

The Three Bandhas

When the Yogi has perfected his Asanas he should practice Pranayama according to the instructions of his master. With controlled senses he should nourish himself with moderation. (Chapter 5, verse 1, Hatha Yoga Pradipika).

Bandha means catching hold of, control. It can mean a posture where certain organs or parts of the body are contracted and controlled. There are three main Bandhas which are important to Pranayama; Mula Bandha, Uddiyana Bandha and Jalandhara Bandha.

Breath can be retained with the lungs full or empty. When breath is restrained it is called Kumbhaka (breath retention). The Bandhas are used with Kumbhaka to channel Kundalini in the Sushumna Nadi and to further the process of becoming one with the absolute. The breath can be held to different stages of practice. 1, till you feel like you want to breathe. 2, until the need for breath is strong. 3, till there is a primal fear that you must breathe or die. 4, until you perspire and tremble. The breath should always be under your control and you should be able to exhale or inhale smoothly after Kumbhaka. Some benefits of Kumbhaka include the stimulating of "internal cellular" breathing which happens in the cells when there is no new oxygen coming into the lungs. It creates a state of emergency in the body which forces the cells to speed up their metabolic activity in order to maintain equilibrium. They become more efficient in their use of oxygen and more efficient in the release of carbon dioxide as well as other toxins. Reserves of prana and oxygen are drawn out from regions of the body otherwise not accessed. During Kumbhaka one experienced a deep sense of introversion. Contraindications for Kumbhaka can include high blood pressure and other heart conditions, heavy menstruation and recent surgery.

The Bandhas:

Mula Bandha:

Mula means root, source, origin or cause, base or foundation. Its location is at the base of the spine (perineum). This Banda is used to lock the energy, to keep it from going downward. It seals the foundation so that the energy can rise upward. When mastered this Bandha should be used in asana practice whenever possible (standing, backbends and first chakra poses). This Bandha can be practiced with Puraka (internal) or Rechaka (external) Kumbhaka. Especially good for the organs of reproduction.

Technique: You can try this Bandha in the table position, exhaling into cat (chin and tailbone curling down and back arching). This draws the Mula in naturally. You can also try this from a sitting or standing position, just exhale and feel the vacuum drawing the energy up naturally. With continued practice work toward using less muscle for the same lifted feeling. Practice until you can feel the area being drawn upward energetically without (or minimally) using the muscles. For beginners, try exhaling completely and continue contracting the muscles even more

and then draw the energy up from the perineal floor. Practice contracting and releasing this Bandha several times until you can do it easily with the breath either held in or out (Kumbhaka).

Uddiyana Bandha:

Uddiyana means flying up. This Bandha is used to continue the upward flow of energy (Kundalini) through the Sushumna Nadi. The abdomen is drawn in and up; to lift the diaphragm and internal organs up into or toward the chest (thorax). Tones and strengthens the abdominal muscles and improve the function of the organs of digestion and elimination. This Bandha is only practiced on Rechaka (external) Kumbhaka.

Technique: after exhaling completely and holding the breath out, the abdomen is drawn in as far as possible and then drawn upward. Uddiyana is never practiced holding the breath in (Antara Kumbhaka). Hint: try exhaling completely and closing the mouth and nose attempt to breathe in abruptly. This suction will allow you to feel the contraction required to perform the Uddiyana Bandha. Or use your hand on your belly and help lift the inners as you contract and lift eventually being able to do this naturally.

Jalandhara Bandha:

Jalandhara Bandha means a net, a web, a lattice or a mesh. In Jalandhara Bandha the neck and throat are contracted, the back of the neck lengthened and the chin is lowered toward the chest. This position contains prana within the container (prana body) If performed incorrectly one feels pressure on the heart, eyes, ears and brain and even cause headaches. This Bandha can be practiced with Puraka (internal) or Rechaka (external) Kumbhaka.

Technique: This is the position of the neck in Sarvangasana (shoulder stand). From a sitting position, lengthen the back of the neck, lower the chin toward the chest and attempt to swallow to complete the seal in the throat.

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