

## **DRE: MEDITATION ESSENTIALS**

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Everyone has their own destined path to follow. Often what works for one person might not work for another. This is what makes the vast system of Yoga so incredibly brilliant and inclusive. Yoga is unique to each individual.

When I meditate, teach meditation, or have a big moment to prepare for in life or at work, I find that time spent slowing down and breathing is vital. In athletics, we have the luxury of calling a time-out. In the world, late therapist and Yoga teacher extraordinaire, Jnani Chapman, R.N. called this “The Welcoming Phase” of one’s meditation or Yoga lifestyle practice. A few minutes of just welcoming yourself to yourself, wherever you are, being attentive to your inner environment [in thoughts, emotions, and feelings] and outer environment without judgment, and letting the whole world settle down.

In working with thousands of patients and clients over the years, I’ve found that everyone has their own methods and techniques that work for them. But, the traditional method of simply spending time being with and looking at one’s breath, especially aspects within the breath that are relatable to life, are often most helpful and most easily applied. This has the potential to create a dynamic impact, both while we are practicing and while we are living life.

Luckily, some of the essential elements of breathing also coincidentally happen to be some of the foundational aspects of meditation and modern life, which can be found in the acronym DRE:

**D – DEPTH**

**R – RHYTHM**

**E – EASE**

**DEPTH** as a physical experience can happen in several ways when encountering the breath. It might be that you deepen your breath vertically, i.e. breathing into the parts of your lungs (top or bottom) – whichever you tend not to favor or default toward. It also might be that you deepen your breath spacially. The concept of special deepening means you open up space circumferentially, 360 degrees around your spine. Some call this the “4 direction breath,” breathing to the front, back, and sides of your body by equally expanding your lungs and rib cages in all directions. [See picture.] The last way the breath might deepen physically is in the felt-sense of the breath, which is just where we feel more connection internally to our breath inside. This type of deepening that can’t really be put into words as we all physically feel our breath in our own personal way. Close your eyes and try it right now and feel how your breath deepens, which might change from sitting to sitting based on your needs. Just remember to open your eyes back up after and keep reading.

As a life lesson, many of us are looking for more depth, or more meaning, in our general day-to-day experiences in life. Deepening in a yogi’s life might be in simple tantric lifestyle methods like tasting food

deeper, deepening our listening to others, deepening our openness to our own potential and Grace, deepening a relationship or friendship with another, and/or ditching the cell phone and communicating to others in a deeper and more engaging way. When we focus on the depth of the breath, the depth of one's life also commonly becomes more empowered, in turn. It's the little things like taking a deep breath in the right moment that help deepen our connection to life.

**RHYTHM** when applied to the breath, can be thought of as speed and consistency. As Ferris Bueller famously said, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." And this is where one's rhythm becomes paramount. Meditation on the breath isn't necessarily to stop it, but to simply slow it down and enjoy it. This allows you to set the rhythm for your life internally, which according to the ancient Yoga masters, is true freedom.

If slowing down would feel good to you, perhaps consider lengthening your breath to slow it down. Scientifically, length and speed are inversely related when we breathe. In other words, the longer we breathe, the slower we breathe. Philosophically in Yoga, this is referred to as *langhana*, or the slowing down and lengthening of one's breath. The best part is, you get to decide what speed the rhythm plays at and you get to personally translate it to a consistent pattern that you establish for yourself and your breath.

Much like a musician plays notes that are strung together and form a song, the same consistency is essential with the notes of each breath when we practice. If the musician were to "check out" or no longer be present to his/her song, there would be an interruption of the rhythm and the song would sound funny – like bad jazz music. If we get lost in idle and random thoughts in meditation and "check out" without coming back, the flow of the practice is altered much like the aforementioned musician's jagged jazz song. Thus, consistency is one of the necessary sub-components of the rhythm of the breath.

In life, if you find things commonly spin out of control, then establishing a sense of rhythm and consistency in the things you do, starting with your breathing, might be incredibly helpful and harmonizing. Maybe clearing a space in your home for practice and setting up a time everyday that you'll visit and just sit in the space is what you need to do. That might help you delight in welcoming and establishing a new rhythm for your day. Or, consider the ways you might "show up" and be more consistent in your life, whether it is in showing up for others, showing up for your responsibilities, or showing up for yourself and putting good energy into manifesting your hopes and dreams. All of these are aspects of rhythm in life that the meditation practice can support.

**EASE** is the juicy part of the breath. Some call the ease in our breathing the peacefulness or the calmness that we experience. Others simply think of the ease as the refinement of one's breath. Refining the breath happens similar to how you'd refine a piece of wood using sandpaper. The sandpaper makes the wood easier and softer to the touch and the refinement of the breath smoothens out the breath and makes it as easy and comfortable inside the body physiologically. This is expressed in the body's ability to initiate the relaxation response, which is the polar opposite to the stress response. By, focusing on the ease of the breath, we cordially invite the relaxation response to the practice much

like a good friend is welcomed at a party – with comfort, openness, and easiness.

Ease, as the counter opposite to stress, is probably the thing we lack the most in modern society. A lack of ease in life seduces many people to develop habits and patterns of addiction, whether to drugs, alcohol, dramatic situations, sex, cell phone and social media use, and judgments. Sometimes a lack of ease even manifests by being overly attached, almost dogmatically, to more “positive” methods that are taken to excess like obsessively working out too much, vegetarian vigilantism, all-encompassing entrepreneurialism without a sense of life beyond it, and/or spiritual bypassing. To cultivate ease in life, we often need to give ourselves permission to do the things we like in life. For more specific examples, ease can express itself as any of the following: taking a nice warm bath, going for a walk, meditating, watching the sunset, playing at the beach, watching the clouds, putting on a silk or cashmere piece of clothing that feels good on your skin, taking time for *sadhana* (one’s Yoga and/or spiritual practice), and/or having a date night with your sweetheart. Those few moments of ease we gift ourselves with in life can be the difference between drudging through the days or, as Henry David Thoreau said, “[living] the life you’ve imagined.” So, give yourself permission to enjoy one aspect of ease each day and watch as, over time, life just feels a bit easier and less stressful. Try it. I guarantee you’ll like it!

All in all, DRE is a simple method of practice rooted in the overall integration of mind, breath, body, emotions, and life. Truly, meditation essentials! So, the next time you think of meditating or have a big moment to prepare for and need to put yourself in the right mood or the right “inner space,” just remember this Dr.’s DRE, and you’ll be well on your way to setting up an environment for success in your life and practice.