

Week 5 Lesson 10: Prana

Prana is what gives your whole life flow.

Dear heart,

The best and most practical way to bring more ***Prana*** into your life is through ***Pranayama***.

Breathing practice.

We are always breathing. Yet, just like waves on the shore, like snowflakes and fingerprints, each breath is unique. But they all look alike unless you take a good look. The ancient yogis said that we are each given a certain number of these one-of-a-kind breaths per lifetime.

If we extend each breath, we can extend our lifetime, so it's recommended that we breathe slowly and deeply, as well as pay close attention to our breathing. This is the only function of our body that is both voluntary and involuntary.

While we might not be able to watch every single breath, we can start the process by doing breath observation and breath manipulation exercises.

This is Pranayama, which means *extension (ayama) of life force (prana)*.

Prana can also be translated to mean "to bring forth mystical vibration."

This is that ineffable energy that exists in sunlight, water, earth, plants, animals, people, and wind or breath.

For us humans, the most direct way to feel this universal life force is through the wavelike nature of our breathing. This reminds us that even though everything is changing all the time, we can still feel peaceful, as long as we keep in rhythm.

Whenever you feel out of sync, take a moment to lengthen and equalize your inhale and exhale. Right away you will feel more balanced. The act of mindfully watching our breathing can have just as profound of an effect as watching the ocean waves. It can help us feel alive and expansive. This is called taking a fresh start. It's available to us every moment! The only problem is that we forget about it.

Dive into this lesson with your body...not just your pen. And enjoy expanding your Prana through Pranayama.

XO

Jane

Journaling and Meditation Questions

How can you continue to develop the positive habit of taking a fresh start on a regular basis?

Try a new Pranayama practice over the next few days. There are several ways to do this. You could set four or five reminders on your phone to go off throughout your day to remind you to pause regularly to breathe and to watch your breath. Or you could start a morning and evening ritual of meditating for 10-20 minutes to watch your breath. Find a way to fit a practice of Pranayama into the next few days and write down below your plan.

NOW...practice Pranayama.

You can use online videos or apps to help you with Pranayama exercises. Or you can just simply breathe in for five counts, pause for one and exhale for five. Do this over and over again for however long you want. Start with at least five minutes and then maybe extend it to ten and then fifteen. Use the space below to make observations about Pranayama. What is hard about it? What do you notice in your body after your practice? What happens when your practice gets interrupted? (Can you start again? And again?)

Pranayama Practices

Here are a few more Pranayama practices to try. Remember to listen to your body and don't continue any breathing practice that causes you to feel light-headed or ill. You are your own best teacher here.

1. **Bhastrika Pranayama (Breath of fire):** Start by sitting tall with your legs crossed. Keep your neck and shoulders relaxed. Take a deep breath through your nose to fill your lungs. Now, exhale forcefully with a hissing sound. Do this for about 5 minutes or 21 times.

2. **Kumbhaka Pranayama (Breath retention):** Sit in a cross-legged position with your hands on your knees. Keep your spine and shoulders relaxed but straight. Inhale and exhale normally for a couple of times. Then, inhale, hold it in for 6 counts and exhale. On the next breath increase the time you retain the air inside your lungs to 7 counts. And then 8. Increase the time until it becomes too much. Then breathe normally. Practicing this exercise each day can help you grow your ability to hold your breath, which expands your lungs.

3. **Simhasana (Lion's Breath)** Start by kneeling down on the floor with your arms on your knees and your ankles crossed. Now, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth by opening your mouth wide and sticking out your tongue. Your tongue should be towards your chin. While exhaling, make a long 'ha' sound. Do this a couple of times and then relax. You can also do Lion's Breath in the cat/cow yoga pose.

4. **Mrigi Mudra Pranayam (Single Nostril Breathing)**

Mrigi mudra is how you hold your fingers. So, curl your middle finger and index finger and press them on the base of your thumb. Keep your other fingers stretched. Use your right hand for the mudra if you are a right-handed person and left hand if you are a left-hander. Now, sit in a cross-legged position and keep your back, shoulder and neck straight. Bring your hand near your nose and use your pinky to close your left nostril. Inhale from the right then close your right nostril with the thumb to exhale from the left nostril. Do this about five times and then relax.

5. **Kapalabhati Pranayam (Skull shining)**

Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position. Keep your spine, shoulders and neck in a straight line. Keep your palms on your knees. Now, take a deep breath and expel it out with short contraction of your abdomen muscles. Try to do around five exhalations for a single inhalation. Eventually, increase it to 10 exhalations per one inhalation.