

The art of breathing



KNOT SO TRUE

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RUBANA HUQ



VISUAL: REHNUMA PROSHOON

How do the monks on ice live magically and produce wonders through detachment from worldly angst?

How did “The Iceman” Wim Hof run a half marathon above the Arctic Circle, barefoot and in a pair of shorts? How did he also run a full marathon in the Namib desert without even a drop of water, swim underneath ice for 66 metres, and hang at an altitude of 2,000 metres with only one finger?

The answers have been pretty straightforward.

Alexandra David-Neel, a French spiritualist, Buddhist, anarchist, opera singer, and writer from the 19th century, who inspired Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg and died at 101, wrote about the monks and their magic in her 1927 book, *My Journey to Lhasa*. She wrote about the Tibetan monks wearing next to nothing, heating themselves in frigid stone monasteries by day and melting circles in the snow around their bare bodies by night, simply through Tummo, a Buddhist breathing technique and meditation.

Wim Hof, when asked how he ran without water, had only one word to say: “Breath.”

Just how important is breath in our lives?

Did you know that nasal breathing alone can boost nitric oxide sixfold and help us inhale 18 percent more oxygen? Did you know that one needs to breathe through one’s nose only, as the breath inhaled through the mouth is adverse breath (“Ni Chi”) and contributes to ADHD as it delivers a disturbance of oxygen to the prefrontal cortex, the area which is associated with that disorder?

Over the years, Chinese doctors have prescribed 13,500 breaths per day, 9.5 breaths per minute, and Chinese Taoist text from the eighth century AD shared that the nose was the door to the heavens. In fact, the Japanese samurai tested a soldier’s readiness by placing a feather under his nostrils while he inhaled and exhaled. If the feather moved, he would be dismissed.

Similarly, in philosophy, Jacques Derrida and Friedrich Nietzsche traced the etymology of the word “breath” to “being.” These two words have a lot in common. Nietzsche believed that being, as a notion, was nothing but vapour, and was only an ethereal result of the sublimation of real things (as explained in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*). Being, truly, was perceived as a nebulous and airy notion, and, therefore, to use the word “being” was to give out nothing but “hot air.” In the same tradition, these words (being and breath) are both evoked in many ways in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*.

Wouldn’t we all want to breathe forever and never run out of breath? Foreverness is an alluring fantasy that became a material reality with the pipe organ. The pipe organs, figuratively, had lungs and could go on forever. It was an instrument that gave artists and dreamers the chance to necessitate artificial wind supplies of fixed pressures, eventually to defeat the breath of the performer by varying the breath of the instrument. The organ, through its production of a vast mechanism, finally challenged man’s ingenuity.

When I was young, my *Ustadji* used to prescribe holding my breath

on one note for as long as I could. So, every raga, every “*taan*” would test my strength to endure the pressure to impress him. I would eventually fail, leading me to remind him over and over again that, just because whales could hold their breath beyond human endurance and were not restricted by the limits of human lungs, I should not be expected to perform the same feat and that his cruelty ought to end. After all, whales could not cry and I could! To this, he had no ready comebacks, but persisted to pressurise me.

But in the true world of art, artists have attempted to attain endless breath to its maximum figurative possibility in music. Yet, no ordinary singer could ever keep the long lines of an unbroken fugue, going without a breath; no ordinary string player could ever articulate this fugue in one movement of the bow. However, amidst all this, a listener might still hear Bach’s intrigued meditation on the capacity of the organ, even one blown by hand or by foot, and have a glimpse of transcendence beyond our frail lungs. But that’s when we

humans need to reconcile with the organs reaching towards realms where breath does not run out.

It was either Stravinsky or Berlioz who said that the organ’s steady wind was the reason he never wrote music for it: “the monster never breathes,” one of them said. Yet, the simple act of switching on an artificially powered blowing system could, perhaps, take one’s poetically inclined listeners halfway to heaven.

In literature, “breath” stands for both life and fragility. King Lear confirms his daughter’s death as “stilled breathing,” while in Tennyson’s poem, Tithonus – who wasn’t entirely human as he was the

son of King Laomedon and a water nymph – seeks mortality from the goddess of dawn, Aurora. In the myth, she kidnapped him and asked Zeus for Tithonus to receive immortality but forgot to stipulate eternal youth. Thus, Tithonus withers away but does not die. It is then that he begs for his breath to end:

“Upon thy glimmering thresholds,
when the steam

Floats up from those dim fields
about the homes

Of happy men that have the
power to die,

And grassy barrows of the
happier dead.

Release me, and restore me to the

ground...”

Who do we choose: Ulysses or Tithonus? While I hear many say that they would rather have a short and meaningful life, I openly admit that I want a long and healthy one. After all, wasn’t it Jack Lalanne, the fitness guru, who said, “I can’t die. It would ruin my image?”

Thus, I consciously breathe every morning and routinely become a serious object of wonder and curiosity for those who live in the house with me. When I hold my nostrils alternately and breathe in and breathe out, people around me are often at a loss. It has been reported back to me that they believe that, since I have reached the half peak in my life, I am now enslaved by idiosyncrasies.

Frankly, I don’t mind that perception anymore. I have chosen to go on practising the forgotten art of breathing, and often, also catching my breath in order to have a better perspective. And yes, I do it more these days lest I am pushed to that narrow space where I will be stifled just because I am out of practice. You see, even if our breaths are being modulated and being interrupted and resumed by timed, rhythmic articulation, even if language is nothing but breath, our “being” cannot just be a “flatus vocis,” a “voice that is mere air,” or a voice that is merely breath.

We cannot just merely breathe. We must breathe right, in freedom that is both rare and fragile. Failing to breathe in the right air would mean wailing in grief, unlike the whales that breathe longer but cannot cry.

Are doctors above accountability?



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ABM UDDIN

In the wake of the deaths of Mahbuba Rahman Akhi (on June 19) and of her newborn (on June 10), resulting from a botched C-section performed at the capital’s Central Hospital, the issue of deaths due to medical errors came under intense scrutiny. The incident received heavy media attention. In response, and perhaps to maintain calm, the hospital fired two negligent physicians. They were arrested by police on June 15. Unfortunately, in protest of their imprisonment, doctors across the private sector launched a two-day strike on July 17, demanding the immediate release of their coworkers, knowing that their actions would possibly jeopardise more lives, exacerbating the issue of negligence that their fellow doctors had been accused of.

The strike was shocking. Demanding an improved work environment, less workload, and even more benefits, and salaries are all part of acceptable civil discourse. However, the incident is beyond the pale. At the time of the protest, when Khulna Medical College Hospital was treating 1,500 patients with a capacity of only 500 beds, according to a report by this daily, such an action by our doctors was outrageous. They reacted as if they were immune to medical malpractice and that their unprofessional conduct shouldn’t be questioned. In fact, by going on strike, they threw the importance of transparency and responsibility out the window. Disappointingly, the protesting doctors’ demand did see fulfilment when, on July 18, the two physicians were granted bail.

However, very little is known as to what actions will be taken to compensate Akhi’s family and hold to account those responsible for the death of her and her newborn. Also, what short- and long-term policies are the authorities going to adopt to stall future occurrences of such

Very little is known as to what actions will be taken to compensate Akhi’s family and hold to account those responsible for the death of her and her newborn. Also, what short- and long-term policies are the authorities going to adopt to stall future occurrences of such negligence? The lack of reporting on the case recently indicates that investigation will slow down and eventually languish in a legal quagmire.

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Akhi’s death reminds me of the fourteen elderly patients who died in nursing homes in Florida in the aftermath of 2017 Hurricane Irma. Extremely high temperatures in the facilities from the loss of electricity were found to be the cause of their deaths. The very next year, the Florida legislature passed a law compelling all nursing homes and assisted living facilities to install generators sufficient to keep the temperature at 27 degrees Celsius or below and provide power for at least 96 hours. With something like this as an example, we must also pursue legislative actions to put a stop to ill-fated deaths in our healthcare facilities.

The drama of arrests, protests, and bail does not help the victims and their families at all.

After allegations of wrongful deaths come about, the proper course of action is the dismissal of the accused, the opening of investigations, and repatriation to jobs or punitive measures for the subjects, depending on the findings. Physicians going on strike to interfere with the normal course of proceedings is simply unbecoming of their profession.

Errors are inevitable, even for the best medical professionals in the most ideal environment. But that cannot spare them from accountability for negligence or intentional harm. According to a recent report, every year, 371,000 people die and 424,000 sustain permanent disability in the US due to medical errors. One might think this number is staggeringly high for a country with the best doctors and technologies. However, the US has twice the population of Bangladesh. Plus, the country encourages investigations into complaints, contributing to these astonishingly large numbers. In contrast, in Bangladesh, we are accustomed to the covering up of wrongful deaths and are less committed to accountability, leading to fewer complaints.

We must adopt medical professional liability insurance for physicians, like in the US, to address medical malpractice. Such insurance will shield providers from financial losses from lawsuits and investigations. In the US, 99 percent of physicians face lawsuits by the age of 65, and 85 percent of lawsuits are related to surgery. Regular recertification and training are commonplace solutions to reducing errors and improving efficiency. If caregivers in Bangladesh claim immunity from wrongful deaths at their hands, they should not pursue this noble profession.

The anarchy in our health system seems to be on autopilot; corruption and irregularities have plagued it from the top to the bottom. Hospitals have become places you go to to get even sicker and for the unnecessary loss of life. Deaths are often forgotten as collateral damage. All this means that it is high time we passed comprehensive legislation to address medical malpractice in Bangladesh.

শেখ হাসিনার নির্দেশ
জলবায়ু পরিষ্কার বাংলাদেশ

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Divisional Forest Officer

Wildlife Management & Nature Conservation Division, Chattogram

and

Project Director

Development & Expansion of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Safari Park, Cox's Bazar (2nd Phase)

(2nd Revised) Project

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তারিখ: ০৯/০৮/২০২৩

e-Tender Notice

e-Tender is invited in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) for procurement of following works:

Tender ID & Package No.	Name of the package	Online notice publication date and time	Online tender last selling date and time	Online tender closing date and time
858232, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-02	Construction of RCC Retaining Wall Part-A	10-Aug-2023 10:00	27-Aug-2023 16:00	28-Aug-2023 12:00
858431, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-03	Construction of RCC Retaining Wall Part-B	10-Aug-2023 10:00	27-Aug-2023 16:00	28-Aug-2023 13:00
858464, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-04	Construction of RCC Retaining Wall Part-C	10-Aug-2023 10:00	27-Aug-2023 16:00	28-Aug-2023 14:00
858581, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-05	Construction of RCC Retaining Wall Part-D	10-Aug-2023 10:00	27-Aug-2023 16:00	28-Aug-2023 15:00
858620, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-06	Construction of RCC Retaining Wall Part-E	10-Aug-2023 10:00	27-Aug-2023 16:00	28-Aug-2023 15:45
858692, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-08	Construction of Canteen (Including furniture and Decorations).	10-Aug-2023 10:00	28-Aug-2023 16:00	29-Aug-2023 12:00
858707, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-09	Construction of 2.5m wide loop road in Lion enclosure for tourists.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	28-Aug-2023 16:00	29-Aug-2023 13:00
858719, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-10	Construction of Water supply infrastructure	10-Aug-2023 10:00	28-Aug-2023 16:00	29-Aug-2023 14:00
858725, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-11	Construction of inner perimeter wall in Herbivore Safari.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	28-Aug-2023 16:00	29-Aug-2023 14:30
858796, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-12	Construction of 3m wide service road (HBB) in Tiger Safari.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	28-Aug-2023 16:00	29-Aug-2023 15:00
858896, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-13	Land Development in different areas of the park.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	29-Aug-2023 16:00	30-Aug-2023 12:00
858930, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-14	Construction of Semi-Pacca barrack for staff.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	29-Aug-2023 16:00	30-Aug-2023 13:00
858948, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-15	Construction of Culvert, Sluiceway and Drain.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	29-Aug-2023 16:00	30-Aug-2023 14:00
859580, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-16	Development of Bangabandhu Square through landscaping.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	29-Aug-2023 16:00	30-Aug-2023 14:30
859600, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-17	Development of Platform and Deck on new lake.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	29-Aug-2023 16:00	30-Aug-2023 15:00
859625, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-18	Installation of Pavement Tiles on footpath from Cox's Bazar to Chattogram highway towards park.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	29-Aug-2023 16:00	30-Aug-2023 15:30
859709, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-19	Construction of digital entry and exit gates at the entrance gate of safari park (various site).	10-Aug-2023 10:00	30-Aug-2023 16:00	31-Aug-2023 12:00
859724, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-20	Installation of Fences around Picnic spots.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	30-Aug-2023 16:00	31-Aug-2023 13:00
859743, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-21	Construction & installation of CC Block in different areas.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	30-Aug-2023 16:00	31-Aug-2023 14:00
859762, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-25	Repair and maintenance of Roads and Culverts.	10-Aug-2023 10:00	30-Aug-2023 16:00	31-Aug-2023 14:30
859883, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-26	Repair and maintenance of Water supply infrastructure	10-Aug-2023 10:00	30-Aug-2023 16:00	31-Aug-2023 15:00
859903, WMNCD/BSMSPC/ 2023-24/WD-27	Repair & maintenance of Electric supply infrastructure	10-Aug-2023 10:00	30-Aug-2023 16:00	31-Aug-2023 15:30

This is an online tender, where only e-Tender will be accepted in the National e-GP Portal and no offline/hard copies will be accepted. To submit e-Tender, registration in the National e-GP System Portal (<http://www.eprocure.gov.bd>) is required. The fees for selling/downloading the e-Tender documents from the National e-GP System Portal have to be deposited online through any registered bank's branches. Further information and guidelines are available in the National e-GP System Portal and from e-GP help desk (helpdesk@eprocure.gov.bd).

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