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Preksha meditation: The technique for purifying and knowing self

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Abstract

The objective of meditation is not to acquire physical goodness alone, but to acquire total psychical goodness by eradicating all evil from one's thoughts, speech and action. It is a "process of remedying inner incompleteness and reducing inner discord" as aptly stated by William James. To achieve this objective, the system of Preksha Dhyana bifurcates into (a) Concentration of Perception and (b) Concentration of Thought i.e. Preksha and anu preksha in the former technique of meditation, perception and awareness are primarily used for concentration; thinking is considered a distraction and is banished as far as possible. In the latter technique, the conscious mind is encouraged to engage itself in a 'thinking process i.e. contemplation. Perception and contemplation both awaken and develop practitioner's conscious reasoning and thereby modify one's attitude and behaviour. Contemplation is, sometimes, defined as 'religious' meditation which is non-discursive (i.e. intuitive) and mostly mystical. But in Preksha Dhyana, contemplation is both discursive as well as intuitive. It means, research and deliberate reflection for Truth and Reality. This paper gives detail of elements and techniques of preksha meditation.

Keywords: preksha meditation, dhyana, perception, contemplation

Introduction

Preksha meditation [Preksha Dhyana] is a popular meditation technique of Jainism. It was formulated by the tenth Spiritual head of Terapanth Shvetambara Ja- in Acharya Mahaprajna in the middle of the 20th century on the guidance of Acharya Tulsi It is the combination of knowledge from ancient religious books, modern science and experience. Acharya Mahaprajna practised the technique on himself for nearly 30 years before presenting it to the general mass in modern languages. With his editorial team consisting of ascetics of the Terapanth order, he matched it with modern science and began to present it in public in the 1970s. Since then, the aim of Preksha Meditation is to continue serving humanity. The word Preksha is derived from the root 'iksha', which means 'to see'. When the prefix 'pra' is added, it becomes pra + iksha = preksha, which means 'perceive carefully and profoundly.' Here, 'seeing' does not mean external vision, but careful concentration on subtle consciousness by mental insight. *Preksha Dhyana* is the system of meditation engaging one's mind fully in the perception of subtle internal and innate phenomena of consciousness.

Samiksha Appagamappaenam. This aphorism from the Jain canon *Dasavealiyam*- forms the basic principle for this system of meditation. It simply means: 'See you thyself'-Perceive and realize the most subtle aspects of consciousness by conscious mind. Hence, "to see" is the fundamental principle of meditation. The main aim of the practice of *preksha dhyana* is purification of emotions, psyche, consciousness and realization of the self. When the mind is cleansed peace of mind automatically surfaces. Balance of mind, equanimity and the state of well-being are also experienced simultaneously.

One commences the practice of this technique with the perception of the body. Body contains the soul. Therefore, one must pierce the wall of the container to reach the content, the soul. Again, 'breathing' is a part of the body and essence of life. To breathe is to live; and so breath is naturally qualified to be the first object of perception, while the body itself would become the next one. The vibrations, sensations and other physiological events are worthy of attention. Conscious mind becomes sharpened to perceive these internal realities in due course, and then

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it will be able to focus itself on the minutest and the most subtle occurrences within the body. The direct perception of emotions, urges and other psychological events will then be possible. And ultimately the envelope of karmic matter, contaminating the consciousness could be clearly recognized. In 'preksha', perception always means experience bereft of the duality of like and dislike, pleasure and pain. Impartiality and equanimity are synonymous with Preksha. Preksha is impartial perception, where there is neither the emotion of attachment nor aversion, neither pleasure or displeasure. Both these states of emotion are closely and carefully perceived but not experienced. And because both are perceived from close quarters, it is not difficult to reject both of them and assume a neutral position.

Thus equanimity is essentially associated with preksha. One whose 'perception' and 'knowledge' are pure, does neither attract new karmic matter nor does he suffer the effect of the old accumulated karmas. The speciality of this process is it is a holistic approach proved by scientific experiments. The main aim of Preksha meditation is to reach and purify the deeper levels of existence, thus spreading peace & harmony.

Elements and Techniques

Complete relaxation with self-awareness - Kayotsarga

Bodily movements, speech and mental functions are threefold activities of our organism. Kayotsarga implies- reduction or total cessation of each of these activities. Kayotsarga literally means "abandonment of the body coupled with high degree of conscious awareness". In practice, it is conscious suspension of all gross movements of the body resulting in relaxation of the skeletal muscles and drastic reduction of metabolic activities. This physical condition results in relieving mental tensions and is an essential pre-condition for meditation practice. It becomes, therefore, the first phase of Preksha Dhyana and must be practiced for a few minutes at the commencement of all types of this technique. Apart from this, Kayotsarga may be independently practiced daily for longer periods.

The practice calms the nervous system, treats psychosomatic illnesses, recharges the body and the mind and cultivates positive attitude and behavior.

Internal trip - Antaryatra

Antaryatra requires the mind to be focused along the spinal cord. Concentration begins at the bottom tip of the spinal cord at *Shakti Kendra* - the Center of Energy and the conscious mind travels from *Shakti Kendra* to *Jnana Kendra* - Centre of Knowledge - top of the head through the spinal cord. Then reverse the direction of focus until it reaches the spinal cord bottom tip. It results in an increased flow of the vital energy (*prana shakti*) upwards. Repeated practice of this process said to assist in better generation of nervous energy.

The benefits of the practice are: reducing stress, improving the nervous system strength, rejuvenating the vital energy and overcoming negative emotions.

Perception of Deep Breathing - Dirgha Svasa Preksha

Svasa Preksha is the powerful technique of observing breath with complete awareness as a means to traverse from the gross to subtle levels of consciousness. An efficient and easy way to control mental activity is concentrated perception of breath. Proper regulation of respiration by the conscious mind results in the development of the controlled activity of the mind. Awareness of breathing helps to stop the restlessness of the mind and canalize its functioning. Shallow, hasty and

irregular (spasmodic) breathing must first be regulated to be deep, slow and rhythmic.

Svasa Preksha can be practiced in two ways:

Dirgha Svasa Preksha

Very slow inhalation and complete exhalation (by the use of diaphragm) is called - *Dirgha Svasa-deep breathing* or *diaphragmatic breathing*. Complete awareness of breathing is the basis of Svasa preksha. Attention can be kept focussed on a single point in the respiratory tract. e.g. nostrils or it can travel the entire tract during inhalation as well as exhalation. Various facets of breathing such as movement of diaphragm, rate of breathing and depth of breathing can conveniently become the object of Svasa preksha. The first step in this process is to regulate the rate of breathing by reducing the number of breaths per minute. Regulation of breath, reduction in its rate, and the rhythm results in steadying the mind. Simultaneously, urges and impulses, emotions and their impelling forces -the primal drives- all become amenable to control. When the breath is shallow and its rate high, primal drives and passions are aroused, strengthening the urges and emotions. One can easily pacify the primal drives by regulating the breath. If one slows down the breath rate and commences rhythmic breathing, the passion forces would at once be retarded.

▪ Samavritti Svasa Preksha - Alternate breathing

The breath is exhaled through one (say left) nostril and inhaled through the other (right). Then exhaling through the right, it is inhaled through the left. Throughout the process, the perceptive mind is closely linked with the breath. As in Dirgha Svasa Preksha, breath is regulated to be rhythmic. In due course by the practice, one can develop the inherent capacities of the subconscious mind such as extrasensory perception, clairvoyance etc.

Deep breathing helps procurement of sufficient oxygen for body. It helps in respiratory process and thereby increases energy. One can get rid of tension. Breath is a reality of the present moment. The practice leads to live equanimously and impartially and in present moment. With regular practice one would notice conception vanishing, leaving behind pure perception.

▪ Perception of body - Sharir Preksha

The subtle spiritual self-works within the gross physical body. It must have a physical body to function and perform in. Thus, the body alone can be the medium of exercising the power and authority of the consciousness to control and subdue one's primal drives, animal impulses and carnal desires.

The process of Sarira preksha is centripetal i.e. from outside to inside, thus reversing one's usual direction of the flow of consciousness which is from inside to outside. Commencing with the outermost layers of consciousness one has to penetrate more and more deeply. Thus the successive stages of sharira preksha would be perception and awareness of:

- The superficial sensation of the skin such as contact with cloth, warmth, perspiration, itching etc.
- The sensation produced by the muscular movements.
- The sensation produced by functioning of the internal organs such as liver, heart etc. and finally
- Subtle vibrations produced by the electrical impulses travelling in the nervous system.

The process of sharira preksha aims at the development of totally impartial perception of pleasure and pain. This is

practically achievable because there is a remarkable distinction between sensation and perception. The sharira praksha changes one's perception so that the sensation signals of pain are experienced without suffering. Same is the case with the signals of the sensations of pleasure.

The extension of the psyche is on par with that of the body and the spiritual self is on par with the psyche. In other words each and every one of the billions of cells which constitute the body is permeated by the spiritual self, and that is why each cell is sensitive and capable of carrying out metabolic functions through biochemical and bioelectrical actions. In short, a totally impartial perception of the mass of sensations within the body is *direct perception* of the psyche and the spiritual self.

On the physical level, it helps each cell to revitalize it-self, it helps digestion, improves quality and circulation of blood and increases the efficiency of the nervous system and bio-electric activities. On mental level, it is a methodology for training the mind to concentration internal phenomenon instead of wandering about externally. On the spiritual level, impartial perception of ever changing biological functions of the body is a means of experiencing the substratum of consciousness through its modes and attributes.

Perception of psychic centres - *Chaitanya Kendra Preksha*

Chaitanya Kendra Preksha is an exercise in which one concentrates on the various psychic centers in the body. The psychic centers are the key locations on the body that receive both the positive and negative energy from the universe and redistribute it through the human system. Focused flow of energy through any specific center intensifies the particular desired behavior.

Human glandular systems consist of two types of glands- exocrine and endocrine, the latter being ductless. Their products (called hormones) flow directly into the blood stream and are distributed by it. The complex of endocrine system includes pineal, pituitary, thyroid, parathyroids, thymus, adrenals, gonads and pancreatic islets. They participate in every bodily function and have profound influence upon the mental states, and tendencies, attitudes, emotions and behavioural patterns of every individual. The endocrines are aptly named psychic centres.

Endocrine and the nervous systems are two very important systems of our body. Close collaboration between the two systems governs mental states, behaviour and habits. The functional interlocking between both qualify them to be regarded as constituting a single integrated system called neuro-endocrine system. It is this system which comprises the subconscious mind and profoundly influences psychological behaviour and tendencies of the conscious mind. Constant triggering and overreaction of the lower endocrines viz. adrenals and gonads result in pernicious bad habits affecting our physical and mental health. Development of the upper endocrines alone can modify the synthesization of the endocrine output, and weaken the intensities of the primal drives, thus making them controllable. Constant and regular practice of *Chaitanya Kendras praksha* results in establishing firm control of the reasoning mind over all actions and would ultimately bring about the desirable transformation in mental behaviour and habits.

Svasa praksha, Sharira praksha and Chaitanya Kendras praksha are tools for developing the power of reasoning mind. Once the authority of the fully developed reasoning mind is established, it would prevent the recurrence of the old

injurious habits.

On the eternal spiritual level, one shall be able to gain self-mastery and attain infinite compassion, bliss and happiness.

Perception of psychic colours - *Leshya Dhyana*

Main article: *Lesya*

Urges and impulses, sensualities and emotions are all endocrine expressions. These forces are primal drives emanating from the microbody (*karmic* body), which is intimately united with the psyche. *Lesya* is the agency, which transforms the imperceptible micro-vibrations of the primal drives into perceptible forces at physical level. On the basis of their intensities *lesya* is divided into two categories:

- Malevolent class - the darker ones: dark black, dark blue, grey
 - Benevolent class - Bright red, bright yellow, bright white
- When one is under the influence of the evil trinity of Malevolent class, the force of the instinctive drives is so powerful that the reasoning mind surrenders to it. On the other hand, with the conversion of *lesyas*, the rational mind is able to countermand the insistence of the carnal desires. The spiritual progress will depend upon the degree of transformation of the malevolent trinity into the benevolent one. To bring about the desired transformation, perception of psychic color - *lesya*-meditation has proved to be a practical means of transformation.

The body is constantly surrounded by an envelope of colors called Aura, which is an effect of *lesya*. Change in *lesya* will bring about a corresponding change in the color of aura. Any change in *lesya* would result in the change in the color of aura, the change in the aura by the influence of the colors of the external environment would bring about a change in the *lesya*. This principle has been utilized in the "perception of the psychic colors" (*lesya-dhyana*) to transform the malevolent *lesya* into benevolent ones.

Leshya Dhyana takes the *Chaitanya Kendra Preksha* exercise further by specifying a color to visualize on the chosen psychic center. Five bright colors known for their positive qualities are used in this technique. As steadiness of meditation increases, visualization of colors intensifies. Today scientific evidence confirms that long exposure to specific colors has an influence on a person's emotions and personality. *Leshya Dhyana* results in purification of the aura.

Contemplation and auto suggestion - *Anupreksha and Bhavana*

Practice of repeated reflection (*bhavana*) further strengthens the will and keeps it awake and alert.

Some important themes of contemplation are outlined to as:

- Contemplation of *ekatva* - "Solitariness" - Man is a social being. His perceptions are constantly influenced by social, economic, political and other environments. In spite of being subjected to all sorts of external influences, transcendently he is "himself"- a solitary individual. To protect oneself from the injurious effect of the environments one should frequently contemplate on his solitariness. Such contemplation will blunt the onslaught of external forces.
- Contemplation of *anityata* - "Impermanence" - Beginning with fragile and mortal nature of the body, contemplation can reveal transitional nature of the entire physical existence.
- Contemplation of *asarana* - "Vulnerability" - We seek security in wealth, power, production etc. But in reality none of these is capable of providing transcendental

security, which is inherent in one's own "SELF". Contemplation of one's vulnerability, therefore leads to the development of one's own innate protective mechanism.

- Contemplation of *samsara* - "**Reality**" - Metaphysically nothing is absolutely permanent nor absolutely changing. Reality, by nature, is characterized by the non-absolutist principle of "permanence-through-change". Our existence also is not an exception to the universal truth. We are born and we die, and during the life's span undergo innumerable changes. Contemplation of this eternal truth immensely assists us in our meditation.

Anupreksha is also about revising and thinking about what was concentrated upon and felt during meditation and analyzing it after the exercise. It is a practice of deep contemplation and understanding. The exercise is practiced for two purposes: to contemplate on that which is eternal, true and real and to bring about attitudinal changes through autosuggestion. This technique can be used for reinforcement of positive qualities or reversing negative traits.

Perception of Thoughts

The mind functions in many ways. At times a train of thoughts is running; at times some conceptual planning occupies it. All these activities can be perceived impartially during the meditation practice. The significance of such perception is that the "spiritual self" is distinguished from the "thought". The "Self" is the "spectator", while the mental activity is the object of the awareness. As soon as one commences the perception of thought as an impartial spectator, the train begins to slow down, (and if the perception continues), it ultimately comes to a halt.

Perception of Present Moment

Bhava-kriya, i.e. synchrony of the mental state with the physical behaviour is in itself a discipline, and steadies the mind, bringing it to meditational level. For example, when one walks, his mind should be completely occupied and be totally aware of the action of walking and it should not be engaged in other perceptual or conceptual activity of any sort. When the mind is fully associated with the vocal and physical activities, they become not only more efficient, but also more purposeful.

Yoga and breathing process - *Asana* and *Pranayam*

Yoga is a science which helps to achieve good health, leads a person to harmony, peace, concentration and balance. It produces flexibility and stability in the body to practice meditation. *Pranayama* is an advance technique of breathing that regulates and balances the vital force pervading in the body. The regular practice in the guidance of the master helps to achieve a calm, blissful and focused mind. It provides enough oxygen to the blood, balances left and right hemispheres of the brain and keeps the body system healthy.

Mantra - Healing sound

Mantra Meditation is a powerful ancient practice using sound that affects the chemistry of the body and mind. Its powerful vibrations create strong safety armour around the practitioner that protects him/her from the outer evil effects and brings desired success in life. Mantra meditation awakens spiritual consciousness.

Conclusion

Preksha Meditation is the combination of knowledge from our ancient religious books, modern science and our experience. It is the practice of purifying our emotions and our conscious (chitta) and realizing our own self and a technique of mediation for attitudinal change, behavioural modification and integrated development of personality. Preksha Meditation Can help in Reducing physical stress and strengthen the immune system, Improve mental and emotional health, develop personality, change harmful habits, and treat phobias, enhance mental abilities, concentration and operational efficiency and enhance creativity and develop career skills and many more.

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