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**SURYA CHANDRA
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Surya Chandra is also known as Sun Moon Breath, Anuloma Viloma ("alternate nostril breathing"), or Nadi Shodhana ("purification of the nadis"). Kaliji has said that Surya Chandra is one of the most important yoga practices that one can do, and she has stated that if one has time to do only one practice regularly, this is the one to do (Ray, 2009, personal communication). Surya Chandra is a pranayama (breathing) practice that has great benefits to students of all levels. Using a slow, smooth, and silent Complete Breath (and vishnu or nasagra mudra to alternately close each nostril), inhale through the left nostril; exhale through the right nostril; inhale through the right nostril; exhale through the left nostril. Repeat 5 or more minutes (Ray, 2002).

Surya Chandra is a practice that greatly steadies and calms the mind. It helps promote alpha brain waves (Ray, 2002). It helps increase lung capacity, increases the intake of oxygen, and relieves sinus congestion, headaches, and nausea (Ray, 2002).

The very word hatha, as in hatha yoga, comes from ha, sun, and tha, moon. Hatha yoga refers to the integration or balancing of these two - sun and moon - energies (Rama, Ballentine, Ajaya, 1976). Surya Chandra, as Sun Moon Breath, is a key practice to promote such balance.

In yoga philosophy, there are two major life forces (pranas), called prana and apana. Prana brings in, allowing energy to nourish the body. Apana takes out, allowing energy to eliminate wastes. To ensure a healthy body and mind, these pranas must be

balanced (Ray, 2002). Inhaling activates prana and exhaling activates apana. Left nostril breathing also activates prana and right nostril breathing activates apana. Therefore, Surya Chandra, with the balance of inhalation-exhalation and right-left nostril breathing, encourages this balance (Ray, 2002).

There are three major energy pathways (nadis): sushumna, ida, and pingala. The central pathway (sushumna) and the subtler nadis contained within it (vajra, citra, and brahma nadis) is the pathway through which kundalini (spiritual energy) travels, activating the energy centers (chakras) and awakening higher consciousness (Ray, 2002). On either side of the central pathway (sushumna) are the ida (mental energy) and pingala (vital energy) nadis. These two nadis spiral around sushumna between each chakra (like a DNA helix). Ida begins on the left side of sushumna and pingala on the right side. Ida travels to the right side of the head; pingala to the left. They cross in the center of ajña chakra (the inner eye) and then ida travels to the left nostril; pingala to the right nostril. Ida represents the moon, intuition, cooling, and feminine energy. Pingala represents the sun, rational, heating, masculine energy (Ray, 2002). If they become balanced, aided by Surya Chandra and other hatha yoga practices, kundalini begins to travel from the base of the spine (muladhara chakra) to the crown (sahasrara chakra). Surya Chandra is, therefore, said to purify/ cleanse the subtle nerve channels (nadis) that carry the flow of life force (prana), to balance male (rational) and female (intuitive) energies, and to harmonize prana and apana (Ray, 2002).

Ultradian cycles are also said to become more regular as a result of alternate nostril breathing. Ultradian cycles are the recurrent rhythms or cycles that repeat throughout a 24-hour circadian day (e.g., in sleep studies, the 90-120 minute cycles of the sleep stages). The nasal cycle is an ultradian rhythm that involves alternating dominance of breathing through the left and right nostrils. Yoga practitioners believe that there is a connection between the phases of the nasal cycle and the dominance (and functioning) of the cerebral hemispheres (Werntz, Bickford, Bloom, & Shannahoff-Khalsa, 1983; cited in Naveen et al., 1997). Right-nostril dominance has been shown to result in the activation of the left hemisphere, resulting in improved verbal performance. Left-nostril dominance correlates with better spatial performance (Naveen et al., 1997). In addition, Osowiec (2000) found that a person's level of self-actualization and psychological health correlates significantly with the regularity of the nasal cycle, an ultradian rhythm. In this study, self-actualization correlated negatively with trait anxiety, state anxiety, depression, stress symptoms, and cognitive and physical stress. Osowiec also found that the regulation of ultradian breathing cycles correlated with improvements in anxiety, depression, and stress.

Due to ultradian rhythms, nostril dominance, and the effects on prana and apana, right- and left-nostril breathing can also have an effect on depression and anxiety. In particular, if one is depressed or has tendencies toward depression, Surya Bheda breathing, repeatedly inhaling through the right nostril and exhaling through the left,

can be helpful. This is said to result from the way that the right nostril activates pingala and the left brain, promoting heat and a more active physical energy, as well as rational thinking (Weintraub, 2004). If one is more anxious or has tendencies toward anxiety, the opposite is true: Chandra Bheda breathing, repeatedly inhaling through the left nostril and exhaling through the right, can be helpful. Left nostril breathing activates ida and the right brain, is cooling, and promotes a calmer and more intuitive mental energy. If practicing on either side leaves one feeling imbalanced (i.e., in the case of Surya Bheda breath, if one feels "too bright"), complete by practicing a few rounds of Sun Moon Breath alternating the nostrils to bring one back to balance (Weintraub, 2004).

References

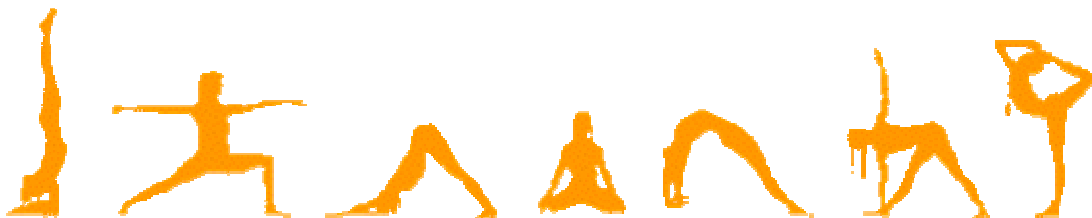
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