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# PRĀṆĀYĀMA

*Other prāṇāyāmas give specific benefits, whereas Nāḍīśodhana gives all the benefits. As you have faith so will the benefits be with prāṇāyāma. With devotion to the Lord Narayana one should always eat satwic food.*

*Yoga-rahasya (1)*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Prāṇāyāma*, meaning ‘*prāṇa-ayāma*’ (*prāṇa*, energy + *ayām*, expansion) or ‘*prāṇa-āyāmah*’ (*āyāmah*, restrain, control, stopping), is the science of controlling one’s own vital energy (*prāṇa*) through breathing techniques.

Āsana is usually only practiced in preparation for *prāṇāyāma*. It is said that, once a person is ready for *prāṇāyāma*, all of the benefits of *āsana* can be attained with *prāṇāyāma* alone. While *prāṇāyāma* is of crucial importance for all yogic practices, it most especially so for kundalini yoga techniques. There are numerous *prāṇāyāmas*, all of which favor different pranic movements and their corresponding effects on body and mind. Some generate energy, others move it. Some cool energy while others clean the channels through which this energy flows. There are seven different terms in *prāṇāyāma* which we should familiarize ourselves with:

<i>Pūraka</i>	Exhalation
<i>Recaka</i>	Inhalation
<i>Antara kumbhaka</i>	Retention after inhalation
<i>Bāhya kumbhaka</i>	Retention after exhalation

<i>Kevala kumbka</i>	Spontaneous (meditative) breath retention
<i>Sahita kumbhaka</i>	Conscious (forced) breath retention
<i>Samavṛtti</i>	Same length
<i>Viṣamavṛtti</i>	Different length

*Prāṇāyāma* is defined by six attributes which outline its practice. Patañjali briefly describes the essence of *prāṇāyāma* in his *sūtras*:

*As the movement patterns of each breath —  
inhalation, exhalation, retention — are observed as to  
duration, number, and area of focus, breath  
becomes spacious and subtle.*

*Pātañjalayogaśāstra, (2:50)*

The first pillar is focus, which is applied on exhalation (*bāhya*), inhalation (*ābhyantara*), and retention (*stambha*). All *prāṇāyāma* begins with exhalation, as one must first become an empty vessel in order to be filled by the greater energy. Inhalation is the second step, and is the filling of the pure inner space with the energy of the practice. Retention is the timeless contemplation about the energy created. Breath is meant to be long (*dīrgha*) and subtle (*sūkṣmaḥ*) – qualities which are both the means and the goal of achieving expansion.

Expansion in subtlety and spaciousness is attained through the framework that mind and body creates. This framework is the place (*deśa*) of focus, the number (*saṃkhyābhiḥ*) of breaths, and the time (*kāla*) of practice. The *deśa* is your internal gaze as well as your outer focus. The number (*saṃkhyā*) is the clear and protected framework of counts in which your breath moves in and out. It is your rhythm, both in terms of the pace of your specific practice and the daily routine in which your practice takes place. *Kāla* is both the hour of practice and its length.

Keep these basic attributes of *prāṇāyāma* in mind when proceeding with this chapter.

## HOW TO PRACTICE

*Prāṇāyāma* is not simply breathing.

Attention is key to *prāṇāyāma*. Without attention, *prāṇāyāma* is useless. This applies more strongly to *prāṇāyāma* than to *āsana*. The greater the distraction during performance, the higher the concentration required. Attention can be painful at first, but with effort this dissipates. When the mind wanders, contemplate: one should do fully what one is doing and nothing else, because what is done if you don't do what you do?

*So, do it fully.*

### *No strain but surrender*

Just as energy cannot be forced into existence, neither can consciousness. When people apply force it is because they are impatient for the good to enter on its own. Why do these people believe the good will not come when one is ready? Why should the Absolute restrain his blessing when your heart is open? There is no good reason to believe in this restraint. All good things are here. Either one is ready to embrace them, or one is not, but if one strains to attain them quickly, all one will achieve is delay.

When practicing *prāṇāyāma*, give yourself completely to the practice. Instead of straining, fix your position to show your beauty. Instead of wanting, pay proper attention to the flow of your breath. Furthermore, over straining – especially in *kumbhaka* (retention) – can be harmful. *Prāṇāyāma* is the manipulation of *prāṇa*. This changes the way you feel, perceive, and think. Your body and being need time to gently adapt to this. Remember, Rome was not built in a day.

*Four things are necessary in practicing prāṇāyāma. First a good place; second a suitable time, moderate food, and lastly purification of the nāḍis. Practice of yoga should not be attempted in a far-off country (loss of faith), nor in the forest (no protection), nor in a city or in the midst of a crowd (exposure). If one does, so he loses success.*

*Gheraṇḍa-smahita (5:4)*

### *Preparation and Posture*

Begin by practicing *āsana* before starting *prāṇāyāma*. Often, just 10 minutes of *āsana* is enough to open the body and release tension. Choose a comfortable sitting posture and sit like the Goddess – then you become a vessel for the great power. Ensure that the body is strong and open.

Avoid unnecessary movements such as fidgeting or scratching. The more physically still you are, the deeper you can dive into the subtle layers. Even the smallest movement can pull your awareness from the subtle back to the physical.

I always imagine that a butterfly is resting on my arm, and I do not want to scare it away.

*Stay in complete stillness.*

So sit still and inwardly observe the flow of *prāṇa*. Your entire posture should reflect strength, beauty, and ease. However, if pain arises while sitting, you should move, shake it out, and then return to the position.

Suffering brings nothing, as it only distracts attention, especially for those who struggle with focus. Conversely, if one can focus correctly, moving a painful leg does not impair concentration. Therefore, one should always sit comfortably.

### *The Intensity is Crucial*

There are many restrictions for the practice of intensive *prāṇāyāma*, as the control of breath is a path to delve into the depths of the human psyche, where the foundation of your being lies. Fears, impulses, and forces that slumber in *prāṇamaya kośa* can be awakened and transformed. The precepts in *prāṇāyāma* are the framework that protects the practitioner on their journey inward.

One can broadly distinguish between normal and intensive practice. Intensive practice requires a pure life focused on spiritual transformation, whereas normal daily practice does not. Daily practice does not exceed a duration of two hours. It energizes, calms, and makes the mind radiant. The energy that *prāṇāyāma* awakens can be used by one's psyche to live more fully and strengthen mind and body.

A practice that lasts longer than two hours or is performed more than twice daily awakens the fire of *prāṇa*, which can dissolve the foundation of the human psyche. Then, the path to complete personal transformation is open, and a protective framework for the psyche is essential.

Serious *prāṇāyāma* should only be attempted if one is determined to transform one's own being. Once this decision is made, a vegetarian diet and a simple life without distracting social contacts should no longer pose a hurdle.

*Thought, speech, and action must be in harmony.*

### *Place and Time*

The ideal time for *prāṇāyāma* is early in the morning before sunrise during *brahmāmuḥūrta*. Alternatively, one can practice at noon or during sunset. *Prāṇāyāma* should not be performed less than two hours before sleeping, as its stimulating effects might make it difficult to fall asleep.

*Prāṇāyāma* should be practiced in a quiet room, free from distractions, allowing one to deeply immerse in the breath. The environment should be clean and well-ventilated. The practitioner should be protected from insects and should not practice in direct sunlight, except during dawn when the gentle rays of the morning sun can envelop the yogi.

*One should practice kumbhaka four times a day: early morning, noon, evening, and midnight, until one can perform 80 rounds [at a time].(...)*

*In the early stages of practice, the Yogi should nourish himself with milk and ghee [clarified butter]. As he advances, such restrictions are no longer necessary.*

*Just as lions, elephants, and tigers are subdued gradually with patience and energy, so too should Prāṇa be controlled. Otherwise, it can kill the practitioner.*

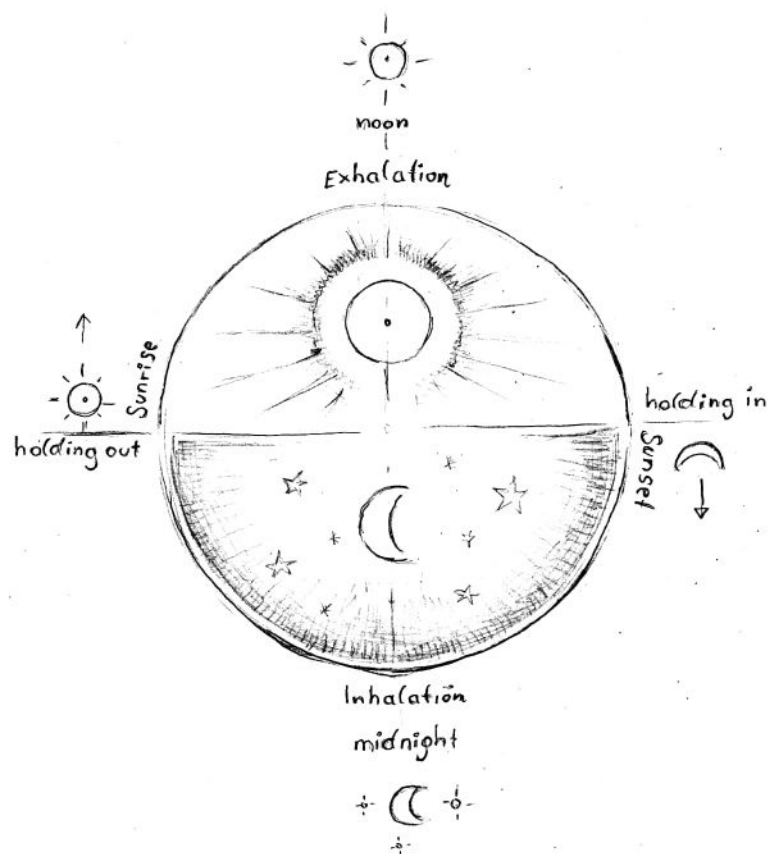
*Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā (2:11-15)*

## Kumbhaka

*Kumbhaka* refers to the techniques of breath retention. Since the body mirrors the macrocosm, day and night, sunrise and sunset find their expression in the functions of the body as well. The flow of breath represents the movement of energy in nature throughout the day. Inhalation symbolizes the rise of energy in the morning, breath retention is the dawn, and exhalation corresponds to the flow of energy into the open sky of night. Retention after exhalation represents the early morning sunrise, and from there the cycle repeats itself.

Since the hours before sunrise and after sunset are sacred, so is the time between breaths. These are the moments when the breath is still and unmoving – these times are referred to as *kumbhakas*.

Some say *prāṇāyāma* only truly begins with proper *kumbhaka*. In fact, the *Hatha-yoga-pradīpikā* makes no distinction between *prāṇāyāma* and *kumbhaka*, as one encompasses the other. This means that when the moments between breaths are sufficiently prolonged and savored, consciousness can expand there.



*Iḍā* and *piṅgalā* are the energy channels related to night and day, and thus to the forces of exhalation and inhalation. *Suṣumnā* is the central channel and symbolizes the energy between day and night, sunrise and sunset. *Suṣumnā* is awakened in *kumbhaka*, as it represents the central fire.

Both *kumbhaka* and *suṣumnā* are one and the same.

*Outside the meru (sacred mountain – the spine), to the left and right, are the nāḍīs of the moon and the sun. The nāḍī suṣumnā, whose essence is the threefold guṇas, lies in the middle. It is in the form of the moon, sun, and fire.*

*Ṣaṭ-Cakra-Nirūpaṇa (1)*

The highest stage is the spontaneous retention of breath as a result of realization, not as a means to it. *Prāṇa* then flows into *suṣumnā*, whereby the breath in the middle comes to rest, as body and mind rest inwardly in the mystical state of sunrise and sunset. When the power of *prāṇāyāma* is fully unfolded, inhalation and exhalation merge into *yuj* – unity. This is the goal of yoga. This is *kevalakumbhaka*.

*When kevalakumbhaka is mastered without inhalation and exhalation, there is nothing in the inner world that is beyond the yogi's reach. Through this kumbhaka, they can hold their breath for as long as they wish. Thus, they gradually reach the stage of rāja yoga. Through this kumbhaka, kuṇḍalinī is awakened, and then suṣumnā is freed from all obstacles;*

*Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā (2:70–76)*





## *Mantra in Prāṇāyāma*

*Prāṇāyāma* is very often used with mantras or *bīja*. The *Yoga-rahasya* considers all *prāṇāyāma* conducted without mantras to be inferior to those conducted with them. Mantras are used to fill the gaps in the breathing process, and measure the time of breathing and retention. Filling these gaps helps fix the mind on the higher goal. Some use the *gāyatrī* mantra to measure the length of the in- and outbreaths. *Om* is typically used to measure breathing.

Initially, one can silently repeat *Om* five times when inhaling and five times when exhaling. This will fix the mind and even the breath. Similarly, ‘*Om Namah Śivaya*, *So-Haṃ*, *Om Yaṃ Ma*’ or ‘*Om Mā*’ can be used.

*Prāṇāyāma is of two types, one done without mantras and the other with mantras. One should choose the appropriate manta for individual requirements. Sagarbha is with mantra and Vigarbha is without mantra. The smritis (texts) say that prāṇāyāma done with mantra is commendable while the other is considered inferior.*

*Yogarahasya (1)*



## THE PRĀṆĀYĀMAS

### *Yogic Breathing*

Yogic breathing is deep and holotropic, with each breath gently filling the lungs to their utmost capacity. Inhalations and exhalations must be of equal length (*samavṛtti*). Allow yourself to savor each breath as if it were a delightful drink flowing with each breath into you. The breath should fill the lungs completely from top to bottom. The belly expands and contracts, massaging the internal organs.

When the maximum inhalation (*pūraka*) is reached, become aware of the gap between the breaths—this place in the middle, beyond the breath, is full of power.



Feel the pause after the inhalation (*antara kumbhaka*). Then gently exhale (*recaka*), let your belly glide inward and stretch toward the sky. Upon reaching the maximum exhalation, feel the silent void of *bāhya kumbhaka*. Hold this stillness for a moment.

Deep yogic breathing requires the full capacity of the lungs as well as concentration. If it seems challenging, make it more playful. The lungs must be able to fully open and close to realize their full volume. This is achieved through three preparatory stages.

#### *Stage One*

Place your hands on the sides of your abdomen, just above the hips, with your thumbs pointing backward and your fingers resting over your belly. Breathe deeply. Move the belly with the flow of breath: inward upon exhalation and outward upon inhalation. Utilize the full capacity of your lungs.

#### *Stage Two*

Place your hands higher, so your thumbs rest on the ribcage and your fingers embrace the chest. Breathe deeply and open the chest. The elbows glide backward and the hands move outward. Expand your chest with the inhalation, opening the chin. Fill the lungs completely. Then exhale gently. However, never close the chest more than to the point where the fingers touch in front of the sternum.

#### *Stage Three*

Interlace your hands behind your neck, elbows stretched to the sides. Tilt the pelvis forward to open the chest. Breathe deeply and fully open the chest, drawing the elbows backward so air flows into the tips of the lungs. On the exhalation, close the elbows in front of the face and relax the chest.

## *Nāḍīśodhana Prāṇāyāma*

*Nāḍīśodhana* (cleansing of the energy channels) is the most important and beneficial *prāṇāyāma* of all. It purifies the mind and deepens the connection with the breath itself. *Nāḍīśodhana* is incredibly gentle and deep. With this practice, you dive into your innermost being, the mind becomes still, and inner beauty becomes tangible.

The *Yogarahasya* of Nātamuni states that many positive effects can be achieved through this *prāṇāyāma* alone. The *Yoga-Yājñavalkya* also dedicates an entire chapter exclusively to this practice.

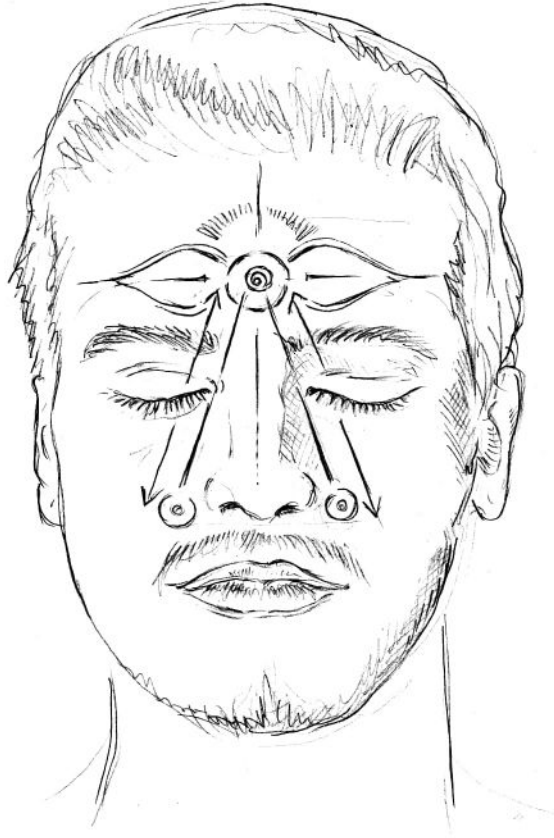
*Nāḍīśodhana* cleanses the channels of the subtle body, making you a worthy vessel. Sit upright and relax your body. Extend one arm over your knee in *chinmudrā* with the palm facing upwards. Bring the other hand in front of your face.

Place two fingers on your forehead and gently massage the third eye. Feel how you gently massage the skin of your forehead over the skull and enjoy this act of self-love.

Place your thumb and ring finger on either side of the nose to regulate the airflow. Begin by inhaling through the left nostril. Imagine the air flowing from the nostril upwards to the *ājñā-cakra*. Hold the air there for a brief moment. Then let it flow down from the forehead and exhale through the right nostril. Once the air has left the body and you have reached maximum exhalation, perform a gentle *bāhya kumbhaka* and hold the air outside. Then inhale again through the right nostril, up to the forehead, hold, and exhale through the left nostril. This is one round.

The nose is a reflection of the central channel along the spine. The two nostrils are energetically connected to the two wings of the pelvis. The tip of the nose corresponds to the opening of the *suṣumnā-nādi* in *mūlādhāra-cakra*, and the bridge of the nose represents the flow of the spine up to the *ājñā-cakra*. Breathing from one nostril to the forehead and back to the other side depicts the flow of *prāṇa* from the pelvis along the spine to the forehead in microscopic form.

Perform *kumbhaka* at each turn of the breath. The breath length is not crucial at first, but the inhalations and exhalations should be of equal length. Likewise, it does not matter how long you hold *kumbhaka*, but at first it must be held evenly in *antara* and *bāhya kumbhaka*. Perform *mūlabandha* with each *kumbhaka*. How deeply the *prāṇāyāma* can elevate you does not depend on the complexity of the breath ratio but solely on your attention and love for the practice.



*Having inhaled the air through the left nostril filling up the abdomen, then meditating on the fire in the belly with its flame in the Dehamadhya and meditating on the seed letter of fire Raṃ, which is established in the region of fire, he must exhale slowly through the right nostril. Then one who is determined and wise, inhaling the air through the right nostril, must again exhale slowly through the left nostril. One should practice this in solitude six times every day at the three sandhis (in the morning, noon and evening) for three to four months or three to four years.*

*Yoga-yājñavalkya (5:17-20)*

## *Kapālabhāti*

*Kapālabhāti* (the shining skull) is a *satkarma* – one of the six purification exercises – as well as a *prāṇāyāma*. It moves the *prāṇas* and purifies them when they mix with the fire at the navel. *Kapālabhāti* is performed from the *kanda*, the navel point. *Kanda* is commonly misunderstood as *maṇipūra* chakra. In some yogic schools, the *nāḍis* all originate from there. It has the form of a golden egg, is situated underneath the navel, and is the center of bodily pranic force. From there, the *prāṇas* expand upwards. The great sun makes them rise.

Sit straight, open up your face, and feel the sun rise on your forehead. Pull *mūlabandha* very gently. Push the air out and move your navel inwards. When the breath relaxes, you will inhale naturally rather than actively. Pulse your navel in and out. Feel the pulse massaging your lower belly. The rest of your body should be relaxed. Your face stays open and released. The pace can be accelerated until a comfortable rhythm is reached. Imagine this little golden egg moving upwards upon exhalation and imagine it moving downwards when the breath relaxes. Imagine a stream of golden light rising to the sky.

*Inhale and exhale like the bellows of a blacksmith. This is  
kapālabhāti and removes all ailments due to kapha.*

*Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā (2:35)*

## *Śītalī Prāṇāyāma*

*Śītalī* (cooling breathing) is like a friend, gentle and comfortable, that you invite into your home to relax. This friend will talk to you decently, calmly, and lovingly. They will make you drink delicious waters, nourish your mind and body, and leave you feeling whole, calm, and as clear as crystal.

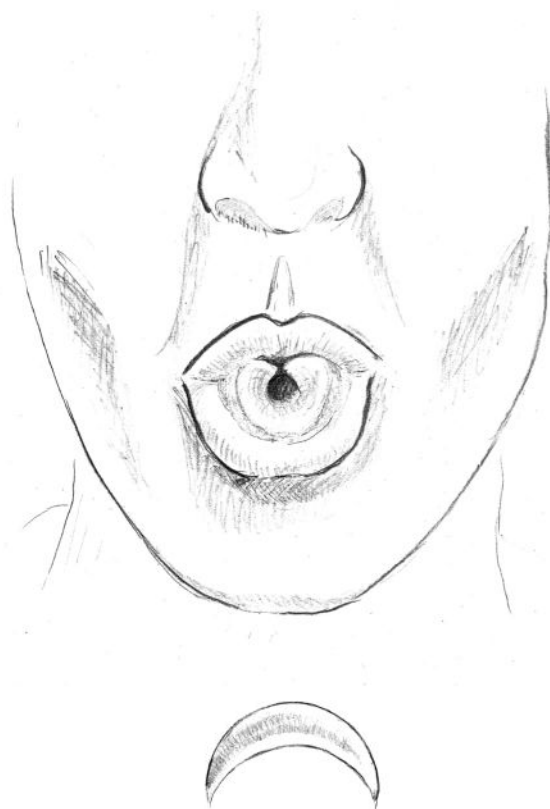
Sit straight and gently tuck in your chin. Stick out and roll your tongue. I realized this is not something everyone can do so, if this is hard for you, try to pull out your tongue a little and roll the sides up as much as you can. Then, slightly press your upper lip against your tongue so that its sides are fixed with your mouth and they roll in naturally. This should help you succeed.

Once done, inhale, slightly raise your chin, and imagine yourself sucking in the air as if it were a delicious drink from the sky. The air is as cooling and white as milk.

It drops down from the moon above you. Drink this air and enjoy it. When you reach maximum inhalation, retain the air inside for the briefest of moments. Pull in your tongue, lower your chin, and deeply exhale through your nose. Keep in- and outbreaths at an equal length. This is one round.

*The wise inhales through the tongue, then follows kumbhaka and exhalation through the nose. This kumbhaka, called śitalī, removes illnesses of the spleen, fever, gall bladder trouble, hunger, thirst, and the effects of poison, like snake bites.*

*Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā (2:36-57)*



### *Bhrāmarī Prāṇāyāma*

*Bhrāmarī* (bee breathing) is said to bring about an unsurpassed level of joy in the practitioner. It can be likened to a wedding with one's self. It is the great joy being expressed in the sound that resides in the heart, that is like an eternal rushing river. *Bhrāmarī* is a way of being, meaning it is thus a body. When one practices *bhrāmarī*, one should imagine being a body made of nothing but this sound, and yet this is not an audible sound in one's ear. Instead, it is a subtle sound that one cannot hear. Whenever you make a humming sound, listen to that which is behind it – the inner sound of the pure pleasure of pure being.

The great *nāda* (primal sound) is everywhere in the body, though some parts are closer to it than others. *Nāda* appears in the central channel of *suṣumnā*, or *sārasvatī nadī*, that is said to have 'sound in her womb'. The heart is said to be the seat of *śabda-brahman*, the god in sonic form.

*Inhale rapidly, producing the sound of a male bee. Then exhale with the sound of a female bee. This is followed by kumbhaka. The great yogis, by constantly practicing this, experience indescribable happiness in their hearts. This is bhrāmarī.*

*Hatha-yoga-pradīpikā (2:67)*



### *The Heart Bhrāmārī*

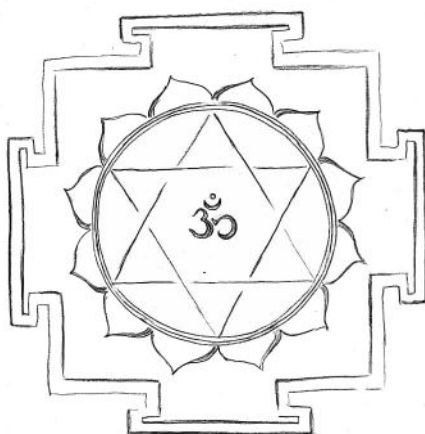
Sit straight and bring your hands in front of your heart, one over the other. Tuck your chin in gently and feel your spine like a staff raised to the sky. Settle in your chest, like a shiny ball falling into the cavity of your heart to the point of maximum repose at the very bottom of your being. You are home.

Pull *mūlabandha* to fix the energy and begin performing this sweet humming sound gently in your heart. This sound is joy in essence, it is your inner honey. Stay focused and listen to the sound beyond what is audible – the music of your heart. Expand that sound from your heart, breath by breath. The sound will expand until it reaches its maximum extension throughout the world of which you are a part, and all is a part of you.

### *The Suṣumnā Bhrāmārī*

Feel this graceful *suṣumnā* that begins from your perineum and runs to the top of your head. It is a line without dimension, incredibly thin, which stretches throughout the universe. Untouchable, it is only realized by its own means. Let us set it into vibration.

Sit straight. Perform *ṣaṅmūkī mudrā*. Close the gates to your face with the fingers of both hands. Close your ears, mouth, and eyes, and place your middle fingers adjacent to your nostrils. When you have closed the channels of your senses, fall inside of yourself. *Pratyāhāra*. There is no world outside, only within. There is only this one endlessly thin line, stretching throughout the universe, this graceful stairway to heaven. Start with *bhrāmārī prāṇāyāma*. Understand that sound as being the very nature of *suṣumnā*. See that sound as being like golden light vibrating within. This is your body, enjoy.





### *Ujjāyī Prāṇāyāma*

*Ujjāyī* (victorious breathing) is the invincible breathing of the one who has mastered the fire and has therefore mastered the mind. It originates from the *viśuddha* chakra, from where you are enthroned over the world. It is the spacious breath. Space is the master, space pervades all.

Sit straight and gently tuck your chin in. Avoid pressing too hard, but feel your neck rising to the sky. Imagine that silver disc shining inside your throat. Start breathing deeply in *ujjāyī*, joined by the sound of lolling waves or fire burning in the wind. It is a clearly audible sound, emitted from the throat. With every exhale, imagine a silvery light shining from your throat and expanding in space. When you inhale, feel that silvery light collected again in the center of your throat. Feel that space in front of you. It is eternal. Expand in that space with each breath and recollect it again in your throat when you breathe in. Become spacious. Become invincible.

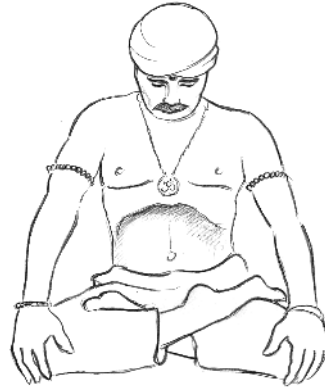
*With closed mouth inhale deeply until the breath fills all the space between the throat and the heart, to the tips of the lungs. This creates a noise. Do kumbhaka and exhale through the left nostril. This removes phlegm in the throat and enhances the digestive power of the body. This is ujjāyī and can be practiced walking or sitting, it keeps diseases away from the individual organs and the Nāḍis, especially diseases that are due to kapha.*

*Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā, (2:51-52)*

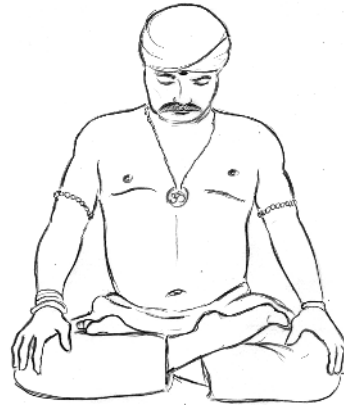
### *Bhastrikā Prāṇāyāma*

This 'bellows breathing' is a remarkably strong *prāṇāyāma* that is, in many ways, a yogic secret. *Bhastrikā* awakens *Śakti* – *Kuṇḍalinī*, and purifies and strengthens like no other breath. *Bhastrikā* can lead to mastery and completely expand ones being. *Bhastrikā* is fire, fire is light, fire is *suṣumnā*, fire is consciousness. It runs the house and warms the kitchen. It sheds light on the altar and the deity and guides the ritual. But be careful, for fire can also burn the temple to ashes and drive a person to madness. Fire is a force, and any force must be guarded with consciousness.

*Bhastrikā* is an advanced *prāṇāyāma*. I was taught four variations of *bhastrikā*, which I will describe in further detail here. It is worth remembering that it is hardly possible to achieve a profound insight into *bhastrikā* when it is not practiced with an experienced teacher's guidance. The teacher may show you the secrets and transmit energy with their presence that you would be unlikely to discover alone.



*Bhastrikā* is the bellows that blows on the fire. It is equally strong as an inhalation or exhalation. It is often mistaken with *kapālabhāti* due to its similar appearance. The crucial difference is equal strength of exhalation and inhalation. It is first practiced in this threefold form. One side after another.



*Idā bhastrikā* – Sit up straight, elevate your head, and venerate your solar plexus. Imagine the sun rising in front of you, and show pride and gratitude. Close your right nostril and perform *bhastrikā* 30 times through your left nostril, and finally inhale and exhale. Take time to relax before continuing.



*Piṅgalā bhastrikā* – Perform the same process but close the left nostril.

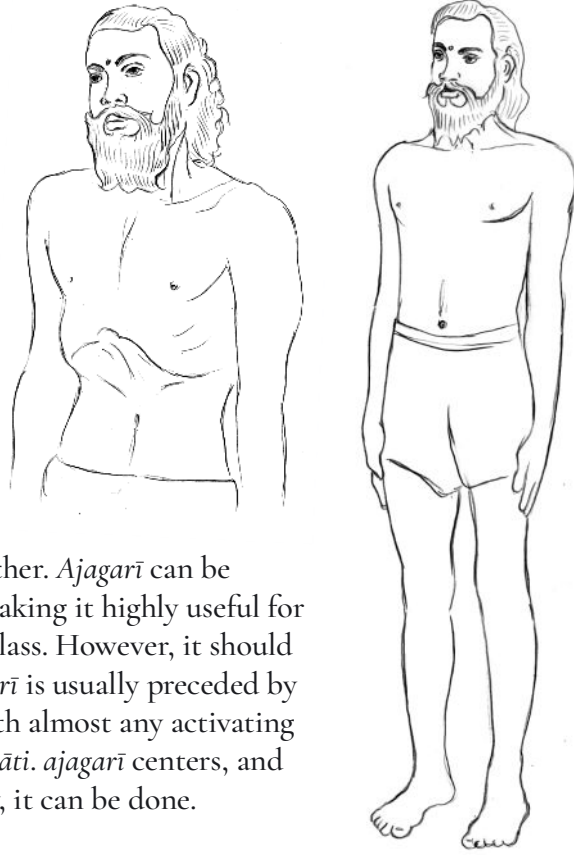
*Madhya bhastrikā* – Then perform *madhya bhastrikā* (central bellows breath) one last time in the center through both nostrils. Keep straight. Once done, perform *Sūryabheda kumbhaka*.

*Sūryabheda kumbhaka* – At the end of your *bhastrikā* practice, exhale slowly from the left nostril. Inhale slowly from the left, exhale from the right, in from the right, and hold in *antara kumbhaka* (the sun). Repeat the whole pattern with internal retention 2–4 more times and then relax. The number of retentions can gradually be increased every 2 weeks from 5 to 10 to 20. Performing *Sūryabheda kumbhaka* after *bhastrikā* is necessary to center the *prāṇā*. *ajagarī* has the same effect.

## *Śārdūla Kriyā -Ajagarī*

This exercise has many names, some call it *śārdūla kriyā* – the exercise of the Panther because it makes one strong and clear like this mystical cat. Dhīrendra Brahmācārī referred to it as *ajagarī*, which is naming its nature as being that of a large and powerful snake – a boa.

*Ajagarī* or *śārdūla kriyā* is a way to unite with one's own energy. Full of force, it centers the *prāṇa*, carrying a great silence, like the panther. *Ajagarī* can be performed in almost all positions, making it highly useful for centering the energy during a yoga class. However, it should be avoided in balancing *āsanas*. *ajagarī* is usually preceded by *bhastrikā*, but it can be combined with almost any activating modification of breath, like *kapālabhāti*. *ajagarī* centers, and whenever this is desired or necessary, it can be done.



However, of all the *prāṇāyāmas*, *bhastrikā* needs either *sūryabheda kumbhaka* or *ajagarī* to return the energy to the central channel. Dissipated yogic energy can make one nervous and angry, and destroy the practitioner. *Ajagarī* protects from these dangers.

After an activating *prāṇāyāma*, inhale deeply, slowly expand your belly, and fill yourself with air. This is called *udarabandha*. Hold this air until you feel the energy settling in silence. Hold for about 5–20 seconds.

Then exhale deeply, contract all your muscles, feel the tension, and pull your belly inwards. Take time to pull your belly in and move the diaphragm upwards against the spine. Perform a gentle, false inhalation and move the diaphragm even deeper to explore this internal space. This is *uḍḍīyānabandha*. Hold for another 5–20 seconds. Then inhale slowly, straighten your body, and relax.

*Contemplate the center in silence.*

*Seated in the vajrāsana posture firmly hold the feet near the ankles and be against the kanda. In the posture of vajrāsana the yogi should induce the kundalini to move. Then he should do bhāstrikā-kumbhaka. Thus the kundalini will be quickly awakened. Then he should contract the ‘sun’ [through uḍḍiyānabandha] and thus induce kundalini to rise. Even though he may be in the jaws of death, the yogi has nothing to fear. When one moves kundalini fearlessly for about an hour and a half, she is drawn upward a little through the suṣumnā. In this way she naturally leaves the opening of the suṣumnā free and is carried upward by the prana current, in this way one should daily move the kundalini.*

*Hatha-yoga-pradīpikā (3:121–122)*