



Pranayama: Deepening Breath & Energy (Level 2)

Prana Vayu

The vital energy of prana is classified in five main categories termed *vayu* (wind):

Prana vayu	Moves in the region of the heart and controls respiration.
Apana vayu	Moves in the lower abdomen and controls elimination.
Samana vayu	Stokes the gastric fires to aid digestion.
Udana vayu	Moves in the thoracic cavity and controls the intake of air and food.
Vyana vayu	Pervades the entire body distributing energy derived from food and breath.

Bandhas

Bandha is a Sanskrit word that means to lock or to bind. The bandhas, once activated, serve two roles: they lock certain parts of the body so energy can't escape, and they help to move that internal energy upward, where it can provide the most benefits. There are three main bandhas: *mula bandha* is held at the base of the pelvis, *uddiyana bandha* is held at the abdomen, and *jalandhara bandha* is held at the throat.

Guidelines for Practice

Whether lying down or sitting, allow the body to be deeply relaxed. Soften facial muscles, eyes, jaw, tongue, and throat. If tension arises in the body, soften around it and let it go. Always breathe in a way that is relaxed and communicates ease, comfort, and well being. Pranayama is very gentle and subtle. If you begin to feel any discomfort, agitation, or efforting, return to a resting breath. When you are again at peace with your breath, return to the practice. Take your time, and savor each breath. Eyes remain closed with awareness deeply inward. Cultivate the ability to be still, quiet, deeply relaxed, and fully alert to each breath. Sit on a cushion or a block with the spine vertical, and the heart area softly lifted and open.

Ujjayi Pranayama

Sitting practice. Even inhalation and exhalation. (*Sama Vrtti*)

Variations:

1. Viloma Stage I: 3-step Ujjayi inhalation, slow steady exhalation.
2. Viloma Stage II: slow steady Ujjayi inhalation, 3-step exhalation.
3. Alternate nostril breathing: using your intention, direct the breath so that you inhale through the left nostril, pause, exhale through the right nostril, pause, for ongoing cycles.

Nadi Sodhana

A nadi is an energy channel through which prana flows. Sodhana means purifying or cleansing. **Mudra:** Tuck the right index and middle fingers into the palm, keeping them passive. Bring the ring and little fingers towards the thumb. Place the right thumb on the right side of the nose, just below the nasal bone, with the ring and little fingers on the left side. Press the fingers softly inward and downward to close off the nostril completely.

Exhale gently and completely. Depress the right nostril and inhale slowly, steadily, and deeply through the left. Pause briefly, deeply relax and savor the breath, letting it spread through your body. Then, depress the left nostril, and exhale slowly, steadily, and deeply through the right. Pause briefly, savoring the silent emptiness. Then inhale again through the right nostril, pause briefly, exhale through the left nostril, pause briefly. Each cycle is: inhale through the left, exhale through the right, inhale through the right, exhale through the left. Take resting breaths between cycles as needed.

Variation:

Surya Bhedana: *Surya* means sun. This practice is heating and energizing.

Inhale through the right nostril (*Pingala nadi*). Retain the breath (*kumbhaka*) with a *mula bandha* (chin lock) and *jalandhara bandha* (root lock). Exhale through the left nostril (*Ida nadi*). Each inhalation is through the right nostril, each exhalation is through the left nostril.

Kapalabhati

Kapalabhati is technically not a pranayama practice, but a *krिया*, a cleansing practice. It activates the abdominal muscles, improves digestion, and is both cleansing and energizing. Kapalabhati purifies the nasal passage and the lungs, helping the body eliminate large quantities of carbon dioxide and other impurities. The added intake of oxygen enriches the blood and renews body tissues, while the movement of the diaphragm massages the stomach, liver, spleen, and pancreas.

Sit with the spine long. Focus on your breathing. Exhale gently and completely. Rhythmically, take a fast vigorous inhalations, and exhale fast and forcefully, like a bellows. With each exhalation, contract the abdominal muscles to force the air out of the lungs. With each inhalation, relax the abdomen, allowing the air to return to the lungs. The exhalation is active, the inhalation is passive. Practice a *mula bandha* with each stroke of the exhalation, to retain the energy you are creating. Each round involves the rapid rhythmic inhale-exhale repeated 20-50 times. Every round begins with an exhalation and ends with an inhalation. Practice for 3-5 rounds.

Bhramari Pranayama

Bhramari means large black bee. As you practice Ujjayi Pranayama, during the exhalation, a soft humming sound is made.

Variation:

During inhalation, a high humming sound is made, and during exhalation, a low humming sound is made.

Savasana

End each pranayama practice with a reclined relaxation. Lie on your back with a thin fold of blanket under the head and neck. The arms are apart from the body, palms facing upward, and legs rolled away from each other. If needed, place a pillow under your knees. Close your eyes. Placing an eye pillow on the eyes helps to deepen relaxation. As you move into stillness, if thoughts or distractions arise, gently label them “thinking”, and let them go. Allow your body weight to fully release, deeply relax, and allow your body to breath itself in its own natural gentle rhythms. As you lie in stillness for 5 – 10 minutes, observe the sensations of *prana* in the silent stillness.

Adapted from:

Light on Yoga and *Light on Pranayama*, by B.K.S. Iyengar
Pranayama, by Swami Kavalayananda