

*The ennobling power of
thoracic expansion*



*Abstract and train of thoughts*¹

Madame Blavatsky on the benefits of mountain air to health and well-being

The mountain air, being placed nearer to the Fountain of Life, fortifies health and prolongs life.	3
Retreat in solitude and unbroken stillness, where air free of all pestilential exhalations and deep study are prerequisites for higher knowledge.	3
Acrimony, antagonism, antipathy, enmity, and resentment are vexatious to the spirit.	4
Holy life flourishes in snow-capped peaks.	4
How to revitalise yourself under the sun.	5

Professor Buchanan on the ennobling influence of thoracic expansion

Singing promotes health and the development of the chest. And the expansion of the chest allows the noblest parts of our nature to unfold.	6
By forcing chest expansion and lung exhalation, high altitudes foster spiritual temperament.	7
Method for thoracic expansion	7
Full breathing is a therapeutic agent, restorative and curative.	7
By compelling chest expansion, the exercise of the thighs is far more efficient than any exercise of the arms.	8
Keep smiling, for smile is the expression of the superior regions of the brain.	8



¹ Title page illustration by Nicholas Roerich. Illustration on page 5: Volcán Cayambe (1858) by Frederic Edwin Church; elevation 5,790m above sea level.

Madame Blavatsky on the benefits of mountain air to health and well-being

They who are on the summit of a mountain can see all men; in like manner, they who are intelligent and free from sorrow are enabled to ascend above the paradise of the Gods; and when they there have seen the subjection of man to birth and death and the sorrows by which he is afflicted, they open the doors of the immortal.

— From the *Tched-du brjod-pai-tsoms* of the Bkah-Hgyur.¹

The mountain air, being placed nearer to the Fountain of Life, fortifies health and prolongs life.

Thousands of years ago the Phrygian Dactyls, the initiated priests, spoken of as the “magicians and the exorcists of sickness,” healed diseases by magnetic processes. It was claimed that they had obtained these curative powers from the powerful breath of Cybelē, the many-breasted goddess, the daughter of Cœlus and Terra. Indeed, her genealogy and the myths attached to it show Cybelē as the personification and type of the vital essence, whose source was located by the ancients between the Earth and the starry sky, and who was regarded as the very *fons vitæ* of all that lives and breathes. The mountain air being placed nearer to that fount fortifies health and prolongs man’s existence; hence, Cybelē’s life, as an infant, is shown in her myth as having been preserved on a mountain. This was before that *Magna* and *Bona Dea*, the prolific *Mater*, became transformed into Ceres-Dēmētēr, the patroness of the Eleusinian Mysteries.²

Retreat in solitude and unbroken stillness, where air free of all pestilential exhalations and deep study are prerequisites for higher knowledge.

The acquisition of the highest knowledge and power requires not only many years of the severest study enlightened by a superior intelligence and an audacity bent by no peril; but also as many years of retreat in comparative solitude, and association with but students pursuing the same object, in a locality where nature itself preserves like the neophyte an absolute and unbroken stillness if not silence! Where the air is free for hundreds of miles around of all mephitic influence; the atmosphere and human magnetism absolutely pure and — no animal blood is spilt. Is it in London, or even the most hidden country village of England, that such conditions can be found?³

¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings* (TIBETAN TEACHING) VI p. 95

² *ibid.*, (BLACK MAGIC IN SCIENCE) XII p. 214

³ *ibid.*, (MADAME BLAVATSKY ON “THE HIMALAYAN BROTHERS”) III p. 268

Acrimony, antagonism, antipathy, enmity, and resentment are vexatious to the spirit.

The place selected for receiving [esoteric] instruction must be a spot calculated not to distract the mind, and filled with “influence-evolving” (magnetic) objects. The five sacred colours gathered in a circle must be there among other things.¹ The place must be free from any malignant influences hanging about in the air.

Commentary by H.P. Blavatsky

The place must be set apart, and used for no other purpose. The five “sacred colours” are the prismatic hues arranged in a certain way, as these colours are very magnetic. By “malignant influences” are meant any disturbances through strifes, quarrels, bad feelings, *etc.*, as these are said to impress themselves immediately on the astral light, *i.e.*, in the atmosphere of the place, and to hang “about in the air.” [158] This first condition seems easy enough to accomplish, yet — on further consideration, it is one of the most difficult ones to obtain.²

Holy life flourishes in snow-capped peaks.

Doubt has been expressed of the correctness of the statement that Indian Yogis have lived and still reside at extreme altitudes in the Himalayas. It has been averred that the rarefaction of the atmosphere is so great at the high plateaux of 15,000 and more feet above sea level that no human beings could exist there for any length of time. Still in the Sabhapati Swami’s little treatise on Raja-Yoga³ he declares that he was permitted to visit some of these holy recluses in the snowy peaks, and at *p.* 92 of our Vol. I [of *The Theosophist*], another Swami, known to us as a man of credibility, states that from that sacred temple may sometimes be seen far up the icy and inaccessible heights men of venerable presence who are permanently engaged there in “sacred pursuits . . . quite unknown to the world.”⁴ Science has now happily determined that life can be supported there without serious discomfort after a course of preparative training. In *Nature* for March 17th, 1881, a recent lecture of Mr. Edward Whymper, the daring explorer of Chimborazo and Cotopaxi, is reported. He says that he spent twenty-one nights above 14,000 feet above the level of the sea; eight more above 15,000 feet; thirteen more above 16,000 feet; and one more at 19,450 feet. At first he experienced “mountain sickness,” an extreme physical lassitude, feverishness, intense thirst, difficulty of swallowing, an impediment in breathing. But [141] by the exercise of dogged pluck (*will power*) these symptoms were eventually overcome, and he and his party finished their memorable explorations in safety.⁵ These facts are not cited because they were needed to fortify the belief of students of Indian *Yoga*

¹ [Note to Students: consult “The True Colours of Man,” in our Major Works Series. — ED. PHIL.]

² *Blavatsky Collected Writings* (PRACTICAL OCCULTISM) IX *pp.* 157-58; [quoting and commenting upon one of seventy-three rules “which every instructor in the East is furnished.”

³ [Entitled: *Om. The Philosophy and Science of Vedānta and Rāja-Yoga*. 3rd ed., by Sirsh Chanda Vasu, Lahore, 1895. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

⁴ See article on “Badrināth, the Mysterious.”

⁵ [This account may be found in Vol. XXIII of the English Journal *Nature*, under date given above, entitled “On the Practicability of Living at Great Elevations above the Level of the Sea,” being excerpts from E. Whymper’s lecture to the Society of Arts, in the Theatre at Soho, Kensington, March 9th, 1881. — *Boris de Zirkoff*.]

science, but to show the Asiatic public in general that modern physical discovery is daily bringing to light fresh proofs that the assertions of Āryan philosophers respecting the reserved powers of man were not loosely and ignorantly made. Let us only wait patiently and we will all see these bold infidels of the West confessing that their grandest discoveries were anticipated many ages ago by these ancients whom they now dare to stigmatise as ignorant theorists.¹

How to revitalise² yourself under the sun.

The loss of vitality should be made good by standing in the sun, with as little clothing on as possible, breathing deeply and slowly, and retaining the breath between each inspiration and exhalation as long as is convenient, *i.e.*, not long enough to cause any struggle or gasping. Five minutes of this should restore the prānic balance.³



¹ *Blavatsky Collected Writings* (HUMAN LIFE IN HIGH ALTITUDES) III, pp. 140-41

² *i.e.*, how to restore your prāna or vital force.

³ *ibid.*, (ON MESMERISM AND HYPNOTISM) XIII p. 363; [posthumously published.]

Professor Buchanan on the ennobling influence of thoracic expansion

Singing promotes health and the development of the chest. And the expansion of the chest allows the noblest parts of our nature to unfold.

Selections from Professor Joseph Rodes Buchanan's *Therapeutic Sarcognomy. The application of Sarcognomy, the science of the soul, brain and body, to the therapeutic philosophy and treatment of bodily and mental diseases by means of electricity, nervaura, medicine and haemospasia, with a review of authors on animal magnetism and massage and presentation of new instruments for electro-therapeutics.* Boston: J.G. Cupples Co., 1891.

The thoracic development which does so much for life, health and energy may be cultivated also by conversation, declamation and singing. By engaging in these daily we increase our stock of normal life and health. They expand as well as vitalize the chest. There is no labour performed so easily and with so little fatigue as that which is accompanied by singing. A citizen of New Orleans named McDonough many years before the war gave to his Negroes an opportunity of emancipation by extra work to buy their time piecemeal. They would buy one hour a day to begin, and with that advantage buy the remaining hours with increasing rapidity. Animated by such hopes, they astonished spectators by the zeal with which they worked, early and late, singing at their work.

The practice of singing, it is well known, promotes the health and the development of the chest.

The expansion of the chest indicates the expansion or development of the noblest elements of humanity, for the higher organs of [394] the brain are in so close a relation to the chest that its development becomes to them an invigorating co-operation.

Thoracic expansion should therefore be steadily sought by all, and when it is not obtained by active exertion, which is the normal method, it may be sought by the expansion of the chest in forced respiration. We should, five or ten times in the day, inflate the chest to its fullest capacity for several minutes, and in walking we should make it a practice to inflate the chest and firmly hold the breath for a fourth of a minute.¹



¹ Says Dr. E. Cutter: "A late account of the gypsies states that every morning they go out early and inhale full breaths, hold them, pound their chests hard in expiration, and then inhale deeply again, and so on."

By forcing chest expansion and lung exhalation, high altitudes foster spiritual temperament.

The inflation of which I speak is by the ascent of the ribs instead of the descent of the diaphragm, and its tendency is to develop the thorax and diminish the prominence of the abdomen, thus giving a desirable form, promoting the growth of the lungs and improving the quality of the voice as well as the aeration of the blood. I regard these systematic exercises in full breathing as of great hygienic value and highly beneficial to the nervous system and the higher sentiments. In expanding the upper portion of the chest and restraining the lower, the abdomen being drawn in as the chest is elevated, we produce an amiable and womanly sentiment. One who wishes to imitate a woman would find this the most natural way to do it. The very great benefit of high altitudes and mountain ranges from two to four thousand feet high, in developing higher health and a more spiritual temperament, is produced chiefly through the expansion of the chest required by a rarer atmosphere and the more active exhalation of the lungs.

Method for thoracic expansion

[Take a baseline measurement of your bust beforehand and then at monthly intervals. Ask friend to do it for you by wrapping the tape around your bust, and straight across and right under the armpits, while your arms are relaxed at your sides. — ED. PHIL.]

The Georgia Eclectic Medical Journal has advocated full breathing as follows:

Full breathing is a therapeutic agent, restorative and curative.

Frequently has attention been called in these pages to the great value of cultivating the habit and practice of filling the lungs to their fullest capacity as a curative measure in all scrofulous and other constitutional diseases. Recently a case of confirmed sleeplessness, that had existed for nearly a month, and had resisted the treatment of two judicious physicians, was rapidly cured by making the patient fill his lungs to their fullest capacity by forced and powerful efforts, and to hold the lungs full for various lengths of time — 10 seconds up to 30 and finally up to 45 seconds — then expel the air, and after a rest at tranquil breathing for five, return again to this forced effort at filling the lungs, which was repeated at intervals of an hour or two during the day. At first the effort was as exhausting and trying as any hard manual labour or violent exercise. After a few hours' practice, and screwing up a heavy force of courage and will-power, the patient could hold the lungs full for 20 seconds at a time the first day, and repeat the act several times during the waking hours. At night his chest muscles felt sore, but he was much refreshed, felt tired and went to bed at 10 o'clock pm, and soon fell into a refreshing and calm sleep, which lasted till 3 o'clock am, the first he had to call sleep for several weeks. [398]

[When breathing in, raise arms to shoulders with palms facing down, thus helping the chest to expand. When breathing out, lower arms to your sides. [If you commit one hour a day for this exercise, expect your bust to expand by about an inch a month. Ideally, you should make an effort to expand your chest 5-10 times a day, as already suggested. — ED. PHIL.]

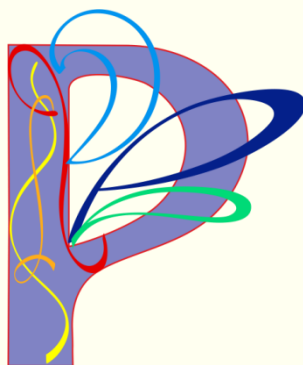
By compelling chest expansion, the exercise of the thighs is far more efficient than any exercise of the arms.

The thighs greatly excel the arms in muscular development, and in their relation to vital force. Hence exercise of the thighs is far more efficient than any exercise of the arms in compelling chest expansion. In ascending a long flight of stairs we are compelled to use all our respiratory power, and in running we soon find that we cannot expand the lungs sufficiently to sustain our exertion. Hence, as a means of thoracic development, walking, running, leaping and mountain climbing take the precedence of all other exercises.

The great vital muscular force of the thigh renders injuries of that region extremely prostrating and dangerous. Of the soldiers shot through the knee in our late civil war few if any recovered except through amputation. [438]

Keep smiling, for smile is the expression of the superior regions of the brain.

The mental condition which is truly ethical and which we should ever cultivate is that expressed by a smile. The smile (according to Pathognomy) is the expression of the superior regions of the brain, a manifestation of amiability and happiness which instantly rouses a corresponding feeling in the beholder. The smile illuminates the face and changes a repulsive to an attractive expression. The frequent smiles of women make their society attractive and win the love of men. Smiles have many varieties and degrees of merit, but all are attractive and healthful. [499]



“Love is the healing power of the successful physician,” in our Higher Ethics and Devotion Series.