

Orange Level Breathing Themes

Fourth Breathing Theme - When to Breathe

It's important to get comfortable with when to breathe in and out during a posture. This will help you get the most out of the pose and help it flow better for you. It will keep you from resisting the pose, and can increase your flexibility while doing it.

Use this breathing theme when you've kind of got the idea of a pose, (you've used it a few times), but it's still not second nature.

Do this breathing theme every now and then when you practice the pose. At other times, go back to doing the *First Breathing Theme*, until you're completely comfortable with the pose.

The Fourth Breathing Theme is simply this: practice when to breathe in and when to breathe out when doing the pose.

In general:

You breathe out while going into - or out of - a pose.

But not always. (We can't have it that simple or yoga teachers would be out of work.)

This general rule sometimes conflicts with a second general rule:

- You breathe in when your body opens up.
- You breathe out when your body closes shut.

You can see it's helpful to have instruction on when to breathe in and when to breathe out. Why not let your body be your teacher? Try doing a pose and see when your body naturally wants to breathe in and out. Chances are your instincts will be good.

If not, get a cat – and study them closely.

Working with the Fourth Breathing Theme

You get the most out of the *Fourth Breathing Theme* when you use it along with a full, step by step procedure for executing the entire posture. The full procedure goes like this:

1. Prepare
2. Relax
3. Focus
4. Acquire
5. Adjust
6. Relax
7. Breathe!
8. Release

Prepare to do the Pose

Get into a good starting position, so that you can do the pose with the least chance of injury! If you line your body up at the start, you'll probably get better extension when you're in the pose. You'll be more amazing to onlookers!

How to line yourself up depends on the pose you're doing. Chances are you're starting from standing, sitting or lying down. Learn to stand, sit and lie down with all your body parts lined up in the right places and you'll be pretty much on track. There are also little tricks you can do to start off well. For that, you'll have to refer to my *Clever Yoga Tricks that Any One Can Do (and Appear to Be Amazingly Flexible) without props*. It's not in the book stores yet, so nag publishers for me, so that they'll publish it.

Relax

You're just about to stick your foot behind your ear and you're supposed to relax?! It's not as hard as it sounds. Once you're lined up to do the pose, you bring your attention to your breathing. (This will take your mind off the impending gymnastics.)

Take a nice breath in (enjoy feeling your body opening up!)

When you breathe out, feel your body letting go as you let go of the breath.

Do this for a few breaths. Particularly feel some key areas as they let go – areas that are often tight for you. For most people that includes the shoulders, and the lower back / hip area.

Also take a moment to feel the muscles around your eyes dissolving and sliding down. As go the eyes, so goes the body.

Remember

Relaxed Muscles Stretch Better!

Focus

Think about what you're about to do. (Even people jumping out of air planes think it through first – so you're in good company.) Imagine yourself going into the pose and doing the pose with excellence! Imagine each body part flowing effortlessly into just the right position.

Reclaim your breathing theme here. By that I mean, remember to go back into your breathing theme – cause, chances are, you've forgotten about it!

If you're doing the *This Fourth Breathing Theme*, just notice your breath as it comes and goes. Your *Orange Level Breathing Themes* are simply remembering to breathe in and out, which is the essence of yoga!

Acquire

And – you're off into the posture.

Not! We can't have people doing yoga willy nilly all over the place. That will eliminate the need for classrooms – and create more unemployment.

One of the most common mistakes beginners make is to launch themselves into the pose. This is with wholehearted enthusiasm that I admire and try to emulate. However, you're like to get hurt this way and you'll lose all the benefits of that careful lining up, relaxing and focusing.

First make a deliberate decision that – at the next appropriate place in your breathing – you will go into the posture.

Then – at the next appropriate place in your breathing – go into the posture. This is usually while you're breathing out, but not always.

Try to use some grace and control here. However, if you feel like a tangled ostrich, that's OK. Poise is something we'll work on with later breathing themes. Just try to go a little slowly.

Adjust

Now you're in the pose. Chances are, you're already thinking of getting out of it. However, distract yourself and buy a little time, by checking for pain. If anything is in pain, or if you feel muscles burning, you will need to make adjustments.

Pain is your body's way of saying "Stop That!"

Continued pain is your body's way of saying "And I mean it!"

When you push your muscles to the point of pain, they are getting little rips and tears in them – that's what's hurting. To start to repair these rips and tears, and to protect these small injuries, your body sends lots of blood and fluids to the muscle. This makes the muscles swell a little – stiffening them up. So, the result of pushing yourself to become amazingly flexible is – you become *less* flexible. For as long as 6 weeks!

If you're in pain, either:

- You've already gone too far.
- You're not aligned well.
- You're doing a pose that's too hard for you and need to try a simpler pose that builds you up to it.
- Yoga is not about pain! It is not about enduring suffering. The reason Yoga masters appear to be overcoming suffering in their poses, is that they're not suffering! They've learned little tricks, they've learned how to execute the poses well and they've coaxed their bodies into these positions over years of practice.

Relax! (Again)

Remember the deep sense of relaxation you had just before you went into this pose? Well, you've probably lost it by now. You can return to that feeling. (Honest.) Here's the trick. You're going to forget about the pose. You're going to let go of wondering if you're doing it right. You're going to stop thinking about how you're not sure you can hold it much longer. You're going to stop worrying if you're up to this whole yoga thing.

Sure. But how? Go back to thinking about your breathing. Do your breathing theme.

Breathe!

For now, try this:

Draw slow breaths in.

As you breathe out, feel parts of your body letting go. Notice parts that aren't involved in the stretch. See how those drop away. Feel them let go and relax as you slowly let go of your breath.

In time, with lots of yoga practice, you'll be able to become deeply relaxed in a single breath – and then you can hold the pose as long as you like, even fall asleep in it! (Honest!)

Release

Let go of the pose. Sounds simple enough. But, we can't make it *that* easy for you. Just as you got into the pose deliberately, (with poise and grace, of course!), you can release it slowly and carefully.

Why is this important? First, you're less likely to injure yourself. Second, it's by acting slowly and deliberately that we build our muscles and gain control over what our bodies are doing. It's also going to give you time to *experience* what your body is doing – which is part of that mind-body connection you hear yogi's talk about so much.

So:

Start by deciding that you are about to let go of the pose, but don't let go yet.

At the next appropriate place in your breathing, ease yourself out of the pose.

And – this is very important – **take the time to feel the tension dissolving out of your muscles as they let go of the stretch.** Feel the muscles releasing and relaxing. Listen to them talking to you.

Chances are, your muscles are saying, "Ahhhhh! Thank you for giving me that stretch. And *thank you* for letting go of it!"

This moment can take about 20 seconds – which, for beginners, is about the time it takes for 4 – 6 breaths.

When you take the time to experience this last step, you start to enjoy what yoga is doing for you. It feels sooooo good to feel your muscles letting go of a stretch. You start to notice that you actually *do* like yoga. You start to realize that you *do* have muscles – in places you least expected. You started to get a feeling for the exact length and shape of those muscles. The muscles tell you how much they needed that pose, so you start to understand which poses are great for which muscles when your body is bothering you. And, very importantly, feeling your muscles relax gives them the chance to let go of the stretch completely.

In order to get the most out of the next stretch, your muscles have to let go of the last stretch completely. They are returning to their neutral state. To give you their best, they need to start from a relaxed, neutral state.

Remember: relaxed muscles stretch better!