

## Breathing Through

When you experience pain what do you do? Does it depend on the type of pain? Would your choice of action change if it was physical, emotional, relational, or spiritual pain? Regardless, if you jump around after stubbing your toe, scream aloud when your lover pisses you off, or seclude yourself after failing financially, when you experience some form of pain you contract. You tighten up to protect yourself. This is a natural reaction. You were living at some level of openness, it was wounded, and now you are contracting in order to protect and recover.

The problem arises when you choose to stay contracted. You were living with a certain degree of openness, you got hurt, and now you are living with a lesser degree of openness. You have closed up. While you might feel safer in this protected place, the truth of who you are is more open. The way to move back to your previous open state is to breath through your pain.

You may have heard this phrase before "breath through your pain", but what exactly does that mean. When you breathe through your nose and mouth your lungs expand and fill with air. Air contains oxygen, which is a fundamental element we require to live. So essentially, when you breath in, your are inhaling life force. Every time you inhale you are drawing in vital air, expanding your lungs, nourishing your entire being. The key word here is expand. You breath in and you expand.

Next time you see somebody in pain watch his breathing. His breathing probably will be very shallow and constricted or he might be holding his breath. Most people when then experience an intense burst of pain tightly hold their breath, which actually increases the pain. Life-giving oxygen is no longer moving freely, it's become stagnant. In any moment, the longer you hold your breath the more acutely stuck you become in what is going on for you.

Breathing through your pain is to *expand through* your pain. This can be done with any type of pain - physical, emotional, relational, or spiritual. You can practice this now while you are comfortable and safe.

Take a long, slow, deep breath through your nose and exhale just as slowly. Only pause briefly as you switch from inhale to exhale and exhale to inhale. Repeat this a few times to feel a rhythm. Now, pick a body part. The back of your right hand, your left knee or your lower

back. Continue to breath in and out with long, slow, deep breathes yet now become aware of that body part. Keep breathing in the same rhythmic pattern while keeping your attention on that physical area.

After a minute or so of doing this feel the breath come in both through your nose and in *through* you chosen body area. Inhale through your elbow, toe, or tummy. Once you've reached the fullness of the breath, exhale through your nose and also the body area. If you are having trouble, simply feel the body area as acutely as possible. Feel the texture on the skin and the muscles below. If you need to, place your hand on that body part to become more in contact with it. With your breath still long, slow and deep keep feeling the sensation of that area. Now again, shift your breathing so that you are breathing *through* that area.

This is a practice you can do anywhere. Pick a body part and breath through it. When you're ready, do this when experiencing physical pain. If you feel sharp, tightness in a joint, feel it acutely and breathe slowly through it. If you have a headache, feel the throbbing pressured ache and breathe through it. When next you stub your toe and are jumping around the room, feel the intensity of the pain and breathe through it.

This may appear very basic and whimsical, yet the profundity of this simple practice is truly immense. People have endured and expanded through intense amounts of suffering, from all forms of injury and disease, including battle wounds and cancer, by breathing through their pain. This technique has been taught and practiced across the world for thousands of years, opening individuals through their painful contractions.

And what is fascinating, is this technique can be used for any type of pain. Distraught because you did terrible at an interview, feel the distraught-ness and breath through it. Horrified because somebody stole your laptop with your life's work on it, feel the gut-dropping horror, and breath through it. Scared to open up to another person who may break your heart, feel your vulnerable fear, and breath steadily through it. Long, slow, deep breathes through any overwhelming emotion, mental anguish, spiritual turmoil, or physical pain to once again open you up to the truth of who you are.

It is your choice to stay contracted while experiencing pain. You have every right to protect yourself from further damage. It is completely reasonable to be cautious and avoid vulnerability. Yet why not see

what happens when you do that AND breathe through your pain. Break your arm, feel the engulfing pain, hold it close to your body, and carefully make your way to the hospital *while* breathing through your pain. The fear of exposing yourself to somebody new arises, speak cautiously to avoid having your heart stung *and* breath through your fear. Experience fully the heart wrenching anguish of losing your child to cancer *while* slowly and deeply breathing through the immense suffering you will carry for some time.

It is important to know that - breathing through your pain will not get rid of the pain. Suffering will end when the many variables that are involved have either burnt out or faded away. This may take moments or an entire lifetime. What *breathing through* offers is a way to stay open in the midst of that. Your desire to stay open through your lifetime, with unavoidable moments of pain, discomfort and suffering, depends solely on how authentic you wish your life to be. Experience pain, contract in reaction, and stay living less than who you are. Or practice breathing through the cuts, kicks, and torment, opening and expanding wider than your reaction. Until every moment you breathe is a complete authentic expression of the life you are experiencing right now.