

## For the Love of Strength Training

By Eric Carlson, Integral Leadership & Journey of Practice member



Of all the recommended practices in ITP, strength training seems to incur the most disdain from practitioners. This became apparent most recently in our Journey of Practice & ITP Leadership groups. As a long time strength-training practitioner, I want to share some of my suggestions with our community. It is my hope to bring more joy and appreciation of strength training to your practice.

I have engaged in strength training for 31 years. I will never forget when my interest

was piqued in middle school during gym class. In the beginning of the quarter, I could only bench press 90lbs. After 3 months of attending class 2x/week, I could bench press 120lbs. The increase in strength from the cumulative efforts of the quarter was so rewarding that I went home and asked my father for my own weight set. I thoroughly enjoyed the transformative effect of my efforts. The changes made in life can often take a long time before we observe transformation. While it can take years to look like Arnold Swarzenegger, I have found that many improvements with the physical body can manifest quickly.

### **Mastery**

I view my strength training practice as a path of mastery. I do it for the sake of doing it, and I know it is contributing positively to my health. Weightlifters change their exercises, their methodology, the amount of weight they lift to transcend the plateau. It is during these times I enjoy strength training the most. It is about the *practice* of strength training during these periods. I breathe into my repetitions, focus on my technique, perform deep listening to my body and enjoy a little change in routine. There are times when homeostasis comes calling, and I want to stay in bed or devote my early morning to a work meeting instead of my practice. Strength training has become something I look forward to so much that I have opened up more time in my calendar to prevent those pitfalls.

### **Altered States of Consciousness**

Perfecting my technique is something I have worked on since I began. Technique is very important to transformation in strength training. Attention to the angles you are using and how you position your body are very important. In addition, using weights that are light enough to control is critical because the speed at which you lift the weight is very important. The moments

of focus during repetitions provide a gateway to the flow state. It is this interplay of focus and surrender during repetition that provides flow. It is only in short duration that you will experience this, but the resulting effect on your mind and spirit will leave you feeling refreshed and ready for the day.

## **Balance & Center**

Breathing is a very important element to strength training and our practice. Through yoga practice I developed a diaphragmatic breath that has become the natural method of my breathing. As in yoga, the breath fuels the workout and cleans the body. The exhalation while lifting (concentric) and inhalation while resisting (eccentric) provide a balance to repetition. Depending on approach, strength training can also provide cardio benefits. After a set I will take time to balance and center, stretch my muscles and breathe into the muscle. The breath expands the conscious awareness of my body and the muscles I am working.

## **How to Enjoy Strength Training**

When you begin your strength training practice, start very light. I will usually do this for 3 – 6 weeks to strengthen my ligaments and avoid soreness in my muscles. It also allows time to develop a sound technique. Make sure to stretch the muscles that are being worked. The Kata provides a great foundation prior to strength training. Bring your phone and some headphones and listen to something you really enjoy. It could be music, a podcast or a George Leonard talk. I listen to a couple of different podcasts and Alan Watts on Sundays. Go during a quiet time like early morning or mid-morning. Strength training practice can be contemplative when the gym isn't crowded. Be mindful about your technique, your muscles, your breath and your feelings. If you get past the first 3 weeks, your body will begin to feel amazing. Have an intention of changing your body shape, increasing strength, preventing injury, recovering from injury or enabling you to excel in something else you enjoy (e.g., cycling/hiking). Track your improvements on your practice plan and surrender to the gifts which strength training can provide you.

This short intro was developed to assist you in integrating strength training into your practice. I hope it contributes to your experience and increases your appreciation for your body. Strength training is another method to love your body and provide yourself the endowment of health. Use the small guidelines I provided above and let me know if your experience changes! Here's to the Love of Strength Training!

**Eric J Carlson**

[Ecarl97@gmail.com](mailto:Ecarl97@gmail.com)