

# Pranayama-Mantra: Oxygen of Life

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## ABSTRACT

*Life definition varies with studies. For Vedic Science prana means a vibratory lively energy, while traditional Science only defines a physical energy as a quantitative property that is transferred to the body through metabolic processes. One-fourth of the world's adult population is suffering from hypertension, which is predicted to increase to 29% by 2025. The awareness and practice of aerobic exercise and yoga is a good proposal for this aged group. In the West most people believe that pranayama is only a respiratory technique useful for wellness and health. But, for Hindu doctrine called Suddha Dharma Mandalam introduced in South-America by Master Sri Vayera Yogi Dasa, exercise also involves a spiritual-mental attitude.*

*The aim of this study is to analyze the role of pranayama-mantras in human health, its methods of actions and objectives*

*Essentially Pranayama (prana or energy + ayama or control) is an expansion process of the human mind to Universal Consciousness leading to divine contact. There are different types of pranayama respiratory exercises with/without mental mantra recitation including inspiration (pooraka)-retention (khumbaka)-exhalation (rechaka): a) Prakrita (matter) only physiological breathing rhythmic exercise, leading to strengthening the body and therapy for organic diseases; b) Atmiya (personal Spirit): breathing rhythmic exercise combined with mental mantra recitation and personal spiritual thought, which allows conscious contact with our Atman; and c) Suddha (Universal Spirit): breathing rhythmic exercise combined with mental mantra recitation and cosmic spiritual thought, reaching contact with Pure Universal Consciousness. Practice Pranayama-Mantra to obtain vital prana*

*"Life is Prana, Prana is life. Presence of Prana in the body ensures life"*

*"Life is not O<sub>2</sub>, O<sub>2</sub> is not life. Presence of O<sub>2</sub> in the body does not ensure life"*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Life's concept depends on criterium analysis. For Vedic Science the whole universe can be comprehended in terms of vibrations, where Prana (Sanskrit word – प्राण) means a vibratory lively energy derived from the Pure Consciousness. He is obtained from the air and absorbed from the breathing. Science has usually ignored concepts when it didn't understand or couldn't prove through experiments and measure through laboratory equipment. Mechanistic science is fixed in the framework of "naïve realism" what you see is all there is. Modern Science talks about various types of basic energies like electrical, thermal, etc. expressions one or cosmic energy described in text known as Upanishads (Baluni R, 2023). By other hand, different lines of evidence from evolutionary biology (Wagner PD, 2008), geochemistry (Becker A, et al. 2004), and systems biology build a central role of oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>) in evolution of multicellular life on the earth (Falkowski PG, 2006). Physiologists consider how O<sub>2</sub> travels from environment to mitochondria, Metabolists its role focused in energy generation, Biochemists as a source of reactive O<sub>2</sub> and Clinicians on tissue structure and function.

The ancient Sanskrit word "prana" carries with it a mystical character. It is much more than just air or breathing. Throughout the ancient world, the concept of moving air was wrapped in wonder. Known as ruah in Hebrew, pneuma in Greek, spiritus in Latin and chi in Chinese it was synonymous with life itself. In the verse from Gospel of John, Jesus explains the nature of pneuma to Nikodemus: "the wind blotch where it listed, and thou headrest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goth: so it is everyone that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). By looking at the Hebrew version of the creation of Adam: "and the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7). Comparatively, the eastern the great Sage Patanjali (~ III century, BC) pointed out: "breathing practices bring true understanding and knowledge into life by destroying all the impurities of mind" (Taimni IK, 1961); pranayama is the fourth of the eight "limbs" mentioned in his famous Yoga Sutras, who presented it as essentially respiratory exercise that is preliminary to concentration as do the earlier Buddhist texts (Pande GC, 1990). Yoga teachers including BKS Iyengar have advised that pranayama

should be part of an overall practice that includes the other limbs of Patanjali's teaching such as asana or postural poses (Iyengar BKS, 2011). The Indian tradition of Hatha Yoga makes use of various pranayama breathing-style where the 15th century Hatha Yoga Pradipika text (Mallinson J et al, 2011), which was written by the sage Svatanmarama includes several techniques widely used today through western schools. In the 19th century the celebrated Swami Yogananda, a direct monastic disciple of Ramakrishna, wrote: "the real meaning of pranayama is the gradual cessation of breathing (Yogananda Paramahansa, 2005). The actual well-known yoga scholar Andrea Jain (editor of the Journal of the American Academy of Religions) states that pranayama breathing was "marginal in the most widely cited sources" before the 20th century, and that these practices were dramatically unlike the modern ones; she writes that while pranayama in modern yoga as an exercise consists of synchronizing the breath with movements (between asanas), in texts like Yoga Sutra of Patanjali, pranayama meant "complete cessation of breathing" (Jain A, 2015)

The breathing pattern of most people is very shallow; we use a very small portion of about 1/11th of our lung capacity! This low capacity breathing pattern deprives us from proper oxygen for health and well-being. In Yoga, the human lifespan is also considered in terms of breathing: yoga says the faster and shallower the breath, the shorter our life. The slower and deeper our breath, the longer our life. Breathing is the very first and very last act of life. The act of breathing is so simple, so obvious that we normally take it for granted; but breathing holds the very fabric of life and is the key to our breath and wellness. The Yoga breathing exercises, well known as "pranayama", are essentials for wellness and health. Yogis say that breathing is the connecting force of the body, mind and heart. Thus, one of the most important benefits of pranayama, aside from our health, is the expansion of consciousness. Our breath, what Yoga calls "prana" or the vital force of life, is a vehicle that moves us into subtle layers of our energy body. With the help of this vital force, we come into contact with our core self-establishment in our true nature. Thus, yogic breathing practices are designed to clear the blockage of energy channels in the body and support movement of prana.

Pranayama cycle (three-phase breath-exercise): Yoga is an ancient Indian practice

for bodily, mental and spiritual communication. In the West, it was introduced by Swami Vivekananda (Vedanta School) in the United States in 1893 (Remadevi S, 1999) and by Sri Vayera Yogui Dasa (Suddha Dharma Mandalam) (SDM) (Janardana TM, 1951; Muñoz C et al, 2020) in South America Chile in 1920 (Fig 1). In today West, standard Yoga usually combines asana (posture), pranayama (breathing) and meditation (mental-spiritual quiet), with 89% of yogis using pranayama and about half (45%) using meditation combined with asana (Dinesh et al, 2015). Pranayama requires voluntary control of respiratory muscles and involves different breathing speeds, shortening and elongation of breathing, and breath holding via the known three main stages or phases: a) puraka or inhalation, b) kumbhaka or retention, c) rechaka or exhalation. According to Hatha Yogis, each stage has the effect of enhancing physical awareness and enforcing introspection; therefore, as a whole, pranayama is integral to the practice of yoga and a key element in the ultimate pursuit of enlightenment. By other hand, there are three types of pranayama including: a) Prakrita; b) Atmiya; and c) Suddha

## II. MATERIAL PRANAYAMA (SINGLE ACTION: BREATHING)

Prakrita (matter) Pranayama: it is defined as only physiological breathing rhythmic exercise, which involves a breath-control for puraka:kumbhaka:rechaka stages with different time-proportions among each of them. This practice leads to strengthening the physical body and it is therapeutic for different organic diseases as shown previously in the second part of this article. While its role in Yoga is recognized its force is however minimized and even dismissed as of no aid to the contacting of the Divine, but permitting its practice actively for the achievements of bodily and mental vigour only. This statement is substantiated with what Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh (Himalayas) has written in his book on the Science of Pranayama, wherein in reply to the poser "Is pranayama necessary for getting darshan of the Lord", the Sage emphatically states NO. So then, it follows that this Pranayama though an "anga" of Yoga is useless, if the goal is held as "contacting the Divine" since it does not serve this purpose at all (Janardana TM, 1953). Modern Yogis turn around and declare, breath-control is intended as preliminary action to lead the Consciousness Godward ultimately, and hence pranayama is

breath-control. Though the act of substituting "container for the contained", and of meaning one thing and stating another, may be euphemistically admirable in other spheres of knowledge, it has no place in an exact science like Yoga. Thus, Prakrita pranayama consequently has no place in a scheme which has for its object God realization as such, exclusively and unconditionally. Furthermore, this Prakrita pranayama involves only a rhythmic breathing. If someone wants to increase their physical power and higher resistance to diseases, then practice this pranayama or respiratory exercise maintaining the adequate times and intensity for inspiration, retention and exhalation, which should be well executed and directed by a competent Instructor.

Several pranayama-breathing studies by diaphragmatic stretching have reported improves thoracic and abdominal cavity expansion, lumbar flexibility, body stability, balance and expiratory muscle activity (Gonzalez-Alvarez FJ et al, 2016; Abel AN et al, 2013; Ankad RB et al, 2011). Respiratory muscles, especially inspiratory muscle strength, plays a significant role in muscle endurance (van der Esch M et al, 2004). Other studies have suggested the effects of inspiratory muscle pressure on high-intensity exercises (Sasaki M et al, 2005; Witt JD et al, 2007) and their effects on the change of perception of respiratory exertion during exercise (Spengler CM et al, 2000). Improving respiratory muscle strength delays muscle fatigue and improves blood flow to peripheral muscles, thereby decreasing the sense of breathlessness (McConnell Ak et al, 2004; Schoser B et al, 2017). Thus, practicing pranayama over an extended period could potentially enhance respiratory circulation and contribute to adequate motor control (Bradley H et al, 2014) as well as bring about further positive changes in physical function. A previous literature review concluded that a minimum of 10 weeks, with pranayama practiced at least twice a week, was needed to observe changes in pulmonary function (Abel AN et al, 2013). In addition, it has been reported that changes in respiratory function take longer in younger than in older people (Ahmed QR et al, 2010; Tran MD et al, 2001)

Among common chronic diseases, hypertension is certainly one of the major health problems globally. One-fourth of the world's adult population is suffering from hypertension, which is predicted to increase to 29% by 2025 (Manchanda

SC, 2013). The World Health Statistics 2012 report depicted that 23% of men/women of more than 25 years of age suffer from hypertension. Physical inactivity is an important risk factor for cardiovascular disease, and less active people have 30– 50% more risk of developing hypertension (Whelton SP et al, 2002). It is found that 54% of stroke and 47% of ischemic heart disease worldwide occur due to hypertension. According to the American College of Sport medicine, even the reduction of 2mmHg systolic and diastolic blood pressure (BP) reduce the risk of stroke by 14% and 17% and risk of coronary artery disease by 9% and 6%, respectively (Baster T et al, 2005). In addition to aerobic exercise, another lifestyle modification which is helpful in reducing BP is yoga through mind-body exercise including asanas and pranayamas (Cohen D, 2007). Interestingly, the maximum awareness of aerobic exercise and yoga come through doctors (65%), followed by self (26%) and social (8%). By the other hand, the awareness and practice of aerobic exercise and yoga was the highest in the age group of 51–70 years old, which increased the prevalence of hypertension that may be associated with age-related changes. Increasing age is one of the important risk factors linked with hypertension due to atherosclerotic changes in the blood vessels, especially during stress (Bharatia R et al, 2016). In conclusion, this concern can be prevailed over by education and awareness program, seminars, or community visit, which will impart the knowledge of the role of exercise and yoga techniques such as pranayamas, with their benefits for hypertension or health to individual.

### III. SPIRITUAL PRANAYAMA (TRIPLE ACTION: BREATHING, RECITATION, THINKING)

In the West during the present time most of the people believe that pranayama is only a respiratory technique. However, for the Hindu doctrine Suddha Dharma Mandalam the significance of word pranayama breath-control is its surface meaning only, the exact Sanskrit word for it being “swasabandana” (mastery of the Energy of Life). Quite obviously pranayama must mean something deeper. As already mentioned, prana is a general word to indicate energy, life-force, intellect, spirit and so on; and the approximating exact word to convey its idea is “Consciousness”; similarly, “ayama” does not merely mean restrain and control, but it also means “expand”; so that, its

importance is best conveyed by “leading to”. Pranayama thus comes to mean “leading to Consciousness”. Of course, the Consciousness is led not towards anything else but God (Janardana TM, 1940). According to Suddha teachings, there are two types of spiritual pranayamas which objectives are described below:

a) Atmiya (Atman or personal Spirit) Pranayama: it is defined as a mental spiritual breathing rhythmic exercise, which involves a breath-control for puraka:kumbhaka:rechaka stages combined with both adequate mantra recitation and personal spiritual mental thinking. This practice is aimed at reaching a conscious contact that allows to experience the excellent qualities of the Atma-Yoti or Light of our personal Spirit, which is housed in the etheric chamber of our heart. This system requires mastery of the senses of the mind and it is practiced by those called “Gnanis” (Sage of knowledge) who have devoted themselves to Atmavichara inquiry into Atman, as being free from and independent of Prakriti (Matter). To them, the word is “mitya” – false or No True – and governed by “maya” – illusion or transitory truth, hence to be rejected. In other words, the contact with the Atman or personal Spirit is the “pure eternal Essence” and the real goal of their aspirations. Atma (Spirit) and Prakriti (Matter) are unrelated and opposed to each other and that to realize Atma has to be suppressed. These two are ever in unison, mutually interacting and influencing each other and that under no condition whatsoever, one remains without the other in the Word-Process are truths which these people have yet to learn. Atmiya pranayama includes the following triple action: rhythmic breathing + syllable/mantra recitation + Atma thought. Figure 2 shows Pranayama-Mantra including the three stages and its respective actions. In relation to this practice, the famous text called Aparokshanubhuti of Sri Sankaracharya and one of the highest Upanishads, says: the comprehension of “I Am an eternal Spirit” is the real Puraka (inhalation), the maintenance of this idea in mind is the real Kumbhaka (retention), and the elimination of any separativity’s idea from the mind is the real Rechaka (exhalation). The disciple should think that Spirit shines with all divine powers into the heart (Suddham Atma Khyamamalam, Suddha Nanatapomayam). To succeed in Atmiya Pranayama, the aspirant should master the senses of the mind, vegetarian and frugal food, will and



purity, the desire to achieve spiritual vision and the wisdom contained in the Atman's Light

b) Suddha (Brahm or Universal Spirit) Pranayama: it is defined as mental spiritual breathing rhythmic exercise, which involves a breath-control for puraka:khumbaka:rechaka stages combined with both adequate mantra recitation and cosmic spiritual mental thinking. This practice is aimed at reaching a conscious contact with The Absolute or Pure-Transcendent-Immanent-Power of Supreme Bright of Universal Consciousness which compenetrates all beings giving them life. The variety of Suddha pranayama is free from the "octopus" of the two previous kinds. Wherein, the play of opposites is the rule, and no easily got over, the act of taking sides quickly yields results. We have the Materialists who act denying the Spiritual-Principle, and the Spiritualists bent on emasculating the ever-present and necessary material vehicles and their legitimate operations in life. It is important to transcend the influence of opposites by which the placements of various parts are understandingly equated to the Whole. It is obvious, to do so, the Mind has got to be educated on proper basis. We must remember that Everything is Brahm, Everything is of the Nature of Brahm (Sarvam tatkalvidam Brahm), Everything is Necessity, which reveal the stand-point of synthesis. Atman is not Brahm, since Brahm is triune - Atma, Shakti and Prakriti - each of these occupying a distinct and unique place in the scheme of the Wholeness, interacting on each other mutually. Atma abides in this World-Processes as the Representative of Brahm, and its realization as a first step though important is not a completeness in itself. The Senses are weaned away gradually from the attractive and repulsive nature of objects by degrees, until at last their effects are neutralized by the perception of True in them, getting thus sublimated. Such a study and objective practice which are subjective are prerequisites that conduce to success in Suddha (pure) Pranayama. Practice of Suddha or Brahmic pranayama involves a triple action: rhythmic breathing + syllable/mantra recitation + Brahm thought

Pranayama as such is the technical name given to that practice which is entirely subjective, since leading the Consciousness Godward is a mental act. Consciousness has its dominant seat in Manas (Mind-emotion plane). Manas by its nature

is usually outward-turned towards objects, and the Senses are their gateways to carry the impressions made by objects. To divert the course of Manas from objects towards God, pranayama is the first act, prior to meditation (Dhyana) which is an act of continuity. Certain external conditions are absolutely necessary while in the period of practice viz solitariness (away from crowd) avoidance of overfeeding, austerity, quietude and a frequent recalling at all times in the Manas of Brahmic beatitudes. Three essential features go to make up a complete pranayama. They are the mental acts of

1. Reducing the Many into the One Immanent-Divine-Essence,
2. Of retaining the idea of Wholeness in which the One and the Many abide as always necessary auxiliaries,
3. And of dismissing all those hindrances that prevent the retention of this unique fact of knowledge. Manas, the eleventh Sense, the vehicle of meditation, though receives its impressions through the Senses, is not exclusively conditioned by them, since it has its own independent movements of likes and dislikes. Various capacities are acquired through the practice of pranayama of which four pertain to Puraka (inhalation) being: attractive friendliness, ability to receive and unite, the abandoning of distractive ideations and the state of wantlessness. Similarly, a second set of fourfold capacities accrued through Kumbhaka (retention) include: state of mental stillness or quietude, state one-ness in Brahm, the feeling of firmness of character and the state of equipoise.

The purpose of this sublime pranayama is to lead to contact with Divinity in oneself and in the infinite cosmos. In physical appearance we are separated, but in reality we are united by very subtle forces and ethers until reach the Atma-Sutra or atomic thread, which forms and maintains the order and unity of all things and beings. If we meditate deeply on Unity (Bhavana), it is possible to feel Unity with the Absolute. Through this elevated sacred spiritual practice, the human being can reach the direct knowledge of Unity of Everything and feel his own soul as expanded in the vastness. The individual Atman connected with the universal Brahm, then the imagination is made that the Divine Power or Brahma Shakti underlying the suns, moons, lands, trees, birds, animals, angels

and Gods, is mentally attracted to the depths of us. The attraction of this Shakti should be as long as possible for the disciple. It must be thought that it is like a magnet of powerful attraction and that it continuously attracts each time the Power which is accumulated in its interior. The transcendently Conscious Spirit of the God (Brahm) is in every place, through his competing and transcendent power with all his Divine powers. In relation to the Suddha pranayama practice, the Suddha Master Vayera Yogi Dasa explained this topic as follows: Puraka or inhalation includes the mental-attraction of Brahma Shakti or Divine Power as long time as possible; the second stage Kumbhaka includes the mental-retention of the Divine Power it accumulates into the subtle heart of the disciple; the last Rechaka phase includes the mental-expansion of the Energy from our heart compenetrating all the things and beings, unifying and infusing them great Peace and Transcendency.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

It seems that when the breath, as prana and not molecular O<sub>2</sub>, is ready to leave, all other senses recognize that it is the most vital. In the absence of Prana, there is no survival at all. Prana is existential, anybody with and willingness to feel the vitality can effortlessly view and experience various sources of Pranic energy

Based on the present background, it is possible to mention that the triple action of breathing-mantra-thought for Atmiya or Suddha Pranayamas represent the key for contacting the Self-Divine through spiritual practice of Raja-Yoga, while the unique action of breathing for Prakrita Pranayama represents good option for strengthening the physical body through the physical exercise of Hatha-Yoga

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