Lesson 5: Introduction to 3 Part Breathing

Goal:
- Learn how you breathe at different times during the day.
- Notice how breathing patterns influence your state of mind.
- To become aware of normal deep breathing.

Philosophy:

A balanced person exhibits a strong life force or vitality. Yoga uses the word prana to describe the life force. Pranayama means mastery or control of the life force, usually done through breathing exercises and other healthy living practice.

The practice of pranayama was developed from experiences and observations that yogi’s made during deep meditation. They noticed that in deep contemplation the normal breathing pattern is slowed. Through experimentation, they also discovered that the reverse is also true - that by controlling the breath, the mind could be brought to a state of deep concentration. Control of the mind via control of the breath is the purpose of pranayama.

Breathing also corresponds to thoughts and emotions. People who are plagued by mental stress are greatly helped by breathing exercises. The breath becomes like an anchor that steadies the mind. Likewise, the emotions are balanced by deep breathing. Both upset thoughts and intense emotions alter normal breathing. By balancing and deepening the breath during emotional distress, some relief can be found. Physically, it is documented that deep breathing boosts immune function by increasing oxygen metabolism, stimulating lymph propulsion and generation, and improving the nervous system’s interface with the immune system.

Since breathing patterns influence the mind and body, shallow breathing has numerous limitations. Years of faulty breathing cause the muscles around the lungs to tighten. As a result, one may breathe in a shallow fashion due to physiology. This kind of constricted breathing impacts one's state of mind in a negative fashion, just as intentional deep breathing lends itself to relaxation. After some practice, try to become aware of the importance of a deep, natural breathing.

Many yoga students use pranayama or simple deep breathing throughout their day whenever they feel tense. You may gauge your emotions by observing your breathing patterns. A few deep breaths can stabilize your mind and help you regain balance in mind and body.

Exercises:

#1: Observe your body’s normal breathing rhythm. Notice which parts of the lungs move -- the chest, ribcage, diaphragm. Count the inhalation and exhalation as well as any pauses. Observe your breathing in a variety of situations until you become familiar with specific patterns. Perform this exercise in the morning, at work, when relaxing, when emotional and while resting. You will notice how the breathing rate alters with the situation. With this awareness, you may then cultivate healthy breathing patterns by improving your imbalances.

#2: Sit comfortably in an upright position in a chair or a meditative yoga posture. Begin equal breathing by inhaling and exhaling the same count through the nose. Start with a manageable count of four to six seconds or longer. Use the diaphragm, intercostal muscles and clavicle area to breathe deeply. Continue for ten rounds. Gradually increase the exercise by one second per week until you reach 20 counts in and out.