

Zen and the Art of Breathing

It is no coincidence that the archer has always been associated with Zen. Archery is used in sport, in war, for hunting, for survival, for self-mastery, and simply for enjoyment.

The force that builds up in the bow as you draw it back is like the force that builds up in your body as you inhale. The force that is released when the arrow flies is like the force that is released when you exhale.

Drawing the bow back and aiming the arrow requires both sharp mental focus and powerful physical dynamics (as does conscious breathing). There is the process: full intensity and complete focus of mind and body...

Everything comes to a peak, to a head, as the bow is flexed, and the target comes into alignment. (That is the point between the inhale and the exhale.) If there is balance and coordination, focus and commitment, strength and grace, the merging of dynamic energy and calm stillness: then there is that magical moment. The moment when all the work is done and there is nothing left to do... except to "let go!"

In that moment of "let go" of surrender, the Zen master falls into his center, he returns for a moment to the source within.

In a flash, we leap from one extreme to another. We go from full active dynamic physical tension and mental focus, to total relaxation and surrender. For a moment, there is no mind, no thinking, no body, no doing, no effort, no struggle, no ego: no duality.

With the release of the bowstring, the arrow takes flight... the future is set in motion. In that moment with nothing more to do or to know... we simply drop into "samadhi," where there is only pure consciousness and bliss.

If the arrow hits the target, there is the celebration of perfection: natural ecstasy! If it misses the mark, the simple presence of full awareness reveals to the archer what adjustment is needed.... and there is the joy of realization. The next step is clear, and there is the celebration of perfection: natural ecstasy!

Pulling the inhale in is like drawing the bow back. Setting the exhale free is like letting the arrow fly. The game is to fully involve the body and mind in every inhale. Breathe the same intention again and again. Use each in-breath to build up force and focus.

Then on the exhale, just let go. It is an un-doing. On the exhale, you are using the out-breath to simply come into the present moment; and in that moment, to fall into yourself, to drop into your self, your center.

At some point, one of those breaths will take the Zen Breather to that special place of "pure presence and being," if only for a moment... But a moment is enough!

Having touched that place beyond right and wrong, beyond time and space, we are fed, we are nourished, we are renewed and inspired! And there is no forgetting. There is no going back!

Within the cycle of one breath, we can reflect or express our soul's entire life's

journey. Maybe that is why the ancient yogis say that one hour of Kriya Yoga (Zen Breathing) can result in more evolution than several lifetimes of re-incarnation!

But this path is the path of fire and light: it is not for the faint hearted; it is not for those who resist growth and transformation, who cling to the illusion of separateness, or who insist on identifying with the ego or the reactive mind.

The further back you pull the bow, the further the arrow will fly. The more expansion you create on the inhale, the more release you produce on the exhale. With the exhale we can be the arrow flying off into the distance, tracking a long arc through the cosmos; or a ray of light bursting forth and leaving its source... landing in another place, another time, on another level of existence... the next higher level of existence.

The arrow can be something that we don't need any more, something we are ready to let go of. The arrow can be an old habit, a negative thought or limiting belief. It can be ignorance, weakness, doubt, or anything that holds us back. The arrow can also be a positive thing. We can send a healing arrow to someone in need. We can send an arrow of peace to a war-torn part of the world. We can send arrows of love.

We feel the tension of the bow at the peak of the inhale, and then we feel the release of the arrow as we let the exhale go. When we let the exhale go, we let go of the body, of all desire, all effort, all thought...

In that moment of letting go, we drop into ourselves, into our center, into silence, peace, into our source, our "Real True Self." Then we rise up again on the inhale, bringing with us the energy of life, the power of our essence, the flavor of our Source.

The journey of one breath... repeated again and again, moment-to-moment, with no clinging, no attachment, no struggle...

This breath breathed again and again, brings us closer and closer to perfection... With each breath, the odds of liberation increase exponentially, and at some point it becomes impossible not to experience a moment of "Samadhi!"

We know what is in our way, or what needs to be done to live in the eternal moment. And there is no forgetting, and there is no going back to sleep!

Breathe in consciously, feeling the actual physical sensations of expansion, from side to side, front to back, top to bottom: you are the bow. When you reach the point of fullness, enjoy the gentle feeling of stretching. Then in a flash, release the breath. Let the exhale pour out of you quickly, completely: you are the arrow.

When you exhale, there is nothing to do except let go. No need to blow or push or strain, or do anything. In fact, anything you "do" will only throw the arrow off its target. The force that is built up on the inhale will do the work for you. Play with being the bow and play with making the arrow your intention. It is an extraordinary experience to feel everything change in a flash!

Realize that no matter what has happened up to this moment, no matter what was true in the last moment, anything is possible in the next moment. The next breath can take you out of anything and can lead you to anything!

With practice, you can clear negativity or pain quickly and easily whenever it is activated or triggered in you.

Issues, challenges, problems you thought would require a long and difficult process simply dissolve! You find yourself in the midst of a beautiful, endless space of peace and love and freedom!

Expand on the inhale and release on the exhale. Do this again and again... each time as if it is the first time. Don't try to achieve anything.

On the inhale you make your intention clear to the universe. On the exhale, you let go and trust that you have done what you need to do. And you let the universe or existence take over the process from there.

Success or failure... makes no difference. Life is as it is, in you, around you, as you! You are now practicing Zen and the Art of Breathing!

Those who become experts at this technique find that they can shift out of any uncomfortable or negative emotional, physical or psychological state at will (In fact all it takes is willingness!).

I invite you to practice this technique. It is the technique of focusing totally on a bright positive intention as you inhale, then letting go totally on the exhale, so that life can do the work for you.

When you master Zen Breathing, you free yourself when pain from the past takes control of your life energy. You can learn to liberate yourself in a moment!

I call the people who have mastered this breath: the "Un-stunned Heroes" of the Spiritual Revolution!