

## TRADITIONAL PRANAYAMA: REGULATION OF BREATH

(from *Gheranda-Samhita* and *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika*)

### Abbreviations:

(R) = right nostril (*pingala*, sun)      RET = retention (*kumbhaka*)

(L) = left nostril (*ida*, moon)      JB = *Jalandhara-bandha*

### Preliminary purification of the energy channels (*nadis*)

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#### NAME (in Sanskrit)

“English”

#### PRACTICE

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#### NADI-SHODHANA

“Purification of  
the channels”

There are two types of nadi-shodhana: “with seed” (*samanu*), that is, a seed syllable, and “without seed” (*nirmanu*).

Sit in Lotus Posture (*padmasana*), on a seat (*asana*) of kusha-grass, an antelope or tiger skin, a blanket, or on earth, and face either east or north. Perform the “adoration of the Guru.”

**SAMANU** consists of three breathing cycles. Each cycle is based on a breathing ratio of 1:4:2, i.e. inhale (*puraka*) for 16 counts of the seed syllable, retain the breath (*kumbhaka*) for 64 counts, and exhale (*rechaka*) for 32 counts.

**FIRST CYCLE.** Seed syllable--of the “wind” (*vayu*) element: YAM. IN (L) nostril; RET; EX (R) nostril.

**SECOND CYCLE.** Seed syllable--of the “fire” (*agni*) element: RAM. Raise the fire from its seat at the root of the navel and join it with the earth (*prithivi*) element in the heart. IN (R) nostril; RET; EX (L) nostril.

**THIRD CYCLE.** Seed syllable: THAM. Fix the gaze on the tip of the nose (light at the tip of the nose known as the “external sign” [*bahir-lakshya*]) and contemplate there the “luminous reflection” of the “moon” (the source of the “nectar of immortality”). IN through the (L) nostril, RET with the same syllable; imagine that the “nectar flowing from the moon at the tip of the nose runs through all the vessels of the body, and purifies them” (*Gheranda*). EX with the seed syllable of the earth element (*prthivi*): LAM.

**NIRMANU** consists of the six physical cleansings (*sadhanas*): “washing” (*dhauti*), “bladder” (*basti*), *neti* (no translation), to-and-fro movement (*lauliki*), *trataka*, (no translation), skull brightening (*kapalabhati*). Refer to *Gheranda-Samhita*, chapter one for further explanations.

BENEFIT: purification of the energy channels (*nadis*).

## Pranayamas (or kumbhakas)

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### NAME (in Sanskrit)

“English”

### PRACTICE

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#### 1. SAHITA “Combined”

There are two types of sahita pranayama: “with seed” (*sagarbha*) and “without seed” (*nirgarbha*).

**SAGARBHA:** seed is the sacred syllable OM (as AUM). IN through (L) nostril (with letter A): contemplate Brahma, rajas, red. At the end of IN, before RET, perform *uddiyana-bandha*. Then RET (with the letter U): contemplate Hari, sattva, black. EX through (R) nostril (with the letter M): contemplate Shiva, tamas, white. Then repeat this process, switching nostrils for IN/EX.

**NIRGARBHA:** same as *sagarbha*, but without recitation of sacred syllable.

**BENEFITS:** levitation; cures diseases; Shakti awakened; calmness, bliss of mind; exaltation of mental powers (e.g. clairvoyance).

#### 2. SURYA-BHEDA “Sun-piercing”

IN through (R) nostril. RET with JB: hold so long as “the perspiration does not burst out from the tip of the nails and the roots of the hair” (Gheranda). EX through (L) nostril.

**BENEFITS:** destroys decay and death; awakens Kundalini shakti; increases body fire (Gheranda); cleanses the brain, sinuses (Svatmarama).

#### 3. UJJAYI “Victorious”

IN through both nostrils (with *ajapa-mantra*), fill the space between the heart and the throat (to the tips of the lungs). RET the breath in the mouth with JB. EX through (L) nostril.

**BENEFITS:** destroys decay and death; never attacked by: phlegm and nervous diseases, indigestion, dysentery, consumption, cough, fever, enlarged spleen. ALTERNATE: EX through both nostrils.

#### 4. SITKARI “Making the [sound] *sit*”

Described by Svatmarama. Similar to #5 below. Purse the lips (as if sipping from a straw) and touch the tongue to the lips. “Sip” the breath through the mouth on the IN, RET for as long as possible, then EX through both nostrils.

**BENEFITS:** become “next to the God of Love (Kama) in beauty” (Svatmarama); removes heat, hunger, indolence, sleep, thirst.

**5. SHITALI**  
“Cooling”

Imitation of the breathing of a serpent. Curl the tongue and protrude it through pursed lips (*kaki-mudra*). IN through mouth with a hissing sound. Fill the abdomen slowly and RET a short time; then EX through both nostrils. Repeat 15-20 times. The tongue protrudes further in Shitali than in Sitkari.

BENEFITS: “giver of bliss”; free from indigestion, phlegm, and bilious disorders; purifies blood; cools system; quenches thirst, appeases hunger.

**6. BHASTRIKA**  
“Bellows”

EX until pressure is felt on the heart, throat, head. Slowly draw in air through both nostrils with a hissing sound and expand abdomen, then “throw it out quickly” (*Gheranda*). Three cycles of 10-20 times each (in the morning and evening). Each cycle concludes with a deep IN, long RET, and deep EX. Then take a few normal breaths.

BENEFITS: purifies energy channels (*nadis*); never suffer from any disease; stimulates gastric fire; kundalini rises quickly, pierces the three “knots” (*granthi*) in *sushumna* (i.e. Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra), which allows the prana to ascend *sushumna* (*Svatmarama*).

ALTERNATIVES:

1. At the end of the cycle, IN through (R) nostril, RET, EX through (L) nostril, then reverse.
2. Use only one nostril for the bellows, e.g. just the (L) nostril. Inhale through the right nostril “when fatigue is experienced” (*Svatmarama*).
3. Use alternate nostrils for the bellows, e.g. first the (L), then the (R).

**7. BHRAMARI**  
“Bee”

ACCORDING TO GHERANDA: In a quiet place “past midnight,” close the ears with the hands. Listen to the sounds in the right ear. Listen for: crickets, lute, thunder, drum, beetle, bells, gongs, trumpets, etc. The last sound heard is the “unstruck” (*anahata*) sound rising from the heart. In this sound is Light, and in that Light the “mind should be immersed.”  
ACCORDING TO SVATMARAMA: IN rapidly through both nostrils with the sound of a male bee; RET; EX with the sound of a female bee.

BENEFITS: success in samadhi; indescribable happiness.

**8. MURCHHA**  
“Fainting”

ACCORDING TO GHERANDA: Fix consciousness in the space between the two eyebrows, join the mind (*manas*) with the soul (*atman*).  
ACCORDING TO SVATMARAMA: IN through both nostrils; at the end of IN, do JB, RET breath for as long as possible (until you feel like fainting); EX slowly through both nostrils.

BENEFITS: acquire the bliss of yoga.

**9. PLAVINI**

“When the belly is filled with air and the inside of the body is filled to its utmost “Floater” with air, the body floats on the deepest water, like the leaf of a lotus” (*Svatmarama*).

**10. KEVALI**  
“Absolute”

ACCORDING TO SVATMARAMA: Pranayama is of two general types: with inhalation and exhalation (*sahita*), and without inhalation and exhalation (*kevali*). Kevali is simply “confining the air with ease,” without “Alone” inhalation and exhalation.

ACCORDING TO GHERANDA: “When the full length of the wind is all confined in the body, nothing being allowed to go out, it is Kevala Kumbhaka. . . . There are no regular Rechaka and Puraka in this process. It is only (Kevala) Kumbhaka. By inspiring air by both nostrils, let him perform Kevala Kumbhaka. On the first day, let him retain from one to sixty-four times.

BENEFITS: “He who knows Pranayama and Kevali is the real Yogi” (Gheranda). “There is nothing in the three worlds which may be difficult to obtain for him who is able to keep air confined according to pleasure, by means of Kevala Kumbhaka” (Svatmarama).