

# Meditation Using Pranayama

Thousands of years ago the yogis began trying to understand the meaning of life, the ultimate reality; what's me and what's not me. They contemplated many things and experimented with many techniques. They took this pursuit very seriously and some spent their lifetime trying to see beyond the veil of illusion to know this total reality. One of the ways they used to see beyond this veil was meditation. Through meditation they found that they could observe reality without participating in it as it's happening. They recognized that their mind's perception of reality was limited and was only part of the totality of true reality. They found that during meditation they could observe that they could be consciously aware of reality. This conscious awareness is the foundation of meditation. They believed that the individual consciousness itself is part of a universal consciousness or supreme intelligence; the source of true reality. This consciousness or intelligence is responsible for all things every where. Prakriti is the energy of creation, the universal life force that we experience as energy. The yogis found that they could be consciously aware of this energy through meditation. Energy is Prana (life force), the mover of all things, and Prana is in all things everywhere.

In the past, before a student could learn yoga from a master, the student was given instruction on Pranayama and was expected to practice regularly until the student gained some mastery over their energy source (Prana). Through direct experience the yogis found that Pranic energy was the mover of all things, the universal life force, the primordial energy. They felt that Pranayama was more important than the yoga postures. If your Prana is weak then your life force is weak, so by mastering Pranayama you become a participator instead of a spectator in the over all quality of your life and you're healthier for doing so.

Any activity that is repeated with conscious awareness can lead to meditation. The word meditation describes a state of consciousness that is focused, to keep the mind present on a particular activity or observance. During meditation, regardless of which type you are practicing, your goal is to become the experience and the one doing the experiencing at the same time. This isn't easy to do. In order to get out of your head (mind) and into experiencing without judgment or desire, most people need something to do. That's one of the reasons why the techniques are used, to provide the mind with something to do so that all other mental activity subsides, leaving only the experience.

Pranayama meditation is similar to breath observance meditation but it requires the meditator to be actively involved in the process. The yogis used Pranayama meditation to manipulate their Prana in order to achieve greater vitality, strength and power. They believed they could harness the primordial energy itself. Such mastery took complete dedication. Like anything you do to become healthier, even a little Pranayama practice can be beneficial. By practicing Pranayama as a meditation technique you will enhance your overall health and wellbeing. Practicing Pranayama as meditation trains the mind to observe what is happening in the moment; breathing. By using the complete (Dirgha) or ocean sounding (Ujjayi) breath which are both, long slow and nurturing, the mind relaxes into the experience and the activity begins to happen on its own. The action and the one acting become one in the same.

To use Pranayama as a meditation technique, the breath you use must be one that you can do comfortably for an extended amount of time. If you become anxious or frustrated you will not relax into the experience. In fact your frustrations will lead you farther away from the present moment as you entertain counterproductive thoughts and feelings.

By using Pranayama as a meditation technique you get all the health enhancing benefits of meditation coupled with the benefits of Pranayama exercises. The complete and ocean sounding breaths both relax the body and calm the mind. They bring oxygen to the farthest reaches of the lungs. Breathing in conjunction with abdominal movement improves digestion and elimination. These breaths strengthen the abdominal muscles, diaphragm, heart and lungs. The ocean breath not only increases concentration due to the hissing sound that you make by practicing it, it also stimulates circulation, metabolism, and more complete absorption of oxygen. The practice of meditation has been proven to lower blood pressure, aid in stress reduction, and bring a sense of mental peace that permeates the entire body.

Start by closing your eyes and enter into a relationship with your breath. At first, don't do anything about the breath itself, just follow it. When this relationship is comfortable begin to participate in the activity of the breath itself by breathing intentionally instead of passively. When both you and the breath are comfortable with one another begin to control the breath by using one of the Pranayama techniques (the complete or ocean sounding breaths). From here, continue to become more active in the involvement of breath manipulation until you are in complete control of the breath itself. This consciously controlled breathing will become energetically stimulating due to the manipulation of the Prana in the air. Your conscious involvement in the breathing technique will eventually lead your unfocused mind to become focused. In other words your mind will be focused or preoccupied and you will have fewer and fewer irrelevant thoughts (hopefully). When you have thoughts unrelated to the activity, come back to the breath. When you are not relating to your mind (thoughts) then the mind is just something you have and your consciousness becomes your reality. And because your reality is being experienced through the air that you breathe (Prana) you will become both the air and the one breathing the air. You and the primordial life force are one. As you continue to actively practice the Pranayama you will have repeated the same breath so many times that it begins to happen on its own, it will just know the way, or so it will seem. The activity and the one experiencing the activity merge. At this point you are the meditation and the meditation is you.

The process of entering into and sustaining meditation takes a little time. You must be patient. You cannot force the breath to meet your needs; it has to come naturally like in any good relationship. Meditation cannot be rushed, it only happens when everything is just right. Through being patient, staying aware, continuing with the meditation technique, letting go of the unnecessary thoughts, and consciously observing, the experience will begin to unfold. Where will it take you? Only you can know.

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