

As a boy Paramhansa Yogananda used to practice Hong-Sau for hours at a time, withdrawing ever more deeply into the spine until he found himself without breath altogether. Hong-Sau's three components of observing the breath, gazing at the spiritual eye, and mentally repeating the mantra (Hong, with the incoming breath, and Sau, with the outgoing), all work powerfully together to draw your consciousness toward Spirit.

Although it may appear to be a simple technique, its simplicity is its greatness.

Repeating the Hong-Sau mantra not only gives the mind a point of focus, its Sanskrit syllables stimulate the chakras and have a vibratory connection with the breath, thereby calming it. Yogis say that on a subtle level "Hong-Sau" is the very sound made by the astral breath. Gazing upward at the point between the eyebrows, or spiritual eye, puts you more in tune with the superconscious, because in deep meditation your energy is centered there. Observing the breath helps to calm it, and since the breath, as we've said, is the greatest obstacle to deep meditation, Hong-Sau works in the most direct way possible to bring you to a state of true meditation.

During Hong-Sau you are a silent observer of the breath. Do not try to breathe slowly or deeply; just let your body breathe as it wishes and notice the flow of air. It may help you to feel as though you are watching someone else breathe. Observing the breath without controlling it may seem a little awkward at first. But this passes quickly.

The practice of not controlling the breath brings deep spiritual benefits, one of the most important being a sense of detachment from your physical body and mental processes. Every time you observe the breath without controlling it, you are affirming the attitude, "I am not this body." Every time your mind wanders and you bring yourself back by repeating the Hong-Sau mantra, you are saying, "I am not this personality." Paramhansa Yogananda said, "The ego is the soul identified with the body."

Patanjali, the great exponent of yoga, pointed out that when we no longer identify with our one, little body, we experience ourselves in all bodies. Swami Kriyananda tells of the time he was helping Yogananda walk in the desert while the Master was in a deep state of God-consciousness. To explain his difficulty walking, Yogananda said, "I am in so many bodies, it is difficult for me to remember which body I am supposed to keep moving."

If you find yourself struggling with unruly thoughts during your Hong-Sau practice, know that every time you bring your attention back to the technique, you are helping to free your Soul of its identification with the breath and the body. At the same time, you also are strengthening your ability to concentrate. Concentration is like a muscle, the more you exercise it, the stronger it becomes.

Using the Hong-Sau technique to discipline your mind will bring you a great sense of peace and clarity. You will find that you can think more clearly and efficiently, and work more quickly. Holding onto the deep calmness you feel from meditation will enable you to apply that peace to all of your activities and relationships. Besides the many spiritual benefits you'll receive from your Hong-Sau practice, you will discover countless physical and mental ones as well.

While visualizations, affirmations, and many modern meditation and relaxation practices are extremely beneficial, the Hong-Sau technique is unique in that it has the potential to take you to God. Yogananda said this technique is "the greatest contribution of India's spiritual science to the world," and that one hour of Hong-Sau equals twenty-four hours of sitting in the silence. One of the most sacred and ancient of all yoga practices, Hong-Sau is one of the four main techniques that comprise the path of Kriya Yoga, which Paramhansa Yogananda brought to the West in 1920.

May your practice of Hong-Sau be blessed with deep peace and awareness of God's presence.