

Less is More

From "Professional Study Guide to the Sounder Sleep System, Part 1"

Copyright (c) 2008 by Michael Krugman. All Rights Reserved.

LESS IS MORE is a Guided Natural Breathing technique. It is designed to restore the natural rhythm and pattern of the breath. That natural breath rhythm and pattern provide the foundation for all our DayTamers, Mini-Moves, and other techniques. Whenever you practice any of them, you breathe naturally.

LESS IS MORE occupies a special place in the curriculum of the Sounder Sleep System. It is the first, simplest, and clearest way to demonstrate and teach natural breathing. It has a special simplicity and purity because it requires no voluntary movement. You simply place your hands on one of the three breathing spaces, and observe the movement. Then you take your hands away, and feel the effect. You will notice that your breath becomes freer, fuller, and more pleasurable as a result.

LESS IS MORE is not intended as a sleep-induction technique. Some may fall asleep when they practice it, and some may ultimately choose to employ it for that purpose. But that is not its primary purpose. Rather, it should be utilized for its beauty, simplicity, and efficacy as a Guided Natural Breathing technique. There is nothing else like it.

As a beginning instructor of the Sounder Sleep System, LESS IS MORE should be the first thing you teach people in any introductory course. It prepares your students for the next step, when you will teach a DayTamer or an Sleep-Inducing Mini-Move, and ask them to breathe naturally as they practice it. They will know exactly what you mean, because they have already had a beautiful, pleasurable, clear experience of what it means to "breathe naturally." That's LESS IS MORE.

Here are some further points to keep in mind:

1. The key to Natural Breathing is to avoid manipulation or control of the breath. We simply allow the breath to come and go of its own accord. For a variety of reasons, people need a little guidance, direction, and encouragement in order to achieve that. That is the purpose of all Guided Natural Breathing techniques.
2. The hands, which are designed for sensing and manipulating things outside ourselves, also provide an excellent tool for identifying and sensing something inside ourselves, in this case, the movements of respiration.

By identifying and exploring the movements of respiration with our external senses (in this case, the sense of touch), we become better able to sense the movements of respiration using our internal (proprioceptive and interoceptive) senses. A heightened ability to sense the movement of the breath, its rhythm and its pattern, is the essential skill of the Sounder Sleep System. This is addressed in one way or another almost by every technique we teach.

3. "LESS is More." We breathe in accordance with our own ever-changing, moment to moment, metabolic needs. During waking activities, our oxygen consumption (VO₂) is about 4000–8000 ml per minute. When we cease action and stand still, VO₂ declines to about 1000 ml. Lying down quietly brings it down to about 375 ml.

As we make the transition from quiet waking to light sleep, our need for oxygen declines yet another 15%. In deep, slow-wave sleep, it declines still further, and reaches its lowest values ever, in the range of 200–250 ml per minute or less.

Therefore, in order to achieve deep relaxation and fall asleep, we need LESS oxygen, not more. For our purposes, for the purposes of deep relaxation and sleep, LESS is MORE.

4. "Deep diaphragmatic breathing" is not indicated for deep relaxation and sleep. In fact, deep breathing actually INCREASES arousal levels, and increases the excitability of the cerebral cortex. In other words, deep breathing wakes you up! (Scientific support for this assertion is on your Study Materials page, in the Breathing section.)

The phrase "deep breathing" should be carefully rooted out from vocabulary of every Sounder Sleep teacher. WE DO NOT TEACH DEEP BREATHING. Deep breathing is counter-productive for deep relaxation and sleep. It produces greater arousal, not less.

In place of "deep" breathing, we advocate natural breathing. Natural breathing means that every part of yourself is available to participate in the movement of respiration, as needed.

(Please note the final phrase, "as needed." That is very specific. It means that not every part of yourself moves with every breath, but that every part is available for movement when and if it is needed. Our needs change according to what we do, how we feel, and many other factors.)

5. Our Natural Breathing techniques are designed to restore the natural rhythm and pattern of the breath, which are often disturbed by the stress of life in the modern world. Restoration of the natural breath is one powerful way to reset your body's biological clock. It is a first step toward re-establishing and restoring our body's overall biological rhythm, including the sleep-wake rhythm.

6. Natural Breathing is the foundation of all Sounder Sleep techniques. When you practice any Sounder Sleep technique, you breathe naturally. There is no manipulation, no control of the breath, ever.

Summary of the Practice

Prelude

Lie on your back and rest quietly for several minutes while practicing these principles of Natural Breathing:

- * Let your breathing be light, easy, and soft.
-
* Make no effort to breathe deeply or any special way.
-
* Simply allow your breath to come and go of its own accord.
-
* Take all the time you need for each breath.

I. Exploring The Lower Breathing Space

1. Place your hands on the Lower Breathing Space. Your hands lie palms down on your abdomen. The tips of your thumbs touch each other just above your navel, and the tips of your index fingers touch each other lower down. The space between the hands forms a triangular or heart-shaped opening. Your hands now lie on the front of the Lower Breathing Space.

2. Continue to practice Natural Breathing while making the following observations:

Observation 1: Each time you inhale, your belly rises and expands, and your hands rise with it. Each time you exhale, your belly sinks and relaxes, and your hands sink with it.

Observation 2: Each time you inhale and your belly rises and expands, the contact between your index fingers becomes less distinct. Each time you exhale and relax, the index fingers touch each other more distinctly.

3. Finally, separate your hands and lower your arms to the floor. Rest quietly for several minutes, as you continue to feel the movements and the rhythm of your breath there in the Lower Breathing Space.

II. Exploring The Middle Breathing Space

1. Place your hands on the Middle Breathing Space. Your right hand cradles the lowermost rib on the right side of your chest, and the left hand cradles the lowermost rib on the left side. Your thumbs lie on the lower part of your rib cage, your palms cradle the ribs on either side, and your fingertips lie on the upper part of your belly. Your hands now lie on the front of the Middle Breathing Space.

Arrange your hands and arms in such a way that there is contact between the fingertips of the two hands. For many people, the tips of the index and middle fingers meet each other quite comfortably. Discover the easiest, most natural way for you.

2. Continue to breathe naturally while making the following observations:

Observation 1: Each time you inhale, your ribs and the Middle Breathing Space rise and expand, and your hands rise with them. Each time you exhale, your ribs and the Middle Breathing Space sink and relax, and your hands sink with them.

Observation 2: Each time you inhale and the Middle Breathing Space rises and expands, the contact between your fingers becomes less distinct. Each time you exhale and the Middle Breathing Space relaxes, the fingers touch each other more distinctly.

3. Finally, separate your hands and allow your arms to rest on the floor. Rest quietly for several minutes, as you continue to observe the movements and the rhythm of your breath there in the Middle Breathing Space.

III. Exploring The Upper Breathing Space

1. Now, place your hands on the Upper Breathing Space, that is, on your upper chest, above your breast and below your collarbones. The four fingertips of your right hand lie a little to the right of your sternum, or breastbone. The thumb lies anywhere it comes to rest comfortably. Now do the same with your left hand. Your hands now lie on the Upper Breathing Space.

Arrange your arms and hands in such a way that there is a soft contact between the tips of the middle fingers, if possible. Discover the easiest, most natural way for you.

2. Continue to breathe naturally while making the following observations:

Observation 1: Each time you inhale, the Upper Breathing Space rises and expands, and your hands rise with them. Each time you exhale, your ribs and the Upper Breathing Space sink and relax, and your hands sink with it.

Observation 2: Each time you inhale and the Middle Breathing Space rises and expands, the contact between your middle fingers becomes less distinct. Each time you exhale and relax, the fingers touch each other more distinctly.

3. Finally, separate your hands and allow your arms to rest on the floor. Rest quietly for several minutes, as you continue to observe the movements and the rhythm of your breath there in the Upper Breathing Space.