

Grounding and Centering

By James Bone

What does being centered mean? Why is it important? Why do we need to keep working at being centered?

STRESS, worry, fatigue and anxiety are common in our society now. Many of us have many commitments, and are often required to do too much in too short a time. Often we are thinking or doing many things at one time. Driving while talking on the phone is one very risky, but common thing – why?..... because the message can't wait?

CHANGE is the other constancy; change which is occurring at an increasing rate, and accompanying this is the need to make decisions rapidly, without much consideration or contemplation.

WHAT does this have to do with grounding and centering – nothing! This is the point. We are often diametrically opposed to ourselves. Due to our lifestyles, poor habits, work and/ or family commitments, many of us are constantly out of balance and have feelings of low grade tiredness, feelings of not being well or in poor health, even when we do the right things such as eat properly, get enough sleep and stay physically active.

TO BE grounded and centered is to be in balance, to feel good, be focused and happy with the direction you are taking in your life.

So what is grounding?

To be ungrounded is to feel unconnected, feel spacy, think too much, worry or feel anxiety. One of the worst states of ungroundedness is panic. When you hold tension in your body you become ungrounded. How often do you do activities with tension in your shoulders.... How often in class are you reminded to drop and release your shoulders....

* To be grounded is to reconnect ourselves to the earth – to feel rooted to the ground. To ground, we need to become aware of our tension and then let go. We can do this simply, by first tensing our muscles and then letting them go sequentially.

* Being grounded also means to be “present here and now” in everything you are doing. You are reminded in class to attend to your practice completely. This applies to all our activities.

* To be grounded means to stay alert, calm and relaxed, even when chaos shines around you. Not easy but you can start by taking slow deep breaths, during a stressful situation.

* It also means to be grounded in your body, rather than in your head. This means being more aware of yourself, your actions and those around, rather than thinking and worrying about the previous moment or the next. It doesn't mean that you don't think, but you simply think at the right time.

* Practically, we can ground ourselves by breathing to the lower belly – at a point called the “hara” – positioned in the centre of the pelvis below the navel. Then breathe from here, downward to your feet and out the toes.

* In your yoga practice you are often taught to ground by correctly sitting on your sit bones, with an aligned spine, becoming aware of the pelvic floor at a point known as Muladhara Chakra, and then lightly contracting the pelvic floor muscles (mula bandha or the pelvic lock). Try this and see how it affects you.

* The ultimate test to see how grounded you are at any moment is to test your balance. Try standing on one leg, as for Tree posture, and see how stable you are Now practice some of the grounding practices mentioned above ... then re-try ... what do you discover?

So what is centering and how do we achieve this?

To be uncentered means to be off balance in your body, mind or life. To centre means to return to equilibrium – a beautiful analogy is of the potters wheel and twirling clay. It is impossible to create a piece properly if the clay is off centred. So in our life, if we remain constantly uncentered, life can become very difficult.

* The first principle of centering is to become centered in our bodies. We can do this by becoming aware of our bodies 3 dimensions in space – forward and backward, side to side,

and up and down. Try this – when standing in Mountain posture, adjust the weight in your feet so that it is even between your heels and toes, and left and right foot, then bring your awareness to the “hara”, the point below the naval.

One of the key classic texts is called Patanjali’s “Yoga Sutras”. In this text it describes the method of achieving yoga and the way to practise yoga. To achieve the state of yoga would be the ultimate centering – to know our core being. However, from a practical point it describes a very important principle of practice, which can keep us centered in our own practice, and also help maintain our center in our daily lives.

* It describes that the practice of yoga’s physical postures (asana), is the union of alert stability (sthira), with relaxed ease (suhka).

* Thus yoga practice is a balance – to practice yoga properly is to stay centered — neither tense nor inert. It is refinement which comes from within, not from external form; and breath is the key — for if there is strain the breath becomes short or stops, and if sleepy, the breath is forgotten.

* When practising next, consider:

 If doing a demanding posture – can I maintain ease?

 If doing an easy posture – can I maintain alertness?

And remember, tension ungrounds us!

* To be centered also means to have a calm mind – a calm mind is “one-pointed”.

* You feel strong, confident - not tentative. “You make a decision, then go with it — give 100% — if the situation changes, make a new decision. Don’t be tentative. To be uncentered is to give to it half heartedly.”

* Centering means to bring ourselves completely to our present focus, whether it be the body or what we are doing. The quickest and simplest way to center is to attend to our Breath....

Try it now.....

* To be centered will change how you move, think and react in all your activities.

When doing an activity – whether it be your yoga practice, washing up or a work project – Stop for a moment and ask yourself “Why am I doing this?” Find your true intention – connect your mind, body and heart in the activity. Don’t do it half heartedly - engage yourself totally. Be connected in all the activities you do – am I alert and steady, while being relaxed and calm – what is unbalanced? What change do I need to make?

Try this in your yoga asana practice:

 Take your awareness down to your centre of gravity - point usually in the centre of your pelvis. Breathe into this point and when you breathe out, breathe out right down to your feet and out your big toes. When you move your body or raise your arms, move from this centered point. Often when we move, we send all our mind to our arms, hands or shoulders. Alternatively – when we move, we are thinking – but often of something unrelated to our action - so we are all in our head, not the body, or our action.

Try this in Hero 2 posture:

 Feel the firm base rather than tensing and lifting your shoulders. Consider whether your mind is forcing action, rather than listening to your body and breath. Learn to accept rather control, find stillness in being, rather than simply going through the action.

However, grounding and centering is a state of being, which we continually need to work towards. This is why we need:

 * **to go to yoga classes regularly**

 * **to practise something daily**

 * **to stop and breathe between tasks**

 * **to remind ourselves constantly, to stop, ground and recenter.**

3 Simple Grounding and Centering Practices

i. Standing Extended Mountain – Stand with feet parallel. Gently contract the pelvic floor

(Mulabandha), and lower abdominal brace. Breathe deeply to your hara. Hold the spine upright and aligned. Lift tall through the crown of your head. Arms by your sides, palms open. Breathe in slowly, raising the arms outward and up over head, as you lift up on to your toes. Feel the contact of the big toes firmly to the floor. Breathe out and slowly lower the heels and arms down, so breath and movement end as one action.

Repeat 8 times – twice per day or as you need.

As a stronger alternative – stand on your toes with arms overhead and take 8 breaths, keeping your awareness on your toes and Pelvic floor.

ii. Walking – while walking gently contract the pelvic floor (Mulabandha), and lower abdominal brace. Breathe deeply to your hara. Hold the spine upright and aligned. Lift tall through the crown of your head. Then attend to your feet; feel the contact to the floor, and step forward with your big toes. Move confidently forward, ready to face all of life's challenges fearlessly.

iii. Meditation – sit in a meditation posture, spine upright and aligned. Focus on your breath – feel the breath expand the lower belly – your hara, as you breathe in, then as you breathe out let the breath descend downward first to Muladhara at the pelvic floor, and then down to the big toes. Stay focused on this awareness, however if your awareness drifts, refocus by sounding the deep OM to yourself as you breathe out and down. Practise 5 to 20 minutes.

Seven Rules to create a new habit:

i. Stop – clear intention

ii. Grounding – release tension, connect to earth - base

iii. Centering – focus, awareness, here and now – balance of C fo G - Hara

iv. Breathing – aware, free, diaphragm

v. Posture – union of alert stability with relaxed ease – balance or being centered – endurance, flexibility, strength

vi. Moving – warm up

vii. Reflection – reactions, emotions, feelings, thoughts – let them go – not suppress them

* New habit of all of above – TIPs where see daily – 40 days to “set” a new habit