

# SAGARBHA PRAANAAYAMA

By S. Ramaswami

Praano Vaayussarirastha  
Aayaamasthasya nigrahaha I  
Praanaayama Ithi Proktha  
Dwivichaf prochyate hi saha II  
Agarbhascha sagarbhascha  
Dwiteeyasthu Tayorvaraha I  
Apidhyanam Vina agarbhaha  
Sagarbhasath samancitaha II

—: Narada —:

Prana refers to the vayu (force) in the body. Aayama is to completely control it (to bring it under voluntary control). Such control of the life force, known as Praanaayama is of two kinds, viz. Agarbha and Sagarbha, of which the latter is superior. Agarbha is to practice breath control without dhyana and Sagarbha is such a practice with an object for contemplation.

In the last few issues, some groups of assanas have been described, with the methodology, sequence, breathing pattern along with pratikriyas wherever necessary and the benefits that accrue to a steady abhyasi. These are quite sufficient and provide a fair variety for many yogabhyasis to exercise the various joints, muscles and maintain reasonably good health. A few more, somewhat difficult asana groups remain to be discussed, but they may be taken up some time later. It is time to describe the next impor-

tant aspect of Bahirangasadhana, which is Praanaayama. Breathing, to which very little attention is paid by many of us in the normal day to day life (except when one suffers from asthma or some such respiratory ailment) has been gone into in great detail by our ancient yogis and sages and in fact there are very many who have proclaimed that Pranayama itself could be the key to attainment of samadhi. The choice of Prana itself as the object of contemplation comes naturally to many people. Unlike in other types of meditation, the advantage in Pranayama is that one need not search and keep an external object for contemplation or an abstract idea for the mind to hang on to. The yogis have found that by exercising control on Prana one can control the mind and thereafter transcend it. The pranic exercises have been gone into in great detail and depth in Vedic, Tantric and also Hathayogic disciplines.

## IMPORTANT PRELUDES

The practice of asana and pranayama is an important prelude to the antheranga-sadhana—puja, Upaasana, japa, dhyana. Asana jaya is a prerequisite for the practice of Pranayama. It has been mentioned that by definition Asana is to sit in a steady and comfortable position, but that position or

posture should be a yogic posture, such as Padma, Siddha, Gomukha etc. It is not necessary that one should have mastered all the asanas to practice Pranayama. In fact it is rare to find one who could do all the postures. But the method of yogasana practice which includes use of breathing with the various vinyasas or variations and pratikriyas ensures that the circulation and respiration are positively improved and one gets an excellent relaxed feeling before starting Pranayama. The savinyasa practice of Yogasana, as propounded by our Acharya based on such authorities as Patanjali, Yoga Kurantam, Vridha vaasistam, Vridha saatatapam, etc., is scientific, comprehensive and hence gives the maximum benefit to the abhyasi, by way of improved physiological functioning, a mind attuned to follow the breath and subsequently attain the capacity for Ekagra, which is essential for all the Antarangasadhana and other mental and spiritual attainments.

#### PATANJALI'S DEFINITION

Patanjali, while defining Pranayama also stressed the conquest of one asana at least before proceeding to do Pranayama

† Takmin Sathi Swara Praswasayoho  
geti vichedaf Pranayamahe.

Remaining in a posture (which is comfortable and steady), controlling the inward and outward movement of breath is Pranayama.

Vyasa in his commentary is more specific. He says "Aasana jaye Sathi"—meaning having conquered a particular posture, one should start on Pranayama.

In yogic breathing, there are four distinct aspects. Expelling the air in the lungs (Kaushtasya Vayu) completely is one, called Prasvaasa or Rechakam. Kaushtasya Vayoho Nissaaranam Prasvaasaha.

The other is inhalation or puraka, which is to draw in the atmospheric air to fill up the lungs completely.

Baahyavayoho Aachamanam Swasaha.

And Pranayama is the act of preventing both the activities of inhalation and exhalation. Even this is of two kinds. One is holding the breath after complete inhalation and the other is to hold the 'breath out' as it were, after complete exhalation.

Thus the four stages are :

- 1) Puraka or Abhyantara vrithi which can be taken to mean complete inhalation.
- 2) Antahkumbhakam or Stambhavrithi which is to hold the breath in after inhalation.
- 3) Rechaka or Bahyavrithi which can be taken to mean complete exhalation.
- 4) Bahyakumbhaka or holding the breath out after exhalation.

#### TO CONTROL THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

The time, duration of holding, the depth to which one feels the effect of breathing, the frequency, the method of controlling the passage of air, the various ratios of inhalation to holding and exhalation, uniformity and the fineness of the breath, the use of mantra or otherwise, all these make a formidable number of pranayamas and hence it requires the guidance of a preceptor to the study and practice pranayama.

† The respiratory function is both voluntary and involuntary. Normally our breathing is shallow and involuntary. In Pranayama a deliberate attempt is made to bring it under greater voluntary control, and hopefully, thereby bring under control many other involuntary conditions of the body and mind and

achieve certain extraordinary powers over one's own physiological functions.

According to a well-known neuro - surgeon, neurophysiologically speaking, it appears that the basic factor in yoga is the control of respiration. Respiratory function can be more easily influenced than any other vital function and the yogi uses it as a first step in his control of the nervous system. When cortical higher brain control is achieved over one basic function, it is possible, to achieve control over other basic functions as vasomotor etc. It is therefore possible to dilate bronchial tubes in an asthmatic, reduce blood pressure or increase it, reduce the rate of heart beat all with the help of Pranayama. Neurological brain disorders as epilepsy, skin allergies etc., also respond to pranic control.

#### ALTERATION OF BRAIN CELLS

A number of functions classified as autonomous are not so for an adept yogi. He is able to control by will many functions that are controlled in ordinary human beings by subcortical areas—which is beyond one's voluntary control. The mechanism involved could be neurological and chemical. Once a steady regular control of respiration is achieved, there is perhaps a reciprocal biochemical stability which helps in the maintenance of this control.

When man establishes full control over this lower vital and emotional function by the exercise of his cortex (will) he has to do it by the reciprocal connections between the cortex, the reticular system and the various concerned centres in the brain. Constant yogic practice of both pranayama and meditation, quite likely leads to an enlargement of the scope of the function of the reticular function and of the cortex. It is quite possible that in a real yogi the reticu-

lar system and the cortex are both functionally altered and structurally proliferated.

Patanjali also emphasises that such a mutation of brain cells is possible. The chitta parinama or scope for altered arrangement of brain cells is inherent in every individual and only practice is the cause of such a mutation. It is activity of the mind, on the mind to transcend the mind. Like a farmer (Kshetrika) who merely diverts the flow of water in field, the yogi has only to channelise his neurological energies along certain paths. There is no external cause (Nimittaprayojakam) for such cortical and neurological changes.

And the key appears to be the control of breath or Pranayama.

Pranayama is of two kinds. Samantraka or Sagarbha which is to practice Pranayama with Mantra. The other is Agarbha or amantraka.

What mantras are to be used in Pranayama? What are the other restrictions.

The practice of Pranaayama with Mantra is well known to Hindus. Many authorities have given rules of Pranayama with Gayatri, Pranava and Bijakshara Mantras.

#### PRAANAYAAMA WITH GAYATRI

These days while the mantra part is maintained by many who observe sandhya and other religious rites, the actual Pranayama portion is completely left out; most people merely touch the nose, or worse still make a suggestion of taking the hand towards the nose.

The oft quoted definition of Samantraka Pranayama, is given in Manusmriti :

Savyaakritikaam Sapranaavaam Gaayatrim Sirasa saha |  
Triphateth ayathapraanaha Praanaayaamassa Uchyate |

Controlling the breath and meditating (Japa) three times on Gayatri with the Vyaahritis, siras and the Pranava, is known as Praanayama.

According to Yagnyavalkya, Pranayama is to do japa of Gayatri preceded by Pranava, associated vyaahritis and followed by siras. Vignaneshwara, elaborating it says that one has to control the vayu in the face and nostrils.

Yogaygyavalkya gives a more detailed account of Samantraka Praanayama.

Bhuhu, Bhuvaha, Suvaha, Mahaha, Janaha, Tapaha and Satyam along with Omkara, then Tatsavituhu, followed by the siras "Omaapaha"—the siras mantra is found in Taithriya. When one does this three times it is known as Praanayama.

#### CHAIN OF CHANGES IN THE BODY

Details of the actual methodology and Praanayama are to be found in many yoga texts like Yoga Yagyavalkya, Siva Samhita, Gherunda Samhita, Hathapradeepika, Uparisads as Amrutanaada, Kshurika, Trisikhibraahmana, Darsana, Dhyanabindu, Naadabindu, Yogakundalini, Yogachudaamani, Yokataitwa, Yogasikha, Varaaha, Saandilya, various Puranas, a number of other texts, and of course the Gita.

To what extent should one draw the external air?—Drawing the external air completely in so that all the nadis are 'filled up'. This kind of indrawing is known as Purakam.

Holding the inhaled vayu in differen parts of the body, as it were, by various Bandhas, after deep inhalation is mentioned by Patanjali by referring to the aspect of "Desa Paridrishti".

When the inhaled breath forces circulation from the roots of hair and the end of nails and held (nirodha), then it is the best according to Rshi Atri. This creates a chain of changes in the body. By prana nirodha, vayu is generated, from vayu, agni and from it Jala (Vatha saaram, Vahni saaram, Vari saaram). With these three one becomes completely purified. Then when exhaling one should do it through the nostril gradually, never forced or abruptly, The body should be kept steady. Such a practitioner is known as yogi of the highest order.

#### PRANAYAMA & MEDITATION

Praanayama is to be done with dhyana; It however requires a preceptor. The better known methods of dhyana are mentioned.

According to Vyaasa, when one does Puraka, one should meditate upon the four faced Brahma whose complexion is red and whose position is in the naval region (Naabhi chakram). During Antahkumbhaka, one should meditate on the form of Lord Vishnu whose complexion is that of blue lotus and while-doing Rechaka one should meditate on the white complexioned form of Lord Siva in the region of forehead. He further explains the form of Siva as :

Lalaatastha Sivam Svetam Rechakenaabhichintayeth.

Sadhum Spatikasamkaasam Nirmalam Paapanasanam.

Sankaram Trayambakam Svetam Dhyayaan Muchyate Bandhanaath.

Siva is like a spotless, sphatika, flawless; he removes all defilements. He is peaceful, three-eyed and white. One who meditates on Him thus in Rechaka is released from all sins.

When one practises Praanayama with Gayatri, the more popular method is to do Rechaka with the mind closely following the

breath. In kumbhaka one should mentally be with the Praanaayama mantra, which is gayatri with pranava, vyaahritis and siras. The exhalation should be done with the mind closely following the breath.

Briefly in Smriti Ratnarkara, it is mentioned that the Japa should be done in Kumbhaka.

Dakshine Rechakam Curyaath Vaamenaapuritoda-  
raha |

Kumbhakena Japam Kuryaath Praanaayamasya  
lakshanam,

Here the method of doing Praanayama is clearly mentioned. It is to draw in the air through the left nostril, do Japa during the Kumbhaka aspect and exhale through the right. It is to be understood that the next inhalation should be through the right and vice versa.

What should be the duration of inhalation, holding and exhalation? Patanjali refers to this aspect in one of the sutras as "Kaala Paridrishti"; that is Praanayama should conform to some measure of time.

Here again there are many variations, but there are many authors who refer to the ratio of Kumbhaka being four times as long as Puraka and twice as long as Rechaka.

## REFERENCES IN UPANISHADS

Many of the Upanishads that refer to yoga and also other yoga texts give the duration quite extensively.

In Trisikhibrahmanopanisad, it is mentioned.

Idaya Vaayumaapurya Brahman Shodasamaatraya  
Puritam Kumbhayeth Paschaath chatur shastyaa tu  
Maatraya

Dwatrisanmaatraya samyag Rechayeth Pingala-  
amlam.

Here the duration for inhalation is given as 16 Maatras, holding the breath as 64

Maatras and exhalation as 32 maatras. Following the method mentioned in Smiritratnakara, the Japa is to be done during holding the breath.

Maatra merely means a measure. In japa, taking one maatra to mean one syllable is valid. Thus the Praanayama mantra is made up of 64 syllables, - 21 for the vyahritis, 24+1 for the gayatri portion and 18 for the siras position. Thus one many practice samantra pranaayama. In actual practice, it takes about 20 seconds for the mantra portion. So it will work out to be 5 seconds for puraka, 20 for kumbhaka and 10 for rechaka. If one practises the Bandhas after exhalation, it will be nearly 40 seconds per breath.

Praanayama with Gayatri is an activating process. Gayatri is an energising mantra as is seen from the word "Prachodayaath".

## PRANAVA IN PRANAYAMA

There is also a method of using Pranava in Praanayama. Using 'A'kaara for inhalation 'V' kaara in holding and 'ma' kaara in exhalation and merging in the total Pranava in Bahya Kumbha is one Pranayama. This is naturally for 'out of the world' yogis and so one has to practise pranayama according to his ashrama or station in life.

Gherunda details sagarbha pranayama by the repetition of Bija Mantra.

Dhyayethvidhim Rajogunam Rekhavarnam Avar-  
nakam |

Idaya purayeth vaayum Maatraya shodasaissudhe-  
ehi |

Purakaante Kumbhakaadye Karthavyasthu Uddiya-  
nakaha |

Sattwamayam Harim dhyaatwa Ukaram Krishnavar-  
nakam

Chatusashtya cea Maatrya Kumbhakenaiva dhara-  
yeth !!

Tamomayam sivam dhyatwe Makaaram Suklavaranakam

Dwaatrimanmaatraya cha eva Rechayeth Vidhina punaha ||

Punaf pingalayaapurya Kumbhakenaiva dhaarayeth

Idayg Rechayeth Paschaeth Tatwijena kra. iena Tu ||

Anulom Vilomena vaa.am vaaram cha saadhayeth |

Purakante Kumbhakantam dhrutanaasaaputadwayam |

Kanishtaanaamika angushteih Tarjani madhye vinaa ||

Seated in a comfortable sukhaasana, facing east or north let the abhyaasi contemplate on Brahma, full of Rajas and of blood red colour, in the form of the letter. 'OM'.

### USE OF TANTRIC MANTRAS

Let him inhale by the left nostril, repeating 'OM', sixteen times Then before he begins retention after completing inhalation, let him perform uddiyana bandha (This requires considerable control and only under immediate guidance from a Guru one may attempt it).

Then let him retain breath by repeating 'OO', sixty-four times contemplating on Lord Hari, of black colour and of Sattwa quality.

Then let him exhale through Pingala (right nostril), by repeating 'IM', 3 2 times, contemplating on Lord Siva of white colour and of Tamas quality.

Then again inhale through the right nostril, retain by Kumbhaka and exhale by Ida (left), in the method as above, changing nostrils alternately.

Let him practice, thus alternating the nostrils again and again. When inhalation is completed, close both nostrils, the right one by thumb (of the right hand) and the left one by the ring finger and the little finger,

never using the index and middle fingers. The nostrils are to be closed so long as the breath is held in Kumbhaka.

There are some who (not initiated in Gayatri or Pranava) make use of mono syllable or two syllable Tantric Mantras, so that sagarbha praanaayama can be universally practised.

Patanjali refers also to the number of breaths or rounds to be performed as an aspect in Praanaayama by "Samkhyaparidrishti".

Here again different authors give different numbers. According to Svaatmaaraama and other Hathayogis, it is upto 80 per sitting and four sittings per day making it 320 Pranayaama per day. This should be taken only as the upper limit, as specifically they refer to gradual increase to that number.

Praatarmaadhyandine Saayamardharaatre cha Kumbhakaan |

Sanaivasitiparyantam chaturvaaram Samabhyaseth |

From the above stanza in Trisikhibrahmanopanisad, it could be observed that 80 rounds per sitting in the morning, noon, evening and midnight, are suggested. By the words 'Sanaiva', one should take it as gradually and "asitiparyantam" upto 80 rounds. Sage Bharadwaja suggests that one should practise pranayama with japa during kumbhaka, and this should be done ten times before proceeding to do gayatri japa.

It could be observed that sagerbha praanayama requires firstly to master a yogic posture and then one should develop the capacity to do kumbhaka for the length of time required for completing the mantra and also to do it without break for the required number of rounds.

Such capacity may be obtained by a variety of Pranayama and Kumbhaka practices

referred in Hathayoga texts. They along with the likely effects on the physiology will be dealt with in the next issue.

The ultimate benefit of Pranaayama is Samadhi itself according to certain schools. In the Gita also it is referred to as the merger of Prana in Apana or and Apana, which is achieved by a very long (dirgha) and fine (sukshma) pranayama.

### SAGARBHA PRANAYAMA

Vaidic Rshis refer to the benefits of sagarbha Praanayama. According to Manu' if done with Vyaahritis, pranava and siras for three times, is the greatest Tapas for a Brahmana. Just as a metal is cleaned in a smelter, by Pranayama the Indriyas lose their impurities. If one does it 16 times a day, in a month even the dreaded Brahma-hathi dosha is destroyed.

According to Sounaka, if one practices three times with great concentration, all the doshas vanish instantaneously. With 12 breath controls, the chitta becomes clear. 24 time is the greatest Tapas.

Pranayama done with 10 pranava (7 with the vyaakritis, one with Gayatri, one at the beginning of Siras and one at the end) and for 14 times for a month releases one from Brahmahathi dosha and all other minor condemnable deeds (upapaathaka), according to Yama.

Vyaasa simply states that the Pranayama mantra japa makes one absolutely fearless. And Yogayagyavalkya, relates the 7 vyaahritis to the 7 worlds or 7 levels of consciousness. With that, he gains the

capacity to communicate will all the higher worlds.

Patanjali the authority on yoga, has this to say,

Tatah kshiyate Prakaasa Aavaranam |

With Pranayama, the clouding of the mind reduces and the intellect shines in its true splendours.

Further

Dharanasu cha yogyeta Manasaha |

As a natural consequence, such a mind, and only such a mind becomes fit for Dhara-na or the first step of Antarangasadhana.

### UNIQUE SYSTEM

The uniqueness of our Acharya's system is that it attempts to include all the various systems of yoga and the gradual combination of the different angas, so that there is no abrupt change. Thus in the practice of asans, introduction of breathing helps to preparing the breathing apparatus for subsequent Pranayama. With need to practice Asana with breath control, a certain mental discipline is already achieved, so that when one starts Pranayama, the mind also cooperates in following the breath, so that in Kumbhaka one may use Vaidic mantras, Bijakshara or other Tantric Mantras. With the requirement of the adhyayana according to one's Saakha, study of yogic texts like yogadarsana, Hathayoga texts, the Upanisads with the foundation of savinyasa asana practice, one may hope to experience the greatness and thoroughness of our ancient system of yoga.



