

In Praise of BREATHING!

Breathing is something we do every moment of our lives without having to think about it. We share it with all humans and all terrestrial animals. It is vital—we cannot live without it. We can take it for granted, or we can take it with gratitude.

We draw air in (containing vital oxygen) from the Earth's generous atmosphere. We take, on average, 20,000 breaths per day for our entire lives. Our systems are built to intake and deliver oxygen to all of our cells. For the hundreds of millions of breaths we take in our lifetimes, gratitude is surely appropriate.

We can befriend our breaths. They are waiting to be befriended. They are available at all times. They are always fresh, new, and now.

Traditional Yoga teachings invite us to take breaths with the qualities of deep, slow, smooth and rhythmic. Doing so is conducive to inner peace. We are further invited to “attend” our breaths at the nostrils or abdomen. This attention brings and maintains our awareness to the present moment of life. Using a play on words, the present moment bears countless “presents,” internal and external.

Arnie Shapiro, M.D.

Breathing is inherently pleasurable. In-breaths satisfy a need in the same way a sip of water does when we are thirsty. Outbreaths relieve a pressure buildup, which is also pleasurable and relaxing.

Our breaths are slow enough to thank each one in a series:

- Inbreath—I give thanks
- Outbreath—I release
- Inbreath—I receive vital O₂ molecules
- Outbreath—I discard byproduct CO₂ molecules
- Inbreath—I enjoy
- Outbreath—I am joy! ■



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