

Chakra 4: Anahata- The Heart Chakra

Anahata the 4th chakra is located at the centre of your chest at the level of the heart. Physically, it controls the lungs, heart, thymus and secondary glands of the chest. Air is the main element. It corresponds with to the subtle energies of our galaxy, It bestows love, affection, selflessness and high aesthetic and intellectual feelings.

Anahata shows conscience and compassion when it is balanced. It's all about how you manifest love, forgive others, and your feelings. This is a powerful chakra, as it is the center of the seven. Three above, three below. Matter and spirit are united. This is a very powerful location in the body. It is directly connected to the Third Eye-Ajna 6th and the Crown- Sahasara chakra 7th.

Anahata is all about love. We may feel love one day and angry and resentful the next. We may have both some deficient and excessive characteristics (see chart). The important thing is to examine the basic stance we take in life and work to bring that stance into balance whenever we can. The main healing in the 4th chakra is to accept love, give love but most importantly practice self love and acceptance. Perform the asanas that open the chest and bring the universal energies and love into the heart. As Anahata influences the lungs, Pranayama, yogic breathing exercises are another method of bringing in life and energy into the chest chakra.

Pranayama is control of Breath. "Prana" is Breath or vital energy in the body. On subtle levels prana represents the pranic energy responsible for life or life force, and "ayama" means control. One of the simplest and safest methods is ujjayi breathing. Deep pranayama practice is not recommended for beginners as it can be dangerous. In the 8 limbs of yoga of the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali, pranayama comes after asana, where good physical conditioning is created in preparation. It is essential you see the guidance and preparatory training of a trained guru for learning the deeper methods.

Ujjayi breathing is sometimes called "the ocean breath". Unlike some other forms of pranayama, the ujjayi breath is typically done in association with asana practice. Ujjayi is a diaphragmatic breath, which first fills the lower belly (activating the first and second chakras), rises to the lower rib cage (the third and fourth chakras), and finally moves into the upper chest and throat. The technique is very similar to the three-part Tu-Na breathing found in Taoist Qi Gong practice.

Inhalation and exhalation are both done through the nose. The "ocean sound" is created by moving the glottis as air passes in and out. As the throat passage is narrowed so, too, is the airway, the passage of air through which creates a "rushing" sound. The length and speed of the breath is controlled by the diaphragm, the strengthening of which is, in part, the purpose of ujjayi. The inhalations and exhalations are equal in duration, and are controlled in a manner that causes no distress to the practitioner.

Ujjayi is a balancing and calming breath, which increases oxygenation and builds internal body heat. Ujjayi breathing may be used continuously throughout Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga, the variations known as power yoga, vinyasa, or flow yoga. This breath enables the practitioner to maintain a rhythm to their practice, take in enough oxygen, and helps build energy to maintain practice, while clearing toxins out of the bodily system. This breath is especially important during transition into and out of asanas (postures), as it helps practitioners to stay present, self-aware, and grounded in the practice, which lends it a meditative quality.

As I, Joanne am a trained teacher in Power Vinyasa yoga ujjayi is the only pranayama technique I can confidently and safely teach you at this point in my training and would recommend as a beginner in yoga.

ELEMENT	DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE	DEFICIENCY	HEALING PRACTICES
Air	4 to 7 years	Antisocial, withdrawn, cold	Breathing exercises, pranayama
NAME		Critical, judgmental, intolerant of self or others	Work with arms, reaching out, taking in
<i>Anahata</i> (unstruck)	Forming peer and family relationships	Loneliness, isolation	Journaling, self-discovery
PURPOSES	Developing persona	Depression	Psychotherapy
Love		Fear of intimacy, fear of relationships	Examine assumptions about relationships
Balance	To love and be loved	Lack of empathy	Emotional release of grief
ISSUES		Narcissism	Forgiveness when appropriate
Love	BALANCED CHARACTERISTIC		Inner child work
Balance	Compassionate		Codependency work
Self-love	Loving	EXCESS	Self-acceptance
Relationship	Empathetic	Codependency	Anima-animus integration
Intimacy	Self-loving	Poor boundaries	
Anima/animus	Altruistic	Demanding	
Devotion	Peaceful, balanced	Clinging	
Reaching out and taking in	Good immune system	Jealousy	AFFIRMATIONS
COLOR		Overly sacrificing	I am worthy of love.
Green	TRAUMAS AND ABUSES		I am loving to myself and others.
LOCATION	Rejection, abandonment, I	PHYSICAL MALFUNCTIONS	There is an infinite supply of love.
Chest, heart, cardiac plexus	Shaming, constant criticism	Disorders of the heart, lungs, thymus, breasts, arms	I live in balance with others.
IDENTITY	Abuses to any other chakra especially lower chakras	Shortness of breath	
Social	Unacknowledged grief, including parents' grief	Sunken chest	
ORIENTATION	Divorce, death of loved on	Circulation problems	
Self-acceptance	Loveless, cold environment	Asthma	
Acceptance of others	Conditional love	Immune system deficiency	
DEMON	Sexual or physical abuse	Tension between shoulder blades, pain in chest	
Grief	Betrayal		

Bhjangasana- Cobra pose

To perform lie on the floor face down, keeping the legs extended and close together. Place the palms on the ground just below the shoulders. Gently pushing to raise the head and upper torso by bending the upper spine. Work on opening the chest and lengthening the neck. Ensure that the hip and pubic bones remain on the floor and press into the ground releasing any pressure on the lower spine. Modification to make this less intense is to move the hands out in front of the shoulders or to rest on the elbows and forearms and working to open the chest and round back. Concentrate on the cosmic energies coming into anahata chakra. Afterward perceive the fine vibrations of the activation of anahata in the area of the heart. Also note a pleasant mood, deep internal calm, attunement with the plane of universal love and affection with no specific object. Forbiddances: People with advanced form of abdominal or pelvic hernia and those with displacement of spinal discs must begin gently and with care.

Benefits:

Makes a flexible spine relieving slipped discs, hunchback, lumbago and certain forms of sciatica. Tones the muscles and nerves of the heart and air cells of the lungs. By creating intra-abdominal pressure the liver, spleen, pancreas, gall bladder, kidneys and adrenals are toned and improves functioning. Bhujangasana is also useful for menstrual difficulties and pain including amenorrhea. Increase blood flow to the pelvis nourishes the reproductive organs and will add in easier childbirth. This asana will bestow self confidence, nobleness and increase the capacity to love. In advanced forms of practice can help in arousing the kundalini coil of energy.

Vajrasana – Diamond pose

A simple kneeling posture performed with the knees slightly apart. Place the big toes so there is a distance of 2-5 cm in between them. Rest the hips and buttocks between the heels so it is supported on the soles. Care should be taken to not sit on the heels and to not have the toes touching. In the beginning a folded blanket can be used between the feet and buttocks, or supporting under the ankles. Keep the spine straight and bring the hands to the hips, with the thumb encircling the waist. Concentrate on the simultaneous arousing of anahata and ajna (6th) chakra by cosmic energies. Afterward note increased mental power and harmony between the heart and mind. With advanced practice you can perceive vajra- a tremendous force of clarity.

Benefits:

Strengthens the muscles and nerves of the calves and thighs, blood pools and nourishes the knees, curing and preventing rheumatism. Relieves pain in the heels, sciatica and all sorts of myalgia (muscle pain) in the lower limbs. Is a cure for flat feet if steadily practiced and extremely beneficial to those who spend long hours standing. Also strengthens the lower lumbar spine. More so vajrasana is known to be useful to remedy issues of the abdominal and reproductive organs. It helps normalize hormone levels and elevates digestion. It is highly recommended to perform vajrasana after eating to aid in digestion and ward off post food sleepiness as it diverts the energy up through the nadis (chakra channels) rather than down. The energy of the food can then nourish the superior structures with pure energy allowing for spiritual use. Vajrasana is also known to prevent graying of hair if practiced steadily from youth.

As vajrasana gives activation of the mind it is useful to perform when increased power of concentration is needed (IE Studying) or if you are prone to excessive sleep. As it simultaneously arouses anahata and ajna it balances the emotional plane with the mental plane and increases self confidence. Steady practice can lead to the achievement of many powers and paranormal capacities.

Gomukhasana- Cow Face Pose

This asana can be performed in two ways. Seated simply in vajrasana or seated with the legs crossed at the knees and stacked. The benefits listed below are for the vajrasana version and performing the hip opening position has additional benefits to the lower limbs. Just as in all the other polar asanas it is important to perform the left, receptive side first then the right dominant side second. Take vajrasana or sit down tucking the left leg under beside the right hip, cross the right leg over so the knees stack one on top of the other and the right foot is beside the left hip. The sides of the feet and ankles should be on the floor with the buttocks seated level on the floor between the feet. In the beginning it may help to elevate the buttocks on a cushion or to lean forward on the hands and knees to work on tucking the feet deeper beside the hips before sitting the buttocks down. Once in the chosen seated position we will raise the left arm above the head, bend the elbow to reach for the shoulder-blade and bring the right hand up behind the back working to grasp both hands together. The typical over-under shoulder stretch. Keep the spine straight, push the chest forward and ensure the neck stays inline with the spine. Relax all the unnecessary muscles and breathe freely.

When performing the left side concentrate on the arousing of the negatively charged aspects of anahata chakra, felt as fine vibrations in the area of the heart plexus and as waves of divine love. In superior stages a state of grace can be achieved.

When performing the right side concentrate on the arousing of the solar aspects of anahata, manifesting as vibrations as well as an increase capacity of offering love to all beings and a mood of gratitude towards the Divine. Finally note the difference between the two performances polarity effects.

Benefits:

Has all the benefits to the lower limbs of vajrasana, if in the cross legged variation extra benefit to opening the hips and ankles. This asana straightens the back, broadens the chest, develops the arms and shoulders. Restores the elasticity of the muscles of the back, balances the spine, lumbar area in particular. Gives freedom to the joints of the shoulder, relieves sprains of the forearms as well as relieving piles and insomnia. Gomukhasana is particularly known for its healing benefits of the organs of the chest. Particularly the lungs and patients of asthma, TB, allergy or other respiratory ailments are advised to practice this asana. The lung on the side with the lowered arm is almost stopped, while the one with the arm raised works rapidly increasing its condition. Whole body purification by the increased amounts of oxygen and prana -life force enter. Practice has also been known to increase the receptiveness to physical sensation of the chest and have great benefits to the breast for relief of fibrosis, tumors or other lumps and to make breast feeding easier.