

# Experiencing the Universal Breath: a Guided Meditation

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Working on the assumption that the average healthy individual completes 15 breath cycles each minute, an individual that is fortunate enough to live until they are 100 years old will take approximately 786 million in-breaths and the same number of out-breaths. From the meditator's perspective, this equates to almost 1.6 billion opportunities to attain enlightenment. The breath, when correctly observed and attended to, can become a potent means of cultivating awakened perception. However, despite the numerous opportunities provided by the process of breathing to become more spiritually aware, it is unfortunately the case that there exist a significant number of people that live out their entire life without being aware of a single breath in or out.

The breath can be used in meditation to collect, calm and focus the mind. Using this meditative calm as a basis, the breath can then be used to cultivate insight into the true nature of reality. In our experience, it is important that the meditation unfolds in this sequence. If an individual attempts to investigate the true nature of reality with a mind that lacks clarity and focus, it is inevitable that the outcome of their investigation will be confused. Therefore, as a given meditation session progresses, there should be a gradual 'opening up' of awareness and a smooth transition from a form of meditative awareness that is more focused on establishing mental stability, to one that is more orientated towards meditative investigation.

When the breath is used during meditation in the manner outlined above, it is the case for most spiritual practitioners

that they are engaging in a practice. They—the meditator—are adopting the breath as the object of their meditation, and they are using it to attain a particular goal (i.e. meditative calm and insight). However, this approach to meditation, while essential for establishing strong meditative foundations, introduces a number of limitations. It is an approach based on concepts and that involves separating meditation into subject (i.e. the meditator), object (e.g. breath awareness) and goal. In truth, though, there does not exist a separation between the meditator, the practice of observing the breath, and the goal of spiritual insight. The reason for this is simple—the breath *is* insight; it is the very embodiment of self-existing wisdom.

Our in-breath comprises part of other peoples' out-breath, and our out-breath makes part of others' in-breath. When we breathe out, the trees and forests breathe in, and vice versa. Our out-breath, carried by the wind, gradually fans out across the planet and permeates all that exists. If a meditator is attentive, they should be able to see their breath on the other side of the planet, in the rain and oceans, and in the food that they eat. In fact, a person following the path of the *Buddhadharma* can draw inspiration from the fact that part of their in-breath contains some breath particles that were once exhaled by the historical Buddha. The same applies to individuals walking the path of the Christian dharma; with each inhalation, they are nourished by the breath of Christ.

If a meditator is practising awareness of breathing correctly, they should eventually come to realize that in essence, there exists just one breath. It is the breath of the universe that flows through all phenomena. Everything that an individual requires in order to attain unconditional happiness and the wisdom of the enlightened ones is present in every single breath. Living beings breathe enlightenment. They are nourished by enlightenment. Enlightenment reaches into each cell of their body and, although most beings fail to recognize it, enlightenment accompanies them wherever they go.

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The meditation that follows is intended to help guide meditation practitioners towards gradually encountering the breath of the universe. However, individuals who choose to practise this meditation should understand that if they meditate with the objective of attaining something or encountering a spiritual phenomenon, the universal breath will never reveal itself. Given that we are already in contact with, and of the nature of, the universal breath, it constitutes an obstacle to spiritual progression if we try to attain that which we already possess. If a wave seeks outside of itself in order to find the ocean, it will remain in ignorance due to perceiving in dualistic terms. However, by simply relaxing into its true nature, the wave can realize that it already has unrestricted access to the ocean.

We recommend that this meditation is practised frequently and with the support of an authentic spiritual guide. Ideally, the meditation should be practised in its entirety so that, as discussed above, there is a natural transition from meditative awareness intended to induce mental calm and focus, to a form of awareness that uses this mental clarity to engage in meditative investigation. The final part of the meditation should then unfold by not seeking to investigate anything and by relinquishing all concepts so that an acquaintance with the universal breath can naturally emerge.

Breathing in, I am fully aware that I breath in.  
Breathing out, I am fully aware that I breath out.  
Breathing in, I allow myself time to practice awareness of breathing.  
Breathing out, there is nowhere else I need to be.

Breathing in, I know if my breath is long or short.  
Breathing out, I know if my breath is deep or shallow.  
Breathing in, I avoid forcing my breathing.  
Breathing out, I allow my breath to follow its natural course.

Breathing in, I observe that my awareness wanders from breath.  
Breathing out, I gently return my awareness to breath.  
Breathing in, I remind myself that no two breaths are the same.  
Breathing out, I remind myself that because I breathe, I am alive.

Breathing in, I observe that my in-breath has a beginning, middle and end.  
Breathing out, I experience that my out-breath has a taste, sound and texture.  
Breathing in, I observe each moment of breath.  
Breathing out, I experience the fabric of breath.

Breathing in, I observe the point where in-breath gives way to out-breath.

Breathing out, I observe the point where out-breath gives way to in-breath.

Breathing in, I relax into the space between the in-breath and out-breath.

Breathing out, I allow this space to steadily expand.

Breathing in, I observe as my breath becomes centred and calm.

Breathing out, I relax into the practice of awareness of breath.

Breathing in, I observe as my breath becomes light and free.

Breathing out, I relax into the practice of simply being.

Breathing in, I slightly loosen my focus on breath.

Breathing out, I see that the present moment is unfolding within and around me.

Breathing in, I follow the breath into my body.

Breathing out, I rest my awareness on the breath in the body.

Breathing in, I become aware of my lungs as they rise and fall.

Breathing out, I become aware of my diaphragm as it contracts and relaxes.

Breathing in, I become aware of my liver and kidneys.

Breathing out, I become aware of my muscles and bones.

Breathing in, I become aware of my heart and the rhythm it is beating.

Breathing out, I know if my heartbeat is fast or slow.

Breathing in, I become aware of the blood that courses through my veins.

Breathing out, I become aware of the pulse of body.

Breathing in, I become aware of the weight of body.

Breathing out, I become aware of the touch of cloth against the skin.

Breathing in, I become aware of contact with the earth beneath me.

Breathing out, I become aware of contact with the air around me.

Breathing in, I know if my body is hot or cold.

Breathing out, I know if my body is tense or relaxed.

Breathing in, I listen deeply to my body.

Breathing out, I listen deeply to the present moment.

Breathing in, with my breath I touch each part of body.

Breathing out, I allow each part of body to calm and unwind.

Breathing in, I relax my face, head and shoulders.

Breathing out, I relax my chest, back and abdomen.

Breathing in, I relax my hands, feet, arms and legs.  
 Breathing out, I allow body to become light and free.  
 Breathing in, I allow breath to penetrate each cell of body.  
 Breathing out, I allow body to be cradled in awareness.

Breathing in, I observe that thoughts and feelings can interfere with my awareness.  
 Breathing out, I simply observe thoughts and feelings and allow them to come and go.  
 Breathing in, I know if my mind is calm or agitated.  
 Breathing out, I know if my mind is present or distracted.

Breathing in, I see that thoughts and feelings are born, they live and they die.  
 Breathing out, I see that like the breath, no two thoughts or feelings are the same.  
 Breathing in, I encompass thoughts and feelings into my field of awareness.  
 Breathing out, I no longer see thoughts and feelings as an interference.

Breathing in, with my breath I touch my thoughts and feelings.  
 Breathing out, I cradle thoughts and feelings in awareness.  
 Breathing in, I experience a mind that is patient and accepting.  
 Breathing out, I observe as the mind becomes light and free.

Breathing in, I recollect that the present moment is unfolding within and around me.  
 Breathing out, I follow my breath out of the body.  
 Breathing in, I see my breath in the wind and rain.  
 Breathing out, I see my breath in the rivers and oceans.

Breathing in, I see my breath in the plants and trees.  
 Breathing out, I see my breath in animals and insects.  
 Breathing in, I see my breath in buildings and manmade constructions.  
 Breathing out, I see my breath in music and art.

Breathing in, I see others' out-breath in my in-breath.  
 Breathing out, I see my out-breath in others' in-breath.  
 Breathing in, I see that with my breath, I am connected to all lifeforms.  
 Breathing out, I infuse my out-breath with compassionate intention.

Breathing in, I see that there is self in other.  
 Breathing out, I see that there is other in self.

Breathing in, I see that self and other are the same thing.  
 Breathing out, I let go of the idea of me, mine and I.

Breathing in, I search for something called a self.  
 Breathing out, I find oceans, clouds, animals, plants and trees.  
 Breathing in, I find planets, universes, time and space.  
 Breathing out, I experience that a separate self does not exist.

Breathing in, I breathe in for me and for all that exists.  
 Breathing out, I experience that my breath encompasses everything.  
 Breathing in, I observe that my breath has always been.  
 Breathing out, I observe my breath as it continues throughout time and space.

Breathing in, I search for something called a present moment.  
 Breathing out, I see that all things change all of the time.  
 Breathing in, I see that the present moment never stands still.  
 Breathing out, I experience that the present moment cannot be found.

Breathing in, since there is no present, I see that past and future are manmade concepts.  
 Breathing out, I transcend notions such as time and space.  
 Breathing in, I let go of concepts.  
 Breathing out, I touch eternity.

Breathing in, I am one with the breath that is within and around me.  
 Breathing out, I experience that there is a universal breath.  
 Breathing in, I relax into the universal breath.  
 Breathing out, I touch the enlightened mind.

Breathing in, I experience that when I breath in, the universe breathes in.  
 Breathing out, I experience that when I breath out, the universe breathes out.  
 Breathing in, I am here and now, alive and aware.  
 Breathing out, I enjoy the practice of simply being.

#### Compliance with Ethical Standards

**Conflict of Interests** The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.