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Ocean Breath / Ujjayi Breath

Breathing Practice

Ujjayi is pronounced oo-JAH-yee or sometimes "ooo" as in cool and "ji" as in hi

Time: 5 minutes or longer

Summary: The Ujjayi Breath, also called the Ocean Sounding Breath, is a yogic breathing practice that builds on the benefits of Dirgha Breathing, the complete breath. Meditative and calming, it creates concentration while it creates stamina and endurance. It produces a calming and meditative quality. This breath helps relieve sinus problems and can diminish headache pain.

The Ujjayi is performed by taking long, slow and deep breaths (the complete dirgha pranayama) while creating a special sound in the back of the throat that sounds like the ocean waves.

Although you will breathe in and out through your nose when doing Ujjayi, it is easier to learn first by breathing through an open mouth while whispering the sound of "home" or "Om." Doing so will allow you to experience the open feeling in your throat that is used in Ujjayi breathing. When practicing, notice how your lips are slightly open when whispering the "ho" or "o" sound. Also notice the open feeling in your throat. Maintain the open sensation in your throat as the sound changes into "mmm." Listen to the sound at the back of your throat as you continue breathing out. Repeat several times drawing out the "mmm" sound more and more each time. This is the Ujjayi sound, a unique, audible Darth Vader-type sound. This same sound and feeling in your throat is used for the inhalation as well.

Next, close your mouth and continue breathing in and out through your nostrils while maintaining that feeling and sound in your throat. When done correctly, there is a slight constriction in the glottis (the opening between the vocal chords) during inhalation and exhalation. Once mastered and the breath is refined, the sound is made by fully relaxing the same area of the throat.

Let's begin.

Either come into a comfortable seated position with your spine erect or lie on your back.

Begin by taking long, slow and deep breaths through the nostrils.

Allow the breath to be gentle and relaxed as you slightly contract the back of your throat creating a steady ocean sound as you breathe in and out. The sound need not be forced but it should be loud enough so that if someone came close to you they would hear it.

Gradually, lengthen the inhalation and the exhalation as much as possible without creating tension anywhere in your body, and allow the sound of the breath to be continuous and smooth. Keep the pitch and intensity of the breath consistent and even throughout. Practice breathing so both your inhalation and exhalation are equal in length and duration.

Continue practicing, allowing your inhalations and exhalations to follow a circular flow that is continuous and almost seamless, leaving as little space between the incoming and outgoing breath as possible. Remember, to relax into your breathing; there is no reason to rush.

Another breathing pattern to practice after your Ujjayi breath becomes smooth and seamless is to hold the breath for a few seconds at the end of the inhalation and/or at the end of the exhalation. This tends to produce more focus. However, never hold your breath if you have high blood pressure.