

Pranayama (*prana*= breath/life force, *yama*= discipline/restraint)

Pranayama should be practiced everyday, on an empty stomach; a few hours before or after eating, *ideally*. You should practice with eyes closed, so that the practice continues to develop a deeper connection to the true Self, the Divine within. Sit in a tall position so that your spine is long and straight. It is best to sit in a cross-legged or kneeling position, but if a chair helps your spine stay at its longest, use a chair (both feet flat on the floor). Feel the length in the lower spine, middle spine and in the back of the neck, without lifting the chin. Begin to notice your breath. What is its rate or pace? How deep is it in and out? Where do you feel the breath move into and out of?

Try an exercise... Lie on your back on the bed or floor. Rest a book on your belly- like a phone book or encyclopedia. Close your eyes and breathe through your nose. Feel your belly push the book away when you inhale and feel the book fall back into you on the exhale. Breathing in this way is the main yogic way to breathe.

We breathe into our bellies when we are babies and small children, but as we age and grow, we begin to shift our breathing, reversing its natural flow and shifting it into the chest, causing unnecessary tension in the heart area and neck. To breathe correctly, inhale and allow your belly to expand, letting the navel move away from you. As you exhale, feel the waist narrow gently and the navel will draw back toward you.

Before doing any pranayama, sit quietly. Sit with a length through the spine that allows the spinal column to be open and receptive. Focus on the universal mantra *OM* (the word that represents the source of all light or knowledge) or say a prayer or chant that you know. You may also want to picture the Divine/God/Supreme Being/peaceful image, mentally. Feel as if you are being guided by this presence so as not to get caught up in any judgments or find yourself doing exercises that are uncomfortable. Pranayama clears away impurities and makes us more mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually fit to reach our personal connection to divinity.

In yoga, the physical body is stretched and strengthened, along with our *astral body*. The astral body contains the elements which allow the experiences of pleasure and pain. The physical body may seem like the means of experiencing pleasure and pain, but it is merely going through birth, growth, change, decay and death. Within the astral body, we find the energy centers or *chakras* and nerve channels or *nadis*. The *chakras* are along the midline of the astral body, corresponding most with the spine of the physical body. The *nadis* run through the astral body similar to how the nerves run through the physical body. The *nadis* also intersect the *chakras*.

There are two *nadis*, one on either side of the *sushumna nadi*/the central or main *nadi* that most closely corresponds to the spinal column. The left one is called *ida* and the right is known as *pingala*. Physically taken as the right and left sympathetic cords, they are [also] subtle tubes that carry *Prana* (life force or universal energy which we can most closely associate with the breath). The Moon moves in *ida* and the sun in *pingala*. The moon is of the nature of *Tamas* and the sun is that of *Rajas*.* *Ida* is cooling while *pingala* is heating. *Ida* flows through the left nostril and the *pingala* through the right nostril. The breath flows through the right nostril for one hour and through the left nostril for one hour. A yogi strives to move the *prana*, through breathing exercises, through the *ida* and *pingala* and eventually, the *sushumna*. When the *sushumna* (the spinal cord around which *ida* and *pingala* spiral) operates, the yogi becomes dead to the world, and enters

into Samadhi.** A Yogi tries his best to make the Prana run in the Sushumna Nadi, which is known as the central Brahma Nadi also.

*In yogic philosophy and Indian medicine, there are 3 *gunas*, or qualities. They can be applied to food, activities, personalities, etc. *Tamasic* describes lethargy, rotten or poor quality of food, laziness, etc. *Rajasic* refers to activity, heat, spice of food, business of mind. *Sattvic* refers to a calm, spiritual state, pure thoughts, pure food. We rid Tamas by Rajas and Rajas by Sattva: laziness is defeated by activity and business of mind is defeated by drawing focus and concentration to the activities we partake in. To increase the *sattvaguna* is the goal.

** The super-conscious state

Different Pranayamas

The Three-part breath

Most of us breathe using only 1/3 of our lung capacity. This exercise can extend the use of the lungs and their abilities.

~Exhale all of your air. Inhale, 1, into your low belly, 2 into your side ribs, 3, up to your collarbones. Hold the breath inside the body while relaxing the face, jaw and shoulders. Now, exhale 3, from the collarbones, 2, from your side ribs, 3 from your low belly. Repeat 4 more times. Then enjoy natural breathing for one minute to re-stabilize blood pressure and nervous system. Repeat breathing exercise 5 to 10 more times, always following with natural breathing, regardless of your level of practice.

Kapalabhati Pranayama: “Diaphragmatic breathing/ skull shining breath”

This exercise should be done after the three-part breath and before alternate nostril pranayama, so that the nostrils are more clear. This breathing exercise is also a cleansing exercise or one of the *shad kriyas*, 6 purificatory exercises. *Kapala* means skull and *bhati* means shines. Therefore this exercise makes the skull shine. This exercise cleanses the nasal passages, removes congestion and alleviates over-consumption.

Be sure not to raise the shoulders. A vast majority of people move the diaphragm in the opposite direction than natural breathing and this can cause shoulder or chest tension. Be sure to feel the belly pulling back to the spine when you *exhale*, like when you sneeze or cough. The belly naturally fills up on the *inhale*. One should not practice this exercise until the diaphragm moves in the correct way.

~ Both hands are resting in *chin* or *jnana mudra* – the thumb and forefinger touch and the hands rest palms up on the knees or legs. Breathe deeply through both nostrils several times. Take a comfortable inhalation and then exhale forcibly through the nose and feel the belly pull back and up slightly. Inhalation will occur naturally and with a softer quality than the exhalation; longer, too. Continue to exhale in a pumping fashion and allow the air to move in naturally on the inhalation. Practice this 15 times and then return to the three-part breath for 30 seconds to a minute between rounds. Repeat 3 rounds. Add 10 exhalations each week until you reach 120 expulsions for each round.

After each of the 3 rounds, retention or *kumbaka* is practiced. Breathe deeply for a few breaths and then take a comfortable, _ full breath in and hold the breath. The body should remain still and relaxed, the breath should not move in or out. Your internal gaze should begin resting at the navel or solar plexus area and you should consciously envision the energy in that area rising up through the center of the body to the point

between the eyebrows, the *third eye*. Retain the breath for 30 seconds and then gently exhale. Add 15 seconds with each of the next two rounds. Remembering to never strain or force, but releasing the breath when it feels necessary.

*WARNING: Retention should not be practiced by pregnant women; it stops the flow of oxygen to the baby.

Aniloma Viloma Pranayama: “alternate nostril breathing”

This practice balances the nostrils, lungs and the sides of the brain, calming the central nervous system and clearing the lungs of any stale or foul air.

~*First month*: “single nostril”

Left hand is in *chin* or *jnana mudra* (thumb and forefinger joined; like “okay”, with back of the hand resting on the knee or leg). The right hand is in *vishnu mudra* (pointer finger and middle finger are curled into the palm, letting the right thumb, ring and pinky finger extend). The thumb will be used to close off the right nostril; both the ring and pinky fingers will be used to close off the left nostril.

Breathe deeply through both nostrils several times. Close off the right nostril and breathe in through the left, counting *OM* mentally, 5 times, “OM 1, OM 2, OM 3, etc.” Exhale through the same nostril counting *OM* mentally, 10 times. The ratio of inhale and exhale is 1:2. Repeat this 15 to 20 times through the left nostril and 15 to 20 times through the right nostril. Increase to 6 and 12 seconds; inhale to exhale. Do not force anything. Go at your pace.

~*Second and third months*: “alternate breathing exercise”

Breathe deeply through both nostrils several times. Close the right nostril with your thumb and inhale through the left for 6 counts (*OM, OM, OM...*). Immediately release the right nostril as you close off the left. Exhale your air through the right nostril for 12 counts (*OM, OM, OM...*). Without pausing, inhale through the right for 6 and switch nostrils to exhale left for 12. This makes one full round. Repeat this 15 to 20 rounds. Gradually increase to 7 and 14 and then 8 and 16.

*WARNING: The next version of *aniloma viloma*, should not be practiced by pregnant women. Retention of the breath stops oxygen to the baby.

~ *Fourth month*: “alternate nostril breathing with retention”

Breathe deeply through both nostrils several times. Close off the right nostril and inhale through the left for 4 counts (*OM, OM, OM...*). Close off both nostrils and gently retain the breath for 8 counts. During this retention (*kumbaka*), be relaxed in your body and mind. Focus your attention to the third-eye at the center of the forehead and mentally repeat *OM* 8 times. Release the thumb from the right nostril and exhale for a full 8 counts. Without pausing, inhale through the right nostril for 4 counts. Close off both nostril and retain the breath for 8 *OMs*. Release the ring and pinky fingers from the left nostril and exhale left for 8 *OMs*. This makes one full rounds. Practice 15 to 20 rounds daily. Never use the pointer finger for closing the nostrils. In yogic science it is found that the magnetic current from this finger is polluted. It is also the finger that represents the ego and in yoga, we are trying to rid ourselves of the ever-damaging ego.

Shitali Pranayama: “the cooling breath”

This curled-tongue breathing practice lowers body temperature. This is especially good during hot flashes or when fever sets in. It also purifies the blood.

~Stick your tongue out slightly from the lips and curl the tongue like a tube. This breathing exercise imitates the breath of a serpent. Draw the air in through the mouth/tongue, hold the breath in comfortably and then exhale through both nostrils. Practice this 15 to 30 times.

Lokah Samastha Sukinoh Bhavantu

May all beings everywhere experience the blessings of great happiness!

*May the entire universe be filled with peace and joy, love and light.
And may the light of truth overcome all darkness.
Victory to that light!*

Jai Sri, Sat Guru, Maharajki, Jai!

Praise/ joy to the ancient teachers, to my teacher, to the teacher within, praise/joy!

Namaste!

The Divine in me, bows to the Divine in you. All beings are one!

~ Allow falsities in life to fall away and seek the truth that brings everlasting happiness. Do not be afraid of silence; it is in silence that we find our Self. Welcome peace and love and share them with others, especially with your enemies and those you don't know~

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