

UJJAYI PRANAYAMA

The psychic breath or ocean breath

Ujjayi means 'victorious' and is derived from the root 'jayi' in Sanskrit, which means 'to greet in loud voice' or to 'acquire by conquest'. The Prefix 'ud', means 'to lift up or raise'.

Ujjayi is therefore the pranayama which gives freedom, expansion. It is also known as the psychic breath, as it leads to internalise and connect with the mind force. It is also used together with khechari mudra, the tongue lock, in tantric meditation techniques such as mantra java, ajapa japan, kriya yoga and prana vidya. *If you want to know more about any of these please get in touch as I do not teach this in my weekly classes, but we do some in the meditation class, retreats or masterclasses.*

Duration: 10 to 20 minutes...build up slowly

Contra indications: those who are really introverted may find this an uncomfortable practice; those who are pregnant or have a heart dis-ease would not do an advanced practice where the breath is retained.

Practice Note: you can practice sitting, standing or lying. Keep the facial muscles soft and relaxed throughout. Let the practice be gentle and invite softness in. The contraction in the throat needs to be slight but steadily applied.

Benefits: a calming pranayama; it may bring heat into the body. Will help to calm the whole nervous system and mind, so helpful if you are anxious or a little stressed. It can feel really relaxing within a short time. Helpful to relieving insomnia...if this is why you are doing it, lie in shavasana so you are ready to sleep. The basic form, explained below, is said to slow down the heart rate and is therefore helpful to those with high blood pressure. Ujjayi also helps to alleviate fluid retention.

How to Practice: find the right position for you, lying if using to help with sleep, close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Bring the awareness to the nostrils and the breath, allow it to come to its normal rhythm.

Bring the awareness now to the throat and try to feel or imagine the breath is being drawn in and out through the throat rather than the nostrils.

You will notice the breath becoming slower and deeper as a soft sound develops...like the sound of the ocean coming and going onto the beach...or like a gentle snore of a baby...the sound is in the throat. Concentrate on the sound of both the inhale and exhale. The sound is in the throat not the nostrils. Only you can hear the sound...it is soft and gentle but steady.

Once you are used to this basic practice you may feel up to introducing khechari mudra...bring the tip of the tongue to the back of the palate and holding it there whilst still practicing ujjayi. If the tongue becomes tired or painful, release it, whilst continuing with ujjayi breathing. When the tongue is rested, again fold it back.