

# Meditation Practices for the Voice Studio

Logan Contreras, DMA

## Meditations Adapted from the Mindfulness Institute for Emerging Adults

The practice of meditation is used to increase one's awareness in the present moment, find a moment of calm or focus, increase memory, or assist with difficult moments that may involve feelings of stress or anxiety. Here you will find basic meditation guides to use in the voice studio that may assist in a variety of situation.

All meditations can (and should) be changed depending on the needs of each singer. When using to improve a student's technical growth, modify the instructions to fit the technical needs of the student.

### **DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATHING**

#### **When to use:**

- Working on overall breath awareness or before breathing exercises
- Increase awareness of breathing mechanism
- Student is overstimulated, overwhelmed, or experiencing heightened states of other mental health disorders (stress, anxiety, depression)

#### **Technical Focus:**

- Personal awareness and sensations of breath
- Improved expansion or release of the breath
- Improved relationship to the breath

**Time Length:** 1-5 minutes

### **GUIDE**

Find a comfortable seated/standing position. If comfortable, allow your eyes to close, and place one hand on your abdomen and one hand on your sternum.

Begin by noticing the way your body naturally breathes. There is not correct or incorrect breath right now, just air entering into your body and the sensation of the breath.

*[Pause for a few breaths]*

Notice sensations as the breath enters your nasal or oral passage. Can you feel the path of the air? What is the temperature? What is the speed of the air?

*[Pause for a few breaths]*

Now shift your awareness to the expansion in your body. Notice if one or both hands rise and fall as in inhale and exhale. Do you notice more movement in your chest or abdomen? As you continue to breathe, allow your abdomen to fully release out with each inhalation. It may help to imagine a balloon being blown up in your abdomen as you breathe in.

*[Pause]*

You may feel like you are struggling at first – that's ok! Feel free to pause and breathe in the way your body is asking you to breathe. Once you reach a state of comfort, slowly work to release your abdomen to a comfortable place.

Shift your attention to the exhalation. Do you notice your abdomen and ribs coming down at a consistent rate? Do you feel tension anywhere? Remember, there is not correct right now – just awareness.

*[Pause]*

It may help use a count to help pace your inhalation and exhalation. Start by breathing in over 3, hold for 2, then exhale for 5. Inhale over 3, hold for 2, exhale for 5. Feel free to change the count as your body sees fit.

*[Pause for 5-20 breaths.]*

When you feel that your breathing rate has become steadier, gently open your eyes.

## **BODY SCAN**

### **When to use:**

- Increase awareness of the body
- Find relaxation/release tension throughout the body or on a certain area of the body
- Decrease feelings of anxiety or reduce sensations related to overstimulation

### **Technical Focus:**

- Increase physical awareness throughout the body
- Identify areas of tension
- Release specific areas of tension.

**Time Length:** 1-5 minutes

**Note:** This exercise can be used in their full capacity, or to solely focus on a few areas of the body. If there is a specific area where the student needs attention – shoulders, spine, jaw, tongue – shift the exercise to focusing on the tongue after the initial centering.

## **GUIDE**

Begin by finding a comfortable position.

*If sitting:* Let your feet rest evenly on the floor with your hands resting in your lap. If comfortable, close your eyes, or you may keep your eyes fixed on the floor in front of you. Notice how you are sitting in the chair – where does your back make contact with the chair? Can you feel your legs along the seat on the chair?

*If standing:* Allow your feet to stand shoulder width apart with your hands resting at the sides of your legs. If able, close your eyes, or direct your focus on the floor in front of you. Notice how your weight distributes down your legs through your feet on the ground. Do you notice more weight being shifted to one foot, or are they evenly balanced?

Now bring awareness to the bottom of your feet. With curiosity, see what sensations come as you explore your feet making contact with the floor. Notice your shoes or socks, notice tingling or pressure in any parts of your feet.

As you become more aware of the sensations in your feet, begin to notice the breath moving in and out. With each in-breath, see if you can increase the awareness of the focus area; with each out-breath, work to release tension and tightness in the area. As you do this, imagine the breath moving in and out of the focus area. Breath in, increase awareness; breath out, release tension.

*[Allow a moment of silences over several breaths]*

Now, slowly move your awareness into the lower portions of your legs. In-breath, notice sensations in the area. Do you feel tension, tightness, tingling, sharpness, pain, relaxation? Out-breath, move the breath through the area to release tightness. Travel from your calves to the front of your legs. In-breath, increase awareness, out-breath, release tension.

As your own pace, begin traveling up to your knees, then your thighs, noticing sensation in each area.

*[Allow a moment of silences over several breaths]*

If you notice your thoughts wandering, imagine a ball of light focusing on each area of your body as you move your attention. With the breaths in, the light grows brighter; with the breaths out, the light becomes smaller as tension releases.

Further focus areas:

**Hips:** Moving into your hips, notice how your weight is distributed. Allow yourself to move and slowly stretch this area, noticing how your body aligns through your hips, down your legs, into your feet. As you roll your hips forward, back, and to the sides, notice the shifts in your alignment, moments of tension release, moments of tightness.

Back and Spine: Traveling up your spine slowly, with each breath in, notice where you sense areas of discomfort. Allow yourself to settle here, taking several breaths in to identify the discomfort, and with each out-breath, imagine the breath moving through the muscles and releasing tension. Do you sense the expansion of the breath? What sensations do you associate with breath in and out? Is there increased tension as you breathe in or out? Decreased tension? Are you focusing on the way your body should be moving? Allow yourself to simplify the thought process, remembering your goal right now is to increase awareness.

Shoulders: Allow your attention to settle on the shoulders. Breath in, what sensations do you feel? Breath out, release feelings of tension, tightness, pull. Notice how your arms hang from your shoulders, allowing gravity to let them release. Do you feel areas where tension grows from your shoulders down your rib cage? Allow the light to focus here, releasing feelings of tension as you breathe out. If comfortable, roll your shoulders back and forward slowly, and notice the shift in sensation.

Arms and Hands: Slowly shift your awareness down your arms and into your hands. What do you feel? What thoughts arise? Do you feel the need to move, clench, tighten, twiddle? As you breathe in, notice these sensations and thoughts as they arise. Allow yourself to move if needed as you breathe out. For your next breath in, see if you can calm the need to move. Notice how gravity releases your arms and hands down towards the ground. With each out-breath, allow that pull to stretch a little further.

*Neck and Head:* Moving up through the neck, pause here and notice sensations that arise. Breath in, increase awareness, breath out, release feelings of tightness. Notice how your head balances on your spine – does it feel heavy? Light? Is it balancing forward or back? Simply notice these things as you focus on breaths coming in and out.

*Jaw and Tongue:* Traveling to your jaw, do you sense any feelings of discomfort? Can you sense the position of your jaw? Are you clenching your teeth? As you breathe in and out, heighten this awareness, and allow the muscles to release one at a time. Notice how your tongue rests in your jaw. Allow it to release, touching the roof of your mouth and upper row of teeth. Can you feel the tip of your tongue gently sitting on the gum line? If it feels uncomfortable to find release here, allow the light to grow on one area at a time as you breathe in, then release feelings of discomfort, tension, or awkwardness and you breathe out.

Now take a few moments to scan awareness from the top of your head back down to your toes. If there are areas of tension that arise, allow yourself to settle here for a moment. In-breath, sense the feelings arising in that focus area; out-breath, observe as tension releases.

When you're ready, slowly open your eyes and bring your awareness back to the room.

## **WALKING MEDITATION**

### **When to use:**

- Decrease feelings of anxiety
- Reduce feelings of restlessness or overstimulation
- Help with feelings of being tired – early in the morning, afternoon, or evening.
- Increase awareness of how the body moves

### **Technical Focus:**

- Slow down overthinking
- Assist with ability to process information
- Release tension or holding in the body
- Find center of body to aid in overall support or breath release

**Time Length:** 1-5 minutes

**Note:** This exercise can be used one-on-one or in a large group setting. For one-on-one, the student can pace back and forth or walk in a small circular motion; for larger groups, the students can begin in a larger circle, following each other as you walk, before breaking off into their own paths around the room.

## **GUIDE**

Begin by standing and placing both feet shoulder width apart. Allow your arms to rest by your side and find a comfortable alignment throughout your body. If able, allow your eyes to close or focus your gaze on floor just in front of you. Your focus for the next few minutes will be on your feet – use the sensations of your feet to anchor you to the present moment as we slowly walk. This walking is very slow. If you notice balance becoming unsteady, walk a little faster or take a moment to pause and gather.

As we walk, notice how your mind thinks and how your thoughts shift. We often find ourselves lost in thought – if you notice your mind racing or thoughts shifting, bring your awareness to the movements and sensations of your feet. This is a time to work on non-judgement. If you feel yourself judging your thoughts, allow yourself to focus on a different section of your movement.

Feel free to let your hands hang by your side as we begin walking. You may also cross them in front. Allow your gaze to focus just ahead on the floor just in front of your feet. If you feel uncomfortable at any point, observe your feelings with an attitude of kindness and compassion.

Begin by moving your feet and noticing sensations as you gently wiggle your toes, rotate your ankles, move your feet side to side, shift your weight.

Now slowly walk in place, rolling your foot and lifting it up from your heel, side of the foot, ball, and toes. While considering an aligned position, slowly shift your weight to your left foot and lift your right foot. Rolling your foot again to your toes, lift your right foot, extend your right foot

forward, place the heel on the ground, roll through your right foot as you shift your weight to the right foot and lift your left heel, roll through your left foot, extend your left foot forward, place your left heel on the ground, roll through to the toes. Shift your weight back to the left foot, and repeat the process again.

As you repeat the process, narrate the movements in your head. Notice the sensations in your feet, legs, abdomen. Notice how your breath is shifting – is it tight? Is it low and released? Slow or quick?

Notice if you are judging your movements. Allow yourself to focus on the movement narration to help anchor your awareness.

*Allow the student to repeat this process as long as needed. Repeat the process of the feet moving, reminding the student to anchor their awareness on the sensations of their feet and the shift of their balance.*

**Additions to assist with technique:**

- Begin a vocal exercise while continuing the slow pace of the movement. Allow the student to pace the start of each exercise, noticing shifts in tension, release, breath, tone, etc.
- Add a breathing exercise, focusing on how the flow of the breath and body tension changes with the slow walking.
- Shift the movements to match those of a character – how do the movements change? How can you speed up the movements to feel the movements of the character.

## **GATHA: Meditation Poem**

### **When to use:**

- Anchoring awareness to the breath or body are not optimal
- Decrease feelings of anxiety or reduce sensations related to overstimulation

### **Technical Focus:**

- Anchoring awareness and mindfulness to text
- Identify areas of tension
- Release specific areas of tension.

**Time Length:** 1-5 minutes

**Note:** This exercise can be used before running a song or vocal exercise, replacing the poem with technical ideas to improve focus during phonation or performance. For inhalation and exhalation, consider using a technical or dramatic focus to help guide the student. Here are some examples:

Breath in: release tension; breath out: energize.

Breath in: engage; breath out: phrase connection.

Breath in: shift emotion; breath out: active emotion.

## **GUIDE**

The Gatha is a meditation poem that helps your mind to focus on the breath by connecting it with specific lines of the text. We will begin by finding a comfortable position.

***If sitting:*** Allow your feet to rest on the floor, hands in your lap, and close your eyes if comfortable or you may keep your eyes fixed on the floor in front of you.

***If standing:*** Allow your feet to stand shoulder width apart with your hands resting at the sides of your legs. If able, close your eyes, or direct your focus on the floor in front of you.

One goal for this meditation is to notice you observing mind. The observing mind is working when we become aware of sensations, thoughts, and feelings as they arise in the present moment. Observing mind allows present- moment awareness and some distance from the worries, plans and judgments that occur in our thinking mind. The thinking mind is active most of the day; if you have a hard time moving from thinking, planning, judging, that's ok. As we continue the exercise, see if you can slowly release the thinking mind and focus on the observing mind.

### **Original Gatha:**

To begin, I will read the lines of the Gatha out loud. As you meditate, link the phrases to your breath, so that each line corresponds to an inbreath or out-breath. After we have practiced with the full Gatha for a few minutes, we will experiment with dropping down to the shorter version of the Gatha. If your breathing pace does not comfortably match my speaking pace, please listen to your body and breathe in a way that is comfortable to you.



There is one line in the poem where I will invite you to “smile.” See what happens if you allow yourself to smile in that moment. Notice what happens to your body and mind when you smile.

As we begin this exercise, allow your awareness to settle on your breath for a few moments. As you continue to watch your breath, we will begin to link the lines of the Gatha to your breathing.

I know I am breathing in. I know I am breathing out. I calm my body and mind. I smile. I dwell in the present moment. I know this is a precious moment...

*[Try matching the pace of the lines to your own slow deep breaths as you guide the student. Lead them through 3 repetitions so they can remember the words. Once you have led the students through the phrases three times, say the following:]*

Carry on, repeating the phrases silently to yourself, going at whatever pace is comfortable for you. If you get lost or forget the phrases, it's ok. Just start back at the beginning. As always, pay attention to your body and notice the signals of your nervous system. If you ever start to feel overwhelmed, remember you have the power to shift attention and bring your body back into a sense of comfort.

*[Then allow for as much silence as needed for them to practice on their own – 1-3 minutes.]*

Now let's drop down to just one word, keeping it linked with our breath. In... out... calming... smiling... present moment... precious moment... in... out... calming... smiling... present moment... precious moment...

*[Repeat this slowly two or three times, trying as best you can to time your words to the rhythm of the breath.]*

Carry on, repeating these words silently to yourself at whatever pace is pleasing for you.

When you are ready, allow your eyes to open slowly and return your attention to the room.

### **Applying to vocalise or song:**

*Decide with the students what technical focuses you want to use for this meditation before beginning.*

As you meditate, link the phrases to your breath to the poem text you have created, so that each line corresponds to an inbreath or out-breath. After we have practiced with the full Gatha for a few minutes, we will experiment with dropping down to the shorter version of the Gatha. If your breathing pace does not comfortably match my speaking pace, please listen to your body and breathe in a way that is comfortable to you.

As we begin this exercise, allow your awareness to settle on your breath for a few moments. As you continue to watch your breath, we will begin to link the lines of the Gatha to your breathing.

In-breath: *insert new Gatha line 1*  
Out-breath: *insert new Gatha line 2*  
In-breath: *insert new Gatha line 3*  
Out-breath: *insert new Gatha line 4*  
In-breath: *insert new Gatha line 5*  
Out-breath: *insert new Gatha line 6*

*[Try matching the pace of the lines to your own slow deep breaths as you guide the student. Lead them through 3 repetitions so they can remember the words. Once you have led the students through the phrases three times, say the following:]*

Carry on, repeating the phrases silently to yourself, going at whatever pace is comfortable for you. If you get lost or forget the phrases, it's ok. Just start back at the beginning. As always, pay attention to your body and notice the signals of your nervous system. If you ever start to feel overwhelmed, remember you have the power to shift attention and bring your body back into a sense of comfort.

*[Then allow for as much silence as needed for them to practice on their own – 1-3 minutes.]*

Now let's drop down to just one word, keeping it linked with our breath.

In-breath: *shortened Gatha line 1*  
Out-breath: *shortened Gatha line 2*  
In-breath: *shortened Gatha line 3*  
Out-breath: *shortened Gatha line 4*  
In-breath: *shortened Gatha line 5*  
Out-breath: *shortened Gatha line 6*

*[Repeat this slowly two or three times, trying as best you can to time your words to the rhythm of the breath.]*

Carry on, repeating these words silently to yourself at whatever pace is pleasing for you.

When you are ready, allow your eyes to open slowly and return your attention to the room.