



How the Breath Controls the Mind

A Conversation – Knoff Yoga Student and Master Teacher James Bryan

Hello!

Hope the days are going well for you. I was watching some Australian news. It appears things have become world-wide issues. What have you guys been doing to stay occupied? You can't have classes right now?

I have a hard time doing stuff. Just trying to call someone or certain things I struggle with. I don't have any direct contact with many people that truly know me or care for me. I think about death a lot. It's not all bad I guess. It's not a poor old me I need attention type thing. I think I have a hard time living in the moment and I dwell on the past.

Do you ever think about dying?

Dear Student,

Yes, I do think about dying as I am going to be 67 in September and Nicky will be 82 in a few days. It is good to realize that everyone on the planet will die - no one escapes. This makes me appreciate how valuable and important life is. This appreciation motivates me to make the most of my days. Instead of getting depressed or anxious, I am motivated to action and grasp the day in both hands.

The lesson today is to learn about how the breath controls the mind.

All humans have a central nervous system(CNS) and an autonomic nervous system (ANS). The ANS controls the automatic functions of the body. You don't have to think about pumping your blood, digesting your food, growing your hair, or breathing. It is all automatically done for you.

You don't have to think about breathing, even when exerting yourself with vigorous exercise as the ANS takes care of the breath. But, you can take control it if you wish. You can deliberately hold your breath, make the breath longer or shorter, or faster or slower.

Learning how to control your breath is vitally important if you want to control your mind. The mind and its emotional states are directly connected to how you breathe.

The autonomic nervous system (ANS) is a continuum, like a piece of string. It has two ends. One end is the sympathetic aspect and the other is the parasympathetic. You can compare these to the accelerator (sympathetic) and the brake (parasympathetic) of a car.

When you are suffering anxiety, it is like a car engine idling at a too high speed or rpm. This causes stress and extra wear on the engine parts. For the health of the engine you need to slow the idle down. To abate anxiety, you need to take control of your breath and slow it down.

With anxiety, you are either breathing too fast, too shallow, or holding your breath. This is like pressing on the gas in your car and causing the engine to rev. In your case it is causing anxiety.

To start with, sit down in an upright chair as you need to keep your spine active. That is, do not slouch into a lazy boy chair or couch. Something like a kitchen chair works well.

Do not rest against the back of the chair. Sit on the front part of the seat so your sitting bones are fully supported but, the back of your thighs are off the chair.

Place your feet hip width apart and keep them parallel with each other.

Place your hands on your upper thighs - palms down.

Breathing only through your nose on both the inhalation and exhalation. Keep your mouth closed. Inhale for 10 seconds, pause and hold the breath for 2 seconds, exhale for 10 seconds and pause again for 2 seconds. This makes for a 24 second breath cycle. Use a watch or clock to do this specific timing. Complete 10 cycles and then let the breath return to normal. Continue to sit quietly for 2 to 5 minutes before getting up.

The name of this technique is the Yogic Full Breath. When we are doing our yoga practice we do a quicker version because we are jumping around on a yoga mat. But, when you are sitting still and wanting to shift turbulent emotional states to something calmer, slowing down and balancing out the breath works wonders.

Practice the Yogic Full Breath every day. The best time is in the morning after you have had a shower, brushed your teeth and had a glass or 2 of water. If possible, do it before having breakfast. The second-best time is just before going to bed. Ideally do both, i.e. morning and evening.

Do this for 7 days and let me know what the effects are.

Namaste

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