

## Three Breaths

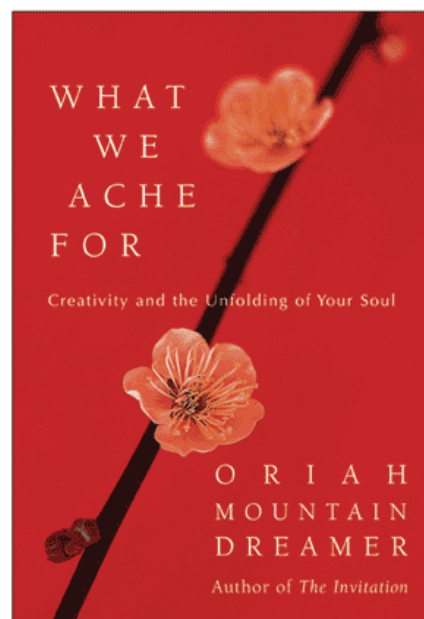
Sometimes we just need to take a breath to bring ourselves fully into the present moment. Lately, when I have completed my daily practice of meditation and contemplative prayer, I take three breaths, each with a different focus. After each breath I take up my pen and write. Sometimes what comes out on the page surprises me in ways that delight or disturb. Always, the breath and the writing bring me more fully into my life in this moment.

Sit in a comfortable position with writing materials at hand. Take several deep breaths and let yourself just be where you are. Then, when you are ready, take a full slow breath, and for the full length of the inhale and the exhale focus on the world outside of yourself- the sounds, sights, smells, and feeling of the world around you. See what you can notice in one breath and then write it down in sensory detail. This is not a test to see if you can notice and write down everything there is to sense about the world at this moment. If you noticed one thing, write about this one thing. If you noticed several, write about them all. Allow what comes during the one breath to be enough.

Then, sit back and take another conscious breath. For the full length of one complete inhale and one complete exhale, notice all that you can, within yourself. Let your attention leave the world outside you for a moment and focus within. There may be sensations, feelings, thoughts. Then write what you noticed about your inner world during the course of this one breath. Again, you are not trying to catalogue everything that is going on inside of yourself. You are simply describing/discovering what you noticed during that one full breath.

Finally, sit back and take a final conscious breath, focusing as completely as possible on the breath itself. Feel the air come into your body and leave your body. Now write what you noticed about this one breath. What was the quality of the breath? Was there a pause at any point? Did you notice the temperature or smell of the air, the sound from within? There are truly an infinite number of things to be noticed about a single breath. Just write what came to your attention today as you focused on this one breath.

The more I do this writing practice the more I find I am able during the course of my day- when things get busy or when I am waiting for the traffic light to change- to simply bring myself fully into the present moment by consciously taking three breaths in a row, focusing first on the world around me, then on the what is happening within me, and finally simply on the breath itself.



Based on *What We Ache For* by Oriah Mountain Dreamer, published by HarperSanFrancisco, 2005

Although Oriah enjoys receiving writing from her readers, the number of messages she gets makes it impossible to send individual responses.