

Upfront

The noise is deafening. Our world is fraught with incessant, hyperbolic, vitriolic blather...the sources are everywhere. Moderating forces are few. Angst begets angst. We are caught in a systemic societal spiral of overreaction. Competing for attention, when attention is a monetizable asset, has become a widespread business, with virtually no barriers to entry. It pays (often handsomely...and in many forms: Money, fame, power, influence, sex – a quintet of elusive and ingenuine proxies for hard-earned and even-harder-to-preserve self-esteem) to be outrageous and loud.

“Take a breath.”

This seems like a trite directive, given that you take roughly 20,000 of them each day. And you're not even trying. But maybe you should. Controlled breathing, a tool used by spiritual practitioners for millennia, can change your life. And, you know what they say: Change your life, and you can change the world.

If you breathe deliberately, with intention, the potential benefits are manifold. Deep and controlled breathing has been shown to reduce stress, increase alertness, and boost your natural immunity. For centuries, yogis have used breath control to sharpen mental focus and bolster vitality. Buddha, himself, declared meditative breathing to be a gateway to enlightenment.

But, perhaps, you're skeptical of anything that seems conspicuously New Age. Let's consult modern science, then. From biology labs to neuroscience conclaves, researchers are confirming the power of conscious attention to your elemental in- and exhalations. Various studies have tested and concluded that sound breathing practices can reduce symptoms of anxiety, insomnia, PTSD, depression, attention-deficit disorder, and other lousy stuff.

How does it work, exactly? With respect to comprehensive understanding of the applicable forces, it's relatively early days. But there are important academic findings that begin to unveil the magic hiding in the millions of tiny, flying particles within each human breath. One theory posits that controlled breathing can alter the response patterns within the body's autonomic nervous system, which controls unconscious processes like heart rate and digestion, as well as reactions to stress. Changing your

breathing signals the brain to adjust the parasympathetic collection of neural connections under its control, thereby slowing heart rate and digestion and promoting feelings of calm. Meanwhile, the sympathetic system is affected, too. It directs the release of stress hormones like cortisol, and stress can trigger mental illnesses like anxiety and depression. Cortisol serves many purposes, among them is its function as the body's alarm system. It prompts us to choose to fight or flight. When your cortisol “spigot” stays on too long, you risk emotional and psychological distress. Regulate the cortisol spikes, which can be achieved through controlled breathing, and you're on your way to brighter times.

What's the point? You ask. Is the guy writing this somehow showing off. Weaving together neuropsychology, a 2,500-year-old (give or take) religion...the earth's fourth largest, and the holy grail of improved digestion into fewer than 500 words (476 to this point, but what's a superfluous sentence or two among friends?). Nah.

It's more like...I've had it. Everything is catastrophic and urgent and diabolically motivated, nowadays. Nevermind the smoke, everywhere there is straight-up fire. Trust is a quaint relic. Either an individual or an institution is irredeemably corrupt, or someone who doesn't agree with him or it will find a way to convince you he or they is/are...true or not. Have we reached an irreversible inflection point...where humans with good and sincere and noble intentions are overwhelmingly outnumbered by everybody else?

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change...” so Reinhold Niebuhr's “Serenity Prayer” begins. He could have added a fourth item to his three-pronged divine plea. After, “...the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference,” he might have asked for “the lungs to draw a particularly deep and cleansing breath.”



To contact The Skinnie with your ideas, responses, letters and more, email us at mail@theskinnie.com



We are fiduciaries.

Fiduciary

[fi-doo-shee-er-ee] noun

Someone that is legally and ethically required to put your best interest before their own.

A partner, whose sole focus is your financial well-being.

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