

UJJAYI PRANAYAMA (the psychic breath)

Sit in any comfortable meditation asana.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Take the awareness to the breath in the nostrils and allow the breathing to become calm and rhythmic.

After some time, transfer the awareness to the throat.

Feel or imagine that the breath is being drawn in and out through the throat and not through the nostrils, as if it is taking place through a small hole in the throat.

As the breathing becomes slower and deeper, gently contract the glottis so that a soft snoring sound, like the breathing of a sleeping baby, is produced in the throat, if practiced correctly, there will be a spontaneous contraction of the abdomen, without any effort being made.

Both inhalation and exhalation should be long, deep and controlled.

Practice yogic breathing while concentrating on the sound produced by the breath in the throat.

The sound of the breath should be audible to the practitioner alone.

Extension:

When this breathing has been mastered, fold the tongue back into khechari mudra.

If the tongue becomes tired, release it, while continuing the ujjayi breathing. When the tongue is rested, again fold it back.

Duration:

Begin with 10 breaths and slowly increase to 5 minutes for general benefits.

As an adjunct to meditation or mantra repetition, practice for 10 to 20 minutes.

Contra-indications:

People who are too introverted by nature should not perform this practice.

Benefits:

Ujjayi is classified as a tranquillizing pranayama and it also has a heating effect on the body. This practice soothes the nervous system and calms the mind. It has a profoundly relaxing effect at the psychic level. It helps to relieve insomnia and may be practiced in shavasana just before sleep. It slows down the heart rate and is useful for people suffering from high blood pressure.

Practice note:

Ujjayi may be performed in any position, standing, sitting or lying. Relax the face as much as possible. Do not contract the throat too strongly. The contraction should be slight and applied continuously throughout the practice.

Note:

*The Sanskrit word **ujjayi** means “victorious”. It is derived from the root **ji**, which means “to conquer” or to “acquire by conquest” and the prefix **ud**, which means “bondage”. Ujjayi is therefore the pranayama which gives freedom from bondage. It is also known as the psychic breath, as it leads to subtle states of mind and is used together with khechari mudra, the tongue lock, in tantric meditation techniques such as mantra japa, ajapa japa, kriya yoga and prana vidya.*