



PROGRAM E-25

**OM SRI SURYA VA NAMAH
OM SRI CHANDRA VA NAMAH
OM SRI BUDDHA VA NAMAH
OM SRI SHUKRA VA NAMAH
OM SRI MANGALA VA NAMAH
OM SRI BRI-HAS-PATHI VA NAMAH
OM SRI SHANI VA NAMAH**

THE AWAKENING

**The Sacred Breath – Part Two
Pranayama**

To quiet the breath, to soften the breath, is to soften your life, and to quiet your pains, so that that which is Ever-Greater may be supped upon

All the exercises and control systems leading up to this stage are simply a preparation for Yoga. The real techniques of Yoga begin with the control of the vital life-energies called 'Prana'. The most important of these ten vital life-energies is the life-energy of the breath.

The control of the Prana or of the ten energies is often simply called 'Prana-yama,' or the control of the breath.

It must not, however, be forgotten that, in truth, it is the control of the vital life energy that controls the breath. The control of the breath is simply an indication of that control. Holding the breath for a long time is not an indication, nor proof, of the control of the life-energy. In short, Pranayama is the concerted action of the respiratory energies.

The Yoga Darshana states that the voluntary interruption of the movement of the breath is Pranayama. It is only through the control of these vital energies that the mind can be brought under control. The mind is rapidly brought under control once the vital pranas are controlled. In no other way can the mind be mastered.

Pranayama has another effect upon the seeker: it purifies and spiritualizes one's being. The Shvetashvatara Upanishad states that there is no technique higher than Pranayama for the realization of the Supreme Spirit. The Shiva Samhita states that the yogi who has mastered Pranayama can cross the ocean and wander freely in all worlds.

Pranayama is composed of three stages:

1. The In-breath
2. The Out-breath, and
3. The Hold, which is often called the 'Chalice'

The Amrita Nada Upanishad states that the in-breath should be like drawing in water through a straw. This stage is called 'puraka'.

The same text states that the out-breath should be like blowing out air that is not part of one's own body. This stage is called 'rechaka.'

The hold, or chalice, is the third stage. In Sanskrit, it is called 'kumbhaka.' The characteristic of the chalice is to keep still without breathing in or out, or moving any limb. A little reflection will reveal that there are two types of chalices:

- a. The full-chalice
- b. The empty-chalice

The full-chalice is the 'hold' when the air is within the lungs. The empty chalice is the 'hold' when the air is not within the lungs.

Again, Pranayama is more than merely stopping the breath. Pranayama is mental action (Kriya), which takes place during the chalice -- especially during empty chalice.

In the beginning stages of practicing Pranayama, the timing relationship is as follows:

- In-breath:** two OM counts
- Full Chalice:** eight OM counts
- Out-breath:** four OM counts
- Empty Chalice:** eight OM counts

Breath-control should be practiced in a place that is clean, quiet and free of drafts. The danger of drafts is that it stops perspiration, which is essential in the purification of the physical and astral bodies. Perspiration, which arises during the practice of breath-control, should be rubbed back into the body. The texts

state that in doing so, one prevents excessive loss of Prana from the body.

Controlling the Prana should be done quietly and in a very relaxed mental and physical state. Although the body is straight, it should not be stiff. The lungs and lung cage should be kept supple; thus the need for yogic stretching and asana exercises.

Most importantly, as stated before, the chalice should not be held until it becomes uncomfortable, nor should the duration of the breath be lengthened too quickly. Take your time to extend the length of the chalice gradually.

Do not overdo the length of time you do any practice in Yoga. A sobbing of the lungs in breathing means that they have become fatigued. At this point, all breathing techniques should be stopped. If this happens, the inverted posture of the Headstand can be practiced in order to strengthen the lungs and lung cage. Other asanas can also be used to strengthen the lungs. Then, the practice of breath-control can be gently restarted in about a week or so.

Needless to say, one should not practice Yoga just after eating. Also, as one progresses with Pranayama, it is wise to moisten the mouth with a little oil or unsalted butter.

It is often asked: "What are the necessary qualifications for the seeker in order to practice breath-control?" Any person who regulates his diet, who speaks gently without anger, who is patient, who is humble and who well-regulates his amusements, is qualified for the practice of Pranayama.

All texts clearly state that the practice of the control of the life-force by means of Pranayama should be done only under the guidance of a qualified Teacher.

There are, however, a few beginning techniques of Pranayama which seekers can practice on their own with great benefit. They need only follow good common sense.

The various texts state that those very busy with worldly affairs, those who work too much, those who are overly dependent, those who have weak hearts, and those who do not observe the yogic observances and abstinences are not qualified for the practice of breath-control.

Although breath-control can be practiced at any age, the texts state that it is best to begin practice between the ages of 7 and 40. It is also best to begin the practice at springtime.

It is said that at least one main Yoga meditative posture must be mastered before breath-control can begin. 'Mastery' means the ability to sit without motion, effortlessly, for 48 minutes.

In short, before the seeker begins the practice of Pranayama, some headway must be made regarding the yamas, niyamas, and a posture.

There are four degrees of breath-control. These are called:

1. Short
2. Medium
3. Long
4. Transcendent

The first three degrees of breath control depend upon the duration of the chalice, i.e., the holding time of the breath. The length of the hold, which determines the degree, is approximately:

14 seconds for the short degree,
28 seconds for the medium degree, and
48 seconds for the long degree.

In the early stages of the practice of Pranayama, the head often grows heavy. However, with continual practice, the head becomes light -- but not dizzy -- with increased mental powers.

The seeker should not press too quickly forward with breath-control. Time should be taken to gradually extend the length of the chalice, whether it is the full or empty chalice.

Do not overstress the body or the mind in practicing breath-control. Just a few minutes of practice is often far better than the practice of a long session, just once a week.

The fourth degree of breath-control is not related to the timing of the chalice because it transcends time. In this stage you transcend all objects, both physical and mental. In this stage the complete cessation of breath takes place and you have attained Samadhi -- which results in the veil over Knowledge being lifted, causing the mind to shine forth in Wisdom.

When the breath is perfected, the Prana, life-energy, moves into the Sushumna channel and ascends into the Sun Center, the Ajna Chakra.

At first, this movement is slow and weak; however, with continual practice, the movement becomes faster and stronger. Finally, it reaches the Sun Center, and darkness turns into Light. This Light purifies all bodies and all things so that only Truth shines forth. As the breath is held longer -- without stress or strain! -- the mind is spiritualized, and the 'fire of life' is awakened.

During the first stages of Pranayama, the mind is less concentrated, but as the breath is held longer, the mind is able to concentrate better.

When the seeker has attained sufficient chalice to concentrate the mind properly, the mind then turns to each of the astral chakras -- one at a time, in their proper order -- until the life-force reaches the Sun Chakra.

Through this process, the seeker gains complete control over the inward universe, and is no longer a seeker, but becomes a sage.

THE MUSCULAR CONTRACTIONS (The Bandhas):

The most important and often the most neglected aspect of breath-control is the use of muscular contractions called 'bandhas', during the breath-control techniques.

Breath-control techniques should never be practiced without the use of these three major muscular contractions. The lifting of the life-energies cannot be attained without their use.

In most yoga postures, certain muscular contractions are necessary and important in order to assist in bringing the Prana to the Ajna Chakra. In all yogic breathing techniques, three major contractions are absolutely essential. They are,

1. The root contraction
2. The net-holding contraction
3. The flying contraction

Without these contractions there can be no success in bringing the vital energies under control -- thus, no breath-control, thus no mind-control, thus no thought-control, thus no concentration, thus no meditation, thus no cosmic unfoldment.

The **root contraction** is the most vital contraction and must be held during the total breathing process. The root contraction consists of a strong contraction of the anus muscles, inward, in which they are drawn in and up.

This bandha causes the Apana energy to be upturned. Normally, the Apana energy is a downward movement. This bandha, in a sense, converts Apana to Prana -- it converts the descending energy to an ascending energy -- a movement away from the physical, and a movement to the mental-spiritual.

It is said that there is a direct relationship between the length of time that a person holds the root contraction and youthfulness.

The Shiva Samhita states: "Close the anus by pressing it with the heel and drawing upward the Apana, bringing it into the upper chakras. (It is normally at the root chakra.) It is this root contraction which conquers old age..."

The **net-holding** contraction is performed by pressing the chin on the upper part of the chest, closing the 'net of arteries' of the neck. That is all there is to it. The chin is pressed against the soft hollow in the center of the chest at the joining of the collarbones. This contraction closes the respiratory tract and prevents air from creating a pressure above the glottis. It also places pressure on the Mercury Center (the Vishudda Chakra), preventing the ambrosia (the true life nectar), which flows from the Thousand-Petaled Lotus, from being 'devoured' by the digestive fire in the Martian Chakra (the solar plexus).

This contraction protects the ends of the nerves from the pressure created while forming the chalice. As stated before, the chalice should not be held too long. If held too long, pains in the back muscles, the upper neck and upper shoulders can be experienced. If this happens, it indicates that the chalice has been held too long, and/or one is stressing the body and mind. If this happens, these muscles should be massaged gently.

The **flying contraction** is performed by drawing the stomach (muscles) in at the navel and slightly lifting the contraction. The flying contraction supports the lungs during the breathing techniques. Its major beneficial effect is that it assists in balancing the various forces of the physical and the astral bodies.

Many texts state that the flying contraction is maintained while the in-out breath is made, but relaxed while forming the chalice. However, I was taught that it is wiser to maintain the flying contraction during the total breathing technique, as it will greatly assist in a faster balancing of the Prana and Apana forces.

At the very moment of exhalation, the net-holding contraction should be relaxed, the head lifted, and the breath exhaled.

There is another exercise, which is neither a pranayama nor a muscular contraction (but somewhere in-between these two). It is a cleansing exercise known as 'Bellows Breath'. The seeker breathes in and out lightly like a blacksmith's bellows. This in and out breathing is very, very rapid. Although it is done very rapidly, it must be noted that it should not be done with excessive pressure, as the net-holding contraction is not used in this technique, and thus there is no protection of the nerves. A word to the wise is sufficient.

There are nine main types of breath-control techniques:

1. The With-and-Against Breath
2. The Piercing-of-the-Sun Breath
3. The Victorious Breath
4. The Cold-Maker Breath
5. The Cooling Breath
6. The Bellows Breath
7. The Rising Breath
8. The Bee Breath
9. The Kriya Breath

The following is a very short summary of these more important breathing techniques:

1. **The 'With-and-Against Breath'** technique is always practiced first, as it purifies the physical and astral bodies, balances the main energies of these bodies, and strengthens the lungs.

After forming an asana, the head, neck, and body being in a relaxed yet straight line, expel the air from the lungs through both nostrils. Air is then inhaled through the left nostril for a 4-count. Remember that the root and the flying contractions are applied here.

When the lungs are full, apply the net contraction and hold the breath for a 16-count. Now, release the net contraction and then breathe out through the right nostril for an 8-count. With empty lungs, hold as long as you can without discomfort. Next, breathe in through the right nostril, hold, and breathe out through the left nostril. This completes one Pranayama. Within 3 months, this breathing technique should clean all nerves, the blood, and the astral channels.

While the seeker is breathing, the body must remain relaxed, natural, and motionless. The eyes must be closed and focused at the root of the nose at the Sun Center.

When breathing in the right nostril, the left nostril is closed with the edge of the index finger; when breathing in the left nostril, the right nostril is closed with the thumb. Some seekers use the little and fourth fingers of the right hand to close the left nostril.

As full chalice is held, the proper mantra, or name of the seeker's chosen deity should be mentally chanted.

2. **The Piercing-of-the-Sun Breath** is performed sitting in one of the meditative Yoga postures. It is done by breathing through the right nostril while closing the left nostril with the little finger. Hold the breath as long as you can comfortably. Now breathe out of the right nostril. Repeat this 5 to 10 times at a sitting.

Generally, immense heat is generated through this breathing technique. Be sure that you 'rub' any sweat into your body. Do not wipe the sweat off of your body, as the yogis say it causes one to lose Prana.

After having performed this technique for a while, gradually increase the number to 25 rounds.

3. **The Victorious Breath:** Take a little air in through the nose holding it for 4 or 5 seconds. Now breathe out the left nostril, while holding the right nostril. This technique is just like the Piercing-of-the-Sun Breath, but one exhales through the left nostril. It will bring greater awareness of the dream state and the inner life.

4. **The Cold-Maker Breath** is performed by protruding the curled tongue and sucking air in through the mouth. Do this for 2 or 3 minutes. This Pranayama stimulates the astral body. It causes the physical body's temperature to drop; thus the emotional and desire nature 'cools'.

5. **The Cooling Breath:** Protrude the tongue beyond the lips and curl it upward. Inhale the air through the

mouth along the path of the curled tongue with a sucking sound, like 's-s-s'. Now swallow, holding air in the abdomen as long as comfortable, and then exhale gently through the nostrils. Repeat this breath 6 to 15 times.

This technique cools the body externally, reduces fevers, purifies the blood, and quenches thirst. It is a good practice during fasting as it reduces hunger. It reduces hot flashes and the discomforts of menopause in older women.

6. The Bellows Breath: As mentioned earlier, technically, this is a breathing technique, and not a Pranayama. Pull the upper lip over the teeth. Inhale and exhale rapidly through the nose as many times as you can comfortable. Then hold the breath as long as possible, but comfortably. Exhale and repeat.

7. The Rising Breath Technique: Form an asana. At the same time apply both the root and flying contractions at the right times. Breathe in and apply the net-holding contraction. Then, place the thumbs on each ear. The forefingers should be placed under the edges of the eyes. The third and fourth fingers are placed on the nostrils. The little fingers are placed over the mouth. The breath is now held for approximately 6 seconds.

Next, relaxing the fingers on the nostrils, breathe out slowly without releasing the net-holding contraction. Breathe in and press the fingers back and on the nostrils. All the other fingers remain pressed throughout the method.

This technique increases the capacity for holding the breath, assisting in the control of the five Pranas – and thus control over the mind itself. With the practice of this technique, the seeker should visualize the colors of the five elements -- one in each chakra.

The colors are:

Yellow = Earth - the first chakra at the base of the spine

White = Water - the second chakra

Red = Fire - the third chakra

Green = Air – the fourth chakra

Blue = Ether - the fifth chakra in the neck area.

All Pranayamas are performed with the eyes closed and the mind focused between the eyebrows, at the root of the nose -- the Ajna chakra.

8. **The Bee Breath** is one of the most meaningful Pranayamas. This technique is the same as the 'With-and-Against' technique, except that at the time of the in-breath and out-breath, a sound is made. This sound is exactly the same as that made by the bees -- thus the name.

Having formed a firm asana, breathe in through both nostrils while making the sound of a bee. The sound is an 'EEE' sound, as in the 'ee' in 'bee.' When the breath is full, hold the chalice for 3 seconds, then exhale through both nostrils again while making the 'EEE' sound. The breath should be exhaled slowly.

This Pranayama is repeated 10 times at first, and is slowly, over the months, extended to 108 per day.

9. **The Kriya Breath** is a secret technique that is given to the disciple by his Guru for rapid spiritual Illumination.

One of the rules of breath-control is that the seeker should not breathe out of the same nostril that the air was just breathed into; however, if air is breathed in through both nostrils, then it can be breathed out through both nostrils, or either nostril.

The ancient texts state that Pranayama should be practiced four times a day: at dawn, midday, sunset and midnight.

Generally, the seeker should begin with 10 Pranayamas at a sitting, four sittings a day. This gives 40 Pranayamas a day.

Each day, it can be increased by 5 Pranayamas at each sitting, a 20 a day increase. The increase is maintained until each sitting is composed of 80 Pranayamas. Some texts state that when 80 Pranayamas per sitting are reached, the seeker should then return to 25 Pranayamas per sitting and hold at this number.

For most people, this is far too strenuous unless one's whole life is dedicated to the task of Unfoldment. Usually, 5 Pranayamas are done twice a day, increasing each sitting by one each day, until the minimum of 15 Pranayamas per sitting is reached. The time for these exercises is early morning and late evening.

When the body is ill, it is best to stop the practice of Pranayama, or decrease it to very, very short periods, until one has fully recovered.

OM

Shanti & Prem,

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