
Breath in Movement & Breath in Stillness

Our breath is the foundation of all that we do in yoga. It's the ever-present anchor that brings us back to the present moment – the only place we can truly exist in complete wholeness. The mind will want to drag us back to the past, or pull us into the future (and sometimes this can be helpful – beautiful memories, or exciting plans), but the only place we can truly exist is here, now – with this breath, in this moment.

As complete beginners, we may have stepped on the mat without having ever given our breath very much thought. But in yoga, we begin to befriend the breath, exploring our relationship with it. We start to understand our habitual patterns, and invite in more helpful and nourishing ways of breathing and being – the link between our body, our mind and our spirit.

If we practice yoga without a connection to our breath, then we are simply making shapes with our body. Yet when we weave our breath throughout our posture practice, we begin to settle the body and mind – and as we do so we can more readily connect to our subtle energy body, and perhaps even discover glimpses of our true nature.

So how is connecting to the breath in movement and stillness helpful?

The Co-ordination of Breath & Movement

- Uniting breath and movement encourages a holistic approach to our practice. When we link our breath with movement, we are practicing yoga with our whole being – our physical body, our mind, our subtle energy body, our spirit.
- As we link our movement with our breath, we often find that the movement naturally slows down. In turn, this can slow the chatter and activity within the mind.
- Our movements become more fluid when they're led and initiated by the breath – we feel less mechanical in our movement, and more natural and intuitive.
- It gives us an opportunity to explore simple breathing and pranayama techniques in our dynamic postures - helpful if you find a more 'formal' seated practice difficult. For example -
 - In cat, incorporate bhramari (humming bee breath) by humming on the exhale as you move.
 - Incorporating simple pranayama ratios in sequences, such as surya namaskar (sun salute), e.g. as you inhale - breathe in to a count of 4, as you exhale - breathe out to a count of 4.
- You can also incorporate a chanting practice – for example 'Om" on the exhale while moving.
- Linking breath and movement prepares us for pranayama practices.
- Our focus and concentration is improved - our wandering mind has a base to return to. Our awareness is guided from the external to the internal. Your asana practice becomes a moving meditation.
- As our mind begins to settle and become focussed, we begin to experience pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses). We build a deeper connection to our inner landscape, developing a sense of interoception – an awareness of the signals and signs from our body.

“Nature made the breath as a doorway, and that doorway is something that we can enter. We can enter into our own selves through that breath awareness” Rolf Sovik

The use of the breath when staying in postures

- When we remain in a posture, the breath provides stability and steadiness – particularly in a challenging asana such as a balance or one which requires strength and stamina e.g. utkatasana (chair pose).
- The breath gives us feedback – with awareness on the breath we notice if we are pushing or forcing, for example if the breath becomes ragged or laboured. A smooth flowing breath indicates that we have a beautiful balance of effort and ease (sthira and suhka).
- We feel and sense the subtleties of the body and breath. For example, can you experience the very subtle movements of the spine in a posture of stillness such as savasana or semi-supine (legs bent, soles of your feet on the mat)?
- We notice that we are never truly still – there is a life-force energy flowing through us at all times. When you become still in a posture, you might notice this pulse and flow of energy (prana).

Ultimately, there is no separation between breath in movement and breath in stillness. As we move and breathe, we connect to the place of pure stillness within us. And as we sit in stillness, the breath is continually flowing and moving within – refreshing us, energising us, soothing us.

If we can find the steadiness and stillness of breath in asana, we can find the steadiness and stillness of breath in the busyness of life. We find our anchor.

Some points to consider...

Breath awareness and altering habitual breathing patterns may not be easy or accessible for everyone, for example if there are underlying aspects such as asthma, COPD, anxiety or trauma. If you find that being guided to focus on your breath or breathe in a certain way leaves you feel agitated or breathless, then simply let your breath flow in the background in whatever way feels right and natural to you. Ultimately, the breath can be a soothing and healing balm, so do ask your yoga teacher or myself for advice if you experience any challenges or difficulties around the breath – we can provide some alternatives or signpost you for further advice.