

# Chapter One

## The History of Breathing

*“The importance of breathing need hardly be stressed. It provides the oxygen for the metabolic processes; literally it supports the fires of life. But breath as "pneuma" is also the spirit or soul. We live in an ocean of air like fish in a body of water. By our breathing we are attuned to our atmosphere. If we inhibit our breathing we isolate ourselves from the medium in which we exist. In all Oriental and mystic philosophies, the breath holds the secret to the highest bliss. That is why breathing is the dominant factor in the practice of Yoga.”*  
~Alexander Lowen, *The Voice of the Body*

Everybody breathes. It's a fundamental activity that we do all day every day. When our breath ceases, everything around us loses all importance. Our breath should be our first priority, yet it's something that we tend to ignore until it becomes a problem. Unfortunately, what most of us don't realize is that our breathing is already a problem.

The reality is that over ninety percent of us are using less than fifty percent of our breathing capacity. We are inhaling very shallowly, taking in a minimal amount of oxygen. On the flip side, our exhalations are also marginal, which perpetuates a shallow inhalation. By taking in a less than ideal amount of oxygen, we are not fueling our blood and bodies with sufficient energy. By not expelling enough carbon dioxide, we are harboring toxins and wastes in our blood streams and organs. Shallow breathing does not provide sufficient oxygen to our brain or other cells and has been linked with degenerative disease, poor quality of life and an early onset of death.

Breathing is necessary for life. But what many of us don't consider is that breathing is also the quickest, easiest and most rewarding solution to deal with stress. As babies, we breathed in a full, connected rhythm through the diaphragm that allows complete circulation in our small bodies. It is untainted by our environment, gravity, poor posture, emotions or bad habits.

As we mature, that rhythm changes. For many people, a shift in breathing occurs as toddlers. By age eleven, the majority of people breathe marginally, engaging only the chest and not the solar plexus.

Think about the last time you were depressed, tired, anxious, scared or sad. Perhaps you breathed more shallowly or occasionally held your breath. You may have felt overwhelmed or too exhausted to breathe fully and deeply. This shallow breathing resulted in circulating less energy and oxygen. And that likely left you more depressed, tired, anxious, scared or sad. Experiencing these negative emotions as they arise isn't fun. But what's even worse is when these emotions are suppressed and accumulate as stored tension in the body that can later result in injury or illness.

When we consciously breathe, we become present with ourselves instead of moving from task to task with hundreds of distractions. Conscious breathing helps us to feel and process emotion. It helps us bring in more oxygen to our cells and our organs so that every part of us can function better. It helps us think more clearly, digest our food and have stronger immunity to disease.

Conscious breathing can be practiced anywhere. It can be done by keeping your eyes open or by shutting them to avoid mental stimulation. Then, taking a long, deep breath through the nostrils, allow the abdomen to expand, then your ribcage and finish by filling your chest with air. Let the shoulders stay relaxed. Then exhale fully. Do not hold your breath at the top of the inhalation nor at the bottom of the exhalation. Make your breath continuous. Make it full. Focus on the inhalation. Relax with the exhalation. Repeat this conscious breathing pattern several times whenever you think about it during the day.

While consciously breathing, you can also do a quick body scan. Do you have a headache? Imagine someone smoothing her fingers softly across your forehead. Allow your jaw to relax. Are your shoulders hunched? Does the back of your neck hurt? Roll your shoulders back and down. Release your chin to one shoulder, exhaling and allowing the stress to flow out of your body and then bring your chin to the opposite shoulder and exhale again. Continue this mental scan, breathing and releasing any area of tension in your body focusing on your arms, your torso and your legs. The most common places to hold tension are the eyes, jaw, hands, abdomen and feet. Pay close attention to those areas. Then simply breathe.

Acknowledge and release any thoughts that crop into your mind. Inhale and exhale. Breathe in positive energy. Exhale and release any anger, doubt or worry.

The more our breath is freed up, the less we are affected by trauma. By breathing more fully, our circulation improves, we are better able to mentally focus and our coordination is enhanced. We can breathe in energy and suddenly renew our outlook on the task that twenty seconds

ago seemed overwhelming. Not only is it now a possibility to complete our task efficiently, we may have gained a new solution as well.

Conscious breathing can offer us a few precious moments to rejuvenate and relax, which will give us a more optimistic outlook on our environment and ourselves. Conscious breathing brings our awareness into the present moment, which helps us to avoid being angry or sad about a past event or worried about or afraid of a future event. Peace, joy and a positive outlook can be easily attained when we focus on the present moment because when we *really* become present, we find that we have all that we need right now and that we are safe, protected and supported.

Conscious breathing helps us to turn inward, so that we can better avoid external distractions and can listen to our intuition. Conscious breathing, or Qi Breathing, veers us away from potentially self-destructive methods of escape, such as eating unnecessary calories, drinking or smoking. It offers us a few precious moments during the day to rejuvenate and relax, which will give us a more optimistic outlook on our lives and our environment.

Rhythmic, deep, and slow breathing leads to calm and peaceful states of mind. Choppy and/or shallow breathing disrupts this innate natural rhythm and leads to physical, emotional and mental blocks. These blocks can lead to inner conflicts, imbalances, personality disorders, destructive lifestyles and disease.

Many people don't realize that there is a deeper meaning and spiritual connection of the breath. In yogic teachings, it is the breath that is our bridge between body, mind and spirit. In meditation, it is the breath that enables us to be awakened to the present moment away from our daily distractions and our busy minds.

For thousands of years, spiritual seekers, mystics and yogis have used the power of the breath to shift their consciousness. By regulating the breath, they could control the mind. They reached altered states of awareness and discovered that profound healing was possible through the breath. Ancient yogis believed that many diseases are connected to disturbed and inefficient breathing. Breathing exercises were incorporated into exercise and relaxation routines thousands of years before the dawn of the Roman Empire. On the deepest level, mental, emotional and spiritual enrichment can be attained through the breath, which automatically supports life itself.

Many cultures have words for breathing or breath that reflect a deeper understanding and respect for the breath. In many languages, the word for breath and spirit are the same. For example in Greek, the word *pneuma* means breath or a blast of air and is also interpreted as spirit. In Latin,

*spiritus* means both breath and spirit. In Hebrew, the word *ruach* generally means wind, breath or spirit. In Arabic, the word *rouh* means breathing deeply and spirit, but also means wind, inspiration, rest, relaxation, going home, happiness and more.

In Sanskrit, *prana* means breath, life force and vital energy. In yogic practices, *pranayama* means expansion of the life force and expansion of the breath. For more than five thousand years, yogis have understood through direct experience that expanding the breath would expand life. In today's world, pranayama helps to establish regular breathing patterns to reverse the negative effects of modern life.

*Qigong*, means the cultivation of life energy. It is a practice that combines movement, breath, exercise and meditation for greater vitality and healing. Qigong originated in China around 2,000 B.C. Around 400 B.C., the Buddha taught the importance of silence and stillness and going within to experience the breath.

Although the western world has been skeptical about the healing powers of the breath, it is difficult to dismiss the obvious transformative effects of the breath. The many forms of conscious, altered breathing that have been developed in the last several decades is called breathwork. Many of these types of breathwork have been derived from yoga.

In the twentieth century, three major pioneers of breathwork were Christina Grof and Dr. Stanislav Grof as well as Leonard Orr. The Grofs developed Holotropic Breathwork, a method of psychotherapy that uses faster breathing, music and bodywork to explore altered states of mind similar to what is experienced with usage of the hallucinogenic drug lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD). Holotropic Breathwork induces non-ordinary states of mind similar to what can be achieved through meditation, spiritual practices, cultural rituals or psychedelic drugs. It is effective in helping people gain insights into the source of their emotional problems and facilitates rapid healing.

Orr developed Rebirthing Breathwork, also known as circular, connected, conscious breathing, in which the inhalation and the exhalation are merged with no pause in between them. It is named Rebirthing Breathwork because it provides the opportunity to heal the birth-death cycle as well as birth trauma. Orr discovered the healing potential of the breath through its ability to provide complete relaxation, a space in which no disease can live.

Today, there are scores of different types of breathwork. Sondra Ray, co-author with Orr of *Rebirthing in the New Age*, developed Liberation Breathing, which can “liberate” you from pain, negative thoughts and

emotions, mental blocks, traumatic incidents, addictions, depression and birth trauma. Ray believes she has taken Rebirthing Breathwork to a new level of effectiveness by invoking the Divine Mother energy into breathing sessions. Dr. Judith Kravitz, who experienced Rebirthing in the mid-seventies, combined conscious breathing with her healing practice as a counseling minister and renamed the process Transformational Breath. Jacqueline Small, who co-taught Holotropic Breathwork with Dr. Grof, developed Integrative Breathwork, which uses music, breathing, meditative autohypnosis and symbolic artwork to release the unconscious mind.

The term breathwork conjures up a certain degree of difficulty simply from the word “work.” Synonyms for work include: effort, exertion, labor, toil, slog, drudgery and grind. From this point onward, the terms *breath technique, method, practice* or simply *breathing* will be used to eliminate the possible mental, physical or emotional anguish that often times is connected with work.

All breathing methods are forms of active healing rather than passive healing, in which a practitioner does a great deal of work on the client’s behalf, such as acupuncture, Reiki energy healing and massage.

This manual focuses on a new breathing technique that was developed in 2013 by Deanna Reiter and Troy Stende called Qi Breathing. Reiter, a breathing practitioner who studied under Orr and Ray, combined her knowledge of breathing with Stende, a Qigong expert. Similar to pranayama, this form of holistic healing deeply connects and expands universal energy, qi, through a connected breathing rhythm. Qi Breathing can increase energy, reduce stress and improve health. Reiter and Stende noticed that a higher quality breath results in a higher quality life and that a fuller, deeper breath promotes a fuller, richer life.

This manual is your key to unlocking the potential of the breath.