

Freedom Breath (freeing the mind, body, and spirit)

This form of breathing will gradually open the doors in the belly and chest to a deeper, slower, freer mode of breathing. This brings physical benefits – relaxation and healing. It can calm the busy mind. It also brings spiritual benefits – one feels freer at heart, connected to an unlimited universe (that some would call God).

Warm-ups

1. You may want to start with a **brief exercise** to open up your breathing spaces. Take a deep in-breath expanding both the belly and chest – now hold that breath, and pinch close your nose, then contract and expand your belly 10-15 times. This will loosen up your diaphragm muscle, just like you would stretch your muscles before exercising.

2. **Practice breathing from your belly** a bit. Relax your stomach. As you breathe in and out, feel your belly expand and contract. You might imagine your belly as a balloon that is expanding in all directions—right, left, front, back—as you breath in.

3. Now add a second part to your breathing. On the in-breath, **after your belly has expanded, gradually allow your chest to also expand**, not only forward but backward and to the sides – this lengthens and deepens the breath. On the out-breath go in the reverse sequence, travelling downward. Release the air from your chest, and then from your belly, until you have fully exhaled. Then rest in the quiet between two breaths.

Note: To really open up the breathing spaces, it can be helpful to meditate lying flat, as on your cot. Just be careful to stay alert, and don't fall asleep! If sitting up, try to keep your posture straight, your neck and head lifting up into the sky, and your legs firmly planted in the earth. You can also sit on a floor with crossed legs (or lotus, or half-lotus if you know such positions).

Now we're ready to begin Freedom Breathing

1. On the **in-breath**, say slowly in your mind: **“Breathing in, I open all the doors to freedom.”** (Saying this can help quiet and replace all your mental chatter.) Pay attention to the air filling first your belly space, and then your chest space. Imagine doors are opening first in the belly, and then in the chest area, to allow for your breath to freely expand.

A) If you wish, you can visualize these as cell doors opening on different tiers (within the space of your body), allowing you and your breath to be free. The bottom tier is the belly, the top tier the chest.

B) In addition, there is a higher, third “tier”—the top of the lungs which reach all the way up to your shoulders. Toward the end of the in-breath, you can also open up the “cell doors” at the top of your left and right lungs, so the breath is fully freed.

2. Allow an **extended pause** (say 2-6 seconds), before the outbreath. Enjoy the sense of rest and freedom. If you wish you can visualize yourself in a beautiful place. When your body tells you it's time, now breathe out.

3. On the out-breath, say slowly in your mind, **“Breathing out, I expand into infinite space.”** The air you're letting out is expanding beyond your body to become part of the greater universe. Let your spirit expand with it, beyond all boundaries. If you prefer, you could also try, **“Breathing out, I dissolve into infinite space,”** or **“Breathing out, I enter the heart of God.”**

4. Again, allow an **extended pause** (say 2-6 seconds), before the next in-breath. During this rest, allow yourself to enjoy the sense of unlimited spaciousness. If you wish, you can visualize yourself connected with all your loved ones, or in a beautiful place where you feel free.

5. Ideally, practice Freedom Breath for **45 minutes** each day. However, if this is not possible, use it for a shorter time (**15-20 minutes**), and even for brief periods (a few breaths, with or without the words) during the day to keep calm and open. First thing in the morning, and before going to bed can be especially good times to practice.

Notes

1. This technique can lead to an extended breath, where a single breath could take as long as 45 seconds. But use a style of breathing that is comfortable for you. If you begin to feel light-headed, dizzy, or anxious, you may be over-breathing. Lighten up. Shorten the breath a little. Listen to your body.

2. If you find your mind keeps wandering, you might want to count your breaths as a way of helping you keep focus. You can say 1 at the end of the first in-breath, 2 on the end of the second in-breath, and keep counting on up to 10 breaths – then start over again at 1. If you forget for a while, pick up again at 1 – it's normal for one's mind to wander. Never get discouraged – the mind is notoriously hard to control, so it's natural to feel scattered and distracted. Just don't give up the practice, and in time it will bring benefits.

3. Many benefits do come from practicing Freedom Breath. It can help **quiet the anxious, or depressive chatter that often goes on in our brain**. It can help **calm the body**, sending **healing energy to places that need it**. It can also bring a sense of **joy, lightness and freedom** to the spirit. Even when remaining physically incarcerated, we can experience a sense of **expansion and liberation**. In a sense, our body, mind, and spirit are no longer in prison. We breathe beyond such boundaries.

4. In most spiritual traditions, we are taught to seek liberation not only for ourselves but for others in need. This can be done even through meditation. If it feels right, instead of saying during the breath, “I open all doors...” and “I expand...”, substitute “We open all doors...” and “We expand...” Then you make your meditation also a prayer which sends positive energy to all those entrapped. This can include a particular person, like your cellmate, or all those in your prison, or even all those around the world “imprisoned” by various forms of limitation and suffering. (This is the human condition.) May we all gain freedom together!