

BASIC KUNDALINI YOGA BREATHING

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PART 1: STARTING A KY CLASS

In our classes here in Bangkok, before we even start the class with Ong Namō Guru Dev Namō we always practice several types of Long Deep Breathing (LDB) and Breath of Fire (BF). Quite often students come to the class somewhat disjointed, frazzled, tense, agitated, out of sync, so that a few Long Deep Breaths followed by Breath of Fire will make the blood alkaline, soothe and charge the nerves and steady and balance the electromagnetic field and the mind.

While some may wait to teach the various locks for a later class, we teach the locks as part of the breathing before every class, because the locks regulate and direct the flow of energy/consciousness (prana). Even a very light set done with correct breathing can be so powerful that it is important that the locks are learned and applied from the beginning.

The set is comprised of the opening salutation / mantra. Here we usually do the long Ong Namō version, in which each of the 5 sounds are made with a single deep breath, after 3 to 5 repetitions we inhale hold the breath and pull the root lock (Mul Bhand), then slowly relax the breath. This often puts many of the students into an electromagnetic grip that gradually subsides and dissipates through the body and mind. The mind is now perfectly still and prepared to simply watch the Kundalini Yoga exercises without thought or inclination of being the "doer." We call this approach "Applied Awareness."

Then to the specified set with rest periods after every KY exercise or Kriya or after 2 or 3 short KY exercises. Maybe because of all the KY classes taught in gymnasiums, where people come for a workout, KY classes have tended to become more of an aerobics of one to the next to the next without a break or very little break. But the rest period in KY is as important as the exercise period. When the breathing is understood and done properly during a KY exercise, blood saturates into the area and nerve/energy channels that the KY exercise puts under an expanding or contracting pressure. After a few minutes the capillaries open and relax under the pressure and the clean vibrant fresh (molecular) air, brought in from the lungs to the heart and out through the arteries, fills the cells with oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen and the other elements of the air, and accumulated waste and gasses is removed and discharged through the veins to the heart and out through the lungs. During the exercise, the cells of the glands and organs and nerves of the body become pranically charged, and the body needs to have a rest period to assimilate, process, store and balance the energy. Glands secrete and vitalize the blood, and these various types of pranic energies need to flow throughout the body to be assimilated and stabilized within the magnetic field.

During this relaxation period, students will become aware of and feel and experience for themselves the flow of prana, which is missed if one goes from one KY exercise to the next without some break. Not only this, but due to this allowing of the prana to flow and balance, the electric charge in the nerves and organs becomes much stronger and deeper with each successive exercise.

Sometime we joke here about the level of electrocution one felt during and after a set and meditation, because with this resting period, the prana is allowed to accumulate and in the process; it permeates every part of the body to a saturation point. Spiritual and psychic centers open by themselves and deep intuitions rise into the consciousness. Yogi Bhajan relates many wonderful benefits to the practice of certain sets, kriyas and meditations, but, if the practice is not done correctly, these benefits will not accrue.

When we go to sleep, the energy in the body increases filling the body with light. This light then withdraws into the ida and pingala, then into the sushumna and to the brain and down to the spiritual heart (not the heart chakra) where the prana merges in infinite undifferentiated light, and the body and mind are restored.

With the practice of KY, where the rest periods are included, the student begins to become aware of this pranic flow, such that it begins to become a natural expanding experience from KY class to KY class. You begin to become consciously aware of the levels of energy/consciousness that we formerly lost consciousness to when falling asleep.

In Reality the body - the Universe, in all its dimensions is bathed in and appears within the Infinite Field of Awareness of Light - always. With the practice of KY this Light emerges into the student's consciousness until the grip of the thoughts and sensations and impressions of the mind dissolves and we say Truthfully, "I am Light."

The KY set is usually followed by a Laya chant (mantra) and/or meditation. The KY set creates the effect of an amplification of the electromagnetic field, which is often felt as some kind of etheric pranic pressure. This pressure is released and resonates with a tremendous power throughout the chakras and spiritual centers, including the aura. The effect is often so powerful that one feels as though the sun has appeared in the spiritual heart, penetrating from behind the veil of the mind suffusing everything with Light.

The end of the set and meditation is necessarily followed by an extended period of relaxation - 10 minutes or longer. It's like entering a new program into a computer and the computer needs to reboot for the new programming to take effect.

This whole process of reprogramming is to bring the awareness to the point where it no longer reflects the old images, but reflects it's single Self. It's as though through this "programming" process, the individual PC is linked to the universal Server, and in the process we become linked "yoked" to and unified with everything, not just as an idea but as a living continuous experience.

After some time the students are brought back from their yoga nidra (yogic sleep) with a few deep breaths, then rotating ankles and wrists, then rubbing the palms of the hands together and soles of the feet together, followed by taking hold of the knees and rocking forward and back the spine. Then, sitting up cross legged for a minute. This is followed by raising the arms straight out at 60o with the tips of the fingers curled in (not the fist), thumbs up and feeling the prana flowing in the spine, through the top of the head, through the heart and arms and around the body's magnetic field. Then Breath of Fire for 2 to 3 minutes. Inhale hold 30 seconds, then, still holding the breath, put the thumbs together over the top of the head. Then making tight fists and pressing the thumbs together with some pressure about 4 inches before the forehead, while leaning forwards slightly and bringing the prana to the third eye (Ajna chakra). Then relax the arms and meditate for a while.

The class is finished by chanting long Sat Nam, which is to place the palms together at the sternum level, inhale deeply, chant "Saaaa...t, Nam," where the "aaaa.." continued until the breath is nearly finished, and ending with "t... Nam" This is repeated several times as the students are made aware of the sound of the "sss" and "aaaa" vibrating through the spine and throughout the body.

Then everyone inhales, pulls the root lock (Mul Bhand), holds the breath suspended in the chest for 30 or more seconds, then slowly exhales. Some may feel an electromagnetic gripping in the posture, as the mind becomes perfectly placid and pervasive.

Many students will continue to stay and remain unmoving, engulfed in meditation in that etherically still pervasive pranic state, watching the flow of prana, free of any thoughts or inclinations.

After, we have Yogi Tea.

One question that might be asked. If this is what the students experience, what does the teacher experience. Something quite extraordinary happens to the teacher. Before the KY class, while beginning to think about the set and meditation, the teacher will feel the flow of prana related to the KY exercises as he/she goes through them.

When the teacher sits before the class, a liquid light flows up through the body filling the teacher's mind, like a stream of polarized etheric energy. The teacher's mind becomes very still and he/she seems to lead the class from an intuitive space. Become a KY teacher and see what happens.

PART 2: HOW TO DO LONG DEEP BREATHING?

Just a brief explanation of what happens physiologically when practicing Kundalini Yoga exercises and kriyas.

The once side of the heart receives the vitalized blood from the lungs, then pumps the blood out through the arteries to the capillaries of the organs and to their cells. The cells take in the vitality from the blood and discharge toxins, waste and gasses, which travel back up through the veins to another chamber of the heart, which pumps the blood through the lungs, where the impurities are discharged and vital air recharged into the blood, and so on. This process is explained in detail in various Kundalini Yoga Manuals, as it reveals a key to how and what Kundalini Yoga is all about and provides the understanding of why these Kundalini Yoga sets and kriyas combined with proper breathing are so effective.

The postures and movements create an expanding or contracting pressure on certain areas of the body that causes the blood to saturate the organs and glands, which with the nerves expand under the pressure opening more and more to the vitality of the blood.

To vitalize the blood, it is necessary that the lower part of the lungs, where most of the blood sacks are, is expanded.

The diaphragm comes down behind the ribs and wraps under, below the lungs. When you expand your breathing downward, the lower part of the diaphragm expands downward and out pushing against the abdominal muscles. Pressing the diaphragm down, you should feel the sense of its distention all the way below the navel and to the sides above the pelvis as the abdomen comes out. The abdominals remain relaxed, as the diaphragm does the breathing.

In a long deep breath, while expanding your breath downward, the diaphragm will naturally expand and distend forward. First you feel the expansion of the air filling the lower lungs higher and higher until there is a sense of suspension that continues to lifting the rib cage from the lower solar plexus area to the shoulder clavicular area, without the slightest exertion of the muscles of the rib cage.

As an assistance to this experience of the diaphragm, you sit cross-legged on the floor with the spine straight, hands resting on the knees, breath in consciously expanding and compacting the air downward to the lowest part of the lungs. As the air is filling in, you press your hands inward against the knees towards the hips and slightly downward. This causes the spine to arch forward and rib cage to open and lift without any exertion of the muscles in the ribs. (Try it.)

As you continue to inhale, pressing the air downward, the middle and upper parts of the lungs will become completely full. Then bring the shoulders back and exhale compressing all the air out of the lungs from the top downward, so that the lower ribs (solar plexus) and abdomen (the Kandal, behind the navel area) contract. This is one long deep breath. It can be done easily and smoothly or with force and power.

Either way, it is the diaphragm which generates the expansion and contraction of the lungs. You can feel the extension of the diaphragm when you breath inward slightly and suspend the breath, which gives a unique sensation without reference to inhaling or exhaling or holding.

With this kind of breathing the blood's chemistry changes dramatically with a few breaths. Before we start a Kundalini Yoga class, we will take several long deep breath, maybe 10 or 20 in different sitting positions, as a means to cleans the energy channels, such as the ida and pingala, charge the nerves so they resonate and clear the mind of distracting thoughts. In this way the mantra dedicating one's practice at the start of the class will have its full effect.

For example, try this to cleans the channels before a class: Sitting straight, as mentioned above, you stretch up your left arm straight beside the left ear, palms facing inwards. Then you raise your right arm, with the right thumb covering the right nostril fingers pointed straight up like antenna. Then begin long deep breathing, stretching the left arm up so that pressure is always felt in the armpits and upward reaching arm. This also opens all the vertebra along the peripheral nerves on the left side of the spine, allowing blood to saturate this entire area. Continue long deep breaths 10 to 20 times (or more), then inhale deeply and completely, hold the breath by pressing the shoulders back and suspending the breath forward in the chest, turn the eyes towards the top of the head, tongue pressing the pallet, pull the root lock expanding the chest, and hold for 30 seconds (or more) without strain.

During this breathing and while you hold the breath, with a slight attention, you will feel the ida nadi or moon nerve (that cools the body), an energy channel from the point between the eyebrows (left lobe of the pituitary) up over the left side of the top of the head and down the back of the left side of the neck and left side of the spine to the base of the spine. You may even be able to consciously follow the flow of energy in and down the energy channel as you inhale and up and out, as you exhale, which draws in and deepens the mind into a penetrating stillness.

Then, keeping the left arm straight, slowly exhale through the left nostril, and after few moments gently lower your arms and hands back to the knees.

Sitting straight, you will feel an electric current along this ida nadi, that will become stronger as you sit, while stilling the mind.

After a minute or 2, begin the same breath on the opposite side, which will cleans the pingala nadi, or sun nerve (heats the body), an energy channel from the point between the eyebrows (right lobe of the pituitary) up over the right side of the top of the head and down the back of the right side of the neck and right side of the spine to the base of the spine.

When you notice how this simple Kundalini Yoga exercise has this dramatic effect, even for many students very first class, then you also realize and understand that this same purification process occurs in every Kundalini Yoga exercise, kriya and meditation, as it relates to the creation of a pressure on the glands, organs and nerves, where such pressure causes the blood to saturated the area under pressure.

You will feel your life force, and as the glands purify and secrete, vitalizing the blood, the electric feeling will deepen and become almost liquid and pervasive.

There are several types of pranayamas combined with certain angles, mudras, pressures that generate a similar effect.

Even though we are not aware of it, the body field generates and is in the midst of tremendous levels of energy. The sounds and images we hear and see in the mind are the creation of the movement of atoms that vibrate on a molecular level.

The same energy that powers the atom, forms and binds the molecules to create the cells of the body and regulate the entire continuous manifestation of the body and mind as a constant single intelligent support and substratum.

As we continue to practice Kundalini Yoga, gradually the cells charge and we begin to become aware of this energy as consciousness. The yogis refer to prana as an intelligent force of light that begins to become brighter and more pervasive than the typical firing of action-reaction thought patterns, emotions and moods.

We find ourselves no longer gripped by the identity to these inherent tendencies, and we begin to feel and become aware of ourselves as this intelligent pervasive light. The body seems to become spacelike - transparent and free, like a light in a projector, turned up to become brighter, as it passes through the reel to reel ongoing movie of impressions and drama, appearing on a screen that fades to white.

Over time, especially if one remembers to relax between Kundalini Yoga exercises to allow the body to readjust to the discharging of waste and recharging of the cells, and the balancing of the glands, organs and nerves, the energy levels deepen to the point where the encoded patterns of the mind in all the cells and molecules of the body field are outshined, and you feel the pervasive light shining through you from within, between and behind the atoms of the body. All this to say that, if one practices the Kundalini Yoga exercises and Kriyas, Laya chants and meditations with still watching awareness; if one practices the long deep breathing, as outlined herein with the energy locks (Bhandas) when required, the outturned mind will begin to reflect the single pervasive Living Light penetrating from the core of Being, and you will recognize yourself as That.

Once one is able to do Long Deep Breathing, which is to say, to feel the complete expansion and contraction of the diaphragm and lungs without the need to feel that the abdominals or ribs are involved in the breathing process, then the Breath of Fire comes naturally and easily. More on the Breath of Fire later

PART 3: HOW TO DO BREATH OF FIRE?

The main thing for breath of fire is that it is done properly, using the whole length of the diaphragm going evenly *in* with pressure on the navel and solar plexus, and *out*, where the lower, middle and upper areas of the diaphragm project out.

To feel the inhalation aspect of the outward distending diaphragm, you might want to try to sniff some air in and feeling it through the lungs evenly, suspend the breath, as though you were still inhaling, but without the continuation of the filling of the upper clavicular area, as with LDB.

You should feel a sensation all along the diaphragm, that may even be felt in the face, brow and crown, like a radiation. Then compress the diaphragm inwards, without squeezing the air out completely, as with LDB or, moreso, kapalabati at the navel and solar plexus.

After doing this sniffing in, suspension and contracting back a few times, so that you can feel the length and breadth of the diaphragm and like one side of a board that opens evenly in a bellows, begin to expand and contract the diaphragm rhythmically, then begin to add more speed and power to the breath, evenly expanding and contracting.

Often people will do the breath of fire using just the upper area of the diaphragm, and even try to use the rib cage and shoulders to act as a pumping mechanism, or they may focus on just moving the navel, or they may mistakenly pump the navel with an inward force, relaxing the breath on the inhale, similar to kapalabati. None of these is correct or a substitute for breath of fire done, as described above with the even full length of the diaphragm expanding and contracting rhythmically with increasing power.

The speed and power of the breath of fire depends on the capacity and development of the student / practitioner. Some may take quite some time to get it right, others will get it right from the beginning. Others will get it right, but it will take time to be able to do the breath with speed and power.

All this to say that so long as you are aware that everyone is doing the breath properly, the rhythm power and speed are up to the practitioner's capability. It's better to do it right and develop the right breathing habit than do it wrong, and not receive the full benefit of the leverage that breath of fire brings to the kundalini yoga exercise, set, kriya, meditation.

In our classes here in Bangkok, we start the classes first with an exercise in long deep breathing, which also assists in discovering the full length and capacity of the diaphragm and then we do an exercise, variations as described above, in breath of fire.

As these 2 pranayamas are the prerequisite for gaining the full benefit of kundalini yoga exercises and full vibratory effect of mantras, we practice these first. It also brings the mind into a clear state of awareness, as the blood becomes alkali with the long deep breathing exercise, and electric from the breath of fire. With the mind still and clear, it becomes much easier to watch the flow of awareness towards the movements and positions in each kundalini yoga exercise and link that awareness (which is the universal consciousness pervading and shining within each of us) to the breath, which in turn further amplifies the flow of (cosmic) energy into the areas of the body put under pressure by the posture, movement or position of the exercise, or kriya, so that you begin to feel the radiance and flow of prana throughout the body and through the arc-line and aura.... merging with the all-pervasive consciousness.

At the end of the exercise in long deep breathing and breath of fire, inhale deeply and hold the breath. The root lock and neck lock should be applied, as when you do these pranayamas correctly, there will be a great flow of energy prana circulating throughout the nervous, circulatory and glandular systems, and the locks channel the energy into nerves and centers that are able to carry a higher voltage easily, namely the ida, pingala and sushumna.

As you know, root lock is the tightening or pulling in of the anus and sex organs to lock the anal sphincter muscles, while pulling in on the navel (arching forward the lower spine), which creates a triangulation effect in the area between the navel and 4th vertebra, called the Kandal, which regulates the energy in the body. From the Kandal, the energy will automatically flow to the base of the spine and upwards through the spine. In the beginning people don't feel this flow, but after a while the energy awareness is strong enough that you do feel it naturally.

The neck lock involves pressing the shoulders back and the chest forward, which converts the inhalation holding the breath to a suspension of the breath, in particular when you also bring the chin back slightly and extend the neck upwards by sensing the atlas and axis (top 2 vertebra) and pulling them back and up with a slight pressure, keeping the head straight. If you do this properly, the suspended breath will circulate, flow downward to the root lock and circulate easily up the spine towards and through the brow point and crown. Just a note that the pulling in of the chin and pulling back and up of the atlas and axis is slight, not forceful as we sometimes see a soldier at attention. When the neck lock is done in this way, you will also feel the shoulders, which you have pressed back, also arch back and seem to lock downwards. Try it and you will see what is meant here, and feel the difference, if you haven't been practicing root lock and neck lock in this way.

These locks are important to assist in the easy smooth flow of the prana that is generated and released when you do long deep breathing and breath of fire properly as a pranayama on its own or in any position, asana or movement, or with any meditation or chanting of mantras, where the release of vibratory energy can be even greater.

When the electromagnetic field becomes balanced and strong, the lower spine will arch forward pulling from within, the chest will come forward with an inward pushing pressure, and the root lock and neck lock will pull into place with a magnetic sensation automatically, and the whole body will fill with light.

While this is a long answer to a simple question, it is important from the outset of kundalini yoga sets, kriyas and meditations, to breath properly and execute the locks properly.

One other area of importance, is that as the energy is so much greater, when you practice properly, it is even more important to be sure that between each pranayama or kundalini yoga exercise that you wait, pause and let the energy make it's complete release in the pressured areas related to the exercise, and then completely circulate so that the glands can secrete, nerves settle with the restabilizing of the prana and the magnetic field balance. Then you will also receive and experience the full intended benefit of the kriya and set and meditation you practice. The difference of effect from pausing between exercises and not, is enormous. You will feel the whole body radiating terrifically. Many students, including the **teacher**, will want to stay on long after the class and meditate in the deepening stillness that by itself draws you into the seer, until you suddenly realize your Self as the screen upon which and within which everything appears.