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Quieting the Monkey Mind

Yoga & Toning for Meditation

By calming our mental whirlpools, we become capable of expanding our awareness to experience our oneness with the infinite. We may not experience this right away, but with practice, anything is possible. **BY DUDLEY AND DEAN EVENSON**

PATANJALI LIVED 2500 years ago in India, and is known for codifying the system of yoga. He wrote a series of Yoga Sutras in which he explained the fundamental aspects of yoga. Today, many people think of yoga as simply a physical exercise to keep the body in shape, but Patanjali explained it quite differently: *Yoga chitta vritti nirodha*.¹

Here are some different translations of this sutra:

- Yoga is the stilling of the whirlpools of the mind.
- Yoga is the silencing of the modifications of the mind.
- Calm the waves and (re)unite the mind to its calm self.

The yoga stretches and postures were designed to help release energy from the physical body so that

a person could sit in meditation for long periods of time without feeling restless. The true nature of yoga is to experience union—union with God, the soul, the Universe, whatever you want to call it. The word *yoga* itself means “union” or “yoke.”

By calming our mental whirlpools, we become capable of expanding our awareness to experience our oneness with the infinite. We may not experience this right away, but with practice, anything is possible.

Our goal in meditation is to focus on one thought, one mantra, one image, one breath at a time or whatever we choose to be our focus. By this singularity of focus, we find that the host of unregulated thoughts will drift away, and we will be able to access the depths of our inner being and tune into our higher consciousness.

Toning, the Breath of Life

THE SANSKRIT WORD *prana* has a depth of meanings: breath, breath of life, ancient, filled, old, full, life, power, air inhaled, vital organ, vital air, myrrh, respiration, spirit, vitality, energy, wind, spirit identified with the totality, dreaming spirits, poetical inspiration, vigor.

In our research, Dean and I were especially curious about the deeper meanings of *prana* as we were aware of its relationship with the breath. One day, we came across a movie about yoga called *Breath of the Gods* where we learned the story of a yogi named Krishnamacharya, who not only understood the subject of yoga, but was also a primary force in bringing yoga out of the caves and into modern life in the mid-20th century. From this film, we were surprised to learn that although the practice of yoga is over 5000 years old, it was virtually unknown in the late 1800s, even in India, except among a few dedicated souls living in caves and keeping the ancient yogic traditions alive. Krishnamacharya was going to change that. He studied and researched everything he could find about yoga, practiced relentlessly, and even spent seven years in a cave apprenticing with one of the last few yogis remaining. There he mastered over 3000 *asanas* (yoga postures) and developed many of his own. Over time, he evolved his own style of teaching, pioneering the sequencing of yoga postures and also prescribing therapeutic values to many of them.

Especially relevant to us was how he combined yoga postures (*asanas*) with intentional breathing (*pranayama*), thus making the asana practice part of the meditation itself, not just preparation for it. He taught that intentional breathing can have spiritual as well as physiological benefits. He also explained that this joint breathing and asana practice should be done in a spirit of devotion, and that practice done with this intention leads to inner calm.

Toning has the benefit of slowing down and elongating the exhalation by putting a brake on it. Slow down the breath and you slow down the heart rate. Slowing down the breath helps to slow down the incessant parade of thoughts crossing your mind. We “tone up” the body through exercise and muscle building. We can also “tone up” the mind, and “tune up” the spirit using our breath and voice to release tension. In the process, we can regain balance and equilibrium, and experience the peaceful Alpha or Theta brainwave states. Toning is an especially

accessible way to do this because it doesn’t require musical instruments or high tech equipment, just the human voice.

The beauty of toning is that it isn’t about words or melodies; it is simply a neutral sound. You could begin with a simple vowel tone such as *ahh* or *ohh*. The longer one tones at a time, the greater the benefit will be in terms of relaxation of the whole body system and calming the mental processes.

That said, one could tone for 30 seconds or a few minutes and still feel a benefit. Through the breathing and toning process, we consciously invoke the life-giving energy of *prana* and enhance our own inner peace.

How Do We Use Breath and Toning Together?

“In the beginning was the Word,
And the Word was with God,
And the Word was God.”

IN INDIA, PEOPLE BELIEVE that OM (or AUM) is the original sound of the universe and from that primal sound reverberated all existence.

Since we are becoming familiar with breathing techniques, let us look now at how we can use the breath to support a technique called “vocal toning.” This system uses the vibration of the human voice to produce elongated vowel tones or humming sounds that can empower the meditation and at the same time balance the body systems. Toning also expands breathing ability and increases lung capacity.

In the process of toning, we use the breath to push out the voice in long sustained tones. The sound also acts like a “brake” on the breath, helping to extend the exhalation. Toning is basically the sound of your vibrating breath, or the sound caused by your breath vibrating your vocal cords. Some people are not confident in their ability to sing or make sounds, but when a person simply focuses on just the breath, the tone follows naturally. No matter what level of experience a person has, toning can be a very satisfying experience.

Toning can be done alone or in groups, and there are advantages to both. Alone, you can exercise your voice and build your confidence. You can tone or sing in the shower, in the car, in the woods, or at the beach. When done in a group or with a partner, there can be an increased energy that occurs when people with a

common intention tone together for a sustained period of time. This can be exhilarating and greatly enrich the meditation experience.

Humming is an especially gentle form of toning. The technique of humming can reach deeply into your body/being and can be done loudly or softly depending on your situation. You could even hum quietly under your breath at the supermarket and people probably won't notice. Allowing your breath to push out a sound can keep you focused and centered whether you are meditating or not.

Basic Toning Exercise:

A GOOD WAY TO BEGIN toning is by taking a deep breath and exhaling as you let out a nice long Ahh sound, sort of like a long sigh. This is the vowel tone for the heart chakra. Along with each Ahh tone, you can imagine that you are sending out love, and with each inhalation, imagine you are receiving love. Do this several times and feel the resonance in your heart chakra.

OM/AUM

ONE OF THE MOST BASIC of sounds is OM. In Eastern traditions, this syllable is considered to be the seed of all sounds and is the foundation where we can begin our experience with toning. All else can follow the mighty OM. In Sanskrit, it is called a bija mantra. The word "bija" means seed, and all other sounds grow from the bija or seed sounds. We concentrate on OM generated from our heart and solar plexus region and let it resonate deep into the center of our being. The long "ohhh" at the beginning merges into the sustained sound of "mmmm." It sounds like A-U-M. The way you hold your mouth when pronouncing OM actually forms the letters A-U-M so both spellings are correct for the same basic sound.

HUM

HUM IS ANOTHER SEED SOUND that resonates deeply within your being. It can also be toned under the breath like a soft humming resonating in your head. You can even do this softly in public places and not call attention to yourself. In Eastern cultures such as India, Nepal, and Tibet, people often chant mantras as they carry out their daily tasks.

Toning can also be as cosmic and sublime as a chakra tone or the sacred OM. The breath is pushing the sound out and that long exhalation is slowing down the

breath which in turn slows down the thoughts, quieting the mind, and helping the body to relax. It is an ideal sonic meditation tool.

Toning with Intention

SOUND IS A CARRIER WAVE for intention. When we tone OM or any other sound, we are sending out a vibration from our inner being to the ethers. If we connect the tone with an intention, affirmation, or a prayer, there can be an increased flow of blessing. Setting an intention prior to toning (and prior to your meditation for that matter) can be beneficial. It can be different each time, or the same. It's all up to you.

Years ago, we were privileged to host a group of Tibetan monks who were offering chant concerts and workshops across the country. We asked the chant master what made chanting useful in the healing and meditation process. He replied that the benefits come from the "meaning" of the words and prayers that are being chanted. These monks were chanting scriptures that were sacred to them. We then realized that it wasn't just the sounds that were beneficial, but the intention behind the sounds that made them work.

Remember, there are no hard or fast rules about toning or about meditation. There is only your experience. There are definitely guidelines and useful techniques that can help you along the way, but developing your own system or "way" of meditation and toning will be the best. No one knows everything about meditation, the "only way" or the best way to do it, so look around, listen, learn, and feel what resonates with your soul.

One nice thing about the uplifting and satisfying practice of toning is you can do it anywhere. It is even okay to do while driving. We would caution that many of the meditation techniques mentioned in this program should NOT be done in a car, but toning and chanting are actually good to do while driving as they keep you focused and centered. Always be your own judge about how you are able to stay grounded in situations where it is important to be aware of your physical environment. 🌸

Notes

- 1 Sutra 1.2 of *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*
- 2 John 1:1-2, New Testament (KJV)

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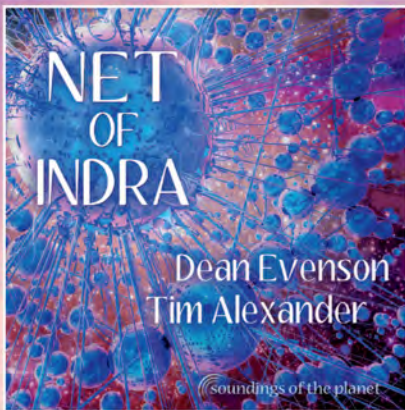
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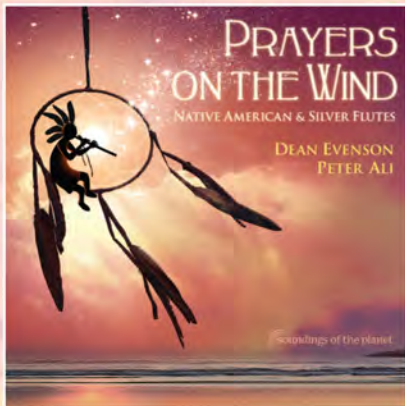
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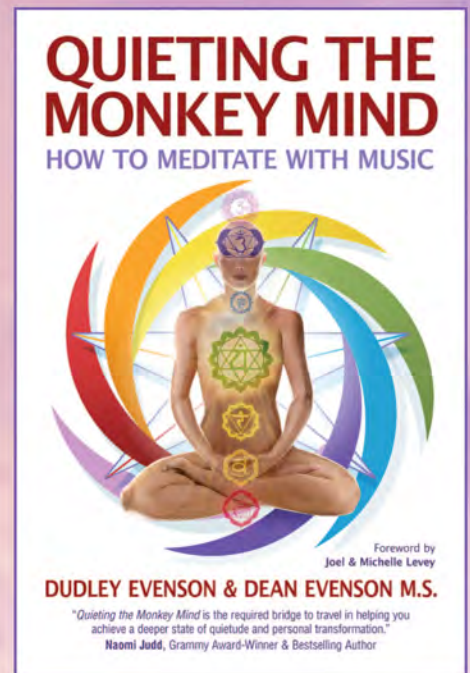
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