

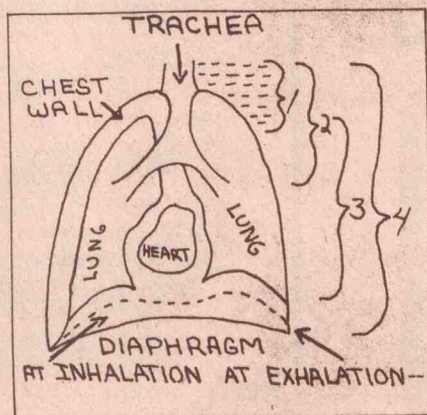
# RHYTHM OF BREATH

by SHANTI

There is rhythm everywhere in the universe. It is present in the solar system, the atom, and if we care to tune in, it is within each of us.

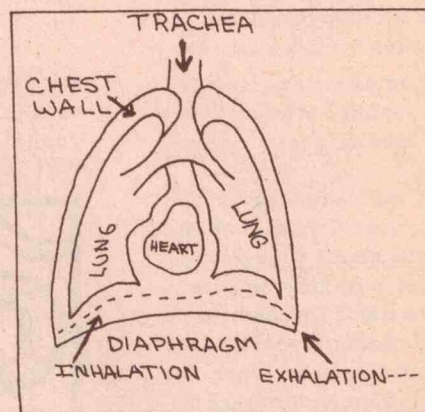
The universal rhythm becomes part of us through our breathing. The Breath is not only the little breath of our body, it is associated with the breath of the cosmos. Regulating the breath means regulating one's relationship with the cosmos to bring about harmony and order. The rhythm of breath leads toward enlightenment and realization of the divine true self. Through your nostrils, you draw in vital energy-Prana, as well as all the vibrations present in the environment, in their most subtle and refined form. Breathing keeps you in continuous contact with the world and, by extension, the universe.

You may be able to survive without food for a few months, without water for a few days, but without air only a few minutes. It seems that we have confused our priorities. Everything seems geared toward food production/consumption, while little is offered in proper use of water and air. We are food conscious but not breath conscious! Hence, the intent of this article is to raise your conscious level of proper (efficient) breathing technique. For better identification, both improper and proper techniques are given.



**HIGH BREATHING**

1) High Breathing - only the upper part of the chest and lungs is expanded. Upper portion of the chest and ribs, the collar bone and the shoulders move. The diaphragm is raised and the abdomen withdrawn, compressing the lowermost portion of the lungs, thus preventing their expansion downwards. Result - minimum amount of air enters the lungs with maximum amount of effort. This may lead to complications of the throat and voice.



**MID-BREATHING**

2) Mid-Breathing - In this type, the ribs of the middle region of the chest are expanded and the diaphragm raised. Lower abdominal region is contracted. This is superior to High-Breathing but inferior to Low-Breathing. Result - just little more than minimum air enters the lungs at a cost of great effort.

3) Diaphragmatic or Low Breathing - In this type, the middle and lower regions of the chest are expanded and the diaphragm is used. Result - you get fairly good amount of air but upper portion of lung is not used.

4) Complete Yogic Breathing - In this type, the lungs are used to their fullest capacity. Following, is a detailed explanation of this type of breathing:



## INHALATION PART

Technique - Sit comfortably with head, neck and trunk in a straight line. Inhale slowly, uniformly and without any jerks. First let the air rush to the lowest and widest region of the lungs. The abdomen will protrude a little like a balloon. Keep on breathing. Incoming air will fill the mid-region of the lungs. This will raise the lower ribs and the front part of the chest. Keep on breathing. Finally, the upper region of the lungs will be filled with incoming fresh air and the chest will be completely expanded, raising the upper ribs. The abdomen will settle back and contract. When the lungs are filled to the maximum capacity, you will not be able to inhale anymore. In this breathing, the first, second and third breathing techniques are synchronized and all are used in a harmonious manner.

## EXHALATION PART

Exhale air in upper part of lungs first. Collar bone and upper chest will sink. Without jerking, exhale the air in the mid-region of the lungs. The chest will contract. Now exhale air from lowest part of lungs by contracting the abdomen.

All breathing practices should be done through your nose. Only a few special techniques use the mouth. The air which reaches the bronchi through the nostrils has been warmed or cooled to body temperature, humidified and filtered by mucosa present in the upper respiratory tract.

The total capacity of the lungs is approximately 6,000 milliliters. The tidal air, the amount breathed in or out during quiet respiration, is 500 ml. for an adult. The vital capacity (quantity of air that can be exhaled after inhaling deeply) is 3,700 ml. for an adult man. The residual capacity is 1,200 ml. So, we normally use only 1/7 of the possible lung capacity. Through complete yogic breathing, vital capacity can be easily increased.

Find the right teacher to guide you in higher pranayama practices. It is best to try breathing when the stomach is not loaded with food and the bowels are evacuated. Start with 10 to 15 minute practice times. Be regular. Practicing at the same time, in the same place, using the same posture will bring faster and better results.

After you have learned to expand your lungs to their fullest capacity through complete yogic breathing, you are ready to establish a rhythm in your respiration. In yogic breathing - inhalation, retention and exhalation are of equal importance, and they bear a fixed ratio to one another. Most yoga texts give the

ratio 1:4:2 for inhalation, retention and exhalation. I do not recommend this ratio for beginners, We will proceed with a 1:2:1 ratio in the beginning.

Maintain the breath for twice the amount of time taken for inhalation. Exhale in the same way you inhaled, taking the same amount of time you did for inhalation. You may time yourself with the second hand of a clock by counting numbers, AUM etc. If you breathe 15 breaths/minute, your current rhythm is about 1:2:1.

### Diagram 3: Beginner

Week	Inhalation/Retention/Exhalation Ratio
First	2:4:2 seconds
Second	3:6:3 "
Third	4:8:4 "
Fourth	5:10:5 "
Fifth	6:12:6 "

Intermediate - start with 7:14:7 ratio. Add one second every week until you come to 15:30:15 ratio which gives you one breath per minute.

Perfect Pranayama - from 16:32:16 till you master 25:50:50. It will take 26 weeks to reach this level by increasing one count in inhalation.

There will be obvious benefits from this practice, even before the first week is over. If one is emotionally upset, practicing this breathing will help soothe the nerves and calm the mind. The mind will be free and concentration will be easier. General health will be greatly improved. The chest will broaden and the senses will be easily controlled. The respiratory act is under the control of the Vagus nerve. Thus, pranayama is, in effect, a process of bringing the Vagus nerve under control, a nerve over which we normally have little control. All the vital forces are more or less under the control of the Vagus nerve.

### Alternate Nostril Breathing for Better Concentration

Sit erect in a comfortable position, keeping head neck and trunk in a straight line. Keep your body relaxed: inhale slowly, uniformly and deeply through the right nostril and exhale through the left nostril. Now inhale through the left and exhale through the right. Alternate this rhythm 9 to 10 times. Breathe the Yoga breath way. Closing eyes while practicing will bring calmer and more tranquil feelings. After about a month's practice, you will notice improvement in your power to concentrate.

*(continued on page 34)*



## Yoga Breathing for Constipation

Stand erect facing the East in the morning and the North at night. Place palms on hips. Inhaling, bend the body to the right. Exhaling, bend it to the left and repeat a few times. Make sure feet are together.

Exhaling, bend forward as much as you can. Inhaling, come up and bend back. Repeat this a few times.

## Yoga Breathing While Walking

Walk with uniform steps. Keep the shoulders stretched back and the chest forward. Do not jerk while inhaling or exhaling.

1. Inhale while taking eight steps.
2. Exhale while taking eight more steps.
3. Inhale through the next eight steps.
4. Exhale through another eight steps.

Continue this pattern as long as you walk.

## Rhythmic Breathing While Running

Rather than taking breaths in a continuous manner, you will breathe in with the first step, again breathe in with the second step, breathe in with the third step and again with the fourth step.

Then breathe out with the fifth step, breathe out with sixth step, breath out with the seventh and again breathe out with the eighth step. Here you are splitting the complete yoga breath in four continuous short exhalations. Don't be too forceful in breathing. Inhalations and exhalations should be gentler, shorter and without jerks to suit your running steps. With this breathing technique, many students have increased running distance by several miles without getting tired and short of breath and have actually started to enjoy the run.

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Steps in Running	Breathing
1	In
2	In
3	In
4	In
5	Out
6	Out
7	Out
8	Out
9	In
10	In
12	In
13	Out
14	Out
15	Out
16	Out

As a concluding remark, I believe God gives something common to all human beings, a half billion breaths to breathe. At the rate of approximately 14 breaths per minute -  $14 \times 60 \times 24 \times 365 \times 70 = 515,088,000$  breaths in seventy years. With 14 breaths per minute, you will take 70 years to breathe about a half billion breaths. If you cut down breathing from 14 to 10 breaths per minute, it will take 98 years to breathe about a half billion breaths, which is God's gift to you. If you cut the breathing rate down, you will take more healthy years to finish your quota. Think it over; regulate and use your breaths wisely. ●

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