Advanced Pranayama:  
Healthcare and Self-Care Through Freeing the Breath

**Syllabus**  
*Christiane Brems, PhD, ABPP, ERYT500, C-IAYT*  
Dates TBA; 30 hours across a one-weekend retreat: F, S, S 8a – 9:30

**Target Audience and Instructional Level**  
This is an intermediate-level course geared to students in the YogaX YTT300 and the following audiences:

- Psychologists, psychiatrists, and other mental healthcare providers interested in bringing pranayama principles and strategies into their clinical practice.
- Psychology, psychiatry, and other mental health-program students in graduate or medical programs interested in bringing pranayama principles and strategies into their supervised clinical practice.
- Yoga teachers interested in offering advanced pranayama practices, especially to students in healthcare settings.
- Yoga therapists providing offering advanced pranayama practices, especially in healthcare settings.

**Training Pragmatics**

- Cost: $800 tuition for this 30-hour workshop or YogaX YTT300 prepaid enrollment
- This training is delivered via online synchronous instruction and with fulltime contact with the lead teacher, Chris Brems
- (see Training Format below for specific details of training delivery)
- Yoga Alliance Continuing Education credits (30 hours) are included in the tuition cost; a CE certificate is issued upon request
- Participation (by entering the zoom link and/or making payment) implies that you have read and agreed to the Stanford Assumptions of Risk, Release of Claims, and Hold Harmless Agreement at [https://www.yogaxteam.com/healthandsafetyinformation](https://www.yogaxteam.com/healthandsafetyinformation)
- YogaX Refund and Payment Policy is available at [https://3de0fc17-4854-87c7-777a583c02cf.filesusr.com/ugd/37469f_73d3c9e8ebb14214a60e11d8b08baba1.pdf](https://3de0fc17-4854-87c7-777a583c02cf.filesusr.com/ugd/37469f_73d3c9e8ebb14214a60e11d8b08baba1.pdf)
- YogaX has no commercial support for this event and there are no disclosable conflicts of interest.
- The zoom link for this event is:  
  - [https://stanford.zoom.us](https://stanford.zoom.us)

**Instructor**  
*Christiane Brems, PhD, ABPP, ERYT500, C-IAYT*
Clinical Professor and Director of YogaX
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Stanford School of Medicine
Training Content Summary

This advanced pranayama training, framed within polyvagal theory, explores breath as a bottom-up process of self-awareness and a top-down process of self-regulation to access emotional and physical balance, as a path to inner awareness (through neuroception and interoception), and as way of stimulating the vagus and creating resilience in the autonomic nervous system. Breath and breathing are investigated as the bridge between mind and body leading to enhanced awareness of and capacity to modulate energy, affect, and arousal.

The training emphasizes the biopsychosociocultural context in which all of us develop given its profound impact on health and breath. It explores our collective and personal history with breath and breathing and grounds the practice of pranayama in this greater context. The training also locates the breath in within the panchamaya kosha model – exploring its developmental place and role as related to all the koshas, and to pranamaya koshas in particular. It is firmly grounded in a therapeutic yoga model that is integrated and holistic.

Central to the development of supportive and healing breathing practices in yoga is breath awareness. It is the starting point with all beginning yogis and remains a central practice even for advanced yoga practitioners. It is a practice of concentration, even meditation, that hones interoceptive skills and awareness. It is a practice that helps practitioners become more familiar with their neuroception and helps them recognize their autonomic nervous system state or guna. As such, it is essential to the development of deeper self-understanding and capacity to begin to self-regulate.

Breath-awareness and self-understanding serve as the pathway toward self-regulation. Several breathing practices are examined, placed in the context of polyvagal and other breathing theory, with the purpose of equipping teachers/clinicians to offer students/clients a variety of breathing techniques. Understanding types of breath and student needs in the context of their unique biopsychosociocultural context model, their personal development in all of the koshas, and polyvagal theory (or gunas, in the words of ancient yoga wisdom) allows teachers/clinicians and students/clients to access the breath in ways that are optimally adapted and tailored to individual needs and resources within a greater collective context and with a greater collective impact.

Optimal functional breathing is emphasized. Categories of breathing are discussed and experienced, including energizing, calming, and balancing breathing, all in the context of first achieving awareness, optimal respiration, and ultimately more complex breath control:

- **Balancing breathing practices** – Breathing, as a bottom-up process of nervous system and emotional self-regulation, focuses on balanced inhalation and exhalation, balanced speed or vigor of breath, and awareness of breath texture and location. It invites a parasympathetic shift in the nervous system, balances mood, energy, and physical arousal, provides opportunity for exploring mind and emotions, and invites social engagement, a sense of safety, and equilibrium.

- **Calming breathing practices** – Breathing, as a bottom-up process of down-regulation to access emotional and physical balance, focuses on exhalation, decreased speed or vigor of breath, and combining breath and resting. It recalibrates a sympathetically aroused nervous system, down-regulates mood, energy, and physical activation, provides opportunity for exploring mind and emotions, and invites gentle curiosity, calming, and relaxation.

- **Energizing breathing practices** – Breathing, as a bottom-up process of up-regulation to access emotional and physical balance, focuses on the inhalation, increased speed or vigor of breath, and the combination of breath and movement. It recalibrates an immobilized or collapsed nervous system, up-regulates mood, energy, and physical vitality, provides opportunity for exploring mind and emotions, and invites engagement, action, and initiative.
Learning Objectives

Learning Objective #1

1. Understand the biopsychosociocultural context of breath and the history of pranayama
   a. history of pranayama as one of the eight limbs of yoga in the ancient wisdom traditions
   b. effects of BPSC on breath development, breathing health, and the energetic manifestation of breath
   c. impact of the BPSC on the development of the koshas
   d. understand how developmental factors may guide how breath manifests and is healed

   Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #1
   • situate pranayama in its historical and wisdom tradition context, especially as a limb of yoga
   • identify the components of the expanded biopsychosociocultural context
   • explain how BPSC affects human development
   • describe the impact of the expanded BPSC on body, energy, and mind

Learning Objective #2

2. Understand the basics of breath and pranayama
   e. anatomy – the respiratory system and its biomechanics
   f. physiology – gas exchange and biochemistry
   g. characteristics of the breath – rate (cadence), volume, location, texture, resting pauses
   h. the subtle energies of the breath – prana vayus (prana, vyana, samana, apana, udana)

   Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #2
   • identify the core structures of the respiratory system
   • explain gas exchange and the role of CO2 and O2
   • define how biomechanics and biochemistry interact with cuing the characteristics of the breath
   • define the prana vayus, identifying the subtle energy represented by each

Learning Objective #3

3. Understand polyvagal theory and its implications for human physiology, arousal, and affect
   a. ventral vagal arousal: perception of safety
   b. sympathetic arousal: perception of danger
   c. dorsal vagal arousal: perception of life threat
   d. mixed types of arousal: play, intimacy, freezing

   Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #3
   • define the components of the autonomic nervous system
   • define and explain the function of the ventral vagus
   • define and explain the function of the dorsal vagus
   • define and explain the function of the sympathetic nervous system
Learning Objective #4

4. Understand the relationship between PVT and yogic concept of the gunas
   a. VVC and sattva
   b. DVC and tamas
   c. SNS and rajas
   d. mixed states and mixing gunas

   Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #4
   • define each of the gunas and provide examples of how the gunas are expressed in nature
   • explain how the concepts of vvc and sattva overlap
   • explain how the concepts of dvc and tamas overlap
   • explain how the concepts of sns and rajas overlap

Learning Objective #5

5. Based on the PVT and optimal functional breathing theory, learn how to tailor breathing practices and know the role of breath awareness as a foundational skill
   a. breath awareness
   b. optimal functional breathing
   c. balancing breathing practices
   d. energizing breathing practices
   e. calming breathing practices

   Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #5
   • engage in breathing self-assessment
   • guide a breath awareness practice
   • lead a small group exercise that is focused on balanced breathing
   • provide 2-3 examples of energizing breathing practices
   • provide 2-3 examples of calming breathing practices

Yama and niyamas (the ethical code) assist us in ... reasoned restraint, acting as a firebreak for our behavior. Asana is a cleansing agent and pranayama begins to tug out consciousness (citta) away from desires and toward judicious awareness (prajna). Pratyahara is the stage at which we learn to reverse the current that flows from mind to senses, so that mind can bend its energies inward. Dharana (concentration) brings purity to intelligence (buddhi), and dhyana (meditation) expunges the stains of ego.

### Schedule and Continuing Education Hours by YA Category

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>8a – 10a</td>
<td>History of pranayama; limbs of yoga</td>
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<td>10a – 12p</td>
<td>Biopsychosociocultural context model</td>
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<td>12p – 1:30p</td>
<td>Lunch break</td>
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<td>1:30p – 3p</td>
<td>Panchamaya kosha model within BPSC</td>
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<td>3p – 4:30p</td>
<td>Experiential application of the BPSC and kosha models to personal development</td>
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<td>4:30p – 6p</td>
<td>Anatomy of breath – nasal and diaphragmatic breathing</td>
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<td>6p – 8p</td>
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<td>8p – 9:30p</td>
<td>Experiential anatomy and physiology practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>8a – 10a</td>
<td>Review of anatomy; physiology of the breath – O2 v. CO2</td>
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<td>10a – 12p</td>
<td>Experiential practice of the features of the breath – optimal functional breathing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1:30p – 3p</td>
<td>Prana vayus</td>
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<td>3p – 4:30p</td>
<td>Polyvagal theory overview</td>
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<td>4:30p – 6p</td>
<td>Application of PVT to understanding breath and freeing of breath</td>
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<td>8p – 9:30p</td>
<td>Understanding and experiencing breath awareness</td>
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<td>Day 3</td>
<td>8a – 10a</td>
<td>Sequencing breathing practices; creating accessibility</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10a – 12p</td>
<td>Balancing breathing practices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1:30p – 3:30p</td>
<td>Energizing breathing practices</td>
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<td>3:30p – 5:30p</td>
<td>Grounding breathing practices</td>
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<td>5:30 – 7p</td>
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<td>7p – 8:30p</td>
<td>Matching pranayama and PVT/gunas wrap-up and discussion</td>
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<td>8:30p – 9p</td>
<td>Closure and adjournment</td>
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### Notes:
- YA = Yoga Alliance; CE = Continuing Education
- TTP = Techniques, Training, and Practice; TM = Teaching Methodology; AP = Anatomy and Physiology; YH = Yoga Humanities; Prac = Practicum; Spc = area of program specialization
- 30 hours of YA CE or YTT300 in the following categories: 5 6 6 7 6 30
Handouts Provided

Several handouts and the slide set for the workshop will be provided to registered and paid enrollees on the day of the workshop. These materials are provided with the understanding that students will not duplicate, distribute, or otherwise publicly use these materials without express permission and proper attribution and referencing.

Handouts to be provided include:

- Breath Assessment
- Impacts of Nasal versus Mouth Breathing
- Impacts of Diaphragmatic versus Chest Breathing
- Impacts of Various CO2 Levels
- The Five Winds of Prana
- Pathways of Sensory Processing Engaged in Integrated Holistic Yoga
- Principles of Trauma-Informed Yoga
- Gunas – Fundamental Expressions of Nature
- Eight Limbs of Yoga
- BioPsychSocioCultural Model
- Integrated Holistic Yoga – Koshas, Limbs, Biopsychosociocultural Context
- Slide Set for the Training
- Content Manual for the Training
Suggested Readings

It is recommended that in preparation for the workshop you read all YogaX blogs, especially the following:
https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/blogbreath
https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/physicallimbs
https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/polyvagaltheory

It will be helpful to have basic familiarity with pranayama prior to attendance, but it is not required. If you want to read a nice beginner’s pranayama book, check out Givens (2020; see citation below). For a lovely overview of the healthful effects of breathing, check out this link:
https://breathe.ersjournals.com/content/13/4/298

Also, peruse YogaX webpage resources and try out some of the offered free practices (asana, pranayama, meditation, and more) at yogaXteam.com and on the YogaX Team YouTube channel, especially the following.

Breathing Practices playlist:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzvkZpUGjwLFmpZVzy_25k4Zr4GHm75Y5

Breath with Movement Exploring Energy and Mind:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxkZItWFQ7Q&list=PLzvkZpUGjwLFmpZVzy_25k4Zr4GHm75Y5&index=1&t=1s

Breath Observation and Mindfulness:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBzzzLcV7No&list=PLzvkZpUGjwLFmpZVzy_25k4Zr4GHm75Y5&index=8

Lovingkindness and Our Social Engagement System:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBF-RjouWUQ&list=PLzvkZpUGjwIG2rpdZj8-MKPwgiQVXWGn7&index=6&t=863s

The following readings will be helpful as you deepen your journey once you have completed the workshop.

Training Format

The workshop uses mixed pedagogical methods, ranging from didactics/lectures to discussion to experiential work, including small group activities. Lecture/didactic time invites discussion throughout and is accented by experiential exercises and activities. The experiential work is yoga-based and includes asana, pranayama, meditation, and guided imagery. To make sure that everyone can enjoy the yoga-based activities safely and with maximum comfort, please note the following (more personal) thoughts and requests.

- Stanford University requires that you sign the release form (link above) to be able to participate in the activities that are part of this workshop. It assumed that you have agreed to this document when you pay or use the provided zoom link for the workshop.

- Required training activities start promptly. To make sure that we can start on time and that you have ample opportunity to get settled or ask questions, it would be lovely if you could arrive as much as 10 minutes early.

- Participants have to provide their own props for the virtual training sessions. Minimum prop equipment includes 2 yoga blocks, 1 yoga strap (10 feet is preferrable), 1 yoga bolster, 1-2 blankets, and a yoga mat. Access to a clear wall space is extremely helpful (a closed door works). Prop substitutes are fine (e.g., a stack of books instead of blocks; a scarf instead of a strap, sofa cushions instead of a bolster, etc.). Please have all props at the ready for each training session.

- Yoga is best practiced on a relatively empty stomach but not starving. A sustaining but light meal prior to class will help you maintain your energy without having a full belly that makes bending and twisting difficult.

- Please ask questions – before class, after class, and during class. If you are wondering about something – whether it’s the reason for a particular shape or movement, an alignment question, or a more healthful way of doing something – someone else is likely to ponder the same thing.

- Always honor your own intuition and body wisdom – if something feels wrong, do NOT do it. We are all anatomically unique and we all express the same yoga shape, breath, or practice in different ways. What works for us, your teachers, or the person next to you, may not be optimal for you. Allow yourself the joy of using props and variations based on the feedback from your own body, breath, and mind. We offer both freely and demonstrate their use throughout.

- Yoga practiced in a group is inspirational. It is never competitive. Work within your own body limits and preferences; give yourself permission not to strive to do what others are doing. Delight in the pleasure of expressing each pose or breath in uniquely your way. If something comes easily, celebrate this state of pure joy; if something is a struggle, embrace the moment of learning.

- Thank you in advance for making me aware of any medical conditions that may affect your yoga practice. It is helpful for me to know if you are modifying practices for a particular reason or if you would like to have help in working with a particular concern.

- Thank for turning off all cell phones, beepers, or other noise-making or distracting devices before you settle in for any given training session.

- Thank you for keeping your cameras on during virtual sessions to the degree possible and appropriate.