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RESPIRATION

*Spiritual Dimensions
and
Practical Applications*

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P R O S V E T A

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I

The *Book of Genesis* says that God formed man from the dust of the earth. Although the true meaning of the Hebrew word *aphar* is ‘ashes’, it has commonly been translated as ‘dust’. But dust and ashes are not the same thing: if God formed man from ashes it implies that something had previously been burned: man, therefore, was formed from matter that had been burned.

Genesis continues the account of the creation of man with the words: ‘*And the Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being*’. The life of man began, therefore, with a breath: the breath of God. For every human being, life begins with a breath. When a baby is born, the very first thing it must do in order to become a citizen of the earth, is to breathe: it opens its little mouth and lets out a cry and all those who hear it rejoice because the baby is alive! Thanks to this first inhalation, the child’s lungs are filled with air and begin to do their work: life is set in

motion. And many years later, when we hear that he has ‘breathed his last’, we understand this to mean that he has died. Yes, breath is the beginning and the end: life begins and ends with a breath.

Life is the greatest of all mysteries. Just think of how many countless thousands of thinkers and scholars have sought to elucidate it! Esoteric tradition even recounts the case of certain magicians who succeeded in producing tiny living creatures in their laboratories and in giving them certain tasks to do! How much truth there is in these stories is another matter, but one thing we do know, and that is that the mystery of life has never ceased to intrigue and absorb the mind of man.

The truth is that the mystery of life is to be found in respiration, breathing. It is not in the air we breathe, nor in the act of breathing, but in an element that is superior to air and which is nourished by air: the element fire. Yes, life is contained in fire, heat, and the function of air is to sustain and nourish fire. Life resides in the heart; the heart is the hearth in which burns the fire of life and the lungs are the bellows that continually feed the flames. The origin, therefore, the first cause of life, is fire, and air is brother to fire, and its role is to sustain and nourish it. When man breathes his last breath, when he exhales for the last time, the fire goes out; life is extinguished.

It is worth taking the time to reflect on the function of respiration which is at the root of life, in order both to understand it better and to practise it more efficiently. In most human beings, the respiratory function suffers from various impediments or is, in some way, diminished or contaminated; they need to learn to work with air so as to revive, purify and intensify the life within them.

One way of reaching a better understanding of the phenomenon of breathing and of the laws that govern it, is to compare it with the process of nutrition.

What do you do when you eat? Before sending the food down to the stomach to be digested, you chew it. The mouth is like a little kitchen in which the food is prepared, cut up, cooked and seasoned with a little oil (that is, with your saliva) by glands especially prepared for this work. This is why it is recommended to chew your food for a long time, until it is almost liquid. If you swallow it without chewing it sufficiently beforehand, it is not really ready to be digested and your organism cannot assimilate it completely; the result is an excessive amount of waste. Also, if your food is insufficiently chewed when it reaches your stomach, your organism has to use much more energy to assimilate it and this is the cause of much of your fatigue.

You must not think that fatigue is always caused by too much work. No, it is very often caused by a waste of energy, and this is what happens when you swallow your food without chewing it properly and without having impregnated it with your thoughts and feelings: it is more indigestible and much more difficult to assimilate.

You must realize that, in order to undertake spiritual work of any kind, you must first be sure that you eat and breathe harmoniously. The two processes are governed by the same laws. Just as it is bad to swallow your food without chewing it, it is bad, also, to breathe so rapidly that the air does not have time to expand your lungs and fill them right down to the bottom. You must draw deep, slow breaths and even, from time to time, hold the air in your lungs for a few seconds before breathing out again. Why? In order to 'chew' it. Yes, your lungs are capable of 'chewing' air, just as your mouth chews food.

The air we breathe in is like a mouthful of food, a mouthful of extraordinary forces and energies. If you let it out again too quickly, the lungs don't have time to 'cook', 'digest' and assimilate it so that the whole body can benefit from what it contains. This is why so many people are tense, tired and irritable: they don't know how to nourish themselves with the air they breathe; they don't 'chew' it; they let it out immediately.

Also, most people breathe only with the upper part of their lungs and the result is that the stale air is never driven out and replaced by pure air. Deep breathing is a magnificent exercise which you should practise regularly, for it revives one's energies.

You all know how the engine of a car or a motor cycle works: you feed it with petrol, which is simply food in liquid form. When the spark ignites the petrol vapour it transforms it into gas (the element air), and this transformation produces the energy which makes a motor vehicle move. Well, the same thing happens when we eat: at each successive phase of disintegration in the mouth, stomach and so on, the food releases a certain amount of energy.

And the air we breathe follows the same process: in order to get the greatest possible benefit from it, it has to be compressed and held in the lungs. While your lungs are holding the air under compression, your organism is doing a work which is the equivalent of the phases of ignition and explosion in an internal combustion engine and, as the air is prevented from escaping, it is forced to circulate through the tiny channels that nature opens for it. If you expel it at once and let it escape, all its energy is lost. When you hold it in, on the other hand, nature directs the energy it contains through these minute paths in your

organism in such a way that it touches and sets in motion various centres along its path.

Similarly, when you attend the sunrise in the morning, if you don't capture and hold on to the sun's rays, if you let them slip past you and don't use them, they will do nothing, they will be completely ineffective. But if you catch and hold on to them consciously, if you collect and compress them inside you, you will be opening a path for them into your spirit. Then they will move through you with tremendous force, setting in motion powerful centres, and you will feel yourself becoming a whirlwind of fire.

The great secret, you see, is to transform each element into one of greater subtlety: to liquefy what is solid, to transform liquids into gases, to transform gaseous elements into ether. He who is capable of doing this possesses the secret of how to draw permanently on the inexhaustible Source. Every living being does this to a certain extent, unconsciously – this is what makes it possible for them to remain alive – but they don't do it fully; they do it mechanically, without thinking about what they are doing, and when it is done unconsciously, the results are not the same as when it is done consciously. To make matter subtler is to release the energy it contains. All that is dense, compact and heavy represents unorganized matter in which energy is held prisoner. And the more

energy one imprisons within oneself (like those who overeat), the more harm one does to oneself. We must, on the contrary, liberate energy, and this is the function of breathing during meals: it allows a greater quantity of energy to be released from the food. I have often told you that nutrition is a form of combustion, and fire is constantly in need of air to revive it; that is why we blow on it. If you take a few deep breaths while you are eating, the combustion of your food will be more efficient. It is enough to pause three or four times in the course of a meal and breathe deeply: in this way, greater energy will be released from your food.

Our role is not to condense or materialize energy; it is already sufficiently condensed. Our role is, rather, to set it free, to release it. The great Initiates, who know this law of the disintegration of matter, are capable of disintegrating a few thousandths of a milligram of the matter of their brain and, with the resulting energy, of working miracles. They effect this disintegration by means of thought; it is a secret that has been in their possession for thousands of years. They apply the principles of nuclear fission to their own brain, a type of matter that contains inexhaustible wealth.

Perhaps someone will say, 'Well, I'm capable of disintegrating matter, too. The other day I had a temperature of more than forty degrees, and I lost ten pounds!' That is not the same thing: a

true release of energy must make you stronger, not weaker! A fever debilitates you and leaves you weaker because it destroys a great many cells: you lose matter without gaining energy. Whereas someone who concentrates or meditates, disintegrates some minute particles of matter and, in doing so, releases energy. And this is all the more beneficial and salutary, in that other, purer, more luminous particles come to take the place of those that are destroyed. This is not the case when you are ill or when there is a loss of energy from some other cause. You must distinguish between an expenditure of energy that enriches you and one that impoverishes you.

As I have said, you have to ‘chew’ the air in order to release the etheric elements it contains. The lungs are composed of several different sections, which can be compared to the mouth and the stomach, except that their position in relation to each other is reversed. As a matter of fact, look at a pair of lungs: don’t they look like a tree standing on its head, with a trunk, branches and leaves? The leaves of a tree are at the top, whereas the ‘leaves’ of the lungs (the alveoli) are at the bottom. A tree relates to the external gaseous atmosphere through its leaves, whereas air penetrates into the lungs through the ‘trunk and branches’.

If you pursue the comparison with the digestive system, you will see that the lower part

of the lungs has the same function as a mouth, whereas the upper part functions like a stomach. When we eat, we put food into the upper part of the digestive tract, the mouth, where it is chewed before being sent down to the stomach. When we take a deep breath we do just the opposite: the air goes all the way down to the bottom of the lungs, to the alveoli, and the alveoli 'chew' it as though they were a mouth. If we don't do this our breathing is shallow, the air remains in the upper part (the 'stomach') of the lungs without being chewed. You must learn to breathe deeply, from the abdomen; if the air does not get down to the bottom of your lungs, you will only extract the coarsest, least subtle particles from it. But if you send it all the way down to the bottom, to the point of putting some pressure on the diaphragm, and keep it there for a few seconds, the 'mouth' of the lungs has a chance to function and to draw the subtlest elements from the air and distribute them throughout the body.

But to obtain the very subtlest elements from the air, you must not only hold it in your lungs, you must also bring it up very slowly from the lower to the upper lobes. In this way it exerts pressure on these lobes whose function is quite different from that of the lower lobes. Science will discover these realities in the future; every cell of an organism, even the different cells within the same organ, are

differentiated and specialized and have their own place according to their own particular function in that organ. The way in which the cells in the lower parts of the lungs absorb air is different from the way of those in the upper parts. It is just as bad for your health, therefore, to breathe superficially as it is to swallow your food without chewing it. Those who breathe deeply nourish themselves properly, whereas those who breathe only superficially manage to stay alive, but don't really nourish themselves.

One day, in order to help us to understand the importance of respiration, the Master Peter Deunov reminded us of the Biblical story of Jacob and the Angel. The Angel, having defeated Jacob, said, *'Let me go, for the day breaks.'* But Jacob refused, saying, *'I will not let you go unless you bless me.'* And the Master explained, 'This is what you must do with air: you must welcome it and fill your lungs with it, and not let it go until it has given you all the blessings it contains.' Perhaps you thought that Jacob was simply doing violence to his adversary? No, he was acting out of zeal, out of spiritual fervour, and we should do the same. As long as the air has not given up all its blessings, we must not let it go. This is the secret of all plenitude.

Similarly, when we go to look at the sun rising in the morning, we do so in order to absorb its

light into ourselves, just as we absorb food, water and air. We focus our attention on the sun's rays; we can even talk to them: 'Oh, luminous rays, enter into us and drive away the clouds that only your light can banish'. We absorb the light through a network of minute channels in our bodies and our whole being vibrates with greater intensity. Of course, light can effect some work in us without our conscious collaboration but, if we are attentive to the work it is doing and eager to take part in it, the results will be greatly enhanced. When you are watching the sunrise, try to steep yourselves consciously in its light and warmth; and be sure that it is already causing something to grow and flourish and that you will soon feel new forces vibrating within you.

But to get back to the subject of respiration: regular breathing exercises will improve your health¹. Each individual has his own method and his own rhythm which he must find by listening to his inner doctor. Yes, for each one of us has his inner doctor and those who don't listen to him will be obliged to listen, one day, to an external doctor! Listen to your inner doctor; he will show you how to breathe, how often and at what moments of the day to do these exercises, for you are all

¹ See section II of this brochure.

different and you must all find your own particular rhythm.

Breathe slowly and rhythmically, focusing all your attention on the air coming into your lungs. Think of all the elements that it is bringing you for the benefit of your health. Perhaps some of you will object that you have been doing breathing exercises every day for years and that they have never done you any good. Well, in the first place, how can you be sure that they have not done you any good? Your health may not be perfect, but what would it have been like if you had not done these exercises? And secondly, are you sure that you were really concentrating on the healing you wanted from them while you were doing them? Didn't your thoughts often wander to the shopping expedition you were planning for that afternoon or to your latest argument with your wife or your boss? If that is the case then, naturally, you cannot expect much in the way of results.

All the cares and worries of your daily life must be put to one side during your breathing exercises; nothing must be allowed to distract you: all your thoughts and all your faith must be centred on the work you are doing. Faith is a divine sentiment which awakens unsuspected powers of thought and action; this is why it is at the root of all healing. Even if faith does not actually cure you, it is still an essential condition for a cure to take place.

You should also synchronize your breathing with the movements of the gymnastics we do every day². Breathe in when you raise your arms, hold your breath for a moment, and breathe out only when you bend down: inhale on the upward movement and exhale on the downward movement. The proper coordination of your breathing with the movements of the gymnastics will help you to understand their significance and to get much more out of them.

It would be a good thing if doctors took care of people before they fell ill, if only to teach them how to breathe correctly. As a matter of fact, the doctors of the future will not look after the sick. Does that astonish you? No, their task will be to teach people who are fit and whole how to stay whole, whereas, today, most of their work consists in trying to glue the pieces back together again..., and they don't always succeed! Deep breathing is a very potent remedy, both as a preventive and as a curative, and if you do have to take medication, it will be all the more effective if you also breathe deeply and consciously.

When you draw air into the depths of your lungs, you must do so in the conscious conviction that you are receiving divine blessings with every breath you inhale. For many of you, all this is too

² See *A New Earth*, C. W. 13: 'Appendix'.

new: you have difficulty in believing that God has put all the elements necessary to your health into the air you breathe. And yet that is so, and you must be convinced of it and make an effort to absorb them. You will ask, 'How can I do that?' It is very simple: you only have to think of the elements you need, calcium, iodine, magnesium, etc., while you are breathing. Your body knows very well what it needs; it has a whole team of very competent chemists at its service, and they know how to get what you need from the air. Of course, this will certainly not prevent you from having to buy certain medicines from the pharmacy, but you will not need so many of them if you learn how to get the elements you need by breathing. The only creature on earth that is capable of breathing consciously – for the moment, at any rate – is man: this is why man is said to be a living soul. So, try to be conscious that, when you breathe, you are absorbing divine life.

Breathing is also very important for the functioning of the brain. It is all right to read and study and meditate, but you must also realize that the functioning of the brain depends on the rest of the body and, in particular, on the lungs. To be sure, the lungs do not act directly on the brain, but they have a very important role to play in purifying the blood and, when the blood is pure, it irrigates the brain and supplies it with elements

which facilitate its work of understanding or of meditation.

You should get into the habit of taking a few deep breaths several times a day, while placing your left hand flat on your solar plexus with the right hand over it. As you do this you should be able to feel your diaphragm expanding and contracting. The way in which you breathe affects your circulation, and it is vitally important for all the organs of your body that your circulation has the conditions it needs to function correctly.

And while we are on the subject of the diaphragm, you should know that it, too, has an important role to play in one's respiration. As you breathe in, the lungs expand and the diaphragm is pushed downwards, and as you breathe out, the lungs contract and the diaphragm moves up again. Certain illnesses of the digestive system or the lungs are due to a displacement or contraction of the diaphragm which is a very powerful muscle and which should always be relaxed and supple.

When you are doing breathing exercises, you should also be careful about the position of the spine: it must be as straight as possible. The spine is of paramount importance for health: everything depends on it. Innumerable disorders of all kinds, both physical and psychic, can result from a deviation of the spinal column!

You can also alleviate certain uncomfortable situations by deep breathing. Suppose, for instance, that my room is cold and I have no means of heating it: I take a deep breath and hold it for as long as possible; in this way I send the warm blood from the centre of my body out to the periphery. Its warmth combats and protects me from the cold outside.

When you get into the habit of doing breathing exercises you will find that your health, your emotional balance, your clarity of thought and even your will-power are enhanced. Try it: when you have to lift something heavy, it is far easier if you start by taking a deep breath. And if you are upset, why not ask your lungs to help you? That is what they are there for! Breathe deeply for two or three minutes and you will find that you are quite calm again. It is normal to need help from time to time, but why do you always have to look for it on the outside when it is there, inside you?

II

'Solve et coagula': dissolve and coagulate, dilute and condense. This twofold precept taught by the alchemists is a transposition into the field of alchemy of two fundamental processes that are to be found throughout nature. All accumulation, concentration or amalgamation is an application of the precept *'coagula'*. And when one disperses, dissolves or dilutes, one is applying the precept *'solve'*. Throughout nature, in the lives of all creatures and, notably, in our own respiration, we find these two great processes of concentration and expansion. We breathe in and breathe out; in and out; in and out. We inhale, and our lungs expand as we draw air into them; we exhale, and they contract as they are emptied of air. This ceaseless alternation of expansion and contraction is a reflection of the immense cosmic rhythm of the universe.

Inhalation and exhalation, the ebb and flow of these two movements by which we alternately fill and empty our lungs: this is what makes us alive. And we are not alone in this, it is a universal law:

everything in nature breathes, animals, plants and even the earth itself. Yes, for the earth is alive, it too needs to inhale and exhale. To be sure, it does not breathe exactly as we do, eighteen times a minute. The rhythm of the earth's breathing stretches over so many years that it is imperceptible to us. But it, too, dilates and contracts, its dimensions are never absolutely stable. In fact, it is possible that volcanic eruptions, ruptures of the earth's crust and many other phenomena are due to this expansion and contraction. The earth is alive and it breathes; the stars, too, breathe. Yes, they breathe in and out and the influence of their respiration is even felt by us, here, on earth.

I repeat: everything breathes, trees, the oceans, even stones. You will say, 'But you can't talk of breathing unless it involves lungs.' Why not? Life does not necessarily need to use the same organs in order to accomplish the same functions. Look at a tree, for instance: it has neither lungs nor stomach, neither liver nor intestines, and yet it breathes, nourishes itself, assimilates and reproduces! And it often lives a great deal longer than human beings! It can survive extreme weather conditions and produce sweet-scented flowers and fruits, whereas man, for all his intelligence, is so fragile that the slightest thing can destroy him.

Many people have very false ideas about nature. According to them, you cannot consider

that something is alive if it does not have a heart, lungs and a stomach like ours. But nature has no use for their opinions and systems. She has created such a multitude of different forms of life that, one day, everyone will be struck dumb with amazement to see them. Yes, that is true: there are still so many things to be discovered! There are seeds buried in the earth that have been waiting for millions of years for the right moment to make their appearance.

Respiration can reveal great mysteries to you, but only if you accompany it with some mental work. As you breathe out, think that you are expanding to the very outer limits of the universe and then, as you breathe in again, you contract and withdraw into yourself, into your ego, that imperceptible point at the centre of an infinite circle. Again you expand, and again you contract... In this way you will discover the movement of ebb and flow which is the key to all the rhythms of the universe. When you become conscious of this movement within your own being, you enter into the harmony of the cosmos and establish a relationship of exchange between yourself and the universe for, as you breathe in, you inhale elements from space and, as you breathe out, you send out into space something of your own heart and soul.

He who knows how to harmonize himself with the respiration of the cosmos enters into the sphere of divine consciousness. But so many of you are still a long way from understanding the spiritual dimension of respiration! If you were sensitive to that dimension, you would spend your lives working to breathe in the strength and light of God and breathe out that light again to the whole world. For to breathe out is also this: to distribute the light of God that one has drawn into oneself.

To breathe in and breathe out... breathe in and breathe out... in and out... There is a link between respiration and every manifestation of the spiritual life. Meditation is a respiration; prayer is a respiration; ecstasy is a respiration; every form of communication with Heaven is a respiration, and your breathing reveals the intensity of that exchange. When you are in communion with Heaven you breathe deeply as though you were embracing your beloved.

Nature has placed keys to these mysteries in all kinds of places, and it is certain that, if philosophers practised respiration consciously, they would find the answers to many problems which are still enigmas to them. They continue to debate these questions and write books about them, but they have not really understood them. One's capacity for thought, in fact, is linked to

one's respiration. If you breathe incorrectly your brain will become clouded.

He who understands the profound significance of respiration begins, gradually, to sense that his own breathing melts into that of God. For God also breathes: He exhales and the world appears; He inhales and the world disappears. Of course, God's inhalations and exhalations take billions upon billions of years. This is what the Hindu Sacred Scriptures tell us: one day God will breathe in and this universe will be swallowed up and dissolve into non-being. And then, once more, God will breathe out and a new creation will appear, to last, in its turn, for billions of years. The rhythm of God's breathing, as it manifests itself through man, is very rapid, but as it manifests itself in the cosmos, it is very, very slow. The slower our breathing, therefore, the nearer we come to the rhythm of God's breathing.

Respiration has been a highly sophisticated science in India for centuries, and the techniques used are often very complex. There is so much to this science, in fact, that it would take years, even centuries, to study it all. Thanks to their very extensive research, the ancient yogis and ascetics came to understand the importance of respiration, not only in relation to physical vitality, but also in relation to the function of thought, for they came to see that all the rhythms of our organism were founded on cosmic rhythm.

In studying respiration and how it relates to the rhythms of the universe, Initiates discovered that, in order to communicate with a particular region of the spiritual world, man had to find the appropriate rhythm, make it his own and use it as a key to establish contact, exactly as one can tune a radio to a particular station if one knows the right wavelength. The wavelength is an important factor in making contact with a particular broadcasting station and the same is true of breathing: you have to know what rhythm to adjust it to, in order to make contact with a particular region of the universe.

But don't misunderstand me: I am not advising you to launch into complicated breathing exercises; on the contrary. You are not Indian yogis and, if you are not very sensible and careful, you could become unbalanced and injure your health like so many others before you.

The breathing exercises that we practise here, in our School, are very simple:

1. Begin by closing your left nostril and breathing in deeply through the right nostril, while you count to four.

2. Hold your breath to the count of sixteen.

3. Close your right nostril and breathe out through the left nostril to the count of eight.

Then you begin again, starting with the right nostril closed:

4. Breathe in through the left nostril to the count of four.

5. Hold your breath to the count of sixteen.

6. Breathe out through the right nostril to the count of eight.

You do this six times for each nostril.

Once the exercise has become easy for you, you can double the time of each movement, counting eight, thirty-two and sixteen, but I don't advise you to go any further than that.

Respiration has a role of paramount importance in the life of every spiritualist¹; this is why you must organize your daily programme so as to do your breathing exercises in the morning, on an empty stomach. It is not the same thing at all if you do them after breakfast: the movement of the lungs is hampered; you can even harm your health if you try to do them after a meal. Breathing exercises should always be done on an empty stomach or at least four or five hours after eating.

I should add that, when you take a deep breath with both nostrils, you must never inhale too rapidly; always inhale slowly and steadily. When you breathe out, on the other hand, you can expel the air rapidly and forcefully.

¹ The word 'spiritualist', in the language of Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov, simply means one who looks at things from a spiritual point of view, whose philosophy of life is based on belief in a spiritual reality.

Through respiration we are able to absorb a very precious quintessence from the air around us, a quintessence that is known to Indian yogis as Prâna. Prâna is at the root of all the energies of the cosmos and it is in the air in greatest abundance at sunrise. When we consciously draw in air through our nostrils, we set in motion the factories in our bodies whose work is to extract this quintessence and, once it has been extracted from the air, it travels throughout our nervous system. In their studies of the human nervous system, the yogis and Sages of India found that this subtle quintessence, Prâna, travels like a fire through the network of nerves that run down either side of the spine. Just as the blood circulates through the arteries, veins and capillaries, this extremely subtle fluid, Prâna, circulates through the nervous system. It is a nourishment which enhances our vitality, emotional balance and mental clarity.

A very long time ago – I can't have been more than seventeen, for I had not yet met the Master Peter Deunov – I practised endless breathing exercises and, as I was very young and had no one to guide me, I did not know where to draw the line and I ended by becoming very ill. But I remember one day in particular for, while I was doing some breathing exercises, I felt as though I had inhaled fire right down into my lungs and experienced a few moments of unimaginable joy, happiness and

illumination. Of course, at the time, I had no idea what had happened. Years later, I understood that it was perhaps the Holy Spirit, the Divine Fire that man receives through the medium of air.

Respiration is an extremely powerful factor: if someone really works at it, it can even enable him to leave his physical body and journey through space, to see for himself the realities that Initiates speak of. The awakening into activity of the *chakras* and the acquisition of spiritual powers also depend on the way one breathes.

You must learn to breathe consciously, that is to say, to associate thought and respiration and, thereby, awaken the forces dormant in the subconscious. Deep and conscious breathing brings with it untold blessings for one's intellectual, emotional and physical life. You should be able to see its beneficial effects on your brain as well as in your soul and in all your faculties; it is an important factor in every aspect of life. Never neglect the question of respiration.

In all the circumstances of everyday life, in all your relations with others, remember to breathe deeply: it will help you to remain in control of yourself. Before an interview, for example, if you want to ensure that a discussion will not degenerate into a quarrel, or before scolding or punishing a child, remember to drive out everything that disturbs you by taking a deep breath: your thoughts

will not weigh on you so heavily; they will become more luminous.

Study and observe yourselves, see how, when you are in pain or on the verge of giving way to anger or sensuality, you begin to pant, your breathing becomes shallow and irregular. Irregular breathing arouses negative forces. You only have to breathe like that for five minutes and you will trigger negative forces from within... and vice versa.

Have you noticed how someone's breathing becomes slower when they are asleep? Yes, because when you are asleep, you are inactive, so you burn up very little fuel and need very little air to stimulate combustion. When you are awake, on the other hand, particularly when you are very active, your breathing rate increases because you use up more fuel. It is thanks to his lungs that man can expend energy without endangering his life. If he did not breathe, he would not get the air he needed from the atmosphere to revive his energies and he would melt away like a lighted candle. This is why I keep telling you that those who insist that they are capable of indulging in every kind of sexual effervescence without exhausting their reserves, are blind and ignorant. The rhythm of their breathing during these moments of ferment proves, on the contrary, that they involve a formidable expenditure of energy.

The centres concerned with love are located in the hind part of the brain: the centre of the love of family and friends and the capacity to exchange and communicate with other human beings and, below this, in the cerebellum, the centre of sexual love. If this lower centre receives too much blood, you feel the urge to give free rein to your sensuality, but you can resist the temptation by breathing deeply; after only a few minutes you will find that you can behave in a happier, more beneficial way.

Good breathing habits can make our exchanges with others more harmonious. Take a practical example: when people meet each other they shake hands; in some, the gesture is warm and firm and shows that they appreciate you, in others it is flabby; some shake your hand carelessly, showing that the gesture does not mean much to them, others crush your fingers to a pulp! But what is important is that, when you shake hands with someone, a current should pass between you, otherwise there is no point in it. If you don't breathe deeply as you should, you will be incapable of shaking someone's hand properly. Before shaking hands with your friends or before going in to their house, take a deep breath (discreetly, of course); in this way your encounter with them will be harmonious.

You are given all kinds of exercises, here, and you must be sure to put them into practice. They

will strengthen you and enable you to contend with your problems. What counts is the intensity of attention and concentration that you bring to them; I have so often seen this to be true! The Master Peter Deunov used to say, 'When you pray, focus your thoughts exclusively on the object of your prayer and take a deep, slow breath'. Prayer has greater efficacy when it is accompanied by peaceful, rhythmic breathing. Conscious respiration links us to God, for He said, 'Take a deep breath and listen, and you will hear My voice'.

Here is an exercise you can do: take a very deep breath and at the same time say a prayer while you are breathing in, holding your breath and then letting it out again. You can take the first three supplications of the Lord's Prayer, for instance:

As you inhale, say to yourself, '*Hallowed be Thy Name*'.

As you are holding your breath, say, '*Thy Kingdom come*'.

As you are breathing out, say, '*Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven*'.

You must learn to breathe consciously, that is to say, to think about what you are doing while you breathe. During your daily breathing exercises, instead of breathing automatically while your mind is busy counting, count with your hands and release your thoughts; fill your mind with the most

luminous images and ideas; in this way, you will be doing magnificent work.

But one of the very best exercises you can do – and I advise you to get into the habit of doing it every day, several times a day – is to inhale light. Pick a quiet spot where no one will disturb you, sit comfortably and breathe: imagine that you are breathing in cosmic light, the light that is even subtler, infinitely subtler than sunlight; that intangible, invisible quintessential light that permeates all creation. Let this light penetrate deep inside you and circulate through all your cells, all the organs of your body. Then, as you breathe out, you draw it from yourself and project it outwards to enlighten, illuminate and help every single creature in the world. This is a truly extraordinary exercise for, in cabbalistic terms, you become the letter Aleph. Aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet symbolizes him who receives light from Heaven with one hand and distributes it, with the other hand, to all human beings. You cannot become Aleph if you think only of yourself, if you keep it all for yourself. Aleph is he whose only concern is to give, to warm, enlighten and vivify others, without a thought for himself. He is a creator, a saviour of mankind, a son of God.

He who learns to breathe consciously develops a clearer mind, a warmer heart and a stronger will;

he also prepares better conditions for his future incarnations. Yes, because, by his conscious participation in what he is doing, he becomes attuned to very highly advanced entities; they are attracted to him, a bond is created. Then these luminous entities will be willing to come and work in him and, one day, when he leaves this earth, he will meet these 'friends' with whom he has already learned to work, face to face. Never forget that your body is a society whose members make a constant effort to maintain unity. At the moment, you still do not know your associates who live inside you but, when you go to the next world, you will meet them and find out that they were your friends and that you lived in the same house together. You will learn, also, that you are going to be associates again, in your next incarnation. This is a very important question, and anyone who wants to manifest himself properly and accomplish the divine mission for which he has been sent to earth, must be aware of it.

And now, let's look at another question that nobody ever thinks about. When we breathe in we take in oxygen from the atmosphere, and it is this that keeps us alive; whereas, when we breathe out, we reject carbon dioxide and other pollutants. Everybody knows this and thinks that the matter stops there, that there is nothing they can do about it. But that is not so: why should man continue to

extract pure, life-giving elements from the universe and give back only poison and impurities? To be sure, as long as he has not attained a life of inner purity, this state of affairs will continue, but once he begins to think, feel and act divinely, he will no longer pollute the atmosphere with his toxic wastes. You may think that that is impossible. No, it is perfectly possible. There have been saints and Initiates of such purity that everything that came from them, all their exhalations, embalmed the air around them. They received the divine life into themselves and, when they projected it into the world, it was still as limpid, luminous and beneficial as when they had received it, because they had not soiled it with impurities or evil of any kind.

Why shouldn't men manage to do what certain insects do? Take bees, for example: they gather their food, the nectar of flowers, and transform it into honey. Can human beings do that? Never! Their cruelty, viciousness and lack of justice makes it impossible. But if they became like bees, if they worked for an ideal of brotherhood, if they purified themselves and worked for a divine idea, they would be capable of transforming whatever they absorbed and producing something just as delicious and fragrant as honey! For my part, I have already seen this; I have read it in the Great Book of living Nature, in the designs of Cosmic

Intelligence. It is written that, one day, it shall be so.

And what about roses? How have they managed to create the most delicious perfume, whereas many other plants, which receive exactly the same influences from the heavens, from the sun and the stars, only manage to produce a vile smell? A rose has learned to receive perfume from the heavens and to distribute it here, on the physical plane. And the same is true of precious stones: they hand on to others the light they have received.

If you study the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, Aleph א, you will understand that it is simply a symbol of exchange, of a giving and receiving. You receive light and you give light to others; you receive purity and you give purity; you receive love and you give love. This is why Jesus said, 'I am Aleph'. For he is the only one who irradiates a light as pure as that he receives. Everyone else gives off impurities. I know very well, my dear brothers and sisters, that I am leading you to regions that are virtually unattainable, but if you make it your ideal to hand on to others the divine light, love and purity you receive, as whole and unsullied as when you received it, you will be preparing for the day when everything that emanates from you, everything that you project, will be pure light. There is only one way to attain

this ideal, and that is to work to spread the idea of universal brotherhood throughout the world, to work for the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness. Only then will the air you exhale be a life-giving breath.

Oh, I know in advance that what I have been saying will not be understood, still less put into practice, for it requires great efforts and great sacrifices, and nobody is willing to sacrifice anything. In spite of that, Heaven has given me the task of making these revelations, perhaps not so much for those who are here, today, as for those who will come in the future. I am obliged to give you nourishment that is almost too advanced to be assimilated by present-day humanity and, although I am aware of men's faults and failings, I shall deliberately continue to do this, for in this way it will be available to help any who are willing to undertake divine realizations, to believe that they can and to find the means of doing so. You are all perfectly free to reject what I say and refuse to follow me; but I have my work to do; I have committed myself and I am obliged to reveal these things to you.

III

As I have already told you, you can do a lot of good work by means of breathing exercises, and one of the things you can do is a work of purification. You do this in association with the Angels of the four elements. In point of fact, there are sixteen Angels of the elements, for the four elements: earth, water, air and fire, exist in the four worlds: physical, astral, mental and divine.

On the Sephirotic Tree of Life, the four elements are represented by the four Sacred Animals, the Seraphim, who dwell in Kether, the first Sephira. Obviously, the appearance of the elements in Kether is not the same as that we see here, on earth. The fire, air, water and earth of our experience are no more than a very pale reflection, a crude condensation of the matter that exists on high, in the bosom of the Eternal Father. This matter, in which the Lord robed Himself in order to manifest Himself, is so subtle, so pure, that we can have no notion of it.

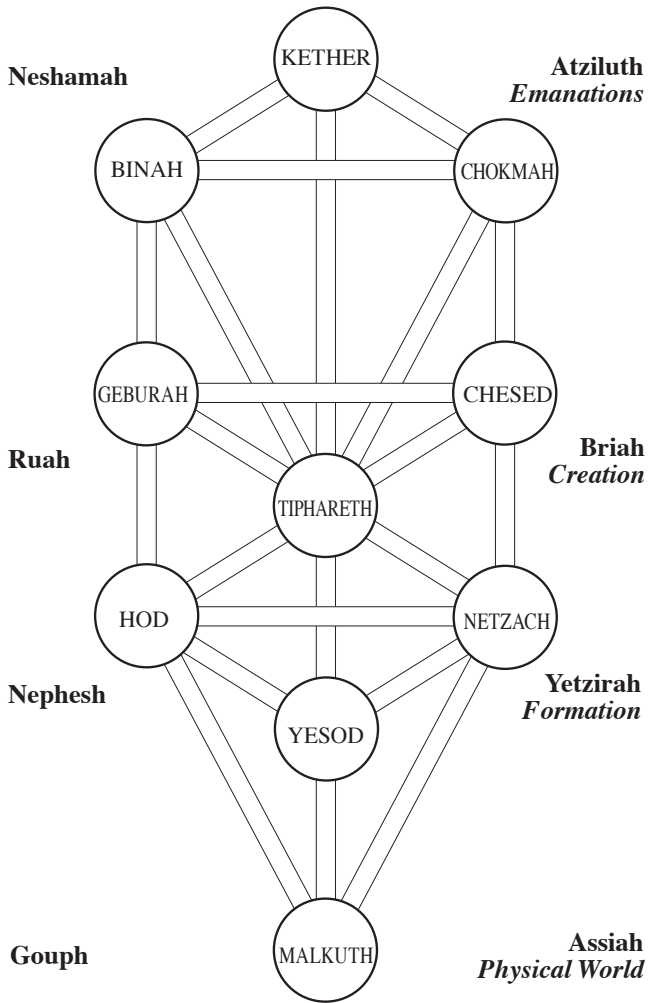
The Cabbalah teaches, also, that when the Lord wanted to create the universe, He started by forming His Kingdom, *Atziluth* (a Hebrew word which means ‘emanation’), which includes the Sephiroth *Kether* (Crown), *Chokmah* (Wisdom) and *Binah* (Intelligence). It was this world of emanations that created the region known in Hebrew as *Briah* (Creation), which includes the Sephiroth *Chesed* (Mercy), *Geburah* (Severity) and *Tiphareth* (Beauty). The first world, therefore, is the world of the spirit and soul; the second world, *Briah*, is that of the intellect. *Briah*, in turn, formed a third world known in Hebrew as *Yetzirah* (Formation), the matter of which is denser than that of *Briah*. This is the astral world and it includes the Sephiroth *Netzach* (Victory), *Hod* (Glory) and *Yesod* (Foundation). And finally, *Assiah*, the physical world, appeared, in which is the Sephirah *Malkuth* (Kingdom).

Cabbalists, therefore, divide the universe into four regions. Beginning with the lowest level, these are: *Assiah*, the physical world; *Yetzirah*, the astral world; *Briah*, the mental world, and *Atziluth*, the world of the spirit. Here, in the world of the spirit, dwell the Angels of the four Elements, the four Principles of matter, who are portrayed as having the face of an ox, a man, an eagle and a lion. St John, the Prophet Ezekiel and many others have contemplated these four Angels. These four

great Angels are represented in the mental world by four other Angels; in the denser, astral world, by four others and, finally, in the physical world by four more.

When we address our prayers to the Angels of air, water, fire or earth, we are speaking to the four Angels of the region of *Assiah* who govern the water, wind, fire and earth that we know and experience in this world. I hope that this is quite clear. You must not confuse the four Angels who govern the physical world and its four physical elements, with the four great Angels who are the Principles of Matter. The fire of our earthly experience is not true fire; true fire is in the world above. I have already explained to you that there are several different kinds of fire and that, for instance, the fire that burns in our fireplaces is not the same as the fire of the sun.

The Cabbalah also shows us how the four regions: *Assiah*, *Yetzirah*, *Briah* and *Atziluth* are reflected in man. The Cabbalists call the physical body '*Gouph*' and the astral body '*Nephesh*'. Then comes '*Ruah*', which means 'spirit' but which corresponds to the mental plane and, finally, *Neshamah*, which corresponds to the world of the soul and the spirit. These four divisions in man, *Gouph*, *Nephesh*, *Ruah* and *Neshamah*, correspond to the four divisions of the universe.



Sefirotic Tree of Life

I believe that this general outline, even if we don't go into details, will help you to have a clear idea of the question.

Our daily breathing exercises are also based on the figure four: four, sixteen, eight or eight, thirty-two, sixteen. To begin with we used the count of four, sixteen, eight, and then, after a few years, we counted eight, thirty-two, sixteen: so now, we breathe in while counting eight, hold our breath to the count of thirty-two and breathe out to the count of sixteen.

The purity of one's whole organism depends on one's breathing. The blood passes through all the organs of the body before going to the lungs to be purified. If you do these breathing exercises consciously every day, therefore, you will gradually purify your system. But while you are doing them, you can also use your powers of thought to attract materials, forces and particles from the higher worlds: light, peace and all the life-giving elements you need.

Depending on the state in which you find yourself, you must decide what you need, and then look for it. While you are holding your breath, for instance, you can choose four virtues that you need and concentrate on them, repeating the four names four times. Or you can concentrate on the four regions of the universe, or on your own four

bodies (physical, astral, mental and causal). The range of possibilities is immense and you are free to choose whatever suits you.

Then, while you are breathing out – and this is what I particularly want to talk about – you can call on the Angels of the four elements. Even if there is not much time while you are counting to sixteen, you can still use your imagination to form a picture in your mind. To the count of four, imagine that fire sweeps through your head, taking with it all that is dark and shadowy: the Angel of fire sanctifies you. During the second count of four, imagine that the Angel of air blows a strong spiritual wind through your lungs leaving them absolutely pure. Another count of four, and you imagine a cascade of crystal-clear water pouring through you and washing your stomach, spleen, liver, intestines and genitals. And, finally, during the last count of four, you call on the Angel of earth and imagine that all the wastes of your body sink down and are absorbed by the earth. The whole exercise can be done very rapidly once you get into the habit. Fire removes all impurities from the brain; air does the same thing for the lungs; water washes the stomach and belly, and earth cleanses the whole body: all that gets in the way of the smooth functioning of your physical body is buried deep in the bowels of the earth.

There: this is an extremely effective exercise.

Of course, you have not tried it yet, so you cannot appreciate its full worth, but it is with methods of this kind that true Initiates purify and sanctify themselves. And, even if human beings are incapable of feeling this purity, there are other creatures in the astral and mental worlds who are very sensitive to it. For someone who is truly pure projects sparks and very powerful, luminous particles all round him.

The exercise I have just given you is one of the very best. If you do it regularly it will open up great possibilities to you. Take the trouble to form clear pictures in your mind of the purest fire, the purest air, the purest water and of the earth that absorbs all your impurities. We live in the midst of magical elements: water, air, earth and fire, to which God has given tremendous powers, and it is up to us to learn to use those powers.

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