BREATH

We've all given, and received, advice to people who are upset, "Take a deep breath." It's just a little more complicated than that: one should take a deep breath, exhale slowly, and repeat at least five or six times.

I think that we should not wait to pay attention to our breath until we are angry or upset. This awareness should be continual throughout the day. It helps us to function well, no matter the circumstances. We should begin the day with it, too.

Our Jewish tradition offers us a way to begin the day. Before doing anything else, even before sitting up, we say: *Modeh ani l'fanekha*/I offer You thanks, *Melekh ḥai v'kayam*/living and eternal Sovereign, *sheheḥezarta bi nishmati*/that You have restored my breathing soul within me. *Rabbah emunatekha*/Your faithfulness [to me, in me] is great.

My own practice is to inhale with the first and third phrases, and exhale with the second and fourth. I have to inhale in order to express my thanks, and I am grateful to be able to do so. With my first exhalation I acknowledge God's sovereignty, as I experience it in my life, and also before my life and after it.

On the third phrase, breathing in again, I state the occasion for my thanks, that God has restored my *n'shamah*/soul (a word derived from *n-sh-m*/breathe), as though it had been wandering while I was asleep. With the fourth phrase, I acknowledge that God is faithful to me in granting me another day, and has faith in me that I will use it well. Then, still before rising, I think of what I can offer God today. Even my errands and appointments can become opportunities to raise mundane activities and casual relationships to a higher level.

In this time of heightened anxieties, we can comfort ourselves and others by paying attention to one of the things we most take for granted: our breath. Inhale/exhale, with gratitude to God and determination to make the most of life.

Rabbi Paul Tuchman