

lindaproscheyōga

Sweet Sound of Pranayama

Fall/Winter 2023/24

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Laurel Garden Studio

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What is Pranayama?

Pranayama means breathing control or practice techniques of the breath.

Pranayama (Yoga breathing practices) are a transitional practice for the mind originally used to prepare the mind for meditation. We prepare the **body** with **asana** so we can sit comfortably. We prepare the **mind** by training our attention using breathing techniques, **pranayama**.

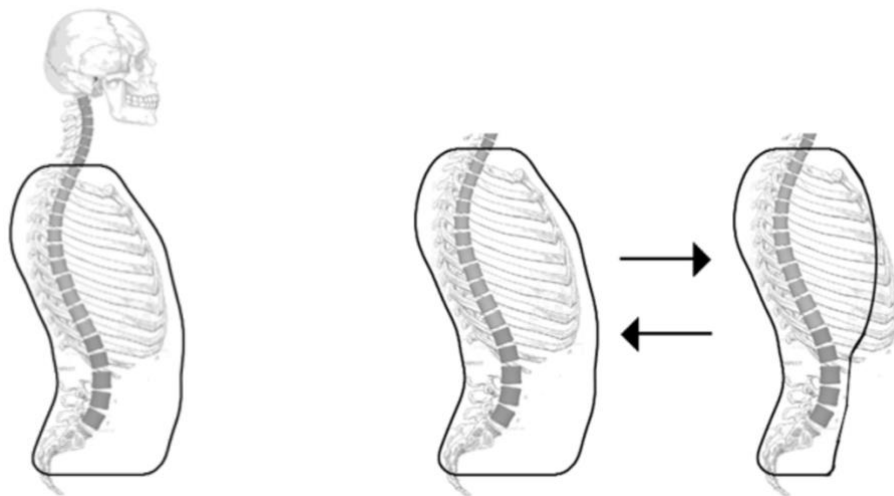
Why do we breathe?

Of course, we breathe in order to live. However, breathing also involves a complex exchange of gasses, nutrients, and toxins. As we breathe in, we nourish, assimilate the nutrients, and then we exhale, we release and eliminate the toxins.

Breathing is as natural as...well, breathing

However, the inhale and exhale are experienced differently depending on the individual. We will explore what that means.

In order to breathe, we need to activate the musculature of the chest area including the ribs, lungs and diaphragm and abdominal muscles. Other secondary muscles are involved as well. Here is a basic look at the structure:



What is of interesting to note in the context of breathing is that the skeletal structure limits the range of motion of breathing. There is relatively less potential motion range in the chest (and it takes considerable conscious effort to do so) and there is relatively more potential motion range in the abdominal area. This is why the movement of natural breathing is more likely to appear in the abdominal area than in the chest for most people.

Why Pranayama?

In the context of the **5-layers of the koshas**, (Studied in our spring Summer session), Pranayama is the second layer “inward” moving from the gross to the subtle, like the layers of an onion. Within this layer, there are complex and yet quite simple methods of how to control the breath in order to achieve even subtler states of mind, body and ultimately spirit...remember **Anandamaya?** (the 5th layer in the 5 and most subtle layer Kosha model)

The application and practice of formulated, measured and repeated breathing keeps the mind busy and involved. It gives the mind something to focus on. It's a little like driving a car for the first time in an unknown town. The first few trips may a little agitating , take longer and full of twists, turns and distractions. But then repetition kicks in. The familiarity of driving around the same block over and over again brings the mind into familiar territory – repetition reduces surprises, places less demand on the mind and enables it to relax.

Bringing the mind to stillness is much easier this way. The mind has slowed down making the transition to stillness easier. The mind is also less anxious making it less resistant to the qualitative change from movement to stillness. The transition into stillness is now completing that last drive around the block, pulling into the driveway and coming to a soft and welcome rest.

All breathing in pranayama applies the conscious effort of directing attention to movement that takes place when in the lungs. We will start our intro session with a few techniques. And allow our attention to sharpen. We start with **intention** of directing **attention**. (let's call out for some help from our friend Patanjali)

Invocation to Pantajali

This invocation is used at the start of each class in the tradition of many yoga styles. It may sound quite unfamiliar to some and a little challenging to learn. However, this chant, known as the **Patanjali Invocation**, has a rich history and deep meaning in the practice of yoga.

It is named after the ancient sage Patanjali, who is said to have compiled the Yoga Sutras, a foundational text on the practice of yoga. The chant is often recited at the beginning of classes to honor Patanjali and to set the intention for the practice. This is a translation of part of the Opening Prayers as taught to TKV Desikachar by T Krishnamacharya and taught by TKV Desikachar to his personal students.

Invocation to Patanjali

Prārthanā Ślokaṃ (Request Prayer) – Dhyānaṃ Ślokaṃ relative to Patañjali.

योगेन चित्तस्य पदेन वाचां मलं शरीरस्य च वैद्यकेन ।
योऽपाकरोत् तं प्रवरं मुनीनां पतञ्जलिं प्राञ्जलिरानतोऽस्मि ॥

yogena cittasya padena vācāṃ malaṃ śarīrasya ca vaidyakena |
yo'pākarot taṃ pravaraṃ munīnāṃ patañjaliṃ prāñjalirānato'smi ||

*'Yoga for the psyche, (the psychology of "right thinking") grammar for speech, (right speaking) and medicine for impurities of the body, (asana and pranayama)
Coming from the lineage of teachers, to Patañjali I salute.'*

आबाहु पुरुषाकारं शङ्खचक्रासि धारिणम् ।
सहस्र शिरसं श्वेतं प्रणमामि पतञ्जलिम् ॥

ābāhu puruṣākāraṃ śaṅkhacakrāsi dhāriṇam |
sahasra śirasam śvetam praṇamāmi patañjalim ||

'Up to the shoulders human form, holding conch, disc, sword.
One thousand heads white to Patañjali I salute.'

श्रीमते अनन्ताय नागराय नमो नमः ॥

śrimate anantāya nāgarājāya namo namaḥ ||

'To venerable, eternal serpent king, Nāga, my reverences.

Translation of the Maharishi Patanjali Mantra:

I bow to Patanjali, who has the form of a man down to the shoulders, holding a conch shell (shankha) and a discus (chakra), with a thousand white heads, resembling a celestial serpent (Adishesha).

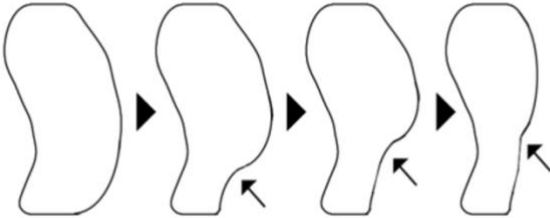
I bow with folded hands to Patanjali, the greatest of sages, who removed the impurities of the mind through yoga, of speech through grammar, and of the body through medicine.

This part of the invocation describes the physical form of Patanjali, as depicted in Hindu mythology. Patanjali is often depicted as a half-human, half-serpent figure, with a thousand heads and the ability to take on different forms. By reciting this part of the invocation, practitioners can pay homage to the symbolism and mythology surrounding Patanjali. I know he looks a little scary. I will try to find another picture.

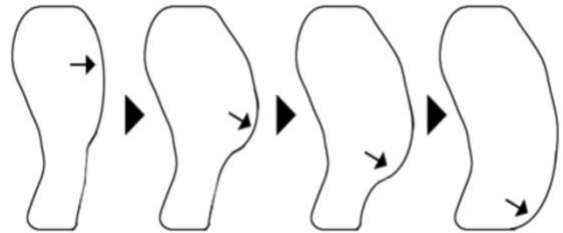


1. **Directional breath** – Here is where attention is honed. And we start with the **intention** (Bhavana) of directing **attention**. (let's call out for some help from our friend Patanjali)

A. Top down – inhale chest to belly, exhale belly to chest



Exhale- Apana meets Prana



Inhale - Prana meets Apana

Once you have a good sense of directional **exhaling** you can introduce directional **inhaling**. Over the time your breathing will develop into a subtle and precise wave movement up and down your torso.

Attentive Practice

Take time to gradually build directional breathing. Let your mind assimilate the idea. Let your body experience and assimilate new sensations. Let your mind connect to the new physical sensations. It takes time to develop this muscular control, it takes time to build a sustainable effort. If you rush through it, you may find yourself forming misapprehension instead of clarity. Please remember this is a subtle form of practice.

As you develop this and bind it into your asana practice you will discover more and more subtle aspects of practice. **How about just 10 breaths in the morning before you step your feet on the floor?**

2. 360 degrees breath

- A. Breathing from the center of the chest out to the surface, front
- B. Breathing from the center of the chest out to the surface, back

3. 3-part breathing –

4. Breath and movement – Practice

5. Yoga Nidra –

6. Q/A

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Laurel Garden Studio – San Anselmo – 9/27/23

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