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YOGIC BREATHING

MATT GLUCK

A close-up, profile view of a young girl with dark hair, wearing a light-colored, textured sweater. She is blowing on a dandelion seed head, which is held in her right hand. The background is a soft-focus green field under a clear blue sky. The text 'Pranayam, Joy' is overlaid in a blue, serif font.

Pranayam,
Joy

And The Big Bang

My first experience of yoga was walking into my mother's room while she stood with her navel drawn back to her spine. I paused, in suspended animation, like the stillness before the "big bang". My mum then relaxed and we both drew in a vast inhalation.

From that moment, I was captivated. My universe was reborn as I sensed what I had just witnessed was only a few frames away from ecstasy. Something inside glowed, like ancient embers rekindled.

I was a chronic asthmatic from the age of two, also being "burned" (or so I thought) with terrible allergies and eczema. My mum had been studying and practising yoga for some years by then and knew that it would help me to relax and see the truth about myself and my role in life. From the age of five she started to teach me classical pranayam (expansive breath cultivation), relaxation, awareness practices and meditation. I experienced such profound moments of intense clarity,

visions of the cosmos and energy-body reality, that I spent many years seeking to return to the same heavenly abodes.

These fleeting insights, embedded deep within the collective unconscious mind, surfaced to the horizon to remind me that my life had a meaning, I had no idea what it was at the time; I just knew that one day I would write about it. I dabbled with Japanese martial arts from the ages of eleven to fifteen. At seventeen I commenced the Shaolin Arts, inspired by my fellow traveller and elder brother Maurice and the monks of the 70s TV series *Kung Fu!*

Once again my soul arose like a shining sun and my body twisted and turned like a sirocco, finding my feet on this steady planet at last. I look back to remind me which way is forward. Throughout these times, there was always one constant, which pointed to some of the immeasurable mysteries of existence. It was and is the breath. I recollect my school-days, when I used to bend over in the playground, clutching for the next in-breath, stooped over in asthmatic angst. Now I laugh and share that my greatest blessing was this disease.

It brings me to you now and leads me dancing daily in truth, joy and continual change. Having gasped for eons, it took me a long time to see, but finally the penny dropped when I stopped trying. Eventually I realised, especially during asthmatic attacks, that I was "being breathed". Any attempt to try was only interfering.

Breath is Life. It grows because that's nature! Cells exhale and inhale. They give birth to new cells according to memory, in the miracle of creation, that we so often oversee when rapt in inner dialogue. I was always striving for more, seeking to please, as we all do when we forget who we are. A few years ago, I began a daily pranayam practice. Prana is the breath, or life force. It is pure energy which gives and sustains all life in whichever state it presently resides.

Exhale is letting go. Inhale is receiving.

Within this binary, we have all that we need. Pranayam is the art, science and way of wakeful living. The breath is the hub of

all that we are, think and do. It provides access to the mind and its deepest recesses. Pranayam, or yogic breathing practices, enable us to voyage in a steady vessel, to new territories, in order that we may continue to expand in harmony with our ever-growing universe. Breathing practices are combined with asanas (postures and stances), mudras and bandhas (seals and locks), to regulate a balanced flow of prana or chi, within the mind-body. Energy cultivation is simply the art of relaxing in to our natural state of meditation. This is "pure beingness", where the "doer" acts in accord with the divine script, for the good of all other "actors" in this play.

Pranayam teaches us that life flows into and out of us, via the breath. This leads to awareness of being, intention and positive acts. When I gaze over my shoulder, I see that all I ever needed came to me. There was no need for effort on my part. Effort—always drained me, as it arose from a place of fear and clutching for personal gain.

Exercise 1. Exhale Heavy – Inhale Light

- A wonderful key to the breath is to LET GO with the exhalation. When you breathe out you are re-leasing your life. You are letting go. This takes no effort.
- As you breathe out, allow your body-mind to feel heavy, as though it is moving downwards, with the gravitational pull of the earth. Give yourself to your breath.
- Exhale heavy with the feeling of letting go at the end of a busy day, or putting down a load of heavy shopping. How do you feel when you do this?
- Inhalation – As you breathe in, allow your body-mind to feel light, as though it is lifting upwards away from the earth.

Light

- See the effect of trying both of these extremely simple ideas.
- When you are heavy and grounded, you feel stable and calm.
- When you are light and buoyant, you feel free and uplifted.
- The interplay of these two opposing forces, exhale-gravity and inhale-levity, brings them together, like two atoms in nuclear fusion.

Exercise 2. Now add this formula to your breath

- When breathing out, you are aware you are breathing out.
- When breathing in, you are aware you are breathing in.
- This awareness of the present moment gives rise to "being", in which we see that all is as it is meant to be.
- These two exercises prove to us that our breathing has a direct relationship with our outlook and that our outlook affects our breathing.
- If I think I feel light as I inhale, then my thoughts are also playing a lead role in the process.
- Whether we are inhaling or exhaling, we are aware of how relaxed we feel. This facilitates even circulation and distribution of blood and oxygen within the joints, connective tissues, organs and glands.
- If we are not feeling relaxed we become aware of this. Without effort to change anything, we return awareness to the breath. As you progress and combine your intention, breath exercises and limbering practices, relaxation and vitality are sure to come.



MATT GLUCK embodied Pranasana Yoga as a way to enjoy and share life with others of like minded heart. Matt is a British Wheel of Yoga and Life Centre qualified teacher and mentor, helping yoga teachers in training. He has been teaching Chinese martial arts, including Tai Chi and Qi Gong, and Hatha Yoga for 22 years.

Matt teaches in classes and privately in Hertfordshire and London and runs workshops and retreats every few months. Most of his free time is given to sharing and discovering the yogic way with friends, on a day by day and moment by moment basis.

He has just written his second book and DVD series, *How To Breathe*. For more information, please visit www.pranasanayoga.com or email yogamatt@pranasanayoga.com.