

## ***Kripalu Transformative Breathwork***

Simple techniques are often the most powerful. One of the simplest and most powerful is conscious, connected breathing, a technique that lies at the root of a wide-variety of spiritual practices that raise energy to higher levels of vibrancy.

Kripalu Transformative Breathwork is a direct application of conscious, connected breathing. For about an hour, you lie on your back and sustain a full and flowing breath through an open mouth. You actively breathe in by lifting the upper chest, then exhale naturally with an intention to completely relax and let go. As you breathe, you will be guided to connect the in-breaths and out-breaths. At the top of the inhalation, you move directly into the exhale. As soon as your exhalation completes, you move directly into the next in-breath, keeping the muscles of the throat relaxed to open the air passage to maximum air flow. That's really all there is to this on the level of technique.

Why is this practice so incredibly transformative for so many? Yoga teaches that energy is intelligent and evolutionary. As you raise energy, you naturally trigger internal and external *kriyas*, spontaneous healing actions that purify your physical, emotional, and mental bodies. As your energy begins to flow more freely, it will automatically move to places where it is blocked. Strong sensations may arise in the body. Old memories and emotions may surface in the mind. Breathworkers say that the breath activates and the breath also integrates. As blocks surface and are released, healing and transformation occur naturally.

During the breathwork session, all sorts of experiences may occur, spanning the spectrum from uncomfortable and difficult to blissful and ecstatic. Some people access a wealth of psychological content through this technique; others simply experience alive and tingling energy coursing through their being. As the session progresses, most are drawn deeper and deeper into a paradoxical sense of awakened energy, deep relaxation, and expanded awareness.

Whatever you experience, yoga teaches that the process itself is guided by an inner wisdom and organic intelligence that can be trusted to bring you exactly what you need for healing and growth. At the end of each session, most participants leave with a sense of deep relaxation, greater insight into themselves, and a fresh perspective on life. If you've done breathwork before, it's important to know that no two sessions are ever quite the same. The best you can do is wipe the slate of your mind clear of expectations and remain open to an entirely new experience.

For the first 5 to 15 minutes, the technique is likely to occur as impossible to sustain and you may encounter resistance or even fear. Most people find that if they can stay with a full and flowing breath, the body takes over and a rhythmic breath arises that can be sustained for the rest of the session. Since it's easy for your attention to wander off the breath, the session leader or your breath coach may remind you to come back to your breath, or encourage you to re-commit to a period of full and flowing breath. You are always free to follow or not follow any guidance offered. If at any time you need help during the session, simply raise your hand to alert your breath coach.

While breathing, you may experience *tetany*, a feeling of numbness or cramping in the hands, feet, and sometimes the lips and tongue. Although sometimes uncomfortable or even painful, the temporary tetany brought on by breathwork is part of the normal process and not dangerous. Tetany usually occurs from forcing the breath out on the exhale, instead of relaxing completely, which is believed to

skew the balance of blood gasses. If you encounter tetany, you will be guided to not push away the sensations, and to relax as much as possible on the out-breath.

There are many different schools of breathwork, and the teachings that surround them vary markedly. The Kripalu approach is to simply activate energy through deep breathing and trust what naturally arises from the wisdom of your own bodymind to transform you. As your program directors and breath coaches, we're here to offer our encouragement and support to stay with the breath, ride the waves of energy and awareness, and remain present to the subtleties of your experience. We also acknowledge that the real teacher is your own inner experience, and our role is to help you remain fully present and awake to learning from your own direct experience of breathing and being.

**Contraindications:** Breathwork has not been scientifically studied, but the process involves both physical and psychological challenge, and some conditions are considered contraindications. These include: pregnancy; cardiovascular disease; personal/family history of aneurisms; epilepsy or other conditions involving seizures; retinal detachment; recent injury or surgery; history of mental illness, trauma or, or current emotional or mental issues that could be aggravated by the breathwork session; untreated high blood pressure; conditions requiring major medications and especially tranquilizers; infectious and contagious conditions; and other serious injury or disease. It is thought that breathwork may pose a risk to people with epilepsy of triggering a seizure. People with asthma usually tolerate breathwork but should bring their inhaler. People with high blood pressure should inform the program director and then carefully monitor their response to an increased rate of respiration.

**Note: Participation in the Energy Intensive breathwork session is entirely optional. You are free to opt out or ask for ways to modify the technique to suit your needs and comfort level. If you have any of the above-noted conditions, or any other conditions that you feel we should know about, it is important for you to bring them to the attention of a program director before the start of the session to discuss your participation. If you experience discomfort or any symptoms of a nature to cause you concern during the breathwork, stop the breathing technique and bring your concerns to the attention of your breath coach and/or a program director so immediate instruction can be given. If during the breathwork you are loud or otherwise present a disturbance your neighbors, you may be asked to move to a different spot in the room.**