



The Five Prana Vayus

vaa - root meaning "to blow" or "to move"
vayu - wind or "bio-electrical activity"

Prashna & Taittiriya Upanishads present the *vayus*

prashna - "question," cognate German *Frage* or *Forschung* -- "describing the results of personal experience in the inner field, carried out by the mind, just as we use it for experiences in the outer field, monitored by the senses."

~ Eknath Easwaren, *The Upanishads, Translated for the Modern Reader*

adapted from David Frawley, *Yoga & Ayurveda*:

"To change something we must alter the energy which creates it."

"There is an old Vedic story about prana that occurs in various *Upanishads*. The five main faculties of our nature—the mind, breath (prana), speech, ear and eye—were arguing with each other as to which was the best and most important. This reflects the ordinary human condition in which our faculties are not integrated but fight with each other, competing for their rule over our attention. To resolve this dispute they decided that each would leave the body and see whose absence was most missed.

First speech left the body, but the body continued though mute. Next the eye left, but the body continued though blind. Next the ear left, but the body continued though deaf. Then the mind left, but the body continued though unconscious. Finally the prana began to leave and the body began to die and all the other faculties began to lose their energy. So they all rushed to prana and told it to stay, lauding its supremacy. Clearly prana won the argument. Prana gives energy to all our faculties, without which they cannot function. Prana takes the first place and without it we do not have the energy to do anything. The moral of this story is that to control all our faculties the key is the control of prana. ... Unless we learn how to work with our prana, we cannot get anything done.

Prana has many different levels of meaning—from the breath to the energy of consciousness itself. Prana is not only the basic life force, it is the master form of all energy working on the levels of mind, life and body. Indeed the entire universe is a manifestation of prana, which is the original creative power. Even kundalini shakti, the serpent power or inner force that transforms consciousness, develops from the awakened prana.

Unmanifest Prana (aka Purusha) --> thru rajas --> Manifest Prana (Prakriti)

sattva or harmony	-->	gives rise to the mind
rajas or movement	-->	gives rise to the prana
tamas or inertia	-->	gives rise to the body

Relative to our physical existence, prana or vital energy is a modification of the air element, primarily the oxygen we breathe that allows us to live in the physical world. Yet as air originates in ether or space, prana arises in space and remains closely connected to it. Wherever we create space, there energy or prana must arise automatically. Air and space, energy and space, and energy and mind, which is a kind of space, remain closely linked and cannot be separated.

The element of air related to the sense of touch, which is the subtle air element. Touch is the subtle form of prana. Through touch we feel alive and can transmit our life-force to others, which is why touch and embrace are so stimulating. Yet as air arises in space, so touch arises from sound, which is the sense quality that corresponds to the element of ether. Through sound we awaken and feel our broader connections with life as a whole. On a subtle level, prana arises from the touch and sound qualities that are inherent in the mind.

Pranayama kosha is the sphere of our vital life energies. This sheath mediates between the body on one side and the three sheaths of mind (outer mind, intelligence and inner mind) on the other and has an action on both levels. This vital sheath consists of our vital urges of survival, reproduction, movement and self-expression, being mainly connected to the five motor organs (excretory, urinogenital, feet, hand, and vocal organs, the *karmendriyas*).

... A strong vital or pranamaya kosha, however, is important for the spiritual path, but this is very different than the egoistic or desire-oriented vital. It derives its strength not from personal power but from the surrender to the divine and the cosmic life force. Without a strong spiritual vital, we lack the power to do our practices. In Hindu mythology this higher prana is symbolized by the monkey-god Hanuman, the son of the Wind, who surrendered to the divine in the form of Sita-Rama. Hanuman can become as large or as small as he wishes, can overcome all enemies and obstacles, and accomplish the miraculous. Such a spiritual vital has energy, curiosity and enthusiasm in life, along with a control of the senses and the subordination of the vital urges to a higher will and aspiration.

QUESTION III

Then Kausalya approached the sage and asked:

“Master, from what source does this prana come?

How does he enter the body, how live
After dividing himself into five,
How leave the body at the time of death?
How does he support all that is without
And all that is within?”

The sage [Pippala] replied: “Your ask searching questions.
Since you are a devoted aspirant
Seeking Brahman, I shall answer them.

“Prana is born of the Self. As a man
Casts a shadow, the Self casts prana
Into the body at the time of birth
So that the mind’s desires may be fulfilled.

“As a king appoints officers
To do his work in all the villages,
So prana works with four other pranas,
Each a part of himself, to carry out
Different functions in the body.

“The main prana dwells in eye, ear, mouth,
and nose;
Apana, the downward force, in the organs
Of sex and excretion. Samana,
The equalizing force in the middle,
Digests food and kindle the seven fires.

“Vyana, the distributor of energy,
Moves through the myriad vital currents
Radiating from the heart, where lives the
Self.

At the time of death, through the subtle
track

That runs upward through the spinal
channel,

Udana, the fifth force, leads the selfless
Up the long ladder of evolution
And the selfish down. But those who are
both
Selfless and selfish come back to this earth.

“The sun is the prana of the universe,
And it rises to bring light to our eyes.
The earth draws the lower fire of apana;
The space between sun and earth is samana,
And the moving air is vyana.

“Fire is udana. Then that fire goes out,
The senses are drawn back into the mind
And the person is ready for rebirth.

“Whatever the content of consciousness
At the time of death, that is what unites us
To prana, udana, and the Self,
To be reborn in the plane we have earned.

“Those who realize this go beyond death.
Their children too follow in their footsteps.
Those who perceive how prana rises,
Enters the body, and becomes fivefold
To serve the Self, they die not; they die
not.”

The one primary prana divides into five types according to movement and direction:

PRANA Vayu

DF*: Literally the “forward moving air” moves inward. It governs reception of all types from the eating of food, drinking of water and inhalation of air to the reception of sensory impressions and mental experiences. Prana is propulsive in nature, setting things in motion and guiding them. It provides the basic energy that drives us in life. Prana is the vital energy in the head, primarily the region of the third eye, which nourishes the brain. It provides positive energy for all the other pranas.

Swami SS*: Governing the area between the larynx and the top of the diaphragm. It is associated with the organs of respiration and speech, and the gullet, together with the muscles and nerves that activate them. It is the force by which breath is drawn inside.

Yogi BP***: The vital force of all creation.

APANA Vayu

DF: Literally, the “air that moves away,” moves downward and outward. It governs the elimination of the stool and urine, the expelling of semen, menstrual fluid and the fetus, and the elimination of carbon dioxide through the breath. On a deeper level, apana rules the elimination of negative sensory, emotional and mental experiences. It is the basis of our immune function on all levels. Apana is the vital energy in the lower abdomen that allows for elimination and reproduction.

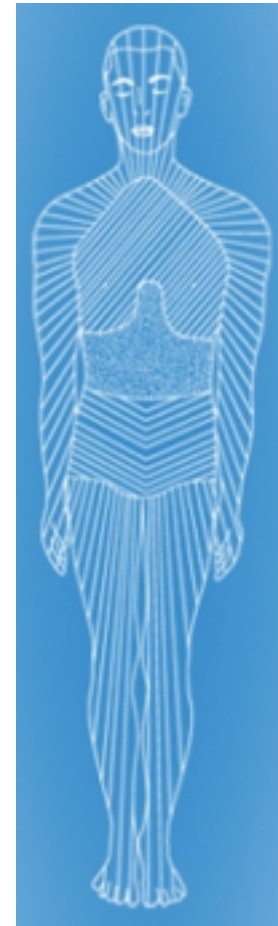
YBP: The manifesting current into the world. Elimination and detoxification.

SAMANA Vayu

DF: Literally the “balancing air,” moves from the periphery to the center through a churning and discerning action. It aids in digestion on all levels. Samana works in the gastrointestinal tract to digest food, in the lungs to digest air or absorb oxygen, and in the mind to homogenize and digest experiences whether sensory, emotional or mental. Samana is the vital energy in the navel, where our energy is centered and where digestion occurs.

Provides stability between inflow & outflow of energy, providing stabilization.

Swami SS: **Samana** is located between the heart and the navel. It activates and controls the digestive system; the liver, intestines, pancreas, stomach, and their



secretions. Samana also activates the heart and circulatory system, and is responsible for the assimilation and distribution of nutrients.

YBP: The equalizing force of the universe.

UDANA Vayu

DF: Literally the “upward moving air,” moves upward—the qualitative or transformative movements of the life-energy. It governs growth of the body, the ability to stand, speech, effort, enthusiasm and will. Udana is our main positive energy unfoldment in life through which we can develop our different bodies and evolve in consciousness. Udana is the vital energy in the throat that governs speech and self-expression and holds the head up through the neck.

Swami SS: **Udana** controls the area of the body above the neck, activating all the sensory receptors such as the eyes, nose and ears. Thought and consciousness of the outside world would be impossible without it. Udana also harmonises and activates the limbs and all their associated muscles, ligaments, nerves and joints, as well as being responsible for the erect posture of the body.

YBP: Our creative expression, upward moving spirituality.

VYANA Vayu

DF: Literally the “outward moving air,” moves from the center to the periphery. It governs circulation on all levels. Vyana moves the food, water and oxygen through out the body and keeps our emotions and thoughts circulating in the mind, imparting movement and providing strength. In doing so it assists all the other pranas in their work. Vyana is the vital energy in the heart and lungs, where our energy expands.

YBP: The outward circulating force of the universe. Provides the outer flow of energy for more manifestation, or for circulating flow throughout the field of manifestation.

* David Frawley, *Yoga & Ayurveda*

** Swami Satyananda Saraswati , *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*

*** Yogi Baba Prem (www.vedicpath.com)

Movements and Roles of the Prana Vayus

While the action of the pranas can be localized to some degree, we must remember that it occurs on all levels because the main role of prana is to link things together. Yet the pranas do govern different types of movement. The key to health and well-being is to keep our pranas in harmony. When one prana becomes imbalanced, the others become disturbed as well because they are all linked together.

The navel is the main prana center in the body, in which all the pranas are held like the spokes in the center of a wheel.

Vayu	movement of energy in the physical body	roles - governs	like workings of a machine	as a diagram of forces - governs
Prana	from the head down to the navel	intake of substances; inspiration, propulsion & forward movement	brings in fuel	gives energy to all the pranas (energizing); inward movement
Apana	from the navel down to the root chakra and down to the feet	elimination of waste materials	releases the waste materials or by-products of the conversion process	downward & outward movement (elimination)
Samana	from the entire body back to the navel	digestion; inner absorption; assimilation; discernment, consolidation	converts fuel into energy	center (contraction)
Vyana	from the navel throughout the entire body	circulation at all levels (incl. nutrients); expansiveness; pervasiveness	circulates energy to various work sites	periphery (expansion)
Udana	from the navel up to the head	release of positive energy that follows digestion; growth; speech; ascension	determines the work that the machine is able to do	upward movement (energizing)

This process [the vayus' interrelationship] is evidenced within the universe, the solar system, the physical body, and even on the cellular level. As an example, on the cellular level, Prana is the vital air coming to the cell via the blood. Apana is the release of carbon, wastes, and other materials from the cell back into the bloodstream. Samana is the balance between these two forces (prana and apana) within the cell. Udana is the higher function of the cell for the health of the body; it is also the communication between cells via chemical messengers. Vyana is the circulation of the vital force throughout the cell.

~ Yogi Baba Prem (www.vedicpath.com)

The Prana Vayus in the Physical Body

Without prana the physical body is no more than a lump of clay. Prana sculpts this gelatinous mass into various limbs and organs. It does this by creating various channels or nadis through which it can operate and energize gross matter into various tissue and organs.

Vayu	creates	specific channels created by	relation to region of body	relation to tissue of body	works mainly in organs
Prana	upper openings or bodily orifices, mainly in the head	openings in head: 2 eyes, 2 ears, nostrils & mouth*	upper body	nerve tissue	brain, senses & heart
Apana	openings below in the lower abdomen	openings of urogenital and excretory systems	lower part of body	bone tissue	kidneys, urinary bladder & reproductive organs
Samana	trunk of body	openings in the middle of the body, of digestive system; channels of intestines and secreting organs (like liver & pancreas)	connects all parts of the body at the navel	fat or adipose tissue	digestive organs, esp. small intestine, liver, stomach & pancreas
Vyana	limbs		front side of body which connects to limbs which mainly move forward	connective tissue, sinews & ligaments	lungs & heart
Udana	upper openings or bodily orifices, mainly in the head	throat, neck & mouth*	back side, which allows the body to stand up	muscle	stomach, lungs & throat

* It could be said that the entire physical body is an extension of the mouth—the main organ of physical activity, eating and self-expression.

Mental & Psychological Aspects of the Pranas

The mind also has its energy or prana. This derives mainly from our intake of sensory impressions and is reflected in our expressions through our limbs and our speech.

Learning to use these expressions of our energy, we can gain control over all aspects of our lives.

Prana on a psychological level governs our receptivity to mental sources of nourishment, sensations, emotions and ideas. It gives energy, vitality and speed to the mind. When deranged, prana causes wrong desire and insatiable craving. We become misguided, misdirected and wrongly motivated. We run after things in the external world rather than following our internal inspiration. **Prana is our positive propulsive energy in life, our ability to move and develop.**

Apana on a psychological level governs our ability to eliminate negative thoughts and emotions, which become toxins in the mind. It gives us detachment and dispassion, functioning as our mental immune function. When deranged, apana causes fear and depression. We get clogged up with undigested experience that weighs us down in life, making us suppressed, stifled and weak. **Apana is our capacity to withdraw our energy and to eliminate things from ourselves.**

Samana facilitates mental digestion, providing nourishment and contentment to the mind. It gives us mental discrimination, concentration and balance. Through it we can unite with what we put our minds and hearts upon. When deranged, samana brings about attachment and greed. We become contracted and tied up inside ourselves, clinging to wrong attitudes, beliefs and emotions. **Samana is our ability to hold and contract.**

Vyana promotes mental circulation, the free flow of ideas and emotions. It gives comprehensiveness, agility and independence to the mind. When deranged, vyana causes separation, hatred, and alienation. We are unable to unite with others or remain connected in what we do. We overly expand our energies to the point at which they dissipate or disintegrate. **Vyana is our capacity for self-expansion.**

Udana provides positive mental energy, will, and strength. It gives us joy and enthusiasm and helps awaken our higher spiritual and creative potentials. When deranged, udana causes pride, willfulness and arrogance. We become ungrounded, trying to rise too high, and lose track of our roots. **Udana is our ability to ascend, rise up and grow.**

Pranayama and the Five Pranas

While pranayama is usually defined as balancing prana and apana, eventually all five pranas must be considered.

Vyana and **samana** - both relate to retention.

Samana is the initial stage of retention in which the air is consolidated in the lungs, with oxygen absorbed through the lung tissue. (retention/contraction)

Vyana is the second stage of retention in which the absorbed oxygen is taken into the blood and carried to the rest of the body. (retention/expansion)

Udana and **apana** both relate to exhalation.

Udana is the first stage of exhalation that creates positive energy and effort, which allows for speech. (exhalation/expression)

Apana is the second stage of exhalation that pushes out the waste air and carbon dioxide. (exhalation/elimination)

Prana—inhalation.

Pranayama Practice Guidelines

Prana

The **pranic** breath is the breath in the head. It is energized through deep inhalation, drawing energy from above into the higher head and brain centers centered in the third eye.

Practice: visualize the prana coming in not only through the nostrils but also through the eyes, ears and mind, opening and purifying the channels and invigorating the entire brain and mind. Try to contact the prana at work in the head. Learn to see its scintillating series of electrical flashes, keeping the mind ever-thinking and senses ever-moving. More specifically, visualize prana like a revolving golden wheel with various spokes turning in the region of the head, setting off lightning currents that emerge through the sensory openings of the head and mouth.

The prana breath is useful for treating all diseases of the mind, senses, head, brain and nervous system. It is particularly good for sinus allergies, head colds, and headaches. It aids in nervous exhaustion and brain fatigue. It provides a pranic bath to the brain, refreshing and revitalizing it for more productive mental activity.

Udana

The **udana** breath is the breath in the mouth. It is allied with thought, sound or mantra and the upward movement of the will.

Practice: take a deep breath with the mouth and draw the energy into the throat chakra, holding it there upon retention. Upon exhalation loudly chant OM. Feel your energy rise and expand like a ball of light from the OM sound in the mouth to encompass the entire horizon and entire universe. Experience the throat as the center of cosmic sound, speech and vibration. Visualize udana like a deep blue lotus or a lotus-like pillar in the region of the throat and neck, holding your energy up and allowing it to ascend.

The udana breath treats all diseases of the throat region and vocal cords. It guards against sore throat, improves the voice, gives vitality and grants more strength. It helps anyone who needs greater powers of articulation and self-expression.

Vyana

The **vyana** breath is the breath in the heart that pervades the entire body and extends outward. Vyana breathing aims at opening the lung and heart region and from there expanding out to the rest of the body, the eternal world and the whole of life.

Practice: take a deep breath, preferably while standing, extending your arms as widely as possible and filling the heart and lungs with energy. Keep the arms wide apart during retention, visualizing your energy expanding from the heart through the blood stream to the entire body and limbs and out through the hands and feet into the external environment, all the way to the horizon. Close your arms upon exhalation, returning all energy to its source in the heart. Feel that your heart is the life-center of all creation. Visualize vyana like a revolving wheel, orange in color, spiraling outward as it turns into various rays.

The vyana breath treats all diseases of the circulatory and musculoskeletal systems. It is good for lung problems, heart disease, arthritis, asthma, and stress. It helps all those who need greater energy and coordination for physical exertion and movement.

Samana

The **samana** breath is the breath in the navel or belly. Samana breathing aims at centering and balancing our energy.

Practice: visualize the energy from the entire universe and its many galaxies, stars and planets spiraling into your body from the distant horizon. Breathe deeply, bringing the breath down into the navel during inhalation, feeding the digestive fire. Hold the breath firmly in the navel during retention, letting the digestive fire blaze up. On exhalation, let the breath extend outward from the navel providing nourishment to all the tissues of your body and all the layers of the mind and heart. Visualize samana like

a spiral of multi-colored energy turning inward into the navel and growing ever more small, concentrated and luminous, providing more stability and centeredness.

The samana breath treats all diseases of the digestive system, liver, gall bladder, stomach, and small intestine. It is particularly good for low appetite, poor absorption, and ulcers. It aids in homeostasis, balances metabolism, and has a balancing affect on both body and mind.

Apana

The **apana** breath is the breath in the root chakra that connects us with the earth and grounds us.

Practice: Take a deep breath, drawing your energy down to the base of the spine, feeling your body like a large and stable mountain. Hold the energy there on retention. Upon exhalation, ground the energy downward through the feet into the earth, allowing any physical or mental toxins to be released into the ground. View apana as a downward-facing dark blue triangle in the region of the lower abdomen, from which the energy moves downward in lightning flashes and grounds itself into the center of the earth below, where there dwells a special fire of strength and resistance.

The apana breath treats all diseases of the reproductive, urinary and excretory systems. It is good for constipation, diarrhea, menstrual problems and sexual debility. It strengthens the immune system, supports ojas, and aids in the prevention of disease.

Prana Vayu Visualizations

In *Prana Pranayama Prana Vidya*, Swami Niranjananda Saraswati also describes an exercise for experiencing the prana vayus. (It should be noted that he uses somewhat different physical locations for the five vayus.) The five vayus are visualized as follows:

- Step One - become aware of vyana vayu, the energy that pervades the whole body, by visualizing streaks of light moving rapidly throughout the entire body.
- Step Two - become aware of udana vayu in the extremities of the body: the legs, arms, and head. Visualize rings of energy circling and spiraling clockwise from the trunk outward along each of these extremities.
- Step Three - concentrate on samana vayu in the abdomen between the diaphragm and the navel by visualizing energy moving quickly sideways from left to right and right to left.
- Step Four - develop awareness of apana vayu, the energy moving downward from the navel to the perineum. On inhalation, see light traveling downward from the navel to the perineum; on exhalation reverse the flow of energy and send it back up to the navel.
- Step Five - become aware of prana vayu in the chest from the diaphragm to the throat. As you inhale, follow the upward movement of prana from the diaphragm to the throat; as you exhale reverse the flow and send it downward from the throat to the navel.

An additional exercise is used to merge prana and apana at manipura chakra. On inhalation, imagine prana moving upward and apana moving downward. On exhalation, visualize the two forces reversing and coming together at the navel. Each time the two forces meet at the navel center, feel heat and light building up at the solar plexus.

-- from "The Invisible Anatomy," by Enid Kassner