

Breathing in Yoga : **Role, Relevance and Technique**

I: The Role of Breathing in yoga

Breath is life. Without breath life is impossible. Nature's breath is observable everywhere, in trees, in flowers, in animals and of course in human beings. Breath is a continuous cycle and when this cycle is active, life exists. Breath is the most basic expression of life. At the physical level it can be seen as a phenomenon of exchange. Alternatively, at a subtle level it can be interpreted as a link to the source of life itself. In many traditions, the breath represents the spirit of life, physical and spiritual.

From the physical point of view, the act of breathing is understood as a phenomenon of exchange. Breath comes into the body during inhalation and goes out of the body during exhalation. The diaphragm is the muscle that plays the important role of bringing the air in when it contracts for inhalation, and then letting the air go out when it relaxes for exhalation.

The air that enters the body and the air that comes out of the body are not of the same composition. A chemical exchange is performed during the process of breathing. Air richer in oxygen goes into the lungs upon inhalation, and this oxygen is dissolved in the bloodstream by the action of the alveoli. Through the pumping action of the heart, blood then circulates in the body through the different arteries and organs to perform the vital functions necessary to life, and finally returns to the lungs through the veins, fully charged with oxidation byproducts. Carbon dioxide and water are then released back to nature through the phase of exhalation. On another physiological level, inhalation contributes to cellular nutrition and the adequate construction of body tissues, while exhalation ensures elimination, cleaning and purification functions, removing the physical and subtle impurities of the body and the mind.

The breathing process is adjustable to the demand and thus depends on the activity level of the individual. A sedentary person breathes slowly and requires less oxygen than a more active person. Respiratory rate (and depth of breathing) is modulated by the degree of physical activity or by the level of stress affecting the individual. During deep sleep, breathing is minimal whereas when running, breath rate can reach a maximum.

Breath is not only understood as a physical or a chemical process. Breathing is even subtler and it is related to the emotional state of mind. Agitation of the mind produces the same variations in the breath as the increased level of physical activity. Take for example the reaction of the breath during an agitated night dream. The power of mind is very influential on the energy of the breath. Ancient yogis have correctly observed that the fluctuations of the mind influence the energy of the breath.

In the normal everyday life, when we do not specifically concentrate on the breath, we use only 30 to 40% of our breathing capacity. This is why we sometimes feel tired, dizzy, and sleepy, our digestion may be slow and our body may be weak. If we want to optimize our physiological functions, it is a good idea to increase our breathing capacity. This is precisely why the role of the breath is important in yoga. This discipline makes it possible to increase breathing capacity up to 80-100% with the help of simple postures, movements and breathing techniques.

Today it is well understood that yoga is not only a physical discipline involving the practice of postures but it is now conceived as a complete array of tools that help to achieve the goal of yoga (YSI.2 Yoga citta vritti nirodha): orientation, clarity and stability of the mind.

Yoga is also understood as a logical and efficient process that was explained in the early days by Patanjali. (YS II.29) One who wants to practice yoga should first make sure that his relations with the environment and other beings is appropriate (yama); he should follow a proper discipline (niyama); he should prepare the body accordingly through the help of postures and appropriate physical exercise and correct attitude (asana); and then under these conditions, the practice of controlled breathing (pranayama) is possible. Asana prepares the subtle process of breathing. In a good yoga

practice, appropriate body preparation is necessary to perform controlled breathing and increase the breathing capacity.

II: The relevance of breathing in yoga

Everyone knows that we have to maintain a certain level of physical activity to be physically fit. However, such physical fitness, which can be addressed by physical exercise, does not necessarily equate with total wellbeing. Total wellbeing would include, in addition to physical fitness, the factors of psychological and mental health and would have to be addressed by using appropriate breathing. An agitated mind is always accompanied by an agitated breath, and from the beauty of this simple fact comes the idea that if we control the breath appropriately, we will reach a state of calm mind as well. For the modern adult, wanting to reduce stress and searching for clarity and stability in life, breath control is probably the most relevant tool. The best instrument to clean the mind is the breath.

The need for such a technique is now evident: breathing control and the control of the energy of the breath is the technique that we call pranayama.

Role of the breath in asana

Especially in the yoga tradition of professor Krishnamacharya breath has an important synergy with movement. In fact every movement in asana should be accompanied by the appropriate breathing phase. For example, postures with movements that open the chest will be performed during inhalation; postures with movements that compress the abdomen (forward bending postures, lateral stretch or twist postures), during exhalation. Also during sitting asana, the action of inhaling into the chest and exhaling from the abdomen will help to stretch the spine vertically, thus expanding the chest and freeing the abdomen which allows the use of the full breathing capacity. Appropriate breathing helps to perform better in asana, and a good asana preparation is necessary to prepare the practice of pranayama. An asana that is adequately performed will respect the two qualities of vigilance and comfort, and the indication of this subtle balance is a breath that is long and smooth. (YSII.46 sthira sukham asanam). The indicator of "sthira sukham"

is quality of the breath. Compared to the practice of asana, the control of the breath will have important effects on the subtle body and the energy of the person.

The practice of controlled breathing

When the performance of asana becomes adequate and the synergy of asana and the breath becomes natural for the practitioner, then a subtler breathing level is attained. Pranayama is this quality of the breath where the phases of exhalation, inhalation and retentions are done more consciously. (II.49 *tasmin sati svava prasvasah gattiviccheda pranayamah*). Breath changes from an unconscious state to a conscious one and also evolves from an irregular pattern to a more regular one.

Awareness of the following breath characteristics will increase - [the four breathing phases (Inhale – retention after inhale - exhale – retention after exhale), the knowledge of the location of the breath, the duration and the number of breaths] – allowing the achievement of a longer and more subtle breath. (YS II.50 *Bahya abhyantara stamba vrittih desa kala samkhyabhih paridrsto dirga suksmah*). This dual quality of length and subtleness is the absolute condition for the practice of pranayama. Without the consciousness of a longer and more subtle breath, no pranayama is possible. Finally, according to Patanjali, practicing controlled breathing is a necessary step to the practice of meditation.

III: The techniques of pranayama

Before attempting to use any breathing technique, one should clarify what is the motivation to start pranayama and what is the commitment to seriously undertake such a discipline. This is what we call our *sankalpa*. Also, before doing pranayama, one should have an adequate knowledge of the basic principles of yoga; especially the idea that yoga is not a competition. One should always respect its capacities in every practice. The practitioner should

have the proper attitude (*Bhavana*) and the adequate mental preparation to undertake the discipline of controlled breathing.

The first step in breath control is the observation of the breath. We have to first observe how our breath currently is, before attempting to control it. Then, the first phase of the breath that is important to control is the exhalation. Extending the exhalation creates a calmer mind and relaxes the body. The exhalation phase removes the impurities in the physical and the mental body as well. A cleaning process becomes possible with breath control; it is one of the most important functions (*samskara*) of pranayama. It helps the practitioner to become calm and focused.

Table: 4 phases of the breath

Energizing phases:

Puraka	abhyantara vritti	inhalation	internal activity
Kumbaka	stamba vritti	retention	after IN

Calming phases:

Rechaka	bahya vritti	exhalation	external activity
Kumbaka	stamba vritti	retention	after EX

The four phases of the breath are the basis for its control. Modulation of these phases creates heightened consciousness and extension of breath elasticity. The modulation of the phases should never compromise the length of the exhalation phase. The wise yogis of the past have invented techniques that help to extend the breath even more. Breath length is measured in seconds (or counts) and becomes extendable by the practice of one of the following techniques.

Nadi sodhana: Nadi means small channels or tubes, through which the energy of the breath circulates into every part of the body. Nadi sodhana is a technique that is known to clean the nadis. Nostrils represent the physical terminations of the nadis, and in the nadi sodhana technique, we breathe through each nostril alternately to remove subtle impurities and eventually feel healthier and better. Nadi sodhana is usually done in three steps, IN left, Hold, EX right, then IN right, Hold, EX left. The alternate blocking of each nostril is ensured by Mrigi Mudra. In this mudra the index and middle finger are folded into the palm leaving the thumb to close one nostril and the other 2 fingers to close the opposite side. The fingertips are pressed against the fleshy part on the sides of the nose just below the bony part. One has to completely close one nostril and partially close the other nostril to lengthen the breath. This technique can be accompanied by a visualization of the energy that comes into the system during inhalation and by visualizing the exhalation of impurities during the exhalation. This is one of the most important techniques in yoga. It is sometimes called the Raja pranayama.

Ujjayi is a technique where one inhales and exhales through both nostrils while producing a continuous throat sound by a partial constriction of the glottis. This inner sound allows the evaluation of the regularity and smoothness of the breath. A uniform smooth sound is produced by a regular breath; a variable and inconsistent sound is produced by a disturbed breath. Such a disturbed breath can happen when we push the body too hard in a posture or when the mind is agitated. The ujjayi technique is known to balance the dhatus or doshas (Vatta, Pita, Kapha) and is universally recommended in yoga, even during the practice of asana, as long as it does not produce throat irritation or fatigue.

Anuloma ujjayi is the technique using alternate nostrils for exhalation while ujjayi is used for the inhalation (IN Ujjayi, EX left, IN Ujjayi, EX right). This technique is commonly used to prepare for nadi sodhana pranayama and has a calming effect since it naturally extends the exhalation.

Viloma ujjayi is the opposite technique and uses alternate nostril inhalation while ujjayi is used for exhalation (IN left, EX ujjayi, IN right, EX ujjayi). This technique produces a deeper inhale and increases the energy level of the practitioner.

Pratiloma ujjayi is a combination of the two preceding techniques and is mainly used for pranayama where a larger number of breaths are to be taken. With longer periods of controlled nostril breathing, arm fatigue may appear and this technique is useful to relieve the arm. One complete cycle of Pratiloma Ujjayi consists of 4 breaths: IN ujjayi, EX left, IN left, EX ujjayi, IN Ujjayi, EX right, IN right, EX Ujjayi. With this pranayama, 12 cycles equals 48 breaths.

Sitali is a technique where one breathes through the mouth. It is useful for people who have problems with nostril breathing. Sitali also produces a cooling effect due to breathing through the mouth with a rolled tongue. In Sitali, we form a tube with the tongue and lower the head. We then inhale through the rolled tongue while slowly lifting the head up. When the inhale is completed, we lower the head while rolling the tongue back to the soft part of the palate, and then we exhale with ujjayi through both nostrils. This is one complete cycle. **Sitali Anuloma** uses the same technique for the inhalation, but then one exhales through alternate nostrils. **Sitkari** is another technique producing a cooling effect and is useful for people who cannot roll the tongue into the form of a tube. The technique is similar to Sitali, except for the placing of the tongue. In Sitkari the tongue is placed behind the teeth, and during inhalation the air comes into the mouth on both sides of the tongue.

Bhramari is a technique where one produces the humming sound of a bee by pronouncing the letter "M" during exhalation. Inhalation remains free and comfortable. For some people this may cause light-headedness but they can correct this by touching the nostrils at the nose bone during exhalation.

Murccha is a technique where we reach a state of semi consciousness. This is achieved by being totally relaxed and then after a deep inhalation, the focus is on a much longer exhalation. The goal of this technique is to produce a very long exhalation while the mind remains totally quiet.

Surya bedhana is a breathing technique used to focus on one side of the body and is useful for healing purposes when we wish to increase the symbolic fire energy or the activity of some organs in the right side of the

body. The right side is solicited by always inhaling through the right nostril and then always exhaling through the left nostril. In yoga, the right side of the body represents the sun and the action of fire.

Chandra bedhana is the opposite of surya bhedana as the focus in this case is on the left side of the body. Chandra symbolically represents the moon and this technique generally has a calming effect. Inhalation is always through the left nostril and then exhalation is always through the right.

About the use of these techniques

Even though there seem to be many techniques, all of them contribute to the same purpose of pranayama: helping the breath to become long and smooth (YS II.50 ...dirga suksmah). One must remember that the techniques are not finality per se; all techniques should contribute to a calmer breath. Longer breath is the indication of a tranquil mind.

Like everything else in yoga, the practice of pranayama should always be adapted to the type of practitioner, in considering strength, suppleness, energy and experience. Pranayama should always respect the limits and the capacity of the practitioner both physically and mentally.

Increasing the power of pranayama with the use of sounds:

Pranayama techniques are certainly powerful and they contribute to the lengthening of the breath and the calming of the mind. Such breathing techniques that do not involve the use of sound are called **Amantraka pranayama**.

The practice of pranayama can also be oriented to address specific aspects of human health and well-being. For example, controlled breathing can be used to increase self-confidence, joy, or to reduce mental agitation or even improve personal relations and self esteem. For such goals, **samantraka pranayama** is useful. This involves the use of breathing techniques combined with sound and meaningful mantras. One should consider that the meaning, intention, intensity, repetition and our own relation to the mantra, will determine its power. In this technique, the inhalation is generally free

and the sound production and mantra repetition are done during exhalation. At a subtler level, mantra can also be repeated mentally without producing sound.

Increasing the power of pranayama with the use of ratios

Apart from the techniques, the effects of breathing can be greatly influenced by the use of different breathing patterns whereby the four phases (IN - Hold - EX - Hold) can be modulated. Generally two main types of pranayama are used to influence the breath:

samavritti is the breathing technique where all the active components of the breath are equal (1.1.1.1 or 1.0.1.0 or 1.0.1.1 or 1.1.1.0).

Visamavritti is the breathing technique in which components are not equal (1. ½. 1½. ½ or 1.1.2.1 or 1.2.1.0 or 1.4.2.1 or 1.0.2.0 etc...). In these ratios, the first number of a sequence represents the value of the average duration of inhalation and is called the "breathing unit". This breathing unit is the duration of inhalation, usually measured in seconds, which one can easily perform for at least 12 breaths while remaining comfortable. For example a ratio of 1.1.2.1 for a person having a unit of 6 seconds of inhalation would result in a breathing pattern of 6.6.12.6, as expressed in seconds. The skill of a good pranayama teacher and a good pranayama practitioner is to choose the appropriate ratio to produce the desired effect. As a rule of thumb, we should say that one should be able to master samavritti pranayama first and establish a balanced breath before exploring the extremes of visamavritti pranayama. One should also remember that the mastery of pranayama techniques and ratios usually takes months of regular and dedicated practice. In order to fully benefit from the positive aspects of pranayama, one should take the time that is needed and never force the breath.

3 main effects of pranayama: brimhana, langhana and samana

The effects of Pranayama can be divided into three classes: brimhana, langhana and samana.

Brimhana is the effect where more energy is produced. This effect comes from putting the focus on inhalation and then on the hold after inhalation. At the conclusion of a brimhana practice, the practitioner feels an expansion of the chest area (and the lungs); a good sensation of balanced energy will follow.

Langhana is a calming and interiorizing effect mainly because of the focus on exhalation and the hold after exhalation. The lungs are empty and langhana can produce a calming effect that can resolve minor insomnia problems.

Samana is a balanced harmonizing effect and results from a combination of brimhana and langhana.

The general effect of a pranayama practice is the result of a combination of factors, which may include the state of mind, the energy level, the age, the motivation and the capacity of the individual. The more intense and regular the practice is, the faster the results will appear. In pranayama, the results do not only appear at the physical level but may also be observed at subtler levels, and they have a noticeable effect on the temper (mood?) of the individual. This is why one should be careful with the application of pranayama and practice under the guidance of a competent teacher.

Extending the breath even more with the use of kramas:

Krama means steps. It is the idea of breaking down the Inhalation or Exhalation into equal steps (generally 2 to 5 steps), and holding the breath for about two seconds between each step. Such techniques are used to efficiently increase the elasticity of the breath and allow the practitioner to extend the length of specific breathing phases. Krama can be used in pranayama only or it can also be performed during the execution of asana. Anuloma Krama is the breathing technique of breaking down the inhalation into equal parts. Viloma Krama is the technique of breaking down the exhalation into equal parts. Pratiloma Krama is the breaking down of both the inhalation and exhalation phases into equal parts (breathing IN with several holds and breathing OUT with several holds). In the implementation

of these techniques, the student usually learns to comfortably split the breath into two equal parts first, then three, then four etc. One should be cautious with these powerful techniques to avoid creating fatigue. An interesting and captivating use of these krama techniques involves the visualization of one of the chakras each time we hold our breath, so that in seven steps we can visualize seven chakras. Another possible method is to concentrate on 5 parts of the body, 5 elements of nature and 5 bhutas (for example: Earth is Prthvi, Water is Apo, Digestion is tejas, Breath is Vayu, and Space is Akasha). Krama with a number of steps higher than five should only be performed by experienced practitioners.

Anuloma Krama pranayama brings life to the five parts of inhalation by visualizing the breath in 5 steps. (IN then hold 2 seconds, continue Inhale then hold 2 seconds) One can also visualize the symbols of the chakras from top to bottom: Vishuddhi, then Anahata, Manipura, Svadhisthana and Muladhara. The exhale is free.

Viloma krama pranayama: Inhale is free, exhale is done in 5 steps (EX then pause 2 seconds, continue EX then pause 2 seconds....) visualize the symbols of the chakras from bottom to top: Muladhara, Svadhisthana, Manipura, Anahata, Vishuddhi).

Pratiloma krama pranayama: Kramas are performed on both Inhalation and Exhalation. One can inhale in 5 steps from top to bottom and then exhale in 5 steps from bottom to top. A ratio of 10.10.10.10 is generally used in this technique by mature pranayama practitioners.

One can introduce the three levels of krama as follows:

- 1 viloma krama
- 2 anuloma krama
- 3 pratiloma krama

Using pranayama for controlling subtle energies with Mudras and bandhas :

The word Mudra means seal or symbol. In pranayama there are several symbols, some of them are called bandhas and three of them are more important: Jâlandhara bandha, Uddiyâna bandha and Mûla bandha. Bandha conveys the idea of binding and contracting. Although this concept is not mentioned in the yoga sutras, the goal is to develop a better perception of certain specific locations (Desa) in the body. Jâlandhara bandha is the contraction that helps to focus on the location of the throat, Uddiyâna bandha is the focus on the abdomen and Mula bandha is the focus on the base of the spine. The bandhas are usually established in a specific order during a pranayama practice.

Jalandhara Bandha

Jalam is the symbolic cup at the top of the spine that is known to hold Amritam – the liquid of life. The sequence to establish Jalandhara bandha is as follows.

Inhale into the chest area and straighten the spine, then lower the head and place the chin near the collar bone
do simple inhale and exhale
then breathe normally, releasing the tucked chin

Mula bandha

Mûla means foundation and represents the base of the spine. The sequence to establish Mula bandha is as follows.

straighten the spine and place chin near the collar bone
exhale, contract mûla and lift up from the perineum
hold for the whole duration of the pranayama with bandhas

Uddhiyana Bandha:

Mala is at the base of the spine, and it represents the accumulation of our impurities, both physical and subtle. The action of this bandha is to bring Mala to the fire (Agni) and keep it there to be burned. Uddiyana bandha is the contraction done after exhalation is completed. The lower abdomen is

contracted with a movement inward and upward towards the fire. Uddiyana bandha is held for a certain duration (ex: for 5 seconds), and released before the next inhalation. Generally we consider that when Mala goes near the fire, impurities tend to be eliminated. The sequence to establish Uddiyana bandha is as follows.

Inhale, straighten the spine, place chin near collar bone (J.B.)

Mula bandha is set at the same moment and maintained until the end of the sequence.

exhale, hold, contract abdomen, lift, hold

release

inhale

Note: For the practice of the 3 bandhas, J.B is first established, then Mula Bandha and then, after every exhale, Uddiyana bandha is established. When the practice of U.B. is complete, then M.B. is released, and finally J.B is released.

All the Pranayama practices with bandhas are very powerful and are known to reduce impurities in the abdomen and increase the capacity for concentration. These practices should be done under the guidance of an experienced teacher because they can have a dramatic effect on the bowels, or the menstrual periods in the case of female practitioners.

Use of bhavana in breathing

Bhavana is a specific attitude of conviction that accompanies the breathing technique. It plays the role of directing the mind; it increases the concentration and supports the attention. Generally, concentration with the help of a bhavana increases the efficiency of the breathing technique. Here are some examples of bhavana used in breathing exercises.

Table: Examples of bhavana

Inhalation in the chest and Exhalation in the abdomen
Focus on the duration of the breath (counts in seconds)

Counting a specific number of breaths (12, or 24, or 48...)
Listening to the regular sound of the breath with Ujjayi
Focusing and counting the holds after IN and-or EX
Duration of IN = EX
Duration of Ex longer than IN
On Inhalation, I visualize Prana
On Exhalation, I visualize Apana
Follow the breath through the nadis
Follow the breath through the chakras
Respecting specific breathing ratios ex: 1.2.2.1
Any other bhavana having a positive effect on the extension of the breath

IV: Characteristics of a yoga - pranayama practice

Yoga is a holistic discipline that addresses the various aspects of human evolution. Yoga uses a wide array of tools, but asana (the practice of postures) is the one that is used most frequently. The practice of Pranayama requires a certain maturity and the pranayama practitioner is usually one that has achieved enough control over his body to allow him to stay in an appropriate position for a given length of time. Even though they are very popular, and sometimes spectacular, bent leg positions are not absolutely necessary for the practice of breathing exercises. This is especially the case for the western practitioner who is accustomed to sitting on a comfortable chair. The correct asana must be chosen in regard to the capacity, flexibility and strength of a particular practitioner. For some people sitting on a chair with the spine erect is a suitable posture for pranayama.

A pranayama practice will also require some asanas to prepare the body for the sitting posture. An asana practice of 10 to 15 minutes is generally sufficient when stretching postures and counter poses are used. Preparatory asanas should not create fatigue since the main goal is to focus on pranayama. The whole pranayama practice, including the preparatory

asanas, usually has a duration of 30 minutes but it may be shorter for beginners and longer for the more advanced practitioner.

Short term goals of pranayama can be viewed from different angles. One primary goal is certainly to develop the consciousness of the breath and to extend breath length. Also, the mastery of some introductory techniques (ujjayi, anuloma ujjayi, viloma ujjayi) is usually achieved within three months of serious practice. A beginning practitioner can also expect to master samavritti type ratios quite easily within the same period of time using a breathing unit of six seconds.

Midterm goals are characterized by the lengthening of the breath unit and an increased breathing capacity. Familiarization with more demanding breathing techniques is usually achieved within 6 months to one year of serious practice and the breathing unit usually reaches 8 seconds or more; while the duration of the exhale may even reach 16 to 20 seconds. At this point, the practitioner is able to adapt his breathing techniques to various ratios of samavritti and some visamavritti like 1.0.2.0. , 1.1.2.1, 1.2.2.1.

Longer term goals of pranayama are usually exceed breathing performance alone. Of course the breath becomes fully mature allowing the practitioner to master almost any type of techniques and ratios, but the real longer term goal is no longer physical. Effects of the long-term practice are really observed when the person has developed a calm and clear mind, and shows stability and signs of self-transformation.

Towards the more subtle aspects of breathing

Having mastered the technical possibilities of pranayama, one will eventually reach a higher state of mind where the breath is transcended. The focus is no longer on the body posture, nor the breath quality. The breath becomes almost automatic with the presence of naturally deep inhalations and exhalations. There is no longer the feeling that "I breathe" but it is more the feeling that "It breathes" that becomes dominant. (YS II.51 Bahya abhyantara vishayaksepi caturthah.) The mind is focused on something subtler - a deep inner peace of being absolutely one with the breath. This is the fourth state of pranayama.

Finally we can say that a mature pranayama practice helps to stabilize the mind, to master the senses and to prepare for meditation.

V: The models used in breathing control

The 5 vayus: prana, apana, samana, udhâna, vyana

The practice of breathing is greatly improved and supported with an understanding of the model of the different winds (vayus) in the body. Each vayu has a specific location and performs specific functions.

Prana is a general word that represents the breath and the energy of the breath. **Prana vayu** is the main location where prana accumulates in the body. It is located in the chest area, over the diaphragm. In that location, energy accumulates in the body through the control of inhalation and holding after inhalation.

Apana vayu is the area of the body where the main eliminatory functions are performed. APANA means "that which eliminates", representing all the eliminatory functions (elimination of solids, liquids and perspiration), including also the function of delivering a baby. Apana certainly plays a vital role, because without proper elimination, the body accumulates impurities.

Samana vayu is the Wind responsible for digestion. We need air and fire to produce the burning flame of digestion. Samana also includes the function of distributing the nutrients. It is said that Samana can become so strong that one can digest almost anything. Too much fire is also observable in the temper and attitude of an overly zealous practitioner.

Udhâna vayu is responsible for communication and elevation. One who meditates on this wind acquires the quality of being understood by everyone. It is also said that such a yogi cannot be harmed even if he steps on glass, once this vayu has been fully mastered.

Vyâna vayu is the adequate circulation of pranic energy everywhere in the body. This energy is responsible for our sensations in all parts of the body; it is our link to the sensation of touch. Vyana takes consciousness to all limbs of the body. An example of a defective vyana vayu is paralysis; it is explained by the fact that vyana vayu is not flowing properly in the affected region.

The model of the 5 vayus is useful for the pranayama practitioner in the sense that the vayus can be the basis of a bhavana and can support concentration during breathing. A very useful bhavana, for instance, is the widely used notion that during inhalation, Prana should come down to apana, and during exhalation, Apana should come up to Prana. The practitioner supports the breathing experience by visualizing the energy of Prana and the flow of its path while breathing. Prana is the energy of consciousness, and if one becomes conscious of the path by which Prana flows, the energy will increase in that part of the body.

VI : Four applications of pranayama

The ancient yogis recognized four main applications for pranayama.

Siddhi is the application of pranayama by which one can achieve special powers and qualities. Yoga Sutra chap. III covers this matter thoroughly. For example, in a case of a regular and intensely oriented practice, if one's breath focuses on specific parts of the body, special siddhis appear. Levitation results from concentration on the udana area. YS III.39.

Rakshana is the application of pranayama for becoming less vulnerable and more resistant to any form of enemy. It confers confidence and protection and is recognized to prevent anxiety.

Yoga Sutra II.16 “Heyam duhkham anagatam” represents the concept that it is not always possible to avoid suffering but one should be well prepared so that the suffering does not become too intense. The actual result is that we suffer less. Prana nourishes all the bodies (5 layers of a person), the emotional body as well as the physical one. A proper concentration of Prana is said to prevent illness of all kinds. Pranayama is prevention; Rakshana means maintaining the health at an optimal level.

Cikitsa is the application of pranayama for healing. It helps remove illness. In yoga we consider that healing is not necessarily the complete cure of a disease or of suffering. Healing may mean, for example, that instead of needing 3 pills, the pranayama practitioner may only need one. Another application of cikitsa pranayama is that it can help pregnant women to treat anxiety problems. Cikitsa pranayama is useful when people are sick and cannot do asana. Pranayama still helps them to relax the mind and create a strong relationship with their body.

In Yoga, one should not consider that healing is only a question of mastering a technique or doing a specific breathing ratio. Lifestyle changes, diet adjustments and breathing exercises can certainly contribute to the healing process. To be healed, one should appreciate the teacher as well as the technique that is proposed. There must be good communication and particularly a good relationship. Generally speaking, a positive attitude between two people will generate positive results. It is generally recognised that positive thinking is linked with improved functioning of the immune system in the body. That in itself is one of the most important healing concept.

Âdhyâtmika is the application of pranayama that leads to personal transformation through the long-term practice of the techniques. Like a student of the violin who first has to learn the notes and the scales before being able to express the subtle emotions of a symphony; a pranayama practitioner has first to master the techniques and then the true seeker will

continue pranayama for the sake of personal transformation. Pranayama is the best preparation for meditation. One who masters the breath will eventually master self transformation.

VII: Conclusion

Pranayama is the tool of energy control for a yogi. The one who masters energy masters everything. This energy is provided to us by something. It can be a "higher Being" for some, a "higher force" for others or it can be represented by the Sun or by any other form of appropriate representation. Some believe that the ultimate source has no form, and that it consists only of vibrations and light. One can say that pranayama reveals the light inside us. Long-term pranayama practice certainly leads to a spiritually mature yoga practice.

The indication that we are on the right path with pranayama is that a good breath should lead to VISVÂSA. For example, when we are with someone we trust, our breath is comfortable. Visvâsa represents this comfortable breathing. Please remember that Pranayama gives confidence, protection and prevents anxiety. It gives stamina and resistance, not just physical, but at all other levels as well.

Every breath is the expression of life. The first thing we do when we are born is inhale... the last thing we do before we die, is exhale. The most profound knowledge attainable with the breath is probably the knowledge of life itself.

This Article is based on the teachings of TKV Desikachar and Kausthub Desikachar from 1999 to 2006, especially from a yoga seminar in Montreal about pranayama, in April 2005, in Canada. This article is written by Daniel Pineault, student of Kausthub Desikachar, June 2006.