



Calming the Performance Anxiety Beast Workshop 1

A Box of “Treats” to Choose From

How You Can Elegantly Care for Performance Anxiety with Simple Breathing and Posture Actions”

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Introduction:

We all have anxiety and it’s not about becoming anxiety-free. Rather, anxiety needs to be managed throughout our lives.

If we keep placing focus on anxious thoughts or feelings, that will add more connections in the brain relating to anxiety, which makes the anxiety more powerful. Reversing that trend, by calming the nervous system, is our main strategy in this workshop.

A person can manage anxiety by enlarging one’s field of perception to include other thoughts and sensations. This takes anxiety away from full attention and makes it become a smaller portion of that of which we are aware. This in itself is calming.

Plus, if actions we do are simple, gentle, and unrushed with easy breathing, that also calms us.

Ways to calm throughout everyday life:

Practices like meditation, yoga, tai chi, and the like can be part of our life style. Other means of cultivating calmness are development of larger life perspective through spirituality and contemplation, immersion in nature or the garden, or learnedness and appreciation of the wider human story. And of course, exercise, healthy eating, and enough sleep are the three key mainstays for our health.

For flutists, “Flute Stories” is a book of stories of flutists telling of their struggles and lessons learned. It is a way to know you are not alone, that you are part of a kinship.

Two practices to hone in on today:

breath prayer*

rest*

Ways to calm before a performance:

Alternate nostril breathing*

Five-pointed star*

Breathe in a deep inhale, pause, then allow the out breath to start and become a leisurely long exhale*

Perfect breath*

Four phases of breathing. When the breath is empty, the mind is empty.*

Thumb in palm*

Hands stroking*

Magic Maple Leaf*

Let your walking be elegant as you move onto the stage. No technique needed, the thought works.

Ways to calm during a performance:

Stay with an unrushed manner.

Sense your feet on the ground.

Play on the vertical axis, contrasted to the horizontal axis.* Playing on the vertical axis keeps one balanced. Horizontal axis playing throws off balance which increases anxiety.

Simply let the felt-sense of yourself be in the background of your attention.

Finding a word that works for you, like “gift,” that you can bring to mind when needing a larger framework of purpose or perception to very quickly calm and refocus. (This really helped me when a thought like “I wonder if I look okay” came into my head.)

Ways to calm after the performance:

Before you bow, pause for just a moment to sense your feet on the ground. Then bow, breathing smoothly. Enjoy it.

At some point, maybe back in the green room once the flute has been cleaned and put away, do a small ritual action like hands together with a smile, or hands down with

“pew!” sound, or hands raised above, to acknowledge your learning, growing, taking risks, your journey. Here’s to you!

Resources and Instructions from today’s workshop:

****breath prayer*** by christine valters paintner, Broadleaf Books, Minneapolis, 2021. (The lack of capitalization is author’s choice.)

***Rest:** Have leisurely time in good company, walk in nature, enjoy beauty, take a nap, sip beverage slowly, read, sit doing nothing, have space of time for putzing around the house, get a massage, unplug. Lastly, if in a hurry, remind one’s self that what needs to happen can be done in a rushed manner or an unrushed manner, and choose the latter.

***Alternate Nostril Breathing**

a Yoga technique

Bring your right hand to your nose. Press your thumb against the side of the right nostril, closing it. Breathe into the left nostril slowly and smoothly for four full counts (one-second counts basically). Then hold your breath for four full counts as you let go of the right nostril and place your fourth finger against the left nostril, closing it. Exhale through the right nostril smoothly and gently for six counts. Keep your hand as-is. Pause a moment and repeat: breathe in the same nostril, the right one, for four counts. Then hold breath for four counts while letting go of left nostril and placing thumb to close right nostril, then breathe out the left nostril for six counts. Then pause and breathe in the same, left, nostril and continue in this pattern for maybe another two to three times, or more.

You can play with variations. Count in six, hold six, out nine. Or four, four and eight. Or no counting, just approximating with the exhalation 1.5 to 2 times longer than the lengths of inhalation and breath holding.

***Five-Pointed Star**

Adapted from my yoga experience

Stand with legs fairly wide apart, arms out to the side a little higher than horizontal, and knees unlocked. Breathe in easily, then breathe out sensing your pelvis as the center of gravity, imagine lines growing from pelvis through the leg bones and feet into the ground. Breathe in, then breathe out and imagine lines growing from the pelvis up through the shoulders, arms, and out of the hands. Breathe in easily, then breathe out imagining a line grows from the pelvis up through each vertebral body of the spine, into the head and out the top center of the head. Then, breathing, sense yourself as a five-pointed star extending outwards from the pelvis through each point: feet, hands and head. When ready, lower arms smoothly and bring feet closer together again.

***Leisurely Long Exhale**

Adapted from common advice for anxiety

Breathe in smoothly and deeply. When the lungs seem satisfyingly full, pause distinctly and sense within yourself for the moment to begin exhale. And then allow the exhale to be very slow, luxuriant, leisurely. Rest for a moment at the end.

***The Perfect Breath** (Aka Coherent Breathing or Resonant Breathing) Adapted from *Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art* by James Nestor. Riverhead Books, New York. 2021

Breathe in gently for 5.5 or 6 seconds, then breathe out gently for 5.5 or 6 seconds. No pauses after an in-breath or out-breath, instead quietly allow for smooth continuous soft breathing. In his *Breath* book, Nestor says to sense the breath as being a circle.

When sitting or standing, be in an easily upright posture. If lying down, be in a comfortable position. Do up to ten times, or, five or six times seems to do quite well.

***Breathing Phases** a movement exploration based on the work of Moshe Feldenkrais

Sense yourself in standing, sitting, or lying: your shapes, angles, position. Notice the distance between your upper teeth and lower teeth, i.e., the sense of space in your mouth.

Sense the ease of the breath, the speed of your breath, how the ribs and belly expand and let go as you breathe in and breathe out, two phases.

Now add a little pause between the in-breath and the out-breath for a few breathing cycles, three phases. How does this affect your breathing? Let it be pleasurable.

Then add a fourth phase by also having a pause between the out-breath and the in-breath. Again, observe the effect of this breathing on yourself.

Let the pause after the in-breath stay a little one, but gradually let the pause after the out-breath become longer. Linger there, moving into the in-breath when you sense a prompting from your body to do so. Keep it all gentle and simple.

Begin to notice that during this pause after the out-breath, when your breath is empty, your mind is empty also. Rest into the emptiness.

***Thumb in Palm** a technique from the *Sounder Sleep System*™ by Michael Krugman

Cradle the back of one hand, say the left, in the palm of your right hand. Have the right thumb in the palm of your left hand.

Breathing easily at whatever speed you happen to be breathing, press the right thumb into the left palm when you breathe out and let the thumb move back up when you breathe in. Have the press of the thumb be infinitesimally small, extremely slight. Let yourself sink into the sensation of the thumb and palm along with the breathing. If your breath changes speed let the thumb change speed with it.

Do until you sense you are ready or want to stop.

You can do this the other way around if it works better, which is to press the thumb into the palm when you breathe in and let the thumb come back up when you breathe out.

***Hands Stroking** a movement exploration based on the work of Moshe Feldenkrais

Let both hands be in their relaxed position, which is neither fisted nor all digits fully straight, but rather in their effortless mildly curved position. Place one hand on top of the other hand and slowly, smoothly slide your hands on each other, back of one hand along the palm of the other and eventually vice versa. Breathe easily and let the hands stay completely quiet in this fully relaxed position as you glide your hands on each other.

***Magic Maple Leaf**

Something I made up

Imagine a maple leaf somewhere near you. Imagine it being able to grow a little, outwards in all directions.

Then “place” this leaf on one side of your face, letting it be melded on yourself, like a wet leaf is melded on the sidewalk. Imagine it spreading there, creating space in your mouth or jaw, softness in the eyes and face. Notice if there is a sense of difference between each side of your face. Does one side feel larger or more expansive or lighter?

Play with the maple leaf on the other side of your face.

Or have it on the back or front of a shoulder, in the mid-back or low back, on one of your hips. Hand or foot. Anywhere. It’s yours to play with.

***Vertical and Horizontal Axis** Learned of this in a Yoga Journal article years ago

The vertical axis is the lines from pelvis down through leg bones and feet, and from pelvis through the spine and out the top center of head. Balancing a book on one’s head, or doing the Five-Pointed Star, teaches the vertical axis. A horizontal axis is from one hand around the shoulders to the other hand, and the head. When we move forward

with just this upper part of ourselves, an easy habit to fall into, we are no longer being carried by our vertical axis. We lose both ground and biomechanical support as a result.

Links to *Feldenkrais* books and recorded lessons:

www.Feldenkrais.com This site is our professional website. You can also find information about Feldenkrais and how to locate a Feldenkrais Teacher in your area.

www.Feldenkraisresources.com This site is a well-established catalog of Feldenkrais materials.