Week 4: Breathing for Well-Being

It is estimated that we breathe 10,000 breaths a day. Why not make these breaths ones that re-balance us? Nurturing ourselves with the miraculous gift of our own breath is simple and amazingly effective. Yet, the practice of breathing is not something we consciously think about. As we move through our day, most of us are not aware of our breathing at all, nor of the reasons why steady, relaxed breathing is so vital for well-being.

Most of us breathe shallowly. In doing so, tension can build, taking up residence smack dab in the middle of your chest, or weighing heavily upon your head, neck and shoulders. You may have felt the truth of this as you became aware of this tension and the relief that came when you took deeper, more intentional breaths.

As we breathe deeply, our body receives specific benefits. The blood is oxygenated, which provides new, healthy blood that flows to our brain, enabling us to think more clearly. It flows to our organs to enhance new cell reproduction. It flows to our muscles and ligaments, helping them to strengthen and become more flexible. With deeper, abdominal breathing, our body can harness its own innate healing energy. This also invites our mind to relax and let go of stored-up negative, emotional energy and tiring thought processes. Deep breathing allows us to be quiet, to get in touch with the stillness within, which can bring peace of mind. In other words, deep breathing can enhance the quality of our physical, mental and spiritual selves—all at the same time!

Try breathing for the purpose of well-being and notice how much more peace-filled you feel. Begin by breathing in deeply through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. The idea here is to begin the inhale slowly, from the lowest point in your abdomen, filling from the bottom up. The exhale is done in reverse order, slowly, from the top of the lungs down to the bottom of your abdominal area, pushing air out from the deepest part of the belly.

When tension is high, practice intentional breathing for relief and relaxation. In this case, the exhale should be longer than your inhale. Inhale for 6 counts. Hold your breath for 1 count. Exhale for 8-10 counts. The longer exhale allows for the release of carbon dioxide from the lungs, which can be quite the culprit when it comes to tension.

Balanced breathing can be practiced anytime, anywhere: while driving, in the shower or tub, at your desk; upon rising in the morning and especially right before sleep; when watching television and while walking. It simply takes remembering to do so. Inner peace can be yours—breath by breath by breath.

Excerpted from Portable Peace: A Weekly Guidebook by Janice L. Lundy

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