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For more information please reach out:
<https://www.yogsadhanashram-usa.org/>
yogsadhanashramusa@gmail.com

2020.07.29 Wednesday | *Topic of the Day* Pracchardana-Vidharana Pranayam

Pre-class Discussion

A quote from Brihadaranyak Upanishad IV.4.5— *You are what your deepest desire is. As is your desire, so is your intention. As is your intention, so is your will. As is your will, so is your deed. As is your deed, so is your destiny.*

In other words, when we have a strong desire to do something, the goal is reached much easier – whether in the worldly or godly sphere. Therefore, we have to intensify the desire. The more intense your desire, the deeper your resolve. With the help of that deep resolve, the harder you will try. The harder you try, the more grace you will attract. And the closer you will come to your goal.

Today's Topic: Pracchardana-Vidharana Pranayam

Pranayam is called the soul of yoga. This is because it helps us at a physical level, at a mental level (calms and clears the mind, and our intellect also becomes cleaner), and it even helps us on the bhakti part. There are special pranayams – such as kevali pranayam, reminding ourselves we are the atma and only the atma. Whether it is yan yog, or karm yog, or bhakti yog, or hatha yog – pranayam is part of it.

Today, the pranayam we are going to discuss is from Yog Darshan. Rishi Patanjali is the one who mentioned this pranayam, in Chapter 1 verse 34.

प्रच्छर्दनविधारणाभ्यां वा प्राणस्य

pracchardana-vidharana-abhyam va pranasya

Or that calm is retained by the controlled exhalation or retention of the breath.

- ***Pracchardana*** describes a forceful exhalation that is done in a particular way.
- ***Vidharana*** describes a special technique for retaining the breath.

Rishi Patanjali did not describe how to do this pranayam but other masters did. A yoga master called Guru Goroka described the 4 steps of this pranayam.

Pre-requisites

- Perfection in the sitting position – keep the back straight, do not lean forward during exhale. Mentally observe the spine stretching.
- High degree of mental stability – mind must be on the breath and on the prana. Any time you are agitated, you will not benefit from this pranayam. Rather, you will become more agitated.
- Sensitivity toward the pranac force through your energy channels. Thus, it becomes a meditation.

NOTE: *If you are already doing pranayam for 10-15 minutes per day, you can do all 4 steps at once. **If you have never done pranayam, practice step 1 for 1 week every day. In the second week, add step 2. In the third week, add step 3. And if you don't have a heart condition, add the fourth step.***

NOTE: *Do this pranayam only after you have cleaned out the nasal passages **by doing jal-neti first (and standing kapalbhati to clear the excess water out of the nose).***

Step 1 (Vigorous Exhalation & Gentle Inhalation – 3 cycles)

Left side:

First, inhale deeply through both nostrils, filling your stomach from bottom to top. At the pinnacle of inhalation, close R nostril with thumb. Keeping R side closed,

1. Exhale forcefully and completely through L nostril. In other words, empty the lungs vigorously, with a noisy exhale.
2. Inhale fully through L nostril as gently and smoothly as possible. In other words, there should be no noise or jerking motion through the inhalation.
3. Repeat steps 1&2 two more times, for **a total of three cycles** on the L side.
4. Then, **meditate:** Lower the hand down and focus on the ajna chakra while breathing normally.

Repeat on Right side:

Inhale deeply through both nostrils. Then, close the L side with the pinky & ring finger. Keeping L side closed:

1. Exhale vigorously from the R.
2. Inhale gently from R.
3. Repeat steps 1&2 two more times, for **a total of three cycles** on the R side.
4. Then, **meditate:** Lower the hand down and focus on the ajna chakra while breathing normally.

Step 2 (Vigorous Exhalation & Vigorous Inhalation – 3 cycles)

Left side:

Close R nostril. Then,

1. Exhale vigorously through L side, then inhale vigorously through the L. In other words, both exhalation and inhalation are noisy. Both exhalation and inhalation are also deep and prolonged.
2. Repeat for a total of 3 cycles.
3. Meditate on the ajna chakra.

Repeat on R side:

Close L nostril. Then,

1. Exhale vigorously through R side, then inhale vigorously through the R.
2. Repeat for a total of 3 cycles.
3. Meditate on the ajna chakra.

Step 3 (Rapidly Exhale & Rapidly Inhale – 1 cycle)

Both the exhalation & inhalation are rapid.

Left side:

Breathe in through both nostrils. Then, close the R nostril.

- Begin vigorous and rapid Exhale/Inhale through the L side. Do as many breaths as you can, but do not exceed one minute.
- Meditate on the Ajna chakra while breathing normally.

Repeat on right side:

- Breathe in, then, close L nostril. Repeat rapid exhale/inhale on R side, without exceeding one minute.
- Meditate on the Ajna chakra while breathing normally.

***** CAUTION *****

- **If you have high blood pressure or a heart condition, proceed cautiously – do not breathe too rapidly and don't do this step for long.** Make modifications as needed, such as taking breaks (see below).
- If your mouth is dry or you feel tired after doing this, you have exceeded your capacity.
- You may wish to start by doing shorter intervals with breaks in between. This means do the breathing exercise for a few seconds, then take a break, and then start again. (During the break, you are still holding the one nostril closed and just breathing normally.)
- If exhalation/inhalation becomes weak, stop. Your goal is to stop before your breath gets weak.

Note that Step 3 consists of only one cycle (not three) of breathing on each side.

Step 4 (Vigorous breathing with Kumbhak)

***** CAUTION *****

If you have high blood pressure or a heart condition, do not attempt this step.

Left side:

Breathe in through both nostrils. Then, close the R nostril.

- Exhale & Inhale vigorously and rapidly through L
- Suddenly but mindfully, make last exhalation deep and prolonged. This means mind should be on the breath. Push out every molecule of air.
- Inhale vigorously and deeply from the L.
- At the pinnacle of inhalation, close both nostrils and do a kumbhak (holding the breath) for as long as possible.
- Release L nostril and exhale forcefully through the L.

Then, repeat on R side.

- Exhale & Inhale rapidly through R (Note: This step is like basarika, but it is a little softer and a little less rapid. Breathing softer and slower makes it easier to do the kumbak.)
- Suddenly but mindfully, make last exhalation deep and prolonged. This means mind should be on the breath. Push out every molecule of air.
- Inhale vigorously and deeply from the R.
- At the pinnacle of inhalation, close both nostrils and do a kumbak, holding the breath as long as possible.
- Release R nostril and exhale forcefully through the R.

Meditate on the ajna chakra.

This is one cycle. After completing the above on both L and R sides, you may repeat the whole cycle if you wish, for a total of 3 cycles. Notice that in Step 4, you are doing L and R, then repeating. (This is different from Steps 1 & 2 in which you repeated Left 3 times, then Right 3 times.)

Q&A

When is the best time to do this pranayam?

When your stomach is not full. Morning is the best time to do pranayam. First thing in the morning, meditate. Then, jal-neti. Then, pranayam. (Asanas can be done after pranayam.)

It is best to do pranayam at the same time, and in the same place (in a peaceful setting), but practice needs to be done. Regularity, sincerity, consistency. “Nitye, Niranta...” = Every day, without a break. If there’s a break, the human mind gets lazy and we stop doing it.

What are the benefits, and how is it different from other pranayams?

(This was discussed in detail in the last class.) Improves immune system. Mind becomes calm so the body functions better. This does everything the other pranayams do but at a deeper level. Because you are combining pranayam with meditation and doing all 4 steps will take 20 minutes. All the sluggishness at the energy level and at the mucous level goes away. We are cleaning out the toxins and energizing the body.

In Step 3: when we breathe rapidly, should we feel the belly expanding and contracting?

Yes, when you exhale, belly contracts. When you inhale, expands. There is also a movement in the chest. Therefore, this step is similar to Bhasarika, but we do it one nostril at a time.

If I do alternate breathing in the morning, can I replace that with this pranayam?

Yes, this one includes anulom-vilom, bhasarika, kumbak, and a short meditation also. Therefore, this is a beautiful way to bring pranayam and meditation to the next level. This pranayam has elements of the others, so you can replace all the pranayam with this one.

Next Class

In the next class, we will do the entire pranayam. **Please prepare by doing jal-neti before the class.**