

## **An Anatomy of One Breath**

Life begins with an inhalation. The doctor, nurse, attendant slaps the new born on the back. Like the person who dives into cold water, there is a quick breath in. There is then a scream, a cry, with the shock of entry. It is a scream that says to the entire world, "I am alive". It is the cry of the diver into the icy water. It is also the cry of the new life that has begun.

An image arises of the Adam myth. He was the primordial first person. Did God slap him on his back so that he would be the first one to inhale the being of life? I am sure that he too cried out after that in-breath, "I am alive", and then all the rest is history. But the image offered by that biblical myth is a little more complex.

God must have enveloped that first person in the being of the Divine. God slapped Adam on the back so that the in-breath could begin. Or maybe God was already before Adam and reached around to slap him on his back. Either way, as Adam breathed in, he breathed in something very special. Actually, it was quite extraordinary. "And God breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life", it is written in the Holy text. As Adam breathed in, he breathed in the breath of God. Then his life began. Then all life began.

"By breath the blessed Holy One made the world, and by breath it is sustained."  
(Zohar 1:47b)

It was the out-breath of God, but the in-breath of Adam. They were in tandem with each other. It was a flowing movement between the two. Maybe it was like a kiss, a divine kiss. Two pairs of lips touched and life began. It all begins as one exhales into the being of the other, and the other takes in that breath. They are then one in an eternal slow movement of breath into breath, being into being. In the beginning there was an in-breath. Life then began.

In the moment that you are in now, become aware of your breathing. Allow your breathing to rest on the in-breath. Feel it coming into your nostrils, brushing by the hairs, and flowing further back down your windpipe. With a practiced awareness you will be able to feel it moving down into your lungs, while having the sensation of your abdomen extending, and the diaphragm spreading down and outward so that your lungs can expand. Exhale, of course, but come back to the inhalation, for this is the breath by which you began your life.

Say to yourself, "This is how I began life." Breathe in and become aware that the air flowing in is the breath of God who is enveloping you now. As God breathed into Adam's nostrils and his life began, so now with you and your breath life begins. With each in-breath your life moves in a rhythmic loop of renewal that places you within time that is called the span of life.

You are breathing with the Divine that is your life support. Contemplate the beginning of your life with each in-breath. Become aware of the constant reinvigoration of your life with a spirit/breath of being that comes from the source of all vitality. Offer a prayer of thanks that the flow of life goes on. Savor each breath. Enjoy each in-breath as

you would the wafting smell of beautiful flowers or any other aromatic sense that uplifts you with pleasant feelings, images and memories.

There is an in-breathing of all the positive qualities of life that enable you to continue with your life. Inhale the breath of God and you inhale hope, faith, belief, love and healing. But do not attach yourself to any of these thoughts, feelings, or images; rather just let them go as a balloon that rises into the sky or the clouds that gently go by. They have touched you in a way that is so special but let them leave. Come and go with the flow, as it is said. Just be with the in-breath and life begins anew with each one. Come back each time to that in-breath, to the flow of new beginnings.

You are now aware that the Divine is no further than the very breath you are taking. You are within God and God is within you. “You all of you who cleave **in** the Lord your God are alive this day,” we are told. You are alive for you are within God, the source of all life. As you, by this practice cleave to that “in-ness” of God’s eternal breath of being, then **you** are truly alive.

God breathes out and you breathe in. Each breath can be like the first if you cherish that breath. Feel that sweet Divine breath as it takes on life through your life. Do not rush its in-flowing. Breathe in slowly and purely, empty of emotional and mental distractions that take you away from the Divine life flow. A sensation of true peace arises within you. You knew that life could be beautiful, but you did not know it could be this beautiful.

Knowing that your life begins again with each in-breath, there arises within you the realization that life is so precious. It is a gift being offered over and over and over again to you, and with each inhalation you are opening your mind, heart, and soul in an acceptance of its infinite possibilities. This is accomplished by the intentionality of acceptance with each in-breath. “I accept life, my life, with this breath.” Living itself is an acceptance of the Divine Presence. We breathe in, God breathes out.

With this mindful act of breathing in, a new revelation comes into view. There is the realization that maybe, just maybe, this might be the last in-breath. That breath, which moves with that realization, becomes an awakening breath.

What if this were the last in-breath that you will ever take? Is this thought frightening?

Maybe at first it is! When you begin, though, to sit with this thought something incredible happens. You realize that even if it were, you could do nothing about that. It just would be your last breath. But then, how very precious it would be, so don’t rush it. Rather, enjoy it, love it, feel it, get to know it, be with it. Each in-breath you take is your first breath, but it might also be your last. It is then, as you breathe it, your only breath!

Ahhhhh ....

How wonderful this is. Breathe in! It is like eating the last berry of the season. If you were to know before hand it was to be the last berry, you might savor it, taking your time to absorb its delicious taste to the fullest. You would not want to end your eating of this wonderful berry. Unfortunately, though, no matter how much time you take to taste, enjoy and swallow that berry, at some time it will be no more, or rather it will lose its own identity and become a part of you.

Imagine that the season is getting closer to the end and you do not know which berry is the last, but you know the last one will be coming, you just don't know when. Your mind is then able to say, "Since I do not know which one will be the last, any one can be. Actually, I must eat each one as if it were the last." Each berry then becomes as if it were the last and is enjoyed in a most wonderful way! So too with your in-breath! Enjoy each one. Savor each one.

Ahhhhh.....

There was a woman who was very ill. One night, her doctor came into her room and told her that it was his belief that that she would not live through the night. He wanted her to be mentally and spiritually prepared for her death. Her description of her first breath the next morning was truly revelatory of the true meaning of the preciousness of breath and of life. Her eyes had opened, she had taken that breath in, and had seen the rising of the sun, and a sun she did not expect to see again. She then realized that she had not died but was to live another day. It was at that moment that she felt reborn and offered thanks to the creator of life, the sustainer of that in-breath, the mover of the sun which rose to shine upon another day.

If she lived to take another breath, or to see another sunrise, it did not matter, for all that did matter was that on that morning she did take that in-breath and came to life for one more breath. No more was necessary, for with each single breath she was touched by the infinite breaths that move through limitless time, and so it was that the one breath was all that mattered. One breath at a time. One rebirth at a time. One part of many. One particle of the Infinite.

Do not wait for your actual last breath to have this feeling and awakening. Experience each in-breath as if it were the last. Make each breath the first and only one you will ever take. Then something extra ordinary will happen.

It is not just each breath, but each step, each act, each thought, each feeling, each image, each activity, each word, each movement that holds that same preciousness. Meditation is not when you just sit in a meditative state; it is the mindfulness that you bring to all the other activities of your life. Each in-breath is the model for every other breath you will ever take, as well as every other part of your life. Each part is a part of the Infinite, once it is recognized as such.

A spiritual life is an expansion process to cosmic proportions. From the minutest of thoughts or experiences there is an implosion into the infinite. Your one in-breath is the out-breath of the Infinite One. "By the word יהוה (Yod-Hay-Vav-Hay) the heavens were made, by the breath of Its mouth all their host." (Ps. 33:6)

Image the *Magein David*, the six-pointed star. The two triangles are heaven and earth intersecting, overlapping, and integrating one within the other. One point spreading outward is the point from within you that through this spiritual awareness expands to the Infinite One. The other point of the second triangle is the expansion from the Infinite One moving outward encompassing you and all of life, its universes and all that is. The breath moves from within and through the exhalation expanding outward into the ether of the universes, into the Eternal, and then the process comes back to you in its reverse. The

Divine-Human dance of breath continues and continues. But there is no beginning of breaths and no end of breaths. Rather, all continues in a loop of in-breathing and out-breathing, in a flow that is Infinitely Eternal. This is an intersection of heaven and earth, the Divine with the All.

The Infinitely Eternal is called in Kabbalah, the mystical teachings of Judaism, *Ayn Sof*. We are Its emanation. “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts, the Whole earth is filled with Its glory.” We are its out-breath, and with our in-breath we become mindful of this connection that is Infinite.

This out-breath flows through the Divine letters of the Infinitely Eternal Divine Name, יהוה (Yod-Hay-Vav-Hay) expressed in a process of a never-ending creative breath. God breathes out ם (yod) and we breathe in life. The first breath, from the deepest recesses of Infinite holiness, flows out with the ם (yod). It flows from the limitless well of Wisdom that offers the beginning of all beginnings. And God thought and shared that thought and then all began.

Breathe in and imagine the ם (yod). It enters through your in-breath. It enters and awakens the Divine Mind that is within you. It is a Mind encompassing infinitely all minds, clearing away all the finite thoughts, feelings, stories, and images that race through your mind. It clears them all away leaving a sense of an Infinite Peace that is there within you. Emptiness arises that is overflowing with an infinitely pure clarity, undisturbed by anything.

Somewhere now deep inside you, there is the turn around, that place in space and time, so small that it is unknown to you. This is where the in-breath becomes the out-breath and the next part of the process of life begins, or it should be said, continues.

An image: you are sitting by a canal that opens into the sea. The current moves out from the canal because the wind is blowing out while the current of the sea moves in. There is that point undetectable, but present, where the two currents meet. There is that point invisible yet known where there is no movement of the currents at all for the in-flowing current is becoming the out-flowing current. At this point, space and time lose all meaning. As the two currents intertwine and become one, all differentiation of the two is dissolved into a complete unity of identities.

As you inhale, know that at some place inside of you, at some instant in time, that in-breath becomes the out-breath, if it is not the last in-breath you will ever take. If your first in-breath is at birth and, yes, your last out-breath at death, then the place where the two interchange is your life; an infinitesimally small particle of time within time that is infinite. For now, it is the space between your two breaths that occurs over and over again, thousands of times every day of your life.

Rest in that place, before you are conscious of the out-breath. At first, this will be challenging because you will want to rush onto the exhalation. This will take practice, but its reward will be great. Here you will find bliss. Peace and calm abide in this interchange between breaths. It is the space of pure being!

Life is very short, if you measure it against time that is timeless, that is unending, as it is in the Divine. With this awareness, life takes on even greater significance. Visualize the next letter of the Divine being in you, the letter ה (hay). It is the reflection of Divine Understanding, the contemplation of the thing-in-itself, of life in itself. As you sit in that space between the breaths, a space that is so ephemeral, so intangible, so unimaginable, take one further breath in and visualize the next letter of the Divine Being that represents all the experiences of life that you have had, have, and will ever have. This is the letter ו (vav). It will be brief, that I must say. It is the brief, but oh so beautiful, last smell of the fragrance, or the taste, or the touch of what is eternally lovely in our finite realm of life. Hold on, but know the process continues. Begin to slowly breathe out. Let it go. Let it be!

Ah!

Life is a continuous practice. Each person is striving to get it right. Each breath is a practice for the last breath. Each breath in life is a practice for the moment of death when the last sound we hear will be an exhalation. The balloon loses all its air. The balloon's skin lies empty and unmoving on the floor. Our body lies still, with no movement. It is cold. Decay begins.

But, with that last breath, and even before that one, a spiritual parcel has been sent on its way. One source says that thirty days before our death, part of our higher soul leaves our body, beginning the process of death. With each breath we take, we are getting closer to the last one. Maybe it is the one you are taking now, so make this one count for something. This is done through an awareness of that breath.

Be with it. Enjoy it. Do not rush it.

Ah!

With this breath, you are leaving behind all that you cannot take with you. All those toys, those objects, that you had to hold onto, that you had to collect; you are letting go, for you cannot take them with you.

Since this is only practice, we pray, make each out-breath count. Get it right. Make each one better by bringing to it this spiritual awareness of holding significant eternal meaning. As you exhale, visualize the last letter of the Divine name, the letter ה (hay). As you exhale, breathe the letter ה (hay). Let it come softly, but firmly from the lower part of the abdomen. Allow it to rise from the depth of your inner being for, as it leaves your lips, it has a long way to ascend. There are many spiritual worlds through which each last breath must rise. As the breath begins to quiet down and becomes less and less, be aware of the emptying experience you are feeling. The balloon is deflating. The air is leaving. It becomes almost a trickle of air flowing gently through your lips. It is so sweet. It is like a still small voice: so still and small you are not sure whether the sound of your exhalation is only a sound or possibly the last very word your voice is trying to utter. Maybe it is the word shalom, the word goodbye. Maybe it is the word love, or peace, or hope, or thank you!

Go with the breath until its very end.

Rest again in this space between your breaths, which is the place of transference and interface between the tide flowing out and the tide flowing in. Stay with it. Let fear drift by and away. It might be the place of death's experience, but it is also the place in which total calm abides. For now, it is but an instant, but some day it will be forever. This is the place where life for one instant ends and once again begins. It is so precious. Fill it with awareness and appreciation, for if it were truly your last breath there would be no beginning again. There would be no next breath. There would be no inhalation. The inhalation would only be God's.

Your out-breath would be enveloped into the in-breath of the Divine. Your continued spiritual life would have its birth. This is the moment for which you have been practicing your entire life. This is the beautiful death. It is death in which you are spiritually active on the journey of your eternal being.

But for now, you breathe in once again, slowly and with mindful awareness. You visualize the letter ' (yod). You are born again. Life has begun anew. You are to repeat this spiritual practice again and again; ultimately for all eternity.

*"Modeh ani,"* you say. "I give You thanks, O Eternal Breath of Being, for I am revived by the in-breath I take. It is there I once again begin life. This breath is precious. This life is good. It is You."

Now let the practice continue again and again.

Ahhhhh....