



Strong Body, Resilient Mind

BY GREG AMUNDSON

Photos courtesy of Yoga For First Responders



Setting challenging fitness goals, executing tough metabolic workouts, enduring long days at the range, and maintaining proficiency in defensive tactics techniques: These all require large doses of physical strength and resilience. Therefore, the temptation is to focus our training and development almost exclusively on the measurable, objective, and largely physical areas of our growth.

However, if we only focus on the physical dimension of our training, we potentially leave an area of our development completely untapped. This area could mean the difference between life and death, not to mention the “life and death” of your emotional and social wellbeing. This article lays the foundation for integrating a spiritual practice into your daily workouts that will help you find inner strength when the conditions of your life, your law enforcement career, or your physical workout present inevitable and all too common barriers and stressors.

The simplest yet most effective techniques to hone mental, emotional, and spiritual strength and resiliency are those aimed at stress reduction. Any officer with more than a few days on the job knows a thing or two about stress. Combating stress to relax the body and quiet the mind builds your spiritual strength and adds fuel to the fire of your physical workouts.

The majority of the world’s great spiritual texts and disciplines teach that the fundamental cause of suffering is the mind’s tendency to regress to the past or project itself into the future. The solution, therefore, is to train the mind to remain centered in the present moment. This tendency of the mind to leap out of the present moment becomes apparent during meditation. Indeed, holding the attention on the present moment can

seem harder than the most demanding physical workout. In many respects, teaching officers to “work in” is more challenging, and more important, than learning how to “work out.”

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Remaining in the present moment helps officers gain perspective over what is permanent versus what is temporary. When we learn to become still and silent, in both body and mind, we can begin to witness our own thoughts, and awaken the “great witness” part of our consciousness. This ability to create a bit of space between our thoughts and our witnessing of our thoughts helps us to discern where we are focusing our attention.

Our mind is like a giant magnifying glass, and whatever we focus our attention on will tend to increase in our life. When we focus on a problem,

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the problem only increases. The real insight, however, is that most of the time, the problem we are focusing on is our perception of a situation, and not the situation itself. Our thinking determines that quality of what we are seeing. When we change the way we look at something, what we look at begins to change. Everything begins within the temple of our mind.

A strong spiritual practice helps cultivate your ability to meet and greet stress in the present, as it arises

in your consciousness. Engaging stress as a warrior means dealing with it on the field of battle at the moment stress presents itself. In this sense, the stress can turn into a strengthening experience and an opportunity to discipline yourself to remain in the present moment.

BOX BREATHING

Breathing is a valuable tool that you can use to remain grounded in the present moment. Developing a

spiritual practice can be as easy as taking one concentrated, focused, and present-moment breath a day. By developing the ability to “watch yourself breathe,” you will begin to develop the mental skills necessary to become aware of what actions can be taken in the present moment, and what illusions of the future, or memories of the past, need to be resolved.

IN MANY RESPECTS, TEACHING OFFICERS TO “WORK IN” IS MORE CHALLENGING, AND MORE IMPORTANT, THAN LEARNING HOW TO “WORK OUT.”

Being able to serve and protect with a clear and quiet mind will have a positive outcome for you, your department and your community. Former Navy SEAL Kirk Parsley, MD, lectures on how performance and willpower are drained if we allow our thoughts to be swept off by insignificant thinking and wasteful decision-making. When our mind is centered in the present moment, we are able to make critical decisions with lightning speed and agility. This same principle works both on duty, and off. Many times the stress we experience is manifested only in our thinking. In other words, we create our own stressful thoughts, which lead to a corresponding release of harmful chemical and hormonal responses in the body. This also means that peaceful, tranquil and positive thoughts can have a corresponding health impact on both our psychology and our physicality.



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“Box breathing” is the foundational combined spiritual, mental and physical technique to get you on your way to developing inner peace. World class warriors and scholars David Grossman, former Army colonel and ranger, in addition to Mark Divine, a former Navy SEAL commander, teach this technique because it’s effective, easy to learn, and easy to commit to memory.

The box breathing technique is described below. Be sure to breathe through your nose, which has several benefits. The hair follicles in the nose help to either warm or cool the air, and clean the air before entering your lungs. The nostril breath also “pulls the breath” into the lower diaphragm, filling the lungs from the bottom to the top. Finally, the nostril breath triggers the parasympathetic nervous system.

- Breathe in through the nose for a four-count (one one-thousand, two one-thousand...)
- Hold the breath for a four-count
- Slowly exhale out through the nose for a four-count
- Hold the out-breath for a four-count
- Repeat for four additional rounds.

Note how you feel, both physically and mentally, after four rounds of box breathing. Note the dual feelings of stress melting away and energy being drawn into the lungs and through the entire body. As you gently center your mind on the movement of your breath, notice how you are realigning with the present moment.

Over the next few days, whenever you feel your “temperature” rising, such as dealing with a challenging situation on the job, or facing a challenging workout in the gym, shift into box breathing mode. Watch the frustration and stress burn away as the positive energy flows in.

Until next time, train and breathe like your life depends on it. Because it does.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Greg Amundson has served in local, state and federal law enforcement for more than 19 years in numerous capacities including SWAT, field training officer, defensive



tactics instructor and sniper. He also served as a U.S. Army Military Police Captain and TAC Officer where he instructed leadership and Army combatives at the U.S. Army Officer Candidate School. He is a Black Belt in Krav Maga and honor graduate of the Los Angeles PD Handgun Instructor School (HITS). He currently serves as a reserve deputy and law enforcement chaplain for the Santa Cruz (CA) Harbor Patrol. Amundson is the author of two bestselling books, and is a graduate student at Western Seminary pursuing a master of divinity with an emphasis in chaplaincy.

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