

A Triad of Calm: Scripture, Breath and Mind

- by Dr. Donna Jagielski

I recall a time in yoga class where a fellow student asked our instructor if he would ever consider teaching a yoga workshop based only on breathwork. His response was that you really can't separate breath from the practice itself. All you can do is place emphasis on the breathwork. Just like life itself, breathing is part of everything we do.

We cannot separate our breathwork from everything else. This is the reason why placing emphasis on our breath in relation to mental and emotional health is extremely important. Since we are never able to "turn off" our minds or breath, our goal is to establish strategies and techniques that position our minds and breath in a state of calm. Whether we find ourselves in a state of calm or "fight or flight" or "freeze" which relates back to our sympathetic or parasympathetic system, it all circles back to our frame of mind and our breath.

In my classes I provide a concrete demonstration using yoga blocks or kitchen sponges. I like using sponges because they are small, easy to pack and most of all, come in vibrant colors. I have three different colors of sponges to represent: body, mind and breath. I explain that when any one of these three sponges are misaligned or scattered, we are "out of sync." Any one of the three: body, mind or breath, can trigger flight, fight or freeze responses and soon after, the two will follow, thus, scattering the sponges, demonstrating the disengagement of all three areas of body, mind and breath. It becomes a domino effect where muscles contract, thinking becomes confused,

negative, jumbled and breath shortens, is labored, all triggering the sympathetic system. This is completely opposite when we are "aligned", which is when I demonstrate the blocks evenly stacked. When all three are aligned, our breath is calm, our mind is at peace and our muscles are relaxed.

As a Christian yoga practitioner, I recognize that we need to focus our minds on Scripture before we can embody and internalize it. For that reason, the triad of calm I engage students in is: Scripture, body and breath.

Focusing our thoughts and minds on Scripture in conjunction with breathwork strengthens our relationship with Christ and creates a groundedness, centeredness and reassurance that we do not need to carry the load. We lift our burdens and surrender them to Jesus. For this reason, it is important to build in Scripture that acts as a breathing meditation. Allowing Scripture to guide us in the reset and reframing of our thoughts will aid us wherever we are in terms of mental and emotional wellbeing. These are three breathing techniques with appropriate accompanying Scripture to help support alignment of the breath, body and mind.

Breathing Technique:
Alternate nostril breathing

Description: This breathing technique is known to help quiet and still the mind. This breathing technique helps to relax both the mind and body. It aids in reducing anxiety and promotes overall well being.

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Accompanying Scripture:

Recognizing that God has breathed life into each of us and every creature. The Lord is our life force and our breath.

Genesis 2:7

"Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature."

Directions:

1. Sit comfortably preferably with legs crossed, easy cross legged pose.
2. Place your left hand on your left knee.
3. Bring your right hand to your nose.
4. Exhale completely and then use your right thumb to close off the right nostril.
5. Inhale through the left nostril and then close the left nostril with your middle and ring fingers.
6. Open the right nostril and exhale through this side.
7. Inhale through the right nostril and then close this nostril.
8. Close off the right nostril, open the left nostril and exhale followed by an inhale.
9. This is one complete cycle.
10. Continue for approximately five minutes.
11. Always complete by finishing the exhale on the left side.

Breathing Technique:

Lion's Breath

Description:

This breathing technique helps to relieve stress in the facial muscles as it stretches the entire face. This breathing technique engages the jaw muscles and the tongue. It also creates an auditory sound upon the exhale. It is one of the very few poses and/or breathing exercises in yoga that engages the facial muscles. Since much tension is held

within the jawline of our mouths, this breathing technique helps to reduce stress by placing emphasis on lengthening, flexing and creating greater mobility of the facial muscles.

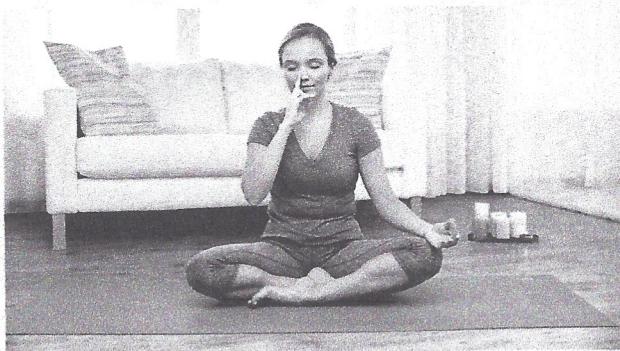
Accompanying Scripture- Punished for praying to God, Daniel was tossed into a den with lions. Instead of fear taking over, Daniel stayed present in his faith to the Lord. As a result, God spared his life by sending angels who shut the mouths of the lions.

Daniel 6:21-22

Daniel answered, "May the King live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

Directions:

1. Sitting in a kneeling position.
2. Place your hands on your knees. Straighten your arms and extend your fingers. Extended fingers are meant to symbolize a lion's claws.
3. Inhale through your nose.
4. Exhale strongly through the mouth, making a "ha" sound. As you exhale, open your mouth wide and stick your tongue as far out as possible towards your chin.
5. Try to bring your gaze to the tip of your nose as you exhale.
6. Perform this at least three times.



Breathing Technique:
Boxed breathing

Description:

Beneficial in clearing the mind, relaxing and increasing ability to focus more clearly. With this breathing technique you are constructing a box-like shape through the pattern of inhaling, holding the breath at the top of the inhale, exhaling, and holding the breath at the bottom of the exhale.

Accompanying Scripture:

Breathing is an integral part of everything we do and relates to everything in life. God has breathed life into each of all, all living things.

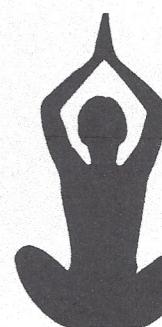
Job 12:10

"In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of all mankind."



Directions:

1. Sit comfortably preferably in an easy cross legged position.
2. Place hands resting comfortably on knees or place the right hand at heart and left hand on stomach.
3. You may choose to either close your eyes or soften your gaze, your dristi, slightly a few feet in front of you.
4. Inhale through your nose as you slowly count to 4.
5. Hold your breath as you count to 4.
6. Slowly exhale as you count to 4.
7. Hold your breath as you count to 4.
8. Repeat 4 times or until you begin to feel more relaxed and focused.



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