

Encinitas Yoga

January Newsletter

Prana and the Practice of Pranayama – Make Each Breath Precious

As we start this New Year, I take it as an opportunity to bring more awareness to breath – especially as it relates to practicing yoga and pranayama. The thought of making each breath count and something precious, even if it is in passing at work, driving or when taking the time to practice yoga in class or at home, is inspiring no matter when and where the awareness in practiced.

With each breath comes a new beginning: on the physical level there are the mechanics and physiological action of refilling your lungs and hence your cells with oxygen and nutrients and with each exhale a clearing and cleansing your body of metabolic waste products; nourishing the entire system, maintaining proper function of the body. It is now well documented, that practicing yogic breathing techniques increase the breathing capacity of the lungs and the oxygen delivery to the muscles, which contribute to better exercise tolerance. Also, the improvements in many respiratory conditions, especially asthma, are currently recognized in the medical community. Improvement in and the maintenance of the elasticity of the breathing related muscle and connective tissues are a key result of regular practice of yoga asanas and pranayama.

The term “prana” is often used interchangeably with the word “breath” in yoga classes. Yet breath is only one of the manifestations of prana. It is prana that you expand and strengthen when practicing pranayama, the variable breathing techniques in hatha yoga, that can be translated to mean prolongation and restraint of breath, controlled intake and outflow of breath in a firmly established posture. The word prana can be difficult to explain and define, as vast as it is, and it is described by different Yogis and authors in different ways; all bringing their descriptions in one way or another to describe prana as Life Force Energy, the eternal energy permeating every living thing in the Universe. It is allphysical, mental, intellectual, sexual, spiritual and cosmic energy. Prana is the hidden or potential energy of all beings; it is creation, protection, and destruction - vital cosmic force.

Through practicing pranayama you become more in tune with the Divine Life Force that flows in and out with each breath you take. With the different techniques of pranayama we practice in class, you are changing the depth and the frequency of breaths and the breaks between breaths as well as between inhales and exhales (retention of breath), thus affecting

the autonomous nervous system; your heartbeat, circulatory and digestive systems (to begin with) as well as the activity of the mind. This prepares the practitioner for a calm, meditative state of mind and body. Asana practice removes obstacles that inhibit the free flow of prana in the body and practice of pranayama regulates the flow of prana through out the body. When prana is flowing freely, you experience a state of health as well as ease.

To breath correctly is longevity. And the purpose of pranayama is the optimum function of the respiratory system, which in turn is essential for the function of the other bodily systems. Once the respiratory system functions at its best, there will be no danger of build up of metabolic toxins and the digestive and eliminative processes can function more optimally.

In start of class, you may have heard the instruction to breathe into your belly, diaphragm, your chest and your throat; this is the key practice to learn correct diaphragmatic breathing. Focusing in on the different parts or sections of the breath helps to isolate and practice the use of the specific muscles in that section to enable more thorough and deep breathing as a whole. Once you are used to the different parts of the breath,

you can learn to use the muscles involved in a lanced and effective way to enhance the breathing capacity of your lungs. Most of us execute the main portion of our breaths in the very top part of our lungs and our chest, without engaging the diaphragm. Practice this three-part breath whenever you can: to get a sense of real, breath induced relaxation during your day, to refresh your energy at any given time or place, to clear your thoughts before meeting or to simply take in the moment of presence and breathe it in fully. Especially focus on the potential of life in each breath you take. It is precious.

To quote Shameem Akhtar's words in India Abroad Magazine for inspiration for this brief newsletter article: “Pranayama is the true alchemy because it sought and succeeded in changing the vortex of thought and breath in our being. So, pranayama is the technique of using our breath to propel us further in our spiritual expansion. In that sense pranayama's real definition is the expansion of life force. It is the alchemy that manages to turn something gross into something precious.”

Wishing you a New Year filled with light, success and abundant life force.

Namaste, Outi

Join Me for a 2-Month Challenge

Happy New Year from Encinitas Yoga!. Let me introduce myself for those of you who don't know me. My name is Grant V and I am the owner of Encinitas Yoga. For the most part, I prefer to simply stay in the background and let the wonderful teachers we have run the show.

I started Encinitas Yoga back in May last year because I couldn't bear to see my favorite yoga flow simply disappear. While 2008 was a challenging year for us, we made it! Now, I am very hopeful for a terrific 2009 and plan to kick the year off right by doing my own 2 month challenge - yoga every day until the end of February. (I do

have some travel plans which will make this a bit challenging though) . If you would like, I invite you to join me with your very own 2 month challenge. The \$100 unlimited yogaspecial will be available again for January with the option to buy a second month at the same price upfront to make it easier for everyone. – Grant V.

Announcements

Schedule Changes: We are adding a 7:00PM Monday night gentle/intermediate class to be taught by Sara and our new instructor Florence will be teaching a new 6:00PM Wednesday heated class, replace that gentle/intermediate class.