

**The Omega Uniform Edition of the
Teachings of Hazrat Inayat Khan**

The Awakening of the Human Spirit
Spiritual Dimensions of Psychology
The Music of Life
The Art of Being and Becoming
Complete Sayings
Tales
Mastery Through Accomplishment

**THE MUSIC
OF
LIFE**

Hazrat Inayat Khan



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The Music of Life

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THE SECRET OF BREATH

As the books, precepts, and doctrines of his religion are important to the follower of a religion, so the study of the breath is important to the mystic. We ordinarily think of the breath as that little air that we feel coming and going through our nostrils. But we do not think of it as that vast current which goes through everything, that current which comes from the Consciousness and goes as far as the external being, the physical world. In the Bible it is written that first the word was, and from the word all things came. Before the word was the breath, which made the word. We see that a word can make us happy; a word can make us sorry. There is a story told that once a Sufi was healing a child that was ill. He repeated a few words, and then gave the child to the parents saying "Now he will be well." Someone who was antagonistic to this said to him, "How can it be possible that by a few words spoken anyone can be healed?" From a mild Sufi an angry answer is never expected, but this time he turned to the man and said, "You understand nothing about it. You are a fool." The man was very much offended. His face was red. He was hot. The Sufi said, "When a word has the power to make you hot and angry, why should not a word have the power to heal?"

Behind the word is the much greater power, the breath. If a person wishes to study the self, to know the self, what is important is not the study of the mind, of the thought, the imagination, nor of the body, but the study of the breath. The breath has made the mind and the body for its expression. It has made all, from the vibration to the physical atom, from the finest to the grossest. Breath is audible; it is a word in itself, for what we call a word is only a more pronounced utterance of breath fashioned by the mouth and tongue. In the capacity of the mouth breath becomes voice, and therefore the original condition of a word is breath. If we said, "First was the breath," it would be the same as saying, "In the beginning was the word."

The mystery of life does not concern only the material plane, but goes much further. This mystery resides also in the breath, for it is the continuation of breath and pulsation that keeps the mechanism of the body going. It seems that the people of ancient times had a greater knowledge of this mystery than those of today. For what is meant by the lute of Orpheus? It means the human body, which is a lute and is meant to be played upon. When this lute is not realized, when it is not understood, when it is not used for its proper purpose, then this body remains without the use for which it was created and has not fulfilled the purpose for which it was made. The beating of the heart and head, the pulse, all these things keep a rhythm. Man very rarely thinks about what depends upon this rhythm. The whole of life depends upon it. This breath which one breathes is certainly a secret in itself; it is not only a secret but it is the expression of all mystery, something upon which the psychology of life depends.

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. 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?"

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 gas 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. 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.

But when we come to the mystery of breath, it is another domain altogether. The perceptible breath that 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. This 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 "soul" and 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 that one exhales but it is a current which, according to mystics, runs from

the physical plane into the innermost plane; a current that 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 that very few people consider important. 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. But the direction of breath is in a dimension that the science of today does not recognize, a dimension that 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, but 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 that cannot be measured, but that is accommodating, that 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." Through that dimension a current runs from the innermost plane to the physical plane, and there it keeps life living. That is why one can say that breath is the soul and soul is the breath. 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 the breath makes a circle, and the end of the circle is again in the nostrils.

The third point to understand about breath is that, just like an electric wire, it shows a glow. 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 that goes on through the body touches every part of the body.

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. 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, 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 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 that projects different rays, and each ray is a soul. Therefore the breath is that current which is a ray, a ray that comes from that sun which is the spirit of God. 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.

Then there is another cover, which is the mind. The difference between mind and heart is like that between the surface and the

bottom. It is the surface of the heart that is mind, and it is the depth of the mind that 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 that is called breath. Therefore, if the ray that 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. Breath runs through all three: body, mind, and soul.

Seeing 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 as people draw 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. Insofar 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 breathe only 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 that 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 that 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 as 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.

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 that 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.

One cannot speak fully of all that can be accomplished with the help of breath. If there are people 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 learned 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, especially in India, which sleep for six weeks. Then one day the cobra awakens, and it breathes because it is hungry; it wants to eat. 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, 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. 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 that 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 people. The more unintelligent the person, 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 that 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 that it gets from space and that 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 learned 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. 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'adi 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. 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. In order to accomplish this breathing a discipline is given by a teacher.

But there is a great difficulty. I have found sometimes in my travels, when I have been speaking about these things, that people come with preconceived ideas. They are willing to learn, but they do not want discipline. But in the army there is discipline; in the factory, in the office there is a certain discipline; in study at the university, everywhere there is discipline. Yet in spiritual things people do not want it; when it comes to spiritual things they make difficulties. They think so little of it that they do not want to make any sacrifice. Because they do not know where it leads to, they have no belief. Besides, there are false methods that are taught

here and there, and people are commercializing that which is most sacred. In that way the highest ideal is brought down to the lowest depth. It is time that the real thing should be introduced, seriously studied, experienced, and realized by practice.

From the mystical point of view it is evident that there is some strength, some current, some affinity that runs through and binds together all the trees and plants in a forest, and also causes the desert to be without them; that causes the coal mine to have coal, the gold mine to have gold, the sulphur mine to have sulphur in it. This strength, or force, draws all these elements together.

So it is too with the tides of the sea. It accounts for the waters running in the same direction, whether at first they tended towards the south, the east, the west, or the north; it accounts for the surface of the waves keeping a rhythm. Wherever we look, be it the changes of the seasons, the changes of the weather, or even the constant circles that the earth describes on its journey, all these show the same underlying current, the current of the whole of nature, which is the real breath. The whole universe is going on with a certain rhythm; there is a current that keeps the whole universe going. It is one breath, and yet it is many breaths.

There is a tide that has a cycle of forty days, a tide that has a cycle of seven days, and another of thirty days. Yet at every moment waves are rising and falling. There is a wave under the wave, and a wave over the wave. There is a tide that turns twice a day, and also a tide that turns once a month. So is it with breath: one breath, and yet many breaths.

Then consider how the trees keep together. There is one tree, and yet its branches and its fruits and its flowers all turn in different directions. Every branch takes a different direction, and yet all keep together. What is it that directs the vigor and the strength of one branch and not the others in that direction—for they are all attached to the same tree stem? Is it not that life current which runs through it that directs their ways? As long as it runs through a tree it produces fruit and flowers.

So it is with animals and birds and people. The same current of life runs through all. Man is the ideal being, as the scripture says.

He is ideal because intelligence is given to him to perceive the secret of this breath, whereas from animals and birds it is hidden. The life of all creatures is mysterious and full of wonder, but man alone is blessed with the intelligence that conveys the power of understanding the secret of the breath. If there is anything more lasting than our transitory life it is this, the secret of our being. It is by this that man is able to master life both here and in the hereafter.

Having understood this truth, mystics have been able to teach that the religion of all religions is the knowledge of self, for the knowledge of self brings the knowledge of life. This life current that runs through the center of man's being, attaching mind to body and to all other planes of existence as well, it is this that is all important. It passes from man's innermost being out to the body, which is the instrument whereby man is able to experience life on the surface. When he has knowledge of this a person begins to realize, "I am not as small as I had thought, not as weak as I had thought; I am much stronger on other planes. I can live much longer than I could on the physical plane. I can see myself on all the different planes by means of that inner knowledge of the breath."

Therefore to the mystic breath is like a lift, a lift in which he rises up to the first floor, and then to the second, and then to the third floor—in fact wherever he wishes to go.

The mystery of the Sphinx, and the mystery of *buraq*, which is mentioned in the life of the Prophet Muhammad, has to do with this. When the Prophet reached the court or gate of God, the *buraq* was sent. The *buraq* was an animal with wings, and the Prophet rode upon it in order to reach the gate of the highest heaven. He passed through gate after gate as he passed the seven heavens. In the end he arrived at the gate of the highest.

What does this allegory mean? The body of the *buraq* is this physical body. The wings represent the ability of the breath to reach far and yet retain its connection with the physical body. The Prophet mounting upon his back represents any soul who treads the spiritual path. Whoever has courage, whoever has faith, whoever has confidence, whoever has trust, whoever has patience and hope and perseverance, can tread this path and make use of the vehicle of the breath.

If we read the history of Buddha, who was a yogi, we shall find that without yoga and without spiritual meditation, which is accomplished by breath, no one in this world has ever attained spiritual perfection. The healing power of Christ, the magnetism of Muhammad, the miraculous power of Moses, the charm of Krishna, and the inspiration of Buddha—all these were attained by breath. How did they attain them if there were not a current passing between us on the earth and the source of energy, the source of power and magnetism?

Is it not plain that breath conveys even the words that go out from our lips to the ears of the hearer? The voice is breath. The word is breath. Without breath speech cannot be produced. Yet a person may easily accept this and acknowledge that it is true that it is breath that does this, but he will not willingly believe that thought also is breath. He can see the movement of the air that arises from speech, and he wonders if it is meant that thought also causes a movement of the air. This is because he does not understand that a life current runs through it all, and that is breath. It is easily seen when it manifests itself upon the physical plane, but on the higher planes it is not seen; yet it extends higher than the planes. If there is anything that connects the mortal with the immortal, it is this bridge which we call breath. It is a bridge whereby to pass from the world of mortality to the world of immortality; it is the bridge whereby immortality passes down to mortality. That life which seems mortal is really the ray of immortal life. What seems mortal is only the shell. It is not life that is mortal, it is the cover that makes it seem mortal.

From the time when man first perceived that there was a secret in breath, he has wanted to use his understanding of the secret in order to be able to perform wonders and reach the spirits, to master the elements, read thoughts, convey thoughts, and to perform psychic or occult phenomena. But to seek to do these things is to give pearls to buy pebbles. How wasteful to spend life in gaining these powers when breath is the rope that takes us from this mortal plane to immortality, that saves us from the struggles and worries of this transitory life, and leads us to the happiness and joy and peace for which every soul longs! If breath can accomplish these pearls will it not also accomplish the small things, the

pebbles, the worldly needs? Yes, it will. After all, to have performed a few wonders is nothing.

One person is perhaps striving all day to earn his own bread so that he may live in a comfortable manner; another is always worrying about how to maintain himself and his children. Another is thinking, "What can I do to save my fellow man from his trouble?" If we compare these people, in order to see who is the greatest, we see that he is greatest whose ideal is greatest.

When we consider the great heroes of the past and present, those whom we admire and to whom we look with hope for right guidance, we shall find that what has made them great has been the greatness of their ideal. The lower the ideal, the less the efforts; the higher the ideal, the greater the life. If we use all our intelligence and strength and wisdom to accomplish some little thing, it is only a waste of life. To consider what great things one can accomplish, to seek to do those things which will be most useful and valuable to others, that is the ideal life. The person who has earned money only to keep himself comfortable, what has he accomplished with his life? If he has just gratified his wish to roam about in a motorcar, to set up a comfortable home, to have people waiting upon him, he cannot be happy, because he has not accomplished anything with his life. He may possess many houses, he may possess much money in the bank, he may make a great name; but it will amount to nothing in comparison with the person whose power is greater than all wealth, position, or fame. Such a one will be much happier with the small things of the world; he has gained that peace with which the pleasures and transitory joys of this earth offer no comparison.

The one life is like the lips touching a cup of delicious wine; the other life is like drinking the whole cup full of heavenly wine. What a difference between just touching the wine with the lips and drinking it! The pleasures of life are like touching the wine. The experience of these pleasures is only like a dream, a passing joy; it comes and goes again. One longs for the joy of that little pleasure to stay, but how can it stay? Even if one tried for thousands of years, one could not keep the happiness that is external. The only way to obtain the eternal bliss is to do as the mystics do,

and to rise by the aid of the breath from plane to plane, finding the greater joy and the greater happiness.

It resembles the taking of a drug. A person may sit in meditation and dream and imagine he is very happy. A materially-minded person may easily say that a meditative person hypnotizes himself into thinking he is full of joy, but is it not hypnotism when a little word of flattery pleases one, when a little silver and gold produces such a change of expression in one's countenance? The materialist, not understanding this, will laugh at the mystic and call him a dreamer. But if the mystic is a dreamer, what is the worldly man? Is he not a dreamer too? What produces the joy in these things that are of no importance? If it is good to be hypnotized by silver and gold, is it not better when the mystic is hypnotized by his divine ideal of perfection? The silver and gold will certainly be snatched away; at least the mystic's ideal of God will last.

When we consider how this life and our environment can cramp and restrict us, we understand how it is that with all our hopes we still seek solitude, try to be by ourselves, and close our eyes to all the passing things. The life and activity that are directed to experiencing the pleasures of life, the transitory sources of joy and pleasure all fade away before that which we seek in solitude, where we strive to reach the inner and enduring things. Even if our bed is comfortable, if our house contains all the comforts that the heart can desire, the mind still goes through all manner of torments, and sleep will not come. We may take a little rest and sit still in order to obtain peace, but the real trouble never goes. It is to drown this trouble that people take drugs and intoxicants and lose themselves in the pursuit of common things, however undesirable. Everybody strives to obtain some remedy that will enable him to realize the joy and pleasure and peace that his inner life unconsciously seeks, but he cannot get it. If he tries to obtain it through drugs or intoxicants, he only becomes a slave to them. If, failing these, he seeks to gain his desire through other vices, he will never find the contentment he seeks.

Come to the mystic, then, and sit with him when you are tired of all these other remedies that you have employed in vain; come and take a glass of wine with him. The mystic wine is the inner absorption, which removes all the worries and anxieties and trou-

bles and cares of the physical and mental plane. All these are now done away with forever. It is the mystic who is at rest; it is he who experiences that happiness which others do not experience; it is he who teaches the way to attain that peace and happiness which are the original heritage of man's soul.

Chapter 29

RHYTHMIC BREATHING

Rhythm is the principal thing to be considered in breath, as it is on the rhythm of the breath that the working of the whole mechanism depends. The chief reason of irregularity of the beats of the heart or head is lack of rhythm in the breath.

As man generally neglects to think of this breath, he overlooks the fact that his health entirely depends on rhythmic breath. Rhythm is the central theme of the whole creation. Therefore the infant moves his hands and legs by turns, forming a rhythm. This shows that nobody teaches anyone rhythm; it is natural to all beings. It is rhythmic movement that enables the fish to swim and the serpent to climb trees. If rhythm were not an instinct, the animal would never have known how to walk, nor the bird how to fly.

The life of man is so pulled from all sides, so divided, that he often forgets things that are most essential to his life, which the lower creatures seem to keep more correctly in their lives. Neatness in man's work and balance in man's actions show rhythm in him. When man shows lack of balance in his life and when his life is disturbed and all things seem to go wrong, it is most often that the rhythm of his breath has become wrong. Irregularity of activ-

ity and repose in the habits of life causes disorder of rhythm in the breath.

Very often the eastern mystical exercises are wrongly understood. When a teacher gives a breathing exercise to his pupil, often he does not mean the breathing itself but rhythm.

Thought given to the breath becomes a weight upon it and naturally holds it longer in its movement, altering it from what it would otherwise naturally be. It is the following of the rhythm of breath and the keeping of the rhythm regular that bring about the best results.

On breath depends the capability, thoroughness, and efficiency with which one does one's work. Shortness of breath causes impatience in man, and lack of endurance and irregularity of the rhythm of the breath causes confusion in man and inclines him to be easily upset. Breath being the life power, it is the same life power that gives one strength to endure all things. One will always find that those who easily get cross, who quickly get upset, and who become annoyed instantly have something wrong with their breath. People, not knowing their difficulty, are annoyed with them; they are put aside and are considered disagreeable people. What they need is training of the breathing. When their bodies and minds have been so repaired, one will find no more disagreeableness in their nature. Then the artist who gets tired of his work and feels a lack of enthusiasm to complete it, a lack of interest and absence of inspiration—often it is all caused by some disorder in the breath.

Regular and rhythmic breathing gives health to both body and mind. Inspiration comes from above, but it comes as light. It is the work of the mind to receive it; if the mind is not ready to receive it the inspiration will come, but it will not be realized. This is like the difference between the metal gong and the wooden gong: the former will resound, the latter will not resound. It is not the fault of the one who strikes the gong, it is the gong itself that does not resound. So it is with the mind that receives inspiration and the mind that cannot conceive it. Yet to every mind inspiration comes; the only difference is that one receives it, the other rejects it.

Right breathing makes the mind vibrate, and vibration is the sign of life. All that vibrates more is more living; what vibrates less

is less living. So it is with trees and animals; they show their life in their vibration.

The horse one chooses as the best is that horse whose nostrils are fully open and whose breath is full, which it shows by the expression of the eyes. A good horse shows vibrations by the quivering of its skin when its back is patted. It is not like a stone-like horse, which takes one step after ten lashes have been laid on its back. In the human being, life can be seen in the same way. It is termed in Hindustani *pani*, which means water.

They say that a horse or a person has a watery nature, which means a fluid nature, living, pliable. And this life, breath gives to body and mind. The influence of the breath on the body is like the influence of the weather on the world. As body and mind act and react upon one another, so the influence of the breath takes the chief place in directing both mind and body. Every emotion is caused by the breath flowing in a certain direction; also by the degree of force of the breath.

There are three different rhythms of breath that have influence upon the mind. Slow breath gives tranquility to the mind, and to all the creative faculties of mind scope is given by this rhythm. Moderate breath helps the mind to continue its activities. If one wanted to make out a plan of work or wished to accomplish a certain work, the slow activity of breath spoken of above would not be helpful, although for poetry or music the slow activity of the breath is more helpful. But quickness in the rhythm of the breath produces confusion, though it gives force to physical activities. One can run well or swim well when the breath is in a fairly quick rhythm. When the rhythm of the breath is too quick it brings confusion to the mind and exhaustion to the body.

One who does not breathe fully, in other words freely and deeply, can neither be well physically nor make use of his mental faculties. Very often one finds most learned and intelligent people unable to work as they wish to and incapable of finishing a work which they have taken up. Sometimes a person thinks it is from bodily weakness or mental weakness or lack of enthusiasm or loss of memory, not knowing that it is very often a matter of regularizing the breath. Most often people think that it is the tired or exhausted condition of the external senses that prevents their

thinking, but in reality it is the lack of right breathing, for right breathing can make the mental faculties clearer and the organs of the senses more capable of perceiving. This shows that the mind can live a fuller life by what I call full breath. For a Sufi, therefore, breath is a key to concentration. The Sufi, so to speak, puts his thought under the cover of the breath. This expression of Rumi's I would interpret as meaning that the Sufi lays his beloved ideal in the swing of the breath. I remember my murshid's saying that every breath one inhales conscious of the Divine Beloved is the only gain there is, and every breath inhaled without this consciousness, the only loss.

Thought is conveyed without speech through the breath. The true wireless telegraphy is the rightly established current of breath. It is difficult for anyone to try it without practice in concentration and lacking development of breath, though unconsciously thoughts are always exchanged through the agency of the breath. The scientist is ready to believe that contagious diseases are spread by means of the breath, but it is the province of psychology to realize that thoughts and mental states such as hilarity, depression, energy, or sloth are conveyed by means of the breath. In the presence of an angry person one feels excited and inclined to anger; the contact of a hilarious person spreads around an atmosphere of hilarity. In the presence of a cold person one becomes cold; the contact of a warm-hearted person warms one. All this is done through the breath as the medium. If an angry person were to close his breath while angry, much less of his feeling would affect another. If a person who is prone to hilarity would close his breath in the presence of an expert comedian, he could protect himself from being influenced by him.

Yogis who rise above the thoughts and feelings of those around them attain power by control of the breath. So the method of the inner cult of Sufis also depends upon the science of breath. Knowledge of another person's pleasure or displeasure, the message of affection, the warning of hostility—all are received by way of the breath. The one who is conscious of the rhythm of the breath and whose breath is pure from grossness begins to perceive a sense that

in time becomes a language to him. Thought reading is not necessarily intuition, although many people confuse thought reading and intuition. There is not much difference between the action of these two faculties: the difference is like that between the telephone and the telegraph. Thought reading comes from without and intuition comes from within, yet for both, rhythmic breath and a clear mind are necessary. The rhythmic breath helps the mind to be clear. Breath breaks the congestion that in the head produces confusion and in the heart depression, which covers the thoughts of others from one's perception and even from one's own intuition. A thought is better conveyed to another through breath than by speech, for a feeling put into words becomes half dead. Feeling in its own sphere is fully living, and when conveyed from there through the breath it reaches the mind to which it is sent. When a person has not developed his mind by concentration and tries to send his thought by the breath, he is not always successful. He is like a person trying to hit the target without ever having practiced in his life. It is practice that makes man perfect.

It is by the power of breath that the animals search for their food. Through breath they perceive what they must eat, what they must not eat. Through breath the carnivorous animals search for their prey. It is through breath that certain animals receive warning of dangers, and again it is through the breath that some animals when ill find their remedy. If the lower creation can do so much by the power of breath, how much more can man do, if he only knows the right way of the development of breath! It is through the breath that birds receive warnings of the changes of the weather, and accordingly they migrate in flocks from one place to another. Through the breath the herds of deer perceive approaching storms, changes of weather, or the approach of a lion or a tiger. Man, who is more capable of perceiving by breath still deeper things—warnings and calls from the earth and from heaven, which places are meant for him to dwell in or to settle in, discriminating between friend and foe and discerning their pleasure and displeasure—owing to his interest in the superficial things of life, cannot fully benefit by the power of breath.

Therefore Sufis and all students of the inner cult believe that breath is the means of receiving all intuitive knowledge from

every direction of life. Absorbed in a thousand things of daily life, man gives very little thought to breath. Therefore he keeps his heart closed to all the revelation that can be received by the help of breath. Man as a rule is never conscious of his breath, of its rhythm, of its development, except at the time when he is so tired that he is breathless, when he is so excited that he feels choked up, or when something keeps the breath from flowing. For a Sufi it is desirable to be conscious of every breath. In the schools of the Sufis in the East the members of certain associations take up as their duty to remind the whole assembly of the same. So one after another, in turn, takes it up as a duty. They call aloud "*Hush ba dam*," meaning, "Keep conscious of the breath." *Nazar ba qadam* is added when the Sufis are walking, which means, "Look down and see whose feet are these that are walking."

Chapter 30

THE POWER OF BREATH
(BREATH LIFE)

Mind is creative and thought is living, but out of what does mind create a thought? Out of the atoms of the mental sphere? But the current that attracts the desired atoms to complete a thought is the breath—not that breath which is outwardly manifest, but that part of breath the action of which is not felt by everyone. The more length and breadth the breath has, the more scope it gives for the creation of thought. It is therefore that the thoughts of the sages and mystics who have gained mastery over breath are more substantial and complete in themselves. Besides this, they prove to be more expressive and impressive.

The breadth of the breath is in its volume. This comes by the facility one has of breathing through wide nostrils and open lungs. The secret of the power of voice is also to be found in this. The voice of the commander of an army, which carries through the army and impresses the soldiers, thus encouraging them to fight, has breath as its secret behind it. Ali by his invocation of the sacred word, which he sometimes used to cry aloud on the battlefield, caused his enemies to tremble.

The length of the breath shows the length of life; lengthy breath is the sign of long life. This comes not only by wide nostrils and

open lungs, but also by the accommodation that the body has for the breath, not only the nose and the chest but also the head and the abdomen.

There are some whose breath has volume or breadth but not much length, and there are others who have length and no breadth. But it is the balance of the length and breadth of the breath that gives balance to the mind.

It is the vibrations caused by the breath that become thought-waves that carry thoughts from one mind to the other. Therefore thought reading much depends upon the position in which two people sit with regard to each other. A certain position makes it easier for the breath to reach than another, although it is not always necessary that a person be facing one in order to receive thoughtwaves through breath. If the thought power is strong and the breath is sound enough to carry the thoughtwaves, a person, whether facing one or having his back turned, must receive the thought.

The mystics not only project their own breath and see the condition of their being manifest before themselves, but also they can make themselves responsive to receive the thoughtwaves of another carried by his breath. This receptivity not only enables an adept to read other's thoughts, but also to a mystic the condition of another revealed by the projection of the other person's breath upon his heart.

Plainly speaking, souls are likened to mirrors, and two mirrors facing one another become projected on one another, one manifesting the reflection of the other. The mirror that has no reflection is capable of manifesting the reflection of the other mirror. In this way breath enables a Sufi not only to know and see his own condition of life, but also to know and understand the condition of those he comes in contact with.

The breath of one person may, so to speak, overpower the breath of another, as a little stream can be washed away by a large stream of water. In this is the secret of knowing the condition of another person. A Sufi whose breath is lively (which is called in Sufic terms *nafs-e garm*) has the influence of scattering the thoughts, feelings, the vibrations of the atmosphere of another. In this way he is able to convey his thought or feeling and create his

vibrations as the atmosphere for another who needs it for his own betterment. In this way a Sufi brings a life and health to another person and can have an influence on the character of another person.

There is a great difference between a developed breath and an undeveloped one. There is as vast a difference, or an even vaster one between the breath of two persons as between two voices. A specially produced singing voice is quite different from the uncultivated speaking voice. It is a psychological fact that the voice and word of a person whose voice is cultivated make a greater impression than the voice and word of an ordinary person. How much more then must the influence of breath work silently. It is in this that is the mystery of the mystic's magnetism, which is healing, harmonizing, exalting, and at the same time invigorating.

Breath penetrates, breath permeates, breath strikes, breath absorbs, breath invigorates, and breath heals. It is therefore that souls with great powers make their thoughts and feelings penetrate into the minds and the hearts of others. As breath creates an atmosphere it permeates the bodies of others and also the sphere, charging the whole atmosphere with its particular magnetism.

The hearts of people are likened to gongs in a temple. Every spoken word strikes them, but by the power of breath one strikes them without a word. It is by the breath that one contracts illnesses, but also one absorbs defects and the depression of others, as well as joy and happiness. The breath of personalities healthy in mind and body is vitalizing. The breath of spiritual beings, whose love and sympathy goes out to others, is naturally healing.

It is no exaggeration that the whole phenomenon of life has breath as its mystery, and once the knowledge of breath is attained and breath is mastered by practice, one beholds a most wonderful phenomenon within and without. There are many who remain skeptical till they have fathomed the mystery of breath. Once they know it, they call it, as Hindus have called it for ages, *breath life*.

THE POWER OF THE WORD

There is nothing that cannot be accomplished, there is nothing that cannot be known, by the power of the word. Therefore the principal and central theme of esotericism and mysticism is the word.