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## **YOGA PRANAYAM – IMPORTANCE OF SYSTEMATICAL APPROACH TO BREATHING**

**Summary:** *In this paper we indicate specificity of traditional yoga approach in education during practice of the pranayama technique (control of life energy through breathing). Technique of pranayama may be perceived as a powerful instrument in different forms of help to individuals and in the process of self-development of an individual, to the most extent.*

**Key words:** *yoga breathing, pranayama, motivation, self-realization.*

### **Introduction**

Yoga as method is slowly getting globalized in the last few decades. People from different walks of life and belief systems are taking to yoga training in different types of set-ups with different motivations and objectives such as fitness centers, health centers, spas, holiday resorts, medical clinics along with very traditional yoga ashrams and spiritual retreat centers.

We find that there are different motivating factors and objectives for taking to yoga. Right from exploring one's skills, competence and capacities at the physical level, we find higher objectives such as self-realization. We recognize still higher goals and pursuits in yoga such as transformation of individualized self oriented consciousness into universalized impersonal states of consciousness. Some individuals practice yoga with a competitive spirit and here a constant comparison is made with the performance of others as is seen in competitive games, sports taking us right up to the Olympic level. Sincere scientists in the field of medical sciences also got interested in understanding the states of consciousness achieved through yoga practices such as yoga meditation, pratyahara... Medical world has started recognizing and endorsing the positive contribution of yoga and yoga practices in the management of health and disease conditions such as chronic functional disorders, anxiety and depressive states, rehabilitation of heart patients, asthmatics, back pain, irritable bowel syndrome.

### **Conscious or spontaneous breathing?**

Yoga can be viewed as an education system. Our education starts right from the intra-uterine life and continues after birth in many different ways and in many different directions. Usually the emphasis is on using five sense organs and sensory faculties and different motor abilities in relation to various objects, events, happenings and phenomena in the external world. This education gets closely related with the development of the human cortex (neo-cortex). On the other hand, in yoga, emphasis is given on working with breathing. It is technically known as **Pranayama**.

We start to breathe after birth and later on we start using our breathing in phonation and articulation of speech to express our feelings and emotions and to communicate our thoughts and decisions with others. We may receive education in singing and talking (oratory/lecturing) which involves breathing. However, we do not get any education in respect of basic breathing and how to work with it.

In traditional yoga (Vedic culture), usually at the age of about 8 to 10 yrs., children in the Brahmin community were introduced to working with breath and breathing under the garb of **Pranayama**. They were also introduced to the sound vibrations of aum/om (pranava) and the recitation

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of Gayatri mantra (Savitru Mantra). Mantra recitation is very much different from singing and talking. Getting guided by the sound vibration with the help of bone conduction of sound is different from phonation and articulation of speech using air conduction of sound. Usually, **Pranayama** (working with the breath and breathing) and recitation of aum (pranava) and Gayatri Mantra is performed in a stabilized, comfortable and relaxed psycho-physical state (asana). Lotus Posture (Padmasana), Siddhasana, Swastikasana and Vajrasana were the postures (asanas) highly recommended for this purpose. Out of these, Lotus Posture (Padmasana) is held in the highest esteem. Other postures were recommended to help in stimulation of activity of yoga chakras (energy centers), stimulation of porosity of energy channels (prana nadis) and pathways (vayu and prana-margas), so that the pranic energy (Kundalini) could flow freely through the Sushumna channel.

Working with breath and yoga breathing presupposes the ability of the practitioner to be able to withdraw his/her mind (attention) from the outside world and remain connected with the body from inside without the active involvement of the five sensing modalities and voluntary motor activities/actions. Without modification of the natural spontaneous breathing, one has to learn to start to perceive, recognize and experience the flow of in-breath (svasa) and out-breath (prasvasa) through the nostrils. One has to learn to get guided by this **flow of breath** along an internal experiential pathway to certain destination inside the body. In the beginning, yoga practitioners are usually guided by the touch on the surface of the body. Here, we learn to get guided inside the body. It involves different nervous system. Person becomes sensitized to learn, recognize, experience and get guided by the gross physical movements related with breathing taking place at different segments of the trunk (perenium, pelvis, stomach, chest), neck, face, head and the vertebral column. In due course of time, one can learn to perceive and experience similar movements related with breathing in the arms and legs right up to the tips of the nails. This experiential knowledge about the flow of breath guiding the individual inside the body and the experience of the gross physical movements related with breathing taking place at the periphery of the body helps one to understand the yogic concepts and doctrines of Lotuses, channels of Vayu and Prana, Nadi-shuddhi pranayama, Loma-Viloma pranayama. In the longer run, the individual can be introduced to sense, feel, perceive, recognize and experience the internal “force” (Kriya shakti) being responsible for these movements (phenomena). In medical language, it is the internal pressure change taking place due to the contraction and the relaxation of the thoracic diaphragm. The cause of diaphragmatic movement is the functioning of the inspiratory, expiratory and the pneumotaxic centers in the Medulla and the Pons which represent Reptile brain in the nervous system. Our most natural spontaneous breathing is going on because of the pressure changes taking place in the abdominal and the thoracic cavities. It is independent of our intellectual and emotional activities which respectively involve neo-cortex (human brain) and visceral or limbic brain. Practicing conscious yoga breathing is multi-functional. It provides blood supply for many bodily regions and enables normal functioning of certain organs. In conducted researches it is confirmed that concentration is enhanced for at least 15 days, ability of mindful thinking and reasonable and meaningful speech in people who practice conscious yoga breathing every day.

Traditional yoga gives importance to the recognition and experiencing of the state of consciousness where there is automatic cessation of breathing (kevala kumbhaka). Such a condition will mean quietening the whole brain activity including the activity in the Reptile brain.

## Conclusion

Pranayama may be perceived as a serious tool in the process of stimulating self-development of an individual. Its implementation clearly leads to improvements of the health condition, increases concentration of practitioner and blood supply of different body regions. That blood supply enables vitality of the whole organism. We mustn't overlook importance of purification of the energy dimension

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of an individual and stimulation of the yoga chakra (energy centers) activity whose activity corresponds the most directly with development of psychological and social functions of an individual. We hope that this paper will inspire more researches in order that technique of correct breathing practice enters schools and helps the health and prosperity of the youth.

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