



B R E A T
H I N G
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by shems heartwell

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With all the talk around superfoods these days, perhaps the most powerful of them all is conspicuously missing: breathing. One can take all the supplements in the world, and they will do little good without the catalyst of richly oxygenated blood.

I discovered the power of breathwork through my Medical Qi Gong and Tai Chi practice during my studies for my masters degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine (Acupuncture). I would arrive at the park at 5 o'clock to practice with my teacher, feeling like canceling and going home to rest, thinking that I did not have it in me to workout after grueling 14-hour days split between the classroom and my side job. But every time I pushed through the resistance, I would feel a major shift in my energy, aliveness, and inspiration during the warm up breathing and joint-opening exercises. By the time the practice was over, I

found myself feeling completely rejuvenated and ready to get back to studying. Through simple, deep breathing and slow, intentional movement of my joints, I would experience a rising tide of energy and life growing within me.

Many years later, having practiced an enormous amount of Qi Gong, yoga and several other breath-focused healing modalities, I have come to find that conscious breathing is the most transformational tool that we have to heal and renew our lives. There is nothing that I have experienced that has empowered my life more than the shift to becoming a connoisseur of breath.

Beyond the palpable energizing and rejuvenating effects of a regular breathing practice, one of the more subtle things I have come to love about breathing is the way that it connects me with the environment I am in.

Sitting next to a wandering stream under a towering oak tree, there is a particular vibration and scent that I am receiving and contributing to as I breathe, deeply connected to my surroundings. I believe this is a way that each of us can bring the sacred into our everyday lives. There is an inherent energy that connects us with all living things, and it is abundant in the air that we breathe. I can feel this connection when I allow the air that I am breathing to drop deep into my core, knowing that what I am receiving is entering my blood and ultimately my heart. And as I let this breath flow out of me I am making an offering to the life around me.

To build a healthy relationship with your breath and get the most vitality from your breathing practice, it helps to do exercises that increase your awareness of your breath as well as the functioning of your lungs. Al-

though the lungs are not muscles, they are intimately connected the health of all the systems of your body, and like a muscle, strengthen and expand when they are exercised. Related muscles and structures, including the rib cage, can become stiff over time and lead to reduced elasticity in the lungs, which creates chronic patterns of shallow breathing. Air can remain in the tissues of the lungs and become stale, hindering fresh oxygen from finding its way into the bloodstream. Every cell in the human body requires oxygen, and although it seems like an automatic function we need not give much thought to, bringing awareness to our breath through consciously practicing breathing exercises will help clear out toxins that may have built up in the lungs. Deep, rhythmic breathing infuses nourishing oxygen into your body, blood, and cells. Blood that is rich in oxygen will lead to systemic re-

Wide Winged Eagle



Sit or stand with a long spine in a place where you can spread your arms wide as you reach out and over your head. Breathe deeply into your belly and begin reaching your arms out wide. As you fill your lungs with air from your belly up, raise your arms up like your are spreading wings.



Feel your fingertips and the muscles of your arms reaching and lengthening along with your spine as you take this long full breath. The arms rise in time with the filling of your breath: When your lungs are full your arms should be stretched over your head. Pause for a few moments while your lungs are full and your arms are stretched up, reaching gently toward the sky.



Then slowly exhale out of your mouth while lowering the arms down again to your sides. While exhaling, continue to stretch and reach with the arms on the way down, feeling your ribs being stretched wide while your scapulas are being pulled away from your spine. Then repeat this same cycle with deep, full breaths while reaching long with your arms in sync with your breath. This is an amazing breathing practice that is active and invigorating. It will wake you up and enliven your entire body if done with strong breath and active reaching. You can do as many rounds as feels right to you. I suggest doing at least eight full cycles.

Deep Breathing Practice



Find a relaxing and quiet place to sit down. Close your eyes, and begin by breathing in deeply through your nose from your belly up. Count to five, inhaling the entire time. Even when you think you can't inhale any more, try to squeeze a little more air in. Allow your lungs and stomach to fully inflate. This enables oxygen to reach the deepest depths of your lungs to inflate all the alveoli and break up any toxins and pollutants that may have accumulated.



Hold your breath for several seconds and then exhale over the course of another five count. When you think you can't exhale any more, keep blowing from the deepest depths of your lungs and stomach. You should feel your chest and abdomen flatten and pull a bit inward. Repeat this breathing exercise 9 to 12 times. Performing this exercise on a daily basis will help increase your lung capacity, build your energy, and help relieve stress. It won't take long before you notice positive improvements!

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juvenation and healing, providing you with more energy, life, and ultimately joy, as well as deeper connection to your body and the world around you.

Those who exercise their lungs, particularly yogis and Qi Gong masters, often have above average lung capacities as a result of taking deeper breaths more consistently. Why? Because deep, rhythmic breathing expands the diaphragm muscle and the air pockets within the lungs. This allows for more oxygen to penetrate the cells within the body, allowing you to further utilize those superfoods that you may be taking, as oxygen is the catalyst for cellular metabolism. Deep breathing also helps to stretch out the torso, which is often overly constricted in shallow breathers, leading to diminished health and vitality. Humans need abundant oxygen for complete cell development. To put it simply, it's truly

impossible to be vibrantly healthy if you're not getting enough oxygen.

You cannot do harm with breathing so long as you are gentle and aware while you practice. The physical benefits of deep, full breathing are truly life changing, and the more subtle spiritual connections that develop will enrich your life in profound and often mystical ways. Try these powerful exercises for expanding your breath capacity and connecting with your deeper spiritual nature to experience the benefits described above firsthand. Remember to practice regularly, daily if possible, for full effect.

Breathing The Sacred

Allow yourself to sit in a place that is outdoors in nature or in a nourishing place in your home. Breathe in and out of your nose very slowly sensing the air as it is traveling

through your nose. Become very aware of the subtle feeling of receiving the breath and giving the breath. Notice what the air smells like and how you experience the inhale. After a few breaths, become aware of your heart beating in your chest and visualize the blood flowing through you being nourished with every breath.

Now imagine that what you are exhaling is not dirty air, but transformed life essence from within you. That anywhere you send your breath is actually blessed and invigorated by your heart and intention. Breathe your essence into the environment and the life around you. Send it to the trees and to the rocks. Spread it as a goodness that comes from your care and love. Imagine that each conscious breath is loaded with a treasure from within you and share it with pride.

You can practice this with a loved one and

experience the beauty and connection that comes with the intention of sharing essence. Giving and receiving to one another with utmost care and respect.

Shems Heartwell is a certified relationship coach and breathwork specialist residing in Hawaii. He has been a student of qigong and yoga for the past 18 years, during which he has studied with numerous teachers, mentors, and spiritual guides. Shems is committed to being a catalyst for transformation and dedicates his work to helping individuals awaken to their powerful innate abilities to be the same. Visit his website: shems-heartwell.com