

NIK LINDER ❖ PHIL SIMHA

THE WATER AND THE BREATH

A GUIDE TO USING WATER AND BREATHING
TOWARDS A STRESS FREE AND SUCCESSFUL LIFE

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FOREWORD

BY UMBERTO PELIZZARI

In the beginnings Freediving was widely perceived as a fight in between man and water. With tense muscles, blown up till they almost burst, Bucher and Matorca broke with, what scientists until then believed, was a given.

Then Jaques Mayol came along and with him came the transformation of the very physical breathhold diving to a discipline of ultimate relaxation. This built up the foundation for me to push the human body constantly forward – in the sense of the early heroes.

It is due to Jacques Mayol, one of my most important mentors, that breathing exercises from the Pranayama-science and physical exercises from Yoga practice were inherited into the sport of freediving. Therefore a beauty and flow, a symbiosis in between human and water, evolved. And water was the element that accompanied me ever since – down to new depths, and down to my inner being.

In modern societies the need for a state of full relaxation becomes more evident on an omnipresent level. Some complain to „not be able to breathe any more“, others are afraid to suffocate. More and more people are affected by pain and chronicle diseases. The solution for fighting these diseases most often is searched in pharmaceutical products. This solution brings temporary abatement and relief, but not healing in a long-term sense. But a new awareness is rising. An awareness that is looking for alternative ways in humans need for relaxation.

In the past couple of years, recreational freediving has evolved to such an alternative way. A way the allows its partakers to open up to breathing and re-

laxation. Because without correct breathing, without full relaxation, there is no freediving.

This book describes simple techniques, which support a healthy and positive way of life. They are not new. But years of practice and coaching experience by the authors led to a vivid and fully illustrated guide, showing the most common practices of professional freedivers.

The simple fact that you are holding this book in your hand, proofs that you are searching. It doesn't matter if you are searching to make progress in the sport of freediving or to find new ways of relaxation for yourself – the text and the photos of this publication will affect you.

Every time, this book comes into your sight, being it on your couch, or the edge of your bed, it will remind you that your personal well-being is on you and no one else than you. Additional practice and exchange with a master is helpful too.





THE MAMMALIAN DIVE REFLEX

If you immerse your face in water and hold your breath, the pulse slows down, and the brain as well as the lungs are distributed with more oxygen than usual. While the blood circulation in the extremities is reduced, the spleen contracts, releasing red blood cells and increasing the oxygen capacity of the blood. You receive a deluxe blood circulation, with a low pulse at the same time. A physical state of attention and relaxation, similar to the Yoga Nidra, is the result.



I. WHAT IS RELAQUA AND WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Five years ago I was contemplating about the fact why we use relaxation in freediving only as means to improve our performances. I do not know of any other sport in which relaxation and physical performance results are so closely related. In Freediving I am condemned to relaxation. If I cannot relax, I cannot deliver a performance. I cannot dive with a high pulse, because my body would consume too much oxygen. A great successful performance in free diving is only possible after I slowed down my whole organism resulting in a low pulse. In Rel aqua you use the breathing as a tool to reduce your heart rate and achieve a deeper relaxation.

BRADYCARDIA

Bradycardia is a condition wherein a human has a very slow heart rate. Medical experts define it as a resting heart rate of under 60 beats per minute. It typically is an indicator for a indisposition of the heart. Endurance athletes, Yogis and Freedivers, though, do reach way slower heart rates with the help of the dive reflex and conscious breathing.

BREATHING AND NON-BREATHING

On land, breathing exercises do not only help to relax. They are common practice in Pranayama, the field of breathing in Yoga. The exercises are known for their lung cleaning effects, their vitalizing effect on the body, they improve the ability of concentration and much more. Mainly these exercises help to develop an awareness of your own breathing. As a consequence you are more attentive, able to recognize stress and simply breathe it away.

In the water the non-breathing comes into play. In this phase where you are not distracted by your own breathing any more, you are able to open up a window to your inner-self. You experience a deep form of meditation.

Exercises from Pranayama, relaxation techniques, autogenic training, meditation, and mental training support this process. As a core element you use a mechanism, that has been inherited in your body ever since – the mammalian dive reflex. It is an important protective mechanism, responsible to make sure humans can spend time under water and stay unharmed. Professional freedivers use the mammalian dive reflex with masterly skill.

Yogis in the field of Pranayama speak about the „art of breathing“ and the „art of let-the-breathing-be“. Parts of the freediving practice are relaxation and breathing exercises. Continuous practice creates more relaxed people, who are using their breathing consciously, anticipate stress faster, and have ways to deal with it.

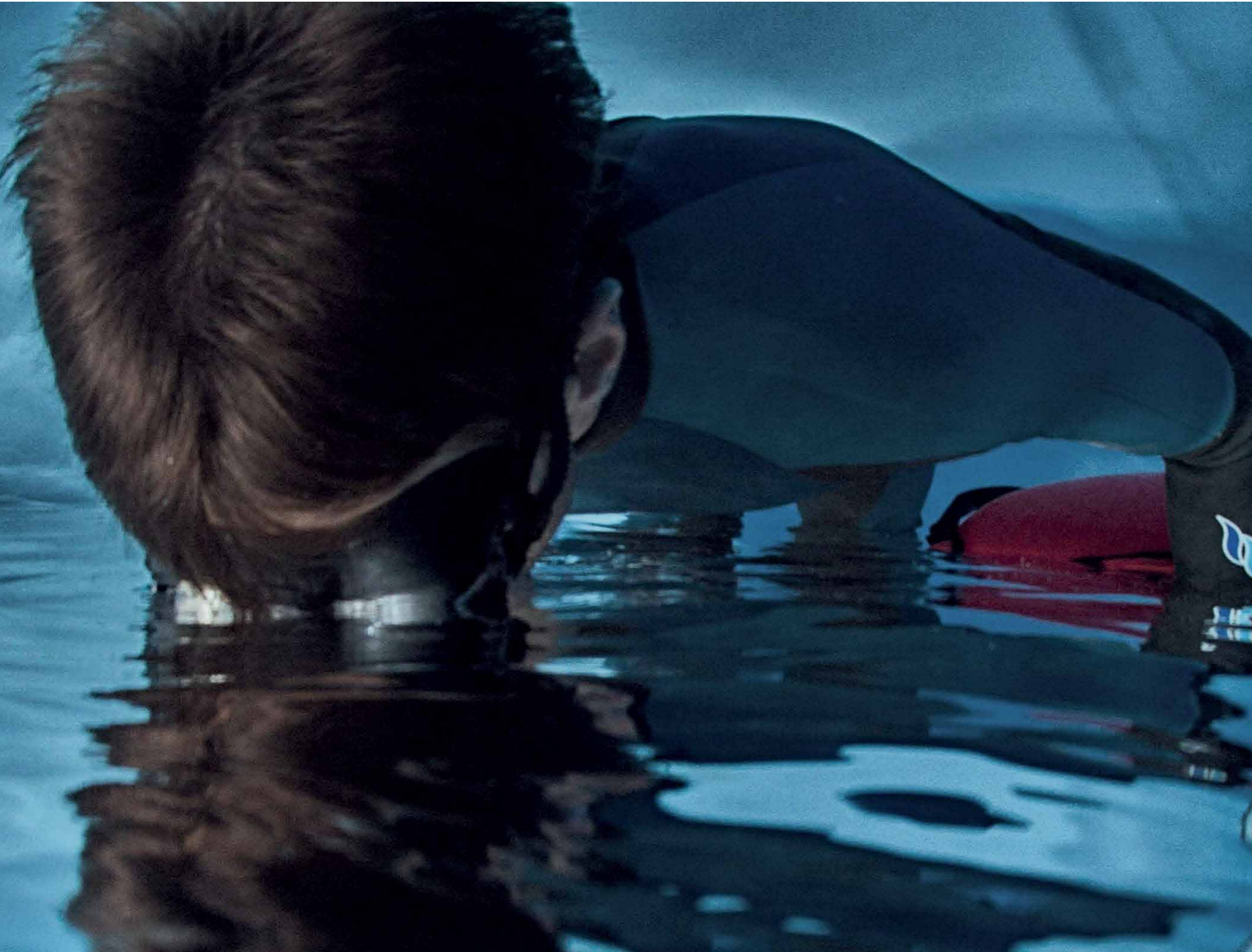
Freedivers use these techniques to improve their performances. Relaqva uses them to help you to relax and avoid stress.

PRANAYAMA

„Prana“ is a term for the life energy (see also Qi).
„Ayama“ can be translated into „control“ or „extend“.

The term „Pranayama“ therefore is referring to the conscious regulation and extension of breathing through constant practice and awareness.





FREEDIVING AND THE MAMMALIAN DIVE REFLEX

Once a student told me: „I really do not see the benefit of holding your breath.“ This was, before she had made her first apnea experience.

During my classes I often ask my students what they were thinking of during their breath-hold. Especially while doing static apnea, when you float in the water, completely motionless – there is nothing to do, nothing to keep yourself occupied with. Most often the answer is: „As soon as I put my head under water, everything is gone. Everything that worried me, everything that bothered me – was just gone.“

The following gives a short description on how static apnea feels: I take my last couple of breaths before diving. I ventilated my lungs, I stretched them and with the help of relaxation breathings I lowered my heartbeat to 66 beats per minute. I take my last deep breath and I dive with my lungs full of fresh air for a so-called maximum attempt in static apnea.

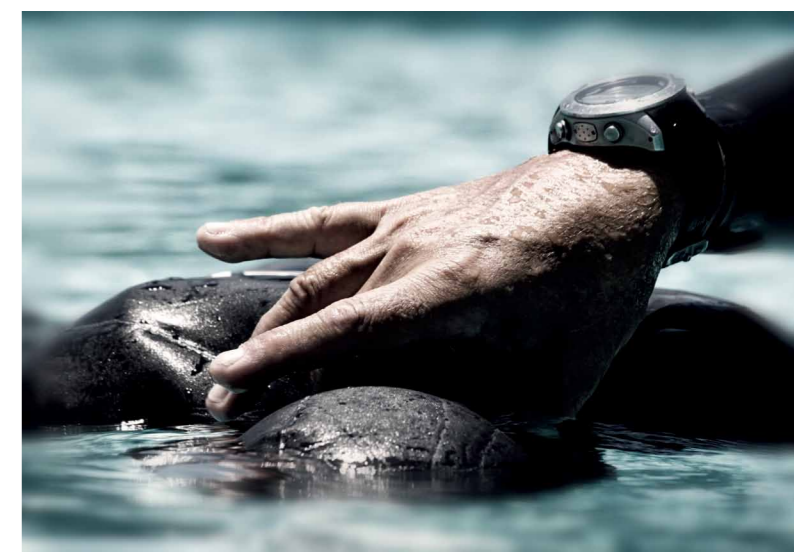
Immediately after putting my face in the water I relax my neck muscles, I visualize each muscle of my body, one after another. The awareness of my body works like a dialogue in which I constantly check on the relaxation and, if necessary, increase it. I keep my eyes closed, to reduce one of my senses that connects me to the environment. I can listen to my heartbeat. With every second I am lying with my face submerged in water, my heart beat drops. It reaches 50 beats per minute quite fast and it is dropping further.

I quit the dialogue with my body. I feel a relaxation of my eyes which leads me into some kind of sleep. I reach the point of absolute deep relaxation. The slight movement of the water lets me imagine I am in the sea. The slight touch of the safety diver gives me the confidence to completely let go.

KUMBHAKA

Khumbaka derives from the expression „kumbha“, which means pot, or jar.

The human body is like a jar, a container for prana, for vital energy, as well as a container for air. If one holds his breath, one holds the prana in the container, then the breathing is in the jar, therefore we say „Kumbhaka“.



How long can you hold your breath?“ It is the most frequently asked question by people interested in freediving. „Why can you hold your breath for longer than six minutes, while I can only hold it for 30 seconds?“

To increase your breath hold capacity, you have to use your lungs in an efficient way. During a regular breath only 0.5 to 1 liter of air is moved. Compared with your full lung capacity, this is not much. Stretching and breathing exercises help to optimize the use of your lungs. This is important, because if I only have one breath, it has to be a deep one. A freediver knows how important a single breath can be.

RELAXATION

Apnea requires calmness and relaxation. The key factor to measure the relaxation of the body is the neck-shoulder-part of the human body. If the neck is relaxed, the rest of the body can rest as well. Here, the dive buddy can help while repeatedly mentioning that the diver should relax his neck.

II. THE FOUR ELEMENTS



THE RELAQUA-PRINCIPLE IS BASED ON THE FOUR
FUNDAMENTAL COLUMNS

WATER, FIRE, EARTH AND AIR.

Due to these elements the principle can be explained the best.



FOUR CONSTITUENTS

We specifically use the terms of the elements air, earth, water and fire according to the classical viewpoints of greek natural philosophers. We do so, because we believe they define the relation to our environment better, than the modern, chemical definition of elements.

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