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- ParaYoga Nidra has five distinct goals. The approach, methods and outcomes will differ depending upon which of the five goals you intend to achieve:
  - healing
  - cognition, elevated cognitive functioning, including memory
  - *sankalpa*, empowering the power of resolve, will and determination
  - transformation
  - spiritual awakening
- Healing. At its core, ParaYoga Nidra is a healing practice, one that activates healing at the levels of the first three koshas: body, energetics and mind.
  - “61 points” practice offers one of the most basic approaches to healing in the ParaYoga Nidra tradition
  - it involves moving attention to different energy or *marma* points—specifically 39 of the 108—in the body
  - through this the energy body is harmonized and purified, and mind and body can access a profound state of healing and deep rest
- Cognition. A variety of methods yield an array of outcomes, all related to improve mental function, decompress conscious and unconscious impressions, increase mental clarity, access states of higher perception and improve memory.



- the practice can be used to resolve deep-seated mental/emotional challenges and uncover answers to key questions with which you are struggling to find answers
- since these practices are done in a state of higher consciousness/deep relaxation—they also heighten intuition
- *Sankalpa*. ParaYoga Nidra can be used to strengthen the *sankalpa*—the power of resolve. Through deep relaxation the unconscious is made more permeable and becomes more responsive to conscious intention. Moreover, one can thus apply a *yoga nidra* state of complete effortlessness to access a state—according to the teachings—that is “beyond all doubt, fear and insecurity” which is the best soil in which to plant *sankalpa*. You become significantly more capable of achieving your deepest held desires.
  - through ParaYoga *Nidra*, you move from relaxing the body to relaxing and creating more spaciousness in the unconscious—making it more open to conscious positive life-affirming intentions
- Transformation. This is the fourth intention for the practice. The practice now aims to directly impact (re. transform) your deep-seated beliefs, the seeds of your reactivity, misperceptions—in total, this means the very causes of suffering.
  - in this stage, you learn to remain in the state of yoga even as provocative images, sensations and memories are evoked
  - the state of *yoga nidra* is deliberately expanded so that it graces and frees the sub or unconscious from deep patterning and non-constructive tendencies



- Spiritual awakening. The fifth and final intention for the practice is the ultimate achievement of the practice—spiritual awakening. Far beyond the state of relaxation and healing, ParaYoga Nidra at this stage becomes the equivalent of the highest states of *samadhi*. This is also the domain from which adepts were able to achieve *siddhi*—miracle-like achievements/perfections.
  - the state of awakening is rooted in the realization that you are not confined by the three normative states of consciousness: waking, dreaming or deep sleep
  - you are perfect, non-dual, consciousness, far beyond the division of subject and object, seeker and sought—you are one with Source
  - in this state, one can transcend the laws of nature and accomplish things that would otherwise seem improbable





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- *Pranayama* is *tapas*.
- Many other yogic techniques build *tapas* as well and share similar intentions, such as: “burning” impurities, transforming the mind, strengthening of character, maturation of one’s personality, transforming unconscious patterning as well as accessing the higher potentials of perception including “witness consciousness.” But no other method is as universally revered for its ability to create *tapas* as is *pranayama*.
  - breath and the mind are inextricably linked
  - change your breath, change your mind
  - slowing your breath slows your mind, eventually leading your conscious mind into a complete stillness
  - upon adding breath retention and/or suspension and maintaining the pattern over time, it is possible to access unconscious patterns seated in the breath
  - what was below the surface is now brought to the surface—the unconscious is now conscious—the very definition of yoga, “to make the unconscious conscious” (*Bhagavad-Gita*)
  - with continued application, it becomes possible to dissolve deep-seated patterns stored in the unconscious
- With Momentum as our focus (as opposed to Content), we turn to the image of Momentum as a river, whose qualities are determined by the unique measure of *guna*, *dosha*, *vayu*, *chakra*, etc.



- While we are under the influence of our Momentum (in the flow of our river of *vikruti*—condition) it is difficult to recognize our own stuff (Content).
- *Pranayama* is perhaps the most impactful and direct method to stop, block or slow down this river of Momentum.
  - by damming (re. blocking) the flow of the river of Momentum, the contents (mind stuff, i.e. memories, deep-seated desires, subconscious thoughts, feelings, and beliefs—all aspects of *avidya*) begin to collect
  - subconscious content is now heightened as it accumulates behind the wall created by *pranayama*; it can be viewed with much more clarity and incisiveness
  - thus, *pranayama* becomes a method to not only increase and/or shape *prana*, it becomes instrumental for gaining greater insight into your own mind and more specifically, those parts of it that are normally hidden/unconscious
  - by creating a restraint system, your content—your mind stuff below the surface—becomes more concentrated, which will sooner or later be provocative
- This process of restraint, blocking as well as accumulating life force and mind stuff is the general strategy behind *bandha* as well as breath retention and suspension of the breath.
- The practice sets the stage for collecting life force, purification for mind and body and finally, provocation.
  - provocation is meant to lead you to becoming more deeply identified with witness consciousness



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- anytime you challenge your Momentum, it can be challenging
- for example, consider living for three or four hours, let alone three or four days without your smart phone or consider a yoga class that challenges your Momentum (if it's too slow, too meditative, not meditative enough, too fast, you will most likely have a desire to leave class or never come back)
- Yet that's exactly what is implicit in yoga practice—create some measure of provocation in order to access and become more completely anchored in the “witness,” the part of you that is unchanging and that is free from all conditioned states, including provocation.
  - this is why we say that the purpose of yoga is to be able to tolerate the intolerable, remain steady in the midst of turbulence
  - to realize this goal you must learn to become increasingly anchored in awareness and thus, be able to objectify all that is changing, including your mind
- This is also why we want to gradually build length in breath retentions and suspensions in *pranayama*. However, it is vital to build toward breath retention and suspension methodically, through *vinyasa krama*.
  - before embarking on breath holds, you must first become completely established in a smooth and comfortable (1:1) rhythm
  - ideally this is done by first linking physical movement with breath in *asana*





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- some schools develop exhale (lengthening exhale) before developing one-to-one (*sama vritti*) breathing
- either approach is a legitimate first step—1:1 breathing or 1:2, in which exhale is lengthened
- lengthening exhale stimulates the parasympathetic system for calming, soothing and detoxification
- *sama vritti* leads to greater stability as well as a calm, more “lunar” orientation
- whichever approach you begin with, the intention is to challenge ingrained dysfunctional patterns in the breath and begin to ingrain a new quality of balance
- students who are more comfortable lengthening their exhale, will become more enlivened, more motivated and expansive (*brahmana*), by emphasizing/extending their inhalation
- students, more comfortable lengthening their inhale, will experience a shift toward greater calm, ease and stillness (*langhana*), by emphasizing/extending their exhalation
- After the flow of the breath can be maintained smoothly, efficiently and consistently for a period of time, you can then introduce pause in the breath.
  - consider beginning with short pauses after exhale (one or two counts is sufficient)—with little to no emphasis on *bandha*
  - generally speaking, pausing after exhale doesn't create as much provocation as pausing after inhale

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- pause after exhale provides the opportunity to suspend thought and also internalizes attention (when the pauses after exhale are short)
- The next step in the sequence—which is more provocative and challenging for some, but not all students—is hold after inhale.
  - initially, holding the breath after inhale can make the mind more active so it's important to start gently
- The final stage in the progression of *pranayama* is long holds with *bandha*. Note: even through the steps leading to this stage have been progressive, practices within this final stage must also be approached gradually.
- In this final stage of *pranayama*, long holds are considered overall to be the most provocative.
  - hold after inhale adds *prana* to your system—it's revitalizing, empowering, and if approached gently can have a nurturing effect
  - hold after exhale is more like fasting, in as much as during longer suspensions your system starts to burn whatever it can find to sustain itself; thus it burns stagnant or tamasic forces, awakening dormant intelligence, particularly around the pelvic area, lower chakras





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- Practicing at this final stage requires the guidance of a skilled and experienced teacher, one who has collected many experiences and who has been guided into the practices.
  - do not proceed into intense *pranayama* or teach it to your students without preparation and attention to intelligent progression
- Additional considerations and guidance for practicing and teaching *pranayama*:
  - remember pure breathing; it is of immense value and can be practiced safely with little to no preparation
  - almost anyone can do pure breathing and yet, despite how accessible it is, the practice is incredibly effective, helping resolve fundamental imbalances in a student's breath pattern and nervous system and even emotional life
  - imbalanced patterning is not necessarily resolved doing more advanced practices—in fact they can be exacerbated as the causes of the imbalances can surface unexpectedly and create significant distractions and dis-ease
  - consider that *prana anusandhana* is also a form of *pranayama*
  - simply being aware of the flow of breath moving through the nostrils and experiencing it eventually collect and be absorbed just as light/presence (*prana*) in the midbrain allows students to access the subtle, yet in many ways just as transformational, aspects of *pranayama*



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- The main idea is that before you engage in longer holds in *pranayama*, first become established in and familiar with "witness consciousness" and the experience of stabilized *prana*.
  - long retentions are contraindicated if your vital reserves (*ojas*) are depleted
  - without primarily sattvic influences in your diet, and lifestyle, etc. you should probably not exceed much more than 10 minutes of regular *pranayama* practice with longer holds
  - include some *asana* to ensure a comfortable, calm and stable seat prior to your *pranayama* practice
  - do not rush, if you don't have a lot of time, focus on *prana dharana*—a subtle form of *pranayama*
  - *mula bandha* is spontaneously triggered each time you exhale, thus mindfully link the elevation of the pelvic floor (anterior wall of the perineum) as you exhale, simultaneously lift the point just below the navel
  - always seek guidance before you embark on more advanced practices
- Pause after exhale intensifies the qualities of exhale, while pause after inhale intensifies the qualities of inhale.
  - generally speaking, pausing after exhale challenges your capacity to let go, promoting fewer connections to what is familiar, the stuff that keeps you grounded/embodyed



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- pausing after inhale promotes connection, linkage, empowerment
- if simple pauses after exhale are challenging, it can be valuable to reflect on your relationship with letting go
- if pausing after inhale is uncomfortable, it can be valuable to reflect on your relationship to developing power and receiving
- to get more comfortable with pauses, begin with viloma and then progress to the inhale or exhale *krama* practice, which will increase your retentive power
- only do as much as you can do without crossing the threshold of discomfort
- always seek guidance before you embark on more advanced practices