



PRĀṆĀYĀMA

Other prāṇāyāmas give specific benefits, whereas Nāḍishodana gives all the benefits. As you have faith so will the benefits be with prāṇāyāma. With devotion to the Lord Narayana one should always partaking limited satwic food.

Yogarahasya, Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Prāṇāyāma, meaning “*prāṇa-ayāma*” (*prāṇa*, energy + *ayām*, expansion) or “*prāṇa-āyāmaḥ*” (*āyāmaḥ* as meaning "restrain, control, stopping"), is the science of controlling one's own *prāṇa*, the vital Energy through breathing.

Āsana is usually only practiced to ready oneself for *prāṇāyāma*. It is said that once a person is ready for *prāṇāyāma*, all of the benefits of *āsana* can be attained with *prāṇāyāma* alone. *Prāṇāyāma* is of crucial importance for all yogic practices, but most especially for *Kuṇḍalinīyoga* techniques. There are numerous *prāṇāyāmas*, all of which favor different movements of *prāṇa* and their corresponding effects on body and mind. Some generate energy, others move it. Some cool energy and some clean the channels through which this energy flows. There are seven different terms in *prāṇāyāma* which are important to know:

<i>Pūraka</i> -	exhalation
<i>Recaka</i> -	inhalation
<i>Antarakumbhaka</i> -	inner breath retention
<i>Bāhyakumbhaka</i> -	outer breath retention
<i>Kevalakumbka</i> -	spontaneous (meditative) breath retention
<i>Sahitakumbhaka</i> -	conscious (forced) breath retention
<i>Samavṛtti</i> -	same length
<i>Viṣamavṛtti</i> -	different length

Prāṇāyāma is defined by six attributes, which outline its practice. Pātañjali says in a few words in his *sūtras* (guiding string) what makes the essence of *prāṇāyāma*.

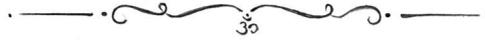
*As the movement patterns of each breath - inhalation, exhalation, retention -
are observed as to duration, number, and area of focus, breath
becomes spacious and subtle.*

Pātañjalayogaśāstra, Chapter II, 50

The first pillar is focus. This focus is applied on out breath (*bāhya*), in breath (*ābhyantara*) and holding (*stambha*). All *prāṇāyāma* starts with the exhalation, as one needs to become empty to be a vessel of the greater energy, inhalation is the second step and is the filling of the inner pure space with the energy of the practice. Holding is the timeless contemplation about the energy created. Breath is meant to be long (*dīrgha*) and subtle (*sūkṣmaḥ*), this quality of breath is both the means and the goal to attain freedom.

Expansion in subtlety and spaciousness is attained through the framework that mind and body creates. This framework is the place (*deśa*) of focus, the number (*saṃkhyābhiḥ*) of breaths, and time (*kāla*) of practice. The place of focus is your internal gaze as well as your outer focus. The number (*saṃkhyā*) is the clear and protected framework of counts in which your breath moves in and out, it is your rhythm, both the rhythmic pace of your specific practice, as well as the daily rhythm in which your practice takes place. Time is the daytime of practice and also its length.

Keep these basic attributes of *prāṇāyāma* in mind when going through this chapter.



HOW TO PRACTICE

Prāṇāyāma is not just breathing

Attention is key to *prāṇāyāma*. Without attention in the practice, *prāṇāyāma* is useless. This applies more strongly to *prāṇāyāma* than to *āsana*. The more the mind is distracted while performing *prāṇāyāma*, the greater the concentration required. Attention can be painful in the beginning, but with effort this is transformed. When the mind wanders, contemplate: One should do fully, what one is doing and nothing else. Because what is done, if you don't do do, what you do?

So, do it fully.

No strain but surrender

Energy cannot be forced into existence, neither can consciousness. When people apply force it is because they are impatient for the good to enter on its own. Why do these people believe the good will not come when one is ready? Why should the Goddess restrain her blessing when your heart is open? There is no reason for this. All good things are here. Either one is ready to embrace them, or one is not, but if one strains to attain them quickly, then the way will be longer.

When practicing *prāṇāyāma*, give yourself completely to the practice. Instead of straining, fix your position to show your beauty. Instead of wanting, pay proper attention to the flow of your breath.

Furthermore, over straining—especially in *kumbhaka* (retention)—can harm your body. *Prāṇāyāma* is

the manipulation of *prāṇa*. This changes the way you feel, perceive and think. Your body and being need time to gently adapt to this. As the old saying goes, Rome was not built in a day.

Now I shall tell you the rules of prāṇāyāma. By this practice a man becomes like God. Four things are necessary in practicing prāṇāyāma. First a good place; second a suitable time, moderate food, and lastly purification of the Nāḍis. Practice of yoga should not be attempted in a far-off country (loosing faith), nor in the forest (no protection), nor in a city or in the midst of a crowd (exposure). If one does, so he loses success.

Gheraṇḍa Smahita, Chapter 5, 4

Preparation and Posture

Begin by practicing *āsana* before starting with *prāṇāyāma*. Sometimes 10 minutes of *āsana* is sufficient. This will open the body and remove tension.

Choose a comfortable sitting *āsana* and fix the body into it. Ensure that the body is straight and does not bend. Avoid any unnecessary movement, such as scratching or wiggling around or looking at others. The body is a vessel and energy cannot accumulate during *prāṇāyāma* if one is not steady. Be firm, stretch your arms and fix them forcefully. The position taken should resemble strength, beauty and ease. If pain occurs, one should move so as to subdue the pain and then return to the position. There is no use in suffering, as this will not help one's attention. If one is able to pay proper attention, then moving a painful leg will not corrupt one's focus.

Food and surroundings

There are many restrictions surrounding *prāṇāyāma*. This may be because *prāṇāyāma* can be very arousing and being polluted is not helpful when one wants to stay in one's center.

Prāṇāyāma should be attempted when one has firmly made the decision to transform one's being. If this decision is made, then a proper vegetarian diet and a pure lifestyle should pose no problems. If one finds that these are problematic, then one should ask oneself: What do I really want? Then strongly act according to the answer. This way the mind becomes directed. Thought, speech and action are aligned.

One should be vegetarian, enjoying sweet and nutritious food. One should not eat before prāṇāyāma. One should rise up. One should avoid superfluous company and entertainment. For more about food, please see chapter "Food" below. He who practices without moderation of diet, incurs various diseases, and obtains no success.... Half of the stomach should be filled with food, one quarter with water: and one quarter should be kept empty for practicing prāṇāyāma

Gheraṇḍasamhitā, Chapter 5, 16, 22

Place and time

prāṇāyāma should be done in the early morning before sunrise at *brahmāmuhūrta*. Alternatively, it can be performed at noon or sunset. *Prāṇāyāma* should not be done less than two hours before going to bed as its arousing nature can prevent sleep.

Prāṇāyāma should be done alone and in a silent place where one can contemplate deeply on breathing. The best environment is a clean and well-ventilated chamber. *Prāṇāyāma* should not be practiced under direct sunlight, except at dawn when the early rays of the sun are gentle.

Kumbhaka

Kumbhaka refers to the techniques of holding one's breath.

Since the body is a mirror of the macrocosm, day and night, and sunrise and sunset find their proper expression in the body's function. The process of respiration is said to mirror sun's (or nature's) movement of energy during the day. Inhalation is the rising into the new day. *antarakumbhaka* is the sunset. Expiration is the night and *bāhyakumbhaka* is the sunrise in the early morning. From there on, the circle repeats again. Since the hours of sunrise and sunset are holy, so must the time in between breaths be holy. When the breath is still, not moving in- nor outward, they are referred to as the *kumbhakas*.

Some say that *prāṇāyāma* starts with proper *kumbhaka*. and the *Haṭhayogapradīpikā* makes no distinction between *prāṇāyāma* and *kumbhaka*, as the former must also bet the latter. This means that when the moments in between the breaths are sufficiently expanded and enjoyed, the raising of consciousness can take place.

Idā and *piṅgalā* also refer to night and day, and therefore to exhalation and inhalation. *Suṣumnā*, either sunrise or sunset, would also resemble *kumbhaka*. Indeed, *kumbhaka* is used to bring the *prāṇa* into *suṣumnā*.

Of course, the highest stage is the spontaneous stopping of the breath as a result of realization, not as its means. *prāṇa* could flow freely into *suṣumnā* rendering breathing itself unnecessary as the body and mind would rest in the mysterious, and simultaneous, stage of sunrise and sunset. When joined together, inhalation and exhalation are “*yuj*”. This is the goal of yoga. This is *kevalakumbhaka*.

When kevalakumbhaka without inhalation and exhalation has been mastered, there is nothing in the [inner] world that is unattainable for the yogi. Through this kumbhaka he can restrain the breath as long as he likes. Thus he [gradually] attains the stage of Rājayoga. Through this kumbhaka, Kuṇḍalinī is aroused and then the suṣumnā is free from all obstacles; but without haṭhayoga there can be no Rājayoga, and vice versa. Both should be practiced until Rājayoga is perfected.

Haṭhayogapradīpikā, Chapter 2, 70–75

Mantra in Prāṇāyāma

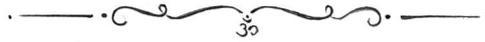
Prāṇāyāma is very often used with mantra or *bija*. The *Yogarahasya* calls all prāṇāyāma conducted without mantra inferior to prāṇāyāma conducted with it. Mantra is used to fill the gaps in the breathing process and measure the time of breathing and retention. Filling these gaps can be useful, as it helps fix the mind onto the higher goal. Some use the *gāyatrī mantra* to measure the length of the in- and outbreaths. More often than not, Om as the *praṇava* is used to measure breathing.

Initially, one can silently repeat “Om” five times when breathing in and five times when breathing out. This will fix the mind and even the breath.

In the same manner, “Om Namah Śivaya, So-Ḥaṃ, Om Yaṃ Ma” or “Om Ma” can be used.

Prāṇāyāma is of two types, one done without mantras and the other with mantras. One should choose the appropriate manta for individual requirements. Sagarbha is with mantra and Vigarbha is without mantra. The smritis (texts) say that prāṇāyāma done with mantra is commendable while the other is considered inferior.

Yogarahasya, Chapter 1

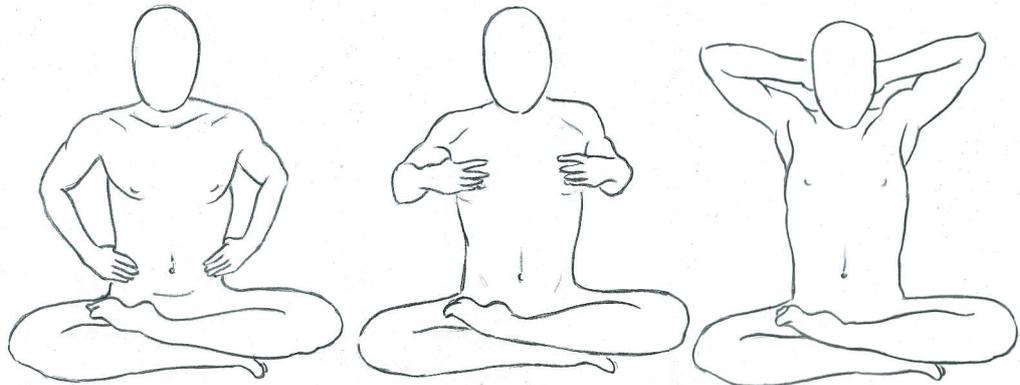


THE PRĀṆĀYMAS

Yogic Breathing

Yogic breathing is a deep and holotropic form of breathing. Each breath gently fills the lungs to their utmost capacity. In- and outbreaths must be even in length (*samavṛtti*). When the breath rushes inside one can feel the pleasure of the air moving in, like a delicious liquid. The air softly fills the lungs from the top down. The belly moves gently outwards. When maximum inhalation (*recaka*) is reached one must gently be aware of the space in between the breaths. This place is beyond breath. It is energy. For a little glimpse, be aware of inner retention, *antarakumbhaka*. You must feel it. Then gently breathe out (*pūra*) for the same length (*samavṛtti*). Let your belly move inward again and lengthen yourself. When you reach maximum exhalation, gently feel *bāhyakumbhaka*. Here you should hold a little, but you must feel the inner sensation of joy.

Yogic breathing may be considered easy, but it requires a fully expanded lung and some concentration. If you find yourself struggling, you must perform it



more playfully. The lung must be able to deeply open and close to its full and natural volume. This is achieved through three preparatory stages.

Stage one

Place your hands at the side of your torso, just over your hips so that your fingers can touch your belly. Breathe deeply. Move your belly inward during the expiration and outward during the inspiration. Breathe to your full capacity.

Stage two

Place your hands at the side of your torso, right at your ribcage so your fingers are underneath your breast. Breathe deeply. Move your chest inward during the expiration—one can tuck in the chin as well. Expand your chest in the inspiration (one can open the chin at this point). Breathe to your full capacity.

Stage three

Place your hands just behind your neck, interlace your fingers and pull gently to the side. Breathe deeply. When breathing in, open your chest wide. When you have reached the maximum inspiration, breathe a little more just at the very tip of the lungs. When you exhale, contract your chest and close your elbows in front of your face. Breathe into the high tips of the lungs.

Nāḍīsodhana Prāṇāyāma

Psychic Network Purification.

Nāḍīsodhana is the most important *prāṇāyāma* of all. It is the gentlest and most useful *prāṇāyāma*. The *Yogarahasya* of Nātamuni says that all of the possible benefits of *prāṇāyāma* arise from this one alone. Moreover, the *Yoga-Yājñavalkya* dedicates a whole chapter solely to this *prāṇāyāma*. It is the *prāṇāyāma* that purifies the channels of the subtle body and therefore turns it into a worthy vessel for consciousness to enter. Sit straight and relax your body. Stretch out one arm over your knee in *chinmudrā* with the palm facing upward. The other hand should be brought up in front of your face. Put two fingers on your forehead, gently massaging the third eye while the thumb and ring finger are at both sides of the nose so as to regulate air flow. Make the air flow into your left nostril and observe this gentle stream of life. Hold the air for just a little while. Then exhale the air through the other side. When the air has left your body, and



you have reached the utmost outbreath, perform a very gentle *bāhyakumbhaka* and keep the air outside. Then breathe in again through the same nostril, hold and breathe out of the left side again. This is one round.

Imagine the breath moving through the heart, or simply imagine nothing at all. Perform *kumbaka* in a gentle manner at each turning of the breath. It does not matter how long each breath takes, but it must be an equal length. Nor does it matter for how long you perform *kumbaka* but, again, it must have an equal length in *antara* and *bāhya* as well. Perform *mūlabandha* at each *kumbaka*. Your success in this *prāṇāyāma* is irrespective of how much you strain or on the complexities of your in- and outbreath ratio. It depends on your attention and love for your practice alone. Be excited about it. Do it with your heart!

Having inhaled the air through the left nostril filling up [the chest and abdomen], then meditating on the fire in the belly with its flame in the Dehamadhya and meditating on the seed letter of fire ("Raṁ"), which is established in the region of fire he must exhale afterwards slowly through the right nostril. Then one who is determined and wise, inhaling the air through the right nostril, must again exhale slowly through the left nostril. One should practice this in solitude six times every day at the three Sandhis (in the morning, afternoon and evening) for three to four months or three to four years.

Yoga-Yājñavalkya Chapter 5, 17-20

Kapālabhāti Satkarma

The Shining Face.

Kapālabhāti is a *satkarma* (one of the six purification exercises) as well as a *prāṇāyāma*. It is moving the *prāṇas* and purifying them when they mix with the fire at the navel. *kapālabhāti* is performed from the *kanda* (*kandasthāna*), the navel point. *Kanda* It is commonly misunderstood as *maṇipūra* chakra, which is actually something else. In some yogic schools, the *nāḍis* all originate from there. It has the form of a golden egg, is situated underneath the navel and is the center of bodily pranic force. From there, the *prāṇas* expand upwards. The great sun makes them rise.

Sit straight and feel your face open and the sun rise on your forehead. Pull *mūlabandha* very gently. Push the air out and move your navel inwards. When the breath relaxes, you breathe in naturally, not actively. Pulse your navel in and out. Feel the pulse massage your lower belly. The rest of your body

should be relaxed. Your face stays open and released. One can accelerate the pace until a comfortable rhythm is reached. Imagine this little golden egg moving upwards when the breath goes out and imagine it moving downwards when the breath relaxes. Imagine a stream of golden light rising to the sky.



Inhale and exhale like the bellows of a blacksmith. This is kapālabhāti and removes all ailments due to kapha.

Haṭhayogapradīpikā Chapter2, 35

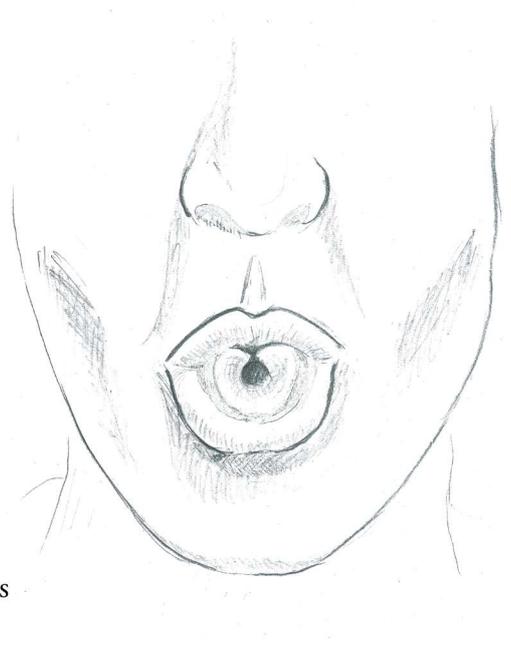
Śitalī Prāṇāyāma

The Cooling Breath.

Śitalī is like a friend, gentle and comfortable, that you invite in your house to provide relaxation. This friend will talk to you decently, calmly and lovingly. They will make you drink delicious waters, nourish your mind and body, and leave you more whole, calmer and as clear as crystal.

Sit straight and tuck your chin in gently. Stick out your tongue and roll her so that she forms a little tube.

If this is hard for you, try this: Pull out your tongue a little and roll the sides up as much as you can. Then, with your upper lip, press a little against your tongue below so that the sides of the tongue are fixed with your mouth and they roll in naturally. This way you should succeed.



Then breathe in, raise your chin a little and imagine yourself sucking in the air as if it were a delicious drink from the sky. The air is as cooling and white as milk. She drops down from the moon above you. Drink this air and enjoy it. When you reach maximum inhalation, retain the air inside for the briefest of moments. Pull in your tongue, lower your chin and breathe out deeply through your nose. Keep in- and outbreaths at the same duration. This is one round.

The wise inhales through the tongue, then follows kumbhaka and exhalation through the nose. This kumbhaka, called sitali, removes illnesses of the spleen, fever, gall bladder trouble, hunger, thirst, and the effects of poison, as for example snake bites.

Hāṭhayogapradīpikā Chapter 2, 36-57

Bhrāmarī Prāṇāyāma

The Humming Bee.

Bhrāmarī is said to bring about an unsurpassed joy in the practitioner. It should be a wedding with one's self. It is the great joy being expressed in the sound that resides in heart, that is like a timeless rushing river. *Bhrāmarī* is a way of being, therefore it is a body. When one practices *bhrāmarī*, one should imagine being a body made of nothing but this sound, and yet it is not about the audible sound in one's ear. It refers to the subtle sound that one cannot hear. Whenever you make that humming sound, listen to that sound behind it, the inner sound of the pure pleasure of pure being.

The great *nāda* (primal sound) is everywhere in the body, but some parts are closer to it than others. *Nāda* appears in the central channel of *suṣumnā*, or *sārasvatī nadī*, that is said to have "sound in her womb." The heart is said to be the seat of *śabda-brahman*, the God in form of sound.

Inhale rapidly, producing the sound of a male bee. Then exhale with the sound of a female bee. This is followed by kumbhaka. The great yogis, by constantly practicing this, experience indescribable happiness in their hearts. This is bhrāmarī.

Haṭhayogapradīpikā Chapter2, 67

The Heart Bhrāmarī

Sit straight and bring your hands in front of your heart, one over the other. Tuck your chin in gently and feel your spine like a staff raised to the sky. Settle in your chest, like a shiny ball falling into the cavity of your heart to the point of maximum repose at the very bottom of your being. You are home.

Pull *mūlabandha* to fix the energy and start to perform the humming sound gently in your heart. Stay focused and listen to the sound beyond the audible—the music of your heart. Expand that sound from your heart, breath by breath. The sound will expand until it reaches its maximum extension throughout the world of which you are a part, and all is a part of you.

The Suṣumnā Bhrāmarī

Feel this graceful *suṣumnā* that leads from your perineum to the top of your head. It is a line without dimension, incredibly thin, which stretches throughout the universe. Untouchable, it is only realized by its own means. Let us throw it into vibration.

Sit straight. Perform *saṁmukhī mudrā*. With both hands close the gates to your face with your fingers. Close your ears, mouth, eyes and place your middle fingers right next to your nostrils. When you have closed the channels of your senses, fall inside of yourself. *Pratyāhāra*. There is no world outside, only the world within. There is only this one endlessly thin line, stretching throughout the universe, this graceful stairway to heaven. Start with *bhrāmarī prāṇāyāma*. See that sound as being the very nature of *suṣumnā*. See that sound as being like golden light vibrating within. This is your body, enjoy.



Ujjāyī Prāṇāyāma

The Psychic Breath.

Ujjāyī is the invincible breath, the breath of the master. The one that has mastered the fire and has therefore mastered the mind. It originates from the *viśuddha* chakra, from where you are enthroned over the world. It is the spacious breath. Space is the master, space pervades all.

Sit straight and gently tuck your chin in. Avoid pressing too hard, but feel your neck rising to the sky. Imagine that silver disc shining inside your throat. Start breathing deeply in *ujjāyī*, joined by the sound of waves or fire burning in the wind. It is a clearly audible sound, emitted from the throat. When you breathe out, imagine that silver light being emitted from your throat and expanding in space. When you breathe in, feel that silver light collected again in the center of your throat. Feel that space in front of

you. That space is eternal. Expand in that space with each breath and recollect it again in your throat when you breathe in. Become spacious. Become invincible.

With closed mouth inhale deeply until the breath fills all the space between the throat and the heart, to the tips of the lungs. This creates a noise. Do kumbhaka and exhale through the left nostril. This removes phlegm in the throat and enhances the digestive power of the body. This is ujjāyī and can be practiced walking or sitting, it keeps diseases away from the individual organs and the Nādis, especially diseases that are due to kapha.

Haṭhayogapradīpikā Chapter2, 51-52

Bhastrikā Prāṇāyāma

The bellows of the blacksmith.

This breath is a very strong *prāṇāyāma* that is in many ways a yogic secret. *Bhastrikā* awakes Shakti – Kundalini and is purifying and strengthening like no other breath. *Bhastrikā* can lead to mastery and completely expand ones being. *Bhastrikā* is fire, fire is light, fire is *susumnā*, fire is consciousness. It drives the house and warms the kitchen. It sheds light on the altar, guides the ritual and makes the deity visible. But the gross fire can also burn the temple to ashes and make one crazy. Fire is a force, and any force must be guarded with consciousness.



Bhastrikā is an advanced *prāṇāyāma* my master Sanjeev Pandey Ji taught me four variations of *bhastrikā*, that I will expound here shortly. It still must be said that it is hardly possible to achieve profound insight into *bhastrikā* when it is not practiced with an experienced teachers guidance. The teacher may show you the secrets and transmit energy with his presence that you would hardly discover alone. This is something that I had to experience myself too.

Bhastrikā is the bellows that blows in the fire. It is an equally strong inhalation like exhalation. *Bhastrikā* is many times mistaken with *kapālabhāti*, as it has a similar appearance. The crucial difference is, the previously mentioned equal strength of exhalation and inhalation. *Bhastrikā* fans the fire. Don't practice *bhastrikā* at great heat.

Stage one

Idā bhastrikā - Sit up straight, elevate your head and venerate your solar plexus, imagine the sun rising in front of you, be proud, be thankful. Close your right Nostril and perform 30 times *bhastrikā* through your left nostril, in the end inhale, exhale. Take yourself time to relax then continue.

Piṅgalā bhastrikā - Perform the same process, by closing the left nostril on the right side.

Madhya bhastrikā - Then perform *madhya bhastrikā* (central bellows breath) one last time in the center through both nostrils. Keep straight. In the end perform *Sūryabheda kumbhaka*.

Sūryabheda kumbhaka.— In the end breathe out left slowly. Breathe in left slowly, breathe

out right slowly, breathe in right slowly, hold in *antarakumbhaka* —this is the sun. Repeat the whole pattern with internal retention four more one more times in the beginning and then relax.

One can increase the number of breaths from 30 to 50 to 100 every two weeks. When this first stage of *bhastrikā* has been practiced for 42 days daily with increased number of breaths, and one has slowly achieved the strength to comfortably practice 100 breaths at all sides, then the next stage can be started.

Stage two

Anuloma Viloma Bhastrikā.- Don't practice this stage if you did not practice *bhastrikā* for 42 days before. Sit up straight and clear, put both of your two fingers (pointing and middle) on your forehead like in *nāḍīsodhana*. Because there is no *prāṇāyāma* without retention, here *bhastrikā* uses *sūryabheda* retention in the end.

Use the same breathing pattern like in *nāḍīsodhana*, but do it with the bellows of the blacksmith. Fan the fire fearlessly and joyfully, this is massaging your your central *nāḍi* who is the insight into the true nature of existence and who is governed by the element of fire. You are that fire. Start slowly till your body understand the movement, then choose a strong pace and enjoy.

Move strongly and forcefully 15 rounds in the beginning. You can gradually increase up to 100 rounds.

Sūryabheda kumbhaka

In the end of your *bhastrikā* practice breathe out from the left nostril slowly. Breathe in left slowly, breathe out right slowly, breathe in right slowly, hold in *antarakumbhaka* —this is the sun. Repeat the whole pattern with internal retention 2-4 more times and then relax. The number of retentions can gradually be increased every two weeks from 5 to 10 to 20. *Sūryabheda kumbhaka* in the end is necessary to control the powers which are awakened by *bhastrikā prāṇāyāma*.

Seated in the vajrasana posture firmly hold the feet near the ankles and be against the kanda. In the posture of vajrasana the yogi should induce the kundalini to move. Then he should do bhastrika kumbhaka. Thus the kundalini will be quickly awakened. Then he should contract the "sun" [through uddiyana bandha] and thus induce the kundalini to rise. Even though he may be in the jaws of death, the yogi has nothing to fear. When one moves the kundalini fearlessly for about an hour and a half, she is drawn upward a little through the sushumna. In this way she naturally leaves the opening of the sushumna free and is carried upward by the prana current, in this way one should daily move the kundalini...

Haṭhapradīpikā, chapter 3, 121-122

