

Fifth Breathing Theme - Exploring the Edge

We do not breathe in or out evenly. Every breath has several stages in it. Some stages flow quickly, some are slower, more halting. Some stages of breathing are relaxed and easy, some are tight.

Take a moment to notice your own breathing right now.

When you breathe in, notice the different stages. When is your breath tight? When does it flow freely? When is it quick? When is it slow? What parts of your body are engaged in breathing? At what stages are you using them?

There is no right or wrong answer here. There won't be a test on this. If you're a person who needs to know how well you're doing with this discovery exercise, write me and I'll give you a passing grade. Better yet, write down your own observations. You'll have a chance to compare these notes with notes written by the future you. That's the person who will be giving you your final grade.

Exploring the Edge

Next time you breathe in:

- Notice that you've probably only taken in a partial breath.
- Breathe in a little more.

Next time you breathe out:

- Notice that you can probably breathe out a little more air.
- Breathe out a little more.

Those moments when you breathe in a little more or breathe out a little more are “the edge of the breath”. The “edge of the breath” has a lot to offer you when you take the time to notice it. It will help you strength and tone your body. It will help you develop richer, fuller breathing; and it will help you relax more deeply than ever.

Working with the Fifth Breathing Theme

Now that you've been doing these Breathing Themes for a while, you might be starting to notice that – Hey! Your body is relaxing while you breathe out...! And even better, as your body relaxes, that stretch is increasing! See how flexible your body already is! That flexibility was in there all along, you've just needed to coax that flexibility into action using breathing strategies.

The more you do yoga, the more strong and flexible your body is becoming. It's by *Exploring the Edge* that you will be building that additional flexibility and strength. This is especially powerful for building muscle strength.

Exploring the edge builds great results in this way:

You get the best results by doing yoga poses three times. The first time you do any stretch, your body wakes up to the demands of the stretch and gives it a fair shot. Just like when you're first waking up and you kind of have a handle on your day but need to get the day started before you're in full swing. Your muscles are the same. They're saying "Hey. Stretch demand happening here. Golly, am I groggy. Feels good to stretch though!"

The second repetition, your body is awake and ready to give you what it thinks is its best. This is when you can get a really good stretch and feel like your muscles are really working for you. But your body is still holding back. When you give it a choice, your body will hold back a little bit from its maximum effort. It's holding something in reserve, "just in case". Stretching at this "comfortable limit" helps you get a refreshing work out without hurting yourself. You don't have to pay attention too closely, because you're still short of the extreme limit where you might injure yourself. Working at your comfortable limit tells you about your body's overall, general condition.

The third repetition is where you build flexibility and strength. This takes you to your extreme limit, (short of pain!). When your body works to its extreme limit, it pays close attention. It likes to have a safety margin between the demands you place on it and its limit – so your body will notice the demands you're placing on it and will send in an order to the muscles to build more strength and flexibility. Your body is deciding to move its safety margin, so that you can stretch to that limit and still have room for error. Result – you become stronger and more flexible. Hurray!

It's in this third repetition that you want to explore the edge of the breath and the edge of the stretch. How do you do that?

Working with the Fifth Breathing Theme

When you move into the pose, explore the edge of the breath. Chances are you can breathe out (or in) a little more. As you do that, you will discover you can stretch a little more than you expected. Take both the breath and the stretch to an extreme limit. (But not to the point of pain.)

Exploring the Edge can be done during any repetition of a yoga pose.

However, by the third round, your body is ready to go full out. This is when

Exploring the Edge will bring you top notch results.

