

MODULE 2: THE 'ART' OF BREATHWORK

LESSON 4: REGULATION - RELAXATION

True relaxation is the forgotten art of the 21st century and the new paradigm in peak performance. More work is done in a state of relaxation than we realise.

Being in a constant state of 'high energy' or adrenalised energy is useful in the short term but toxic to the system in the long term. Most of us are holding habitual patterns of tension that need to be unraveled so that energy can flow effectively throughout our system.

We 'react' to relaxation by falling asleep but conscious relaxation is a skill that is fundamental to self-mastery. Breath holds the secret to letting go and activates the relaxation response. We use the breath to relax more quickly, more deeply, and in more situations.

Energy	Relaxation
Inhale	Exhale
Sympathetic	Parasympathetic
Mouth Breathing	Nose Breathing
Greater volume	Less volume
Fast Rhythm	Slow Rhythm
Upper Breathing Space	Middle and Lower Breathing Space
Right Nostril	Left Nostril

When we are working with any conscious breathing technique, we are not only working with physical parameters of breathing, we are working with life force, and tapping into Source Energy which fills us with the feeling of calm energy and centred aliveness.

There is no right or wrong way to breathe, simply different ways to breathe for different effects. The above table illustrates the various parameters of breathing and their physiological and energetic effects. In this lesson we will be exploring a range of physiologically relaxing techniques and their possible applications.

When we work with breath regulation, we can work with four parts of the breath in various ratios for different effects:

Inhale

Pause

Exhale

Pause

To activate the parasympathetic nervous system and the relaxing effects of breathing, the idea is to spend more time on the exhale by lengthening it and slowing it down. An expanded inhale and hold after the inhale can also activate the parasympathetic system. The physiology behind this is that it allows more time for the stretch receptors in the alveoli to be activated. It can also be very soothing to relax into the pause after the exhale.

Breathing through the nose has a soothing, cooling and relaxing effect as the architecture of the nose spirals the air and slow it down.

Breathing "low and slow" i.e. low into the belly and with a slow rhythm will calm the system.

Sometimes it necessary to charge up the system to get the benefits of relaxation, for example, the relaxation that comes after doing an energising technique such as 20 connected breaths.

This creates a "squeeze and release" effect which can be effective when there's tension in the system that needs to be shaken up with a more vigorous technique.

The Yawn and the Sigh

Both the yawn and the sigh are natural reflexes that activate the vagus nerve and that naturally reboot the system. They should be used and activated as natural recovery loops throughout the day.

Ocean Breath (Ujjayi Breath)

The Sanskrit word "ujjayi," which means "to conquer" or "to be victorious". Therefore, it is often referred to as the "Victorious Breath". Because of the sound it makes when performed correctly, this breath is also sometimes called "Ocean Breath" or "Hissing Breath."

Seal your lips and start to breath in and out through your nose.

Take an inhalation through your nose that is slightly deeper than normal. Exhale slowly through your nose while constricting the muscles in the back of your throat.

If you're having trouble getting the right sound for your breath, try this:

With your mouth open, try exhaling the sound "HAAAAH"- it's similar to the sound you make when you're trying to fog up a mirror. Get comfortable with this sound to get the hang of the practice.

Close your mouth and attempt a similar sound, feeling the outflow of air through your nasal passages. Once you have mastered this on the outflow, use the same method for the in-flow breath, gently constricting the back of your throat as you inhale.

If you're doing this correctly, you should sound like waves in the ocean - the inhales can be compared to the sound the ocean makes as the water is gathering up to form the wave, the exhales can be compared to the sound of the waves crashing to the shore. Some people compare *Ujjayi* breathing to Darth Vader from Star Wars, if that's helpful.

Applications:

When you're agitated: Since the *Ujjayi* breath is especially good for settling agitation and stress, and balancing the mind, try shifting into *Ujjayi* breath whenever you find yourself becoming aggravated or stressed. You should notice a soothing effect promptly.

When exercising: *Ujjayi* is also useful when you're doing aerobic exercise such as running or cycling. In fact, some Olympic-level athletes have introduced *Ujjayi* into their training routines to improve their respiratory efficiency. Experiment with this breath technique when you're working out and see if it reduces wear and tear on your body.

Anxiety and stress: The slow and rhythmic nature of the *Ujjayi* breath is incredibly helpful to calm nerves. Next time you find yourself with a case of the jitters, try some yogic breathing to settle the worries.

1: 2 ratio

Deepen your inhale by inhaling through the nose from the belly to the chest and while counting 1,2,3,4.

See how many counts you need to breathe in fully

Begin by equalising the length of the inhale and exhale

You can exhale through the nose or mouth

And then lengthen the exhalation making it twice as long as the inhalation. For example, if you inhaled for a count of 4, exhale for a count of 8.

Continue this for seven cycles

After 7 breaths like this, let your breathing return to normal and tune in to how you are feeling physically and emotionally, and feel how you are breathing.

Applications:

- Insomnia/before bed
- Anger management
- Anxiety

5: 5: 10 ratio

Inhale through the nose for a count of 5

Hold the breath (without tension) for a count of 5

Slowly exhale through the nose or mouth for count of 10

Applications:

- Insomnia/ before bed
- Anger management
- Anxiety

4: 7: 8 ratio

This technique should form part of your evening wind down routine, which means switching off from electronic devices, and activating your body's natural rest and digest mode.

As you get into bed, move and stretch to make yourself comfortable. Give yourself a few soft sighs of relief as you dump out tension. Turn towards the breath and the sensations in your body. Feel like the breath is drawing your attention away from the mind and into the body. Feel your body becoming soft and heavy. Inhale through the nose smoothly expanding your belly and your chest for a slow count of 4. Hold the breath in your lungs for a count of 7. Try not to hold the breath with tension or muscular effort. Try to relax your body as you hold the breath. Exhale very slowly and gently through the nose for a count of 8.

Repeat 10 times, as you feel yourself gently slipping into a deep relaxation.

In both the above techniques, the focus here is on the exhalation, prolonging the pause after the inhale and lengthening the exhale. This serves to powerfully stimulate the vagus nerve, supporting the body to deeply relax and slip into sweet slumber.

Humming Bee breath (Brahmari)

This comes from a yoga breathing (Pranayama) technique. Brahmari is a Sanskrit word that means "bee" and is named for the humming sound that bees make. The sound is soothing for a spinning mind, and the practice lengthens the exhalation without excessive strain.

Sit comfortably, with the back tall and shoulders relaxed. Start by taking a few natural breaths and close your eyes. Then, keeping the lips lightly sealed, inhale through the nostrils.

When you exhale close off the ears with the thumbs and gently place 2 fingers over your closed lids.

Exhaling, make the sound of the letter M, essentially a humming sound. Sustain the sound until you need to inhale. Then repeat: Inhale through the nose, then hum like a buzzing bee as you exhale. Continue by inhaling as needed and exhaling with this sound for several minutes. You can practice as long as it feels good.

Brahmari can be used as a regular daily practice to encourage relaxation or as an on-the-spot remedy. Because of the buzzing sound, however, it's the kind of practice that you might not choose to do in public. If you are out somewhere and experiencing anxiety, look for a place that's relatively private, like a bathroom or your parked car.

Most people struggle to relax and are not even aware of the amount of tension the body habitually holds. Test the ability to relax on the exhale. Deepen the inhale slightly through the mouth or the nose. Invite a full free exhale and notice any holding patterns and areas of chronic tension. Encourage an open jaw, relaxed throat, full and free yawning and release of joints and muscles with the exhale. Invite and enhance a very natural breathing reflex: the sigh of relief, which is an inbuilt in recovery loop that nature has provided to help us to deactivate the stress response and reboot the system.

You might need to use props, loosen restrictive clothing, or use touch to facilitate deeper relaxation. Encourage sound on the exhale, the sound of an exaggerated sigh. Use the passive soft exhale to relax and release tension from the body. The idea is to snap the exhale loose, to release the air quickly and completely, allowing the elastic tendency of

the muscles, gravity and atmospheric pressure to facilitate the exhale. You may need to encourage the feeling of complete exhale by pushing gently on the chest, encouraging more 'emptying'.