

PranAligned

Based off the Teachings of Karen Mlscall-Bannon & Embodyoga®

PranAligned is a basis for the practice of yoga asana that looks to align each practitioner with their *prana*, or life force energy. This life force energy is present in all living beings, from plants to animals to humans. The absence of prana is the remains of all things listed above: a dead tree, a lifeless animal, or a human in a casket.

In yoga, we learn of the koshas, or sheaths of our being. PranAligned focuses in on the Prana Maya Kosha, or subtle (energetic) body and encapsulating the prana throughout each posture, and the movements in between.

What is Prana?

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika defines prana as "vital energy force sustaining life and creation, permeating the whole of creation and existing in both the macrocosmos and microcosmos" (Muktibodhananda, Bihar School). It can also be said the Prana is the field in which we are animated, as it is the continuum and we are a blip on the map.

Western science has yet to address the energetic body, relying solely on the physical body, or annamaya kosha. (See Koshas, page 76)

Note: Prana can be differentiated by use of a capital "P" when referring to all manifested, living creation.

Forms of Prana

BREATH (PRANAYAMA)

As we begin to study yoga, the term prana usually shows up in "pranayama," as one limb in the 8-Limb path of yoga. It is most commonly translated to mean "breath control" or "breath restraint."

If Prana is the ever pervasive presence of life, and breath is what continues to give us life, we can see that breathing is our most utilized form of prana.

From Yoga Anatomy (Kaminoff & Matthews):

"It is important to note that in spite of how it feels when you inhale, you do not actually pull air into your body. On the contrary, air is pushed into the body by the atmospheric pressure that always surrounds you. This means that the actual force that gets air into

the lungs is outside of the body. The energy expended in breathing produces a shape change that lowers the pressure in the chest cavity and permits the air to be pushed into the body by the weight of the planet's atmosphere. In other words, you create space, and the universe fills it."

CREATION OF SPACE

With this in mind, that Prana is an ever present force that we as humans are reliant on and only privy to for a certain length of time; and that we only create the space, and the universe breathes us in; we start to see a bigger story of how, as we align to prana, we are able to live in congruence within this universal truth and for lack of a better term, milk it for all it's worth.

One could go on to say that anything that is taken into the body, through mind, body or soul, is a form of prana. Kaminoff starts Yoga Anatomy introducing the term prana as "what nourishes a living thing, but it has also come to mean the action that brings the nourishment in." Enter yoga asana, a place fully ready and capable of being the action to bring prana in.

Hatha yoga, itself, is defined as the yoga of forces.

NOURISHMENT

Kaminoff continues with apana, as it "refers to the waste that's being eliminated as well as the action of elimination." On the cellular level, all activities revolve around prana (taking in) and apana (removing). As beings that are made up of over 30 trillion cells, it becomes important to mimic these patterns as a whole, embodied human being.

How do Prana and Apana apply to Asana?

THE MACRO REFLECTS THE MICRO

The process of prana, bringing in, and apana, releasing, correlate to yoga asana first and foremost with the breath. If we have the support of the breath within every posture, nay every moment, we are able to start accessing the prana maya kosha.

These concepts can also be mimicked in the postures. Prana is expansion, as a cell may expand upon taking into nutrients or oxygen, and then condensing with Apana when releasing waste or exhaling. As we move from micro to macro, or cellular breath to embodied breath we start to see the correlation of the spine within this framework.

SPINAL REFLECTION

Our bodies naturally come into what is known as spinal extension with every inhale and spinal flexion with every exhale. The cervical spine, or neck, moves slightly back in space as we breathe in and slightly forward as we exhale. You may also experience movement along the spine within your own body that exhibits this natural pattern.

The Bandhas

Bandha is an energetic lock within the body. Most schools of yoga recognize the following bandhas:

- Mula Bandha — root lock, pelvic floor muscles, perineum
- Uddiyana Bandha — floating up, abdominal muscles, diaphragm
- Jalandhara Bandha — net holding, chin, base of skull

Jivha Bandha is another lock that is done by placing the tongue lightly at the hard palate of the mouth, separating the upper and lower jaw. This bandha is known as the Lock of the Soul or Tongue, and connects to the pineal gland — the home of amrit, or nectar.

Different schools use the bandhas at varying levels for different applications. For the use in PranAligned hatha practices, the practice of bandha is the energetic echo of muscular sensation; meaning, non-grasping and non-forcing. It can be said that the bandhas are always present, not something to be done, just something to not let go of.

PRANA CONTAINMENT

The areas defined by the bandhas are within the axial skeleton — the torso and head. As we start to view the torso as a container for prana, with the supports of breath and bandha, we open our practice to a deeper understanding where we are able to experience the movement of prana in the body and harness it. Every posture and the movements between postures become a unique experience of life force energy.

Anatomy Background

Before we ever start to think about muscles and bones, it is important to think of the development each of us has undergone through becoming human, in the womb. The creation of our being and the development that unfolded at our simplest levels creates the patterns and framework for us to explore and contain prana at the highest level.

Before we ever look anything like humans, the cytotblast that creates us through sperm and egg creates a three-layered disc that continues to develop into who we are today. There are steps before this disc, but for all intensive purposes we shall focus on when the three layered disc consists of the ectoderm, mesoderm, and endoderm. The primitive streak that moves laterally down the center of the three-layered disc starts to become the notochord (the beginning of the