



## Philosophical Importance of Swar Yoga

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### Abstract

*The Sanskrit word 'Swara' means 'sound' or 'musical note'. It also refers to the conscious flow of air through one nostril. Yoga means the union of consciousness with super consciousness. Swara Yoga is a science concerned with the realization of cosmic consciousness through the control and manipulation of breath. Swara Yoga is known as the science of breath. Swara Yoga helps activate the three major nadis: Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. Swara Yoga is a complete scientific study. It helps individuals do the right things at the right time and brings balance and order into life. Swara Yoga teaches one to remain relaxed and conscious of one's own state of being before beginning an activity. The practice of Swara Yoga can produce remarkable results. This glorious and valuable science of Swara Yoga should be utilized by all yogis to improve the quality of their lives. Swara Yoga is an ancient science that correlates the breath with the sun, moon, and the five elements, helping individuals control moods, heal ailments, and remain attuned to the cosmic rhythm.*

**Keywords:** Swar yoga, Nadi Network, Anulom Vilom Pranayama,

### Introduction:

Swara and Yoga have etymological roots that translate to "the sound of one's own breath." Thus, through the use of breath, Swara Yoga helps an individual attain a state of oneness (Muktibodhananda, 1999). There are three Swaras. In Swara Yoga, alternate breathing is considered important because it allows different swaras to flow at different times: (i) one Swara flows through the left nostril (Ida), (ii) another through the right nostril (Pingala), and (iii) a third Swara flows through both nostrils simultaneously (Sushumna). By activating different energy centres and components of the neurological system, these swaras influence individuals in various ways.

The ancient rishis, or seers, of India, intuitively studied different aspects of human existence, and Swarodaya Vigyan, or the ultradian nasal cycle described in the classical *Shiva Swarodaya*, is one such example, where the differential effects of distinct phases of the nasal cycle are explained (Bhavani, 2002). A notable real-world illustration of this concept was found in

Kayser's 1895 study of the nasal cycle, which first revealed "changes in the volume of blood flowing through the cavernous tissues of the nasal conchae." The cycle, in which the patency and efficiency of the right and left nostrils alternated with varying regularity, was regarded as an ultradian rhythm.

Yoga is the evolutionary process of integration (*yuj* = union). In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna states, "Samatvam yoga uchyate" (yoga is equanimity). The yogic concept of *Loma Viloma* (balance of the two sides/opposites) encompasses the wide range of processes occurring within the body, emotions, and mind and, in this manner, helps attain mental equanimity. Yoga and Tantra emphasize the balance between the two halves of the body in terms of *Loma* and *Viloma*. The right side of the body is considered masculine in nature, endowed with warm, golden, and positive pranic energy, and is represented by the Nadi Pingala (the energy channel located to the right of Sushumna). The left side of the body is regarded as feminine and endowed with cool, silvery, negative, and apanic energy, represented by the Nadi Ida (the energy channel situated to the left of Sushumna). The Sushumna Nadi is the energy channel that passes through the centre of the central canal of the spinal cord. (Note: All these energy channels exist within the pranamaya kosha, although corresponding structures are present in the physical body.) The yogi seeks to understand, utilize, and establish balance between the energies of the two sides of the body. A practical example of this concept can be observed in the study of the nasal cycle.

### **A. Rhythmicity of the Swara**

The textbooks of Swara Yoga (Charandas, 1954; Kannan, 1967; Gautam, 1975) describe a definite breathing pattern in a healthy individual for each day of the month at dawn. It is stated that on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 7th, 8th, 9th, 13th, 14th, and 15th days of the bright fortnight (the two weeks following the full moon), the breath should flow predominantly through the left nostril at dawn and during the morning. On the 4th, 5th, 6th, 10th, 11th, and 12th days, it should flow mainly through the right nostril at dawn. Likewise, during the dark fortnight (the two weeks after the new moon), on the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 7th, 8th, 9th, 13th, 14th, and 15th days, the breath is expected to flow predominantly through the right nostril at dawn, whereas on the 4th, 5th, 6th, 10th, 11th, and 12th days, it should flow through the left nostril at dawn. Due to chaotic lifestyles, it may be difficult for modern individuals to maintain these natural patterns; however, in preliminary studies conducted among students who underwent six months of yoga training at ICYER, Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri of Yoga Maharishi reported a clear relationship between the lunar phase and the Swara pattern.

### **Facts of Swara Yoga**

Swara translates to "the sound of one's breath," while Yoga means "unity." Therefore, Swara Yoga enables an individual to attain a state of oneness through the process of breathing. [Telles S,

2012] Generally, only one nostril remains predominantly open for a certain period, allowing the breath to flow in and out. Eventually, the opposite nostril opens while the other gradually closes. This alternation produces a particular type of neural stimulation and also influences the brain in a specific manner. (Chetry P, 2023)

### **The Nadi network**

Upanishads describe Nadis as subtle channels of vibration, sometimes associated with the nervous system. Nadis carry Prana, or life force, throughout the body, much like power plants generate energy and distribute it through electrical systems. Instead of wires, the human body utilizes nadis for the transmission of energy, with Prana being stored in the chakras. (Muktibodhananda S. 1999) The major nadis include Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna. The Ida Nadi channels mental energy, or *Manas Shakti*, while the Pingala Nadi channels dynamic energy, or *Prana Shakti*. When inactive, the third nadi, Sushumna, remains anchored in the *mooladhara chakra* and functions like an earth wire, preventing a “short-circuit” between the two.

The Ida Nadi, located on the left side or negative channel, permeates the body, carrying consciousness and influencing internal processes through the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). The Pingala Nadi, situated on the right side or positive channel, carries *Prana Shakti*, the life force that energizes and externalizes awareness. It is associated with the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), which activates the body’s stress response by releasing adrenaline, increasing heart rate, and elevating body temperature. It terminates at the root of the right nostril, influencing the entire right side of the body.

### **Right and left hemispheres of the brain**

The functions of the brain’s hemispheres are closely associated with the activities of Ida and Pingala. The right hemisphere, linked with Ida, governs the left side of the body, processes information in a holistic manner, and is involved in spatial orientation, psychic perception, and creative abilities. The left hemisphere, related to Pingala, controls the right side of the body, processes information logically and sequentially, and is responsible for rational and analytical functions. Ornstein (1973), Kinsbourne M. *Sad Hemisphere* (1981). It has been observed that breathing through the left nostril activates the right hemisphere, whereas breathing through the right nostril stimulates the left hemisphere, as demonstrated through EEG technology and ANB. Wertz DA (1987).

### **Swara Yoga physiological and psychological functions**

Based on research, predominant breathing through one nostril correlates with increased brain activity in the opposite hemisphere, enhancing cognitive functions specific to that hemisphere. Jella SA et al. (1993) The significant effects of right (Surya Bheda) and alternate nostril (Nadi

shodhana) breathing on the task performance were found, suggesting these techniques enhance left brain activity. Telles S et al. (2007), Kamath A (2017). Studies also shown that RNB significantly increases blood glucose levels, whereas LNB lowers it. The metabolism that is measured by the increase baseline oxygen consumption has significantly increase through RNB. Gloor P (1954) Breathing through the left nostril produced a significant increase in the baseline GSR suggestive of reduced sympathetic activity to palmer sweat glands. LNB decreased systolic, diastolic, and mean blood pressure as well. Mohan SM (1993), Shannahoff-Khalsa D (1991). To balance the Swara, the main method is Nadi Shodhana Pranayama, also known as ANB, which purifies the body's subtle energy pathways (Nadis). Lan MC et al. (2021) The PNS, in contrast, focuses on rest, energy conservation, and recovery, lowering heart rate and blood pressure, aiding digestion, and eliminating waste. Kennedy B, Ziegler MG, Shannahoff-Khalsa DS (1986), Telles S, Nagarathna R, Nagendra HR (1994) The secretion of catecholamine, stress hormone, exhibits an alternate dominance in the left and right sides of the body. Malhotra V, Srivastava R, Parasuraman P, Javed D, Wakode S, Thakare A, et al (2022) These studies confirm Swara Yoga principles, showing that the 90-min nasal rhythm reflects alternating dominance of the sympathetic and PNSs, affecting the physiology of the human body. Subramanian RK, Devaki PR, Saikumar P. (2016) The Vedic science that studies the function of the nasal cycle was known as Swarodaya Vigjan (Swara = sonorous sound produced by the flow of air through the nostrils in the nasal cycle, Udaya = state of functioning and vigjan = knowledge). The Shiva-Swarodaya, an ancient Sanskrit literary treatise, advises the yogi to undertake more peaceful and passive activities (Soumya Karya) when the flow from the left nostril is dominant (Ida/Chandra Swara), to engage in strenuous and tiring activities (Raudra Karya) when the flow from the right nostril is dominant (Pingala/Surya Swara) and to relax or meditate when the bilateral nasal flow (sushumna Swara) is operative, as it is considered unsuitable for carrying out worldly activities.

### **Ida swara & pingala swara**

The Ida Swara (left nostril dominance) has been described as feminine, Shakti and moon-like (chandra), while the Pingala Swara (right nostril dominance) has been described as masculine, Shiva and sun-like (Surya). Similarly, the traditional Indian description of Ardhanarishwara is that Shakti (the feminine element) is represented on the left side and Shiva (the masculine element) on the right side of the body. This notion of left-right, feminine-masculine duality was common in traditional Eastern medicine and also in Western alchemy. The nasal loop has been demonstrated not only in humans, but also in rats, rabbits, and domestic pigs.

### **Third Swara "Sushumna"**

It represents 'Shiva' (pure consciousness) in the state of 'So-Ham.' It is located at the center of the spinal cord. The Third Swara or Sushumna is said to be active when the Left and Right Swara

flow together. No worldly action is recommended during this period as work gives no result. Sushumna indicates non-attachment to the mundane things. Meditation is recommended when this Swara is active.

Breathing directly influences the brain and central nervous system, particularly the hypothalamus, which controls emotional responses. Erratic breathing sends irregular signals to the hypothalamus, leading to disturbed emotional reactions. Certain areas of the nasal mucous membrane are connected to visceral organs, and irregular impulses from the nose cause these organs, especially those linked to the coccygeal plexus, to respond erratically. This disturbance sends more irregular signals back to the brain, creating further imbalance. Bhavanani A. B (2002)

Yoga teaches that wherever there is life, there is Prana; similarly, science has discovered that wherever there is life, there are electrical properties. Kahana-Zweig et al. (2016) Swara Yoga talks of the positive and negative energy currents flowing in the body. (White, D. E., Bartley, J., & Nates, R. J. 2015). The presence of both positive and negative ions within the body exerts a considerable influence on its overall functioning. In this light, Swara Yoga considers the act of breathing to be a stimulating experience. Kayser, R. (1895) The nasal cycle is an ultradian rhythm that involves periodic nasal congestion and decongestion, occurring approximately every 60–90 min. The term “nasal cycle” was first articulated in 1895 by Keyser (1895).

An imbalance in these organs can result from improper breathing or irregular breathing patterns in the nostrils and vice versa. Kumaran, E. M. (2018) Research indicates that obstruction of the nasal passages may reduce heart rate and blood circulation, which can hinder adequate tissue oxidation and potentially result in hypoxemia. Epe, Janika & Stark, Rudolf & Ott, Ulrich. (2021). Low sympathetic-high parasympathetic activity and high sympathetic and low parasympathetic activity are directly correlated with nasal congestion and decongestion, respectively. Garg R, Malhotra V, Tripathi Y, Agarawal R. (2016) Sympathetic activity is lower during Ida (left nostril breathing [LNB]) followed by pingala (right nostril breathing [RNB]) and found maximum in the Sushumna Swara (bilateral nostril breathing). Muktibodhananda, S. (1999).

Nostril breathing techniques influence psychophysiological recovery by modulating autonomic nervous system activity through hemisphere-specific stimulation. LNB activates the right hemisphere, enhancing parasympathetic activity, reducing heart rate, blood pressure, and sympathetic tone, and lowering blood glucose levels. In contrast, RNB stimulates the left hemisphere, increasing sympathetic activity, oxygen consumption, and metabolic rate. Alternate nostril breathing (ANB) (Nadi Shodhana) balance's autonomic function, with studies showing reductions in respiratory rate, blood pressure, and heart rate, along with improved lung function and stress regulation, particularly with sustained practice. These findings support nostril

manipulation as a nonpharmacological intervention for enhancing physiological and psychological recovery in both clinical and general populations.

Recovery is a multifaceted process involving physiological and psychological restoration over time, often disrupted by fatigue from physical or mental exertion. Inadequate recovery can lead to neuroendocrine imbalances, reduced performance, and symptoms such as anxiety, sleep disturbances, and poor digestion. Sellakumar, GK. (2015). Numerous studies have investigated the individual effects of uninostiril and ANB techniques, demonstrating their relevance to both physiological and psychological parameters. Building on these findings, the present study evaluates how specific nostril manipulation may be beneficial, with a particular focus on patterns of psychological and physiological recovery. This approach offers significant advantages, not only for athletes aiming to enhance performance and accelerate recovery in the sense of regulation of blood lactate, HRV, cortisol hormones, and other related parameters, but also for the general population seeking to reduce stress and improve overall well-being.

#### **Reviews of Literature:**

There is currently no direct empirical evidence examining the specific effects of Swara Yoga on psychological and physiological recovery, indicating a notable gap in the scientific literature that warrants focused investigation. This study establishes the relationship between psychological and physiological recovery by drawing on existing research highlighting the impact of Swara Yoga on enhancing both psychological and physiological functions.

1. **Chetry P et al. (2025)** This study investigated the impact of a 12-week Mental Skills Training (MST) program incorporating yogic breathing techniques on adolescents' psychological skills. Forty-five healthy school students participated in the intervention, which integrated daily 15-minute sessions of Nadishodhana, Chandrabhedhi, and Suryabhedhi Pranayama. Confirmed statistically significant gains between baseline and subsequent time points ( $p < 0.05$ ), particularly between Week 0 to Week 6 and Week 0 to Week 12. The most pronounced effects were observed in mental preparation and self-confidence. These findings suggest that MST combined with yogic breathing effectively enhances mental resilience, emotional regulation, and performance-related skills in adolescents.
2. **Chetry P et al. (2025)** Swara Yoga, an ancient yogic practice focuses on the control of breath through specific nostrils, has significant effects on psychological, physiological, and psychophysiological functions. This review aims to synthesize existing evidence on Swara Yoga's influence on brain hemispheric activity and psychophysiological functions regarding physical and mental recovery. Alternate-nostril breathing balances both sympathetic and parasympathetic activity, improving autonomic regulation, reducing anxiety, enhancing memory recall, and increasing parasympathetic tone. It presents an integrated perspective on

how nostril breathing manipulation techniques can influence overall recovery, suggesting the therapeutic applications in managing stress and improve overall well-being.

3. **“Singh A et al. (2024)** studied “cross nostril breathing.” Methods: Oxygen consumed during “cross nostril breathing” was measured in healthy participants ( $n = 47$ , males,  $26.3 \pm 6.4$  years). Five sessions (viz., right nostril inspiration yoga breathing [RNIYB], left nostril inspiration yoga breathing [LNIYB], alternate nostril yoga breathing [ANYB], breath awareness (BAW), and quiet rest (QR) were conducted on separate days in random order. Sessions were 33 min in duration with pre, during, and post states. Results: Volume of oxygen consumed ( $VO_2$ ) and carbon dioxide eliminated ( $VCO_2$ ) increased during RNIYB (9.60% in  $VO_2$  and 23.52% in  $VCO_2$ ), LNIYB (9.42% in  $VO_2$  and 21.20% in  $VCO_2$ ) and ANYB (10.25% in  $VO_2$  and 22.72% in  $VCO_2$ ) with no significant change in BAW and QR. Diastolic blood pressure decreased during BAW and QR and after all five sessions ( $P < 0.05$ ; in all cases).
4. **Kivimäki M et al. (2006)** during periods of relaxation, feeding, or rest, the PNS regulates the body’s response to rest and digestion. In essence, after a stressful event, it reverses the effects of sympathetic division. Heart rate and breathing are lowered, and digestion is accelerated by the parasympathetic nerve system.
5. The process of assisting our body in returning to its typical state following exercise or competition is known as recovery in sports. To preserve their health and performance, athletes must recover from training and competition as soon as possible to return to their regular physiological and psychological states. Molina PE (2005), McEwen BS (2006)
6. When a person sits with their back straight and their neck upright, it puts pressure on the thorax, and when they lie on their side, it affects the predominance of nasal activity. One nostril also prefers to rest while the other nose is active. This type of movement changes how each nostril is activated, and when either nostril 's mucosa is blocked, the other nostril predominates, and vice versa. Anand A. B (2002).
7. Garg et al. (2016), studied left nostril 1 dominance may boost memory connotation and significantly lower anxiety levels by reducing tension, which in turn increases attentional or focus capacity.
8. Telles S et al. (2007) In research they discovered that ANYB was linked to increased serenity whereas silent sitting without clear instructions was linked to excitement. The findings suggested that ANYB may be used to lessen stress and anxiety.
9. Raghuraj P. et al. (2008), evaluated the effect of right, left, and alternate nostril yoga breathing on autonomic and respiratory variables and concluded that unilateral nostril yoga breathing techniques appear to influence blood pressure in distinct ways. These findings showed that nostril breathing might have therapeutic benefits.

10. A similar study explored the effects of Surya Anuloma Viloma Pranayama (SAV), a right-nostril breathing practice, on physiological responses and a significant increase in oxygen consumption (17%) and systolic blood pressure (9.4 mmHg), along with a decrease in digit pulse volume (45.7%). Both SAV and NB reduced skin resistance. These findings indicated that SAV Pranayama stimulates the SNS. Subramanian RK et al. (2016) The effects of LNB and RNB pranayama on heart rate variability (HRV) were evaluated, and both the low frequency (LF) and LF/high frequency (HF) ratio, which are frequency domain parameters, significantly increased, the high LF values indicated increased parasympathetic activity rather than sympathetic regulation. Raghuraj P, et al. (2008) The immediate effects of ANB on heart rate variability (HRV) in nonpractitioners differ from the long-term parasympathetic benefits seen with regular practice. Srivastava RD et al. (2005) These findings suggested that different unilateral nostril yoga breathing practices affect blood pressure in varying ways. Nadi Shodhana may be ideal for long-term management of high blood pressure, whereas Surya Bheda could be useful for addressing low blood pressure. Gajbhiye HA et al. (2022) Fifteen minutes of ANB reduced respiratory rate, heart rate, and blood pressure, with further improvements after 8 weeks of daily practice. Peak expiratory flow rate increased, especially after extended training. These results suggest that ANB may enhance parasympathetic activity and could support treatment for hypertension and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Guthmiller KB et al. (2025)
11. The above studies examined how breathing techniques can aid in body recovery by influencing the autonomic nervous system and related physiological functions. Right-nostril breathing was found to stimulate the SNS, boosting metabolism and preparing the body for action, which can be useful in situations requiring immediate recovery and energy mobilization. [Malhotra V et al. (2022) -Subramanian RK et al. (2016)]

### **Conclusion:**

The practice of Swara Yoga is believed to produce remarkable results. One is advised to wake up each day at least half an hour before sunrise and identify the dominant nostril. The corresponding hand may then be kissed and used to touch or gently rub the face, neck, chest, thighs, and feet. While stepping out of bed, the foot corresponding to the active nostril should ideally touch the ground first, after which one may proceed with morning activities. A proper understanding of Swara can be highly useful in regulating body temperature. Due to this, the sensation of heat during summer may be reduced, and the cold of winter may become more tolerable.

Swara Chikitsa is considered useful in managing the common cold, particularly when the left Swara dominates, as it is associated with coldness. Changing the dominant left Swara to the right Swara is believed to help relieve the common cold and certain other ailments. Similarly, in individuals experiencing acidity or fever, the right Swara often dominates, as it is hot in nature.

Shifting the breathing pattern to the left nostril or left Swara may be beneficial in such cases. It is further believed that, regardless of the disease experienced by an individual, altering the Swara from right to left or vice versa may help reduce symptoms and associated distress. From the perspective of preventive healthcare, breathing through the left nostril during the daytime and through the right Swara at night is considered helpful in maintaining overall well-being.

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