

Practicing Spiritual Breathing

Your breath is much more than just the simple movement of oxygen in and out of your lungs. Your breath is a vehicle for not only the physical oxygen that's necessary for your body functions, but subtle energies as well. The air has its own aura or energy field. Sometimes, you can even see these tiny scintillating particles of light filling the air around you. (Please don't tell me I'm the only one who sees them!) Indian scriptures use the word *prana* to describe this life force and their word for breath exercises that increase your life force is *pranayama*.

You've probably noticed that your state of mind affects the way you breathe. For example, when you're agitated, your breath tends to get shallow and fast. When you're feeling happy and peaceful, your breath becomes slower and deeper.

Just as your state of mind affects the way you breathe, so also the way you breathe affects your state of mind. Because your breath mirrors your mental state, you can create an intentional feedback loop where you guide your breath to become calm and slow, little by little. Calming your breath also calms the thoughts in your mind. As the agitation of your mind begins to subside, your breath naturally becomes even calmer, thereby making your mind even quieter.

Consider

Breathing slowly and deeply can lead you into more peaceful spaces within your mind, heart, and soul.

Spiritual Wisdom

The soul is the divine breath. It purifies, revivifies, and heals the instrument through which it functions.

—Hazrat Inayat Khan

Spirituality in Action

Here's a way to experience healing life-force energy through breath control:

1. **Sit quietly in a meditative space, allowing each breath to get longer and longer, deeper and deeper.**
2. **Slowly increase the length of each inhalation, as well as the pause at the peak of your inhalation while holding the air in.**

- 3. Let the air out slowly with each exhalation, pausing again at the end of each exhalation as the air is retained outside.**

You may have an easier time doing this exercise while counting mentally. You can begin by breathing in to the count of three, gently retaining the breath for a count of three, releasing the air to the count of three, and resting on the point of exhalation to the count of three. After the count of three is comfortable, you can add a number, and do the same cycle to the count of four.

Continue to add numbers to your breath rounds until the point where it would become uncomfortable. If you feel a need to take a few ordinary breaths here and there before continuing on, that is fine. Trust your inner guidance.