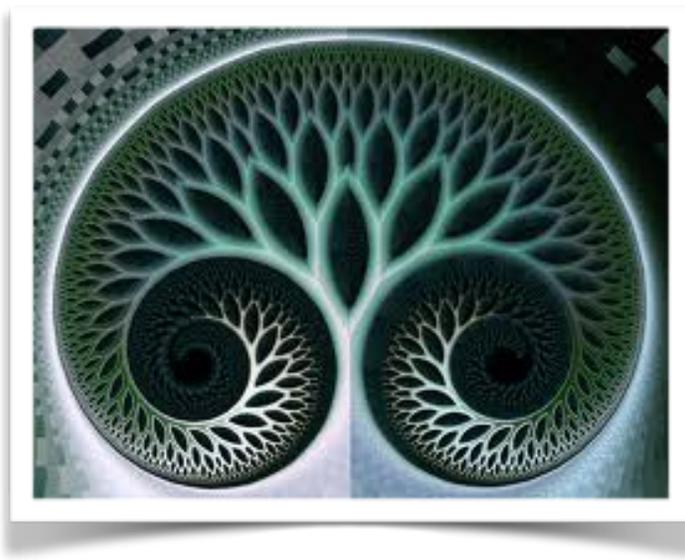


BREATH OF LIFE- NATURE'S ABUNDANT ADAPTOGEN

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To be inspired literally means to breathe in. Each breath is an inspiration.

We don't actually "take" a breath, we simply receive each breath, one after the other; over fifteen thousand breaths per day. With each breath, with each inspiration, we receive the gift of life that breath is. As we breathe out, we let go. With our final expiration, the final letting go, at death, we breathe out our last breath and with it, some say, we breathe out our soul. This is the cycle of life, death and renewal. Receiving and letting go. Letting go and receiving.

The Oxford Dictionary gives the meaning of "inspiration" as "Divine guidance" or a prompting to exalted thoughts or creative activity. Inspiration is the Divine Spark that provides the "juice" for the 99% perspiration that inevitably follows. We are creative beings. Creativity is the expression of our spirit, inspired by and in concert with the Divine Spirit.

To breathe deeply and freely is to be able to receive life fully. To be able to exhale deeply and completely is to be able to let go of stress, to let go of things and people that are gone, and to let go of attitudes that do not serve us. Letting go allows us to receive more fully. Most of us breathe shallowly, especially under stress. Shortage of oxygen switches on the sympathetic nervous system, which is the fight or flight response. Shallow breathing can keep us locked in the sympathetic nervous system mode, with its attitudes of fear and anxiety. We may feel irritable or have a knot in our stomach. Medical research states that stress-related disorders account for as much as 50% to 80% of all illnesses. Exhale.... Let go... Relax...

When we breathe naturally, we breathe with the whole body. In Chinese Medicine it is said that the air we breathe sparks the formation of Qi, the life force that flows through our body. Qi flows throughout specific pathways in our bodies to nourish and vitalize all our organs, tissues, and systems and to energize biochemical and electrical activity in our body.

As we naturally breathe deeply and effortlessly we are in harmony – grounded in the parasympathetic nervous system, which imparts a restorative and healing effect. Full, deep breathing helps us release old holding and energy patterns and switches us to this relaxing parasympathetic mode. We allow ourselves to simply be, to receive grace and experience peace. This is the greatest adaptogen of all- it's accessible by anyone, anytime and... breathing is free!

Researchers who study psychosomatic healing understand that stress and our attitudes effect our health primarily via the limbic-hypothalamic modulation of the nervous, endocrine and immune systems. While we cannot usually alter stress in our lives, we can always change our attitudes. When we are peaceful, centered, calm and relaxed inwardly, we are able to deal with stress more graciously, make decisions from a place of clarity and strength and to positively influence our well-being.

Recommended books:

The Tao of Natural Breathing for Health, Well-Being and Inner Growth by Dennis Lewis

Breathing exercises

1) **Yawns & FACIAL BREATH:** Separate the teeth while keeping the lips closed, breathe deeply as though one were yawning. When done properly one can feel the air cold as it passes through the nose and down the throat. This method of breathing relaxes all the throat and facial muscles and insertion points where the nerves of the eyes insert.

2) Relax and Recharge

Hold the center of your palm, with the thumb or fingers of the other hand. Exhale. Feel your shoulders drop, your tensions and worries release, as you exhale down to your toes. Inhale down to your toes, receiving the vital spark of life, giving thanks. Exhale. Repeat this cycle 36 times or for a few minutes each day. Or, you can just hold the center of your palm and bring your awareness to your breath.

3) Relaxation

You can do this anytime but often this is an especially helpful relaxation for sleep. As you're laying comfortably in bed, with your eyes closed, place your right thumb over your umbilicus so your hand rests gently on your lower abdomen. Feel your tensions melt away. Thank God for your day and for this time of rest. Gently bring your awareness to the rising and falling of your lower abdomen under your hand with each breath. There is no need to force your breath. Simply observe. If your mind wanders, simply bring your awareness to your breath again.

4) Awareness

Throughout the day, at work or play, whether sitting quietly or in the midst of interaction with others, simply bring your awareness to your breath. Whenever you remember, gently bring your awareness to your breath.

NOTE: In Chinese medicine, the correct style is to use a capital letter when referring to an organ in terms of its Chinese medical/energetic qualities (as Lungs) and to use lower case (lungs) when referring to the organ in terms of modern medicine or normal Western usage.