

Breath of Fire (Agni Pran)

Breath of Fire is one of the foundational breath techniques used in the practice of Kundalini Yoga. It accompanies many postures, and has numerous beneficial effects. It is important to master this breath so that it is done accurately and becomes automatic.

Doing Breath of Fire:

- ▶ Breath of Fire is rapid, rhythmic, and continuous. It is equal on the inhale and the exhale, with no pause between them. (Approximately 2-3 cycles per second.)
- ▶ It is always practiced through the nostrils with mouth closed, unless stated otherwise.
- ▶ Breath of Fire is powered from the navel point and solar plexus. To exhale, the air is expelled powerfully through the nose, by pressing the navel point and solar plexus back toward the spine. This feels automatic if you contract the diaphragm rapidly.
- ▶ To inhale, the upper abdominal muscles relax, the diaphragm extends down, and the breath seems to come in as part of relaxation rather than through effort.
- ▶ The chest stays relaxed and slightly lifted throughout the breathing cycle.
- ▶ When done correctly, there should be no rigidity of hands, feet, face, or abdomen.
- ▶ Begin practicing Breath of Fire for a duration of 1-3 minutes. Some people find it easy to do Breath of Fire for a full 10 minutes right away. Others find that the breath creates an initial dizziness or giddiness. If this happens, take a break. Some tingling, travelling sensations, and lightheadedness are completely normal as your body adjusts to the new breath and new stimulation of the nerves. Concentrating at the brow point may help relieve these sensations. Sometimes these symptoms are the result of toxins and other chemicals released by the breath technique. The symptoms may be relieved by drinking lots of water and changing to a light diet.
- ▶ Breath of Fire is *not* hyperventilation, nor is it Bellows Breath (see below).
- ▶ There are restrictions for doing Breath of Fire while pregnant and menstruating. (See *Roles & Responsibilities of a Kundalini Yoga Teacher.*)

Common mistakes in doing Breath of Fire:

There are three common problems to watch for when teaching beginners:

- ▶ *Paradoxical breathing.* As we mentioned earlier in this chapter, many people learn to breathe backwards: they inhale by pulling the belly in, thus making the space for the breath less rather than more. This is called paradoxical breathing. People who are often anxious or smoke frequently tend to have this pattern. It can be easily changed by placing a hand on the chest and one on the belly and doing Breath of Fire slowly with total awareness.
- ▶ *Trying to breathe by an exaggerated pumping of the belly.* Breath of Fire is *not* the deep-bellows cleansing breath that pumps the stomach with complete exhales and inhales. Breath of Fire comes from higher up near the solar plexus.
- ▶ *A loss of attention to the balanced ratio of the inhale and exhale.* One way to get this right is to do it wrong first. Try to inhale much more than you exhale with each breath cycle at 1-2 times per second. Within 30 seconds you can sense the over-stimulated jumpiness and imbalance of the breathing. Then switch to a much greater exhale than an inhale at the same pace. Almost immediately you will sense a loss of strength, lethargy, distraction, or depression. Now make the breath exactly equal on the inhale and exhale. Listen to the sound of the breath and create a steady rhythm.

Benefits of Breath of Fire:

- ▶ Releases toxins and deposits from the lungs, mucous linings, blood vessels, and other cells.
- ▶ Expands the lung capacity and increases vital strength.
- ▶ Strengthens the nervous system to resist stress.
- ▶ Repairs the balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.
- ▶ Strengthens the navel chakra.
- ▶ Increases physical endurance and prepares you to act effectively.
- ▶ Adjusts the subtle psycho-electromagnetic field of the aura so that the blood becomes energized.
- ▶ Reduces addictive impulses for drugs, smoking, and bad foods.
- ▶ Increases oxygen delivery to the brain, facilitating a focused, intelligent, and neutral state of mind.
- ▶ Boosts the immune system and may help prevent many diseases.
- ▶ Promotes synchronization of the biorhythms of the body's systems.

Beginning a Practice of Breath of Fire

- ▶ Sit straight and place the hands in Prayer Pose.
- ▶ Close the eyelids 9/10ths. Roll the eyes up and concentrate at the Brow Point.
- ▶ Begin Breath of Fire for 1-3 minutes.
- ▶ Then inhale and hold for 10 seconds. Relax. Stay still and place the hands on the knees in Gyan Mudra, palms up. Watch the natural flow of the breath and the constant stream of internal and external sensations. Continue for 3 minutes.
- ▶ Inhale deeply, exhale.
- ▶ Repeat this combination 3-5 times.

Another good series for beginners is the Pranayam Energizer Series.

(See *Sets & Meditations.*)