

Pranayama is a set of breathing exercises through regulation of inhalation, retention and exhalation of breath in a controlled manner, in order to cleanse and energize all the 7.2 million **nadi** or the energy channels and purify the **prana** or the life force. **Pranayama** comes from two Sanskrit words- “**prana**” meaning the life force and “**aayam**” meaning “exercise”. **Pranayama** is one of the eight limbs advocated by **Patanjali Maharishi** in **Hatha Yoga** practice. Hence **pranayama** is the science of regulating and extending the breath, so that the **prana** or life force in the body energizes and provides vitality to each and every cell of the body. The mind and the breath are correlated. When the mind is constantly pinged by thought after thought after thought, the person’s breath is irregular, erratic, shallow and in some cases, the breath is very fast. The quality of the breath is affected by mood changes. When in a calm state of the mind, one’s breath is long and effortless. Similarly, when one consciously controls the breath, the thoughts change, moods change and the entire perspective of the world changes. The main goal of **pranayama** is to raise the latent, sleeping power of **kundalini** through the **sushumna nadi** or the energy pathway. Normally the breath flows through either **ida** or **pingala**. The **pranic** pathway of **Ida** is through the left nostril and for **pingala**, it is through the right nostril. Thus **pingala** controls the left side of the brain and **ida** controls the right side of the brain. **Ida, pingala** and **sushumna** arise from the base of the **mooladhara chakra** or root **chakra**. **Ida** and **pingala** cross each other like the figure of 8 around the spinal column. However, **sushumna** is in the middle and is a straight path. All the chakras or energy centers are housed in **sushumna**. The goal of **pranayama** is to channelize the **pranic force** that is flowing through **ida** and **pingala**, into the **sushumna**. Such a surge of **prana force** or in other words, the upward movement of the **kundalini shakti** spells the spiritual progress for the **sadhaka**, to ultimately unite with the cosmic consciousness or realize the Absolute truth.

In order to understand Pranayama, one should understand about the prana or pranic force or the life energy. The **Pranic force** is the all pervading life force that permeates every living unit of the cosmos, regulating all physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the living entity. The **pranic force** is also called **prana vayu**. **Vayu** means that which flows. Hence the **prana vayu** moves and expresses itself in the body like a wind. There are 49 different types of **prana vayu** in the body. But the important ones are **prana, apana, vyana, udana and samaana**. Each of these **pancha prana** controls specific physical, mental and spiritual centers in the body, and they work together in perfect harmony resulting in a healthy, holistic human being.

- **Prana** – **Prana** means forward moving force. It is responsible for assimilating energy from any input (breathing, eating, drinking, sensory

stimulus and mental perceptions) into the body. It controls homeostasis and vital organ functions in the body. **Prana** is the king of all the **vayus** (life forces) in the body. It controls, regulates and directs all the other **prana vayus**.

Physical presence- base of the throat to diaphragm

Element- Air

Presence in subtle body- **Anahata Chakra** or heart chakra

Movement- It moves downward in a loop from the base of the throat (**Vishuddha Chakra**) to the navel (**Manipura Chakra**) and back.

Yogic control- **Jalandhara Bandha, Bhastrika pranayama, Nadi Shodana and Ujjayi pranayama**

- **Apana- Apana** means outward moving force. It ejects and eliminates any waste (excretion, exhalation, child birth etc) or anything not needed by the body. It is responsible for will power and motivation. When unregulated, **apana** creates a dull, lazy and confused state in human beings. It also controls the survival instincts in living things.

Physical presence- Excretory system (kidneys, colon, rectum, genitals and sweat glands).

Element – Earth

Presence in subtle body- **Mooladhara Chakra** or Root chakra

Movement- It moves downward in a loop from the navel (**Manipura Chakra**) to the perinium (**Mooladhara Chakra**) and back.

Yogic control- **Moola Bandha, Nauli, Agnisara Kriya and Ashwini Mudra**

*Spiritual evolution starts only when **Prana** and **Apana** are merged into one another. These 2 forces are oppose one another. i.e., during inhalation, **prana** moves upward from **manipura chakra** to **vishuddha chakra** while **apana** moves downward from **manipura chakra** to **mooladhara chakra**. On Exhalation, **prana** moves downward from **vishuddha chakra** to **manipura chakra**, while **apana** moves upward from **mooladhara chakra** to **manipura chakra**.

Apane juhvati pranam pranepanam tathapare; Pranapanagatee ruddhva pranayamaparayanah (Gita, Ch. IV-29.)

Meaning- Others offer **Prana** (outgoing breath) in **Apana** (incoming breath) and **Apana** in **Prana**, restraining the passage of **Prana** and **Apana**, absorbed in **Pranayama**.

- **Vyana- Vyana** means outward moving force. It is a centrifugal force that pervades over the entire body. It integrates and connects all the

voluntary and involuntary systems of the physical body with the subtle bodies. It coordinates the digestive, skeletal, circulatory, nervous, glandular and sensory systems of the physical body with the **Chakras** (energy centers), the 72000 nadis (pranic pathways) and their networks that reside in the subtle body. It is responsible for physical and mental balance and mind and body coordination. It is responsible for the good feel during and after meditation

Physical presence- Skin. Essentially connects the skin of the physical body with the envelope of the subtle body.

Element – Water

Presence in subtle body- **Swadhishtana Chakra** or sacral plexus

Movement- Origin is at the navel and envelopes the entire body.

Yogic control- **Moola Bandha, Anthar Bahya Kumbhaka pranayama, Kevala Kumbhaka pranayama**

- **Udana – Udana** means upward moving force. It controls and regulates the 5 **karma indriya** and the 5 **jnana indriya** and their functions. It controls the sense organs, spine, muscular strength, growth, speech, enthusiasm and joy. It is also responsible for creativity, new approaches and ideas. It regulates all forms of speech- **vaikari, madhyama** and **pashyanti**. Unregulated **udana** causes respiratory disorders, shortness of breath, depression and uncontrolled limb movements. It accompanies **Kundalini** (the coiled primordial energy dormant in the **Mooladhara chakra**) arousal. Control of **udana** gives control over the five elements- earth, water, air, fire and ether. The aspirant in control of **udana** can levitate, float on water and attain all siddhis.

Physical presence- Throat

Element – Space

Presence in subtle body- **Vishudha Chakra** or Throat Chakra

Movement- It moves upward in a loop from the throat (**Vishudha Chakra**) to the fontanel (**Sahasrara Chakra**) and back.

Yogic control- **Jalandhara Bandha, ujjayi pranayama, sitkari pranayama, sitali pranayama, Brahmari pranayama, bhastrika pranayama and Viparitarani Mudra**

- **Samana – Samana** means the balancing force. It controls metabolism, digestion and the digestive organs and respiration in the body. It regulates gastric juices, hormones and enzymes, eliminates toxins from the circulatory, lymphatic, nervous and glandular systems. It is responsible for sound judgement, intellect (buddhi) and the power of

discretion (viveka). It influences the psyche and consciousness. It unites **prana** and **apana**. Unregulated **samana** causes delusions, hysteric tendencies, gastric disorders, fiery anger and confusion. Control of samana gives a lusturous, brilliant aura around the person that can be noticed even by those who do not have the ability to see auras.

Physical presence- Navel

Element – Fire

Presence in subtle body- **Manipura Chakra** or navel

Movement- It moves upward in a loop from the navel (**Manipura Chakra**) to the heart (**Anahata Chakra**) and back.

Yogic control- **Uddiyana Bandha**

It is important to understand that the **Kundalini shakti** is the same as the **prana shakti** or life force and it is a dormant force. It is an indwelling energy that can be awakened to the physical body, the subtle body and the causal body, to elevate a human being to realize the supreme union with the cosmic consciousness or the realization that “My Father and I are ONE”. **Kundalini** in Sanskrit means coiled or circular or annular. **Kundalini** is considered as a dormant, feminine energy that is metaphorically stated as a serpent with its tail in the mouth, sleeping in three and a half coils, at the base of the **Mooladhara** or the root chakra between the tailbone and the genitals, which is at the base of the spine. This serpentine power of **Kundalini** can be raised by **Shaktipat** or transmission of power from the **Sadguru** (also called as initiation or **Deeksha**) to the disciple or by regular, continuous practice of **yoga, kriya, bandha** and meditation, by **mantra sadhana** or by intense personal experiences like accidents, emotional trauma, childbirth or near death experiences. Spontaneous awakenings also happen due to possible spiritual practice in past lives and by the grace of God. **Kundalini** is a spiritual energy that is to be approached with complete surrender and unconditional love. It should not be manipulated with ego. Uncontrolled **kundalini** leads to many unpleasant and irreparable complications. In the yogic tradition, it is said that the **kundalini** power when awakened, tries ceaselessly to ascend from the **Mooladhara**, travelling across the chakras (**Swadhistana, Manipura, Anahata, Visshudda and Ajna**), while dissolving the attachments and purifying the chakras, to finally unite with the cosmic consciousness in the **Sahasrara Chakra** or the 1000 petal lotus on the crown of the head, through the energy channel or **nadi**, called **Sushumna**. The mouth of **sushumna** through which the **kundalini** ascends, has its opening in the **mooladhara chakra**. This union is also called **Shiva-Shakthi** union, where the cosmic consciousness is the **Shiva** and the **kundalini** is the **Shakti**. **Kundalini** awakening is also called **pranic** awakening. As the **kundalini** rises and moves through the **sushumna**, the seeker is endowed with supernatural powers and

siddhis. Under the able guidance of a **Sadguru**, the seeker realizes the Self. Unrestrained or uncontrolled **kundalini shakti** can produce serious psychological and physical effects.

Now coming back to **Pranayama**. **Pranayama** has 3 important processes. The process of inhalation of breath which is called **Puraka**, the process of breath retention called **Kumbhaka** and the process of breath exhalation called **Rechaka**. The quality of the breath (strong or weak), the length of the breath (long or short), the type of breath (from the lungs or abdomen), and the pace of the breath (fast or slow) have a significant impact on the **pranayama** practice. There are innumerable benefits of practicing **pranayama**.

Regular practice of **pranayama** gives the following physical benefits and more:

- The body is always energetic, alert, supple, full of strength, with vigor and vitality.
- It helps to control blood pressure, diabetes, asthma and many other psychosomatic illnesses without taking dangerous pills.
- It energizes the neural networks of the brain, slows down the death of the brain cells, as well as activates and recharges the endocrine and glandular systems, especially the liver and kidneys.
- **Pranayama** is an excellent blood purifier as it flushes the body with oxygen and promotes lung capacity and heart health.
- It wonderful means for weight loss without any side effects.
- It slows the aging process and the related discomforts and extends life.
- It enhances the defense mechanisms of the body against diseases, psychosomatic illnesses, poisonous chemicals etc.
- **Pranayama** has been proven to cure many debilitating, fatal diseases that no medicine is known to cure

Regular practice of **pranayama** has the following mental benefits and more:

- **Pranayama** increases memory, sound judgment, enhances power of discretion, profound awareness and to be present in every moment in life.
- It promotes a calm mind and gives control over emotions. It propels one to be in a state of equilibrium or **samana stithi**.
- **Pranayama** fills one with unconditional love, attitude of selflessness and propels one to lead a virtuous life.
- The person has a charming countenance and other people, animals, birds, essentially all living beings or **prani** (meaning any being that has prana) are attracted and react with love to the person practicing **pranayama**.

- **Pranayama** grants freedom from six crocodiles of **Kama**, **Krodha** (anger), **Lobha** (Greed), **Moha** (attachment), **Madh** (Pride) and **Matsarya** (Jealousy).
- **Pranayama** impacts not only you, but your surroundings as well. It fills the people around you and the environment with peace, calmness and joy.
- **Pranayama** promotes inner strength, will power, resilience, intuition, wisdom and expands the consciousness and awareness beyond the Self.

Regular practice of **pranayama** has the following spiritual benefits and more:

- **Pranayama** is the only means to transcend the sheaths or **Kosha** that are wrapped around the soul. For more information, see **Kosha**
- Regular and proper practice of **pranayama** may give rise to super natural powers or **siddhis** in the person.
- It promotes spiritual progress in all the 3 states of existence- **Jagrut avasta** (awakened state), **Swapna Avasta** (dream state) and **Sushupti** (deep sleep state)
- It helps one to transcend the **rajo** and **tamo** guna (attributes) and be established in the **Satva Guna**.
- The entire **nadi** system or the energy channel network in the body is purified, cleansed and charged. Through regular practice, a person's aura glows.
- The divine energies of **Ojas** and **Tejas** increases in the body
- It opens the chakra pathway and promotes **kundalini** awakening.
- **Pranayama** helps to attain the Samadhi stithi (see **Samadhi**) and break the cycle of birth and death. It serves to realize the true nature of the soul as well as the union of the soul with the cosmic consciousness.

Rules for practicing pranayama

- Early morning and the **Agnihotra** times is the best time for practicing **pranayama**. At the **agnihotra** times, the circadian rhythms of the environment are in sync with the biorhythms in the body that propels the mind and consciousness to a state of oneness. If morning is unsuitable, then it can be done during the evening, in a cool and pleasant atmosphere.
- **Pranayama** must be practiced in empty stomach. There should be a minimum of 3 hrs of gap after a full meal, at least 1 hr of gap after any meal and at least half an hour of gap after drinking water.
- However, **Pranayama** should not be practiced when stomach feels full or when you feel too hungry

- **Pranayama** is best practiced when bowels are empty.
- If you are practicing more than one session, the sessions should be spaced evenly during the day. You can do 6 sessions in a day with a gap of 4 hrs between each session or you can do 2 sessions a day with 12 hrs between each session. Regularity and consistency is the key to **pranayama** practice.
- Pregnant women should not hold their breath at all.
- Never struggle or strain or force any breath. It is a smooth and natural process of progress and evolution.
- Bath should be taken before or after a minimum of half an hour gap after the **pranayama** practice.
- Follow all **pranayama** practice with at least 15 minutes of **shavasana** or the corpse pose and relaxation. **Yoga Nidra** is highly beneficial.
- **Pranayama** should not be practiced immediately after eating, after a bath or vigorous physical exercise like aerobics, swimming or running, or after sex or during menstrual periods.
- **Pranayama** should not be practiced when the body has fever, intense physical pain or under conditions of depression.
- **Pranayama** should be practiced under supervision of an expert teacher, if you suffer from asthma, heart problems, blood pressure problems, illnesses like pneumonia or while undergoing chemo therapy or rehabilitation from drugs and alcohol addiction
- Always practice at the same place and time. The place should not have too much draft. **Pranayama** is best practiced in a ventilated room at a moderate temperature.
- Maintain the divinity or sacred nature of the place where you practice **pranayama**. Always keep it clean, dust and clutter free.
- Though there may be simple errors in the beginning, never give up practice. Pranayama is very scientific. Always listen to the inner voice, your viveka or judgement.
- Always remember that the grace of the Sadguru is protecting you like an armor, irrespective of the time or place that you may be.
- **Pranayama** should be practiced under expert guidance if you suffer from severe depression, mood swings, epilepsy, heart problems, chronic diseases, suicidal tendencies, trauma or grief.
- **Pranayama** practice is not to be taken lightly. When in doubt, consult a yoga expert and/or your physician.
- There should be no feeling of suffocation or discomfort or giddiness during any stage in **pranayama** practice. Do not push yourself, way beyond your physical capacity.

Types of pranayama and practice

The basic rules for any **pranayama** practice are

- Wear comfortable loose and breathable clothing
- Practice in a stress free, peaceful, silent environment
- Sit comfortably in an erect posture like **padmasana** (Lotus pose), **arthapadmasana** (Half Lotus pose), **Vajrasana** (Thunderbolt pose), **Sukhasana** (easy pose) or **siddhasana** (the perfect pose). If you cannot sit on the floor or in any of these poses, sit in a high backed, straight chair that will keep your spine and torso erect, knees close together, with both feet firmly planted on the ground.
- Before practicing advanced breathing techniques like **Bhastrika** or **Ujjayi**, practice the cleansing breath of **Nadi shodana** for purifying the **nadi** or energy channels.
- After every pranayama, relax for 2-5 minutes in the pose or in the corpse pose and at the completion of the session, always relax in shavasana or corpse pose.
- Never get yourself to a state of breathlessness or a state of hyper ventilation.
- Relax the body, while keeping the head, neck and the spine erect and in a straight line. No slouching or bending. The erect posture opens the **pranic** pathways, making energy flow possible.
- Bring your attention to the breath. Calmly watch the breath. Become one with the breath and watch the breath slow down. Now you are ready for practice.
 1. **Anuloma-viloma:** or alternate nostril breathing or **nadi shodana** is the first breathing technique taught in the practice of **Hatha Yoga**. This technique purifies all the energy channels. It fills the body with strength, vigor and vitality. Regular practice brings a shine to the face. It rejuvenates the nervous system, floods the brain with oxygen and blood, flushes out the toxins from blood and the cells of the body. **Nadi shodana** means cleansing of the **nadi** or the **pranic** pathways. It floods the body with **prana** and prepares the body for spiritual advancement. It energizes and balances both the right and left sides of the brain and enhances cognitive functions and logical thinking.

Process-

- Sit erect in a comfortable posture.
- While breathing, breathe into the lungs and not into the stomach.
- Using the right hand thumb, close the right nostril.

- Inhale through the left nostril calmly as per your lung capacity. You can count 1,2,3... to estimate the length of your breath.
- After complete inhalation, close the left nostril with your right hand ring and pinky fingers.
- Exhale completely through the right nostril by removing the thumb.
- Do the reverse- Inhale again through the right nostril, and close it with the right thumb
- Exhale through the left nostril by removing the pinky and the ring fingers.
- This is one round of **Anuloma-Viloma**.

After you practice 3-10 rounds, change position.

- Start by closing the left nostril by the left thumb and inhaling through the right nostril.
- After complete inhalation, close the right nostril with the left ring and pinky fingers.
- Now open the left nostril by removing the thumb and exhale completely.
- Inhale again through the left nostril, close it with the thumb
- Exhale through the right by removing the ring and pinky fingers.

There is no retention of breath here. Do 3-10 rounds in the alternate position. Your session is complete.

Try to practice with **sama vrutti** or equal duration of breath during inhalation and exhalation. Start with 3-10 rounds on each side and slowly increase it to 30 rounds on each side per session by 45 days. Try to breathe without making any sound. If done properly, you will feel a surge of energy, a sense of peace, relaxation and calmness immediately after practice. This **pranayama** can be done in all the seasons and throughout the year.

2. Bhastrika: or the Bellows breath is an intensely stimulating **pranayama**. It rejuvenates the entire body, giving it a new life. It increases supply of blood to the brain and increases memory. It improves eyesight, hearing and gives clarity of speech. It recharges the respiratory system. It stimulates digestion and enhances metabolism. This **pranayama** in combination with **Jalandhara bandha** activates the **manipura chakra** and pulls the **kundalini** up

towards the ***vishudda chakra***. Hence the focus for this ***pranayama*** is the ***Manipura chakra***.

Process-

- Sit erect in a comfortable posture.
- After a few calming inhalations and exhalations, Inhale and exhale in a fast and rapid pace for 20 breaths, as per your lung capacity. You can count 1,2,3... to estimate the number of breaths. The abdominal wall pushes in and out like the movement of bellows. The breath is completely from the diaphragm and the chest and other parts of the torso remain still.
- After the 20th breath, deeply and slowly inhale, retain for as long as easily possible and exhale.
- This is one round of ***Bhastrika***. Take rest for a few breaths and repeat this entire cycle.

Bhastrika- Method 2

- Sit erect in a chair with both the feet firmly planted on the ground.
- Take both the thumbs and place it at the back of the neck on either side of the vertebrae.
- Inhale slow and deep through both the nostrils.
- Raise both the hands upto the sky with open palms facing front.
- Now, exhale forcefully through the nose and simultaneously close the palms into a fist and forcefully and swiftly bring the hands down, as if you are forcefully pulling down a curtain with both the hands. Bring the hands to the waist and let the palms cup the waist on either side.
- This breath is like a forceful sneeze.
- This breath can be done 6-7 times morning and evening.

This ***pranayama*** can be done to a maximum of 4 rounds or (6-7 times of the 2nd method) for beginners. Do not do both the methods in one pranayama session. The count should not be increased without the expert guidance of a teacher. Before the practice of this ***pranayama***, ***nadi shodana pranayama*** should have been performed regularly for atleast 3 months.

3. **Ujjayi Pranayama:** or the Conqueror's breath. This is a purifying or detoxifying **pranayama** that purifies the physical body and the subtle body. It also purifies the **antahkarana**, the **karmendriya** and the **jnanendriya**. It drives away, negative thoughts, negative attitudes, laziness, depression and other negative emotions. This **pranayama** has profound effects when done in conjunction with the **Mula Bandha**. This **pranayama** is capable of destroying any poison in the body. There is a hissing sound produced when doing this **pranayama**. This **pranayama** brings **ekagratha** or one-pointedness to the mind and silences the mind.

Process-

- Sit erect in a comfortable posture.
- Inhale deeply and slowly through both the nostrils
- Retain the breath for as long as easily possible
- Exhale slowly through the open mouth with a HAAAAAA sound or a whispering sound, by contracting the glottis or contracting the air passage. The breath actually hits the back of the throat.
- Repeat 5 times and close the mouth
- Now inhale deeply and slowly through the nostrils and exhale deeply and slowly through the nostrils, while focusing the breath towards the back of the throat. This will result in a hissing sound.
- Start the cycle again

This **pranayama** can be done for 3-5 times initially. Before the practice of this **pranayama**, **Anuloma-viloma pranayama** should have been performed regularly for atleast 3 months.

4. **Bhramari:** or the Bee breath is a wonderful aid to combat depression and mental tension. This breath opens the **pranayama** and very beneficial to the **vedic mantra** chanters and singers. It also promotes intellectual wisdom, intuition and intelligence. **Bhramari** when practiced with **shanmukhi mudra** gives immense mental relaxation and spiritual progress.

Process-

- Sit erect in a comfortable posture.
- Inhale deeply and slowly through both the nostrils, drawing the base of the tongue to the throat wall. This can also be done by closing your ears with the index fingers and inhaling the breath through the nostrils.

- Retain the breath for as long as easily possible
 - Slightly tilt the chin and keep the lips closed tight.
 - Exhale slowly through the nostrils, making a deep buzzing sound at the throat. It sounds like a swarm of bees.
 - Repeat 3 times and practice no more than 10 times.
5. **Sitali:** This is a cooling **pranayama**. It is practiced mostly during the summer months to cool the body down. **Sitali** when done with the **Jalandhara bandha** cools the entire body when it feels hot. It stabilizes the body temperature. This **pranayama** can be practiced when thirsty to moisten the throat. **Sitali** controls the **pitta prakruti** of the body.

Process-

- Sit erect in a comfortable posture.
 - Relax head and shoulders, but stay erect.
 - Stick the tongue out while curling the lateral sides of the tongue to form a channel or tube.
 - Close the lips around the tongue channel in order to form an “O” around it. Such that the air can pass only through the tongue channel and there is no other gap available.
 - Now draw the air in through the tongue channel slowly and deeply. Feel the cooling air. Hear the smooth, hissing sound. Practice so that the sound is not rough or raspy or quivering.
 - Then use the tip of the tongue to softly touch the inner top roof of the mouth and exhale deeply. The breath will come out of the nose.
 - Repeat 3 times and practice no more than 10 times.
6. **Sitkari:** or the Teeth hissing breath. **Sitkari** controls hunger, laziness, excessive sleep and fatigue. The benefits are the same as **sitali pranayama**.

Process-

- Sit erect in a comfortable posture.
- Relax head and shoulders, but stay erect.
- Stick the tongue out. Curl the tongue in such a way that the tip of the tongue touches the upper palate and the mid part of the tongue touches the lower lip to form a horizontal channel or tube from left to right.

- Now draw the air in through the tongue channel slowly and deeply with a sli..sli...sliii sound. Feel the cooling air.
- Exhale deeply and slowly through both the nostrils.
- Repeat 3 times and practice no more than 10 times.

7. Kapalbhati: or the Skull shining breath. Kapalbhati consists of short rapid, forceful inhalations and exhalations that expels all the negative energy, pain, fear, misery, grief or stress. It is a very powerful **pranayama** technique that purifies the physical, subtle and the causal bodies. It is a wonderful **pranayama** for weight loss. It stimulates digestion and metabolism. It promotes healthy circulation, digestive and excretory systems. It floods the body with **prana** or the life force. Regular practice of the **pranayama** actually gets the aura of a person to shine brilliantly and can be seen even by an untrained eye. It strengthens the will, enhances the power of discretion, tones and energizes the physical body. The effects are best realized when practiced.

Process-

- Sit erect in a comfortable posture.
- Keep your eyes and the mouth closed and focus on the lower belly.
- After a few deep inhalations and exhalations, quickly contract the lower belly muscle, forcing and expelling the air out of the lungs. It creates a “Hisshh” like sound. The other way to do it is to forcefully inhale and exhale out of the lungs. Due to the movement of the air, the belly will automatically move in and out. The belly is drawn in while you exhale.
- Inhale passively without any effort as the belly goes back to the original position.
- Exhale forcefully again.
- Repeat the steps continuously for 20 times and increase practice to upto doing atleast a 100 times continuously in one cycle. Gradually increase to 5 rounds of 50-100 breaths per round.
- On the last breath in each round, inhale slowly through both the nostrils and retain the breath inside for as long as you comfortably can. With eyes closed, focus on the ajna chakra or the space between the eyebrows. Then slowly exhale through both the nostrils. You may feel current like vibrations all over the body. Enjoy the

vibrations and very slowly inhale and exhale deeply to come out of the session.

- Kapalbhathi is done at the very last of the yoga session followed by shavasana or the corpse pose. It is done after all the asanas, bandhas, mudras and other pranayama in every session.
- Never move diaphragm in the opposite direction- i.e, don't contract abdominal muscles while inhaling.
- Do not contort facial muscles, or shoulders or any unnecessary movements of the back or chest during the inhalation or exhalation.

8. *Antar Bahya Kumbhaka:* or the Internal and External retention on breath. Kumbhaka means retention of breath. This is the most highest and very powerful spiritual practice. Here the in-going breath, the out-going breath and the retention is controlled. This is the highest form of Agnihotra, where the out-going breath is offered as the ahuti or offering into the in-going breath. When a seeker achieves perfection in this state, he is absolved from all the duties and karma. He easily attains the state of infinity or kaivalya stithi or state of Samadhi. It is a very powerful ***pranayama*** technique that purifies the physical, subtle and the causal bodies. During this breathing cycle, no strain should be felt.

Process-

- Sit erect in a comfortable posture.
- Keep you're the eyes and the mouth closed and focus on the breath.
- When one with the breath, do 4 cycles of ***Anuloma-Viloma pranayama.***
- Now you are ready for ***Antar Kumbhaka***, i.e. Retention of breath after inhalation.
- Close the right nostril with the right thumb.
- Inhale slowly and deeply through the left nostril for a count of 2.
- Now close the left nostril with the right ring and pinky fingers.
- Hold the breath within. If you inhale for the count of 2, then you should hold the breath for 4 counts.
- Now open the right nostril by removing the right thumb and exhale for 8 counts.

- If you can do the **mula** and **jalandhara bandha** during the retention, along with this **pranayama**, you would achieve tremendous spiritual progress.
- Repeat the steps with the other nostril.
- This completes one cycle of **Antar Kumbhaka pranayama**
- Repeat for 3- 10 cycles, as you feel comfortable.
- End with atleast 15 mins of **shavasana or yoga nidra**.

For Bahya Kumbhaka Pranayama, i.e, Retention of breath before inhalation

- Sit erect in a comfortable posture.
- Keep you're the eyes and the mouth closed and focus on the breath.
- When one with the breath, do 4 cycles of **Anuloma-Viloma pranayama**.
- Now you are ready for **Bahya Kumbhaka**, i.e. Retention of breath before inhalation.
- Close the right nostril with the right thumb.
- Inhale slowly and deeply through the left nostril for a count of 2.
- Now close the left nostril with the right ring and pinky fingers.
- Now open the right nostril by removing the right thumb and exhale for 8 counts.
- Once you exhale completely, do not breathe in for 4 counts.
- Now start the inhalation for 2 counts in the nostril that you exhaled with.
- Repeat the steps
- This completes one cycle of **Bahya Kumbhaka pranayama**
- Repeat for 3- 10 cycles, as you feel comfortable.

Both of these pranayama, help tremendously to silence the mind and give tremendous concentration. A seeker can make phenomenal progress in a short time of sincere practice. The count should not be increased without the expert guidance of a teacher. Before the practice of this **pranayama**, **nadi shodana pranayama** should have been performed regularly for atleast 3 months.

Pranayama schedule for beginners

- Practise **Anulom- Vilom** (without any retention) for 1-2 months. 3-10 rounds per session. Inhale and exhale on **sama vrutti** or for equal counts. i.e., if you inhale for 3 counts, then you exhale for 3 counts.

Then gradually include retention in **Anulom-Vilom** in the ratio of 1:4:2. i.e. you inhale for 1 count, hold within for 4 counts and exhale for 2 counts. Very gradually (over a period of months), increase the ratio to 16:64:32.

- Practise **Kapalbhati** after 3 weeks of practice of **Anulom-Vilom**. One can start with 10 breaths per round for 2 rounds. Very gradually (over a period of months) increase it to 50-100 breaths per round for 3-5 rounds.
- After 3 months of practice with **Anulom-Vilom** and **Kapalbhati**, start practicing **Bhastrika** of 10-20 breaths per round, upto 6-7 rounds per session.

Conscientious, regular practice of **pranayama** gradually leads to the state of **Samadhi or Turiya state**. This is the state of deep meditation when one transcends or goes beyond all 3 states of consciousness (i.e, the physical awakened state, or the dream state or the deep sleep state) and experiences oneself as the universal being or Almighty God. It is a state of infinite existence that is beyond the play of the physical body or the mind, or the intellect and ego. All duality, fears, emotions and limitations of time and space dissolves in this state of consciousness. As a cloud free sky or a calm ocean free of waves, the being is free of thoughts and its influences and one gets established in the cosmic consciousness. At this state, one is capable of involving the consciousness into the material world and at the same time transcends into the nothingness- a limitless, infinite existence. When on top of a mountain, one can see the foothills as well as the space above. The state of turiya or Samadhi is similar to that. Samadhi is the eighth and the last **anga** or limb of the **Ashtanga Yoga** tradition. This state is also called **Kaivalya Stiti** or the state of being in infinite awareness and intelligence (**Sarvagnyatha**).