

## Basic breathing practice from Gitananda Approach.

For your knowledge there are two foundational pillars for pranayama within the Gitananda system.

**The Mahat Yoga Pranayama is the first main pillar.** It brings awareness into the physicality of the lungs and apparatus of breathing. It highlights the three sections of the lungs, ie lower lung or abdominal section (adham), middle lung or intercostals (madhyam) and upper lung or clavicular (adhyam). Without this practice the instruction “breathe in” results in a rather general unspecific response – in and up. There is movement, but it is not focused and not localised. With this practice of breathing into specific areas, you start to work with fine movements of specific muscle groups.

**The Sukha Purvakha Pranayama** is the second main pillar of pranayama preparation. In this practice we release our awareness of the physicality of parts of the body driving the breath, and where the breath is going and instead start to be more aware with the act of breathing. We feel an in breath, feel an out breath, feel a breath hold – both after the in and out breath. That is we start becoming aware of the duration of the components of the breathing cycle. The word ‘sukha’ means ‘sweet or symmetrical’. The word benefits purvakha means ‘the parts between’. As the practice develops, we work with the in-breath and the out-breath and also the breath holds in and out (kumbhakas), all in various combinations. We increasingly explore and develop what it means ‘to breathe’.

Having spent time on the two foundation pillars, when you do start on the more commonly known or “classical” pranayamas, the whole practice of breathing is at a very different level to that before you started. These practices open up the lungs and attune the nadis.

You will only need to teach practice one and two, please omit practice three for the time being!

### **Practice one: breathing into the hand space**

Here we are simply locating the different areas of the lungs and breathing into these areas.

- 1) Adham is the upper abdominal region located by making a fist with the thumb extended, placing the thumb on the base of the sternum and the fist below. Where the fist is now positioned gives us the placement of the adham region. So at this level of the body now place hands on either side of the front of the torso and breathe into your hands. Take 9 breaths here. Let your breath be easy and rhythmic using a natural breath rather than a breath technique such as ujjayi.
- 2) Madyham is the mid chest region located by locating the base of the sternum and placing the hands one hand width above that point. Again place hands on either side of the front of the torso at this level and breathe into your hands. Take 9 breaths here. Let your breath be easy and rhythmic using a natural breath rather than a breath technique such as ujjayi.
- 3) Adyham is the upper chest region located by stretching the hand open and measuring from the tip of the index finger to the tip of the thumb, place the tip of the index finger at the base of the sternum and this region is sited at the height of the placement of the tip of the thumb. Again place hands on either side of the front of the torso at the level and breathe into your hands. Take 9 breaths here. Let your breath be easy and rhythmic using a natural breath rather than a breath technique such as ujjayi.

**Practice two: three part breathing into each region**

Now we will breathe into the front, sides and back of each region to help us become aware of the muscles used and the movement possible at each placement.

- 1) Place hands in the correct position for the adham region (lower abdominal area). Inhaling breathe into the front, sides and back feeling them sequentially expand, then exhaling relax and contract the back, sides and front. Work in this way for 9 breaths.
- 2) Place hands in the correct position for the madyam region (middle chest region). Inhaling breathe into the front, sides and back feeling them sequentially expand, then exhaling relax and contract the back, sides and front. Work in this way for 9 breaths.
- 3) Place hands in the correct position for the adyham region (upper chest region). Inhaling breathe into the front, sides and back feeling them sequentially expand, then exhaling relax and contract the back, sides and front. Work in this way for 9 breaths.

**Practice three: breathing through all regions**

Now we will learn to breathe through all of the regions. Notice we will be inhaling as we travel up through the different regions of the body and exhaling we will also be traveling up through the body because it is believed that to exhale traveling down through the body will close the body whereas when we exhale traveling up through the body it is believed the body remains open.

So inhaling without placing hands see if you can feel the abdominal region (front, sides and back) then mid chest region (front, sides and back) then the upper chest region (front, sides and back) expand then exhaling feel the abdominal region (back, sides and front) then mid chest region (back, sides and front) then the upper chest region (back, sides and front) relax and contract.

You will need to keep your breathing slow and smooth to accomplish this task so please let this be a primary emphasis.