

BREATH

The extraordinary times in which we now live are dominated by respiratory concerns - i.e. concerns about breath.

Some reflections on breath:

Breath = Life, physical and spiritual (the word SPIRIT is derived from the Latin *spirare* - to breathe).

In Genesis 2:7 we are told

“then the LORD GOD formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”, i.e. physical life is a gift from God the Father;

and in John 20:21-22 we read

“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you’. When He had said this, he breathed on them and said to them ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’.” i.e. spiritual inspiration as a gift from God the Son.

Several thousand times every day we are poised on the threshold between breathing in (our first action at birth) and breathing out (our last action at death). Observe your breath. Be aware of this threshold from life to death.

When we are uncertain on the threshold, we hold our breath - we suspend life for an instant until apparent certainty returns.

We can use our breath as a basis for contemplative prayer, as Rebecca Ruiz suggests, following the Jesuit Anthony de Mello:

Go to a quiet place in your house or outside in nature. Sit upright, and plant your feet firmly on the ground. Feel the ground beneath your feet. Imagine that your feet are rooted in the earth. You are stable and grounded.

While still remaining in an upright posture, relax your body, slowly, from head to toe. Now, very slowly, breathe in deeply through your nose, and then breathe slowly out through your mouth.

Now begin de Mello’s contemplation:

As you breathe in, be conscious of God’s Spirit coming into you...Fill your lungs with the divine energy he brings with him...

As you breathe out, imagine you are breathing out all your impurities...your fears...your negative feelings...

Imagine you see your whole body becoming radiant and alive through this process of breathing in God’s life-giving Spirit and breathing out all your impurities... (Sadhana: A Way to God)

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