

Pranayama: ... power behaves in a way analogous to the waves on the ocean, with peaks and troughs, which can be measured in terms of wavelength and frequency. The rise and fall of the breath can be linked to our emotions, which is reflected in the way we breathe, as the more agitated we become, the faster the breathing rate. We are all modifications of power, and here the analogy with the waves on the ocean ends, as the energy that constitutes our being is intelligent and guides the pattern and form that we set ourselves.

Prana is the name we give to the infinite manifesting power of the universe, which is the source of all life, and herein is the secret to eternal youthfulness. Most people's breathing rate is linked to the outer demands of the body; whereas the subtle breath, when refined and made conscious, will help us to understand and explore the inner world of light and life on which the phenomenal world stands.

There is a blissful element in Prana breathing; it is the *Ana* or serpent like rhythm, the *Amanda* that undulates throughout space, hence the analogy of the ocean waves as they gently rise and fall. To observe the non urgent rise and fall of the breath, is both calming and relaxing.

There are different aspects to Yoga breathing exercises; those that improve the depth and action of the lungs and help to improve function; and the intuitional or spiritual directives that arise from the stillness that underlies each breath. There is a great deal of misunderstanding about the nature of breath retention and breath restraint *yama*; which should be part of a natural progression and never forced.

Pranayama or Yogic breathing is never mechanical, as it is a conscious process that brings light and life to the entire body and which by natural progression, leads to *pratyahara* (detachment). It is the space between the breaths in which reality lies and which guides the natural processes of life. Space is not empty and is full of the creative spirit of life, which the beginner will discover as they awaken to the creative spirit within the centre of their being.

Although there has been a great deal written about a variety of pranayama techniques there is much that we can learn exercises in breath awareness; by attuning ourselves to the light of the breath and its healing properties. The

spirit of the breath is never wholly contained by the lungs and creates an energy flow that can be directed to any part of the body. It is the right or consciousness of the breath that enlivens and heals, wherever its light and energy is directed. The breath is life and when allowed to flow naturally and easily its beneficial effects will be readily felt; the retention when it occurs is the natural response when focussing healing Prana.

No two people are exactly the same and the responses to the intelligence of the breath may vary. For the Rajistic it may be the Breath of Fire; the Tamistic may make no effort whatsoever and for the Sattvic, the breath and the light of the breath, is an almost imperceptible rhythm and imparts peace and tranquillity to the whole body. (Gordon Smith – Founder Member)

The Guest House

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honourably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

~ Rumi ~

Meditation -The Jupiter Breath: imparts a spirit of openness and Jollity and is able to release one from the restrictive influences of life. The opposite are the saturnine influences that cause us to shut down, impede circulation, and hide all that is threatening behind a wall of tension.

Often we do not recognise the tensions that we have, because they have become habitual and too well established over a long period of time. The Jupiter Breath is refreshing and releases energy previously unavailable. Each day, if experiencing stress, breathe deeply, with a sense of opening; expanding and stepping beyond any stress that you may feel, avoid re-capturing the inertia of previous limitations as you step into the freedom of breaking identification.

This can be developed into a simple standing or walking exercise; by taking a step forward, inhaling deeply as the arms are extended to the sides, the exhaling, relaxing and releasing as the feet are brought together and arms returned to the sides. (Gordon Smith – Founder Member)

Lentils with veggies and zesty lemon (Nigella Lawson)

Serves one:

1 carrot, peeled and halved lengthwise then roughly chopped
1 leek, trimmed and halved lengthwise then roughly chopped
3 tbsp chopped fresh parsley
1 tsp chopped fresh mint
grated zest 1 lemon
125g puy/green lentils
1tsp english mustard
500ml water
salt and pepper to taste



Cafejohnsonia.com (Google Images)

Fry carrot, leek, parsley, mint and lemon zest in garlic oil for 5 mins, in a heavy pan with lid, stirring frequently. Stir in the lentils and cook for another minute, then add mustard and stir everything together. Add the water and bring everything up to the boil, put on the lid and simmer very gently for 45 minutes until the lentils are tender. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Yogic Breathing – Lower, Middle, Upper and Full Breath

An essay by Gillian Smith

Introduction

Breathing constitutes part of the fourth limb of yoga, pranayama, highlighting the importance of breath in our yoga practice. Pranyama is a technique designed to gain control of the respiratory system, connecting the breath with the mind and spirit. Brown (2004) describes pranayama as a means to increase vitality and mental focus and expand our consciousness.

In order to master pranayama, first we need to learn how to breathe. While that might sound strange, seeing as we breathe all day long without thinking, it is this unconscious action that we need to gain conscious awareness of, in order to take some control of the breath.

From my experience as a clinician, most people do not know how to breathe optimally and certainly underestimate the influence breathing has on their health and wellbeing. Coupled with a sedentary lifestyle and inadequate diet, we put our bodies under incredible stress to maintain optimal function. As a consequence there is the increased opportunity for 'lifestyle' disorders, such as cardiovascular and nervous system problems, to occur.

Understanding the Breath

During an inhalation the diaphragm flattens, allowing an increase in space within the thoracic cavity for the lungs to expand. Air is drawn in and gasses are exchanged at the vast internal surfaces of the lungs. As the diaphragm relaxes, the lungs deflate and air is expelled from the body. The inhalation is vital to provide oxygen to the body, while exhalation is vital for carrying away waste carbon dioxide. The whole breath is therefore important for physiological function.

The general population generally focusses on the importance of inhalation. In yoga, importance is also placed on a slow and complete exhalation, as this is an essential prerequisite for a correct and complete inhalation. The more complete the exhalation, the greater the quantity of fresh air we will be able to inhale.

In yoga, the breath also provides pranic energy to the body, allowing it to flow efficiently and giving us our life force. Prana is vital for healthy growth in all koshas of a being, and our link with the universe and other beings. As Patanjali states "all that vibrates in the universe is prana" (Iyengar, 1993).

The breath is intrinsically linked to our physiological function, increasing naturally in times of stress and decreasing in times of rest. As such it is linked to our emotional state, the impact of stress and increased breathing rate leading to heightened emotions. As such a person with suboptimal breathing patterns may experience emotional instability unnecessarily.

Sabatini (2006) describes unconscious, mechanical, breathing as dulling the mind and crippling the body – leading to tension, insomnia, poor concentration, irritability and nervousness. In contrast, conscious breathing lightens the body and brings clarity to the mind.

Yogic Breathing

Yogic breathing breaks the breath into three parts. I personally feel this helps develop focus in each area of the lungs, engaging the correct muscles and aiding development of full, optimal breathing.

Lower breathing - also known as diaphragm breathing, this is the first stage of a full yogic breath. During this breath the diaphragm flattens, pushing the organs down and allowing the stomach to expand. Focus remains on the naval, relaxing the rib cage, shoulders and neck. It is believed to improve lymphatic drainage and increase circulation to the organs, regulating digestion and reducing hypertension (Auden and Tomkinson, 2011). This technique stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system so is a natural sedative. I believe it can be used as an anti-anxiety technique, of benefit to those suffering with stress, anxiety or depression and may also help cope with chronic pain.

Middle breathing – also known as thoracic or intercostal breathing, this is mostly used during exertion, when increased circulation is required by the body. Attention is focussed on the rib cage, encouraging expansion to the front, sides and back of the chest; the stomach, shoulders and neck remain relaxed. This breath takes pressure off the heart and improves circulation to the upper abdominal organs (Auden and Tomkinson, 2011).

Upper breathing – also known as clavicular breathing, this mostly occurs naturally as part of a stress response. Focus remains on the collarbones, where slight movement can be detected during expansion of the upper lungs and shoulders. The stomach and ribs remain relaxed. This breath strengthens the hilar lymph nodes, improving lymphatic drainage from the lungs (Auden and Tomkinson, 2011).

I find most people breathe into the middle and upper chest, while personally I find upper breathing the hardest part to achieve. As it is related to the

stress response, upper chest breathing can induce sympathetic nervous system activity, which includes increased cortisol production, leading to increased heart rate and reduced digestion. This is not supportive of a healthy body.

Full yogic breath – the complete yogic breath maximises inhalation and exhalation by incorporating lower, middle and upper breathing. The full yogic breath begins with an inhalation to the base of the lungs, flattening the diaphragm, moving up to expand the ribcage, and finally expanding the clavicular region. On the exhalation the body relaxes, from upper, to middle to lower regions or vice-versa. Nasal breathing should be encouraged where possible and focus must remain on the breath throughout. This attention ensures all parts of the lungs are utilised and the breath remains calm and controlled, yet relaxed and effortless throughout both inhalation and exhalation.

The full yogic breath is said to increase lung capacity and improve energy by increasing oxygen circulation and improving physiological function. It eliminates the toxins from the depths of your respiratory system (Brown, 2004).

Conclusion

Breath, life and energy are rooted together. Breathing correctly can improve energy from a physical perspective, increasing oxygen circulation and waste excretion, and also from a spiritual perspective, increasing the flow of prana. Yogic breathing aims to untangle the true breath from any other breathing patterns (Brown, 2004). Simple awareness of the breath allows us to get to know our normal breathing pattern. Lower, middle and upper breathing bring awareness to each part of the lungs in turn. In doing so we can find the true breath and can develop an optimal breathing pattern, progressing to pranayama practice in a safe and beneficial way.

I believe correct breathing provides us with an element of control over our nervous system, and hence our emotional and physical responses to a stressful situation.

“As water purifies the skin, so the breath is capable of cleansing our whole being” (Sabatini, 2006)

References

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Sabatini, S. 2006. Breath: The essence of yoga, a guide to inner stillness. Pinter & Martin.

Circulating Prana and refreshing the light body will help to improve health and physical well being. We are condensed light and made of the stuff that stars are made of, we are children of primordial light and there is no light which is not spirit. Light is pure consciousness, pure awareness and is a symbol of your intelligence. The following exercise is related to Atman Yoga and those familiar with the subtle dimensions of pranayama.

Start by stilling the mind and refining the breath, commencing with alternate nostril breathing. Then using the right nostril, visualise light being drawn in with the breath and heightening consciousness in the right hemisphere of the brain. Repeat several times then continue with the left nostril, refining awareness of the left hemisphere.

Finally breathe slowly and evenly through both nostrils 'letting' light and consciousness fill all of the space inside your head. There are two aspects to this; one which stimulates the Ida and Pingala Nadi as the breath passes over the bridge of the nose, and the power of the imagination which guides consciousness into the space beyond. If Body and Mind are relaxed it is not unlike drawing a curtain and opening a window, to let light and air flood the space beyond.

Light as pure consciousness is a catalyst and breaks through the inertia of old energy patterns, bringing refreshing change and new ways of perceiving reality. At each stage spend a few moments in stillness and enjoy the sensation of the refreshing and healing light.

Continue with alternate nostril breathing using your imagination to help bring healing light deeper into the right and left hemispheres of the lungs, finally breathing in fully and deeply through both nostrils as soothing light fills both lungs, retain the breath briefly to help assimilate the healing Prana. Again enjoy a few moments in meditative stillness as the light soothes and heals.

First using the right nostril, then the left, take the healing Prana deeper toward the base of the spine and circulate the light energy as you refresh the energy in the abdominal area. Then breathe in fully and deeply through both nostrils as you continue to recharge the abdomen with light and Prana. Complete the Light/Prana circulation by breathing in fully and deeply through both nostrils into the entire body. For specific problems spend a little more time for healing in that area, with mind still, and remaining detached, as you 'LET' the healing light of consciousness soothe and renew. (Gordon Smith – Founder Member)