

On Breath by Murshid S.A.M.¹

(Murshid S.A.M. is Murshid Samuel L. Lewis, also known as Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti)

“The Breath is an absolute, profound, and pure way of communication from all planes of existence to other planes.” – S.A.M.

“There is only one thing to be gained in life, and that is to remember God with each breath; and there is only one loss in life, and that is the breath drawn without the remembrance of God.” – Abu Hashim Madani, the teacher of Hazrat Inayat Khan who was Murshid S.A.M.’s teacher

“A recent edition of the Wall Street Journal has a headline ‘Man can control his automatic nervous system.’ This newspaper superman yoga trick was taught to any and all who came to Murshid’s house on Sunday nights. ‘Take a long breath and be conscious you’re taking a long breath,’ he would say after asking everybody to just be conscious of your breath. ‘Now take a short breath and just be conscious you’re taking a short breath.’ Then after several breaths, two or three only, he would instruct, ‘Now take a heavy breath and be conscious you’re taking a heavy breath,’ and two or three or breaths later, ‘Now take a light breath and just be conscious you’re taking a light breath.’ After a pause he would say, ‘Now refine that breath as fine you can make it.’ There would be no sound in the as breaths were refined. ‘Now breathe in all LOVE that you are capable of breathing in: love in and love out, love in and love out,’ and then he’d do it. ‘Alright, now breathe in all the JOY that you are capable of breathing out; joy in and joy out, joy in and joy out.’ And when that had been practised for a moments, moments only, he’d say ‘Alright, now with the breath very refined breathe in all the PEACE that you can breathe in, and breathe out all the peace that you can breathe out; peace in, peace out.’ This would be practised. ‘Now expand that to fill this room.’ This would be practised. Now expand that peace over the city,’ etc. These called the Jhanas of Lord Buddha.” – Mansur

38 Thoughts On Breath

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. Breath may be called the essence of man from one point of view. As individual being, man is mind. As collective being, man is Adam. It was into Adam’s nostrils that God breathed the breath of life. It is breath which invigorates each and all men. It is mind which makes the man; it is breath or spirit which unites men, which forms Adam. This makes possible the Brotherhood of Man in the Holy Spirit or Divine Breath.
3. One notices that after a rain the air is purified. This is one part of the process by which poisons are removed from the atmosphere, but it is only one part...

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4. 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.
5. 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, there is energy apart from matter. The energy connected with breath is called *prana*. The science of may be called *pranavada* in Sanskrit and *Pasi Anfas* ‘in the Sufi language.
6. 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 *Shiva* and *Shakti*.
7. What is called the Neck Centre in Indian esoterics corresponds more or less to the glottis in man. This organ or gland sends material into the digestive tract and spirit with air to the lungs. All functions in man are of the Shiva or Shakti varieties.
8. 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 free you from identification with the body.
9. Practice meditation by repeating the Darood (“Toward the One”) either a prescribed number of times or at least five 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 actualize “This is not my body, this is the temple of God.” This is used as a disciplinary practice for beginners; it is used as a method identification (fana or yoga) by the more advanced.
10. The degree of spiritual evolution can be measured by the breath – its power, its sweetness, its rhythm and its tonicity. Spirit and breath become one, and the grade of spiritual evolution is measured by the breath
11. Every element in the breath attracts a similar element in another person’s breath. This is one the reasons for harmony between people...
12. Every inhalation is God’s gift to man and every exhalation is man’s sacrifice to God...

“WATCH YOUR BREATH”

“Murshid and I were out for a walk. We came to a busy street with six lanes of cars whizzing by in both directions. There was no stop sign. He said, ‘Watch your breath!’, and grabbed my hand and dragged me into the street. I felt like a wild stallion rearing on its hind legs and trying to get away. He kept shouting, ‘Watch your breath!’ The cars whizzed by on all sides. Needless to say, we made it across safely.” – Fatima

13. Christ is born when breath enters man’s body, and Christ is crucified when man thinks of himself. 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 *Nafs* by Sufis and is the greatest obstacle to life and happiness.

14. 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.
15. 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 four-legged animal. Notice the difference in breathing; (this subject is continued in the commentary on the “Inner Life”).
16. 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 Zikars, not only to bring peace and harmony to each person, but also to each group.
17. 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 destroys the *nafs* (ego-mind) and prevents inharmony. Esoteric practices regulate breathing.
18. 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.
19. 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 man may obtain many calories from his food without being able to utilize them in actions. 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 chemical 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.
20. Shiva is great-energy and Shakti is body material. In the Jewish mysticism there are these aspects expressed as 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.
21. In some Hindu philosophies such as *Samkhya*, one is disciplined to identify with Purusha (Shiva) and become free from Prakriti (Shakti). For this, mental instruction does not suffice. Esotericism (Ryazat) must be practised.
22. The goddess Kali represents the divinisation 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 subhuman forces.
23. Thus the breath makes the mortal out of the animal. Thus the breath makes the immortal out of mortal.
24. The Sufi does not force any type of development or 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.
25. Purification may come through the repetition of sacred phrases. In Sufism Wazifas are so used.

26. Given a problem: Meditate on the problem. Given a problem, meditate on “Toward the One.”
Ryazat: Fikar-concentrate on *La ilaha* 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. Now after this re-concentrate on 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.
27. Practice of Darood (“Toward the One”) will generally give one more strength from another person. It is therefore not necessary to hold inimical thoughts. By these methods of practising the presence of God one assures himself of self-firmness, and helps to build up with and from others. We all breathe the same atmosphere, and therefore are in communion whether we are aware of it or not.
28. 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.
29. The Hindu repeats, “*Neti, neti.*” The Sufi has the positive practices of Darood, Zikar and Fikar.
30. The small self is not overcome by any attention to the self. The small self becomes of even less importance in practicing the praise of God or repeating His Attributes.
31. The Praise of God is the RIGHT PATH. Then there is no room for ego. The ego is not effaced, but is transmuted by joining in the praise.
32. Inhalation and exhalation both have their sounds and also their colors. Each of these has its significance.
33. The movement of earth around the sun necessarily alters the metaphysical constitution of the atmosphere. Motion of earth, angle of sun’s declination, intensity of light or degree of darkness, all have their peculiar effects. Light has a direct upon consciousness and so affects breath....
34. 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 “Blessed art the poor in spirit.” Thus mild breathing may increase the scope for magnetism and bliss.
35. The breath sciences enable one to understand the Sufi mysticism in all its aspects.
36. 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.
37. 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 what the scientists call ozone. Ozone is not only physically activated oxygen, it is also a carrier for the all-pervading power in space. Yogis and ascetics often live in high mountain areas where there is less denseness and less oxygen, but where the ozone is comparatively higher.
38. An adept controlling his breath and able to draw the blessings of *Nayaz* can adapt himself to any environment.