



WHAT IS PRANAYAM?

Pranayama is the controlling of the prana, the life force. 'We' are because of the energy (life force), which runs in us. It is this energy, which formulates our entire being- our health, moods, thinking, actions, and our physical, mental and emotional states. Perfect balance of this energy is what ensures our perfect physical and mental state. Any imbalance in the flow of this energy in any part of our body, results in disease and illness of that part.

Pranayama practices help us to manage the life force. They are the greatest purification techniques, removing impurities from the body, mind and senses. These practices are all about breath control. It is through the controlling of the gross aspect-the breath, that the subtle aspect- prana can be controlled. No spiritual progress can be made without practice of Pranayama.

Breath is the connection to our inner being. Breath is the physical aspect or the manifestation of the life force. The life currents can be manipulated by controlling of the breath.

Life force is like the electric current running on the wires of breath. By controlling the motion of respiratory organs, the life force can be controlled.

To begin with the practice of Pranayama, one must be prepared. According to Patanjali, Pranayama must ideally begin after the aspirant has gained steadiness in asana (yogic posture). It is said that if you can sit in an asana comfortably and continuously for three hours at a stretch, you have gained mastery over the asana. If you are able to sit from half to one hour, you can take up the practice of Pranayama.

Pranayama has three components - Exhalation, Inhalation and Retention of breath.



It is the duration of each of these components, and the number of cycles, which formulate the Pranayama practice. Yogic practices should not be done after meals.

Time taken for each breath-

The ratio for Inhalation (I): Retention (R): Exhalation (E) is 1:4:2. If inhalation is to the count of 12, then the retention should be to the count of 48 and exhalation to the count of 24.

For a beginner - The I: R: E ratio should be 12:48:24.

As one progresses it can be increased to the ratio of 24:96:48 and move on to 32:128:64. The increase in count should be done gradually. It may take several months. Also it is important to keep you comfort levels in mind.

One set of I: R: E makes one cycle/round of Pranayama.

The important rider to the above is that under no circumstances should the lungs feel exerted or tired. If strain is felt, then relaxation of relative time durations takes precedence rather than straining the breathing system.

During any yogic practice, awareness of the self is crucial. Keep listening to your body. If you feel uncomfortable during any step, stop the practice. You will fall down even from a staircase, if you are not careful.

Remember, pushing yourself that little extra helps, pushing too much harms. Do not despair. Keep up the practice, even if for a small duration of time, you must be regular with it. Gradually you will find your balance and discover for your self what Pranayama suits you the best. You may keep your eyes closed, for heightened physical awareness.

- Manali Haridas-