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Introduction

Prana is the universal principal of energy for force. It is the vital force. It is all-pervading. It may be either in a static or dynamic state. It is found in all forms, the highest to the lowest, from the ant to the elephant, from the unicellular amoeba to a man, from the elementary forms of plant life to the developed forms of animal life. It is prana that shines in your eyes. It is through the power of prana that the ear hears, the eyes see, the skin feels, the tongue tastes, the nose smells, in a young lady, the melody in the music, the power in the emphatic words of an orator the charm in the speech of one's beloved are all due to prana. Fire burns through prana. The aeroplane moves in the air through prana. Prana is electron. Prana is force. Prana is magnetism prana is electricity. It is prana that pumps the blood from the heart into the arteries of blood vessels. It is prana that is responsible for the processes of digestion, excretion, and secretion.

Prana is expended by thinking, willing, acting, moving, talking, writing etc. A healthy, strong man has abundance of prana or nerve-force or vitality. The prana is supplied by food, water, solar energy, etc. The supply of prana is taken up by the nervous system. The prana is absorbed by breathing. The excess of prana is stored in the brain and nerve centres. When the seminal energy sublimated or transforms, it supplies abundance of prana to the system. It is stored up in the form of ojas. Ojas is nothing but prana.

The yogi stores abundance of prana by a regular practice of pranayam just as a storage battery can be made to store electricity. That yogi who has stored up a large supply of prana radiates strength and vitality all round. He is a might power house. Those who come in close contact with him imbibe prana from him, and get strength, vigour, vitality and exhilaration of spirits. Just as water flows from one vessel to another, prana actually flows like a steady current from

a developed yogi towards weak persons. This can be actually seen by the yogi who has developed his inner yogic vision.

Pranayam is the control of the prana and the vital forces of the body. It is regulation of the breath. This aim of pranayam is the control of prana. Pranayam begins with the regulation of the breath for having control over the life-currents through the control of breath. Breath is the external manifestation of the gross prana. A correct habit of breathing must be established by the regular practice of pranayam. In ordinary worldly persons the breathing is irregular.

If you can control the prana you completely control all the forces of the universe, Mental and physical. The yogi can also control the omnipresent manifesting power out of which all energies take their origin, whether magnetism, electricity, gravitation, nerve-currents vital forces or thought vibration; in fact the total forces of the universe.

If one controls breath or prana, the mind is also controlled. He who has controlled his mind has also controlled his breath. If one is suspended, the other is also suspended. If the mind and the prana are both controlled one gets liberation from the round of births and deaths and attains immortality. There is an intimate connection between the mind prana and semen are also controlled. He who has controlled his seminal force has also controlled his prana and mind. When you wish to hear a faint sound, the breath gets automatically suspended for a short time. The coolie who carries heavy bags of rice at the railway station instinctively fills his lungs with air and practises unconscious retention of the air pranayam till the bag is lifted into his practices long jump and high jump and various exercises with the parallel bars practices retention of breath instinctively. This retention of breath augments his vitality strength. It provides abundance of energy immediately.

Just as a goldsmith removes impurities from gold by heating it in a hot furnace and by blowing strongly through a blow-pipe so also the yogic student removes the impurities of the body and the indriyas by blowing his lungs i.e., by practising pranayam.

The chief aim of pranayam is to unite the prana with the apana and take the united prana-apanas slowly upwards to the head. The effect or fruit of pranayam is awakening of the sleeping kundalini.

Pranayam, though it concerns the breath only, gives good exercise also to the various internal organs and the whole body. Pranayam removes all sorts of diseases, improves health, energises digestion, improves the nerves, removes passions and awakens kundalini shakti. It bestows good health and a steady mind. A pranayam practitioner can stop his breath. Person can break stones on his chest. He does not feel anything because he has controlled his prana. A pranayam practitioner will have a light body free from diseases, a very fair complexion, a sweet melodious voice and a pleasant smell from his body.

He who practises pranayam will have good appetite cheerfulness, a handsome figure, great strength, courage, enthusiasm, a high standard of health vigour and

vitality and good concentration of the mind. Thus pranayam is quite suitable for all.

A yogi measures the span of his life not by the number of years but by the number of breaths. You take in a certain amount of energy or prana from the atmosphere along with each breath. Vital capacity is the capacity of a man to inhale the largest quantity of air the deepest possible exhalation. A man takes fifteen breaths in a minute. So the total number of breaths amounts to 21,600 per day.

The room in which you practise pranayam must not be damp or ill-ventilated. It must be dry and airy. You may practice by the side of a river or lake, in the corner of a garden in the open air when there is no chill or draught of cold air or on the top or foot of a hill. The practice of pranayam should be performed daily with the mind firmly fixed on truth. Then the chitta is absorbed in the sushumna. Consequently the prana becomes steady. It does not fluctuate. Pranayam requires deep concentration and attention.

There should be no strain at any stage in the practice of pranayam. You should experience joy and pleasure in doing the same. You should not feel any undue strain. Always inhale and exhale very very slowly. Do not make the least sound. Whenever you feel uneasy, depressed, or dejected, practise pranayam.

The practice of kumbhak (retention) in pranayam produces heat and thereby the kundalini shakti is awakened and passés upwards along the sushumna nadi. Kumbhak increases the period of life also. Mild kumbhak during the practice of asanas augments the efficacy of asanas and gives increased power and vitality. During the practice of pranayam repeat your ishta mantra japa. That will be pure yoga.

As there is always some drowsiness when one gets up from bed, it is advisable to do a few pranayams, 10 to 20 mild kumbhak just to drive off drowsiness and to make your meditation fit. The mind gets one pointed after the practice of pranayam.

Sukh Purvak

(Easy comfortable pranayam)

Sit in the padmasana or siddhasana pose in your meditation room. Close the right nostril with the right thumb. Draw in the air very slowly through the left nostril. Then close the left nostril also with the little and ring fingers of the right hand. Retain the air as long as you can comfortably keep. Then exhale very very slowly through the right nostril after removing the thumb.

Then draw in the air through the right nostril. Retain the air as before and exhale it very very slowly through the left nostril after removing the little and ring fingers. All these six processes constitute one pranayam. Do 5 pranayams to start with and increase the number gradually. You can do 20 pranayams at a sitting.

Have a bhav (mental attitude) that all the daivi sampat or divini qualities such as mercy, love, forgiveness, shanti, joy, etc. And asura sampat devilish qualities such as lust, anger, greed, etc., are being thrown out along with the expired air. Repeat OM mentally during purak (inhalation) and rechak (exhalation).

This pranayam removes all diseases, purifies the nadis, steadies the mind in concentration, improves digestion increases the digestive fire and appetite, help to maintain brahmacharya and awakens the kundalini shakti. Purification of nadis all set in rapidly.

For purak, kumbhak and rechak the ratio is 1:4:2. If you inhale for 4 seconds, retain the air for 16 seconds and then exhale for 8 seconds. You can gradually increase these to 16, 6 and 32 seconds respectively.

Ujjayi

Adopt the padmasan or the siddhasan pose. Close the mouth. Inhale slowly through both the nostrils in a smooth uniform manner till the breath seems to fill the space between the throat and the heart. Retain the breath as long as you can comfortably and then exhale through the left nostril by closing the right nostril with your right thumb. Expand the chest when you exhale. During inhalation a peculiar sound is produced owing to the partial closing of the glottis. The sound produced during inhalation should be of a mild and uniform pitch. It should be continuous also. This pranayam can be practised even walking or standing. Instead of exhaling through the left nostril, you can slowly through both nostrils, you can exhale slowly through both nostrils.

This pranayam removes the heat in the head. The gastric fire is increased. It removes phlegm from the throat. Asthma, consumption and all sorts of pulmonary diseases are cured. Everything is accomplished by ujjayi. The practitioner is never attacked by diseases of phlegm nerves, dysentery, enlarged spleen, consumption cough or fever. Perform ujjayi to destroy decay and prevent death.

Sitali

Protrude the tongue a little away from the lips. Fold the tongue like a tube lengthwise. Draw in the air through the mouth with the hissing sound. Retain the breath through both the nostrils. Practise this 6 times. You can do this even while standing or walking.

This pranayam purifies the blood. It quenches thirst and appeases hunger. It destroys inflammation of various chronic diseases, fever consumption, indigestion, bilious disorders, etc. You will find this extremely useful in summer.

Bhastrika

In Sanskrit bhastrika means bellows. Rapid succession of forcible expulsions is a characteristic feature of bhastrika. Just as blacksmith blows his bellows rapidly, so also you will have to move your breath rapidly.

Sit in padmasan. Keep the body, neck and head erect. Close the mouth now inhale and exhale quickly ten times like the bellows of a blacksmith. Constantly dilate and contract the chest. Forcibly and quickly inhale and exhale ten times and then make a deep inhalation through do with comfort and then exhale completely. This is one round of bhastrika. You can do this 4 times. After some practice, you can gradually increase the number of expulsions to 20. You can do 10 rounds in a sitting. You will not feel any fatigue, if you take a little rest after each round. Take a few normal breaths after each round. Then you will be fresh for the next round.

The number of expulsions for each round are determined by the strength and capacity of the practitioner. You must not go to extremes. practise regularly every day and gradually increase the number of rounds.

There is another variety of bhastrika where in only one nostril is used for breathing purposes.

Bhastrika is a powerful exercise. It relieves inflammation of the throat, increases the gastric fire, destroys phlegm, remove diseases of the nose and chest and cures asthma and consumption. It removes all diseases which arises from an excess of wind, bile and phlegm. It gives warmth to the body. It purifies the nadis considerably. It is the most beneficial of all kumbhaks. It awakens kundalini shakti quickly. For health and strength, practise bhastrika.

Suryabhedhi

Suryabhedhi pranayam has been praised in the Hatha Yoga Pra dipika as the pranayam that cleanses the skull, destroys wind related diseases and removes worms (microorganisms like bacteria and viruses). Diseases such as hiccups, arthritis, asthma, Parkinson's, memory loss, stroke, paralysis, anxiety, depression, cold hands and feet and negative emotions, nervousness, fear, anger, suspicion, jealousy etc are attributed to an imbalance in vayu (wind) element.

Close your left nostril by applying gentle but firm pressure on the left side of your nose with the help of the little and ring finger of your right hand. Inhale steadily through the right nadi (right nostril) then slowly exhale through the left nadi (left nostril) while closing your right nostril with your thumb. Repeat several times. Another variation is to hold the breath per capacity upon inhalation through right nostril, followed by exhalation through the left nostril.

According to the Gherand Samhita, practicing Suryabhedha pranayam helps awaken Kundalini energy and destroys feebleness and death.

Suryabhedhi pranayam increases heat in the body; hence one should avoid doing too much in the summer time. Foods that bring warmth to the body should be consumed if one is afflicted with an imbalanced wind element. Hence consuming foods that are inherently and temperature warm or hot can help

restore balance in people with wind imbalance related disorders. Examples: Hot cereals, warm teas, warm milk, nuts, honey, sweet fruits, ginger, cloves, peppers, sesame oils, almond oils, olive oils. Self massage with these oils is also highly beneficial.

Preparation of Suryabehdi

- Sit on your favourite Asana (Padma asana, Vajra asana or Sukh asana) in a well ventilated room free from any distractions. Keep the waist, back, neck and spine erect. For beginners, you can sit on a chair or sit cross legged on the yoga mat/ carpet keeping your back, neck and spine erect. Inhaling and exhaling should be slow and it should not make noise. Keep the breathing exercise easy and enjoy it. Do not tax your body. Any time you feel discomfort, discontinue and take rest.
- For closing the right nostril, it should be pressed with thumb of right hand. For closing the left right nostril, it should be pressed with ring finger of right hand. Keep the other hand on your knee.
- Alternate method. For closing the right nostril, it should be pressed with thumb of right hand. For closing the left right nostril, it should be pressed with ring finger of right hand.
- Initially your hands will get tired easily, so you can use either of the hands. One hand gets tired, use other hand.

Benefits of Surya Bhedi pranayama

1. *Surya Bheda Pranayama* activates the body and the bodily functions.
2. It increases the digestive fire.
3. It destroys all diseases that are caused by insufficiency of oxygen in the blood.
4. The *Hatha Yoga Pra-deepika* says that *Surya Bheda Pranayama* cleanses the frontal sin uses, destroys disorders of *wind* and destroys intestinal worms.
5. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradeepika*, it is also said that one can perform *Uddhiyana Bandha* by pulling in the abdomen at the end of Kumbhaka or holding of breath. This will force the prana to enter the central pranic channel called *Sushumna Nadi*. This leads to awakening of the *Kundalini Shakti*.
6. With this we come to an end to today's lecture. I hope this must have enhanced your knowledge about this important topic. Thank you very much. Have a good day.