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YOGA BREATHING TECHNIQUES (2 scripts/3 exercises each)

Breathing (Pranayama) is not only the most essential element of life, but breathing correctly will enhance the overall quality of your life, from offering energizing benefits and calming effects to some more physical benefits attainable discipline: Improves digestion, opens the sinuses, aids with nervous disorders, appeases thirst and hunger and improves overall focus.

Practice Foundations:

- How often? One of the essential elements of pranayama practice is regularity. Try to work toward a practice of at least 5-6 days a week.
- When? The best time to practice is just before or during sunrise. If this is not realistic try to practice at the same time every day.
- How long? Start your daily practice off slowly. For the first few months aim for about fifteen or twenty minutes per session.
- Where? Dedicate a room, or part of room in your house that can remain quiet and secure during your practice.

Energy Enhancing Breaths (suggested for the beginning of a class)

Bringing large amounts of oxygen into your body in a rapid and controlled fashion is nature's way of giving you the energy boost you need, with no artificial stimuli.

Practice:

1. **Bellows Breathing (Bastrika)** – Benefit: Rapid energy revitalization, enhanced blood circulation/body warm up. Technique: Sit comfortably*, spine straight, eyes and mouth closed. Rapidly inhale and exhale ten times through nose. Do not allow breath to travel deep, keep breaths short and fast, focusing on exhale. Much like a bellow stoking a fire. After tenth breath, breathe in deeply through nose, bend neck toward chin to hold breath in as long as comfortable. Then raise head and release breath. Repeat cycle starting with ten rapid breaths. Begin practice with one to three cycles, work up from there as you become more comfortable. (Caution: If you overdo this exercise you can become light headed).
2. **The Retaining Breath (Murcha)** – Benefit: Enhanced mental energy and subtle sensation of euphoria. Technique: Sit comfortably, eyes and mouth closed. Breathe in deeply through nose, bend neck toward chin to hold breath in as long as comfortable. Then raise head and completely expel breath through nose. Repeat cycle starting with deep breath in. Begin practice with one to five cycles. As you progress, the length of time you can hold your breath will extend.

3. **The Hissing Breath (Ujjayi)** – Benefit: Enhanced energy, mental focus and invigorated feeling. Technique: Sit comfortably, spine straight, eyes and mouth closed. Consciously breathe in deeply through both nostrils, trying to lock breath in area between chest and throat. Hold as long as comfortable. Close off right nostril with right thumb and exhale only through left nostril. Draw in another deep breath, just as before. Hold. Release breath through right nostril only, holding left nostril closed with right index and middle fingers. Perform ten to twenty repetitions when starting out. You may work up to fifty or more as you progress.

The Calming Breaths (suggested for the end of a class)

Practicing certain breathing techniques can calm you down, focus and rejuvenate your energy and often result in more insightfulness.

1. **The Cooling Breath (Sithali)** – Benefit: Physically cool down body when exposed to high temperatures, also used to remove desire for food, water, and sleep when they can not be had. Technique: Sit comfortably, eyes closed. Curl tongue in circular pattern and extend outside of mouth. Consciously breath air in through this tunnel while mentally experiencing the breath feed your entire being. As you complete the inhale, bring tongue into mouth and close lips. Hold breath as long as comfortable. Release through the nose. Take a minute to feel the lightness or void of air in your lungs. Again, extend curled tongue and slowly breath in. Repeat complete cycle up to fifteen rounds. This breath can settle your mind and help aid with physical distractions.
2. **The Sipping Breath (Sitkari)** – Benefit: Cleansing breath, can calm body and mind while invigorating mental capacity and providing energy, may keep you from experiencing cold, hunger, and thirst (similar to Sithali). Technique: Sit comfortably, spine straight, eyes closed. Place tongue firmly against roof of mouth. Inhale through mouth, causing a “sipping sound”. Relax tongue, close mouth and hold breath as long as comfortable. Release out your nose. Repeat in breath with tongue on roof of mouth, as before. Practice this cycle five to ten times to calm the body and mind.
3. **The Humming Breath (Brahmari)** – Benefit: Can help steady troubled mind, activate higher realms of self. Good practice prior to meditation. Technique: Sit comfortably, eyes and mouth closed. As you breathe in, contract the glottis (opening between vocal chords). Breath will create a snoring sound as you inhale. Fill your lungs, hold as long as comfortable then exhale completely through nose. Use stomach muscles to push out any remaining air. Take a few seconds to experience the emptiness then begin the cycle again with an inhale. Practice for approximately ten repetitions to center and focus your mind.

A few things to remember:

- It is a good idea to periodically reevaluate your breathing practice in the context of your larger spiritual practice; why are you doing it and what are your goals/expectations?
- Always keep your practice within comfortable limits.
- Change in the breath comes slowly.
- Recognize and value the short term physical benefits of the practice.

No effort in this world
Is lost or wasted;
A fragment of sacred duty
Saves you from great fear.

From The Bhagavad Gita, page 35

Please use these ancient Pranayama exercises to help lead you in a more mindful, less stressful life.

Namaste

*Sitting comfortably: If, in the beginning of your practice you experience legs/feet falling asleep, backaches or fidgeting, you might try one or more of the following suggestions. Sit in a chair. Raise crossed knees onto a blanket. Change the cross of the legs every few minutes. Sit with your back against the wall. Take regular stretching breaks. Start slow, building up over time.