



Ujjayi Pranayama for Snorkelers and Divers

Being both a yoga instructor and a diver, I have learned to appreciate the benefits of deep, cleansing breaths both on land and underwater. The style of deep breathing that is typically learned first in a hatha yoga class is referred to as the Ujjayi (oo-jy-yee) pranayama. This breath is audible and rhythmic, ridding the body of carbon dioxide and other toxins in exchange for new oxygen. This breath helps one focus on the present moment and is used to clear the mind and slow the heart rate while engaging in movement and preparing the body for meditation. This calming breath creates a sense of peace and mental clarity that can provide many benefits throughout yoga class and beyond.

To practice this breathing style, inhale through the mouth for at least six seconds while using the throat like a vacuum. This breath should fill the lungs and the diaphragm. Hold the breath for a few seconds, then exhale with the mouth and throat open as if you were fogging up a mirror (making a HA sound); the exhale should be equal in length to the inhale. Once you have mastered this, try closing your mouth bringing the air in and out through the nostrils. This breath will be audible, and will sound similar to Darth Vader (not a very peaceful and yoga-like character, but a helpful auditory tool none the less!).

I have found that this Ujjayi (victorious) style of breathing is particularly beneficial when I am snorkeling or diving. This breath can help one feel much more in control of his/her breathing and create a sense of comfort and relaxation in the water. It will also aid with maintaining a steady rhythm, avoiding the shallow, nervous breathing that is inefficient and raises the heart rate. The sound will also help focus the snorkeler or diver on the present moment, enhancing the entire audiovisual experience. Although a snorkeler or diver may want to regulate the breath even more in order to conserve air, practicing this type of breath underwater can prove to be a very valuable tool to feeling safe, secure and relaxed during, what should be a truly dynamic, relaxing and fun experience. Just one final tip - make sure there is no water in your snorkel before taking that long inhale! Enjoy your underwater experience and Namasté.