

The Complete Principles of Pranayama
As Taught by Sri BNS Iyengar
Compiled by Joey Paz, Mysore India 2013-2025

Module 1: Vishama Vritti Pranayama
Lesson 1

For the common man, to stop the breath is death. For the yogi, it is Samadhi. The purpose of Pranayama is realization. Realization means uniting Common Soul with Super Soul. Pranayama is required to mingle with the divine.

Just as steps are required to reach the top floor from the bottom floor of a building, steps are also required to unite Common Soul with Super Soul. This is why Pranayama requires proper principles.

To build the steps from the 1st floor to the 2nd floor of a building, materials are required - water, cement, brick, stone, and so forth. Like that, principles are required to properly practice pranayama. Asana is the ground floor of yoga practice. It must be strong before you begin to build on top of it. Pranayama is the stairway to the higher states of yoga.

What happens if you try to build a stairwell with improper procedures or measurements? You must measure your materials precisely. You need water, concrete, wood, metal, and stone in exact proportions. Otherwise it is not a stairwell. This is why ratios are important. Proper principles are required. Without the proper measurements, your stairwell is unstable and dangerous. Without proper principles, pranayama can be destabilizing to the mind and nervous system. Pranayama must be conducted *systematically*. This is very important.

See the hand: the pinky finger represents the body. The ring finger represents the mind. The middle finger represents intellect (Buddhi). The first finger represents common soul (Jivatman), and the thumb represents the supersoul (Atman). The mind is the chain of thoughts. The intellect is memory and logic. You go to the market. The mind is telling you, "You need this, you need this, you need this." But, it is the intellect that tells you the proper proportions to purchase for ingredients. This is the difference between mind and intellect.

Shanka mudra must be used to conduct pranayama. The thumb is used to close the right nostril; pinky and ring fingers are used to close the left nostril; index and middle finger are tucked into the hollow of the hand. Shanka is a conch shell, representing the primal vibration of OM.

For the common man, the passage of time depends on the movement of the sun. For the yogi, the passage of time depends on the number of breaths. It is under your control. We cannot control the movement of the sun. But, yogis can control the breath and therefore conquer time. Long breathing, long life. Short breathing, short life. A dog breathes 80 times per minute, panting all the time. This is why dogs have short life spans. But, a tortoise breathes only 4 times per minute and lives 400 years.

Common Man

60 seconds = 1 minute
60 minutes = 1 hour
24 hours = 1 day
365 days = 1 year

Yogi

15 breaths = 1 minute
1 hour = 60 X 15 or 900 breaths
1 day = 900 X 24 or 21,600 breaths
1 year = 21,600 X 365 or 7,884,000 breaths

100 years = Age of man. One lifetime.
Retain the breath, postpone the death.

To convert water into steam, heat is required. Water cannot rise to mingle with the sky on its own, it must first become steam. As such, the body cannot become divine on its own, it must first be converted. Soul rises like steam to mingle with the divine. With Pranayama we create heat in the body in order to convert the body into mind, mind into intellect, and intellect into soul. Then, we get power. Become divine. Now, education in the principles of pranayama begins.

Vishama Vritti Pranayama (Uneven Rotation Pranayama)

Before beginning any pranayama practice, you must remove the stale air from your lungs. Exhale and empty your lungs completely through the left nostril. Why the left nostril? To represent taking birth from your mother. The left nostril represents the feminine pingala nadi (Moon). The right nostril represents the masculine ida nadi (Sun). First you must prepare yourself for Vishama Vritti.

Preparation for Pranayama

Close the right nostril with the thumb. Exhale through the left nostril. Empty the lungs completely. Close the left nostril with the pinky and ring finger.

Inhale right while counting to 12 mentally- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Exhale right while counting to 12 mentally - 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close the right, open the left. No retention.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. Empty the lungs completely. Relax the mudra. Take a deep breath in through both nostrils. Normal breathing. This completes the preparation for vishama vritti.

Vishama Vritti: 1st ratio, 12-12-12

Retention is the 3rd force necessary for pranayama. Previously there was no retention. Only preparation. Now proper pranayama will begin.

The 12 count retention represents concentration in Ajña Chakra, the 3rd eye center, the place of intellect (Buddhi). The gaze is here during the 12 count ratio of Vishama Vritti. As with preparation for Vishama Vritti, each inhalation, retention, and exhalation will repeat 3 times on each side, for a total of 7 retentions.

3 and 7 are both uneven numbers, which gives this Pranayama its name- *Vishama*=Uneven *Vritti*=Rotation. Step by step method as follows:

Close the right nostril with the thumb. Always exhale through the left nostril to begin. Empty the lungs completely. Close the left nostril with the pinky and ring finger.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.
Close both. Retain. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.
Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.
Close both. Retain. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.
Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.
Close both. Retain. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.
Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.
Close both. Retain. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Open the left. Right is closed.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.
Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.
Close both sides. Retain. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. Empty the lungs completely. Relax the mudra.

Take a deep breath in through both nostrils. Normal breathing.

This is one round of Vishama Vritti 1st ratio. Repeat 5-10 times.

Vishama Vritti Pranayama, 2nd ratio

You go to the market to buy vegetables. You select the vegetables and bring them home. You wash them, one time or maybe two times to clean them. But do you only wash the vegetables? No- what is the purpose of washing the vegetables only? You must cook the vegetables before they spoil and go to waste. In Yoga, asana practice is only washing the vegetables. Preparing the body. Pranayama practice is cooking the vegetables. Don't become obsessed with washing the vegetables only. Cook the food! Eat the vegetables! Absorb their power.

But- you cannot cook vegetables in a clay pot. The heat will destroy it. Asana practice converts the clay pot of the body into steel, so that it can withstand the higher currents of cosmic heat (Prana) generated through pranayama practice. This cosmic heat is necessary to "cook the vegetables"- meaning to convert gross body (*Sthula Sharira*) into subtle body (*Sukshma Sharira*), and subtle body into causal or astral body (*Karana Sharira*).

In other words, step by step, converting food into blood, blood into bindu (potential energy/procreative energy), bindu into mind, mind into intellect, intellect into consciousness, and consciousness into SUPERCONSCIOUSNESS. Superconsciousness is realization. Realization is the purpose of Pranayama.

Now we move to the 2nd ratio of Vishama Vritti Pranayama.

Vishama Vritti: 2nd ratio, 12-18-12

As we discussed in lesson 1, the 12 count kumbhaka represents Ajña chakra, the 3rd eye region. It is the place of intellect. After you have mastered the 12-count retention ratio, (meaning you can conduct it in comfort, without mental anxiety, trembling of the body, or gasping), you are prepared to increase the kumbhaka to 18. The 18 count retention is associated with Anahata Chakra, the region of the heart. In pranayama, we are moving downward through Shushumna nadi towards Muladhara Chakra in order to clear the path and finally open the gateway for kundalini to rise.

Now we will move from 12 count retention representing Ajña chakra to 18 count retention representing Anahata chakra, heart.

Begin: Close the right nostril with the thumb. Exhale through the left nostril. Empty the lungs completely. Close the left nostril with the pinky and ring finger.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 18. Internal concentration is on Anahata Chakra.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 18.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 18.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 18.

Open the left.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 18.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 18.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhal left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 18.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. Empty the lungs completely. Relax the mudra. Take a deep breath in through both sides. Normal breathing.

This is one round of Vishama Vritti, 2nd ratio. Repeat 5-10 times.

Module 1- Vishama Vritti, 3rd ratio: 12-24-12

For the common person, money is the currency. For a Yogi, Prana is the currency. It must be earned by your practice. But, before you begin to earn money, you must first learn a trade. Yama & Niyama are going to school to learn a trade. Then, you may begin to earn a living and gain currency. Asana practice is gaining the currency. Pranayama is getting a raise - Increasing the currency. But, you cannot begin earning currency before first learning a trade. You cannot go directly into asana. You must build a basement before beginning to construct a house. Yama & Niyama are the basement of Patanjala Yoga. These are the 10 principles of natural law. The Yogi has taken these vows. If you go directly into asana without first standing upon the firm ground of Yama & Niyama, you cannot reach Samadhi. Build a strong basement first, then begin to construct your house. Without building a strong basement, you cannot have a ground floor. Without a ground floor, there is nothing from which to construct your stairwell. As we've said before, constructing the stairwell is pranayama. We are in the process of constructing a strong, sturdy stairwell.

Moving from 18 count to 24 count retention represents moving from Anahata (heart) region to Manipura (navel) region. This is the region of the fire element. The Manipura chakra region is associated with desire for money, fame, and sex. When it is out of balance it results in excessive anger, lust, cupidity (covetousness), enmity, and desire for prestige. To reach realization, we must conquer these 6 enemies. We conquer these 6 enemies by directing this Yoga Fire (*Yogagni*) cultivated in Pranayama for Tapas (austerity & discipline towards transformation and self-mastery) rather than the power simply to fulfill ego-based desires. In other words, using fire to cook our food rather than to harm or burn others to gain an advantage over them. Last week we spoke of cooking the vegetables. To cook the vegetables, first we must have fire. In Pranayama, we are adding fuel to this fire. If we are not careful to use this fire for alchemy, transforming ego-based desires towards states of higher consciousness, we run the risk of burning ourselves and others.

Mastery of the 24 count retention with conscious awareness in the region of the Yoga Fire, Manipura chakra, represents this victory. We now move to the 3rd ratio of Vishama Vritti.

To begin: Exhale through the left nostril. Empty the lungs completely.

Inhale right for 12. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 24 counts. Inner awareness in Manipura Chakra.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 24.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 24.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 24.

Open the left. Close the right.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both sides. Retain for 24.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 24.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 24.

Open Right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. Exhale. Empty the lungs completely.

Relax the mudra. Normal breathing.

This is one round of Vishama Vritti 3rd ratio. Repeat 5-10 times.

Vishama Vritti - 4th ratio

Pavamana Mantra

From the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad (To set the intention for Pranayama ritual)

Om asato mā sadgamaya
tamaso mā jyotirgamaya
mṛtyormā'mṛtaṁ gamaya
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti

Lead me from the untruth to the Truth.

Lead me from darkness to light.

Lead me from death to immortality

Om Peace Peace Peace

Historically, religious people have conducted festivals, ceremonies, and so many religious rituals (Yajña). But, those who are not in connection with these religious functions, those who have rejected this society, living on their own terms, they are called Yogis. They don't go to temples. They don't do their father's religious ceremonies. So, how can they get realization? By raising the Kundalini. Kundalini rising is the purpose of a Yogi. That is, all the effects of a religious ritual, he (the Yogi) himself, sitting in one place, practicing Pranayama, he can achieve. The ritual is internalized. The fire is inside. This is Yogic Tapas-sacrifice and dedication. With this internal fire the Yogi can conquer time. Conquer hunger and thirst. Conquer the world. In Pranayama, you are sacrificing the ego into the fire that you yourself create with the heat of your Tapasya (internal sacrifice and self-dedication). It is this intensifying yogic heat that awakens the sleeping Kundalini. See, religious people (the Brahmin caste) have placed restrictions- certain people can conduct certain rituals and ceremonies. Others should not do these ceremonies. There are social restrictions. But, for a Yogi, to raise the Kundalini, there is no restriction. The second birth for a Yogi is the rising of Kundalini.

Now we will move to the 30 count retention representing mastery over Muladhara chakra and the earth element. Muladhara Chakra is the gateway into the central channel, Shushumna Nadi. This gateway must be open for Kundalini to rise.

Vishama Vritti: 4th ratio, 12-30-12

Close the right nostril with the thumb. Exhale completely through the left nostril.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 30.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 30.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 30.

Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 30.

Open the left. Right is closed.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both sides. Retain for 30.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 30.

Exhale left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Inhal left. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

Close both. Retain for 30.

Open the right. Exhale right. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12. Empty the lungs completely. Relax the mudra. Normal breathing.

This is one round of Vishama Vritti 4th ratio. Repeat 5-10 times.

This ratio concludes Vishama Vritti Pranayama. Once you feel stable in Vishama Vritti, you are prepared to move into the next Pranayama, *Nadi Shodhana Pranayama*.

Module 2:

Nadi Shodhana Pranayama (Pulse Purification Pranayama)

Lesson 1

According to the Yogic scriptures, there are 72,000 *Nadis* or pulses in the human body. These are the conduits or channels through which currents of Prana travel in the body. The Nadis originate from a gland below the navel called *kanda*. Shodhana means “purification.” Vishama Vritti Pranayama brings balance and begins to increase the currents of Prana. Nadi Shodhana Pranayama purifies the Nadis and removes blockages, allowing Prana to flow smoothly in Pranamaya Kosha- the sheath or layer of the life force.

Pranayama is the culmination of Hatha Yoga. Hatha Yoga means Pranayama, nothing more. The west has confused Hatha Yoga with physical posture. Ha means sun, Tha means moon. That is, Pingala and Ida. This must be understood. Pranayama is Hatha Yoga. Hatha Yoga is Pranayama. Nadi Shodhana must be conducted to purify and strengthen the Nadis to prepare for Kundalini to rise. Kundalini rising is the second birth for a Yogi. It is quite necessary for liberation.

You see, the body is an iron slab. It must be magnetized. If you rub a magnet on an iron slab, it rearranges the molecules of the iron. It becomes magnetized. Molecules are arranged right and left, according to their negative or positive charge. Properly arranging the right and the left. “Vinyasa” means “arranging principle.” The arrangement is according to Surya (sun) and Chandra (moon) channels. That is Pingala and Ida nadis. Arranging Sun and Moon. That is Pranayama. That is the purpose of both Asana and Pranayama in Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga. We are magnetizing the body, arranging the

molecules properly on the left and right side, so that our system can withstand the voltage of Kundalini rising.

Nadi Shodhana: 1st ratio, 12-12-12

In Nadi Shodhana, there are 6 inhales and exhales on each side, with 6 retentions.

As before, always empty by exhaling through the left nostril. Empty the lungs completely. Close the left. Begin with an inhale on the right.

Inhale right for 12.

Close the right.

Retain for 12.

Left is open. Exhale left for 12.

Inhale left for 12. Close it.

Retain for 12.

Open the right. Exhale for 12.

Inhale right for 12. Close it.

Retain for 12.

Left is open. Exhale for 12.

Inhale left for 12. Close it.

Retain for 12.

Right is open. Exhale right for 12.

Inhale right for 12. Close it.

Retain for 12.

Left is open. Exhale left for 12.

Inhale left for 12. Close it.
Retain for 12.

Right is open. Exhale right for 12. Finished.

One round complete. Repeat 5-10 times.

Patanjali Yoga Sutra 2:49

Tasmin sati śvāsa-prāśvāsyor-gati-vicchedaḥ prāṇāyāma

tasmin = after this (referring to asana in the previous sutra)

sati = being accomplished

śvāsa = inhaling

prāśvāsyor = (from *prāśvāsa*) exhaling

gati = movement

vicchedaḥ = interruption; braking; ceasing; mastering

prāṇa = life force; life energy

yāma = bind; regulate

āyāma = release; liberate

prāṇāyāmaḥ = harmony with life energy; yoga breathing exercises

Swami Satchidananda Translation:

That [firm posture] being acquired, the movements of inhalation and exhalation should be controlled. This is pranayama.

BKS Iyengar Translation:

Pranayama is the regulation of the incoming and outgoing flow of breath with retention. It is to be practised only after perfection in asana is attained.

Ronald Steiner Translation:

Once harmony with the physical body has been achieved, through interruption of the movement engendered by inhaling and exhaling you attempt to harmonize your energy (pranayama).

Seth Powell Translation:

That [Āsana] being in place, Prāṇāyāma (breath-control) is cutting off the flow of the in-breath and out-breath.

Module 2:

**Nadi Shodhana Pranayama
(Pulse Purification Pranayama)**

Lesson 2

There are 5 types of prana... that is Vayu. Air. Prana is in the heart. It must be converted into soul. Outside the body it is air. Inside the body it is breath. In the body it is life. Life is breath. Breath is life. Outside air must be converted into inside life. Through Pranayama, life is converted into soul.

Soul means, it can become separate from the body, then it rises to mingle with divinity. But, for air to be converted into soul, it must be heated. Pranayama is the heating.

So, this body is a vessel. The content of the vessel is water. The water must be heated for it to become steam. It can only be heated by Pranayama.

Then, certainly it separates from the body in the form of soul.

Think of it as gas. That is steam. If water is life, then steam is the soul.

Understand? Beginning outside the body it is air. In the body it is breath. Breath is life. Life is converted into Soul. Soul is steam. Steam can rise to mingle with space. That is Ether. Akasha. Transcending the 5 elements. Water cannot rise until it is heated and becomes steam. When the breath of life is converted into soul, then it can rise to mingle with the Supreme Consciousness. When you separate the water from the vessel by heating, it can go to heaven. That is, Superconsciousness. Religious people call it heaven. Yogis call it Superconsciousness. Unless you separate the water from the vessel, there can be no Realization. The physical body

must be converted into subtle body, just as water must be converted into steam in order to rise.

That is the purpose of Pranayama.

Nadi Shodhana: 2nd ratio 12-18-12

18 count retention represents anahata chakra or heart. This is the place of mind. Whether we are doing Vishama Vritti or Nadi Shodhana, mastering the 18 count retention represents conquering the mind, or chain of thoughts.

Exhale through the left nostril. Empty the lungs completely. Close the left.

Inhale right for 12.

Close the right. Retain for 18.

Left is open. Exhale left for 12.

Inhale left for 12. Close it.

Retain for 18.

Open the right. Exhale right for 12.

Inhale right for 12. Close it.

Retain for 18.

Left is open. Exhale for 12.

Inhale left for 12. Close it.

Retain for 18.

Right is open. Exhale right for 12.

Inhale right for 12. Close it.

Retain for 18.

Left is open. Exhale left for 12.

Inhale left for 12. Close it.

Retain for 18.

Right is open. Exhale right for 12.

One round complete. Repeat 5-10 times.

Patanjali Sutra 2:50

बाह्याभ्यन्तरस्थम्भ वृत्तिः देशकालसंख्याभिः परिदृष्टो दीर्घसूक्ष्मः ॥५०॥

bāhya-ābhyantara-sthambha vṛttiḥ deśa-kāla-sankhyābhiḥ paridr̥ṣṭo dīrgha-sūkṣmaḥ
॥50॥

bāhya = external; exhalation

abhyantara = internal; inhalation

stambha = steadiness; restraint; suspension; stationary

vṛttiḥ = (nom. from *vṛtti*) wave; thoughts; thought waves; movement

deśa = place; technique

kāla = time

sankhyābhiḥ = (nom. from *sankhyābhi*) number; mathematics

paridr̥ṣṭo = (from *paridr̥ṣṭa*) measured; regulated; precisely observed; verified

dīrgha = long; extended

sūkṣmaḥ = (nom. from *sūkṣma*) subtle; fine

Swami Satchitananda Translation:

The modifications of the life-breath are either external, internal or stationary. They are to be regulated by space, time and number and are either long or short.

BKS Iyengar Translation:

Pranayama has three movements: prolonged and fine inhalation, exhalation and retention; all regulated with precision according to duration and place.

Ronald Steiner Translation;

Exhalation, inhalation, retention, technique, time and number must be very precisely regulated over a lengthy period.

Seth Powell translation:

[The breath's] movement is external, internal, and arrested; observed according to place, time, and number, it [becomes] long and subtle.

Module 2:
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama
(Pulse Purification Pranayama)

Lesson 3

In Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna asks Krishna, “Is concentration of the mind possible?”

With steadiness of your continual, regular practice and dedication, concentration of mind will come. In Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the mind is compared to mercury. If it falls to the ground, it becomes millions of pieces. But on the total, it is one substance. Like that, our minds seem to be composed of millions of thoughts. If it comes down to one thought, that is concentration. Converting your past and future thoughts means coming to concentration. In meditation, you are gazing at a flame. That is one thought. You are converting your past thoughts into present thoughts. That is concentration. That means converting that mind (manas) into intellect (Buddhi). To the flame. No future thoughts. No past thoughts.

But, it is very difficult to concentrate one one thought! It is as difficult as catching the air with your hand!

That's why Patanjali gives Pranayama as a precursor to meditation. Pranayama first, then Dharana. Control the breath first to control the mind. Then, to go to concentration. Meditation. Superconsciousness.

So, the principle of this Pranayama is to learn how to concentrate perfectly, to convert mind into intellect, which is necessary to take you to Samadhi! Understand? If you go to Samadhi, you have forgotten the past, forgotten the future, forgotten this body. Then, there is no time. You have conquered time. No past, no future. Only God.

Nadi Shodhana: 3rd ratio, 12-24-12

With the 24 count retention, we move to Manipura, the region of fire.

Exhale through the left nostril. Empty the lungs completely. Close the left.

Inhale right for 12.

Close the right. Retain for 24.

Left is open. Exhale left for 12.

Inhale left for 12. Close it.

Retain for 24.

Open the right. Exhale for 12.

Inhale right for 12. Close it.

Retain for 24.

Left is open. Exhale for 12.

Inhale left for 12. Close it.

Retain for 24.

Right is open. Exhale right for 12.
Inhale right for 12. Close it.
Retain for 24.

Left is open. Exhale left for 12.
Inhale left for 12. Close it.
Retain for 24.

Right is open. Exhale right for 12.

One round complete. Repeat 5-10 times.

Patanjali Sutra 2:51

बाह्याभ्यन्तर विषयाक्षेपी चतुर्थः ॥५१॥

bāhya-ābhyantara viṣaya-akṣepī caturthaḥ

bāhya = external

abhyantara = internal

viṣayā = region; sphere

bāhya-ābhyantara = external retention; breath retention after exhalation

abhyantara-viṣayā = breath retention after inhaling

ākṣepī = going beyond; surpassing

caturthaḥ = the fourth

BKS Iyengar translation:

The fourth type of pranayama transcends the external and internal pranayamas, and appears effortless and non-deliberate.

Swami Satchidananda translation:

There is a fourth kind of pranayama that occurs during concentration on an internal or external object.

Ronald Steiner translation:

The fourth pranayama technique ultimately transcends breath retention after exhaling or inhaling.

Seth Powell Translation:

The fourth [type of Prāṇāyāma] leads beyond external and internal objects.

Nadi Shodhana: 4th ratio 12-30-12

With the 30 count retention, we move to Muladhara, the root region. This is where we must open the divine gate leading to Shushumna Nadi.

Exhale through the left nostril. Empty the lungs completely. Close the left.

Inhale right for 12.

Close the right. Retain for 30.

Left is open. Exhale left for 12.

Inhale left for 12. Close.

Retain for 30.

Open the right. Exhale for 12.

Inhale right for 12. Close.

Retain for 30.

Left is open. Exhale for 12.

Inhale left for 12. Close it.
Retain for 30.

Right is open. Exhale right for 12.
Inhale right for 12. Close it.
Retain for 30.

Left is open. Exhale left for 12.
Inhale left for 12. Close it.
Retain for 30.

Right is open. Exhale right for 12.

One round complete. Repeat 5-10 times.
This ratio completes Nadi Shodhana pranayama.

Patanjali Sutra 2:52

tataḥ kṣīyate prakāśa-āvaraṇam ||52||

tataḥ = (from *tata*) then; thereby; thence; from that
kṣīyate = is destroyed; thinned; diminishes; vanishes
prakāśa = light
āvaranam = (acc. from *āvarana*) veil; covering

Swami Satchidananda Translation:

As its result, the veil over the inner Light is destroyed.

BKS Iyengar Translation:

Pranayama removes the veil covering the light of knowledge and heralds the dawn of wisdom.

Ronald Steiner Translation:

The veil covering the light of the true self then vanishes.

Seth Powell Translation:

From this, the covering of illumination is destroyed.

Module 3:***Sheethali Pranayama*
(Cooling Pranayama)**

Sheethali pranayama generates a cooling effect on the body. Contracting the nervous system is called cooling. The nervous system expands when heated. Yogis do not eat cold food, drink cold drinks, or take cold showers. If the nervous system/pulse system becomes too contracted, circulation is affected. Yogis do not take cold liquid. The yogi must cool him or herself with this pranayama only.

Method:

Sit with a straight spine. Exhale through the nostrils, empty the lungs. Roll the tongue and inhale as slowly and deeply as possible through the rolled tongue. No count for inhale. Fill the lungs completely. Hold. Conduct Jalandhara Bandha. Do not focus on Mula Bandha during retention. If the spine is straight and the trunk is steady, Mula Bandha will engage on its own. Merely focus on Jalandhara Bandha during the retention. Hold for 25 counts. Raise the head and exhale slowly through the nostrils. Relax and take 3-5 normal breaths. Repeat 5 times.

The 25 count represents nature. 25 is a multiple of the 5 elements. If man conquers the 5 elements, he conquers the nature and achieves realization. If nature conquers man, he gets rebirth. When comfortable with 25 count retention, increase to 30 count retention.

Module 4:
Bhastrika Pranayama
(Bellows Breath): “The King of Pranayamas”

This pranayama generates extreme internal heat to purify the system in preparation for the final Pranayama, Shakti Chalana.

Method:

Sit in a firm asana with a straight spine. Conduct Uddiyana Bandha. Contract the face. Concentrate on the tip of the nose. Inhale and exhale forcefully and powerfully through the nostrils 8 full times. Body should not oscillate. Shoulders should not move up and down. On the 9th inhale, retain internal kumbhaka conducting Jalandhara Bandha for 15 counts. After 15 counts, release Jalandhara Bandha and exhale through the nostrils. This is one round of Bhastrika. Repeat 5 times. After several weeks, increase the retention to 20 counts, then 25, then 30.

Benefits of Bhastrika pranayama:

1. There is a disease of the nose called sinusitis that is incurable by medicine. Only this pranayama can cure it.

2. The link where the spine meets the skull will be strengthened. If this link is severed, immediate death results. This is how they execute people by hanging. Bhastrika prevents separation of this link.
3. Lubricates the joints with oxygen.
4. Spondylitis will never arise.
5. Irrigates the medulla with blood to give energy and enthusiasm.
6. Memory is improved.
7. Deafness will never occur.
8. Cataracts will never form.
9. Exercises the face and cheek muscles and makes the skin glow. Pimples will not form. No wrinkles will form on the skin into old age.
10. Thus, Bhastrika is the king pranayamas with the most health benefits.

Module 5:
Shakti Chalana Pranayama
(Kundalini Rising Pranayama)

The purpose of Shakti Chalana pranayama is to raise the kundalini. Kundalini is the name of the Goddess Shakti dwelling as cosmic electricity in the human system. She sleeps in the form of the cosmic serpent, coiled at the base of the spine in Muladhara chakra. When awakened by heat generated in Shakti Chalana pranayama, she rises like *surpashiki*, or a cobra's hood, to Sahasrara chakra. Shakti Chalana is the one and only pranayama that can raise the kundalini.

Shakti Chalana: 1st ratio, 6-24-12-12-24-6

Method:

Exhale through the left nostril. Empty the lungs completely. Close the left.

Inhale right for 6.

Close the right. Retain for 24.

Left is open. Exhale left for 12.

Inhale left for 12. Close it.

Retain for 24.

Open the right. Exhale for 6.

This completes one round of Shakti Chalana. Repeat 10 times.

Shakti Chalana: 2nd ratio, 8-32-16-16-32-8

Method:

Exhale through the left nostril. Empty the lungs completely. Close the left.

Inhale right for 8.

Close the right. Retain for 32.

Left is open. Exhale left for 16.

Inhale left for 16. Close it.

Retain for 32.

Open the right. Exhale for 8.

This completes one round of Shakti Chalana, 2nd ratio. Repeat 10 times.

Shakti Chalana: 3rd ratio, 10-40-20-20-40-10

Method:

Exhale through the left nostril. Empty the lungs completely. Close the left.

Inhale right for 10.

Close the right. Retain for 40.

Left is open. Exhale left for 20.

Inhale left for 20. Close the left.

Retain for 40.

Open the right. Exhale for 10.

This completes one round of Shakti Chalana, 3rd ratio. Repeat 10 times.

Shakti Chalana: 4th ratio, 12-48-24-24-48-12

Method:

Exhale through the left nostril. Empty the lungs completely. Close the left.

Inhale right for 12.

Close the right. Retain for 48.

Left is open. Exhale left for 24.

Inhale left for 24. Close it.

Retain for 48.

Open the right. Exhale for 12.

This completes one round of Shakti Chalana, 4th ratio. Repeat 10 times.

This ratio concludes Shakti Chalana Pranayama.

After reaching this stage of Pranayama practice, you are prepared for the *48 day Pranayama Mandala*. This is a secret initiation that cannot be divulged here. Only in person by Guruji, or one of his students who has undergone this initiation themselves. The result is far too profound to be described, and is only for the most courageous and devoted seekers of the Ultimate Reality.

Daily pranayama practice:

(Pranayama must be conducted *after* asana practice and not before.)

1. Vishama Vritti (12-30-12) 5 times
2. Nadhi Shodhana (12-30-12) 5 times
3. Bhastrika OR Sheetali with 30 count kumbhaka (Choose one only, do not do both) 5-10 times
4. Shakti Chalana (10-40-20-20-40-10) 10 times.

*When practicing asana, the 10-40-20-20-40-10 ratio of Shakti Chalana is quite sufficient.

This concludes the complete pranayama system of Sri BNS Iyengar.

Epilogue

Throughout all the years of studying and all the teachings I have received from Guruji, the one that has stuck with me the most is this:

One day, a yogi goes to the market to buy food for lunch. At his favorite food stall, he orders a piece of chapati bread. Separately, he also orders a bit of ghee to put on the chapati. After receiving his food, he decides he wants a chai as well. He orders the chai, and places his food down on the bench next to him as he sits to drink his chai. Just as he takes his first sip, a dirty, ragged street dog sneaks up behind, grabs the chapati in its mouth, and flees with it. Immediately he leaps up, and begins running after the dog, chasing it all through the market yelling, 'Wait! Wait! You forgot the ghee!'

This must be the yogi's attitude towards every living being.

The Complete Pranayama Teachings of BNS Iyengar,
Compiled by Joey Paz, 2013-2025
Mysore, India
www.joeypazyoga.com
joeypazyoga@gmail.com