

Daily Meditation 3-16-26

Our Sacred Air: An Original Blessing We Dare Not Take For Granted

Good morning.

In today's meditation, we're reflecting on the important reality of Air: air and atmosphere. And how surely we don't want to take these original blessings for granted. And how air is very, very complicated, especially air that is fine-tuned to our needs as human beings, and to those of the many animals and plants we share the Earth with.

So precious and valuable is air, and so holy. The spiritual traditions around the world have underscored this. The very name for Spirit is breath in biblical languages, and in many languages around the world. To have breath is to have life. The breath we breathe is the Divine breath.

And so many meditation practices teach people to not take air for granted, but to be still and breathe in and breathe out. So let's do that for just a couple minutes.

Practice breathing in, breathing out, breathing in deeply, breathing out inspiration.

That word inspiration has the word spirit in it, doesn't it: taking spirit in, and expelling it.

Many people believe that the word Yahweh as taught in the Jewish tradition, the divine name is, in fact, a breathing practice:

Yah

Weh....

Yah

Weh....

Yah

Weh....

Thich Nhat Hanh taught us a method, a template that can be adapted very readily for breathing in and breathing out. For example, breathe in joy,

breathe out sadness.

Breathe in joy,

breathe out sadness.

Breathe in beauty,

breathe out anger.

Breathe in beauty,

breathe out injustice, which is ugly.

And we can make many practices employing just one word, breathing in, breathing out. And of course, you can breathe in and breathe out the same word, the same concept:

Breathe in joy,

breathe out joy.

Breathe in life,

breathe out life,

All these practices can underscore, and not taking for granted, the gift of spirit, the gift of breath, the gift of life, the gift of air.

Now let me turn to a few more insights from Sam Kean's book, *Caesar's Last Breath: Decoding the Secrets of the Air Around Us*. He points out that at just seven miles away from Earth, seven miles up — maybe we should say out from Earth — as he says, it's no farther than a Sunday jog. A Sunday jog you can run for seven miles. *At this level up, the oxygen levels have dropped to roughly one-quarter of their value at sea level. It becomes so low with the oxygen, that life all but ceases.*

Notice, at just seven miles away, a distance you can walk or run, and of course, you can drive in five or six minutes — life is not possible.

And so he concludes, quote, *we live inside a precariously thin shell of air, a precariously thin shell of air, far less thick proportionately than the skin of an apple. The skin is to the apple is thicker than what the air is, the atmosphere is, to the earth.*

What more evidence do we need about the preciousness of air, the holiness of air. And it is, obviously, a sine qua non for life, for our lives certainly, but for all the lives of the beings we love and admire and eat and share and dance with, on this planet.

He points out that *the air that humans were breathing in the year 1600, is not the air we're breathing today. The industrial development has changed the chemical composition of air. And our intellectual understanding of air has changed even more dramatically since 1600.* And it's in that context that he says, *Only recently have scientists started to appreciate just how complex our atmosphere is, rivaling the human brain in both its intricacy and its fragility.*

Rivaling our brain for its intricacy and fragility. And is that not a fire to light under the environmental revolution? Under our awareness of the survival of the planet? And the love that we carry toward our grandchildren and to our children not yet born? That they, of all species, human and the other species, inherit healthy air.

There are politicians in very high places who say environmental concern is a hoax. A hoax. And these pictures of horror that we saw from Tehran, 10 million people and all the plants and animals breathing in this poisonous acid rain coming from the bombing of oil depots. Isn't that enough to remind us that war is obsolete? It should be for anyone who loves life, cares about breathing, and says they love their children and grandchildren.

I love how he describes the evolution of oxygen, back and forth in the hundreds of millions of years. "It has veered drunkenly," he says. He's a wonderful writer. "Oxygen has veered drunkenly between 15% and 35% levels."

So here we are in this perfect situation. The oxygen is just right. And you know, it was the flowers that fine-tuned it for us. Yes, flowers. Flowers are not only beautiful to look at and to smell, and to have around us — they also do some very important work. They fine-tune the oxygen for us. And here we are, at just the right level for our survival, for our thriving, for our gifting back, returning blessing for blessing. That is our "thank you."

Thank you. We'll see you next week.