

ANNE RUITBERG TAYLOR, PHD

7 Ancient Rituals to Heal Modern High-Functioning Anxiety

Anne Ruitberg Taylor, Ph.D.

Copyright ©2020 by Anne Ruitberg Taylor

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copyright owner except for the use of short quotation.

Front Cover Image Courtesy of Canva under Free Media License
Front Cover Design by Anne Ruitberg Taylor
Published by Anne Ruitberg Taylor
310 NE Camano Drive
Camano Island, WA 98282
https://HowToRelieveStressNaturally.com

Praise for 7 Ancient Rituals to Heal Modern High-Functioning Anxiety

"I'm one of those people who is naturally skeptical, and rarely allow myself to go all-in with anything that seems too otherworldly or mystical. So I was very pleased to discover that the information and recommendations in the book are backed up by data. The basic premise is that ancient people had a grounding in their bodies and the earth that we modern people have largely lost. Anne's program helps tap into those timeless methods in a manner that works in our post-industrial society to bring us back in balance. As someone who's always go-go-go, stopping for these short intervals to get re-grounded is helping me become less frenetic in my life. To add to the benefits, the author points readers to an app and device that actually record your physical biofeedback to help you learn to de-stress in real time." Beth Pickett. Founder: College Prep Counseling

"Anne Taylor has provided some practical and effective tools that lay a foundation for a resilient life. In these Covid 19 times and beyond, we need to adapt and continue to make our stress management a priority in order to not only be physically and mentally healthy, but also to experience good energy and a life filled with joy. Anne lives what she teaches here, which is evident if you ever have the chance to meet her, hear her lecture or participate in her Kundalini classes. These valuable tools in this book will put you on a path to peace." Lisa Erskine Knopp, MA Education, COVT.

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to Stephen W. Porges for granting permission to use his "Physiology of Rituals" table in this book.

Thank you to my editors for their detailed review and commentary of 7 Ancient Rituals to Heal Modern High-Functioning Anxiety.

A heartfelt thank you to Beth Pickett, Founder of College Prep Counseling and Lisa Erskine Knopp, MA Education, COVT. and all my readers who took the time to read and provide feedback on my first edition.

Disclaimer

The statements made in this book have not been evaluated by the FDA and are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent disease. 7 Ancient Rituals to Heal Modern High-Functioning Anxiety and related media are provided for informational purposes only. Always check with your healthcare provider before beginning any new exercise program.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements
Introduction10
Chapter 1: High-Functioning Anxiety: A Modern Epidemic12
Chapter 2: How is High-Functioning Anxiety Impacting Your Life?14
Chapter 3: 7 Ancient Rituals to Healing Modern (High-Functioning) Anxiety19
Ritual 1: Opening the Sacred Space35
Ritual 2: Mantra (Vocalizations) or Naad Yoga45
Ritual 3: Pranayam Breathwork53
Ritual 4: Postures or Asanas60
Ritual 5: Meditations or Prayer67
Ritual 6: Trancing with a Gong Bath74
Ritual 7: Social Engagement & Compassion84
Chapter 4: What if Nothing Changes?89
Chapter 5: What is Possible for You?94
Chapter 6: Invitation to My Readers97
Afterward: Compassion, HRV, and the Return of the Feminine99
About the Author105
Resources:

"Science is the tool of the Western mind, and with it one can open more doors than with bare hands. It is part and parcel of our understanding, and it obscures our insight only when it claims that the understanding it conveys is the only kind there is"

C. G. Jung, Alchemical Studies¹

Alchemical Studies. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. The Collected Works of C. G. Jung. Vol. 13. Bollingen Series 20. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970. Page 6.

Introduction

Collectively, we are living in times of high anxiety and many people experience a feeling of existential angst. Some people experience anxiety more acutely than others, often as a result of previous experiences and traumas. Everyone feels anxious sometimes, but more and more people are experiencing sustained levels of high anxiety.

There are clinical anxieties that should be treated by your healthcare provider. A few example of these include: Social Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and Substance/Medication-Induced Anxiety Disorder (5th ed.; DSM–5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). If you have one of these conditions, please consult your clinician before proceeding.

If you suffer from high-functioning anxiety (which is not a clinical condition) and are looking for natural means of healing (defined as a "restoration of wholeness"), then this book is for you. Virtually everyone can benefit from the information gleaned from the Ancient Wisdom traditions of those who understood the human being as a microcosm of the greater whole.

Ancient cultures understood the significance of people being aligned with their hearts and the higher order of the Universe, especially when circumstances feel beyond their control. Whether it's called the *tao*, heart rhythm coherence, or being in the flow zone, we moderns have much that we can learn from the Ancient ones and their rituals.

When we are out of alignment with our flow state, we often feel fear, anxiety, depression, and, in

general, a sense of being out of control. People can feel victimized when circumstances are outside of what they can affect. But that is the nature of life, and there are tools and techniques to bring oneself back into balance.

By regaining your center, your North Star, you learn to take back control in your life. Ancient people used the ritual process to realign themselves with the Universal order and to bring them back into a state of wholeness.

Note: If you have a clinical condition, or you are under the care of a health professional, we recommend that you consult your physician for appropriate advice and treatment. The information in this book is based on ancient wisdom from the Kundalini Yoga and Wisdom traditions.

Chapter 1: High-Functioning Anxiety: A Modern Epidemic

People who live with high-functioning anxiety experience many of the same symptoms as those with generalized anxiety, but are able to function in the world (or so it seems!). These people, mostly women, keep their symptoms hidden behind a smile that pretends that "everything is ok." Those around them don't usually know how much they are suffering in silence with symptoms of anxiety.

Anxiety currently afflicts more than 20 million Americans and the numbers are growing. Behind the mask of being in control are some common symptoms of high-functioning anxiety:

- A sense of impending doom
- Elevated heart rate
- Rapid breathing
- Shallow breathing
- A feeling of nervousness or restlessness
- Always feeling tired
- Troubled sleep
- Cyclical thoughts of worry
- Gut (gastrointestinal) problems
- Worry that becomes uncontrollable
- A tendency to avoid situations and people that trigger anxiety²
- Post-traumatic stress (PTSD)

² https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseasesconditions/anxiety/symptoms-causes/syc-20350961

If left to run its own course, high-functioning anxiety has the potential to worsen into more serious clinical conditions. Stress is a root cause of anxiety, exacerbating the condition and making life exceedingly difficult.

The demands of today's world are almost impossible to keep up with. There is simply more coming at us than we can handle. And if you're prone to high-functioning anxiety, it can feel like you're on a sinking ship. You keep up, but at what cost to your health and personal life?

People with high-functioning anxiety can appear to be super-human to the outside world. They are often list-makers in an attempt to keep chaos at bay. From the outside, they look like real go-getters, but the truth is that they are hanging on by a thread.

Many people are opting for non-pharmaceutical solutions to stress, high-functioning anxiety, and stress-induced depression management. Breaking the grip of the anxious mind requires help from many fronts.

There is another way. Our ancestors had tremendous wisdom that we moderns can tap into.

Chapter 2: How is High-Functioning Anxiety Impacting *Your* Life?

For the purposes of this book, I focus on emotional states that are generally within your control, as opposed to conditions and disorders of brain chemistry such as clinical depression or severe anxiety.

One client recently told me how she feels:

"I never feel caught up. Work, home, chores. I just want to sleep when I have time off."

Do You Think You Might Have High-Functioning Anxiety?

- Your career is on track, but your personal life is a struggle
- You appear highly responsible and ambitious, but it's anxiety that's driving the show
- To the outside world, you have it together, but getting through every day is very difficult
- Unexpected changes in your routine cause you to be upset
- Your mind never stops, and you feel exhausted
- You internally react to things that others aren't fazed by
- You often cancel plans with friends because you are too exhausted to "put on a smile"
- Days off are often an opportunity to collapse rather than have fun and recharge

Who is Affected by High-Functioning Anxiety?

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), approximately 40 million people suffer from an anxiety disorder at any given time, and some fall into this category of "high functioning"—a silent anxiety masked by a smile. Some sources report that women are twice as likely as men to suffer from anxiety.

People with high-functioning anxiety appear to be in total control at work and social situations, however, under the surface, they are experiencing the same symptoms of anxiety disorders. These include feelings of unrelenting worry, dread, fear, heart fluttering, gut issues, and quiet despair. Fear propels people with high-functioning anxiety to achieve more, while other forms of clinical anxiety may have more organic-based origins.

High-Functioning Anxiety is one symptom of a dysregulated autonomic nervous system.

Regardless of their outstanding accomplishments, there is an impending sense of "the other shoe dropping" or something going horribly wrong. The negative mind takes over by scrutinizing and criticizing even the best jobs that were well done. The "what if" scenarios get replayed in their mind over and over.

15

³ <u>https://www.womenshealth.gov/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/anxiety-disorders</u>

What Are the Symptoms of High-Functioning Anxiety?

- Needing to have everything under control in order to feel at ease
- Getting things done is a higher priority than your health
- Saying yes to non-essential requests, when you are already overwhelmed
- Feeling distressed, yet you continue to operate in your day-to-day life while no one around you really knows what's happening with you internally
- Sleeping problems caused by incessant worry
- Wearing a mask to hide your emotions, not showing up as your authentic self
- Relentless negative self-talk
- Destructive self-soothing behaviors such as smoking, drinking, drugging, shopping
- Excessive ruminating
- Reliance on the approval and opinion of others, rather than tapping into your own internal reference point

Many people are opting for non-pharmaceutical solutions to stress, anxiety, and depression management; the exercises provided in this book can be used with or without other medications. I am not a medical doctor and do not prescribe medical advice.

If your doctor has you on a medication, please do not stop taking it! 7 Ancient Rituals and other mind-body exercises can be layered over existing treatment plans. The practices included in this book are not designed to be a substitute for medical care.

That said, the Ancient rituals presented here have been shown to be effective in improving heart rhythm coherence, a biomarker of health and general well-being.

There is another way -- the 7 Ancient Rituals for Healing Modern High-Functioning Anxiety.

Journaling Questions

Journaling is an excellent way to uncover some of the hidden effects that stress and high-functioning anxiety are having in your life.

Here are a few questions to ponder; take time and journal your observations and reactions.

- 1. How is high-functioning anxiety negatively impacting your life right now?
- 2. What relationships are being compromised due to your high-functioning anxiety?
- 3. What needs to happen to your stress and anxiety levels in order to feel calmer and more centered?
- 4. What obstacles, challenges, and struggles do you regularly come across that triggers anxiety?
- 5. How is anxiety affecting your health?
- 6. What would you like to see happening in 6 to 12 months regarding your stress level and its effects on your health and feelings of wellbeing?

Chapter 3: 7 Ancient Rituals to Healing Modern (*High-Functioning*) Anxiety

"When the patient found the yellow piece of amber and it began to beat like a heart, and the earth and trees and all of nature joined in the rhythm, [. . .] it was a moment of Tao"—C. G. Jung⁴

The Ancients were ahead of the curve when it came to managing their emotional states, or so it appears. Since the beginning of time, rituals have been used to restore harmony, wholeness, and health. There is much for modern people to learn from Ancient ritual practices.

What is a Ritual?

Although people often think of the term ritual being used in a religious context, I'm using the term ritual to describe actions that have been used since time immemorial by individuals or groups to bring the participant(s) back into a state of wholeness. In modern terms, this may be thought of as a "flow state" or high heart rhythm coherence.

Ancient Wisdom traditions used rituals to bring individuals back into harmony with tribal tradition and

⁴ Jung, CG. Visions 2: Notes of the Seminar Given 1930-1934. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1997. p 676.

cosmic order⁵. Rituals were often performed as "soul retrieval" to bring the person back into alignment with his or her soul (or psyche), which in turn aligns one with the greater whole. Psychology is, after all, the study of the soul. Many modern humans have lost this invaluable concept.

This is the original meaning of psychology, psyche, Greek for "soul" and the suffix "-ology," the field of study. This is not to suggest that a form of religiosity is required to practice ritual; rather, rituals involve a return to one's embodied soul, which is inherently a part of nature. The path to this lost connection is through the heart and the journey requires a re-orientation of your ego and higher Self within. That is one of the primary functions of the ritual process, a realignment of internal core values that emanate from your heart.

"Every beat of your heart is the rhythm of your soul. The voice of your soul is your breath."

While statements about the ritual process may seem a bit woo-woo for some, the purpose of this book is to demonstrate how select Ancient Ritual practices can reduce your levels of stress, high-functioning anxiety, and cold depression (feeling of numbness and disconnection). New paradigms of healing high-functioning anxiety will involve more than talk therapy;

20

Qtd. Smith, Michael C. *Jung and Shamanism In Dialogue:* Retrieving the Soul/Retrieving the Sacred. p 265. This quote was from a conversation between C. Smith and Jungian analyst Donald Sandner, on the system of myth and healing.

http://www.harinam.com/every-beat-of-your-heart-is-the-rhythm-of-your-soul-yogi-bhajan-2/

the body has to get into the healing act and Ancient Ritual practices will help you do just that! The Ancient Ritual practices discussed in this book directly affect heart rhythm coherence, a psycho-physiological state of being in sync within your body-mind and with the greater Universe beyond. This claim is verifiable through heart rate variability (HRV) monitoring. I'll get to what that means a little later. This book is informed by Dr. Stephen W. Porges' polyvagal theory, the depth psychology of C. G. Jung, and the Kundalini yoga tradition.

The Heart of the Ritual Process

The ritual process may at first appear to be a non-Western way of thinking, as it certainly was for C. G. Jung. Western thinking has gone too far over to the logical way of thinking, but that is not the only form of thinking. As modern Westerners, we have largely forgotten about the power found in the wisdom of the heart and ritual process.

In *Memories*, *Dreams*, *Reflections*, Jung recounted a conversation with a Native American named Ochwiay Biano of the Taos Pueblo community who revealed the stark contrast between the logos of the West and the heart-centered worldview of Native Americans, and virtually all Wisdom traditions worldwide. Ochwiay Biano expressed his views as follows, followed by Jung's response:

-

⁷ Jung was a Swiss psychiatrist famous for theories such as psychological types (Myer-Briggs), introvert/extrovert, shadow, anima/animus, and depth psychology, the study of the unconscious mind.

Ochwiay Biano: "See how cruel the whites look. Their lips are thin, their noses sharp, their faces furrowed and distorted by folds. Their eyes have a staring expression; they are always seeking something. What are they seeking? The whites always want something; they are always uneasy and restless. We do not know what they want. We do not understand them. We think that they are mad."

Jung: "I asked him why he thought the whites were all mad."

Ochwiay Biano: "They say they think with their heads."

Jung: "Why, of course. What do you think with?" I [Jung] asked him in surprise.

Ochwiay Biano: "'We think here,' he said, indicating his heart." *

The Western approach to healing high-functioning anxiety and stress-induced (cold) depression has overlooked the importance of the heart and its role in "thinking." Thanks to the research of UCLA Professor J. Andrew Armour, MD, PhD, we now know that the heart sends significantly more information to the brain than it receives. This due to its intrinsic "heart-brain," a term coined by Armour. The heart has its own "brain," a complex neurological system called the intrinsic cardiac nervous system.

_ _

⁴ Jung, C. G. *Memories Dreams Reflections*. Trans. Richard and Clara Winston. NY: Random House, 1963. p 247-248.

When we perceive the heart only as a pump, we miss the opportunity to gain vitally important information about the homeostasis of the body, and mind. This imbalance in the West, and in the world as a whole, is reflected in our bodies, especially in our nervous and hormonal systems.

The ritual process allows us to reintroduce heart wisdom into our daily lives and bring the wisdom of heart power to healing stress by engaging the parasympathetic (rest and digest) branch of the autonomic nervous system. The vagus nerve (10th cranial nerve) regulates the parasympathetic system. I'll go into this a bit more when I show examples of heart rhythm coherence as measured by heart rate variability below.

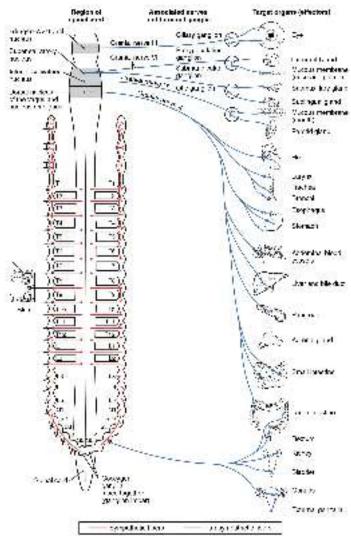


Figure 1 Autonomic Nervous System, Vagus Nerve = Cranial Nerve X OpenStax College - Anatomy & Physiology, Connexions Web site. http://cnx.org/content/col11496/1.6/, Jun 19, 2013., CC BY 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=30148020

"The vagus nerve is the nexus of the mind-body connection," Dacher Keltner.

Many Ancient Ritual practices such as chanting, prayer, meditation, and postures are potent stimulators to our nervous systems because they exercise the vagus nerve (Stephen W. Porges¹⁰ "Ancient Rituals"). By doing so, the vagus nerve quells the fight-or-flight instinct, but can only do so when a person feels safe and unthreatened.

Another academic source recognizing the neurological benefits of rituals is Dr. Michael Winkelman, who stated that, "Ritual affects emotional, cognitive, social, and interpersonal dynamic, producing physiological changes and providing a range of mechanisms for transformation of health" (Winkelman 232"). Ritual practices have been deeply embedded in the human psyche stretching back into mythological times.

The well-being and health techniques known by the ancient cultures are astonishingly practical and effective in treating anxiety and the depression that often goes along with it.

⁹ Dacher Keltner is a professor of psychology at University of California, Berkeley, where he directs the Berkeley Social Interaction Lab.

¹⁰ Stephen W. Porges is a "Distinguished University Scientist" at the Kinsey Institute, Indiana University Bloomington and professor in the department of psychiatry at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill.

Winkelman, Michael. *Shamanism: The Neural Ecology of Consciousness and Healing*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 2000.

A Polyvagal Informed Approach

The connection between Ancient Rituals, contemplative practices, and vagal pathways has been established by Stephen W. Porges¹², the scientist and theorist behind the "Polyvagal Theory," which he introduced in 1994. Interested readers are encouraged to read *The Polyvagal Theory* or view his many YouTube videos for a detailed explanation.

The Physiology of Rituals

Ritual	Vagal Mechanism
Chants (vocalizations)	 Laryngeal nerves Pharyngeal nerves Respiration (long exhalation and deep abdominal inhalation enhance vagal 'brake')
Meditation (breath)	 Respiration (long exhalation and deep abdominal inhalation enhance the vagal 'brake')
Prayer (posture)	Carotid baroreceptors (vagal contribution to blood pressure regulation)

Figure 2: The Physiology of Rituals by Stephen W. Porges (used with permission)

Porges' Polyvagal Theory contributes an innovative perspective that links autonomic nervous system (ANS) function to human behavior¹³. The ANS

-

https://www.embodiedphilosophy.com/ancient-rituals-contemplative-practices-and-vagal-pathways/

Porges S. W. Orienting in a defensive world: Mammalian modifications of our evolutionary heritage: A Polyvagal

takes care of bodily functions that we don't have to think about such as digestion, heart rate, breathing, and a host of others. The primary role of our nervous system is to ensure our survival. The ANS operates independently of conscious awareness, thus the term autonomic. Think of the term "autopilot" or "automatic" and you got the gist of what autonomic conveys.

In an effort to keep us safe and alive, the nervous system continuously scans and interprets signals from the outside as either benign or threatening. Think of the ANS as a continuous surveillance system on the lookout for danger. When we experience fear, stress, and anxiety, our nervous system responds as though under threat of danger. Threats can be real or perceived as real. Either way, the nervous system responds to potential danger by remaining vigilant and triggering hormonal as well as neurological responses. (The amygdala is the portion of the brain that is responsible for safely surveillance.)

When you are under chronic stress, symptoms of anxiety and depression may occur due to the overtaxing of your nervous system, which in turn sends out stress hormones. Your body is preparing to save your life whether the threat is real or perceived. The body isn't given sufficient time to repair and rejuvenate itself when it is trying to prepare for defense. What Porges recognized was that ancient rituals (and contemplative practices) induce physiological states of calmness, primarily mediated by the vagus nerve. This affects parasympathetic activity, which downregulates (think of shifting a car into neutral) the stress response of the sympathetic nervous system (fight/flight/freeze

Theory. Psychophysiology. 1995;32:301–318. [PubMed] [Google Scholar]

response). For simplification, I will categorize the calming response as parasympathetic activity and the mobilization response (sometimes called fight-or-flight) as sympathetic activity.

Porges teaches that "Most of the neural pathways of the parasympathetic nervous system travel through the vagus nerve" and therefore the health and tonality of the vagus nerve is important. Nerves have "tone" just as muscles do; the term vagus nerve tonality means the health and responsiveness of the vagus nerve, which is a reflection of the parasympathetic nervous system.

Porges also brings forth the immobilization or freeze response, the third portion of the polyvagal theory, which is part of our "old nervous system" when feigning death may be the only option for survival. This is similar to a reptilian response verses the more evolved portion of the ventral vagus nerve (above the diaphragm), which is unique to mammals.

The vagus nerve originates within the brain and descends on either side of the neck, affecting speech and the voice, continuing through the thorax where it connects to just about all the organs of the body, and ends at the pelvic floor. The right vagus nerve innervates the SA node, the heart's intrinsic or natural pacemaker, and serves to lower heart rate. Sometimes, the vagus nerve is

contemplative-practices-and-vagal-pathways/

Porges, S W. "Ancient Rituals, Contemplative Practices, and Vagal Pathways." *Embodied Philosophy*. https://www.embodiedphilosophy.com/ancient-rituals-

referred to as a "brake;" it slows things down, including heart rate.

Stress, anxiety, and depression suppress vagal nerve activity, which causes the sympathetic branch to become dominant. Until the real or perceived threat is removed and a sense of safety is restored, the sympathetic branch remains in overdrive. It's trying to save your life! That's why, once you get into a fearful or anxious state, it can be difficult to come down from it. Learning to consciously reengage the vagal brake is a significant benefit of the *7 Ancient Rituals*.

To restore a sense of calm and centeredness, you must first remove the threat of danger. That may mean assessing whether there is a real danger or whether our memories, possibly unconscious ones, are reacting when it isn't healthy or necessary to do so. Ancient rituals and contemplative practices teach us how to regain our center so that we can move into a state of calm.

The Proof is in the Pudding

So how do you know when your vagus nerve is reengaged and you are in a restorative healing mode? It is a well-established fact in the medical literature that vagal nerve activity is reflected in the biomarker heart rate variability, or HRV for short. "Psychophysiological research integrating heart rate variability (HRV) has increased during the last two decades, particularly given the fact that HRV is able to index cardiac vagal tone."

¹⁵ Laborde, S. et al. "Heart Rate Variability and Cardiac Vagal Tone in Psychophysiological Research – Recommendations for Experiment Planning, Data Analysis, and Data Reporting." Front.

It is possible to monitor your own short term HRV using a biofeedback device such as the HeartMath® Inner Balance smart phone app. Although not diagnostic in nature, it provides the user with a dynamic window into the status of their autonomic nervous system. The practitioner can tell when he or she is primarily operating out of the sympathetic branch (suppressed vagal action), the parasympathetic branch (vagal activity functioning), or in a balanced state called heart rhythm coherence (like being in the flow zone). Note: for diagnostic quality HRV, I encourage you to seek a medical professional who is trained in 24-hour Holter monitoring.

Because this book is intended for the reader who doesn't necessarily have a science background, I am going to assign "code" words that communicate the main point.

Sympathetic Activation	Yang
Parasympathetic Activation	Yin
Balanced Autonomic	Tao
Nervous System	

The zone of *Tao* can be thought of as being in the flow of high heart rhythm coherence. An individual who is predominately in the yang zone is in a stressed state psycho-physiologically. The goal is to get into the zone of *Tao*, a balanced autonomic nervous system response.

Psychol., 20 February 2017

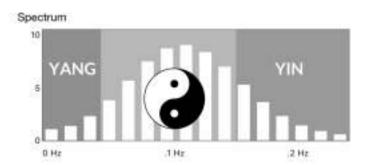


Figure 3 The Yin and Yang of HRV, Credit: author.

It is not necessary to understand the psychophysiology behind heart rate variability to benefit from HRV biofeedback. If you think of the area labeled "yang" as the sympathetic branch, "yin" as the parasympathetic branch, and the central area as being in a state of *tao* then you've got the essential concept of heart rhythm coherence.

For most people, 0.1 Hz is an optimal $HRV^{_{16}}$, however, it is not a static state. The autonomic nervous system is designed to oscillate between yang and yin and occurs within each inhalation-exhalation breath cycle. More on this point when I discuss breath work or *pranayam*.

My Own Experience with HRV and the Vagus Nerve

I happened upon the connection between parasympathetic activity and HRV during my own Kundalini yoga practices. *Pranayam* (yogic breathing) and chanting (*mantra*) have been highly effective ways

31

 $^{^{\}mbox{\tiny 16}}$ 0.1 Hz is optimal heart coherence when using HeartMath® technologies.

to bring my heart rhythm into coherence, the *tao*. Using my Heartmath Inner Balance®, I noticed a consistent increase in parasympathetic activity and increased heart rhythm coherence during *pranayam* and chanting that is fairly reproducible. In addition to the breathing and chanting, thoughts quickly influence heart coherence. That is where meditation will come in a bit later in this discussion.

In the Kundalini yogic tradition, the vagus nerve is referred to as "the central tuning string of the body," a beautiful metaphor that encapsulates its function. The vagus nerve is a two-way information highway that runs between the major organs (and other critical areas) and the brain. When the vagus nerve is "in tune," the parasympathetic and sympathetic systems are in harmony and the heart enters into a rhythmic or coherent flow state, the *tao*. The internal organs and the brain begin to resonate with the heart and the heart resonates with the greater cosmic order, as the Ancient Wisdom traditions understood. Cosmic order can be thought of as the electro-magnetic fields of the earth, sun, and solar system.

We begin to enter "right order" as our heart aligns with the beat of the universe. The words of mythologist Joseph Campbell say this so well:

The goal of life is to make your heartbeat match the beat of the

¹⁷ As taught by Yogi Bhajan.

universe, to match your nature with Nature.

As discussed earlier, a coherent heart enables the rest of the body to resonate with the "central tuning string," and thus creates a harmonious vibration that can extend beyond the body. This energetic field begins to affect others nearby.

Stimulating the vagus nerve creates feelings of empathy and the instinct to nurture. Stephen W. Porges coined the term "nerve of compassion" to reflect this special function (among many others). This happens, in part, because the nerve stimulates receptor networks for oxytocin, a neurotransmitter that has been shown to increase trust and human bonding. Not only does the vagus nerve increase oxytocin, making us trust and want to bond, but it affects our electromagnetic field or aura, making others trust and want to bond with us as well. Again, this assumes we receive cues of safety from others and the environment. Rituals are often done within a community where the individuals find safety within the group.

"Rituals involving chants, prayers, meditation, dance, and posture shifts (e.g. kneeling, falling prostrate, etc.) provide potent stimuli to our nervous system to challenge and 'exercise' the vagal pathways that downregulate defense and promote states of calm and stillness" (Porges). Yogic exercises, such as breathing (pranayam) and postures, which focus on vagal nerve stimulation and parasympathetic rebalancing, are highly

Porges, Stephen W. "The polyvagal perspective." *Biological Psychology* 74 (2) (2006): 116-43.

effective for optimizing heart coherence, thereby relieving high-functioning anxiety and cold depression, feelings of numbness and isolation.

By applying the premise that HRV is an indicator of health and vagal tonality, people using any HRV biofeedback device, including HeartMath®, can determine the effectiveness of vagal exercises for themselves. As research continues to document the effectiveness of mindfulness-based techniques, just about anyone can confirm this for themselves.

Elementary logic can be of assistance here. If HRV is a predictor of all-cause mortality, as Western medical journals have and are continuing to report, then optimizing your own HRV will improve your health and well-being. This is time well spent. It is relatively inexpensive to do and if you need help I offer mentoring services to support you in your process (see Resources at the end of this book). Get into the zone of the *tao*, improve your health and well-being, and get a handle on your high-functioning anxiety and cold depression-now. Let's get started!

Ritual 1: Opening the Sacred Space

Ancient rituals, as well as many modern ones, begin by "opening the sacred space," where we leave the ordinary day behind as eternal time and place are metaphorically entered. The creation of a sacred space also provides a safe container for individuals, essential for the rituals to be effective, especially regarding the regulation of the nervous system. There are many benefits to ritual time and space, but since our focus is primarily relieving high-functioning anxiety, I will focus on the nervous system and the ritual process. First, some broader context regarding the ritual process and sacred space.

In The Rites of Passage, anthropologist Arnold van Gennep refers to the three stages of the ritual process, beginning with a separation from the previous world (21). For rituals to be effective there needs to be a separation from our daily routine. A "time out," if you will. Émile Durkheim coined the term the "sacred and profane" to distinguish ritual time (sacred) and everyday time and space (profane or ordinary). Ritual time allows for something special to occur, something unusual has the opportunity to break through ordinary consciousness, a hierophany. In this book, I define hierophany, loosely, as higher consciousness that breaks through when lower vibratory thought patterns or mind fluctuations are calmed. As the ancients understood, the Ultimate (Christ consciousness Christian consciousness in terminology, Buddha consciousness in Buddhism)

[&]quot;Hierophany is a term coined by Mircea Eliade to describe

[&]quot;breakthroughs of the sacred (or the 'supernatural') into the World" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hierophany

underlies our everyday awareness and may spontaneously appear when the mind calms its mental fluctuations.

Creating sacred space provides containment for safely entering ritual time.

Sacred spaces reach back into mythological times, where a grove of trees or a designated lake served as a portal for transformational. Indigenous people created circular teepees with a central pole representing the world axis. Ancient people lived in direct contact with the earth, which has proven health benefits. The earth's surface is electron-enriched and helps improve sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous system balance (Chevalier, "Emotional Stress, Heart Rate Variability, Grounding, and Improved Autonomic Tone" Although modern humans are almost always electrically isolated from the ground, you can easily incorporate "earthing" techniques into your day by simply making skin contact with the earth or "grounding."

Temples, cathedrals, and sacred sites have long served humankind as places set aside to enter ritual time and space. Sacred sites may be grand or a dedicated place that you reserve for your practice. It may also be your own meditation cushion, perhaps with a couple of candles lit. It is the intention behind the space and not

https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Emotional-Stress%2C-Heart-Rate-Variability%2C-and-Tone%3A-Chevalier-Sinatra/844fa28756f93afbb1777d336bedd12cd04fdb11

necessarily the space itself that creates a feeling of safety and separateness from the outside world.

Creating an environment of safety is essential before you can enter a state of calm and let down your guard. Whether entering sacred space alone or in a group, the feelings of safety allows your nervous system to suspend its vigilance of scanning for danger (Porges²¹). Sacred space is a safe place and is required for the rituals to be effective, in our case, relieving high-functioning anxiety.

Opening the sacred space can be done in many different ways.

- Designated place; a special mat, enclosed by a circle, or a designated retreat center
- Connection to earth, either directly or with a grounding mat (rubber yoga mats isolate you from ground and therefore are not used when grounding)
- Being removed from daily routine
- Bringing in the elements; earth, water, fire, air, and ether (some or all)
- Creating a safe environment to allow for emotions to emerge
- Invocation for healing or setting other intentions

Ritual 1: Creating Sacred Space from the Kundalini Yoga Tradition:

37

¹¹ https://www.embodiedphilosophy.com/ancient-rituals-contemplative-practices-and-vagal-pathways/

An example of creating a safe place for ritual practice comes from the Kundalini yoga tradition. A conscious application of the following ancient mantras is used in modern times to open the sacred space. Before practicing yoga, the practitioner "tunes in" to the creative consciousness of the universe and our own internal wisdom that guides us to be the best version of ourselves. Yogis teach that when you chant the *Adi* mantra, you reconnect with the guru within. In the Kundalini yoga tradition, guru means to transform yourself from a state of darkness (ignorance) into the light of higher awareness. This excludes the notion of some guru out in the external world. This is strictly an internal process of increasing awareness.

Adi Mantra:

Ong Namo Guru Dev Namo

Translation:

I bow to the Creative Wisdom; I bow to the Divine Teacher within.

The *Mangala Charan* mantra follows and is chanted to invoke protection from all four directions:

Aad guray nameh, Jugaad guray nameh Sat guray nameh, siri guroo dayv-ay nameh

Translation:

²² Although the Kundalini tradition is often associated with the Sikh tradition, neither 3HO or the Kundalini Research Institute requires any religious beliefs or associations for the mantras to be effective.

I bow to the primal wisdom.

I bow to the wisdom true through the ages.

I bow to the true wisdom. I bow to the great unseen wisdom.

Posture:

Sit either on the floor in easy pose (cross-legged) or in a chair, connected to the ground.

Feel your sitting bones deeply connecting to the earth. Ensure that your spine is straight. Tuck your chin in slightly into "neck-lock" (*jalandhar bandh*).

Hand Position (*Mudra*):

Press your hands together at your heart center in prayer pose.

Vocalization (*Mantra*):

Chant each three times: the Adi Mantra, followed by the *Mangala Charan* (see above)

Eye Position (*Dhrist*):

Eyes are closed and focused at the third eye point (between the eyebrows).

Breath Pattern (*Pranayam***):**

Allow the breath to flow naturally.

Visualization:

Tune into your own subtlety and allow yourself to feel centered as you tune into Universal consciousness. Set an intention to relieve your stress and anxiety as you connect with your inner Heart's Wisdom.

Time:

The time it takes to chant three rounds, approximately 45-50 seconds.

Contraindication:

None. If you begin to feel dizzy, stop the exercise.

Optional HRV Biofeedback:

I have included an HRV biofeedback session recorded on myself at the end of each Ancient Ritual exercise to show how the exercises affect the autonomic nervous system. It is a powerful experience to witness how quickly your thoughts can affect your nervous system balance, and how you have the power to restore that balance. If you have an HRV biofeedback device, you may choose to use it during meditation. For many people, until they learn how to meditate, HRV biofeedback may be too distracting, as there can be a tendency to check in and see how you're doing.

Note: Different meditations affect people differently. By finding a meditation that resonates with you, you can begin to experience improved heart coherence if you choose to do so.

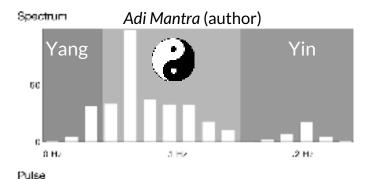


Figure 4 HRV Biofeedback session using HeartMath® Inner Balance app, Image credit: author.

Note: Heart rhythm coherence is highly affected by fluctuations of the mind. Feelings of safety must first be established before the ritual practices can really do their work. Every person will experience his or her own level of coherence while practicing this or any meditation. Factors include overall ANS functionality, mental state, and the breath.

Ritual 1, Example 2 from the Native American Tradition

Opening the Sacred Space: A Shamanic Tradition from the Americas

Wisdom traditions throughout the world begin ritual practices and ceremonies by opening the sacred space. Our second example comes from the Native American Shamanic tradition. As an invocation to open the sacred space, this prayer summons the powers of the Four Cardinal Directions (South, West, North, East) plus the Above (Sky) and Below (Earth).

Each direction has its own unique archetypal power beginning with the Snake in the South.

Invocation for Opening Sacred Space

[This Invocation for Opening Sacred Space is used with written permission; from Dr. Alberto Villolo's book *Shaman*, *Healer*, *Sage*.]

South

To the winds of the South
Great Serpent
Wrap your coils of light around us
Teach us to shed the past the way you shed your skin
To walk softly on the Earth
Teach us the Beauty Way

West

To the winds of the West Mother Jaguar Protect our medicine space Teach us the way of peace, to live impeccably Show us the way beyond death

North

To the winds of the North
Hummingbird, Grandmothers and Grandfathers
Ancient Ones
Come and warm your hands by our fires
Whisper to us in the wind
We honor you who have come before us
And you who will come after us, our children's children

East

To the winds of the East
Great eagle, condor
Come to us from the place of the rising Sun
Keep us under your wing
Show us the mountains we only dare to dream of
Teach us to fly wing to wing with the Great Spirit

Mother Earth

We've gathered for the healing of all of your children The Stone People, the Plant People The four-legged, the two-legged, the creepy crawlers The finned, the furred, and the winged ones All our relations

Father Sun

Father Sun, Grandmother Moon, to the Star Nations Great Spirit, you who are known by a thousand names And you who are the unnamable One Thank you for bringing us together And allowing us to sing the Song of Life

When the participants are ready to close the sacred space, the invocation is vocalized once again with deep gratitude.

When a person calls upon the six directions he or she orients him or herself to the greater cosmic order, one *coheres* with Universal order. The recurring theme of bringing oneself into alignment with the greater universal order is key and inherent in heart rhythm coherence.

Opening the sacred space is often accompanied with sounds, scents, and one or more of the five elements. Examples include adding ritual drumming, singing, chanting, aromatic herbs, water, fire, and earth elements. A simple candle warming essential oil helps transform ordinary space into sacred space.

Ritual 2: Mantra (Vocalizations) or Naad Yoga

Ancient people from around the world have chanted since time immemorial. From the Shamanic traditions, to Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism and beyond, people have chanted in order to connect with their unique incarnation of Universal consciousness. Mantras, in their original language, contain repetitive patterns of sound that vibrate the body and mind in specific patterns and frequencies. Mantras are sacred songs designed to unite the chanter with higher fields of vibration. Chanting is an embodied practice where the chanter has a direct experience of his or her own soul in relation to the greater whole.

The Ancient Vedic tradition, for example, teaches that mantra is a sound, syllable, word, or pattern of sounds that fosters transformation. When mantras are translated into English or most other languages, the rhythmic patterns may be lost or greatly weakened. Mantras are like seeds that get planted in the person's unconscious psyche and over time spur new behavior patterns. This includes new responses to stress triggers, especially useful in transforming high-functioning anxiety.

Mantras have specific cadences and frequencies. The *Naad*, or essence of the sound, is designed to alter your conscious awareness. The word *Naad* comes from the word *naadi*, the subtle nerve channels, or meridians in the ancient Chinese tradition. Sound travels as vibrations and causes a resonance pattern at specific frequencies. This is referred to as *Naad* yoga and is incorporated into the Kundalini yoga tradition. Yogis

teach that, when you chant sacred mantras, a neurophysiological cascade begins to happen. As you chant specific mantras, the tip of the tongue rhythmically taps the upper palate of the mouth, which contains eighty-four meridian points. The pressure causes the hypothalamus gland to become stimulated, which in turns signals the release of hormones. Yogi Bhajan described it as follows:

"You can feel the upper palate with the tongue and experience its different surfaces. There are two rows of meridian points on the upper palate and on the gum behind the upper teeth. The tongue stimulates those meridian points, and they, in turn, stimulate the hypothalamus, which makes the pineal gland radiate. When the pineal gland radiates, it creates an impulsation in the pituitary gland. When the pituitary gland gives impulsation, the entire glandular system secretes and a human being obtains bliss. This is the science." –Yogi Bhajan²²

Naad yoga is the science of sound vibrations that affects the body, mind and spirit through the patterned movement of the tip of the tongue on the upper palate of the mouth. Chanting mantra is not the same as singing; rather, it is the creation of specific vibrations that has a direct effect on your emotional state. Chanting is an excellent technique to practice to quell high-functioning anxiety and stress-induced depression.

https://www.3ho.org/kundalini-yoga/mantra/naad-yoga-how-mantra-works/basics-sound-mantra

The polyvagal informed approach identifies specific vagal mechanisms that are exercised during ritual chanting. The vagus portion of the laryngeal and pharyngeal nerves are exercised during Ancient Ritual chanting (Porges, Vagal Pathways: Portals to Compassion²⁴) that incorporates long exhalations, vibrational toning, and diaphragmatic breathing. An example follows, Ritual 2 exercise.

The yogis teach that when you resonate with the vibratory frequency patterns of a mantra, you will attract the same vibratory pattern of the mantra. As you begin to vibrate the mantra in the cells of your body and in your electro-magnetic field, you will attract that which harmonizes with the mantra. Mantras are universal and can be practiced by anyone independent of faith.

Ritual Exercise 2: Long Sat Nam's: Meditation to Completely Neutralize Tension¹⁵

This Kundalini yoga meditation uses a prolonged sound current, which neutralizes tension. The SAAAAAA in "Sat Nam" is extended so that the exhalation becomes long and slow. The practitioner inhales deeply and lowers the diaphragm prior to beginning the vocalization.

Tune-in (Vocalization) and Open the Sacred Space (see above)

-

²⁴ https://youtu.be/VAL-MMYptQc?t=1581

https://www.3ho.org/kundalini-yoga/mantra/long-sat-nams-meditation-completely-neutralize-tension

Posture:

Sit with a straight spine.

Hand Position (Mudra):

Bring forearms up and place the back of the right hand in the palm of the left hand. Extend fingers and place left thumb tip in the center of the right palm and cross the right thumb over the left thumb.

Vocalization (Mantra):

Sat Nam, pronounced SAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA Nam (nam rhymes with mom)

Translation: Truth is my identity.

Inhale deeply as you open your abdomen, allowing the diaphragm to lower; exhale completely as you chant long Sat, short *Nam:*

The ratio of *Sat* to *Nam* is approximately 35:1.

Eye Position (Dhrist):

Eyes are 9/10ths closed.

Breath Pattern (Pranayam):

Allow the breath to flow naturally as you chant the elongated Sat Nam. Allow your diaphragm to lower as you chant by "opening" the abdomen.

Visualization:

Tune in to your own subtlety and allow yourself to feel centered as you tune into Universal consciousness. Set an intention to relieve your stress and anxiety as you connect with your inner Heart's Wisdom.

Time:

The time it takes to chant three rounds.

Contraindication:

None. If you begin to feel dizzy, stop the exercise.

Optional HRV Biofeedback:

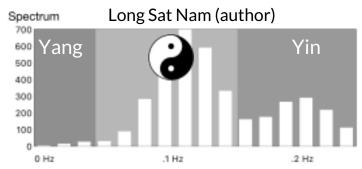


Figure 5 HRV Biofeedback session using HeartMath® Inner Balance app, Image credit: author.

Notice that most of the autonomic nervous system activity is in the zone of Tao and Yin. This means the parasympathetic nervous system is activated along with the vagus nerve.

Ritual 2, Example 2 from the Ancient Christian Tradition, Gregorian Chants

Sacred chanting is ubiquitous with Wisdom traditions, including the Christian Contemplative traditions which incorporated Gregorian Chants (named after named after Pope Gregory The Great in 600 CE) into worship.

Long, tonal syllables chanted in ancient rhythmic breath patterns have been central to numerous (if not all) spiritual traditions world-wide. The elongated vowel tones vibrate the body, including the vagus nerve as previously discussed. Dr. Cynthia Bourgeault, Episcopal priest, writer, and internationally recognized teacher, says the ancient chanting, "Unites the center of the heart with the vibrational intelligence of the body." (Introduction to Sacred Chanting 2:04 https://youtu.be/_J80rH4-Wt4 min 2:04). In language used in this book, sacred chanting establishes heart rhythm coherence through the stimulation of the vagus nerve.

Whether due entirely to the stimulation of the vagus nerve, I do not know because I have not tested performed HRV analysis on this ritual process What I do know is that sacred chanting has the ability to reach deep into my soul and enliven me with a new sense of being. It can be an otherworldly experience that touches the heart while bypassing the rational mind. In the words of Arvo Pärt, the renowned Estonian composer:

"Gregorian chant has taught me what a cosmic secret is hidden in the art of combining two, three notes." 26

In "Origins and Applications of Music in Chronic Illness: Role of the Voice, Ancient Chant Scales, and Autonomic Nervous System," Benedictine Sister Ruth Stanley (former head of the complementary medicine program at the Central Minnesota Heart Center at St. Cloud Hospital, observed that "The body can move into a deeper level of its own inherent, innate healing ability when you play a chant." Chanting helps regulate the autonomous nervous system by increasing the parasympathetic activity and balancing it with the sympathetic branch. This is the same concept as chanting the long Sat Nam mantra in the previous example.

Once again, I encourage readers to perform their own HRV biofeedback analysis and determine which ancient rituals are most effect for obtaining optimal states of heart coherence. In order to quell high-functioning anxiety (and other stress related conditions) the goal is to attain high heart coherence. The preferred method of achieving improved heart rhythm coherence is best left up to the individual as there are many paths to achieving high heart coherence.

-

⁽¹⁹⁸⁸ interview with Martin Elste, Fanfare, March-April, 1988. https://www.arvopart.ee/en/arvo-part/article/an-interview-with-arvo-part/)

[&]quot;Stanley R. "Origins and Applications of Music in Chronic Illness: Role of the Voice, Ancient Chant Scales, and Autonomic Nervous System." In: Stoltzfus M.J., Green R., Schumm D. (eds) Chronic Illness, Spirituality, and Healing. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013.

Ritual 3: Pranayam Breathwork

Breathwork or *pranayam* is one of the most immediate and effective ways to shift feelings of stress, anxiety, and stress-induced depression in the moment. Breathing is under both autonomic control and can be overridden by conscious awareness. Most people can feel benefits of breath work within seconds and you can measure your body's response with HRV. An example follows later in this section.

An advantage of pranayam over yoga postures and even mantra is that when you are feeling anxiety, you can take a quick break and consciously breathe. Even a few minutes can reset your emotional mood.

Breathwork affects the regulation of the autonomic nervous system through the stimulation of the vagus nerve³. As you inhale, your heart rate naturally increases and during the exhalation your heart rate

53

https://integratedlistening.com/blog/2019/12/02/the-nervous-system-circuitry-of-safety-sound-

gratitude/?utm_source=Unyte+Newsletter&utm_campaign=f23dcf f5bb-

<u>EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_09_05_COPY_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0a25b9765a-f23dcff5bb-</u>

^{315092149&}amp;mc_cid=f23dcff5bb&mc_eid=5bf694c9a0

gradually decreases. These changes are subtle and you will not likely notice them. When you utilize heart rate variability biofeedback, these changes become apparent. You can retrain yourself to use breath to quell anxiety and shift cold depression.

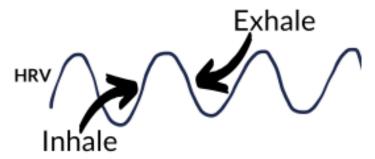


Figure 6: Heart rate increases on the inhale, decreases on the exhale. Image credit: author

The right vagus nerve goes directly to (innervates) the heart's pacemaker, the sinus atrial node, which initiates the heartbeat³⁰. The vagus nerve acts as a brake on the pacemaker, meaning when the brake is off, the heart beats faster; this occurs on the inhalation. When the vagal brake is on, the heart rate slows; this occurs on the exhalation. See Figure 5.

Heart rate accelerates during inspiration and slows down during

54

³⁹ a phenomenon that is called respiratory sinus arrhythmia

The vagus nerve goes from the brain stem to most organs and many locations in the body; for the purpose of this discussion we are only concerned with the heart and heart rate.

expiration, a phenomenon that is called respiratory sinus arrhythmia.

Ocean Breath (*Ujjayi Pranayama*)

The vagus nerve travels through the jaw area and is sensitive to vibrations. I have found Ocean Breath to be one of the quickest ways to bring myself into optimal heart rhythm coherence, the *tao* flow.

Tune-in¹¹ (Vocalization) and Open the Sacred Space (see above)

Posture:

Sit either on the floor in easy pose (cross-legged) or in a chair, preferably grounded. Feel your sitting bones deeply connecting to the earth. Ensure that your spine is straight. Tuck you chin in slightly into "neck-lock" (*jalandhar bandh*).

Hand Position (Mudra):

Hands can be resting in your lap or in *Gyan Mudra*, thumb and index fingers pressing together.

Vocalization (Mantra):

Gentle sound of the ocean breath. See Breath Pattern below.

call to your higher Self, the healer within, and aligns you with Infinite source.

Tuning In: Translation: I bow to the infinite teacher within, and open myself to the infinite source of wisdom, healing, and creativity within me. Before beginning any Kundalini yoga practice, "tune-in" with the Adi Mantra, which sets an intention to connect with your infinite Self within. This also helps to set practice time apart from your normal daily routine. Tuning-in is a

Eye Position (Dhrist):

Eyes are closed and focused at the third eye point (between the eyebrows).

Breath Pattern (Pranayam):

"Ocean Breath" or *ujjayi* sounds like the ocean when done properly. The back of your throat is slightly constricted as you inhale and exhale. This pressure causes the "ocean" sound. Imagine that you put a large sea shell up to your ear and listen. That is the sound you will be aiming for.

Begin by imagining you are fogging a mirror through an open mouth on the exhalation--listen to the sound. Now close your mouth and continue breathing making the same sound, now using the nostrils. Create the sound on both the inhale and exhale.

- Inhale deeply and slowly using diaphragmatic breathing.
- Partially close your glottis (the part of the larynx consisting of the vocal cords and the opening between them) by constricting the back of the throat—gently.
- Exhale and inhale slowly making an "ocean sounding breath"

Visualization:

Tune into your own subtlety and allow yourself to feel centered as you tune into Universal consciousness. Set an intention to relieve your stress and anxiety as you connect with your inner Heart's Wisdom.

Time:

3-11 minutes, build up to 31 minutes if desired.

Contraindication:

None. If you begin to feel dizzy, stop the exercise.

Optional HRV Biofeedback:

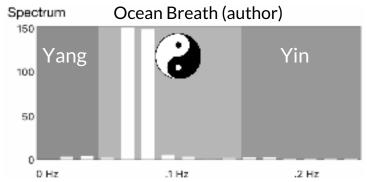


Figure 7 HRV Biofeedback session using HeartMath® Inner Balance app, Image credit: author.

I have found that for myself and my clients, Ocean Breath is one of the most consistent practices that brings me into high heart coherence, in the *tao* zone. The gentle pressure that you apply to the throat stimulates the vagus nerve pair that runs through the throat. Everyone's experience may vary.

Ritual 3, Example 2: Qigong Ritual Breathwork

The words "breath" and "spirit" are synonymous in many of the world's Wisdom traditions. Although the yogic traditions have popularized *pranayama* (the Hindu science of breath), virtually all spiritual practices incorporate breath work, or did so at one time. *Prana* is the life force energy. In Japan it's called *ki*, in China, *chi*, and the ancient Hawaiians called it *ha*.

The ancient Chinese exercise, Qigong, uses focused breathing techniques based on Taoist methods. Focused, circular breathing is central to Qigong where the practitioner consciously aligns breath, body, and spirit. There is a growing body of research that concludes "there is evidence that Qi Gōng can improve HRV but studies that would use the same parameters are needed to further confirm that" ("Carla Cristina Ramos et al. Qi Gong and Heart Rate Variability: A Systematic Review").³²

Interested readers are encouraged to try practicing Qigong and maintain their own HRV biofeedback records. Over time, you will have valid evidence if this ancient practice adequately improves your HRV.

http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/ Open Access

Carla Cristina Ramos et al. Journal of Bio- sciences and Medicines, 5, 120-127. https://doi.org/10.4236/jbm.2017.53013

Received: October 15, 2016 Accepted: March 24, 2017 Published: March 27, 2017 Copyright © 2017 by authors and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

Ritual 4: Postures or Asanas

Yoga postures (*asanas*) can also be an effective means of relieving anxiety, in part by stimulating the vagus nerve. Examples of Kundalini yoga postures that invigorate the vagus nerve include: neck lock, shoulder stand, plow pose, and cobra pose³³.

Yoga postures are typically done within a sequence of postures, also known as a *kriya*. I find that each of these postures has the application of pressure on the neck region and the carotid region of the vagus nerve in common. There are likely other factors that influence vagal nerve stimulation.



Figure 8 Plow Pose (photo credit: author)

https://www.3ho.org/subtle-anatomy-brain

Always allow the yoga to meet you where you are.

It is highly advisable to find a local certified yoga teacher to help guide you into and out of this and other postures. While yoga can be relaxing, it is also imperitive not to push yourself beyond your limits. Injury may result.

There are numerous modifications for most yoga postitions that allows your body to adjust slowly. Over time you will develop greater flexibility. Always allow the yoga to meet you where you are.

Optional HRV Biofeedback

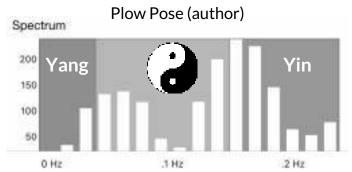


Figure 9 HRV Biofeedback session using HeartMath® Inner Balance app, Image credit: author.

During plow pose, my HRV biofeedback shows increased parasympathetic activity. Again, this reflects vagal nerve and increased parasympathetic (Yin) activity.

Vagus Nerve Exercise³⁴

Tune-in³⁵ (Vocalization)

Posture:

Sit either on the floor in easy pose (crosslegged) or in a chair with a straight spine.

Hand Position (Mudra):

Press your hands together at your heart center in prayer pose.

Vocalization (Mantra):

None.

Eye Position (Dhrist):

Eyes are closed and focused at the third eye point (between the eyebrows).

Breath Pattern (Pranayam):

Long Deep Breathing. As you inhale, feel your abdomen expanding and your diaphragm descending.

Visualization:

Visualize a gold chain connecting your chin and the hollow in the center of the base of your neck; shorten the chain by imagining that you are pulling the

⁴ https://www.3ho.org/subtle-anatomy-brain

chin down into an exaggerated Neck Lock (Jalandhar bandh).

Time:

Build up to 11 minutes

Contraindication:

None. If you begin to feel dizzy, stop the exercise.

Optional HRV Biofeedback:

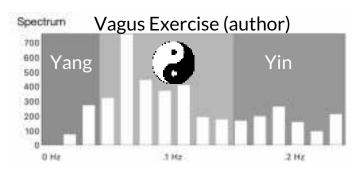


Figure 10 HRV Biofeedback session using HeartMath® Inner Balance app, Image credit: author.

The Vagus Exercise, also part of Ritual 4, was effective in stimulating the vagus nerve (as the name suggests) and increasing parasympathetic (yin) activity. The yang activity, although present, is significantly reduced.

Ritual 4, Example 2: Prayer Pose from Other Traditions



Figure 11 Prayer Pose, Photo Credit: Pixlar.com 4gcqrf3f2i

Prayer Pose is a universal posture used in ritual practices as well as yoga classes. Prayer Pose, also called *Anjali mudra*, embodies an act of surrender, composure, and a coming home to the heart. The palms are pressed together and the thumbs press into the sternum, forming a physical and energetic connection with the heart. The fingers are aligned and touching; the experience is balancing and centering.

Yogic traditions teach that the right side of the body, the *pingala*, and the left side, the *ida*, are polarized and a neutral space is created by bringing the hands together in Prayer Pose. Whether you practice Prayer Pose as part of a ritual practice or in a yoga pose you will likely find the posture centering and grounding.

Ritual 5: Meditations or Prayer

Balancing Mind & Heart Unto Infinity Meditation

This meditation uses a reverse "whistle" breath. Breath practices that tense the lips in a rounded formation tend to stimulate the vagus nerve and is said to balance the frequency and quality of the Heart Center.



Figure 12: Hand position for "Heart and Mind Unto Infinity," Image credit: author)

Tune-in (Vocalization) and Open the Sacred Space (see above)

Posture:

Sit either on the floor in easy pose (crosslegged) or in a chair. Ensure that your spine is straight. Tuck your chin in slightly into "necklock" (*jalandhar bandh*).

Hand Position (Mudra):

Bring the hands on to the chest so that the thumbs are tucked into the armpits. Press the thumbs against the rib cage. Relax the palms and fingers of each hand against the chest. Elbows are relaxed at the sides.

Vocalization (Mantra) and Breath Pattern (Pranayam):

So Hung

Translation: Infinity, I am Thou

Pucker the lips and inhale deeply through the mouth with a whistle breath. Listen to the whistle sound of the inhalation as you mentally vibrate the sound **So.**

Completely exhale through the nose as you listen to the breath and mentally vibrate the sound *Hung*.

Eve Position (Dhrist):

Eyes are closed and focused at the third eye point (between the eyebrows).

Visualization:

Tune into your own subtlety and allow yourself to feel centered as you tune into Universal consciousness. Set an intention to relieve your stress and anxiety as you connect with your inner Heart's Wisdom.

Time:

3-11 minutes, build up to 31 minutes if desired.

Contraindication:

None. If you begin to feel dizzy, stop the exercise.

Optional HRV Biofeedback:

Spectrum Balancing Mind & Heart (author)

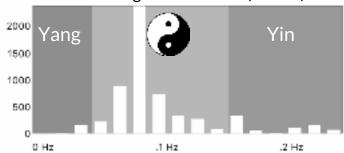


Figure 13 HRV Biofeedback session using HeartMath® Inner Balance app, Image credit: author.

The Balancing Mind and Heart ritual exercise resulted in a balanced autonomic nervous system, at least during part of the practice, where the Yang and Yin were balanced, resulting in the zone of Tao.

Ritual 5, Example 2: Sufi Mystical Poetry as Prayer

Sufism constitutes the esoteric arm of Islam and embraces the metaphor of the seeker or wayfarer as lover who searches for his or her Beloved, the Divine as the ultimate Home. Each seeker must find his or her unique pathway, for which Sufism provides several universal guideposts. The Sufi's heart holds one's high consciousness, envisioned as the Beloved (Infinite).

Through continual remembrance of the Infinite (the practice of *dhirkr*), grace may be bestowed from the Beloved Divine to human lover. This moment of spiritual awakening is the "turning of one's heart" (*tauba*) towards the Beloved. The Sufi's remembrance is heartfelt and experiential (*tahqi*), not performed through intellectualizing or from imitating spiritual practices (*taqlid*). One must be engaged with the practice and *experience* the transformative effects derived from spiritual work. (Just as one can experience heart coherence and gain great value, or read about it and gain virtually nothing.)

Rūmi emphasized the value of direct experience of the spiritual realm versus the emptiness of mimicking truth through another's eyes. In other words, parroting prayers and spiritual rituals have little to no value if one is not *experiencing* that which is intended to shine through.

If you become an exponent (imitator) of the song of birds, how will you become acquainted with the (real) meaning of the bird? If you learn the note of a nightingale, how will you know What (feelings) it has towards a rose?

Or if you do know, 'twill be from analogy and surmise, like the conjectures formed by deaf people from those who move their lips. (*Mathnawi*, *Book 1* lines 3355-3360)

Readers who are drawn to the poetry of Rūmi (or any ancient spiritual text of their choosing) are encouraged to practice HRV biofeedback after reading for 15 minutes or so. I have personally experienced some of my highest coherence scores after reading spiritual texts.

Mystical Christian spiritual reading, or *Lectio* Divina (Latin: Divine Reading) has four separate components:

1. Lectio: Read

2. Meditatio: Meditate

3. Oratio: Pray

4. Contemplatio: Contemplate



Figure 14 Image Credit, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectio_Divina

The reading of spiritual texts may be a preferred way for some readers to reduce high-functioning anxiety while increasing heart coherence.

As I have emphasized previously, direct experience is the key to learning what gets you into high heart coherence; what works for one person may not have the same effect on someone else. Explore and create your own unique rituals practices that yield the highest heart coherence, an indication that you are aligned with the higher Universal order (or whatever your preferred term is).

Ritual 6: Trancing with a Gong Bath

The gong is one of humanity's oldest and most transformative instruments. Like the sound AUM, it resonates the creative essence of the Universe. The gong has been used in ritual ceremonies throughout the history of humanity from its use in Buddhist monasteries, to ancient Egypt and Greece, and many other civilizations past and present. Ancient cultures considered the gong to be a portal into other realms and a powerful instrument for transformation and healing.

The sound of the gong ushers in a crossing of a threshold. It opens doors to other realms and has been used as an integral part of transformational rituals including birth, death, marriage, and initiation rites (Benton *Gong Yoga*). To the Ancients ones, these ritual events were considered to be liminal, a state of betwixt and between. Let's take a closer look at what is meant by the term "liminality."

Returning to van Gennep's *Ritual Process*, the second phase of the ritual process is that of liminality or threshold rites. From the Latin, liminal means threshold, a separation of two different realties. Using the example of marriage, the groom carries the bride across the threshold, symbolically acknowledging moving from a state of separation (being single) to a new state of union (marriage). Although the threshold is a momentary passage, it is life changing. Threshold rituals honored the transition and allowed for time to make the necessary shift in consciousness from the "before state" to the "after state."

Most everyone experiences mind-body (psychophysical) liminality, the stage between sleeping

and waking, on a daily basis. Liminality is a state betwixt and between two very different states, in this example, sleep and waking consciousness. This liminal zone is referred to in psychological terms as a *hypnagogic* state, passing between sleep and wakefulness or vice versa. Borders of reality are blurred on the threshold of sleep and wakefulness. Liminality is not limited to the sleepwaking threshold state. Beyond the sleep-waking example, it was believed that in order for transitions to be made effectively, a state of altered consciousness was necessary.

An altered state of consciousness is thought to be an integral part of the healing process in Non-Western traditions.

Trancing has been an integral part of the ritual experience for thousands of years. The ritual process invokes a liminal state by way of several methods. Examples from various traditions include: mind-altering ethnobotanicals, rhythmic drumming, the whirling dances of the Sufis, and the hypnotic chanting of Gregorian monks.

In Shamanism, the Shaman entered altered states of consciousness, the Shamanic state, in order to access spirits and the spiritual realm. From a psychological perspective, Jung claimed that the "spirits" existed within the psyche yet they could not be connected to ordinary waking ego consciousness. The ego must be lulled into compliance so that the practitioner could enter

into states conducive to healing (a return to wholeness) and transformation.

C. G. Jung described trancing (later renamed active imagination) as a hypnotic state that allowed one easier access to unconscious material. During altered states of consciousness, the veils between waking reality and the unconscious realm become thinner. Entering liminal space can be thought of as a sort of "mini-death" where the ego surrenders its authority to the higher Self.

This experience of surrender requires the ego to let go of its grasp on reality as the individual drifts beyond everyday time and space. This death or surrender of the ego allows for a realignment of our true reality (Self, atman, Christ consciousness) with greater cosmic order.

Healing high-functioning anxiety and cold depression requires a surrender of ego consciousness and a realignment with a higher organizing principle within.

There is a resurgence of sound therapy options today, and the gong plays a central role in this vibrational healing modality. "Gong baths" have been popular in yoga classes as a way for students to enter deep yogic sleep (nidra). This unique state of altered consciousness is a state of direct awareness that is believed to allow for the processing of persistent unconscious material. The yogis call these blockages samskaras, and they are released as the mind-body allows the sound vibrations to

reorganize discordant patterns of thought and behaviors.

Participants in sound healing enter into a light trance that has been described by some as "otherworldly." The synchronization of mind, body, and psyche is central to healing and restoring one to the natural state of *tao*. Joseph Campbell reflected that,

"The myths and rites were means of putting the mind in accord with the body, and the way of life in accord with the way that nature dictates" (Joseph Campbell, Power of Myth 87).

The sound current realigns your mind-body rhythms with the rhythms of the cosmos. The gong resonates/vibrates out the primal sound of the universe. During a therapeutic gong bath, your mind and body begin to resonate with the primordial vibration of *AUM*.

There is a mind-body basis for the "otherworldly" experiences during a gong bath. On a more pragmatic level (to the Western mind), you can demonstrate the effects the gong has on your autonomic nervous system. The ANS shifts into a parasympathetic dominant state (Yin on the graph) for most people. It is important that you are able to completely relax into the sound current to have a therapeutic effect.

If you've ever experienced a "gong bath," you may have felt somewhat overwhelmed at first as the ego is reluctant to surrender to the experience. Once you let go and relax into it, the sound begins to bypass the mind

and activates the vagus nerve. How do we know this? By remembering that HRV is an indirect measurement of vagal activity, and when the parasympathetic is engaged, the vagus nerve is working (see graph below, remembering the Yin state is primarily parasympathetic activity).

Optional HRV Biofeedback:

This HRV session screen shot was recorded during a gong bath using Dr. Hari Simran Singh Khalsa's, "Seed" soundtrack. Although professional live gong playing is preferable, a recorded gong session can be used if live gong music is not available.

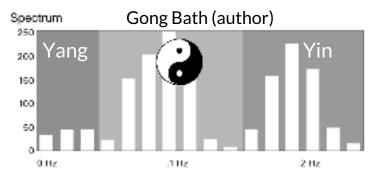


Figure 15 Gong Bath HeartMath® Inner Balance iPhone app, Credit: author

The sound of the gong penetrates the listener deeply and positively affects heart rhythms. The sound of the gong allows you to get beyond your analytical mind. During this gong bath, I recorded this HRV segment that shows a mix of being in the zone of Tao and Yin, deeply relaxing.

Ritual 6, Example 2: Trancing or Active Imagination: A Jungian Perspective

Jung's method of "trancing," or active imagination, is one avenue of healing high-functioning anxiety through the generation of images that carry potent messages from psyche. "Trancing," "visioning," and the "picture method" were synonymous terms with what is known today as active imagination. Jung used the terms trancing and active imagination to indicate a technique for entering the archetypal realm between conscious and unconscious awareness. This state is synonymous with the theta frequency of brain waves (4-8 Hz), one that occurs while meditating or drifting off to sleep.

Jung's initial term trancing more appropriately reflects an auto induced non-ordinarily state of consciousness than does his later term active imagination, a more sanitized term. Trancing has shamanistic overtones associated with healing rituals of indigenous people. Trancing evokes a right-brained mode of accessing the collective unconscious (composite of human experience since time immemorial) which Harner and Castandeda have referred to as the non-ordinary reality of the shaman (qtd. Jung and Shamanism, 114).

As a comparison, the *Kundalini* tradition utilizes the hypnotic effect of chanting *mantras*, and similarly, whirling dervishes from the Sufi tradition purposefully whirl to induce a non-ordinary state of ecstatic consciousness.

The following was Jung's description of the trancing technique he communicated to one of his patients, Christina Morgan:

You only use the retina of the eye at first in order to objectify: Then instead of keeping on trying to force the image out you just want to look in. Now when you see these images you want to hold them and see where they take you—how they change. And you want to try to get into the picture yourself—to become one of the actors. When I first began to do this I saw landscapes. Then I learned how to put myself into the landscape, and the figures would talk to me and I would answer them (*Redbook Reader's Edition* 75).

The trancing technique dims conscious awareness and allows the unconscious to break through in the language of image. Most people have experienced falling into a daydream, which is similar to trancing. Trancing requires a person to purposefully drop out of ordinary consciousness by softening one's gaze, entering a meditative space, and plunging down into the imaginal realm of archetypal images, the collective unconscious. Trancing provides an entrance into this imaginal realm, a state where images appear not as fantasies, but rather as symbolic messages from psyche--soma.

(Note: you may require the assistance of a person trained in Jungian archetypal psychology to assist you in bringing meaning to images that emerge from a light trance state. Please refer to the resources section at the

end of this book).

The following image entitled "Alchemical Snake" is provided an example of the power of trancing or active imagination.



Figure 16 Alchemical Snake, Image: used with permission of artist choosing to remain anonymous.

The snake image in an alchemical vessel is one from a series of "visionings" experienced by a former client. This example provides insight into the possibilities of working with trance images. As part of a series, this indicated a phase of development on the person's individuation process, the journey of

becoming your highest and most authentic or "coherent" self.

Ritual 7: Social Engagement & Compassion

The first six rituals are simple practices that you can do on your own to stimulate your vagus nerve and help restore autonomic nervous system balance. That said, doing everything on your own only feeds into the false notion that independence and competition are the only ways to function in the world. Going it alone may appear to benefit you in the short term, but it often leads to feelings of isolation, loss of meaning, and burn out. Human beings are not designed to be on their own all of the time. We need each other for safety, support, and our own healing.

The role of compassion plays a great part in our healing journey: compassion for ourselves and compassion for others. Ancient rituals involved a community effort that supported the transformation of individuals or groups. Our physiology and emotional states directly impact those around us. In a mutually trusting environment, we can give and receive positive feedback and safety cues through facial expressions and voice intonations.

In "Vagal Pathways: Portals to Compassion," Stephen W. Porges proposed "a model that emphasizes the dependence of compassion on a vagal-mediated state that supports feelings of safety" (190). What does this mean? The state of compassion is linked to a healthy, functioning vagus nerve that communicates signals to the brain that "all is well." The brain acknowledges the signal by turning down the dial on stress-induced high-functioning anxiety.

When we are in fear mode, the vagus nerve shuts down so that our body can do what it needs to do to stay alive. As mentioned earlier, that may mean fight, run, or fake death in an attempt to outmaneuver the opposing threat. When the threat is your boss, your livelihood, or mounting bills, the stress signal stays on until we can interrupt and let the brain know that everything is okay. When experiencing fear, anxiety, and depression, you cannot simultaneously feel compassion.

Another way that group work proves beneficial is knowing that our electromagnetic fields interact with those of others, creating stronger energy fields that benefit everyone in it.

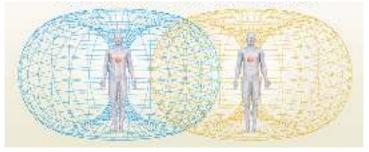


Figure 17 Interacting electromagnetic fields generated by the heart, credit: HeartMath®

The human heart is the strongest oscillating field in the human body and generates a powerful electromagnetic fields that can be measured from several feet away from the body. The heart's magnetic field interacts with other electromagnetic fields generated from other, the earth, and the solar system.

When you self-regulate your electromagnetic field (aura in yogic terms) you increase your feelings of health and well-being.

People engage in mindfulness practices, yoga, HeartMath® techniques, or other self-regulation techniques in order to feel calm and centered.

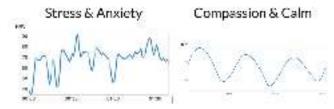


Figure 18 Emotional Signature of Stress & Compassion on Heart Rhythms using HeartMath® Inner Balance iPhone app, Credit: author.

Compassion and Healing

Your emotional state changes your heart rhythm pattern. Notice the difference between the signature pattern of stress versus that of compassion (Figure 13). Which pattern do you think is more centering and healing? The serpentine sine wave pattern on the right shows high heart coherence during which your capacity for compassion increases. If we feel stress and anxiety on a fairly regular basis, then our heart becomes chaotic and the vagus nerve becomes squelched. As humans living in challenging times, we owe it to ourselves and others to have a compassionate heart. This is so needed right now on our planet for healing and transformation. This was obvious to our ancestors and we can remember this wisdom for ourselves in today's modern world.

In order to be effective, social engagement needs to take place with people with whom we feel safe. Contact with people who undermine or threaten your emotional and physical sensibility are to be avoided whenever possible or kept to a minimum. Your health and well-being depend upon it because otherwise the stress response stays turned on in order to protect you from potential threats.

I understand. It is not always easy or even possible to change the people in your life who drain you. But what price are you paying for staying in repetitive situations that cause stress and high-functioning anxiety?

Find your own tribe of like-minded people. One of the positive benefits of the internet is that it opens up the world to you. Through social platforms and online classes and gatherings, it is possible to find people you wouldn't normally get a chance to meet. You may find that many like-minded people live within a reasonable

distance of you. Expand your tribe and socialize with people who are like-minded and appreciate you for you as you are.

Chapter 4: What if Nothing Changes?

I have been walking and creating the path of the 7 Ancient Rituals for many years because stress had caught up with me. And I didn't even realize just how stressed I was! After a while, stress and anxiety become the new norm of your life and the lives of people around you.

As some of you who follow my blog may know, I was diagnosed with Hashimoto's disease, a common low-thyroid condition. But what my endocrinologist didn't tell me was that it is an autoimmune disease, and one of the major underlying factors is unmanaged stress. I simply took the medication as I was told and never questioned it. At least not for a long while.

Unmanaged stress leads to disease states, as I talked about earlier. If you just keep chasing the symptoms, then the disease will likely pop up elsewhere. That is, until you get to the root causes, and stress is a major tap root.

You may not necessarily think about the fact that high-functioning anxiety creates the seed bed for disease until a stress-related diagnosis hits you. When the nervous system is overtaxed, the hormonal system follows.

Over time, you may begin to notice relationships becoming strained, sleep problems developing, addictive behaviors starting to form (food, alcohol, excessive shopping, drugs ...), and eventually we may develop a stress-related disease, whether it is an autoimmune disease, heart disease, high blood pressure, or many, many others.

Unmanaged stress and high-functioning anxiety can lead to burnout and disease states. Should you begin to experience feelings of burnout, this is a sign that you *need* to get your stress and high-functioning anxiety under control.



The relationship among chronic stress, anxiety, and disease is well documented in Western medical literature. As we've discussed throughout this book, HRV is a biomarker for stress and nervous system health. Here are just a couple of examples that you can read for yourself if you are interested:

"Chronic imbalance of the autonomic nervous system is a prevalent and potent risk factor for adverse cardiovascular events, including mortality"."

"HRV has been shown to correlate with FM [fibromyalgia] pain and is sensitive to change; in particular, pain related to physical and mental stressors. Thus, ANS [autonomic nervous system] dysfunction as assessed by HRV analysis may serve as a useful biomarker"

Over the past decades, research is emerging from leading Western medical institutions, including

90

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11794458

[&]quot; https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2772072/

Boston University and Harvard Medical Schools³⁸, demonstrating the effectiveness of Kundalini yoga (which includes meditations) on generalized anxiety disorder (GAD). Researchers are establishing connections among stress, anxiety, and meditation³⁹. More evidence-based research is required in order to establish Kundalini yoga as a therapy for anxiety disorders in the eyes of medical science. An NIH-funded, 5-year, multi-site trial currently underway will provide further validation of the effectiveness that Kundalini yoga has on generalized anxiety.

In the meantime, medical science has already established evidence-based linkages among anxiety, vagal nerve tonality, and heart rate variability (HRV). HRV is able to index cardiac vagal tonality. In other words, HRV is a biomarker (measurable index) for the functionality of the vagus nerve.

"In the general population, **low HRV** has been linked to increased risk of cardiovascular events and **all-cause** mortality.""

^{*} https://www.3ho.org/yoga-research-kundalini-yoga-anxiety

[&]quot; Int J Yoga Therap. 2018 Nov;28(1):97-105. doi: 10.17761/2018-00003. Epub 2018 Apr 26. "Kundalini Yoga for Generalized Anxiety Disorder: An Exploration of Treatment Efficacy and Possible Mechanisms." Researchers, M. G. Gabriel, Joshua Curtiss, Stefan G. Hofmann, and Sat Bir S. Khalsa concluded in their study that "Kundalini Yoga [which includes meditation] may show promise as a treatment for GAD [generalized anxiety disorder], and this treatment might convey its effect on symptom severity by reducing somatic symptoms."

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29698081

<u>ttps://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4995012/</u>

There is a plethora of research published in the medical literature examining the relationship between HRV, anxiety, and heart health. Here are just a few examples where researchers conclude that anxiety disorders are associated with low HRV:

"Given the importance of the autonomic nervous system to cardiovascular health, it is not surprising that there is and has been great interest in measurements of human sympathetic and vagus nerve traffic as tools that might inform physiological and pathophysiological mechanisms" (Eckberg, D. Sympathovagal Balance: A Critical Appraisal)."

Other research articles relating to anxiety and HRV:

Chalmers, John A et al. "Anxiety Disorders are Associated with Reduced Heart Rate Variability: A Meta-Analysis." *Frontiers in psychiatry* vol. 5 80. 11 Jul. 2014, doi:10.3389/fpsyt.2014.00080

Deschodt-Arsac, Veronique et al. "Effects of heart rate variability biofeedback training in athletes exposed to stress of university examinations." *PloS one* vol. 13,7 e0201388. 26 Jul. 2018,

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0201388

92

⁴ Eckberg, D. Originally published Nov 1997https://doi.org/10.1161/01.CIR.96.9.3224 Circulation. 1997:96:3224–3232

Lee, Jieun et al. "The benefit of heart rate variability biofeedback and relaxation training in reducing trait anxiety." *Han'guk Simni Hakhoe chi. Kon'gang = The Korean journal of health psychology* vol. 20,2 (2015): 391-408. doi:10.17315/kjhp.2015.20.2.002

Lin, I-Mei et al. "Heart Rate Variability Biofeedback Increased Autonomic Activation and Improved Symptoms of Depression and Insomnia among Patients with Major Depression Disorder." *Clinical* psychopharmacology and neuroscience: the official scientific journal of the Korean College of Neuropsychopharmacology vol. 17,2 (2019): 222-232. doi:10.9758/cpn.2019.17.2.222

If you think you may be experiencing excessive stress and high-functioning anxiety, consult with your healthcare practitioner. It is between you and your doctor to discuss medication options. The 7 Ancient Rituals presented in this book can be practiced even if you decide (with your healthcare provider) to take medication. These tools are designed to teach you how to self-regulate your emotional response to external and internal stressors. If you are unsure how stress is affecting your life, you may want to consider the "HeartMath Stress and Well-Being Assessment." Go to HowToRelieveStressNaturally.com and access this free test during 2020 and possibly beyond.

Chapter 5: What is Possible for You?

My health concern was many years ago and through diligent research (and a bit of discipline), I learned how to get my stress-related disease under control. Not only did I get rid of my symptoms, but I am enjoying real lasting health by addressing the taproot cause of chronic stress.

From my personal experience and the experiences of my clients, I can affirm that it is possible to regain the feelings of calm and centeredness most of the time. The 7 Rituals for Healing Modern High-Functioning Anxiety is the essence of what I have found most effective in my own healing and the healing journey of my clients. If you would like one-on-one personal attention, please feel free to contact me to set up a free 15-minute session to see if we are a good fit to work together. I will accept free appointments as long as Contact calendar allows. me my at HowToRelieveStressNaturally.com/contact

It is possible for you to gain control of your chronic stress and high-functioning anxiety. Incorporating the 7 Rituals for Healing Modern High-Functioning Anxiety is a start. These practices will help you:

- Optimize your own Heart Rate Variability (HRV)
- Overcome fear and worry
- Replace anxiety with serenity
- Lower stress hormone response

- Improve heart rate for maximum longevity
- Maintain emotional calm in the midst of chaos
- Reclaim your intuitive "inner knowing"
- Transform feelings of overwhelm to a sense of being in control
- Reclaim your personal power
- Calm heart palpitations (assuming you've been medically cleared)
- Renew your sense of purpose and meaning
- Reignite your MOJO

It is important that you check in with your health care provider to ensure that you are cleared from any underlying illnesses, including clinical depression and anxieties.

So many people I have spoken with say that their doctors can't find anything wrong with them despite symptoms such as heart palpitations and digestive issues. You may be offered medication to take the edge off, and that is between you and your health care provider. I have experienced heart palpitations for years and have quelled them using the 7 *Rituals* plus dietary changes with great results.

The 7 Rituals are highly effective for rebalancing the autonomic nervous system. This means you can learn to "find the switch" inside that regulates the stress response and restores you to feelings of calm and centeredness.

Chronic stress and high-functioning anxiety management is not something that anyone else can do for

you. It is something that you must learn to do for yourself and it helps to have a guide, someone who has covered the terrain before and can lead the way. Get one, whether it is myself or someone else.

Consistent Short Practices +
Accountability = New Patterns of
Behavior

Anyone who stays with their short daily practice can expect positive results, often right from the first few sessions. Consistency is the key in forming new habits. You need to allow time for new neural network patterns to form. Clients track their progress using HRV biofeedback as discussed earlier in this book. This provides Western evidence-based validation to the effectiveness of Ancient ritual practices.

Chapter 6: Invitation to My Readers

Learning to self-regulate your emotional response to stress takes time, practice, and commitment. I designed this book to serve as a blueprint to get you started with learning to self-regulate your emotional responses to stress using Ancient Ritual practices. When you become less reactive to life's bombardment of stressors, anxiety also lessens its grip on you.

The Ancient Rituals provided in this book are designed to serve as examples that are spiritually oriented, but not associated with any specific religion. You can get creative and modify the rituals to meet your specific belief system. Most importantly, ensure your ritual, meditation, or mindfulness practice is fruitful. You will know this by utilizing the HRV biofeedback so that you know when you're in the zone of healing, the *tao* of heart coherence.

If you hit your daily practice hard for a few weeks, then gradually slide back to your old patterns of behavior, you will not create lasting change. The key to self-regulating your emotional response to stress is to establish an effective and consistent daily practice.

There is another way to live.

As one of my clients said to me, "this work has been life changing, thank you." Spending the time to learn how to establish new patterns of thought behavior is time well spent. It is an investment in the quality of your life for the rest of your life.

Not sure you can do this on your own? You don't have to. Let's set up a time to talk. I'd love to hear about

your situation and see how the 7 Rituals for Healing Modern High-Functioning Anxiety can work into your lifestyle. I help people create custom programs based on their likes and dislikes, and practices to which they want to commit.

You can contact me through the link below. As long as my calendar allows, I will personally spend 20 minutes with you over the phone or web platform.

https://howtorelievestressnaturally.com/contact

I wish you all the best on your healing journey, a life lived from a place of being centered and calm. Once you form new habits, generally anywhere from 40 to 180 days, you will enjoy feeling more:

Compassionate (towards yourself and others)
Centered
Calm
Rejuvenated
Rested
Non-reactive
Empowered
Confident
Resilient

Afterward: Compassion, HRV, and the Return of the Feminine

I wrote the 7 Ancient Rituals to Heal Modern High-Functioning Anxiety to provide examples of how ancient wisdom can be applied to ease the burden of high-functioning anxiety. This book follows my own journey as I have found Kundalini yoga and meditation to be a real game-changer in dealing with my own mindset challenges. With the use of heart rhythm biofeedback and Ancient Rituals, both my Eastern body and Western mind were satisfied.

From "talking my walk," I have discovered profound gifts along the way that continue to unfold each and every day. What began as my journey to lift "cold depression" and dispel free floating anxiety became a portal to a larger experience of consciousness.

I am awakening.

The mind (the ego, or "little me") has a way of wrapping us around its little finger so that we tend to follow it wherever it goes. When it becomes afraid, our psycho-physical selves lower our vibrational state as we have seen with the biofeedback graphs. Lower vibrational states of mind produce chaotic patterns and the higher vibrational states such as calm, peace, and love literally raise our vibrational pattern. As we learn to balance our internal masculine and feminine forces (yang-yin), we sync with the larger patterns of the cosmos. This requires the feminine yin to step up and participate more fully, in our autonomic nervous system as well as in our lives. This applies whether you are

male or female, for every human is comprised of both polarities, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

While this may sound woo-woo for some, it is easy enough to do a self-study and experiment with this phenomenon for yourself. There is no need to wait for further scientific evidence to come out on heart coherence in order to get started right now. High heart rhythm coherence has already been proven to be associated with improved health outcomes, including anxiety and depression. (Again, stay on whatever protocol your health care practitioner has set you on, simply check if these exercises are reasonable for you to do. Let common sense prevail.)

Try 11 minutes of a meditation a day for one year and keep a journal tracking your emotional and physical states every day. The changes are subtle yet profound. Although you may not feel any changes in the moment when you look back after a month, six months, or a year, you will likely find yourself being more compassionate, to yourself and others. Your sense of well-being will likely improve as well as your level of awareness. Compassion is by nature a feminine quality.

By exercising our "nerve of compassion," another name for the vagus nerve, as prescribed in the 7 *Rituals*, we raise our vibration (heart rhythm becomes more coherent). After practicing Ancient Rituals for over ten years now, I feel that I am beginning to evolve into the person I was destined to become. Many negative behavior patterns have dropped away and I feel more centered and calm most of the time. My own compassion has begun to flower more fully as I take great joy in serving others on their journey of healing and transformation.

As we raise our levels of compassion, we send ripple effects out into our families and communities. When we are more compassionate to our fellow human beings, we begin to cooperate and care for the "other" as much or more than ourselves. Life becomes bigger than worrying about me and mine.

Compassion, calm, and peace are qualities of the feminine principle, the Yin as I described it throughout the book. As the feminine principle (including the parasympathetic system) is restored, so too is our humanity. The masculine principles have been in overdrive for too long and have morphed into "toxic masculinity." I see this as analogous to "toxic sympathetic overdrive," where the fight/flight/freeze response stays stuck on for too long.

Culturally, things are beginning to change as exemplified by the #MeToo movement and other rejections of masculine abuses of power. Many people are beginning to recognize that chronic stress, high-functioning anxiety, and cold depression result from toxic thought patterns that are essentially under our control.

Both masculine and feminine principles are needed in the right proportion for any given circumstance that we find ourselves in, individually and collectively. I will end with a beautiful case study of one man's awakening.

Roland's Story

My first introduction to Roland⁴² was at a Kundalini yoga workshop in Seattle focusing on the heart and opening the heart *chakra*. Roland, the workshop teacher, briefly shared his personal story of how his life radically changed after quadruple bypass heart surgery. It was his wake-up call that his world had become so out of balance that his life was now in jeopardy.

Exceptionally bright, Roland graduated from MIT and Harvard in engineering and started following the yellow brick road to the American dream. Getting an Ivy League education essentially guaranteed financial success, but one must play the game following the rulebook of cultural norms in order to be "successful."

All of his energy was focused on work, and he turned it off at the end of each day with two or three strong martinis. Roland was stuck in overdrive of the flight/fight or "yang" side of the pendulum (the HRV graphs) until it caught up with him. His heart was paying the price until it gave him a real wake up call.

Upon awakening from the anesthesia, a symbol appeared to Roland in the form of letter "C," which he described as being imprinted onto his heart. Without overthinking what this meant, the message "rang to my core," as he described it. The "C" stood for COMPASSION.

He had not been living the truth of who he was, and although involved with spiritual practices beforehand, he recognized that his approach had been

⁴² The name has been changed to respect his privacy.

an intellectual exercise. His heart was calling him to bring forth compassion, for himself and others. Roland was receptive to the "message" and was grateful for it. His heretofore out-of-balance masculine approach to life was now making room for his feminine *core* values, beginning with compassion.

By reconnecting with his own ability to feel compassion for himself and others, he serves to broaden the circles of compassion for everyone. When you seek to restore your own balance, you not only become calm and centered, you also reopen yourself to compassion. The ripple effect broadens and as

Roland shared that his lifethreatening experience did not leave him with a feeling of being a "victim" of heart disease; rather, he viewed the disease as delivering an urgent message of needed change.

If you feel that your life is out of balance and you are anxious much of the time, begin by taking small steps to change your reality. High-functioning anxiety is a warning sign that you are out of balance in one or more areas of your life.

Take advantage of the free Heartmath Stress and Well-Being Assessment with complimentary 20-minute mentoring call (if desired). Dr. Anne Taylor is a licensed Heartmath Provider and can walk you through the fine points of the assessment.

Claim your FREE HeartMath® Assessment An evidence-based Stress and Well-Being Assessment (SWBA)

Retail value \$197, limited time offer. Visit: HowToRelieveStressNaturally.com (no credit card required)

https://howtorelievestressnaturally.com/stress-and-well-being-assessment

About the Author

Anne Taylor, B.S., Ph.D., helps people who struggle with high-functioning anxiety feel calm, centered, and confident that they are good enough *just as they are*. Her work is at the nexus of Neurobiology, Mythology, & Depth Psychology as all three approaches contribute to a holistic healing approach that aims at the root cause of anxiety.

Anne draws on Ancient Wisdom traditions for time honored ritual practices that open your mythic imagination, yet stand up to the rigors of Western evidence-based scrutiny. Her use of contemplative neuroscience helps restore nervous system balance and feelings of well-being. Anne's passion and purpose is to lead people out of a life overwhelmed by stress and anxiety to one infused with calm and compassion.



Anne is uniquely qualified with the following credentials:

- B.S. in Medical Biology
- Ph.D. in Mythology and Depth Psychology

- KRI Certified Kundalini Yoga & Meditation Teacher (11+ years)
- Licensed HeartMath Provider

https:HowToRelieveStressNaturally.com/contact

Client Experiences:

Once you master a few basic techniques and practice on a consistent basis, you will feel more empowered. Here are a few examples of my clients' experiences:

"I cannot thank you enough. It hasn't been that long since you turned me onto this, but what I'm feeling and experiencing is incredible. I'm actually going out with my mom and my brother on Friday and not the least bit agitated or having anxiety about it. You are my hero." R.K.

"I'm feeling balanced again. Thank you so much. You kind of come in when I meditate. You're a bright and shining light!" T.S.

"Truth is it took me a couple of tries last night [to get into the tao zone]. I was feeling tense and anxious and upset. But I stuck with it three times and finally worked it through! It also helped me go to sleep in peace. Thank you, Anne." L.B.

"This work has been life changing. Thank you." R.S.

Further Reading

Armour, J. Andrew MD, Ph.D. *Neurocardiology: Anatomical Functional Principles*. Boulder Creek, CA: Institute of HeartMath Publications No. 03-022., 2003.

Benton, Mehtab. *Gong Yoga: Healing and Enlightenment Through Sound*. Bloomington, IL: iUniverse, 2008.

Childre, D. and Rozman, D. *Transforming Anxiety: The HeartMath® Solution for Overcoming Fear and Worry and Creating Serenity*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2006.

Childre, D. et al. *Heart Intelligence: Connecting with the Intuitive Guidance of the Heart*. Waterfront Press, 2016.

HeartMath. (n.d.). Science of the Heart: Exploring the Role of the Heart in Human Performance an Overview of Research Conducted by the HeartMath Institute.

Porges, Stephen W. "The polyvagal perspective." *Biological psychology* vol. 74,2 (2007): 116-43. doi:10.1016/j.biopsycho.2006.06.009

Steffen, Patrick R et al. "The Impact of Resonance Frequency Breathing on Measures of Heart Rate Variability, Blood Pressure, and Mood." *Frontiers in public health* vol. 5 222. 25 Aug. 2017, doi:10.3389/fpubh.2017.00222

Singh Khalsa, Dharma, MD. *Meditation as Medicine: Activate the Power of Your Natural Healing Force*. New York, NY: Atria Paperback, 2009.

Singh Khalsa, Harbhajan. *Praana, Praanee*, *Praanayam*. Espanola, NM. KRI, 2006.

Smith, C. Michael. *Jung and Shamanism in Dialogue: Retrieving the Soul/Retrieving the Sacred*. Victoria, BC. Trafford Publishing, 2007.

Stanley R. "Origins and Applications of Music in Chronic Illness: Role of the Voice, Ancient Chant Scales, and Autonomic Nervous System." In: Stoltzfus M.J., Green R., Schumm D. (eds) Chronic Illness, Spirituality, and Healing. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013.

Villoldo, Alberto. Shaman, Healer, Sage: How to Heal Yourself and others with Energy Medicine of the Americas. New York, NY: Harmony Books, 2000.

Resources:

How To Relieve Stress Naturally Website Move From Stress & Anxiety to Centered and Calm https://howtorelievestressnaturally.com/

Heartmath Inner Balance Sensor https://howtorelievestressnaturally.com/heartmathinner-balance-product-review



Heartmath Inner Balance Smart Phone app: Go to your favorite app store and look for this icon.



Work with Dr. Anne Taylor https://howtorelievestressnaturally.com/work-withdr-anne-taylor Claim your FREE HeartMath® Assessment

An evidence-based Stress and Well-Being Assessment (SWBA)

Retail value \$197, Limited time offer.

Visit: HowToRelieveStressNaturally.com (no credit card required)

https://howtorelievestressnaturally.com/stress-and-well-being-assessment