

THE PRACTICE OF PRĀNĀYĀMA IN YOGA ETHICS

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Abstract: *Yoga Philosophy advocates about mental modification (citta vritti) for the realization of spirituality or liberation. As long as our mind is tainted with impurities and intellect vitiated by evil thoughts, man cannot realize the spiritual truth. Spiritual insight can be achieved when the mind is purged of all impurities and rendered perfectly calm and serene. For the purification and enlightenment of the mind, the yoga gives us the eightfold means to attain the spiritual enlightenment. And prānāyāma is one of the eight limbs of yoga, which is an integral step on the path to enlightenment. Prānāyāma means the regulation of breath and it is the fourth stage in Ashtanga yoga and it gives steadiness and lightness to the body and calmness to the mind. Prāna or bio-energy flows through pranic pathways and prānāyāma helps to clean these pathways. This has a direct effect on the physical body as well as mind. Yogic breathing which controls of life force and is aimed at increasing vital energy in the body and mind. Our life has become stressful because of the hustle and bustles of our metropolitan life. By focusing only on prānāyāma that can help to change our negative response to stress and it is the surest ways to attain mastery over the modifications of the mind, making the mind one-pointed and inward. The mind has a desire and will which are expressed in bodily actions. So the regulation of the vital forces leads to control of the mind. Breath control is conducive to concentration of mind. It removes the crust of affliction from the illumination of the sattva of the mind and removes the demerits which obscure discriminative knowledge. Breath control is the supreme austerity, which purges the mind of impurities and generates illumination of knowledge. The purpose of the paper is to highlight the power of prānāyāma to experience the Samadhi i.e. yoga's true aim. This present paper attempts to show how the yogic breathing practice leads an individual to the state of the spiritual realm or liberation.*

Key Words: *Prānāyāma, Citta Vritti, Spirituality, Samadhi, Prana, Ashtanga yoga.*

I. Introduction

‘*Prānāyāma*’ is a Sanskrit word alternatively translated as “extension of the *prāna* (breath or life force)” or breath control.’ The word is composed from two Sanskrit words: *prāna* meaning life force and either *Yāma* (to restrain or control the *prāna*, implying a set of breathing techniques where the breath is intentionally altered in order to produce specific results) or the negative form *Āyāma*, meaning to extend or draw out (as the extension of life force). It is a yogic discipline with origins in ancient India. *Prāna* means energy, breath, or life force. Learning to direct and control *prāna* in the body has long been considered a crucial aspect of yoga. As an essential bodily function, breathing is an involuntary act. *Prānāyāma* is the conscious and deliberate control and regulation of the breath. Although we cannot control whether or not we breathe, we can to some extent control the way that we breathe. Exercises in breath control, such as breath retention and deliberate methods in inhalation and exhalation for specific mental and physical benefits are at the core of *prānāyāma* practice. Yogic breathing exercises are an important part of a developing yoga practice. *Prānāyāma* is one of the eight limbs of yoga referenced by the yoga sutras of Patanjali, which means that it was considered an integral step on the path to enlightenment. In addition to supporting and deepening our yoga *asana* practice learning ways to calm the body through breathing will greatly benefit all aspect of our life. Paying attention to the breath is also a meditation technique that can be used on or off the mat, as it has the effect of keeping us constantly in the present moment. The past and future melt away when the mind becomes fully focused on breathing.

Prānāyāma consists of deep inspiration, retention of breath, and expiration with measured durations. *Prānāyāma* is defined as the “control of life force” and is aimed at increasing vital energy in the body and the mind. *Prānāyāma* involves the voluntary control of breath and is practised widely in yoga and meditation, but is something that anyone can do. Slow *prānāyāma* appears to shift the automatic nervous system from the fight to flight sympathetic to the claiming para-sympathetic state and has been shown to positively affect immune function, hypertension, asthma and stress-induced psychological disorder. Neither *asana* nor *dhyana* practice can harness the breath the *prāna*, the life force. And that is exactly this that *prānāyāma* is designed to do. Without *prāna* the body is dead and the mind is utterly inert. It is *prāna* that moves both. For this reason, *prānāyāma* was always considered the axial yogic limb. *Prānāyāma* is the axis around which the wheel of eight-limbed yoga revolves and it brings success in all other yogic limbs and it is also the axis that connects *asana* and meditation. *Prānāyāma* combined with yoga postures (*asana*) and

meditation is a way to control and master our breathing and in turn many aspects of our yoga practice and life in general which is the foundation of life force.

Prānāyāma is not about the breath; breath indeed has very little to do with, if anything. *Prānāyāma* is not a simple breathing exercise yet it is a scientific breathing process. Breathing is only one of many exercises through which we get to the real *prānāyāma*. *Prāna*, a word often used in yoga, is here control over *prāna* is achieved. *Prānāyāma* is the connecting link between physical and mental yogic practices, the vital force of life. When the *prāna* in the body is low, one tends to be more lethargic, dull and unenthusiastic. Toxins then accumulate in these areas and pain, stiffness or disease set in. Through the practice of yoga, *prāna* beings to flow, allowing toxins to be released and removed. On the other hand, the body is just a gross form of the mind. They are not the separate entities often one thinks of them as and every mental knot has a corresponding physical knot in the body and vice versa. Yogic practices aim to release these knots and to connect us with the joy, love and creativity, integrating, and harmonizing the body and mind. Patanjali devoted five sutras out of 195 sutras, on breathing alone. This in itself shows what a valuable and important that it is learned with proper guidance. A natural result of going deep into *prānāyāma* is clarity, steadiness and one-pointedness of the mind. Yoga prescribes breath control for the concentration of the mind because it conduces to the steadiness of the body and the mind. So long as the function of breathing continues, the mind also goes on fluctuating and noticing the current of air in and out. If and when it is suspended, the mind is in a state of undisturbed concentration. Hence by practicing the control of breath, the yogin can suspend breathing for a long time and thereby prolong the state of concentration.

Yoga Darshana states that when one sits in one of the convenient *asanas* and regulates the act of respiration, it is *prānāyāma*. The act of inhaling air in the body to reach the lungs is called inspiration and the act of throwing this air out of the body is called expiration. There are various stages in *prānāyāma* i.e. to inhale air i.e. *puraka* (to inhale), *kumbhak* (to retain the air so inhaled in the body for sometime), *rechak* (to exhale the air i.e. to throw the air out of the body) and *bahya kumbhak* (to keep the air out not to inhale the air to get into the body). By regular practice, this four-step exercise of *prānāyāma* becomes easy to perform. Then according to yoga darsana on acquiring proficiency in these four stages of *prānāyāma*, *chitta* becomes free from ignorance, mind is covered by radiant light of knowledge of ultimate reality and then according to yoga darsana the *sadhaka* acquires fitness to reach the enters our body, but along with the air a divine energy also enters which keeps the body alive. Adopting *prānāyāma* does not mean that only taking the air into the

body(inhaling) and throwing it out(exhaling), but along with oxygen, we also take in our body the vital energy permeates the entire universe and what we inhale and exhale is a fragment of it. Mere exhaling or inhaling is not *prānāyāma*, but it is a link with it and to maintain it is by way of *prānāyāma*.

II. Objective of the Paper

1. To highlight the power of practising *prānāyāma* which is very essential for the concentration of the mind which makes our mind free from ignorance and later it leads to a divine state of energy.
2. To show that *prānāyāma* is not only vital for physical upliftment but it is necessary for self-realization or spiritual liberation.

III. Types of *Prānāyāma*

There are many types of *prānāyāma* used in the practice of yoga. Utilizing the breath while doing the physical postures, such as while seated is the foundation of *Hath* yoga. Combining all three elements of *prānāyāma*, posture and meditation are the corner stone's of most other practices of yoga as well.

Dirgha prānāyāma: This *prānāyāma* is also known as the three separate inhalations, each with a short pause between them, the first deeply into the abdomen as far as the rib cage, the second into the rib cage expanding the ribs and finally all the way up to the chest and clavicles which actually lift slightly as the lungs fill with air. The exhale is also done in three parts but in the opposite direction, clavicles descending first, then the ribs and abdomen, again each with a short pause in between. This is a slow deep breath that utilizes all the alveoli in the lungs, flushing the entire lungs with fresh air and allowing for a greater percentage of oxygen to be in the haes making oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange more efficient.

Ujjayi prānāyāma: The *ujjayi* breath (victorious breath) is best known for its use through the asana practise in *Ashtanga yoga*, but it is a separate *prānāyāma* technique in itself involving the gentle contradiction and lifting of the *uddiyana bandha* and the *mula bandha* to lift the breath into the thoracic cavity. It can be practised with or without *kumbhakas*. It is also known as the ocean breath due to the sound made by the gentle engagement of the *jalandhara bandha* in the throat to create some resistance to the passage of air. This sound should become more subtle as the practitioner advances in both asana and *prānāyāma* so that it is audible to only the practitioner themselves. In the yoga sutras, Patanjali suggests that the breath should be *dirge* (long) and *suskma*

(smooth). It is a balancing and calming breath which builds up internal heat and increases oxygenation.

Nadi shodhana prānāyāma: This *prānāyāma* is also known as the alternate nostril breathing as the thumb of the right hand is used to close the right nostril and the ring finger of the same hand is used to close the left nostril. One round consists of inhaling through one nostril for a defined length of time and exhaling for the same length of time the same side. This nostril is then closed and the same breath is repeated through the other nostril. The left nostril *prānāyāma* group showed an increase in galvanic skin resistance, the electrical resistance of the skin which is a measure of emotions in people that is part of the polygraph test.

Viloma prānāyāma: *Viloma* means against the natural order of things. In *viloma prānāyāma*, inhalation or exhalation is done with several pauses. It teaches the practitioner how to fully utilize the entirety of the rib cage and how to direct the breath into specific areas of the chest ensuring a deep breath. *Viloma* can also be practised through alternate nostrils and is called *Anuloma viloma*. *Viloma* aerates the lungs and improves the muscle tone of the breathing muscles. Both *anuloma viloma* and *viloma* have been said to lower blood pressure, however the only controlled scientific study showed that there was an increase in systolic blood pressure probably due to cutaneous vasoconstriction as shown by the simultaneous decrease in digit pulse volume. Both practices have also been shown to increase oxygen consumption and therefore may be of benefit to the obese that are known to have a lower resting metabolic rate than the non-obese called *Anuloma viloma*. *Viloma* aerates the lungs and improves the lower blood pressure, however, the only controlled scientific study showed that there was an increase in systolic blood pressure probably due to cutaneous vasoconstriction as shown by the simultaneous decrease in digit pulse volume.

Sitali prānāyāma: *Sitali* is also called tongue hissing due to the sound produced when practising it. The tongue is curled up into a tube and during inhalation the air passes over the motion tongue, cooling down and refreshing the throat. The tongue is drawn back into the mouth and the lips are closed at end of the inhalation and the exhalation takes place either through the throat or through the nostrils. This is cooling *prānāyāma* which is thought to have developed from observation of how animals breathe to cool down using their tongues.

Kapalabhatti: *Kapalabhatti* means skull shining breath and is one of the cleansing techniques of yoga. If there is mucus in the air passages of tension and blockages in the chest it is often helpful to breathe quickly. In this practice, the diaphragm and associated muscle are used to "pump" the air

rapidly out of the lungs in forced exhalation. This is followed by a rapid but passive inhalation. “*Bhatti*” means that which bring lightness. One must be careful with this technique because there is a danger of creating great tension with the breath or one may become quite dizzy when breathing becomes rapid. For this reason, *kapalabhatti* is usually concluded with some deep slow breaths.

IV. Benefits of *Prānāyāma*

Prānāyāma holds a central position in the Indian yogic system, it is said that liberation of the soul is achieved through proper *prānāyāma* and meditation. *Prānāyāma* meditation benefits are both tangible and intangible. God has provided the supreme source of power named “*prāna*” free of cost to all human beings. Proper utilization of this free source of energy can make remarkable changes to our health, vitality and self-confidence. *Prānāyāma* can help us to prevent stress and people have been living so stressful life that they had found trouble in breathing or found themselves out of breath. Stressful thought can set off our body’s fight or flight response, providing us with a burst of energy to react to the discerned threat. This can cause us to take quick and shallow breaths using a chest for the most part instead of the lower lungs. This leads to shortness of breath and other symptoms like increased blood pressure and pulse rate. *Prānāyāma* offers a proven countermeasure to take deep and slow breaths to initiate the parasympathetic nervous system to induce calmness in our body as well as in our mind. Deep breathing allows more oxygen to enter our body and can further help relieve the pressure on the neck and upper chest muscles.

Prānāyāma yoga brings stillness and calmness to the mind, increased concentration and stability of mind. After taking breathe for a few seconds, one will realize the calming effect, deep controlled breathing has on our nerves, stress and muscle fatigue. *Prānāyāma* makes us habitual of breathing deeply and being in control of our breath. As a result, gradually one becomes and then remains more aware, calm and relaxes at all times. Although the process might be slow and gradual, *prānāyāma* yoga can help us to lose weight. *Prānāyāma* technique that may help contribute to burning fat is that of *anuloma viloma*. This technique involves inhaling through one nostril, holding our breath, and exhaling through the other nostril keeping in mind. *Anuloma viloma* practised with some yoga poses regularly can help us to get rid of the fat throughout our body. Deep breathing, such as straight spinal, full-body breathing increases the level of oxygen in our body and prevents shortness of breath in even in stressful situations. Again *prānāyāma* yoga technique coupled with yogic poses conducted in concentrated, meditative fashion can also lift our levels if performed consistently over a period of time. In this case, especially *Kapal bhatti prānāyāma* helps rejuvenate brain cells, gives our mind a boost, causes the face to glow, invigorates the nervous system and

improves blood circulation. This breathing technique holds advantages for our muscles and abdominal organs and can improve digestion as well as fuel our appetite.

V. Significance of *Prānāyāma*

Prānāyāma is not a simple breathing process. It is much more than exhalation and inhalation. It is a regulated breathing process, which comprises of three stages viz. *pukara*-slow and prolonged inhalation, *kumbhaka*-retention of breath, and prolonged exhalation. *Prānāyāma* is always performed in a specific posture, especially sitting in *padmasana* while in case of normal breathing; it is not so like that. Normal breathing provides physical benefits while *prānāyāma* breathing benefits comprise of physical, mental and spiritual merits. *Prānāyāma* is confined not only to our physical upliftment, but it also transcendence our mental states to a spiritual state. *Prānāyāma* is one of the most important milestones of on the path to self-realization, it is not only a breathing exercise and it is much deeper than that. *Prānāyāma* works with the breath, mind and subtle life energies in the body to bring the nervous system and attention under our conscious control. *Prānāyāma* is the bridge that one must over to get from physical consciousness to this Divine awareness within. By the practice of *Prānāyāma* one develop such power of concentration that when one attempt to draw mind within, it obey us.

Yoga teaches us step by step how to free the mind from the constant distractions of sensations and the restless thoughts roused by sensations. We learn to calm the breath and heart. When the heart is made calm, then sensations will disappear of themselves. The mental approach to god is not only sufficient but the *prānāyāma* approach to god is must then one can disengage the mind from the senses and race towards god. The moment we pray to god to reveals himself, we are immersed in the experience of one of his intoxication qualities, bliss or peace or comforting, unshakable security". By *prānāyāma* meditation, what we are doing is pulling away from the obscuring veil of *maya*, so that one realizes as oneself as the soul. In that state, there is no consciousness of the little ego. Ego is tied with the flesh, to mundane desires frame and glory, name and position and so on. But in soul consciousness, all those cravings vanish.

Meditation on God who is the supreme lord of *prāna* and infinite glories is the most important feature of *prānāyāma*. True *prānāyāma* gives a new boost to the *prāna* or the life force of the body. When one consciously breathe in positive thoughts, they reach every cell in the body and activate the entire psychosomatic system. This is the reason why *prānāyāma* is such a powerful medium to rouse the innate divinity which is lying dormant. God too responds quickly when every cell in the body

pulsates with divine thought current. Therefore, we are sure to receive divine grace if *prānāyāma* is done properly. God showers his special grace on those *sadhakas* who do *prānāyāma* with utmost faith, devotion and self-surrender. God's grace leads to inner bliss and *sadhaka* experiences a fresh vigour, extra strength and enthusiasm. Divine grace transforms man into a divine being. So, for *prānāyāma* to be highly successful, unswerving devotion, unflinching faith and intense longing for God are of paramount importance. Referring to *prānāyāma*, Patanjali's yoga sutras(2:52) state: *tatah kshiyate prakasavaranam* "thence the covering of the light is destroyed". Here the covering refers to that which obscures the *Chitta*, consciousness, of the individual. *Chitta* (mind) is essentially pure, being itself made up of *sattva*, but is obscured by *rajas* and *tamas*. This amalgamation of *rajas* and *tamas* constitute the covering which is removed by the regular practice of *prānāyāma*. Thus it is said that *prānāyāma* purifies the consciousness and once revealed the light of knowledge shines. *Dharanasau cha योग्या Manasseh*- "the mind becomes fit for concentration" (yoga sutra 2:53).

Prānāyāma is the fourth limb of Patanjali's raja yoga prepares the mind for concentration by removing the veil of disturbing energy obstructing the light of consciousness. Following which mind becomes stable and steady like a flame in a windless place. When through *prānāyāma*, the *prāna* *vayu* moves in the *Akasha Tattva*, the breathing will be lessened and at this time it will be easy to stop the breath. Thus the velocity of the mind will be slowly lessened by *prānāyāma*, making it stable and focused for concentration and higher practices. Distraction is removed, *rajas* and *tamas* are destroyed and the mind becomes one-pointed. The mind of a person can thus be made to transcend ordinary experience and exist on a plane higher than that of reason, known as the super consciousness cannot comprehend. This ought to be achieved by proper training and manipulation of the subtle forces of the body to cause them to give as it were, an upward push to the mind into the higher regions. When the mind is so raised into the super consciousness state of perception, it begins to act from there and experiences higher facts and higher knowledge. Such is the ultimate object of yoga, which can be achieved by the practice of *prānāyāma*. The control of the vibratory *prāna* means the yogi kindles the fire of supreme knowledge, the realization of the self.

VI. Conclusion

From the above discussion on the yogic practice of *prānāyāma* conclusion can be made that *prānāyāma* is not only for the physical prosperity yet it is also essential for the mental concentration which leads us to spiritual upliftment. From own experience, it can be stated that the moment one sit to meditate, nothing else exists for that person. The world, the work, everything fades away. But it is because of *prānāyāma*, after all these years of practising it, one can see that no matter how distressed

our mind is, no matter how our thoughts are wrapped up in the duties and responsibilities of the organization, the moment one concentrate mind on that technique, the person is one with god. With just a few moments of practice, the sensations in the body and the restlessness in the mind are almost instantly calmed down. And that kind of constant practising of *prānāyāma* makes one different from others from the perspective of physical and mental aspects. This is because one is constantly practising it for many years so one should never give up. The practice of *prānāyāma* and *asana* sustained muscular activity with internally directed focus, producing a temporary self contemplative mental state. That is why the main object of this paper is to encourage people to persevere in making the same deep effort and realize the potentiality of *prānāyāma* which is very much essential for our spiritual peace of mind.

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