My Personal Experience of Praanic Awareness
as a Healing Art
by Rebecca

The confluence of my two practices, praanayam and homeopathy, has given rise to a direct understanding of how our breath can be used as a healing art.

As a homeopath, my approach to praanayam is holistic, which is to recognise that no part is separate from the whole. Praanayam, an ancient holistic science, addresses the underlying energetic imbalance. In harmony with Ayurvedic medicine, the healing benefit of praanayam restores balance to the heating and cooling systems of the subtle body by recognising the different effects of calming and energising breathing techniques.

Two yogic principles, langhan (reducing and relaxing yogic techniques) and brahman (stimulating yogic techniques) are helpful to determine which praanayam is needed for which type of imbalance. For example, prolonged stress is alleviated by practising langhan praanayam techniques, whereas the state of depression requires brahman techniques.

I see many patients who feel stressed and wish to relax but do not have an effective technique to turn off their nervous system’s sympathetic (fight or flight) response. Some patients suffer ailments that I perceive are due to the discordant interplay between one’s subtle and relative energies. For example, intellectually developed minds are very astute, but they may remain oblivious to the needs of their body. The difficulty of other patients, who may be spiritually attuned, lies in not feeling grounded. For example, they can access subtle perceptions and yet find difficulty in paying their bills on time.

These observations led me to use the breath therapeutically. I started guiding my patients to practise grounding breathing techniques, particularly using Ujjai praanayam and bahya kumbhak, to down-regulate the nervous system’s sympathetic response and up-regulate the parasympathetic (rest and relax) response.

I further noticed that these types of energetic imbalances are aggravated by certain hyperventilating praanayam techniques, such as Kapal Bhati and Bastrika, or indeed any praanayam that takes a strenuous approach causing hyperventilation. This observation led me to discover the scientific principle, The Bohr Effect, which explains the effectiveness of langhan praanayam in down-regulating the over-stimulated response of the nervous system.
The Bohr Effect is a physiological phenomenon, first described in 1904 by the Danish scientific, Christian Bohr, stating that when carbon dioxide in the body increases (by reducing our intake of oxygen), blood pressure and pH is reduced, resulting in improved oxygen delivery to the metabolically active tissue, i.e. breathing less optimizes oxygen in the cells, and thereby releases tension in the body’s tissues, muscles, and blood vessels.

Through the deep practice of bahya kumbhak (suspending the breath on the exhalation), which is a langhan Praanayam, I understood that the perfection of the homeopathic principle, "less is more", in conjunction with The Bohr Effect, is that the subtler the breath, the more potent the effect. This is the true meaning of potency. We can make ourselves potent by bringing the breath into alignment with our subtle awareness. Through the practice of raising our potential energy, we optimize our health, whereby the body and mind naturally come into balance, calmness in a perfectly integrated way.

Praanayam is an ancient yogic practice. It is difficult to know for sure, but I imagine that there has never been a time like today, when people’s nervous systems have been in such an over-stimulated state. Therefore, we must be mindful not to practise hyperventilating praanayam if what we need is langhan praanayam – reducing our breath in order to up-regulate our rest and relax response.

It is for this reason that I call my approach to praanayam Praanic Awareness, to distinguish it from the conventional practices of praanayam. For many years I had practised traditional praanayam, until I started adapting my approach to suit my patients, which had a profound healing effect on my own health. I had been told my high blood pressure was genetic, and therefore could not be remedied without anti-hypertensive medication. But I was able to lower it perfectly with Praanic Awareness. I have also been able to cure my bronchial allergies, which were due to pollen. Even holistic doctors had told me that if I could not remove the cause, I could not overcome the allergic response.

Ordinarily, one is advised to take a deep breath in order to relax. But we must understand what a deep breath actually means. ‘Take a deep breath’, should mean to utilize your breath more effectively. Opposite to what we may think, reducing our intake of oxygen results in an increased oxygen delivery to the cell, and thereby relaxes smooth muscle, which constitutes our air passages, blood vessels, the digestive tract, and the diaphragm. Whereas, over-breathing contracts smooth muscle and causes stress. Therefore, Kayval Kumbhak (suspending the breath) is considered the ultimate goal of praanayam, and so it is referred to as the king of praanayam.
Understanding the biochemistry of breathing, along with praanic wisdom and its breathing practises, we can truly relax with a deep breath without further fuelling our stress response. A healthy breath is imperceptible, subtle, gracious and always from the belly.

I am very inspired to share my findings and techniques with others, especially those in the health care professions, psychotherapists, life coaches, or yoga and meditation teachers, who will be able to guide their own clients and students in Praanic Awareness.

“Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts.” —Thich Nhat Hanh (Zen monk).