



TOPIC OF THE MONTH  
November 2012

PRE-Pranayama Breathing Exercises

THE FOUR PURIFICATIONS

These breathing exercises I learned from Nancy Gilgoff, she learned them from Baba Hari Dass. They are in the book "Ashtanga Yoga Primer" by Baba Hari Dass. They are known as "The Four Purifications" and help to prepare one for pranayama; they are generally safe for everyone but best when accompanied by a consistent yoga practice, and best done after your asana practice. They are 2 breathing exercises and 2 bandha exercises.

Nadi Shodhana

Alternate nostril breathing (without khumbaka). To alternate the nostrils you use a special mudra -- a mudra is a position that elicits energy movement in your body. The mudra for Nadi Shodhana breathing exercises is called Vishnu Mudra -- it makes the closing an opening of nostrils smooth and efficient.



Vishnu Mudra (hand gesture of Lord Vishnu) This is one of the hand gestures used to alternate the breath through the nostrils during Nadi Shodana. In this mudra the right hand is used as it is associated with giving while the left is associated with receiving. However if for whatever reason you need to use your left hand during practice that is fine. The thumb and fingers rest lightly so very little movement is needed to close each side during practice.

Vishnu is the Hindu God who preserves the universe. He does this through an interplay of opposites; creation and destruction, male and female, dark and light. Uniting these qualities through yogic practices helps us keep a balance in our lives and live with more understanding of others and how we relate to them.

Alternate nostril breathing is about bringing balance in our body and mind -- balance in being extroverted and introverted, balance between our feminine and masculine sides. The mudra used for this is appropriately named after the god responsible for helping us with this balance.

Nadi Shodhana in the four purifications - you place your right hand in Vishnu Mudra position on either side of your nostrils, your breath should be deep and slow; Inhale Left (closing the right nostril with your thumb), exhale Right (closing the the left nostril with your ring finger), Inhale Right, Exhale Left = L R R L. This is one round. Start by performing 10 rounds and gradually increase to as many as 40 rounds.



You can use your left hand for counting, at the start of each round use a finger to keep track of how many you have done.

### Kapalabhati

Means Skull Shining. It is a breath that is similar to Bhastrika but a bit easier. You pump your lungs on the exhale and relax on the inhale (in bhastrika you pump both on the inhale and exhale). Do 30 blasts, then take a few recovery breaths and repeat for a total of three rounds. You can gradually increase to 60 blasts for 10 rounds.

Kapalabhati helps to clear your mind and calm your thoughts, reducing stress.

### Working with the bandhas in the last 2 purifications

This first exercise should not be done during menstruation, if you think you are pregnant or if you are trying to become pregnant.

### Agnisara Dhauti (Agni = Fire, Sara = Cascade, Dhauti = Purification)

Take a deep inhale, then exhale all air out and hold. If this is new to you, do this a couple times to get used to holding your breath out. Once you are comfortable holding your breath out, exhale hold -- lean forward place your hands on your knees -- lift and drop your abdomen as many times as you can while comfortably holding your breath out. Work up to 30 pulls for three rounds. Over time you can increase it to 60 pulls.

Agnisara Dhauti strengthens your uddiyana bandha, purifies your 3rd chakra, stimulates our digestive fire, and eliminates constipation.

### Ashvini Mudra

Ashvini means horse, the posture is named after a horse since the horse does this gesture after going to the bathroom.

Inhale completely and hold your breath in, contract and release the anal sphincter rapidly and repeatedly, only as long as you can comfortably hold your breath. Work up 30 pulls for 3 rounds, increase gradually to 60 pulls when 30 is easy.

Ashvini mudra strengthens the pelvic floor, improves mula bandha and pushes prana upward slowing down the aging process. This mudra can also be used to heal problems such as hemorrhoids and constipation.

### Putting them all together:

After practicing all 4 purifications for 3–6 months you can put them together and practice them in a way that there are no “rest breaths” in between. For example:

ॐ Do 10 rounds Nadi Shodhana, after last exhale out Left nostril



- ॐ Inhale partially through both nostrils and begin kapalabhati. After 1 series inhale completely, exhale fully and HOLD your breath out
- ॐ do Agnisara Dhauti for 30 – 60 pulls, inhale completely and HOLD your breath in
- ॐ do Ashvini Mudra for 30–60 pulls. Exhale completely and begin again with Nadi Shodhana.

Do a total of 5 rounds in this way.

I performed these four purifications as part of my meditation practice for years before I learned the Pranayamas from Nancy. I enjoyed doing them and miss them now that I do pranayama instead. It was fun to do them again this month.

The four purifications practice prepares you well for pranayama, improves your connection to your bandhas, and improves your breathing.

#### ONE MINUTE MEDITATION

Lastly I want to share with you a ONE MINUTE BREATHING/MEDITATION that I learned from a Western Ayurvedic Dr. name John Douillard who is in CO. He recommends this meditation: “It pumps oxygen into your brain so your brain begins to feel from the heart rather than think from the mind. Let your heart be in the driver’s seat for a minute versus the controlling interests and needs of your mind. Often times this pumps enough energy into your nervous system to give you the ability to be calmer and settle your mind.”

<http://lifespac.com/2009/08/one-minute-meditation/>

It is a simple breathing exercise that can be done anywhere, anytime. It is especially good to use if you are getting ready to face a stressful situation or need to clear your mind or calm your nervous system.

- ॐ Begin with Bhastrika (bellows breath): Breathe deep through your nose, in and out, using all five lobes of your lungs like a big bellows. Use your lungs in and out as much as you can -- in and out only through your nose. Do that for 30 blasts.
- ॐ Then do our normal yogic loud breathing (some call it Ujjayi) slowly (about a 5 second inhale and a 5 second exhale) for 5–10 breaths. Repeat if you have time (you can lengthen the time of ujjayi breathing if you have more time or if you plan to do several rounds of this).

When we use all of our lungs, especially our lower lungs, like in bhastrika, we activate calm receptors that soothe our nervous system.

"The world is an abstract art. We see it as we want to see it. It is a garden of roses and it is also a forest of thorny bushes and poison oak."

**\* INTERMEDIATE METHOD**

AFTER PRACTICING THE 4 PURIFICATIONS SEPARATELY FOR 3-6 MOS, YOU CAN PRACTICE THEM IN A WAY THERE ARE NO 'REST BREATHS' IN BETWEEN. FOR EXAMPLE:

- DO 10 ROUNDS OF NADISHODHANA  
 AFTER LAST EXHALATION OUT (L) NOSTRIL
- INHALE PARTIALLY THROUGH BOTH NOSTRILS + IMMEDIATELY BEGIN KAPALA BHATI  
 AFTER 1 SERIES INHALE COMPLETELY, EXHALE HOLD THE BREATH OUT + DO
- ~~ASHWINI MUDRA~~ AGNISARA DHAUTI  
 AFTER 1 ROUND INHALE COMPLETELY. HOLD THE BREATH IN
- + DO ASHWINI MUDRA
- EXHALE COMPLETELY OUT THE NOSTRILS + BEGIN AGAIN W/ NADI SHODHANA.  
 DO 5 ROUNDS

These four techniques must be practiced for two to three months before beginning regular *pranayama*. Do them in the order given. Sit in a meditation posture with eyes closed, concentrating on *ajna chakra*.

**Nadishodhana**

(Alternate Nostril Breathing)

Gently exhale all air. Close the right nostril with the thumb of the right hand, and inhale slowly and deeply through the left nostril. Close the left nostril with the ring finger, releasing the thumb, and exhale through the right. Inhale through the right, then close it with the thumb and exhale through the left. This makes one round. Begin with ten rounds and gradually increase to forty.

**Kapala Bhati**

(Skull Shining)

*Kapala bhati* is a series of forced exhalations: exhale and inhale quickly and lightly through both nostrils, feeling energy striking the point behind the eyebrow center. Emphasize the exhale, letting the inhalation come as a natural reflex. After one series of exhalations, which should last no longer than one minute, rest and breathe naturally. Then repeat. Begin with three rounds of thirty exhalations each and increase gradually to ten rounds of sixty each.

This method purifies the head area which calms the thoughts. In this way

the rapid breathing of *kapala bhati* induces a calm mind and calm breath. Persons with high blood pressure or lung disease should not practice *kapala bhati*. *Kapala bhati* is also one of the *Shat Karma*. (See page 19.)

**Agnisara Dhauti**

(Fire Wash)

Inhale, then exhale all air. While holding the breath out, pull the abdomen up and toward the backbone; release it suddenly. Repeat this in-and-out movement rapidly as long as the breath can be held out without strain. Then inhale gently. Start with three rounds and increase gradually to ten, beginning with thirty pulls and increasing to sixty in each breath.

This method strengthens *uddiyana bandha* and creates heat at the navel center (*manipura chakra*), which purifies the *nadis* and stimulates the digestive system.

**Ashvini Mudra**

(Horse Mudra)

Inhale completely and hold the breath. Contract and release the anal sphincter rapidly and repeatedly. Hold the breath only so long as the following exhalation can be slow and controlled. Begin with three rounds of thirty pulls each, and increase gradually to ten rounds of sixty each.

*Ashvini mudra* strengthens *mula bandha* and pushes *prana* upward.

\* SEE NOTE