



YOGA BREATH - SOURCE OF LIFE

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ABSTRACT:

KEYWORDS:

ABOUT THE BREATH

In order to live and keep the body healthy, we require not only food and water, but also air to breathe. The air we breathe is even more important than eating and drinking. Without food we can survive several weeks. Without water we can survive for a few days. However, without breathing we can survive for just a few minutes. Our life begins and ends with a breath.

Within one breath, three phases can be distinguished [\[1\]](#):

1. Inhalation
2. Exhalation
3. Pause in breathing

One phase flows into the other. The exhalation should last approximately twice as long as the inhalation. The pause in breathing arises naturally at the end of the exhalation phase and lasts until the impulse to inhale occurs of its own accord. The inhalation forms the active part of the breath. With it comes contraction of the respiratory muscles. The exhalation is the passive part of the breath, the phase of relaxation.

Quiet, regular and deep breathing is decisive for our health. It has a harmonising and calming effect upon body and mind. On the other hand, breathing that is too rapid and shallow has a negative influence upon us, as it can intensify nervousness, stress, tension and pain.

A frequent mistake in breathing is drawing the abdomen in as the chest expands, rather than relaxing the abdomen forwards. Drawing in the abdomen considerably impairs deep breathing. Often fashion and restrictive clothing inhibits this natural movement.

Therefore, all exercises in Yoga, including the breath exercises, should be practiced slowly and without unnecessary tension - without ambition or competition. The breath should be silent and through the nose (Because the air is filtered, moistened and warmed within the nose.). Over a period of time and with practice, one tries to

gradually slow and lengthen the breath. Only through correct breathing can the full effects of the Yoga exercises totally unfold.

With all exercises it is very important that they are practised in a physically and mentally relaxed state. A physically relaxed state is essential, as it is only then that the muscles can stretch in the respective Asana without creating tension. A mentally relaxed state is necessary so that the Asanas can be practiced with full concentration on relaxing and breathing. By exhaling consciously, one can considerably assist in the relaxation of the muscles, as the relaxation of the muscles is connected to the exhalation.

Yoga shows us how body and mind can be influenced by different breathing techniques. Unfortunately our normal method of breathing has moved a long way from the natural and correct way of breathing. A fundamental requirement to restore healthy breathing is practice of the Full Yoga Breath.

THE FULL YOGA-BREATH

To help in learning the Full Yoga Breath three types of breathing are distinguished:

1. Abdominal or Diaphragmatic Breathing

With an inhalation, the diaphragm moves downwards compressing the abdominal organs so that the abdominal wall extends outward. With an exhalation the diaphragm moves upward again and the abdominal wall flattens. In contrast to the inhalation, the exhalation is a passive process.

The abdominal breath forms the basis of breathing as it allows the full use of lung capacity, slows down the breath in a natural way and promotes relaxation.

2. Chest Breathing

With an inhalation, the ribs are lifted so that the chest expands. With an exhalation, the ribs return

to their original position. The air flows into the middle lobes of the lungs. The lungs are not filled as much as in abdominal breathing and the breath is more rapid and shallow.

This breathing occurs automatically in stressful situations, due to nervousness or tension. The unconscious use of this more rapid form of breathing creates a heightened state of tension. To break this unfavourable cycle, slow and deep abdominal breathing is of great assistance.

3. Collarbone (Clavicular) Breathing

With this type of breathing the air flows into the top of the lungs. With an inhalation, the upper part of the chest and collarbones are lifted and with an exhalation, they lower again. The breath is very shallow and rapid.

This type of breathing occurs in situations of extreme stress and panic, or where there is great difficulty in breathing.

In a healthy and natural breath, all three variations occur. Each is united into a flowing wave, which proceeds from the bottom to the top of the lungs with the inhalation, and from the top to the bottom with the exhalation. With the inhalation, the abdomen extends forward and the chest is expanded. With the exhalation the chest and the abdomen return to their original position. When one practises this type of breathing utilising the full lung capacity naturally and without any force, one is practising the **Full Yoga Breath**.

EXERCISES FOR THE THREE TYPES OF BREATHING

Starting Position: Lie on the back

Concentration: on the whole body and breath

Duration: 2-3 minutes

Practice: Lie on the back. Arms are relaxed beside the body and palms face upwards. The legs may be straight, or bent with the soles of the feet on the floor. Close the eyes and relax the body.

Variation A: >Place the hands on the abdomen and observe the movement of the abdomen with each inhalation and exhalation. >Now place the hands on the side of the ribs (fingers point towards the centre of the chest) and observe if and how far the ribs expand and contract beneath the hands. >Next, place the hands just beneath the collarbones and observe the movement of the chest in this area.

Variation B: >Inhale and exhale several times quietly and a little more deeply than normal. Become aware of all the sensations associated with the breath. >Continue to breathe in the same way and, keeping the arms straight, slide them along the floor towards the head. Observe how the sensations associated with the breath change with each position of the arms, and how the volume of the breath increases.

1. Keeping the arms straight move them sideways along the floor to an angle of about 45°. Pause and consciously observe the flow of the breath.
2. Move the arms a further 45° along the floor so that they now stretch out to the side at shoulder height. Pause briefly and once again observe the flow of the breath.
3. Continue the movement of the arms until they rest beside the head on the floor.

Exhaling keep the arms straight and slowly slide them back along the floor until they are beside the body again. Straighten out the legs and remain lying still for a short time, relaxing.

EXERCISE FOR THE FULL YOGA BREATH

Starting Position: Lie on the back

Concentration: on the whole body and breath

Repetitions: 5-10 rounds

Practice: Lie on the back. The legs fall loosely away from each other. The arms lie relaxed beside the body with the palms facing up. Relax the whole body. Close the eyes.

Variation A: >Inhaling keep the arms straight and slowly move them out to the side and upwards along the floor, until they rest beside the head. Coordinate the breath with the movement of the arms, beginning with the abdominal breath, then moving into the chest and finally into the area of the collarbones. >Exhaling slowly return the arms beside the body. The exhalation is carried out in reverse: consciously begin the exhalation in the area of the collarbones, continue through the chest, finally relax the abdomen.

This is one round. Repeat the exercise 5-10 times. Consciously feel the process of breathing so that the breath is as deep and full as possible.

Variation B: >Inhaling keep the arms parallel to each other and raise them in a high arc towards the ceiling. Place the arms on the floor beside the head with palms facing up. >Exhaling return the arms beside the body in the same way. The palms rest on the floor. >Consciously feel and observe all three types of breathing (abdominal, chest and collarbone breathing).

Repeat the exercise 5-10 times. Notice how this breath exercise increases the volume of the breath after only one round.

LEVEL 1

"It takes time for a sprout to grow into a large tree. God-Realisation means that your whole being - every cell of your body, every breath, every corner of your consciousness and every glimmer of an idea - is filled with God's presence."

The first level of the system "Yoga in Daily Life" is known as **Sarva Hita Asanas** ("good for everyone") as these exercises are of benefit to all people and all parts of the body. The Sarva Hita Asanas help us to attain integral wellbeing, as they bring body, mind and soul into balance. Anyone from any age group, regardless of physical

condition, can perform these exercises.

No matter what goal you are striving for with Yoga (preservation of health, inner peace and balance, an increased ability to concentrate, meditation or spiritual realisation) it is best to begin with the physical exercises and breath exercises. These form the basis for any further Yoga studies.

To create a solid base for the more advanced exercises, you should proceed systematically, beginning with the practice of Sarva Hita Asanas. In this way, you will learn the basics - how to perform the Yoga exercises correctly and how to breathe in the correct way. The body becomes flexible, the muscles strengthened and through this the joints become stronger. The exercises are also valuable for anyone who would like to meditate, as the Sarva Hita Asanas calm and balance both the mind and nervous system. They deepen the breath and prepare the body for longer, motionless sitting in meditation posture.

The exercise programme of Sarva Hita Asanas lasts for three months. It is subdivided into six sections and each section is practiced for a period of two weeks. Each programme consists of physical exercises, breathing practices and relaxation exercises. In conjunction with these exercises, the first level of Self-Inquiry Meditation can be practiced.

LEVEL 2

"Your heart is like the ocean into which thousands of rivers pour without overflowing. Your mind is like the clear sky, endless and free, raised high above this world. Your being is like the tree that gives its shade and yields sweet fruit to all. The tree does not cling to its fruit, nor withholds them from those who throw stones. Like your heart, the tree offers its fruit to all, no matter into whose hands they fall."

After completing the first level of "Yoga in Daily Life" you are now well prepared for the classical Asanas of Yoga.

As you have already experienced, there is a great difference between conventional gymnastics and Yoga exercise. The Yoga postures exert a far-reaching effect on all bodily functions, as well as the mind. In this way it can be observed that the Asanas not only influence the body, but also one's entire personality. In a very natural way the Yoga Asanas bring health and balance to both body and mind. One experiences an inner peace and freedom.

In order to achieve rapid and long-lasting results, it is of great importance to establish a regular and systematic practice of Yoga. Initially, regular practice may seem difficult and a little inconvenient, however once the body and mind begin to experience the benefits, they appear to desire the Yoga exercises, as if of their own accord.

There are Asanas that are easier to perform in the morning and others in the evening. There are specific breathing techniques that are a blessing for those who have difficulty waking in the morning. People who suffer from poor sleep, long for the relaxation that Yoga practice brings and so they establish a regular routine. Problems with blood pressure, back pain and other health complaints all benefit

from regular practice. After some time it simply becomes a healthy habit, just like taking a shower - the Yoga practice is something we just do not want to miss.

SEQUENCE OF A YOGA SESSION

- Begin your Yoga session with a relaxation and then practice some dynamic exercises such as stretching the body, rolling the body, twists or simple exercises from the "[Sarva Hita Asanas](#)" to warm the muscles, loosen the joints and stimulate circulation.
- Then continue with the Asanas from the exercise level you are currently practicing in "Yoga in Daily Life". To begin with, practice each Asana three times without holding for a longer period. After practicing this way for a while, begin to extend the practice by holding the posture for a few minutes with normal breathing. Conclude the physical exercises with a short relaxation.
- After the Asana practice, air the room and practice [Pranayama](#). Follow this with a [meditation](#) according to your current level.
- Complete the Yoga session by singing OM three times and the Peace Mantra, **OM ŚĀNTIḤ ŚĀNTIḤ ŚĀNTIḤ**.

LEVEL 3

"There is no heaven and no hell, except in your own heart. Your own thoughts are simultaneously heavenly bliss and the torments of hell."

The previous exercises have increased the flexibility of the spine, improved the body's physical condition and heightened awareness to the importance of relaxation. It has been emphasised that each exercise be practiced slowly, coordinating movement with the breath, pausing motionless in each position and always with full concentration.

As practice continues and progress begins on the path of Yoga, it becomes even more necessary to pay attention to the precise movement of all exercises and maintain concentration throughout the practice of each exercise. The Yoga practices will bring good health and awaken dormant powers within the body, all of which are of great importance in life.

In the Bhagavad Gita (VI/15) it says: "One who through Yoga controls the body and has learned to master the feelings, senses and mind, sheds the chains of desire, fear and confusion and attains peace and supreme bliss."

All this can be achieved through Yoga if the techniques are practiced systematically and regularly, with faith and devotion.

LEVEL 4

"Yoga is the source of spirituality and spirituality is the basis of all religions. Yoga is the way to God."

Now you have reached the fourth level of your Yoga practice and have thus become an advanced Yoga student.

Here so much more attention is required on slow, concentrated practice of the exercises. Remain in each position longer than previously, as this way you will experience the influence of the Asanas upon body and mind even more deeply.

With respect to the level of intensity of this practice, often it seems no progress is being made. Feelings of uncertainty and despondency can be overcome on reflection of the following advice as given by Bhagwan Sri Deep Narayan Mahaprabhuji in his Golden Teachings:

"The success of your actions lies in the strength of your inner conviction and self-discipline. Do not lose courage and never give up." and **"Whatever you have resolved to do, do it with firm determination. Success will be certain."**

In the Bhagavad Gita (II/40) it says: "On this path no effort goes in vain; also there is no loss. Even a small step on this path liberates one from great fear."

Everything, even the smallest endeavour on the Yoga path, brings a multitude of gains. Those who do not give up, who practice regularly and continue with full confidence, will reach their goal.

LEVEL 5

"When you call God from the depths of your heart day and night, He will come to you and take your life in His loving hands."

Yoga is no longer simply physical training for you, but rather a method to control and overcome inner disturbances and restlessness, such as poor concentration, dissatisfaction, depression, etc.

Sage Patanjali states in his Yoga Sutras that the substance of thought (Chitta) is a product of nature (Prakriti). When the thought process is directed towards an object it takes on the form of that object. This phenomenon is called Chitta Vritti, which can be roughly translated as "mental state". Since the objects to which the mind is directed vary, the Chitta Vrittis vary as well, and a false identification of our Self (Purusha) with these varied modifications takes place. Through the Yoga practices we can achieve a controlled stilling of the Chitta Vrittis ("Chitta Vritti Nirodhah") and with this, liberate the Self from the erroneous identification with the changing states of consciousness.

Besides the Asanas and Pranayamas, a further step is now included in the daily practice - deep concentration. This is often mistakenly called meditation however, meditation is much more than concentration. One cannot practice meditation, it arises by itself in the same way that sleep suddenly overcomes us without us being able to distinguish the exact moment we fall asleep.

Concentration is a preliminary practice for meditation, with the goal being to observe and to calm the body, mind and senses. If our ability to concentrate is not strong enough, we either become restless or fall asleep. Both prevent us from going into meditation. That is why in the

practice of concentration we aim to overcome both restlessness and sleep. The techniques that are described in the following levels are certain to develop the ability to concentrate for those who would like to reach a genuine level of meditation.

SOME ADVICE FOR YOUR SUCCESS IN YOGA:

1. Live as a vegetarian.
2. Stay away from drugs. Drugs damage the health of both body and mind, and severely hinder your Yoga development. Avoid the mistake of thinking that your will-power is strong enough that you can decide at any moment to stop taking drugs. It never is.
3. Avoid alcohol and any kind of excess. They are obstacles on your Yoga path, which can ruin all endeavours.

LEVEL 6

"Create the right balance between material and spiritual life and you will possess two strong wings with which your soul can soar towards God."

Progress is made on the Yoga path by systematic practice of Asanas, Pranayama and concentration. The Yoga path is not always easy. Difficulties and obstacles that arise must be overcome. With experience we learn the importance of keeping our goal in sight and continue to practice unwaveringly, with confidence.

The concentration exercises control the mind and make us more aware of mental restlessness. This restless mind creates inner tension, which prevents us from following a single train of thought consistently to the end. Because of this, the mind often leads us astray.

Yoga calms the mind and develops the power of discrimination. Viveka is that aspect of the intellect (Buddhi), which guides us towards correct understanding and to discern what are the right decisions. One of the most important tasks now, apart from the physical, breathing and concentration exercises, is to train the intellect and use it correctly. Yoga ignites in us the **light of wisdom** so that we gain clarity and are able to become aware of true reality.

LEVEL 7

"The greatest happiness and the greatest gift from God is human life. A fool is he who does not realise this and carelessly wastes this precious gift. He acts like one who throws away a diamond as if it were worthless glass. Don't let your life trickle away like sand slipping through your fingers."

Once more a new level of Yoga practice is ahead of you and an equally new level in your development.

In daily practice you have gained your own understanding and experience of the effects of Asanas, Pranayama and Meditation upon body, mind and soul. The next step is to consider more deeply the philosophy and spiritual aspects of Yoga. "Where do I come from?" "What is the meaning

and purpose of life?" "What duty must I fulfil in this life?" And finally, "Where will I go after this life?"

Within the practice of "Yoga in Daily Life" the answers to these five vital questions can be found. Ultimately we can free ourselves from the wheel of destiny and attain the final and supreme goal of Yoga - liberation from Karma, death and rebirth.

On the path to this goal, you become free of many health problems, mental worries and fears. Most importantly you can free yourself of those inner qualities that disturb you such as anger, egoism, hatred, attachment, envy and addictions.

Always be conscious that Yoga is an entirely voluntary path - bright and clear like the rays of the sun and free like a bird in the sky. No one should feel pressured. It is completely your own decision to determine what steps you take and when.

Often one is tempted by the restless and changeable nature of the mind to break from the Yoga path and again try something new. This is why you must develop great awareness and analyse your thoughts very carefully. Never allow yourself to be tempted to change out of mere curiosity. The success you gain in Yoga can be likened to the care given to a tender plant - it will only grow and bear fruit under your gentle and loving care. If you repeatedly plant and replant a small seed, it will never gain the opportunity to take root and thrive. In the same way the flower of spirituality will only develop through patience, love and perseverance.

LEVEL 8

"The more wisdom you possess, the more humble becomes your mind. The more understanding you develop, the more helpful become your actions. The more goodness residing in your heart, the more love you feel for everything."

We now come to the final and highest level of Asanas - **Padmasana** (Lotus) and the practice of various postures in Padmasana.

Along with Shirshasana, Padmasana is known as the supreme and "royal" Asana. Why is this posture so important? Padmasana is the only sitting posture in where the spine is completely upright, so that the lungs are entirely free for breathing. Above all, it opens the Chakras along the spine and activates the corresponding nerve centres. As the qualities of each Chakra begin to unfold, the Yoga aspirant is opened to diverse levels of consciousness. This is why Yogis always sit for deep meditation in Padmasana.

The lotus is a symbol full of meaning for the Yogi and the Yoga aspirant. In mythology, the lotus blossom represents beauty, purity and spirituality. Since it always floats upon the surface of water, it also gives us a model of how to live and act in this world. Water is symbolic of Maya (the world) and the lotus blossom is symbolic of man. Humans and the world are strongly interrelated and just as the lotus blossom can only thrive in water, humans and other living beings can only develop and attain realisation in this world. Just as the lotus floats upon the water's surface, untouched by the water, Yogis live in this world inwardly untouched by temptations, pleasures, difficulties and misfortunes. In every respect they are free, even though Maya seeks to lead them astray through the waves of emotion and desire.

To the Yogi, the lotus blossom is a symbol of Divine consciousness and love. Those who meditate on the lotus blossom can realize its perfection within themselves. For those who find the divine lotus within, the search is over.

REFERENCES

NO REFERENCES