

the tide recedes drawing back toward the center. The in-breath is a movement toward the peripheral consciousness; the out-breath moves in to the core of consciousness.

We have seen that as leaves move in the wind, your mind moves with your breath. When breath is regulated and pacified, there is a neutralizing effect on the mind. And when you hold your breath, you hold your soul. By retaining the full in-breath, you hold the divine infinite within yourself. At this moment you have reached the full potential of your individuality, but it is a divine individuality and not the small, selfish creature you normally take yourself for. By exhaling you generously give out your individual self to the universal world. To expire means both to breathe out and to die. What dies is the known I-sense, which clings passionately to its own identity and existence. In retention after exhalation, you experience life after death. The ego's worst fear is confronted and conquered. The veil of illusion that shrouds the "*me*" is lifted.

Inhalation engulfs the whole body with life. Exhalation surrenders that life to the source of life—the Life Giver. The body moves in toward the core of being, like a puppy nestling against its mother, secure and trusting. If retention causes tension or pain in the head, you are holding from the brain, not the lungs. This is egotistical holding. The key to retention is naturalness. Nature is energy. It supplies all our wants. The ego is finite. Nature's energy is infinite. By denying nature, we deny our own energy. Let this ocean of energy bear up the lungs and let it purify the body and refine the consciousness.

It is because of the possibilities that exist in the relationship between prana and citta (consciousness) that the great yogi Svātāmara in the Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā concludes that breath is the key to ultimate emancipation. In addition, breath builds up the tremendous power needed in the practitioner to face the infinite light when grace dawns. By withdrawing the mind from our senses of perception and organs of action, retention of breath brings consciousness to rest on the