. Once the rhythm and the rhyme of breath is established, you transcend into the state of 'Kumbhak' – Pranayam

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becomes easy and the breathing experience blissful. You step into the journey of meditation.

Understanding these parameters in-depth and applying it with awareness both allow us to attain supremacy over the quality of breath and the optimal usage of our respiratory muscles. One can witness wonders of eliminating chronic tension and stress at the physical as well as mental level, improving oxygenation in the blood cells, eliminating maximum waste from the body and mind and thereby,

allowing mind to handle any situation in the most effective manner possible.

Century old Yoga philosophy contains it all, in minute systematic details. Just performing 'Yogic Breathing' with complete and focused consciousness has the power to elevate the quality of our 'inner health'.

Click here for Yogic Breathing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g58JruFZ5Gs&t=29s>