

Vinyasas have three primary benefits:

1. They create heat in the body, which is cleansing.
2. They create strength of the breath, which helps us to concentrate.
3. They create the *appearance* of a flow, which can be absorbing for the mind.

Vinyasa describes the action of synchronizing breath and movement. Breath and movement are a natural pattern of the body, nervous system, and respiratory system, and vinyasa maximizes the effects of this pattern. Our bodies are a collection of physiological processes that all follow patterns; likewise, our bodies and breath are in a constant pattern with each other.

For example, when we inhale, our chests expand and the belly will protrude a little. When we exhale, our chest relaxes down and the belly might come back in a little. You can observe this easily in a sleeping baby. With vinyasa, we are taking this natural breath-body movement pattern, this up-and-down pattern, and applying conscious awareness to it, whereby every inhale will be a conscious upward movement, and every exhale will be a conscious downward movement. The breaths we take, either in or out, are done in conjunction with moving into discrete asanas such as *chaturanga dandasana* (the push-up position) or *urdhva mukha svanasana* (upward-facing dog), or

in transitions, such as when we lift our heads and chests up before and after a forward bend.

I sometimes like to think about vinyasas, or linking movements, as the individual frames of a movie. Each vinyasa is like one frame. When we watch a movie, it takes on the appearance of a flowing sequence of events, sort of like real life; but when we examine the film, we see each distinct frame. When we apply awareness to each vinyasa, we can, for the time we are practicing, live in a frame-by-frame, or moment-to-moment, existence. In this mental space it becomes easier to examine our lives, goals, ambitions, faults, and tendencies. The vinyasas, in this way, can teach us to live in the present, one moment and one breath at a time.

However, there is another level of vinyasa, and this occurs when the practical details become second nature to us, and the frames become internalized and natural. Our awareness can then expand beyond just that one frame and spread out to the whole process; we enter into a state that feels like we are in a flow, both body and mind, whereas earlier the mind was focused on just one frame at a time. Both are important, and there is going to be a coming and going of how we move in and out of each state. You have to practice scales before you can play a sonata, and you have to repeat many mantras before you can become absorbed in pure sound. Likewise, we have to practice many asanas, and many vinyasas, in order to enter into the flow of awareness.

In chapter 3 of the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali describes concentration (dharana) as the mind's ability to become completely