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Role of Prana Vayu in human body

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Abstract

The term prana is most commonly used to describe the vital force in its totality, but within the context of the five divisions of Pranic energy the term refers to all the ways in which we take in energy. Inhalation is by far the most important vehicle for absorbing prana, but prana is drawn from other energy sources as well. We also absorb energy from food and water, from sense impressions such as the sights, sounds, and smells we gather through the sense organs, and from ideas and impressions communicated to the mind. According to the yoga tradition this far-reaching system of vital energy contains five major functions, called variously the five pranas, the five Vayus, or the five Prana-Vayus (the term Vayu means “wind, breath, or life-force”). Each function has a distinct role, and each is integrated into the total system of human energy. If we understand the role of each Prana-Vayu, we can grasp how the forces of prana serve the whole person, and see how disturbances among the pranas reduce our quality of life and lead to illness.

Keywords: Prana Vayu, human body

Introduction

Prana is energy, vitality, power. Prana is the foundation and essence of all life; the energy and vitality that permeates the entire Universe. Prana flows in everything that exists. Furthermore, Prana is the connecting link between the material world, consciousness and mind. It is what makes life on the material level possible. Prana regulates all physical functions for example, the breath, the supply of oxygen, digestion, elimination and much more. The function of the human body is much like a transformer, receiving energy from the Universal flow of Prana, distributing that energy, and then eliminating it. If a person or a room has a healthy, harmonious vibration, we say: “There is good Prana here”. Illness, on the other hand, disturbs or blocks the flow of Prana. As we develop the ability to control Prana, we gain harmony and health, of both body and mind. In addition to this, with long and consistent practice an expansion of consciousness is experienced.

Prana is divided into ten main functions:

The five Pranas - Prana, Apana, Samana, Udana and, Vyana.

The five Upa-Pranas - Naga, Kurma, Krikala, Devadatta and Dhananjaya.

The Five Pranas (Figure 1)

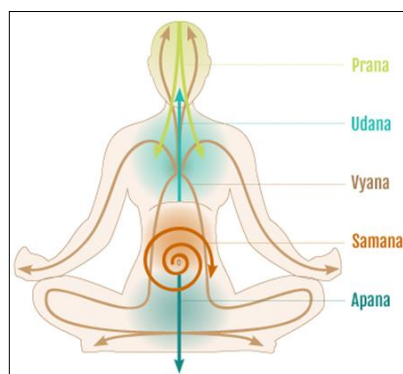


Fig 1: The five pranas

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Prana

Prana is that special function of the Cosmic Prana, which supplies the human body with essential oxygen. Its energy flows from the nostrils to the level of the heart.

Clean air is vital for health however, on its own air, is not the decisive factor in good health. Some people are prone to illness, even though they are frequently out in the fresh air. On the other hand, people who live in rooms or suburbs with relatively poor air quality remain healthy. Our health is not influenced by external factors only. Health is also governed by our inner condition, by the power of resistance and the inner will - Atmabala - the inner vitality. When Atmabala is strong within, external forces can barely harm us. The practice of "Yoga in Daily Life" strengthens our vitality. Certain techniques in particular activate Prana Shakti, these are Bhastrika, Nadi Shodhana and Ujjayi Pranayama.

Apana

Apana Prana influences the lower part of the body from the navel to the soles of the feet. This Prana regulates the elimination process. Diseases that affect the lower abdomen, intestines, kidneys, urinary tract, legs, etc., are the result of disturbed Apana Prana. The techniques of Nauli, Agnisara Kriya, Ashvini Mudra and Mula Bandha serve to strengthen and purify Apana Prana.

Samana

Samana is a very important Prana that connects two main Chakras - Anahata and Manipura Chakras.

Samana Prana distributes the energy of nutrition throughout the human body. We are aware that food not only influences our physical body, but also affects our psyche and consciousness. The quality of our Prana (all types of Prana), is directly associated with the quality of our food. Pure, sattvic, vegetarian food and the practice of Pranayama will provide a healthy and balanced body for life.

Samana Prana has an influence on the Manipura Chakra, whose corresponding element is fire. When Yogis are able to control Samana Prana it is a pure flame within them. Those in whom Samana Prana is completely pure are surrounded by a radiant aura, which is even noticeable by those who do not have the ability to see auras.

This Prana is strengthened through the practice of Agnisara Kriya and Nauli. The practice of these two Kriyas prevents digestive problems and Diabetes. It also improves one's resistance to infectious disease and cancer, due to the digestive fire that is awakened in the whole body, which purifies and cleans.

The most effective technique for awakening Samana Prana is Kriya Yoga. The practice of Kriya Yoga warms the entire body. This is due to the rising of Samana Prana. A very aware person can observe the aura of a Kriya practitioner becoming brighter and stronger with each round of practice.

Udana

Udana Prana is the ascending energy that flows from the heart to the head and brain. Udana Prana accompanies the awakening of the Kundalini Shakti. It is with the assistance of Udana Prana that the Astral body separates itself from the physical body. A strong Udana Prana eases the phase of death.

With the control of Udana Prana, the body becomes very light and one may gain the ability to levitate. When Udana Prana is in our control, external obstacles such as water, earth or stones no longer obstruct us. Intense practice of the Yoga

breath exercises also gives the possibility of walking on water, or even floating in the air. Fakirs who sit or lie on a bed of nails possess the ability to control their Udana Prana. Yogis who live in the forest and remain unaffected by heat, cold, thorns and insects, etc., are protected through the control of Udana Prana. Udana Prana is activated by the practice of Ujjayi Pranayama, Bhramari Pranayama, as well as Viparitarani Mudra.

Vyana

Vyana Prana flows through the nerve channels of the human body. It has an effect upon the whole body and particularly on the Nadis. Poor circulation, impaired nerve stimulation and nervous breakdowns, originate from a deficiency in Vyana Prana.

Vyana Prana is activated and strengthened in the practice of Kumbhaka (breath retention). With each natural, relaxed breath that we take, there is an automatic pause between inhalation and exhalation. In the practice of Pranayama, this pause is consciously lengthened. When we retain the breath, we withhold energy in the body with a resultant build up in pressure. This pressure has the effect of releasing energy blockages. Kumbhaka stimulates the nervous system. Anyone who has combined the techniques of Kumbhaka and Maha Bandha, knows the subsequent, pleasant sensation of peace that flows through the body. This is the reason for being able to meditate well after this practice. The feeling is produced by the increased flow of Vyana Prana throughout the whole body.

The Five Upa-Pranas

The five Upa-Pranas regulate important functions in the human body.

NAGA - Burping

Removes blockages of Prana and Apana and prevents gas formation in the digestive system. Constant suppression of Naga can lead to Cardiac Arrhythmia. Other functions include triggering of the vomit reflex due to indigestion and dissolving blockages of Samana Prana.

Kurma - Blinking

This Upa-Prana functions in the area of the eyes, controlling opening and closing of the eyelids. The energy of this Upa-Prana is active when we are awake and is revitalised when we sleep. Kurma protects the eyes from the penetration of dust and foreign bodies etc. Disturbance of this Upa-Prana causes uncontrolled blinking and twitching of the eyelids. The practice of Trataka provides balance and strength to Kurma, as does the chanting of OM, placing warm palms over the eyes and Asanas where the head is bent forward.

Devadatta - Yawning

The function of Devadatta is similar to that of Samana Prana. Yawning expels gas, reducing tiredness after eating. Certain foods such as grains, onions and garlic cause fatigue. Many Yogis only eat vegetables and some milk products in order to sustain their level of vitality and thereby reduce lethargy.

Krikala - Sneezing

Clears blockages in the respiratory system. Sneezing can also ease headache as it releases energy blockages in the head and neck. A sneeze should not be suppressed, as this may affect vertebrae in the cervical spine. In folk tales it is said that he who sneezes loudly and strongly, has a long life. Weak sneezes indicate weak vitality.

Dhananjaya - Opening and Closing of Heart Valves

Dhananjaya resides close to the Heart. It influences the whole body and in particular the muscles of the heart by opening and closing the heart valves. Cardiac Arrhythmia and even Heart Attack may occur due to a serious disturbance of Dhananjaya. There are four areas in the human body where the flow of Prana is particularly intensive - through the sole of each foot and the palm of each hand. The feet are closely related to the earth element and represent negative polarity. Therefore one should never concentrate on the feet in meditation. Conversely, the energy of the palms originates from the heart. It is related to the air element and produces positive polarity. Prana is distributed throughout the whole body, through the network of the Nadis (nerves). There are 72,000 Nadis in the human body. Of these, there are three Nadis of particular importance.

IDA, the "Moon System", correlates with the left nostril and the Parasympathetic Nervous System.

PINGALA, the "Sun System", correlates with the right nostril and the Sympathetic Nervous System.

SUSHUMNA, the "Central Nadi", penetrates the spinal column and correlates with the Central Nervous System.

The practice of Asanas and Pranayamas, harmonise the Ida and Pingala Nadis and has a purifying, strengthening and balancing effect upon the energy flow in all 72,000 Nadis. Pranayama and Meditation practice enhance energy flow in the Sushumna Nadi. When spiritual energy begins to flow in the Sushumna certain brain centres and Chakras are activated, creating a development and expansion of our consciousness to higher spiritual levels.

Prana itself is totally pure and neutral, just as the spring-water of a river is clear and clean. In its course, the river picks up many substances which change the quality of the water. Exactly the same occurs with Prana. Prana flows into the body clean and pure, but how it departs depends upon the individual - on their lifestyle, their inner qualities and feelings, the type of food consumed and the environment and company in which one lives. The quality of the Prana that radiates from people impacts on both the surrounding environment and the individuals themselves.

The level of vitality existent in the blood and individual cells determines the condition of the human body.

The more cells that die, the weaker one becomes, and the quicker one ages. When the flow of Prana is restricted, the result is the same. The flow of Prana is affected by the worries we create for ourselves. The more we feel disheartened or depressed, the weaker the flow of Prana, leaving us more susceptible to illness, and the aging process occurs more rapidly. On the other hand, those who are balanced and content radiate vitality, and their strength reaches out to touch fellow human beings. Therefore, we should always endeavour to radiate positive Prana.

Conclusion

The Prana that we radiate (our "vibration" or "aura"), is clearly perceptible to others. The type of aura depends upon the purity of our thoughts and feelings, and also our internal Biorhythm and physical state of health. Mental unrest, inner tension and illness are clearly seen in the aura, as is a harmonious balance of body, mind and soul.

It is most advantageous for others, and ourselves to cultivate positive, confident, trusting and good thoughts. Above all else, negative, self-destructive and hostile thoughts are most harmful to us. With such a mental attitude we poison ourselves. That is why Yoga aspirants always endeavour to

keep their thoughts and feelings pure and positive. The practice of meditation and Mantra maintains pure Prana and the practice of Pranayama increases our capacity to store Prana.

When the soul leaves the body and death comes, the life energy also escapes from the body. It is our destiny to die one day, but we always forget this fact. When we die we leave everything behind - our body, worldly possessions, friends and also enemies. So wherein lies the meaning of life? The purpose of life is to recognise reality. This reality is the Divine Self (Atma) within us. This is what we seek in meditation, when we ask ourselves the question: "Who am I?". When we recognise our Self, we have Realised our Self.

In order to achieve this, physical exercises and breath techniques alone are too little. One's whole life must be directed towards the good. When we are free of hatred, greed, anger, envy, jealousy, passion and dependency, and live in love, harmony and understanding with the environment and ourselves, all our problems will be resolved. When daily practice and a positive way of life merge with each other in such a way that they become one, our practice has become effective and successful.

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