

Breath Is Life

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?'

The Physical Breath

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.

Breath Is a Current

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.

Breath Is the Self

Breath 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; 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 and 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.

[Because the breath runs as a current between the source of being and the and the physical embodiment of being,] one can say that breath is the soul and soul is the breath. 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; and 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.

Breath Travels "Within"

The direction of breath is in a dimension which the science of today does not recognize, a dimension which 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.

Breath Makes a Circle

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.

Breath Glows

The third point to understand about breath is that, just like an electric wire, it shows a glow; and 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.

Breath in Different Directions

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 childbirth, 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 Covers of Breath

The body is a cover over the ray of breath. 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.

Harmonize by Breath

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.

Using Breath to Accomplish

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, and 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, specially in India, which sleep for six weeks; and then one day the cobra wakens, 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 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 Sa'di 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.