

Pranayama-1

The most important Limb of Astanga Marga, which is the basis for controlling mind and regularizing the energy flow into the body, is Pranayama.

The limbs of Astanga Marga can be classified as under for convenience based on their utility.

Yama, Niyama, Asana - Body

Asana, Pranayama, Pyathyahara - Mind

Pyathyahara, Dharana, Dhyana - Soul

Pathanjali describes Pranayama in very simple terms as under.

tasmin sati svasa-prasvasayor gati-vicchedah pranayamah

(After establishing in Asana, the observation and Analysis of Inhalation and Exhalation is called Pranayama)

bahyabhyantara-stambha-vrttir desakala-samkhyabhih paridrsto dirgha-suksmah

(To be observed and analysed: the external, internal, cessation, nature and pattern, location, duration and repetition(no. of times), subtleness and extenuation (Of breath/Prana)

After sitting firmly in Asana, one should observe the inflow and outflow of his own breath. Keen observation and utmost concentration is needed here to see how the breath is flowing into and out of our body. In the beginning it is very difficult to observe the flow in full, as it is very subtle and henceforth not observed.

Practical tips for observation& Analysis:

Sit in any Asana, which is comfortable and steady, with spine erect. Gently close eyes. Keep your mind pointed towards the nostrils from where the breath enters into your being. Don't inhale with effort; the breath should be effortless and natural. Find out whether the air is entering from one nostril or both nostrils, in general we breathe from one nostril at a time. It can be either left or right. Observe where it is going from the tip of your nose. In the beginning you may be able to observe flow just upto the root of the nose, where both nostrils join together. But by practice and increase in concentration you can able to observe the breath deep into your body. Similarly observe the outflow of breath. The breath may be swirling, while going in or out. At times it stops (cessation), keenly observe the process of cessation. Observe the place, where the cessation is occurring. Whether this cessation giving comfort or pain?

In fact, prana is not mere breath it is the vital energy flowing through our entire body. Feel the sensation of energy in your every limb while it is flowing through. You need not guide it, you just observe it, and it guides you. The nature of flow is directly related to your physical condition & mood swings and vice versa.

Note: Some people call the above mentioned as Meditation, it is not correct. You have to cross two more steps to enter into the profound state of meditation.

-Ramachandra Raju Kalidindi