



TOPIC OF THE MONTH

December 2012

PRANAYAMA

I read more when I travel . . . planes, trains, and beds that are strange where I take a little longer to fall asleep. I have been enjoying my pranayama practice and decided to research it -- in both science and yogic text books . . . which as I've learned over the years comes to the same conclusions only in different languages . . .

Pranayama is another yoga limb of the 8 limbs of Ashtanga Yoga.

Pranayama means expansion (ayama = extension or expansion) of our life force (prana). Which means feeling Vitality, when pranayama is done correctly you feel freshness, energetic, and lightness in both body and mind.

Pranayama is breathing exercises that increase absorption of prana and improve the distribution of it throughout our body.

Prana is that magical force in our body that shines our eyes and grows our hair. But we do have some science to put behind it. The negative ions in the atmosphere are akin to Prana. The negative ions are very active mobile ions -- in the atmosphere they work to keep our air clean. In our body negative ions take part in all vital functions and are the catalysts for oxygenating our blood.

Most people associate prana with our breath -- but since have prana in utero (before we have breath) prana is more than breath, it is an energy in our body. The sanskrit word prana means "moving always" -- energy is energetic . . . we need this energetic energy to move always throughout our entire body, where it is blocked disease forms.

Pranayama both is Scientific and Spiritual

Pranayama on a scientific level helps our body better "digest" the air we breathe. Many of us do not pay much attention to our breath, resulting in shallow breathing. **Shallow breathing does not oxygenate our tissues enough -- depriving us of oxygen and leaving us feeling drained of energy. Shallow and erratic breathing also disrupt the mind.**

- ॐ Our breath rate can be on auto pilot or can be controlled. We can not at will give orders to our liver, spleen or stomach but it is possible to regulate breathing at any moment. When our breath is left to subconscious control it is easily influenced by our emotions and what is happening around us, this sets off a chain reaction of stress responses in the body that are not favorable i.e. dry mouth, cold sweat, racing heart, this shallow breath slows down the digestive tract and diverts blood flow and body energy from our organs to fight or flight and stimulates the release of adrenaline. **By consciously controlling our breath and keeping it deep we set off a chain reaction which calms our heart and slows our pulses, helping the organs of the body operate efficiently.**



Pranayama techniques improve our breathing and breath awareness 24 hours per day, you breathe deeply not just when practicing asana or pranayama, but all day long. Pranayama establishes regular breathing patterns.

Pranayama:

- ॐ Increases lung capacity
- ॐ Removes toxins, the slower breath rate allows more time for CO₂ to be expelled
- ॐ Induces a meditative state
 - Mental activity correlates with our breathing pattern, more thoughts = more breaths and erratic breaths. **By reducing the number of breaths we take in a given period it makes concentration and meditation easier**
 - * Pranayama is a tool for living in a meditative state where ease and happiness is easier.
- ॐ Increases our Life Span
 - The sages observed animals and noticed that animals with a slow breath rate such as elephants, tortoises, and pythons have a longer life span than animals with shallow breaths such as rabbits, birds, and dogs. From this observation they realized the importance of slow breathing for increasing our life span. Our respiration and heart are directly related, a slow breathing rate keeps our heart beat slower and stronger.

Pranayama can be as easy as slowing down your breath rate and breathing deeply and evenly as we do in our ashtanga practice. This is safe pranayama for anyone.

- ॐ **Ideal breath rate for our normal day is about 6 breaths per minute -- this is a 5 second inhale and 5 second exhale. Not difficult to do This breath rate gives more time for each cell in our body to expel CO₂ and take in O₂. Slower breathing also allows more time for prana absorption.**
 - Reciting mantra or prayers also slows down breath rate to about 6 breaths per minute.

Advanced pranayama techniques are actually a lack of breathing! Breath holding (khumbaka) -- holding our breath after inhaling (puraka), or exhaling (rechaka), or after both.

Pranayama with breath holding can make you crazy if done incorrectly . . . therefore the advanced pranayamas that include breath holding need to be learned from an experienced teacher. It is important to have an asana practice to prepare our body for pranayama.

- ॐ As long as we live we are prana conductors. However our wires can get bent, blocked, or broken reducing our prana flow.
 - **We do Asana to unclog the channels** – Asanas precede pranayama, as in the ashtanga method outlined by patanjali, asana comes before pranayama. Asanas quicken the circulation of blood throughout the body, open up capillaries and



enable prana to be distributed throughout our body without "short circuits" -- pranayama may cause pranic disturbances in a body that is not limbered by asana (these disturbances have no long term consequences -- everything goes back to normal when you stop the pranayama). Imagine a river that floods and causes damage.

If you are not yet ready for a "real" pranayama practice the style of loud breathing we do in our ashtanga practice which was given the name Ujjayi Breathing is a good place to start. Ujjayi or Loud breathing where you use your throat muscles to slow down the passage of air into and out the lungs and where you use your bandhas or abdominals to get a deeper exhale has many great benefits:

- ॐ Ujjayi lowers heart rate and blood pressure
- ॐ calms our nervous system
- ॐ reduces stress
- ॐ increases psychic sensitivity
- ॐ ujjayi alleviates fluid retention (due to the use of the bandhas with the breath the bandhas put pressure on our lymphatic system)

Ujjayi is the pranayama which gives freedom from bondage; the sanskrit word means victorious. It is derived from the root "ji" which means to conquer or to acquire by conquest, and the prefix "ud" means bondage.

If you are having a stressful day try 10 minutes of our yoga breathing to feel better in body and mind. This is some of the spiritual side of a pranayama practice. So is the exercise below.

Rest Pose breathing exercise to help you connect with your breath:

- ॐ Observe your natural and spontaneous breathing process
- ॐ Develop awareness of the rhythmic flow of your breath
- ॐ Feel your breath flowing in and out of your nose
- ॐ Notice your breath is cool as it enters your nose and warm as it leaves
- ॐ Bring your awareness to the region of your throat
- ॐ Feel your breath flowing in and out of the back of your throat
- ॐ Bring your awareness to the region of your chest
- ॐ Feel your breath flowing in the trachea and bronchial tubes
- ॐ Feel your breath flowing into your lungs
- ॐ Be aware of your lungs expanding and pressing into your rib cage, then relaxing
- ॐ Shift your attention to your rib cage and enjoy the expansion and relaxation of this area
- ॐ Bring your awareness down to your abdomen
- ॐ Feel your abdomen expand on the inhale and fall in on the exhale
- ॐ Feel the entire breathing process from your nostrils to your abdomen
- ॐ Feel your body absorb prana and energy from the inhaled air
- ॐ Feel your body expel toxins from your body and mind as you exhale
- ॐ Return to this state often.

Nasal Breathing and Bandhas



Nasal Breathing

- ॐ Inhaling and exhaling through your nostrils instead of your mouth filters and humidifies the air you breathe.
- ॐ Breathing through your nose also turbinate the air you breathe taking it down deeper into lungs -- the capillaries in the lower lobes of the lungs have more O₂ in them.
- ॐ The receptors for the Parasympathetic Nervous Systems are in the lower lungs, nasal breathing stimulates this part of your nervous system which is why deep breathing slows down your heart rate and reduces blood pressure. Where are breathing through your mouth keeps your breath shallow in the upper lobes of the lungs where the receptors to the sympathetic nervous system are located. Shallow breathing stimulates this part of your nervous system preparing you to fight or flight releasing cortisol and adrenaline into your blood stream.

TAKE IN THE AIR

When you are outside or practicing yoga or pranayama how you breathe can increase your prana absorption. Animals do this very well, have you ever noticed a rabbit breathing? Animals nostrils are very mobile and flexible and expand with each inhale — and so are the nostrils of humans that still live in nature such as tribes in Africa.

When we normally breathe our nostrils barely move — and sometimes they even pinch shut a little as the suction from inhaling tends to draw them inward.

So instead try to TAKE THE AIR, expand your nostrils as you inhale — notice how the air enters more easily, in greater volume, and in better balance between both nostrils.

Flare your nostrils as you inhale – Greater volume of air that is easier to inhale

- ॐ Breathing this way directs more prana over the olfactory nerve endings in our nose which take in prana from the atmosphere.
 - o Opening the nostrils during inhalation directs more of the air toward the area in our nose with the most sensitive nerve endings. The air current that enters our nose goes is divided into three streams — 2 of the directions are in and down, the third direction brings the air across our olfactory region at the top of our nasal cavity. This olfactory region — where our sense of smell is — is also the region of our nose that absorbs prana (the olfactory region is our prana accumulator).
 - o A purposely slowed breath, or when smelling something, or a rapid increase in the breath rate as we do for uth pluthi, or in the pranayama practices of bhasrika or kapalabhati all increase the flow of air to the olfactory region giving us the opportunity to absorb more prana

By flaring your nostrils slightly as you inhale you pull more air across this region of your nasal passages. You will notice that by taking in the air in this way makes breathing easier, harmonious, and well balanced. **Even if the change is imperceptible to you, it is not too optimistic to say that breathing this way increases the amount of inhaled air by 10%.**

What to do if your nose is stuffy?

- ॐ Neti – make it a daily habit

There are 3 options you can try to clear the nostrils At the beginning the air current need not be the same on both sides -- only a severe blocking can prevent you practicing pranayama



- ॐ First, if your left nostril is clogged lie down on your right side and relax for 1–3 minutes -- and vice versa.
- ॐ Second, Find a spot on the back of your neck near the base of your skull and press on it with your thumbs -- use a gentle but firm pressure, with both thumbs somewhere on either side of your spinal column.
- ॐ Third, Find a similar spot under your arm, place your armpit firmly on the back of a chair. If your right side is blocked place your left arm over the chair and vice versa. This spot will be easy to find as it is tender.

BANDHAS are important for pranayama. They improve your breath and help to move energy.

- ॐ Mula and Uddiyana throughout
 - o The physical contraction mula bandha has beneficial effects on our nervous system — keeping us in our calming side of our nervous system, by toning the nerves that innervate the lower pelvic region we can remain “parasympathetic dominant” this will also help in maintaining hormonal balance.
 - o Uddiyana bandha stimulates our vagus nerve also keeping us parasympathetic dominant. It also helps to keep our lymph moving in our gut—since the lymph does not have a heart to pump it, moving lymph is important to our immune system.
- ॐ **Bandhas while deep breathing puts a slight pressure on the tissues just below our diaphragm where venous blood is collected. This pressure helps to support the movement of the venous blood upward toward our heart where it is circulated and refreshed with O2 and nutrients.**

Jalandhara bandha is our “Pranayama Bandha” -- The 3rd bandha that is rarely talked about. Jalandhara bandha is using your chin to create a “seal” at your throat. It is most important on breath holding -- on inhale holds and longer holds.

“Jalan” means net or network and “dhara” means stream or flow upward. It refers to the network of nerves and arteries in our neck. Jalandhara bandha prevents our amrita -- our nectar of life from flowing down and getting consumed in the fire of agni.

- ॐ Jalandhara bandha has many other benefits during pranayama:
 - o Compression on the throat -- pressing of chin into the hollow in the collarbones:
 - * **prevents air moving upward and causing pressure above the glottis, this is important as pressure in the Eustachian tubes is not good.**
 - * **puts pressure on the carotid artery which helps to keep our heart rate lower (when you hold your breath your heart rate speeds up).**
 - o The stretching of the cervical vertebrae at the nape of the neck pulls on the spinal cord relieving pressure on the cranial nerves and acting on the nervous



system -- particularly the parasympathetic nervous system -- the part of our nervous system that de-stresses us.

- o Compression on the thyroid, helping to balance the action of the thyroid.

Practicing sarvanganasana and halasana will help prepare one for jalandhara bandha, this is why many years of asana must precede pranayama and breath retentions.

HOW TO PERFORM JALANDHARA BANDHA (if you have an overactive thyroid you should not practice pranayam breath holding.)

- ॐ Inhale, hold your breath, swallow your saliva, Lift your sternum and drop your chin into the notch in your collar bone. This is easier on inhale holds because the chest is lifted and expanded. On exhale holds do not force the bandha as it could strain your neck.

Tri-Bandha – When all three bandhas are performed together they create a seal at either end of our spine keeping our energy in our spine and helping us to move it.

Jalandhara bandha is only fully used during an advanced pranayama practice, however we can use the posture for it to help improve our daily posture by keeping our hearts lifted -- just do not tuck your chin down. And at the same time remember to keep the slight tuck under of your pelvis to keep you in your bandhas.

Good posture for breathing deep, healthy spines, and attitude is to level our pelvis while lifting our heart and broadening our collarbones.

WHEN TO START PRANAYAMA -- at least the more advanced pranayamas that include breath holding:

KPJ would sit in front of you, you would sit in lotus and breathe with bandhas, he put his thumbs in your lower abdomen (bandhas) to check to see if you were ready for pranayama . . .

In lieu of that . . .

Start Pranayama

ॐ Only if you have a consistent practice

ॐ After you have learned 2nd series and have been practicing both first and second for 3-4 years.

- o In the old days you would usually not learn pranayama until after you learned 3rd series, now in the new way ashtanga is taught since you are held back so long they have been starting you on pranayama after you learn all of 2nd.

KUMBHAKA – Holding your breath

Breath retention = better distribution of prana throughout the entire body

As we get used to kumbhaka we can Direct prana where we need it at will in our bodies



ॐ Kumbhaka between 3–20 seconds

- o Accessible for everyone – to better utilize and digest inhaled air. We only use a small percentage of our inhaled oxygen. This is why we can save someone's life with mouth to mouth resuscitation . . .
- o **By holding the air in our lungs we increase the time the air is in contact with our pulmonary membranes increasing O2 absorption and makes CO2 evacuation more complete.**

ॐ Kumbhaka between 20–90 seconds will pronounce the above reactions even more.

ॐ Kumbhaka beyond 90 seconds will put you in a pre-comatose state. Only to be done in the presence of a qualified teacher:

- o Placing your body in an unfavorable but non-fatal condition stimulates the creation of biostimulins --- biostimulins are what keep an organ alive when it is removed from one person and re-implanted into another human body. This process actually stimulates the organism to regenerate in order to survive. Some people think of this effect as a "fountain of youth".
 - * another example would be my daughters pinky finger which recently got partially amputated by a hockey stick -- the tip regenerated and grew back thanks to these biostimulants.
- o Prolonged kumbhaka is physiological acrobatics and is not without danger. This is where pranayama is dangerous and can make you crazy or kill you

The most useful kumbhaka is between 30–60 seconds.

ॐ While in kumbhaka, **breath holding causes the body to break down sugar to form O2 to compensate for the interruption from O2 from the outside.** (Would this help prevent diabetes?) But CO2 rises since we are not exhaling.

ॐ Pranayama makes you sweat . . . **Exhaling also releases heat from the process of cells taking in O2 and releasing CO2 -- intracellular combustion.** With the pulmonary radiator "disconnected" the body responds by asking for greater activity on the part of the skin which is why we get warm and sweat during pranayama. This explains why the yogi can stay warm in the colds of the Himalayas with breath control. Yogis can manufacture their own heat when they need it **Sweat should be rubbed in and not wiped off. It is full of Ojas (electrical energy).**

HOW TO HOLD YOUR BREATH

Breath retention stimulates cellular breathing, increasing our prana. Here are some guidelines to hold your breath safely and effectively.

1. The most common error by beginners is to fill up the lungs too much thinking that will help them hold their breath. In actuality it is **the O2 carried in the blood (not the**



- lungs) that allows us to hold our breath comfortably -- whose saturation depends upon the previous breaths. This is why we take 5 complete ujjayi breaths between the pranayamas. This is also one of the reasons it is better to do pranayama after practice -- you've just had an hour and a half of deep breathing and oxygenating your blood
2. **Pranayama needs to be performed on an empty stomach**, if your pranayama precedes asana then your stomach is already empty. If pranayama is performed at a different time of day then the time lapse between your last meal and pranayama session will depend greatly on what you have eaten and how well you digest it -- this could take anywhere from 1-1/2 hours to 5 hours!
 - a. I taught pranayama one day shortly after I had eaten -- I got so nauseous I had to fake it and just cue the student through it.
 3. **SPINE** -- As spoken about above -- your spine should be kept straight during pranayama to allow the lungs to expand more fully and operate efficiently. Also pranic currents run through the marrow of our spine, keeping it straight makes the passage of energy and neurons smoother.
 4. **BANDHAS** -- As mentioned above as well, bandhas are important during pranayama, especially during kumbhaka. As KPJ would say "contract your anus".
 5. **NEVER FORCE** a hold. It should feel comfortable and easy. Slowly progressing is important. Performing holds too long too soon can leave you with a fever.
 - a. When you release a hold, your breath should be slow and continuous, smooth and controlled. If you gasp you held too long -- this will result in a loss of prana.
 6. Listen to your heartbeat. **Our best rhythm to hold is to our heartbeat.** RHYTHM is more important than how long you hold your breath! Our heart likes rhythm.
 - ॐ The introduction of rhythm into work regulates it and reduces muscular and intellectual fatigue. This is why we love music :) If we have a good beat going we can work very efficiently.
 - ॐ The duration of each breath has limited importance, rhythm is the decisive element. We tend to think of duration as the objective, but this mindset will make you crazy . . .
 - ॐ Long holds are inappropriate and can cause death or brain damage.
 7. Exhale and Inhale slowly -- this allows more time for gas/prana exchanges in the lungs and nose.
 8. While in Kumbhaka focus on **Anja chakra** and on the increase and distribution of **prana in your thorax**.

CELLULAR HEALTH = Preventative Medicine!

After I got done explaining all this . . . someone asked "and what does getting our body better oxygenated really do for us?"

Filling your body with O₂ and getting more O₂ to your cells and tissues is preventative medicine at a CELLULAR level. Healing at the root of what could grow into a health problem.



Cellular Health depends up 2 processes -- getting nutrients into a cell and toxins out.

- ॐ Oxygen plays a vital role in every metabolic process in our body. **Health depends on how efficiently nutrients can be absorbed and utilized at a cellular level.** Oxygen is what breaks down food in the cell turning sugar into energy, remember the Krebs cycle? I love how we are one with the universe :) Photosynthesis and Respiration are the same in reverse . . . Photosynthesis is a plant turning the Suns energy into Sugar, Respiration is the process of turning that sugar back into energy :)
- ॐ Healthy cells are aerobic -- meaning they have adequate levels of O₂. When cells are deprived of O₂ decay sets in and cells can mutate or die. One or two mutated cells our body can handle, but if too many cells mutate then disease sets in.
 - o The primary cause of cancer is directly related to cells deprived of O₂. Cancer cells are anaerobic and thrive in an oxygen-deficient environment.

And the other side of breathing – the release of CO₂. Health is also dependent on how effectively toxins and waste can be removed from the body.

- ॐ Cellular waste is removed from the body in several ways:
 - o some is dissolved in water and transported to the kidneys or to the liver where it can be excreted in our urine or bowels.
 - o **Some of the most toxic poisons in the body can only be “burnt up” and neutralized through oxidation. This is the job of O₂ rich blood cells.** Have a good Pranayama session and “POOF” toxins gone ;)

Another reason to breathe deep: The issues are in the tissues

Dr. Pert discovered the role certain neuropeptides play in carrying emotional chemicals to receptor sites found in cells throughout the body. Old traumatic emotions can literally block these receptors, altering the flow of the information network.

While emotional peptide receptors are found all over the body, they are concentrated in certain areas — the respiratory tract is one of them, there are receptors for every type of peptide found in the body.

According to the research done by the late Dr. Pert, changes in the rate or depth of breathing can trigger a release of emotion-carrying peptides from the brain stem. Through the process of deep breathing it releases these peptides quickly diffusing them throughout the cerebral spinal fluid, where they release old emotions.

Many of these peptides are natural endorphins or opiates, they are capable not only of freeing up old emotional pain, they can relive physical pain as well. Deep breathing and other breath work can reduce the feeling of pain in our body due to the opiate peptides.



Science once again is supporting what the yogis have always said — deep breathing can give us access to control of hormonal, immune, psychological, and nervous system functioning — it's somewhat autonomic ... but we do have more control than we realize.

Breathing is a key tool in the balancing of body, mind, emotions and spirit.

And going off track a little . . . The body is amazing, it has a strong will to survive and prosper. We need to learn to trust the body and its processes -- and give it a healthy environment to do what it needs to do.

Alternative medicine does this, it strengthens the body and gives it the tools it needs to heal itself -- which further strengthens our immune system and our ability to heal. For example, once you get chicken pox your body will protect you from it again for the rest of your life. Teach your body to heal itself and it will continue to get better at healing itself.

vs.

Traditional medicine with pharmaceuticals and/or surgery impairs the immune system and makes the body weaker. Once you start on this path the body does not learn how to heal itself, then you have to rely on pharmaceuticals and surgery.

In the meantime breathe deep and Oxygenate your cells while you burn up toxins :)

PRANAYAMA continued.

The 5 Ashtanga Pranayamas and their benefits

There are 5 pranayamas that were researched and put together to go with the Ashtanga practice. Just like the ashtanga practice they are quite intense pranayamas . . . and you learn them just like you learn a series, one pranayama at a time slowly adding on.

All the pranayamas promote cellular health, purifying our blood and nourishing our body with O₂ while efficiently expelling CO₂. They also reduce stress in our body and mind, inducing tranquility.

When you are ready to learn pranayama, I teach it to you as I learned it, one on one with my teacher after practice. You take your rest after asana practice, then sit up and do your pranayama.

NO Pranayama when SICK or menstruating. Pranayama is **not** for people with:

- ॐ Heart conditions or HBP (if you are on HBP medication you HAVE HBP!)
- ॐ People with LBP also need to avoid pranayama

The first two pranayamas seem to be to get you used to holding your breath out and holding your breath in. Breath retention is easier after the second round or cycle. When you hold your breath it stimulates your spleen to contract -- expelling large quantities of



red blood cells (and therefore O₂) into your bloodstream. Remember it is not the amount of O₂ in your lungs that helps you hold your breath -- it is the amount of O₂ in your bloodstream that allows you to hold your breath easier, thus after one or two rounds of breath holding it gets easier. (The spleen is an amazing organ -- it is the purifier of our blood and stores a lot of blood, it is connected to our lymph system and is a key organ in removing toxins and microbes from our system. When our body is under duress -- such as hemorrhaging or not breathing -- our spleen contracts and sends extra O₂ into our bloodstream to help oxygenate the cells during the "emergency".)

The last three pranayamas are where the "real work" is done.

The first two Pranayamas

In the first pranayama you hold your breath out 3x then you hold your breath in 3x. It is called BAAHYA KUMBHAKA or I have heard it also called Antha Kumbhaka (internal) and Bahih kumbhaka (external).

On the second pranayama you take a breath and hold it in, you release that breath and hold it out. So you are getting used to kumbhaka after each half breath.

Baahya benefits:

- ॐ stomach and uterus
- ॐ reduces hernias
- ॐ reduces urinary problems.

Nadi Shodhana is the third pranayama and the hardest of them all. Nadi Shodhana means nerve cleansing, it is an alternate nostril breath with kumbhaka after each half breath. The alternate nostril breathing is best creating balance in our body and mind.

Recommended for those engaged in mental work.

Benefits:

- ॐ Creates balance in the body and mind by balancing vata, pitta, kapha, and Ida and Pingala.
- ॐ It stimulates your brain to work clearer and induces tranquility.
- ॐ It clears blockages in the nadis (this includes the arteries, the yogic texts claim nadi shodhana can help remove heart blockages).
- ॐ Reduces neural related diseases, migraines, and depression
- ॐ Is good for reducing asthma, allergies and sinus problems

Bhastrika is the 4th (and my fav) pranayama. Bhastrika means bellows and just like how a bellows fans a flame to make it stronger bhastrika increases our agni -- our digestive fire in our solar plexus area.

The "work" in this pranayama is the breathing, the kumbhaka is only to bring your CO₂ levels back to normal after performing bhastrika.



This is similar to the breath we do in Uth Pluthi -- breathing in this manner pulls the air across our ol' factory sense where we absorb more prana from the atmosphere. This breath also clears the mind which can be a nice benefit for doing it in Uth Pluthi as your mind will be clear for rest pose.

Other benefits include:

- ॐ Increases Agni and improves digestion
- ॐ Burns up toxins
- ॐ Removes phlegm (improving kapha), improves bile (regulating pitta), and regulates wind (curing vata problems).
- ॐ Improves metabolism
- ॐ Reduces the level of CO₂ in the lungs.
- ॐ Good for asthmatics

Surya Bhedana (& Chandra Bhedana)

This pranayama is where you get to practice longer holds increasing prana absorption, digestion of air, and improving cellular health. This is also an alternate nostril pranayama.

Do not "time" yourself, this western propensity leads to "performance" which is opposed to the spirit of yoga and not in your best interest. Instead just count your heartbeats in multiples of 8 and hold your breath to a comfortable level.

Benefits:

- ॐ Creates heat in the body – Surya Bhedana, Chandra Bhedana cools the body.
- ॐ Balances vata dosha
- ॐ Activates Pingali increasing extroversion (Chandra Bhedana activates Ida inducing introversion)
- ॐ Energizes the body and reduces laziness
- ॐ Chandra Bhedana cools the body and helps cure heart burn.

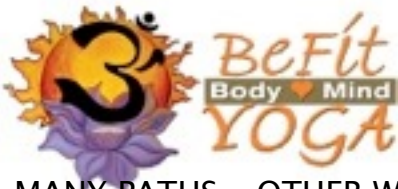
Finishing Pranayama: Sitali

Sitali is like closing -- no matter where you stop your pranayama you always end with Sitali. As stated earlier pranayama increases your body heat, so you end with sitali to cool your blood so as not get a fever or overheated. The kumbhaka here is short, as breath holding builds your body heat you do not want to hold too long.

Benefits:

- ॐ Cools the body and mind
- ॐ Improves temperature regulation through the brain centers
- ॐ cools and reduces mental and emotional excitation
- ॐ Induces relaxation

PULSE OXIMETER – I ordered one for the studio for us to play with, a pulse oximeter is a finger clip with a beam in it that can measure the amount of O₂ in your blood. It might be fun to check our blood O₂ level before a practice and after a practice :)



MANY PATHS – OTHER WAYS to increase your PRANA

Not ready for pranayama yet? There are other ways to collect and absorb prana, this extraction takes place by four main points of prana absorption in our bodies (in order of importance):

1. The nerve endings in the nasal cavities – The olfactory sense (where our sense of smell is) is how we collect prana from the atmosphere in our breath. This is why nasal breathing is important. And as I stated above this is one of the purposes for the bhasrika pranayama and also the way we breathe in Uth Pluthi.
2. Air cells in our lungs – this is where pranayama and slow breathing gives our body more time to absorb the prana from the air we breathed in, better digesting our inhaled air.
3. Tongue – The tongue is actually an important part of prana absorption, a considerable part of our energy is extracted from food — how well this energy fuels us and fills our body with vitality depends on the pranic quality of the food. The yogis link prana with taste, so food that has real flavor has more prana—flavor is not prana, it only indicates its presence. And it is interesting to note that no other prana absorbing organs exist in the digestive tract. Pranic energy from food is absorbed by the tongue without digestion. Foods with the most prana are fresh vegetables and fruits that are not too long out of the earth and sunshine (more on this in my [blog on Prana](#)) Foods that are processed and/or chemically flavored contain very little to NO prana. Prana in foods is associated with giving us better vitality.
4. The Skin – We absorb prana from the atmosphere through our skin. We need our skin to be exposed to sun, wind, and water with very little clothes on. This is why we must not electrically insulate our bodies; clothes and shoes interfere with our electrical exchanges through the atmosphere. Some materials are better than others, for example cotton, silk, and wool do not interfere with our prana absorption vs. polyester which totally blocks the skin exchanges (that's why I am a 100% cotton girl!). Wearing polyester is like wearing plastic soda bottles on your skin. The manufacturers will tell you that the fake materials “wick” . . . but cotton dries pretty fast . . . and those “wicking” materials do not let your skin breathe. They suffocate. Rubber soled shoes also interfere with our prana absorption -- walking bare feet on mother earth serves us well in several ways -- absorbing prana and also the electrical exchange that takes place between our bodies and the earth.

We use nature to ‘charge our batteries’; through our lungs and skin we are constantly charging and discharging – the purer the air and the less clothes and shoes we have to interfere the better. This constant charging and discharging is what fills us with vitality — with prana.