

A Calm Spirit

"When angry," wrote Thomas Jefferson, "count to ten before you speak; if very angry, one hundred." Mark Twain amended that. "When angry, count to four," he advised. "When very angry, swear."

But such advice is counter-productive. The angrier you get, the more you want to yell. The more you want to yell, the less you are able to do so. This according to Dr. Laura Kubzansky of the Harvard School of Public Health. The doc and her colleagues found that irascible old men had a considerably reduced "forced expiratory volume in one second" compared to their more mellow coevals. A reduced FEV1 means that for those more likely to swear, those nearby are less likely to hear.

Which, I suppose, is a good thing.

Scientists aren't exactly sure of the cause-and-effect link between short tempers and weak lungs. It isn't that hostile guys are fatter and smoke more than calm ones; that is true, but the study adjusted for such factors. It could be physiological: aggression hurts the immune system. It could be sociological: nobody likes to hang around people who live life at the emotional red-line, and isolation leads to poor health.

Long ago, King Solomon had a thought on the subject. "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry," he wrote in Ecclesiastes 7.9, "for anger resteth in the bosom of fools." Wrath is a spiritual matter in the old sense of the word in both Hebrew and Greek: wind or breath. Your bosom can host only one spirit at a time. Suck down cigarette smoke and you reduce the storage space for oxygen. Stuff your chest with fury and you crowd out the Holy Spirit.

So if you want to be heard, wise up, calm down, breath in, then speak out. Righteous indignation has its place. All four gospels record Jesus' angry action in cleansing the temple, but not one indicates excessive decibels. Keep your chest clear for the cleansing breaths of prayer. You'll not only live longer, but the life you're living will be the eternal kind.

Inhale...Exhale,
Doug