

L. is a male in his mid-30s. He owns a flooring company, and spends most of his time navigating between his clients and contractors. He still does some physical labor himself, exercises regularly, and is part of an ongoing meditation group.

PROBLEM

On his intake form L. reported “lots of low back tightness/stiffness, lack of mobility, and some shoulder issues”. During our first session, he mentioned that he possibly had disc herniation in his L5-S1 area. He was experiencing pain on the right side of his lower back that sometimes was so debilitating, that he would curl into a fetal position and couldn’t straighten up. He’s been experiencing those episodes for many years.

INVESTIGATION

During our movement investigation, it became obvious that L. was very guarded in his lower back. His right leg rotated outward quite a bit both at rest, and while walking. Forward bending was restricted and uncomfortable. His lower back had a sense of being brittle and sensitive.

STAND-OUT FACTOR

Right from the start I found it curious how tight-lipped L. was about himself and his life. He didn’t volunteer any information, and I had to get it out of him drip by drip. I decided not to push him, and as we continued to work together, over time he began to open up a bit. I was getting a stronger and stronger sense that he had a lot of inner intensity, but was intent on controlling it, often by suppression. It even happened in his meditation practices. He admitted that he used to have issues with rage, and was trying to do everything in his power to overcome it. He exhibited very strong Pitta energy, but he didn’t quite know what to do with it.

HYPOTHESIS

The conversations we kept having continued to point to an imbalance in the Third chakra. He was experiencing ongoing digestive distress, feelings of anxiety that manifested as dull ache in his stomach, and traveling pains in his lower back. He eventually confided that he grew up in a religious cult, where he never had autonomy or sense of personal power, so he had to suppress a lot of his feelings and tendencies. This sense of suppression of his inner fire and feeling guarded kept showing up in different forms. I decided that we needed to find a way for him to channel his intensity in a creative, and not destructive, way.

COURSE OF ACTION

We put together a short lower back and hip strengthening practice that L. could do at home on his own. In our sessions, we focused on

- Paying attention to his actual physical experience instead of blocking it out;
- Differentiating between pain and sensation in his back;
- Giving him a sense of control over his physical state (that he could impact the way he felt through his actions);
- Releasing chronic tension in his abdomen through breath and movement;
- Embracing his Pitta constitution and finding a way to make his inner fire work for him.

L. confided that the image of fire was very familiar to him, and sometimes that inner fire felt all-consuming. We discovered that he unconsciously “self-medicated” by spending time on his friend’s boat. He felt the best when he was on the water, surrounded by friends.

One particular meditation turned out to be the most effective. We spent an entire practice alternating progressive abdominal contraction with complete abdominal relaxation. At the end, we did the following meditation.

FIRE MEDITATION. Imagine building fire in your belly with Kapalbhati. As the fire begins to rise, imagine it warming up your heart, fueling it with passion. Stay with that awareness for several breaths. Then imagine the fire rising up and warming up your throat, purifying and clarifying your speech. Stay with that awareness for several breaths. Then imagine the fire rising up and illuminating your mind, giving you mental clarity. Stay with that awareness for a while. Reflect on how your inner fire, your inner drive can serve you. Stay with that image for as long as you like, and then imagine the fire gradually subsiding. Notice how you feel.










RESPONSE

L. had a very strong response to this meditation. He felt that it gave him a way of channeling his inner fire in a productive way. It encouraged personal growth and the life of meaning, instead of destroying him from within. He was relieved that he didn't need to suppress the fire, but rather redirect it and use it for nurturing himself.



This meditation became a part of his home practice. He also started taking Pitta herbs prescribed by his Ayurvedic practitioner and spending time on the water regularly. Those steps, combined with regular home yoga practice and daily walking/running, significantly diminished his lower back discomfort. He reported that he got it to a place where he didn't have to think about his back anymore. He still experiences occasional discomfort if he has to do too much physical labor at work, but now he feels confident that he has a set of tools to come back to if the need arises.



Yoga practice for L.

<p>1</p> 	<p>RESTING POSITION. Lie down on your back and bend your knees, feet on the floor. Take 6 full deep breaths here paying attention to how your lower back feels.</p>	
<p>2</p> 	<p>APANASANA. To loosen up the lower back and hips. 4 breaths.</p>	<p>Begin on your back with hands over your knees. EX: Gradually contract the abdomen and bring the knees toward the chest. IN: Move the knees away from the chest. Try to keep the movement consistent.</p>
<p>3</p> 	<p>SUPINE LEG EXTENSION. To strengthen the hip flexors. Repeat 3x on each side alternating sides.</p>	<p>Begin on your back with both knees bent, hands pressing into your knees. IN: Extend your right leg down along the ground while raising your right arm up over the head (keep pressing the left hand and left knee into each other). EX: Return back to the starting position, press both hands into your knees.</p>
<p>4</p> 	<p>VAJRASANA. To gently strengthen and stretch the lower back. Repeat 4x.</p>	<p>Begin standing on your knees. IN: Sweep your arms up. EX: Gradually contract your abdomen as you bring your chest down to your thighs and butt toward the heels, placing your hands on the lower back. IN: Lead with the chest as you go up to stand on your knees, sweeping the arms up.</p>
<p>5</p> 	<p>ANJANEYASANA. To stretch and strengthen the quads and hip flexors.</p>	<p>Begin on your knees with your right foot on the floor in front of you, both hands on the front thigh. IN: Curl the toes of the back foot under and slowly lift the left knee up. EX: Lower your left knee down, hovering it over the ground. Repeat a few times, then lift the back knee, raise both arms up and stay in the pose. IN: Lift the chest forward and up. EX: Hug the waist in toward the center.</p>
<p>6</p> 	<p>CHAKRAVAKASANA. To loosen up the lower back. Repeat 4x.</p>	<p>Begin on your hands and knees. IN: Lift the chest forward and up, away from the navel. EX: Progressively contract your abdomen as you bring the elbows down first and then move the butt down toward the heels.</p>
<p>7</p> 	<p>BHUJANGASANA. To strengthen the glutes. Repeat 3x on each side alternating sides. Then stay in the pose for 4 breaths.</p>	<p>Begin on your stomach, feet hip distance apart. IN: Lift the chest up and one leg up, keeping the leg straight. EX: Move down, placing your chest and leg down. Repeat alternating sides. Then bring your feet mat-width apart, keep your legs down, lift the upper body up and stay in the pose.</p>
<p>8</p> 	<p>SUPINE LEG LIFT. To strengthen the hip flexors. Repeat 4x, hold for 4 breaths, then switch sides.</p>	<p>Begin on your back with your right knee by your chest and left leg extended along the ground. EX: Slowly raise the leg up to about 45 degrees. IN: Slowly lower your left leg down, keeping it straight. Do not touch the ground. Repeat 4x, then hover the leg slightly above the ground for 4 breaths (keep your abdomen engaged).</p>
<p>9</p> 	<p>JATTHARA PARIVRTTI LATERAL. To stretch the hip flexors. Stay for 6 breaths on each side.</p>	<p>Begin on your back with your right arm extended up. Little by little move both legs and your upper body to the left, forming a crescent shape. Be sure to keep both buttocks and the upper back on the floor. Turn your head to the left and turn the toes of both feet to the left as well. EX: Gently rotate the right leg in. IN: Let go of the effort. Stay in the pose for several breaths, then switch sides.</p>

Yoga practice for L.

10		<p>APANASANA. To loosen up the lower back and hips. 4 breaths.</p>	<p>Begin on your back with hands over your knees. EX: Gradually contract the abdomen and bring the knees toward the chest. IN: Move the knees away from the chest. Try to keep the movement consistent.</p>
11		<p>DVIPADA PITHAM. To stretch the hips and thighs and to strengthen the glutes and hamstrings. Repeat 4x.</p>	<p>Begin on your back, knees bent, feet hip-distance apart, arms extended along the body. IN: Slowly roll the hips up as high as it's comfortable. EX: Slowly roll the hips down.</p>
12		<p>REST WITH LEGS UP. Stay for 5-10 breaths relaxing the body completely.</p>	<p>Put your legs up on a chair. Relax and breathe deeply.</p>
13		<p>KAPALBHATI (Skull shining). Heating, stimulating, purifying effect. 3 cycles, 15 breaths each.</p>	<p>TECHNIQUE. Inhale rapidly, relaxing the abdomen; on the exhale rapidly and vigorously contract the abdomen, forcing the air out.</p>
14		<p>MEDITATION. Imagine building fire in your belly with Kapalbhati (above). As the fire begins to rise, imagine it warming up your heart, fueling it with passion. Stay with that awareness for several breaths. Then imagine the fire rising up and warming up your throat, purifying and clarifying your speech. Stay with that awareness for several breaths. Then imagine the fire rising up and illuminating your mind, giving you mental clarity. Stay with that awareness for a while. Reflect on how your inner fire, your inner drive can serve you. Stay with that image for as long as you like, and then imagine the fire gradually subsiding. Notice how you feel.</p>	