

The Science of Upanishads – Part 48: Foundations of Modern Yoga Practice (Contd.): Description of Pranayama (Breath Exercises) as The Fourth Anga (Limb) of The Ashtanga Yoga (Eight Limbed Yoga) of The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

(February 14-February 20, 2018)

For the past several weeks, we have elaborated on Asanas (poses) as the third Anga (limb) out of the eight Angas (limbs) of Ashtanga Yoga (Eight-limbed Yoga) described in **Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: (1) Yama** – Ethical Rules, **(2) Niyama** – Discipline or Virtuous Habits, **(3) Asana** - Physical Poses, **(4) Pranayama** - Breath Exercises, **(5) Pratyahara** - Withdrawal of the Senses from External Objects, **(6) Dharana** – Concentration, **(7) Dhyana** - Meditation, and **(8) Samadhi** - Complete Realization. We will now move on to the fourth Anga: Pranayama, the Breath Exercises.

Prāṇāyāma is made out of two Sanskrit words *prāṇa* (प्राण, breath) and *āyāma* (आयाम्, restraining, extending, stretching). Pranayama is the practice of consciously regulating breath (inhalation and exhalation). This is done in several ways, inhaling and then suspending exhalation for a period, exhaling and then suspending inhalation for a period, slowing the inhalation and exhalation, <https://www.yogajournal.com/poses/types/pranayamaonsciously> changing the time/length of breath (deep, short breathing).

There are a variety of breathing techniques that are known to reduce stress, aid in digestion, improve sleep, and cool you down. Here are two pranayama

exercises worth practicing and the most beneficial times to do them. In the next Mandir Bulletin, we will describe a couple more of the Pranayama techniques:

1. Nadhi Sodhana aka Anuloma Viloma

Nadhi sodhana, also known as alternative nostril breathing, is a very relaxed, balancing breath that is used to help calm the nervous system and aid in a restful night's sleep. By increasing the amount of oxygen taken into the body, it's believed that this breath can also purify the blood, calm the mind, reduce stress, and promote concentration.

How to do it: Nadhi sodhana can be done seated or lying down. To start, empty all the air from your lungs. Using the thumb of your dominant hand, block your right nostril and inhale through your left nostril only. Be sure to inhale into your belly,

not your chest. Once you are full of breath, seal your left nostril with the ring finger of the same hand, keeping your right nostril closed, and hold the breath for a moment. Then release your thumb and exhale through your right nostril only. Be sure to exhale all the breath out of the right side and pause before inhaling again through the same side. Seal both nostrils once you've inhaled on the right side and exhaled through the left side. A complete cycle of breath includes an inhalation and exhalation through both nostrils. If you're just starting out, you can do a four-count inhale, holding your breath for four to eight counts, then exhale for four counts. Perform up to ten cycles and notice how your body responds. You may feel more relaxed and calm in both your mind and body.

When to do it: Nadhi sodhana is a calm, soothing breath that can be done any time of day. Try practicing this technique when you are anxious, nervous, or having trouble falling asleep.



2. Kapalabhati Pranayama

Kapalabhati means skull shining breath. It's a pranayama exercise as well as an internal *kriya*, or cleansing technique. Practitioners of kapalabhati believe that this breath will help clear mucus in the air passages, relieve congestion, reduce bloating, and improve lung capacity. Kapalabhati is an invigorating breath that can build heat in the body.

How to do it: Start by sitting in a comfortable seat with a tall, straight spine, and exhale completely. Inhale briefly through both nostrils, then sharply exhale (again out of your nose) while pulling your navel in toward your spine. The exhalation is short and quick, but very active, while the inhalation is short and passive. Again, pull your navel in as you exhale and soften it on the inhalation. Do one round of 30 (counting your exhalations) and rest for a minute with some deep breaths in between. Repeat. If this seems strenuous, start with 15 and gradually work your way up.

When to do it: Kapalabhati is great to do in the morning if you're feeling chilly or sluggish. You may also try it when you're feeling congested or bloated, but don't try it on a full stomach. Avoid this technique if you are pregnant, or suffer from blood pressure issues or heart conditions.



More Pranayama Exercises to Follow.....

[Read Here for more on Pranayama Exercises.](#)