



October 1999 Contemplation Theme

## **Breathing**

By Rama Berch, C.S.Y.T., E-RYT 500

Check and see right now — are you breathing? Take a breath — and let it out slow and long. If your exhale is truly slow AND long, your next inhale will be easy and full. Your exhalation is the key to your breath. Do it again — a long slow exhale. How does it feel?

“Waiting to Exhale” was a great movie title because it named a reality. You are always waiting to exhale. You are always holding your breath. You have heard the phrase, “Do not hold your breath.” It means that the thing you are waiting for is not coming to you imminently. You are always holding your breath because you are always waiting for something — something that will make it okay for you to breathe. Consider, what one “thing” could possibly happen in your life that would make it okay for you to breathe easy? The reality is that no one “thing” will do it for you. Even if you do get all the “things” in place, they are likely to shift around again. Then, you are back to waiting. So, you need to breathe anyway. Just exhale. Give a long slow sigh of relief and the things won’t seem so important. But even more than giving yourself an occasional long breath, your whole breathing style needs to change.

The average eighty-year-old person breathes one half of the amount of the average thirty-year-old. Imagine if you breathed only one half of the amount you currently breathe. Unfortunately, knowing about this is not enough. It is impossible to remember to breathe more — breathing happens spontaneously (thank heaven!). You need to do something that reprograms your everyday breath, so that each breath is naturally easier and more open.

Every yoga class begins with the full yoga breath, Ujjayi Pranayama. It is incredibly beneficial if you incorporate it into your daily life. The easiest way is to do it in bed before you go to sleep at night. Your sleep will be deeper and more restful. You may even need less sleep!

The five elements of Ujjayi Pranayama, in order of their importance, are:

1. making the breathing sound in your throat (on both the exhalation and inhalation),
2. slowing down and smoothing out the pace of the breaths (which makes the breathing sound quieter),
3. gently extending the length of each inhalation and each exhalation,
4. increasing the quantity of breath that you fill in and empty out without straining or forcing,
5. sequencing or placing the breath in specific interior spaces.

Developing these qualities makes Ujjayi Pranayama a profound and powerful practice. It can cure allergies and free you from all anxieties. It will create vibrant health and vitality as well as lay the foundation for you to experience deep meditation.

Ujjayi Pranayama is not the way you are supposed to breathe all the time. It is impossible to remember to breathe this way all day long. You are not supposed to have to remember to breathe. Do it only ten- or twenty-minutes per day. Within a few days, you will find that your usual breathing style has changed without you having to pay any attention to it. You will no longer be waiting to exhale, because you will no longer be holding your breath or waiting for some “thing” to happen. Life will be rich and satisfying just the way it is.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Rama'. Above the signature is a small heart symbol containing the initials 'S.T.C.'.