Movement lesson

Angela 2 — Week 5, Day 4, Session 3 — 51 minutes

Summary: Four-phase breathing is a way back to grounded presence that can be done anywhere, with care for the gaps and how each breath begins. Chest and belly expand and diminish in sitting, on the back, and on the front, with a downward fullness on the exhale. Standing, the inner rhythm is quieter and more whole.

Four-phase breathing

So, in this lesson, we're going to return to one of the great, great, great allies in my experience for returning to presence, for this grounded, centered presence. And what's so helpful about it is that you can do it anywhere.

It's the four-phase breathing, and I do not go a day where there aren't many moments during the day where that's a thing. It's such a help for creating pauses and creating space in the inner life.

Those gaps in the breath are like a rhythm for the organism that create gaps in— if it's revved, or if it's needing some spark, it allows a recalibration of the inner rhythm.

So I use that quite frequently, because, you know, our breath is innervated from multiple levels of your brain. And when you begin to consciously experiment with it, you're not only working with it at a conscious level, you're also affecting other levels. And you can really get into the autonomic nervous system through working with your breath.

This is why the yogis so focused on different styles of breath, and different ways of working with the breath.

So just the four-phase breathing, with the emphasis— clarity in the gaps, and especially how you initiate the exhales and how you initiate the inhales. Those movements influence the smoothness with which your diaphragm can work at other times. So it's like a training for your whole breath mechanism.

So there are many levels in which the four-phase breathing is very helpful.

Sitting

So let's just start sitting. And I'm going to introduce the picture that we can have four ways of attending to our inhale, and four ways of attending to our exhale. And then we're going to work with this in different positions.

So, first. The next breaths, as you inhale— I'm worried you're not going to be comfortable sitting there. Would a chair— well, a chair is good. A chair is good.

Okay, so. The next few breaths, each of these is four phases, but I'm just going to speak out how you breathe, how you direct either your inhale or your exhale.

The next few breaths, inhale, expanding your chest. When I say expand, I don't mean making yourself feel tense. A smooth expansion in all directions.

Pause. And then a smooth exhale. Not trying to control how the exhale happens.

And again, inhaling, expanding the chest.

Pause. Listen how you pause, how you stop your breath.

Exhaling, how you enter, how you stop, you pause.

Inhale, chest. If my rhythm is too slow or too fast, you can play with it.

And I'll let you have your own rhythm right now, still inhaling, chest, expand.

These next breaths, inhale with the abdomen expanding. Sink down towards the bottom of your pelvis. Feel how you stop the inhale. Then how you start it. You let it go.

Next breaths, feel your chest dropping, getting smaller. Not a strong contraction, but feel as if, as you inhale, there's a decrease in the expansion of the chest. The chest recedes a little bit, pulls in in all directions.

How can you inhale with the chest getting smaller?

You're best not to get tight, just finding a way to drop inches.

Four phases. Then please, feel that the belly could come in as you inhale.

Distinct phases to the breath throughout this lesson, except when I give you a pause.

Now, with your exhale, find a way to exhale expanding your chest. You grow in your chest, so there's a movement of your torso that's next to the breathing, but is actually free from the breathing.

Anyone feeling lost right now?

Good, and now the exhale filling out your belly. Exhale, letting your belly get bigger.

The feeling of a downward movement, and as you might remember from the second week, this is key to our capacity to have a fullness in challenging situations.

This is used in the martial arts a lot, in old, old time Zen practice. This is what's sometimes called paradoxical, where there's a pushing out into the abdomen with the exhale, out and down.

And then when you exhale this time, let your chest fall.

And these next times, let your belly come in as you exhale.

Just breathe naturally for the next few moments, sensing the inner rhythm of your whole self, as well as your breath.

And please lie on your back.

On the back

Just rest here, not trying to breathe any particular way.

Take off your glasses. Get comfortable.

[Silence 48 seconds]

Please bend your legs.

And so, remember we're listening for smoothness, particularly at the ending and beginning of a phase. Each of these can be done in a more contracted way or in a more flowing way, and of course we're looking to get more lighter and flowing.

The next few breaths, inhale, expanding your chest.

[Silence 45 seconds]

And switch to expanding your abdomen with your inhale. And go all the way down, towards the bottom of your pelvis. Also include the back towards the sacrum.

The pause after the exhale might be briefer than the others, but still let it be distinct. Don't rush through it. We want that open space.

And during the pauses is a wonderful time just to feel the inner state. It feels usually so different when we're full of air or when we're empty.

And as we looked at in the second week, different people have different preferences. Some really like slow air there. It's a space, endlessness. For some people, that's a little uncomfortable.

Inhale, letting your chest fall. How can you decrease the volume of your chest and let the air in?

Keep feeling that.

Inhale, letting the belly come in.

[Silence 39 seconds]

Exhale, expanding your chest. You let that volume grow as the air goes out.

Be really inside your torso, feeling how those ribs can move. There's all this possibility. Air is going out and the chest expands.

And then, take your time letting the belly get full with the exhale.

Is it subtle? A gentle pushing downward that goes with that.

As you're doing this, let your head turn left and right so that the neck is free from this downward pushing on the exhale. Let your head turn left and right. There's still the four-phase breathing.

Can the head be free from the four-phase breathing?

Leave that, please, just rest. Just feel the inner rhythm.

[Silence 31 seconds]

On the front

Please come onto your front.

Sense the whole front of yourself in contact with the floor where you touch. A feeling of support and contact.

Just lightly, lightly begin to turn your pelvis, lifting one side a little bit, letting the leg roll a little, and the knee bend slightly, and then the other side.

Just go back and forth, lightly, letting your pelvis, abdomen, chest get familiar with the floor. Light, light.

Good. And pause. Feel free to change over your arms and your head whenever you want to. Okay, so you're free to do that.

And inhaling, expanding your chest. Feel in all directions how the chest can grow.

And then feel how you could inhale, decreasing the size of your chest. How can you find that? How can you do that without a sudden contraction?

And then inhaling, increasing the fullness of your abdomen, all around, include the back, the whole area around that midsection. Feel how you can get full there with the inhale.

And also feel how you could decrease the size of your abdomen. You can pull it in gently as you inhale.

And then please put your forehead on your hands.

Just listen to the breath as it is, where you feel it, what its rhythm is like.

And letting the right side of your pelvis come away from the floor, slide your right knee a bit out to the side. Just feel that movement.

And just pause there with the knee drawn up.

And exhale, letting your chest get larger, letting it expand as you exhale smoothly.

How can you increase the volume in your chest? And for a lot of us, this is really working with some very old contractions. You can expand with the exhale.

[Silence 31 seconds]

Lengthen your right leg. Pause for a moment comfortably on your front. You can turn your head if you like.

You bring your forehead back to your hands, and your left knee out to the side.

As you exhale, let your belly come in.

A smooth transition in the breath and in the movement, in the way the belly moves.

And now with the exhale, get full down into your pelvis.

Linger here. If I was going to say there's one most important one I'm hoping that you'll receive—and they're all important. This fullness downward with the exhale. So very helpful.

Helps release the contractions in the abdomen. Really works with a lot of the old contractions towards the pelvic floor.

Good. And lengthen your leg and please come onto your back.

Crossed legs

And just listen to the rhythm of the inner state, the rhythm of the inner world.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Bend your legs, cross your right leg over your left leg, and— if your lower back is feeling challenged at the moment, you might want to just have the feet standing next to each other. Listen, or do the movement very small.

The leg is crossed, the right is over the left, and it's crossed all the way over. It's not the lower leg sitting.

And so slowly, gently begin to move your knees a little to the right and back, just a number of times. Just kind of get familiar with that pattern. Just to the right and back to neutral.

And let your head mirror the motion, so your nose is approximately at the angle of your knees. So we're just going rightward from neutral, and back to center, and you're following that through your whole spine.

Continuity, a consistency of quality, just to the right.

And then these next few movements, let your head go left as your knees go right. And again, at approximately the same angle away from center. So you're tracking all through.

Good. And then come back to neutral and uncross.

[Silence 40 seconds]

Cross your right leg over your left. Actually, I'm sorry, cross your left leg over your right.

Just take a few moments to experiment going leftward. Sensing that, and letting your head go leftward, letting the nose be approximately at the same angle as the knees.

And again, listening to a continuity of movement. Not sudden lurching is the kind of flow.

In these next movements, let the head go opposite. Head right, legs left.

And then come back to neutral, and uncross your legs.

[Silence 2 minutes]

Bend your legs, cross the right over the left, and let the legs go right, to some comfortable place, not pushing it, and you can always change that. And you're just letting your head be as it is.

And inhale, expanding your chest. Pause. Exhale, expanding your belly.

Do that a few times. Inhale, expanding your chest. Exhale, expanding your belly.

Once you've done two or three complete cycles of four-phase, bring your knees back to neutral. Keep them crossed. Back up to neutral.

This time, in a moment you'll go rightward, and what you're going to do is inhale, expanding your belly. Exhale, expanding your chest.

Go ahead to the right. Inhale, expanding your belly. Smoothly let your chest grow with the exhale. Listen in all directions.

Just a little bit. The knees don't— you don't need to go to your limit at all.

Good. When you've done two complete cycles, come back to neutral. Uncross your legs.

Just rest for a few moments. Breath.

[Silence 46 seconds]

Bend your legs, left over right, and now you'll be inhaling, decreasing the size of your chest, exhaling, decreasing the belly. The belly comes in with the exhale, the chest drops with the inhale.

The legs are to the left, and as you inhale, the chest gets smaller. As you exhale, the belly gets smaller.

And then reverse that. Inhaling, let the belly get smaller. Exhale, let the chest get smaller.

Let the knees come back to neutral. Uncross your legs.

Just take hold of your knees for a moment. Bring your knees towards your chest. Just holding your legs like that, holding your knees towards your chest comfortably, gently, lightly.

Inhale, expand your chest. Exhale, expand your belly.

Inhale, expand your chest. Exhale, expand your belly.

Last one is inhale, expand your belly. Exhale, expand your belly.

Feel— how are you going to do that? There needs to be something happening during the pause, so you can gently fill your abdomen with your inhale and get full with the exhale as well.

That's good. Let your legs come down, and just listen to the rhythm. Your inner life, the breath.

[Silence 40 seconds]

To standing

Please roll up to sitting.

Can you, just for a minute, stay there. Just feel the rhythm of the inner movement.

Feel the volume inside and the sense of space in the belly and chest.

The qualities of the inner world at the moment.

[Silence 33 seconds]

It's good to stand.

Listen to how the breath comes.

Feel where there is an opening. The breath feels different than usual.

Again, listening to the inner rhythm, a sense of what happens, taking this time with four phases of breath in this way.

[Russell:] What do you notice? Who has something—

[Participant:] My back. But I can breathe into my back.

[Russell:] Yeah. The breath comes back in there. Is there any feeling connected to that? You notice nothing? Safe?

[Participant:] Just expanded.

[Russell:] Yeah.

[Participant:] Yeah. Seems— yeah. Makes me think about nodding with that, yeah. All at the same time, rather than parts.

[Participant:] It feels, maybe more than in usual ATMs, a general quieting in the system.

[Russell:] So, next step, let's do a little bit outside before we then come in and do a resource process. What do I want to do? Yeah, we'll go outside.