

**MEDITATIONAL EXAMINATION OF THE CONCEPTS OF SUFI BREATH  
PRACTICE HABS-I DAM AND HINDU BREATH PRACTICE  
KEVALAKUMBAKA**

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**Abstract**

*Breathing practices are seen in almost all mystical religions always have similar features. Seeing breathing meditations in all belief systems with mystical, metaphysical, and spiritualistic features and performing these meditations according to certain methods and rules is to ensure the body-brain balance and keep the desires under control. Breath is vital for the human body. At the same time, it has an important place in the spiritual lives of people. Specifically, breathing practices in Asian religions have found a place among the rituals of some Muslim groups. Breath and breathing practices have been talked about frequently in every period for the continuation of a healthy life and keeping the spiritual life alive. Hinduism and Sufism are two religions with very different and unique doctrines as their source and starting point. However, religious practices may show some similarities at some points over time. In order to achieve their religious goals in both belief systems, they adopted the same methods with their own religious arguments and applied them in similar ways. As a result, the Indian Sufi movement and Hindus, who managed to live together for a long time, were conceptually influenced by each other as a result of these long-neighborly relations, and some method transfers took place. The Sufis' Habs-i Dam and the Hindus' KavelaKumbakabreathing techniques have been accepted as a means of deepening in worship and concentrating on the knowledge of God. In addition, breathing techniques are at the forefront of both belief systems in order to regulate brain-heart-body relations.*

**Keywords**

*Breath, Hindu, Sufi, Similarities, Habs-i Dam, KavelaKumbaka, Breath Meditation, Breath Control*

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## Introduction

Breath is the most important factor that ensures the continuity of life. All living things on earth need breathing or respiration in order to renew themselves or survive. According to the dictionary meaning of breath: “the air inhaled and exhaled in respiration”<sup>1</sup>. Breathing increases the vitality of the human body and ensures that other organs work in a healthy and efficient way. Breath has many cognitive benefits for the human body as well. The breath factor is very effective in the realization of actions such as thinking, calming down, dreaming, staying fit, happiness, focusing, deepening ideas, and making decisions.”Meditation is the act of remaining in a silent, focused, and calm state for a period of time, as part of a religious training, or so that you are more able to deal with the problems of everyday life”<sup>2</sup>. Meditation is not only a ritual, but rather important in terms of preserving one’s spiritual integrity. Meditation is also used for functions such as *concentrating* on a subject, *deepening*, *focusing*, *reducing stress*, *anxiety*, *depression*, and *pain*, or making a healthy decision in problem-solving.

Breath meditation appears as a focus, deepening, or concentration practice seen in almost every belief system. Breathing meditations such as *Muraqaba*(contemplation of God), *Dhikr* (remembrance God), *Rabita*(connection with), *Fikr*(thinking God deeply), or *Sama* (dance of love)are found under the name of breathing exercises in Sufism. The purpose of Sufi breath meditation is defined as feeling the presence of God without limits. We can say that Hinduism is a belief that breathing exercises are much more than in other religions. It is even thought that many of the breathing meditations are transferred from Hinduism to other religions. *Yoga* breathing practices and *Pranayamas*(breath exercises) are the most well-known breathing meditations in the world. The purpose of the breathing exercises seen in religions is to keep the body alive and living, to close ourselves or the individual to the outside world in the face of the subject to be focused on, only to stay at the point we aim at. And not to deal with anything else from that point forward. Breathing in a regular, measured and disciplined way allows the body and mind to find their rhythm. It is extremely important to control the body-heart-brain cycle and maintain its balance in order to focus and deepen the idea. Therefore, breathing not only brings rhythm to the individual but also provides spiritual vitality, calmness, and self-awareness to the individual. Breath meditation allows the doors of many different worlds to open, as well as allowing the individual to discover himself.

Sufism is not a belief system separate or independent from Islam. Sufism is also called the philosophical side of the mystical side of Islam. Getting this definition is undoubtedly the meditation he uses to get closer to God. We can say that meditation

is equivalent to concentration. The Sufis added their own terminology to these meditative exercises and used them in their religious rituals. At the beginning of these meditations are Sufi breathing practices. We can say that the phrase “*We came from Hay, we will go to Hu*” which is a frequently encountered concept in Sufi terminology, has been a beginning in Sufi breathing practices. According to the Sufis, when a person takes the first step into the world from his mother’s womb, he breathes by saying “hay,” and in this way, he gets acquainted with worldly life. While the person is saying goodbye to life, in his last breath, he exhales by saying “Hu”(O) and leaves the world. “Hay” is one of the ninety-nine names of Allah in Islam. Hay means eternal and life-giving. “Hu” is Allah himself<sup>3</sup>. What is meant here is “*We came from God and we will return to God*”. These philosophical and mystical concepts of life and he were later reshaped as Sufi breathing and are known today as Sufi breathing or Sufi breathing exercise. Sufi breathing is done with the mouth. Hay is said while inhaling and it is done by saying this while exhaling.

Among Islamic Sufi meditations, breathing exercises are found in the content of mystical concepts such as Sama, Dhikr, Fikr, and Muraqaba. One of these breathing exercises is *Habs-i Dam*.” The term “habs-i-dam”(habs-inafas) refers to the act of confining one’s breath or imprisoning the breath<sup>4</sup>. Although the technique appears to be a sort of breath-holding in which one exhales and then retains air, the genuine approach is directed at trigger point stimulation—specifically the diaphragm. The diaphragm is drawn in as air is expelled, and the diaphragm is then held in this posture.

“One of the widespread practices associated with Sufi recollection, ritual, and prayer, designed to assist the individual toward greater concentration, often referred to with the Persian expression habs-i dam or award-burd.”<sup>5</sup>

Sufism is associated with sense-control and breathing awareness, according to Shibli, one of the first Sufis. The difference between ego (or material soul, as) breath, which comes from the lower body and exits via the mouth, and spirit (ruh.) breath, which originates in the brain and exits through the nose, is crucial. Breath control was inherently vital in activities that entailed speaking or singing, and has been linked to altered consciousness as a result of hyperventilation in some situations. Exhaling heavily while reciting a certain repeating dhikr formula (such as the phrase Allah), for example, has an effect on one’s equilibrium and awareness. “Some forms of recollection involve a quieter and simpler observation of breathing in and out in which the practitioner simply focuses on parts of one phrase (such as “there is no god” while exhaling, and “except God” while inhaling)”<sup>6</sup>.

The breathing exercises in Sufi meditations are a way to catch the heart’s rhythm. According to the Sufis, if a person pronounces the names of Allah sincerely

and according to his breathing methods and catches the rhythm of the heart, the heart becomes enthused with the love of Allah and the *Salik* (Sufi person) begins to transcend the Sufi levels, which is a metaphysical step. In Sufi philosophy, attention is drawn to the connection between the heart and the mind, and the increase in the rhythm of the heart is defined as the mind's approaching or reaching God. *Habs-e Dam* Sufi meditation is a breathing exercise aimed at holding your breath for a long time. Habs-e Dam breathing meditation must be done with a murshid. Murshid means "master" or "teacher" in Sufism. It is known that the inventor of this application is *Hazrat Badiuddin Zinda* Shah. It is known that these breathing exercises are meditation that *Naqshbandi* Sufis often resort to.

"Step 1: Sit (can sit by kneeling completely or on a chair without touching your back to chair) facing towards Qiblah direction. Make sure to sit in a comfortable environment without any disturbances.

Step 2: Close your eyes.

Step 3: Slowly inhale the outside air from both of your nostrils.

Step 4: Now hold your breath till your breaking point and try to focus on your heart's sound after a few seconds.

Step 5: on the "Lub" or first heart sound recite Al and on "Dub" or second heart sound recite lah. So in all, it should be "Allah".

Step 6: Once you reach your breaking point, then slowly exhale. One can start with 3 times a day but can extend up to 5 times. Sufi students must consult the local pir/shaykh (experts) before doing it".<sup>7</sup>

The Sufis' understanding of worship is about cleansing the Spirit, reducing desires, renouncing everything in the world, purification, and focus. Spiritual cleansing in Sufi meditations is a necessary step in approaching God. Because at the end of Sufi meditation, there are spiritual dimensions and spiritual steps such as reaching Allah and feeling the love of Allah, such as *Fana*, *Baqa*, *Fanafillah*, and *Bakabillah*. The breathing exercises of Sufis are very important for changing the spiritual dimension.

Hinduism, which is one of the oldest belief systems in the world, is frequently mentioned in the world for the principal methods it applies. Hinduism, which is known to be of mystical, ascetic, and spiritualistic origin, gives great importance to soul cleansing. Focusing, purification, concentration, and mind control are methods frequently encountered in Hindu meditations. The application of these methods is undoubtedly the fact that Hindus try to control the body and brain with breathing exercises. Breathing exercises in Hinduism are especially evident in Yoga meditation. Before embarking on a spiritual journey, yogis establish

and intensify the body-heart-brain balance with breathing exercises. The most well-known of these breathing exercises in the world are *KevalaKumbhaka*.” Mastery of the breath in hamha texts is marked by the ability to spontaneously suspend the breath for as long as desired. This is called *KevalaKumbhaka*”.<sup>8</sup> It is possible to say that the mystical elements in Hinduism serve as a means to achieve religious goals. In almost all mystical beliefs, we can talk about the philosophy of reaching God with a philosophical theme.” *KevalaKumbhaka* is considered the final stage of spiritual union or samadhi (state of meditative consciousness)”.<sup>9</sup> Concepts such as spiritual serenity, calmness, self-discovery, self-discovery, peace, reducing worldly desires, and protecting the body-heart-brain balance in Hinduism are the main lines of Hindu philosophy. The breathing exercises performed by the Hindus are very effective in the realization of these concepts. Breath ensures the continuity of the human body, as well as the vitality of the soul. However, breathing only contributes to the spiritual and material structure of a person when it is technically trained or developed. “*Kevalakumbhaka*, meaning “only isolated breath retention” in English, is a yogic breathing practice in which the breath is retained or held and is often practiced in pranayama along with the bandhas and meditation.”<sup>10</sup> Breath retention of this type focuses on keeping the breath on a slight breath rather than on or immediately after an unambiguous inhale or exhale. *Kevalakumbhaka* is a Hatha yoga technique that yogis believe improves prana (vital life force) holding inside the body, enhancing vitality and good energy within.” *The perfect man breathes as though he is not breathing*”.<sup>11</sup> The length of breath retention is a criterion for the body’s health and energy level. It also symbolizes the purity of both the body and the intellect. The state of *KevalaKumbhaka* occurs when the bodily breath stops. “It occurs during asanas, meditation, samadhi, or as a result of pranayama exercises”.<sup>12</sup> The highest level of *Kumbhaka*, “equivalent to the phase of Samadhi,” is *KevalaKumbhaka*, in which respiration and exhalation can be halted at will.

Our system has a more sophisticated respiratory mechanism based on prana. If the body and mind are pure enough, which may be achieved via yoga, including Pranayamas (suspension of breath) with lengthy breath retention like *nadishodhana* (Alternate Nostril Breathing) energy, prana can be assimilated straight from the environment without physical breath. This energy-breathing system is dormant, but it may be reawakened by yoga practice. The kundalini steadily wakes and *KevalaKumbhaka* is accomplished when one can hold their breath for more than 5 minutes. Breathing comes to a halt without any effort. The purpose of pranayama is to achieve this.

“Step-1- If anyone wants to perform kevalaKumbhaka that requires the application of both the Jalandhara and the Mula Bandhas, in addition, the rib cage gently “hugs” your lungs at first.

Step-2-Sama Vritti Ujjayi (example, the vritti count is 6 OMs). To begin, you have to apply the two bandhas when you near the end of your inhale and retain the breath for 2 OMs (no more than that). then you slowly press your ribs against the expanded lungs. Then you exhale, concurrently releasing Mula Bandha, and when you finished, you can raise your head to neutral positions.

Step-3- Generally, your first kevalaKumbhaka should be 1/3 to 1/2 the length of your Sama Vritti count. you should Practice at this level until you’re completely comfortable with it, which may take several weeks or longer even months.

Step-4- Then you shorter the number of Ujjayis slowly between each Kumbhaka until you can retain your normal breathing from comfortably for 2 OMs. on sequential inhales for about 5 to 6 minutes. Then you have to increase your Kumbhaka to 3 OMs, but again you have to separate them by 2 to 3 Ujjayi’s. Then again gradually bring down the Ujjayi count you can comfortably retain for 3 OMs on sequential inhales for about 5 minutes.

Step-5 At last, you have to proceed methodically until your kevalaKumbhaka count matches your Sama Vritti count or breathing. Now STOP the pranayama”<sup>13</sup>

Hinduism and Sufism can be perceived as two different belief systems that cannot go side by side. However, it is usual for all belief systems of mystical origin to have similarities in terms of exercise, principle, or practice. The breath factor is very important in Islamic Sufi meditations, that is, in spiritualistic Sufi practices such as *Muraqaba* (contemplation of God), *Dhikr* (remembrance God), *Rabita* (connection with), *Fikr* (thinking God deeply), or *Sama* (dance of love). The same breathing factor appears in Hinduism as an exercise that can be seen in every phase of Yoga. Breath is almost a control mechanism for Sufis and Yogis. Breathing exercises are directly proportional to reducing the body’s desires, finding the rhythm of the heart, and the brain going into a trance. Breathing practices in Sufi and Hindu doctrines are seen to be very effective in the emergence of concepts such as calmness, vitality, focus, purification, concentration, and deepening. In *Fanaqilah* (reaching God) and *Baqabillah*, (Spiritual Way of God) which are the last spiritual stages of the understanding of reaching God or gaining the love of God, which is seen in the doctrines of Sufis, especially in Dhikr, are the biggest goals that Sufis want to achieve. In Hinduism, the concept of *Samadhi*, which is the biggest breathing exercise and expresses spiritual calmness, is accepted as a goal.”Habs-i dam (nafas) or breath-control is a method of the regulation of breath similar to the hathyogic practice of

pranayama meant to awaken the higher states. It is done by invoking la ilaha silently while breathing in and then keeping the breath confined for a while. After it, the breath is thrown out saying *Ella's Llah*".<sup>14</sup>

The concept of purification appears to be a concept that has been heavily used by both Sufis and Hindus. In Sufi meditations, *dhikr* (repetition of God) is frequently chanted to try to cleanse the heart and soul. According to Sufi principles, it is not possible to reach God's presence without getting rid of evil, negative characteristics, and sins. In Hinduism, there is a significant respect for nature, living things, and matter. Especially in yoga meditation, the idea of getting away from the world is seen frequently. One of the goals of Hindu breathing meditation is to get rid of bad habits and desires. Breathing clean air, wearing clean clothes, and eating healthy meals are other features of purification. "This recognition is *Habs-e Dam* for Sufis and *Kumbhaka* for Hindus. Also, they called it *Pranayama (Kevala)*".<sup>15</sup>

In both belief systems, he considers it necessary to do the breathing meditations with the Master. "Under the Sufi system, it can only be used under the strict supervision of a 'Guide' – a mentor - and even then, only for a limited time period".<sup>16</sup> According to the Sufis, the concept of "the *master of the one who has no master is the devil*" is seen in all Sufi metaphysics. In Sufism, this task is performed by Sufi saints called "Shayk" or "Pir". Some days of the year are observed as days of mass worship in Hinduism. However, since the breathing meditations are perceived as a metaphysical and extraordinary journey and they are processes directly related to the conscious states of people, it is not allowed to act alone in the breathing meditations. These breathing practices are accompanied by a "Guru" "Yogi" or "Rishi" in Hinduism.

"By combining this method with the stimulation of other key trigger points [which will not be divulged], fakirs and magicians could go into a trance state that simulated death, almost their entire metabolism could be slowed to a faint glimmer of life. As a consequence, they often went out of the body for extended periods. The following allegory [a cage is symbolically our physical 'prison' the bars that separate us from the spiritual world] describes the technique – you 'hold your breath until you appear to die'.<sup>17</sup>

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