

## THE PAUSE THAT REFRESHES

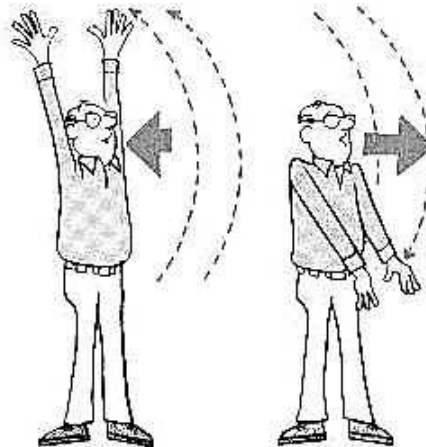
### **Simply raising your arms and taking a deep breath can lead to stillness that lies at the heart of Yoga.**

By Richard C Miller

*'Knowledge more secret than the science of breath, wealth more useful than the science of breath, a friend more true than the science of breath has never been seen or heard of', says the ancient Shivagama treatise on the science of breathing.*

we begin our study of yoga. We need to give it conscious attention during every movement, from extending a finger to moving the entire torso. Breath influences every movement and every movement influences the breath.

Physical health, emotional balance, mental clarity, and spiritual unfoldment are all intertwined with the movement, depth, rhythm, and continuity of the breath.



A simple practice to begin observing this dynamic interdependency is the simple standing pose, TADASANA / Mountain Pose, while moving your arms back and forth from resting by your side to lifted above your head.

Every bodily function – the beat of our heart, the elimination of cellular wastes, the pH balance of our blood – is linked to the flow of the inhale and the exhale. Emotions rise and fall with the breath; mental activity depends upon healthy balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide in the brain, and in meditation, the breath is an exquisite pointer to our essential nature.

Begin by standing in a comfortable position with your feet hip-width distance apart and your arms resting at your side. Allow your knees to be slightly soft so that your feet take the entire weight of your body. Close your eyes and take a few slow breaths while you find your calm centre of balance and steadiness. Sense each body part in turn from your toes and feet, to your head and face, to your hands and fingers. Take your time. Feel yourself settling.

Therefore, we need to give more than just a passing attention to the role breathing plays during our practice of yoga. In fact, it should be integrated into every component of our practice – from the first asana to meditation – from the very first day

Begin to sense the back and forth flow of inhalation and exhalation. At the end of each breath, honour the spontaneous pause of one to three seconds that naturally occurs.

During movement thoughts tend to disperse into everyday thinking. Pausing helps us refocus into the present activity. I call this the "pause that refreshes".

Now allow your arms to rise out and away from your sides and upward as you inhale and return to their resting position by your sides as you exhale. Arms and breath should move together. Don't let the arm movement get ahead or behind the breath movement. You are partaking in a synchronised dance of movement, breath and energy.

Allow the movement of your arms and breath to become slow, smooth and steady. Your arms should feel as if they are floating up and down on the breath like feathers on a soft and gentle breeze. During the pause between breaths, body and mind should be still. This is a moment to observe, relax and be completely aware of yourself.

During your first three breaths move your arms only one-third of the way towards the vertical position, then back down. With the next three breaths, move the arms two-thirds up, then down again. During the final three breaths, allow the arms to move all the way into the vertical position, then down. This gives your body, movement and breath time to adapt to one another and become friends.

While moving & breathing, observe how your body responds to these simple gestures. Are you forcing the movement or the breath, or are you really allowing them to come on their own without comparison or competition?

After about twelve breaths, take a few breaths with the arms held over your head. With the inhalation, allow the arms to lengthen upward. Imagine that your hands extend through the ceiling into the sky. On the exhalation, relax the shoulder and sense the entire body. Be at ease, knowing that the pose is perfect and there is nothing to accomplish.

After a few breaths, return to your resting position. Take a few moments in silence to observe the impact the movements have had on your body-mind.

Movement is only one part of yoga. The "pause that refreshes" between breaths and movements is also of tremendous importance. While stopped, pay attention to the silence within the pause. Herein lies one of the greatest teachings of yoga. Can you bring this silence back with you as you begin to move again, so that it remains an ever-present background behind everything that you do?

The "pause that refreshes" points us toward the all-pervading Silence-pure consciousness – that is our essential nature. Realise this and from the very beginning of your yoga practice you have arrived at the end-goal of yoga – the awareness of your true nature. From something so simple as raising your arms and breathing comes the discovery that lives at the heart of yoga.

*Richard C. Miller is a clinical psychologist and yoga teacher in Mill Valley, California, and editor of the Journal of the International Association of Yoga Teachers.*