



## TriYoga® Center of Philadelphia at Mind-Body Services

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### WHAT IS PRĀNA?

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I was recently asked this question by a long-time student. Prāṇa is defined in different ways: energy, life energy, breath. It can also be thought of as qi or chi (concepts from Traditional Chinese Medicine). In yoga philosophy, the two great aspects of existence are prāṇa and cit (pronounced chit), energy and consciousness. Prāṇa, as energy, exists everywhere and in everything. It is the energy of creation and the essence of matter and form in the universe. It flows through subtle energy channels called nāḍīs. The breath is one of prāṇa's subtle material forms. The practices of yoga are designed to increase prāṇa, by encouraging control of its flow and energy-enhancing (or "right") actions. Prāṇa Vidyā is the knowledge of life energy; in other words, it is the knowledge and the application of this knowledge to control the flow of prāṇa for greater health and awareness. Prāṇayāma is defined as breathing practices that control and expand prāṇa.

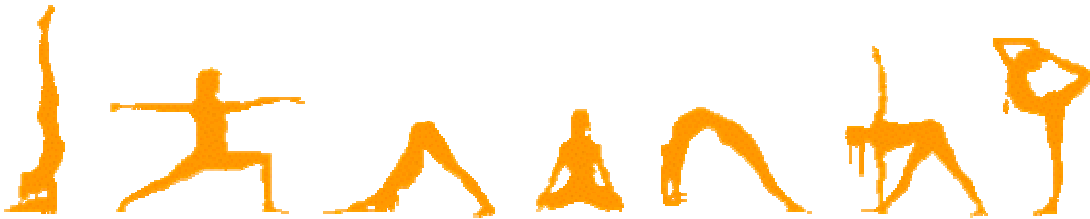
Prāṇa needs to be experienced. It cannot be understood through explanation alone. This is the reason that yoga is an experiential practice in which self-experiment, self-inquiry, and self-realization are encouraged. The experience of energy, of breath flow, and of activity (prakṛti) are ways to experience prāṇa. We can experience prāṇa and gain knowledge of it by tuning in to our experience of energy, breath, and activity, and more particularly, that which increases our energy, breath capacity and flow (svara), and ability to focus. The experience of prāṇa can also be (and often is) quite subtle. For example, it may be possible to feel shifts in energy using hasta mudrās (hand mudrās) or subtle movements of the body in meditative states (prāṇa kriyās). One may also be able to experience the subtle or energy body in relaxed and meditative states (as if experiencing an aura or energy field around one's physical body). Kriyāvati, the inspiration for the TriYoga Flows and Prāṇa Vidyā practices, is the manifestation of kuṇḍalinī (universal life energy) via haṭha yoga.

In class this week, I encouraged students to experiment with changing their breath pacing and the timing of their flows and movements, in order to experiment with and experience

these shifts in prāṇa. For example, it can be interesting to see how one's focus, relaxation, breath, thoughts, and experience of energy change if one comes to Knees to Chest from Partial Recline (1) synchronizing breath and movements of legs and arms versus (2) when one breathes randomly and brings each arm and leg into the posture at a different time. The practices of TriYoga are designed to awaken, enhance, and control the flow of prāṇa through encouraging positive lifestyle choices (including dietary choices), the TriYoga Flows, prāṇayāma (breathing) practices, mudrās, practices which focus the mind (pratyāhāra, the withdrawal of the senses; dhāraṇā, concentration; and dhyāna, meditation), the experience of expanded consciousness (samadhi), and selfless service (karma yoga). Prāṇa is experienced more easily when the body is relaxed, the breath is rhythmical, and the mind is calm; this also expands prāṇa.

The mind and breath are interdependent. Prāṇayāma practices are one of the most powerful ways to control and calm the mind. Thus, yogic teachings maintain that prāṇayāma is one of the greatest yogic disciplines because it brings the breath – and therefore the mind – under control. The more one can increase prāṇa through the breath practices and calm and focus the mind, the more one can balance and increase the flow of life energy.

*For more information, please study Kali Ray's Prāṇa Vidyā manual (2008).*



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