

## PRANAYAMA TECHNIQUES: LEVEL I

### DEERGA SWAASAM - YOGIC DEEP BREATHING

**TECHNIQUE:** Deergha Swaasam incorporates all three levels of breathing from the diaphragm, through the chest, and up to the clavicles or collarbones. It is complete breathing, utilizing the full capacity of the lungs. The three parts flow one into the next, as one complete, deep breath. It begins with a slow exhalation through the nose. At the end of the exhalation, pull the abdomen in slightly. Then begin the inhalation by slowly releasing the abdomen and allowing it to expand. Continue the inhalation as you expand the rib cage and then continue to inhale, allowing the upper chest to expand until the collarbones rise slightly. The collarbones rise as the chest expands fully, so there is no need to lift or tense the shoulders. To exhale reverse the order of the inhalation. First drop the collarbones, then contract the chest, and then the stomach—one section flowing into the other.

For beginners, it may be easier to start part by part. To begin the first part, exhale slowly through the nose. At the end of the exhalation, pull the abdomen in slightly. Now begin to inhale slowly, releasing the abdomen and allowing it to expand. Now exhale slowly and evenly, contracting the abdomen slightly at the end to squeeze out the last bit of air from the lungs.

Now add the next part. On the next inhalation allow the abdomen to expand and then continue to inhale while expanding the chest. Now exhale fully contracting the abdomen at the end. On the next inhalation add the third part. So inhale, allow the abdomen, rib cage, and chest to expand and continue to inhale allowing the upper chest to expand until the collarbones rise slightly. Remember that the collarbones rise as the chest expands fully so there is no need to lift or tense the shoulders. Begin to exhale by first dropping the collarbones, then contracting the chest, and then the stomach—one section flowing into the other. Repeat this breathing slowly and steadily.

**TIME:** 3 to 5 minutes. Can also be practiced anytime during the day. As you progress in your practice, you can reduce the amount of time spent in Deergha Swaasam, as the deep breathing is incorporated in the alternate breathing techniques.

**BENEFITS:** This method of three-part deep breathing fills the lungs to capacity and empties them thoroughly, enabling you to supercharge the system with seven times as much oxygen and prana as in a normal breath.

### KAPAALABHAATI — THE SKULL SHINING

**TECHNIQUE:** In this breath, only the abdominal area will move. The chest remains still. It is particularly important during Kapaalabhaati not to slump the posture, because it is easy to strain the chest muscles if you are in the wrong position. So you may wish to place your hands on your knees which helps to spread the chest, yet be sure to keep your posture relaxed not stiff.

Kapaalabhaati is rapid diaphragmatic breathing. We will do this by a series of rapid expulsions. After every expulsion the air naturally flows into the lungs and you are ready for the next expulsion. This is done in quick succession. If you are new to this practice, it's a good idea to put your hand on the abdomen so you can feel if the abdomen moves in as the breath goes out. When you quickly and forcefully contract the abdomen, snapping it in, automatically the air will be forcefully expelled through the nose. Then the abdomen relaxes between contractions and the air flows back in on its own. After the last expulsion, inhale deeply and exhale as slowly as comfortable. This constitutes one round of Kapaalabhaati. Make sure your shoulders don't bounce up and down, and that only the abdomen moves during Kapaalabhaati.

**Time:** Beginners—begin with about three rounds of 15-20 breaths per round, and gradually over time you can build up the number of breaths per round and the number of rounds.

Experienced students — work up to 5 rounds of 100 or more expulsions per round, as long as there is no strain in the system.

**BENEFITS:** Kapaalabhaati cleanses the naadis in the skull and helps to burn out the excess mucous that causes sinus problems and allergies.

**CAUTION:** Do not hurry this breathing at any point. If dizziness results, stop the practice.

**HINTS:** This practice needs a firm and steady posture because of the contractions of the abdomen during the expulsions. The head, neck, and trunk should be in alignment so the chest can be well-expanded and the abdominal muscles relaxed for proper breathing during this pranayama.