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Importance of pranayama in yoga

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Abstract

Breathing is life. The ancient yogis in India knew the intimate connection between breathe and the mind. For example, when your mind is angry, watch your breathing. It will be disturbed. And similarly, if you hold your breath for long, your mind will get agitated. The yogis were trying to get some degree of control over the mind. By controlling the breath, they were indirectly able to influence the mind. Breathing is an automatic process controlled by the autonomic nervous system. We do not have any conscious control over it. The science of bio-energy including the breathing movements is the practical yoga par excellence in the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna that one should practice yoga to purify himself. Pranayama, or control or regulation to purify him is the fourth step in Ashtanga yoga system of Patanjali. The control of breath leads to control of the life force or Prana. The ancient yogic developed many breathing techniques to maximize the benefits of prana. The word Pranayama is made up of two words, Prana and Yama. Here prana means the capacity to keep body alive by air i.e breath and Yama means expansion, stretching or extension and control of breath. Thus pranayama means the art of controlling breath. Pranayama is used in yoga to clear and cleanses the body and the mind.

Keywords: pranayama, breathing, Ashtanga

Introduction

Pranayama is not as complex as it thought to be. Before doing pranayama, one must learn the sectional breathing. We breathe through three parts of chest mainly, upper, middle and lower as well as the abdomen. We must first learn how to breathe through each part individually before we can breathe through all of them. Sectional breathing helps to increase the lung capacity by encouraging fuller breathing into the lungs. It has a deeply calm effect on body and mind. The practice of pranayama is highly recommended before relaxation and meditation or at the end of the session.

Stages of Pranayama: The four stages are given below

1. **Puraka (Inhalation):** A single inhalation is termed puraka. It is a process of drawing in air, it is expected to be smooth and continuous. If a person should pause one or more times during the process of a single inhaling, the process might be spoken of as a broken puraka rather than as a series of purakas.
2. **Kumbhaka (Pause after inhaling) Full pause:** Kumbhaka consist of deliberate stoppage of flow of air and retention of the air in the lungs, without any movement of lungs or any part of the body and without any incipient movements. A beginner may experiment by using some force to keep such pause motionless. Quite elaborate instructions and techniques have been worked out for this purpose.
3. **Rechaka (Exhalation):** The third stage, exhalation is called rechaka. Like inhalation, it too should be smooth and continuous, though often the speed of exhaling is different from that of inhaling. Normally, muscular energy is used for inhaling whereas exhaling consist merely in relaxing the tensed muscles. Such relaxing forces air from the lungs as they return to an untensed condition. However a person can force air out with muscular effort; so when he sits or stands erect and has his abdominal muscles under control, muscular effort may be used for both inhaling and exhaling. Especially if one deliberately smoothes the course of his breathing and holds the cycles in regular or definitely irregular patterns, he is likely to use muscular energy at each stage, including the pauses. However, in a

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condition of complete relaxation, one should expect effort to be needed only for inhaling.

- 4. Bahya Kumbhka (Pause after exhalation) Empty pause:** The fourth stage, the pause after exhaling is also called kumbhka, especially when the stoppage is deliberate or prolonged. The fourth stage, the empty pause, completes the cycle which terminates as the pause ends and a new inhalation begins.

Control of breath

The first important step is to master the asana of posture or to control the body. The next exercise is pranayama. Correct posture is indispensably requisite for the successful practice of pranayama. An easy comfortable posture is asana. That pose is the best which continues to be comfortable for the greatest length of time. Chest, neck and head must be in one vertical line. You should not bend the body either forwards or literally, i.e either on the right or left side. You should not sit crooked. You should not allow the body to collapse. By regular practice the mastery over the pose will come by itself. Fatty people will find it difficult to practice the Padma asana or siddha asana. You need not wait for practicing pranayama till you get full mastery over the asana.

Pranayama is the control of prana and the vital forces of the body. It is regulation of the breath. This is the most important step. Pranayama begins with the regulation of the breath for having control over the life-currents or inner vital force. In other words, pranayama is the perfect control of the life. If you can control the prana you can completely control all the forces of the universe, mental and physical. The yogi can also control omnipresent manifesting power out of which all energies take their origin, whether concerning magnetism, electricity, gravitation, cohesion, nerve-currents, vital forces or thought-vibration, in fact the total forces of the universe, physical and mental. If one controls the breath or prana, the mind also is 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 prana are both controlled one gets liberation from the round of births and deaths and attains immortality. There is intimate connection between the mind, prana and semen. If one controls the seminal energy, the mind and prana are also controlled. He who has controlled his seminal energy has also controlled his prana and mind.

Benefits of pranayama

Reduced breathing rate. With yoga breathing, you can train yourself to breathe more slowly and more deeply. You can reduce your breathing rate from fifteen breathes a minute to 5-6 breathes a minute, which amounts to reducing the breathing rate by one third. Reduced breathing rate leads to slowing down the heart rate as more oxygen can be pumped even with less number of breathes. Follow the ratio of 1:2 for inhalation: exhalation.

Blood circulation improves. As a result of breathing, the freshly oxygenated blood (during exhalation) travels from lungs to the heart. The heart pumps it via arteries and blood vessels to every part of the body and cell. This improves the blood circulation and more oxygen or cosmic energy reaches all parts of our body.

Benefits of pranayama for functioning of body organs:

Better functioning of autonomic nervous system improves the working of lungs, heart, diaphragm, abdomen intestines, kidneys and pancreas. It improves the digestive system and diseases pertaining to digestive organs are cured. It vanishes

the general irritability due to lethargy.

Better mental health

Pranayama practice provides freedom from negative and harmful mental conditions like anger, depression, greed for money, arrogance etc. With pranayama fluctuations of the mind are controlled and it prepares the mind for meditations. With practice of pranayama, you will start experience lightness of the body, feeling of inner peace, better sleep, better memory and better concentration whereby improving the spiritual powers/skills.

Better breathing improves the quality of life in old age

As a person with sedentary life style reaches middle age, lung tissues tend to grow less and less elastic and lung capacity decreases. Pranayama can help to reduce the following old age problems which are loss of vitality, backaches, headaches, stiffening of muscles and joints.

Some other benefits of pranayama

1. It removes sensory distraction of mind.
2. It is used to energy the mind for mental work, to sleepiness and to prepare to the mind for meditation.
3. It makes the mind more alert and perceptive and is an excellent pre—meditation.
4. It's also useful in the treatment of low blood pressure, high blood pressure, and heart disease.
5. Pranayama relieves stress and cerebral tension alleviating anger, anxiety, insomnia.
6. It speeds up the healing of body tissues.
7. It gives control over hunger and thirst, and generates a feeling of satisfaction.
8. It clears pranic blockages causing sushumna nadi to flow which leads to deep states of meditation and spiritual awakening.
9. Regular practice of pranayama helps in the elimination of waste materials from the body, which is normally carried out by digestive, respiratory and urinary systems and of course through skin.
10. The intestines and kidneys benefits in the same way as do the other abdominal viscera, by pressure changes in pranayama and by improvement of circulation.
11. Pranayama helps in elimination of carbon dioxide and water vapour properly.
12. Elimination of excess salts in the form of sweat is promoted by pranayama. This is because pranayama stimulates the sweat glands through its influence on the hypothalamus.
13. The basic idea of pranayama is that by purifying the whole of nervous system including the brain, it ultimately leads to the removal of ignorance and to stability and peace of mind. These are the qualities, which every one of us desires to have but very few do actually possess.

Special instructions for pranayama

In the early morning, answer the nature calls of nature and sit for the practice. Practice pranayama, in a dry well-ventilated room. Pranayama requires deep concentration and attention. It is always better to have the practice in a steady sitting posture. Do not keep anyone by your side to avoid distraction of your mind.

Before you sit for pranayama practice, thoroughly clean the nostrils well. You can take a small quantity of fruit juice or a small cup of milk or coffee even before the practice. When you finish the practice take a cup of milk or light tiffin after

10 minutes. Have one sitting only in the morning during summer. If there is heat in the brain or head, apply amla oil or butter in the head before you take your bath. Take misri sharbat by dissolving sugar candy in water. This will cool your whole system. Do sitali pranayama also. You will not be effected by the heat. Asana and pranayama remove all sort of diseases, improve health, energise digestion, invigorate the nerves. Practice of pranayama and asana bestows good health and steady mind. As no sadhana is possible without good health and as no meditation is possible without a steady mind, hatha yoga is of immense use for dhyana yogins, karma yogins, bhaktas and vedantins as well.

Be regular in practice. Regularity in the practice is very necessary if one wants to realise the maximum benefits of asana and pranayama. Those who practice by fits and starts will not derive much benefit; generally people will practice for two months in the beginning with great enthusiasm and leave off the practice. They always want a yogic teacher by their side. Do not continue pranayama when you are fatigued. There must be always joy and exhilaration of spirit during and after the exercise. You should come out of practice fully invigorated and refreshed. Do not bind yourself by too many rules. Do not take bath immediately after pranayama is over. Take rest for half an hour. If you get perspiration during the practice, do not expose the body to the chill draughts of air when you perspire. Always inhale and exhale very slowly. Do not make any sound. In pranayama like bhastrika, kapalbhati, sitali and sitkari, you can produce a little mind or the lowest possible sound.

Pranayama in its popular and preparatory form may be practiced by everyone in any posture whatsoever, sitting or walking; and yet is sure to show its benefits. But to those who practice it in accordance with the specific methods prescribed, fructification will be rapid.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study was that Pranayama plays an important role in the life of the people. The players who can do pranayama in the morning it will help them in improving their game and skills. It is also very helpful for the individuals who are not related to games and sports. It speeds up the healing of body tissues. It gives control over hunger and thirst, and generates a feeling of satisfaction. It is helpful for the players to enhance their performance in games and sports. It is also helpful for the individual who are not related to sports.

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