

DEEP BREATHING RELAXATION MEDITATION

by Ezra Bayda

The autonomic nervous system is divided into two branches – the sympathetic and the parasympathetic. The sympathetic is associated with high levels of anxiety, e.g., rapid heartbeat, shakiness, etc. The parasympathetic is associated with calm, e.g., lower heart rate, etc. The two branches cannot both be dominate at the same time, so the practice is to cultivate the parasympathetic response of calm, and to learn to override the sympathetic response of panic.

To cultivate the parasympathetic response, do the following deep breathing meditation at least two times a day.

With eyes closed, take 5 deep breaths through the nose and exhale slowly through the mouth while you say “Relax.” Let body relax.

Think of someone or something you love to help activate the heart center.

If you’ve established a visualization of a peaceful place – a place of “Sanctuary” - you can include that here and throughout the remainder of the meditation.

Count breaths from 50 to 1, breathing deeply. Count on the exhale.

Feel the breath enter through the nose. Feel it in the chest. Then feel it in the abdomen area, letting it “soften the belly” on both in-breath and out-breath.

Maintain an intense focus of awareness of the breath in the body.

As you soften the belly feel the tension drain out of you and sink into the earth.

When you’ve finished counting to one, repeat the following statements ten times, to solidify the association between the deep breathing and the parasympathetic response:

“When I count back from 50, I feel calm, relaxed and safe.”

To end, acknowledge and feel the calm and relaxed state in the body.

DEEP BREATHING AND DISTRESS

by Ezra Bayda

The following use of deep breathing is a phobia or panic desensitization process.

Once you've developed the ability to trigger the parasympathetic response through counting (and this takes doing the exercise at least twice a day for several weeks), you're ready to start the desensitization process.

Start by doing the deep breathing of counting backward from 50.

Once you've reached the count of one you pre-create the fearful situation, allowing yourself to go through the whole experience. In pre-creating the experience, be as specific as possible – visualizing where you will be, what will happen, what you fear, etc.

Continue the deep breathing/counting until the anxiety subsides.

When done, include feeling relieved and acknowledging that you did ok.

Note: during the visualization, if you have even a little anxiety, which is the old brain or sympathetic response of bodily fear, you stop and count back from 50 until it subsides. Then you continue. You may not get through the entire imagery the first several times, but you never try to push through the anxiety. Take a deep breath and start counting until it subsides, thereby reinforcing the parasympathetic response of calm.

The day of the difficult procedure or experience, you only use the deep breaths and counting. Just starting to count back from 50 should lower the anxiety level significantly. You can do this all day, but most especially at the time of the fearful event.

If anxiety is strong one can also add EMDR bilateral stimulation with the hands or eyes.

SANCTUARY

by Ezra Bayda

In difficult moments it is sometimes helpful to be able to go inward to your own place of sanctuary – a place that has associations of safety and calm. It is best to establish this place in our memory before difficulties arise so it can be called forth when needed.

To establish a sanctuary recall some physical place from your past where you have good memories, where you felt most relaxed.

Picture the place – recalling the specifics of colors, smells, sounds, etc. – remembering the feelings of safety, calmness and happiness that you felt when you were there.

Find a word that best describes your feelings, such as “calm” or “peaceful” or “safe.”

As you remember the place, say the word that describes it while breathing deeply - inhaling through the nose into the chest and belly areas; and exhaling slowly through the mouth.

Do this for at least 25 breaths, saying at the end, “When I remember the (Luxembourg Gardens) I feel peaceful and safe.”

Do this 2 times/day for 2-3 weeks. This will establish the place of sanctuary in the memory, and when recalled it will help trigger the parasympathetic nervous response – to counter any anxiety that has arisen.

Once established, the sanctuary visualization can be added to the Deep Relaxation Meditation of counting backwards from 50 to 1.

My Sanctuary – Luxembourg gardens: sitting on a bench, 70 degrees, sunny, gentle breeze, flowers, birds, blue sky with pretty clouds. Peaceful. Safe.