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# THE ELEMENTAL BREATH: YIN AND YANG IN PRANAYAMA FOR INNER BALANCE

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**ABSTRACT:** The concept of the Elemental Breath within the practice of Pranayama harmonizes the Yin and Yang energies, fostering inner equilibrium. Pranayama, an ancient yogic technique centered on breath control, encapsulates the essence of this balance. Yin and Yang, representing complementary forces in nature, symbolize duality and interdependence. In the context of Pranayama, these energies manifest through the inhalation (Yin) and exhalation (Yang) phases. The Elemental Breath practice aims to synchronize these opposing forces, fostering a harmonious flow of energy within the body. During inhalation, the Yin energy gathers, signifying reception, coolness, and introspection. It embodies the receptive quality, drawing in vital energy (prana) and allowing for introspective connection. Conversely, exhalation embodies the Yang energy, representing release, warmth, and active expression. It symbolizes the outward flow of energy, facilitating release, and cleansing. The Elemental Breath technique involves consciously attuning to these energies. As one inhales, focus on drawing in pure, revitalizing energy, envisioning it as Yin's nurturing force. As the breath reverses, exhaling, channel the accumulated energy outward with the force of Yang, releasing any stagnant or impure energy.

**KEYWORDS:** Yin and Yang, Pranayama, Elemental Breath.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Yin Yoga, a derivative of Taoist Yoga, combines Western scientific thought with ancient Indian and Chinese energy maps of the body (meridian or nadi system) to gain deeper understanding of how and why yoga works. Yin Yoga brings the practitioner into a deep and mindful state, stretching the connective tissue of the muscular system and bringing increased energy flow through the meridians.

Through deep meditation, the ancient gurus and spiritual practitioners gained insight into the energy system of the body. In India, yogis called this energy prana and its pathways nadis; in China, the Taoists called it qi (pronounced chee) and founded the science of acupuncture, which describes the flow of qi through pathways called meridians (please refer to the level 1 teacher training notes on meridians). The exercises of Tai Chi and Qi Gong were developed to harmonize this qi flow; the Indian yogis developed their system of bodily postures to do the same – yoga. Through the study of meridians, we know that Yin is the stable, passive, unmoving, inward motion of things; yang is the changing, moving, revealing, outward motion aspect. Other yin-yang polarities include cold-hot, down-up, calm-excited, sun-moon, femininemasculine, night-day. There is a movement in Western forms of yoga towards a more 'yang' practice such as Vinyasa, Power, and Ashtanga yoga. These styles of yoga infuse the muscles with blood, as do standing poses, Sun Salutations, or inversions. Once the muscles fill with blood, they become much easier to stretch. Yang-style yoga is wonderful for detoxing the body and emotions, conditioning the cardiovascular system and strengthening the muscles and mind. It could be debated that deep flexibility and stillness of mind, however, is generally not achieved through yang-style asanas to the degree to which yin yoga practice can. Yin-style yoga of holding poses for at least 3-5 minutes, brings greater flexibility to the body through the release of the connective tissue. Yin poses also develop the ability to meditate within the asana, giving rise to a greater ability to sit for longer periods of time in seated meditation

## II. ELEMENT BREATH

We human beings recognize the physical world around us through our five organs of perception and without them we would not be aware of the physical world. Our five senses of: Hearing, touch, sight, taste, and smell. This fact is self-evident and most people are aware of it. What is not so widely known, is that each of these senses is related to one of the five elements: ether, air, fire, water, and earth.



Ether is the medium through which sound is transmitted thus; the ethereal element is related to the hearing function. The ear, the organ of hearing, expresses action through the organ of speech, which creates meaningful human sound.

Air is related to the sense of touch; the sensory organ of touch is the skin. The organ of action for the sense of touch is the hand. The skin is especially sensitive and the hand is responsible for the actions of holding, giving and receiving.

Fire manifests light, heat and color, is related to vision. The eye is the organ of sight, governs the action of walking and is thus related to the feet. For example a blind man can walk, but that walking has no definite direction. Eyes give direction to the action of walking. his is energy, which is converted to colour and light by our eyes. So fire governs our eyes but also gives us direction when we are walking or moving.

Water is related to the organ of taste, without water the tongue cannot taste. The tongue is closely related in function to the action of the genitals. Earth element is related to the sense of smell. The nose is the sensory organ of smell, is related in function to the action of the anus, excretion. The person who has constipation or an unclean colon demonstrates this relationship: he experiences bad breath and his sense of smell becomes dull.

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### III. PRANAYAMAS TO BALANCE YIN AND YANG IN YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Our autonomous nervous system (ANS) is in charge of the regulation of involuntary body functions such as digestion, cardio-respiratory activity, urinary excretion, and reproductive function. The ANS consists of two antagonistic (opposing) parts which work by counteracting each other to maintain a balance. These parts are respectively called the sympathetic and parasympathetic system. This kind of functioning matches many aspects of Yin-Yang theory; sympathetic nervous system would correspond roughly to the Yang aspect (active, fast response, stimulation of activity oriented towards the outside world) while the parasympathetic nervous system shares many characteristics of the Yin aspect (passive, in charge of nourishment and regeneration, activity directed towards the inside world).

#### Action of Sympathetic/Parasympathetic System

The sympathetic system was designed to provide fast action in case of life-threatening danger, as would be normal for a prehistoric man trying to hunt down a hamburger. It prepares us for a "fight-or-flight" reaction: blood flows to the muscles, the pupil dilates, the heartbeat accelerates, glucose is liberated into the blood (if we need to run), while blood flows to the abdomen and digestive activity decreases (we have to spare energy on that level meanwhile). The parasympathetic system was designed to provide rest and adjust the system once the hamburger is obtained, and one had to get the best of it! As a result of parasympathetic activity, a first phase salivation is activated, gallbladder is ready to secrete, and the digestive tract moves more actively. Heartbeat relaxes, pupils contract. Parasympathetic activity leads to energy saving, and concentration on perceptions of oneself rather than the outside world. It is observed during sleep, hibernation, and deep relaxation. This is a Yin effect that leads the activity towards nourishment and regeneration.

#### Permanent Urgency of Modern Life and Sympathetic/Parasympathetic Activity Imbalance

As a result of modern way of life, there is a general tendency to a sympathetic shift. Constant stimulation of senses (audiovisual ads, city noise), multitask working, and around the clock availability contributes to the prevailing of permanent urgency and to the hyperactivation of sympathetic activity. On the other hand, most people do not belong anymore to supporting social structures and family members are often living far away from each other. This leaves many people without direct emotional support, anonymous and isolated in the metropolis. As a result, our environment is easily interpreted as hostile and dangerous. In few words, we've become victims of stress.

#### Symptoms of Sympathetic Hyperactivity

If you experience digestive problems (sluggish digestion, constipation, heartburn), have a dry mouth or hot flushes, anxiety, suffer from palpitations or have difficulty to sleep, you may be experiencing sympathetic hyperactivity.



Sympathetic hyperactivity is a correlative factor often observed in depression, heart condition, obesity, type II diabetes, and when maintained over a long time, it weakens the immune system. We are depriving the body of its regenerative and nurturing properties and logically illness feels invited.

#### IV. PRANAYAMAS TO BALANCE THE ANS

Breath is normally controlled involuntarily by the ANS, but we also have a voluntary control over the breathing muscles. It is a gate between the voluntary and autonomous aspects of our physiology and can allow us to gain control over a hyperactivated sympathetic system. Yoga techniques, through breathing exercises (Pranayama) or stretching of muscles, can help stimulate the vagus nerve, which is the main component of the parasympathetic system. Through a regular practice, stress levels can be reduced and health is promoted.

##### 1. Abdominal Breathing

Lie down so that gravity won't interfere with your moving diaphragm. Close your eyes. Let the breath relax to normal pace and depth. Bring your attention to the area under your navel. Take a slow deep breath, letting the belly relax and expand. Feel the expansion both outside and downward: as you inhale, feel the air pushing down against your perineum. Don't force anything. As you exhale, gently pull the navel in and up toward the spine. Keep the chest relaxed. If you are not aware of your body, you can help yourself by putting one hand below the navel and one on the chest. On the inhale, the hand on the navel should raise toward the ceiling following belly movement. On the exhale it should lower steadily. Monitor the chest with the other hand. It should stay still and relaxed.

##### 2. Lunar Breathing (Chandra Nadi Pranayama)

\*Posture for the following exercises: Sit in Easy Pose (or your favorite meditation pose), with the spine straight. If you are a beginner, you can also seat on a chair, but keep your spine straight and your chest open with relaxed shoulders. Close the right nostril with the help of your right thumb, putting the thumb below the nostril orifice. Slowly inhale through the left nostril counting to a count of 5. Exhale to a count of 5. Follow during a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 10 minutes. This breathing is particularly useful for people suffering of hypertension.

##### 3. Crow Beak Breathing (Kaki Mudra Pranayama)

Hands are lying on the knees in Chin Mudra. Gaze towards the nose tip, with nearly closed eyes. Purse your lips and slowly inhale. Exhale smoothly through the nose. This exercise works on the tongue and mouth which are innervated by the vagus nerve, favoring the parasympathetic activity. This is a cooling pranayama, perfect for hot weather and when excessive sympathetic activity manifests as sweating, hot flashes, and more.

#### yin yang yoga for balancing energy flexibility and strength training

Yin Yang Yoga blends two styles of yoga into one practice – bringing together the benefits of passively holding yoga poses with more dynamic sequences and standing postures. Yin and Yang are the Taoist concepts which describe the two relative qualities present in everything. Yin is more internal, passive, cooling and downward. Yang is more external, dynamic, warming and upward. When these terms are applied in yoga, Yin Yoga is a slower practice where poses are passively held for longer. It works on the deep, dense (Yin) connective tissues and joints in the body. Yang Yoga, in contrast, refers to a more active practice. This works on the (Yang) muscles and blood flow, building strength, stamina and flexibility. Yang styles of yoga are those with rhythm and repetition like Vinyasa Flow.

For a balanced yoga practice, we need both Yang and Yin elements. You could try including one or two Yin or Restorative yoga sessions along with more active yoga into our weekly schedule. Or try practising both Yin and Yang aspects in the same class.

#### The practice of Yin Yang Yoga

A Yin Yang yoga class may start with Yin yoga to calm the mind and to work on the joints before the muscles are warm. Alternatively, the class may start dynamically (Yang) and end with longer held poses to relax and calm the nervous system. The sequencing of the class can have a powerful effect on your energy levels and how you feel after class.

#### Benefits of a regular Yin Yang Yoga practice

##### Yin Yoga

- Stimulates the meridians (energy channels) bringing balance to the organs in the body
- Improves flexibility and joint mobility
- Calms and balances the mind and body
- Reduces stress and anxiety

- Works deeply on the connective tissues (fascia, tendons and ligaments)
- Can prepare the practitioner for meditation practice

#### Yang Yoga

- Strengthens and tones the body
- Improves flexibility and circulation
- Increases stamina
- Calms the mind down by inviting us to synchronise movement with breath
- Removes tension and obstacles in the body to allow breath and prana to flow

#### Practising Yin and Yang Yoga together

“The practice of yin/yang yoga helps us learn about stillness in movement and the flow in stillness.” Sarah Powers Combining both Yin and Yang elements in one class provides a balanced practice and can have a powerful effect on energy levels. For example, if you are low in energy, starting with some Yin poses can be a good way to get on the mat and into your practice. Alternatively, beginning with Yang and finishing with Yin will leave you feeling calm and grounded so can be a nice practice for the evening. By practising Yin yoga first we can carry over this very mindful way of practising into our dynamic practice. This is beneficial for those of us who might have a tendency towards competitiveness or striving in asanas.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Elemental Breath technique within Pranayama serves as a potent means to cultivate inner balance by integrating the Yin and Yang energies inherent in our being. Through the conscious practice of synchronizing breath with these opposing forces, practitioners embark on a journey of self-awareness and harmony. The inhalation, embodying Yin, represents receptivity and introspection, drawing in revitalizing energy. On the other hand, exhalation embodies Yang, symbolizing release and active expression, allowing for the outward flow of energy. By attuning to these energies and consciously balancing their interplay during the Elemental Breath practice, individuals not only harmonize their physical breath but also harmonize their emotional and mental states. This union of Yin and Yang within Pranayama provides a pathway to achieve a holistic state of being. The pursuit of inner balance through the Elemental Breath technique offers a profound opportunity for personal growth and self-discovery.

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