

Pranayama: A Key to the Healthy Life

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The biggest happiness of life is to stay fit and healthy and therefore it is said that ‘the first joy is to have a perfect health.’ Any person can enjoy one’s life if s/he is physically and emotionally fit. A well-known proverb says, “a healthy mind is a source of a healthy body.’ Hence, emotional fitness always comes first. Our ancient sages and seers opine:

“The body is a very important instrument to keep doing our duty on regular basis. If we believe in righteous conduct, in that case, to keep our body healthy becomes our first duty.” Even in *Yajurveda*, it is said that “may you live hundred years performing all your duties with pure detached attitude.” Similarly, in other *Vedas* as well, it is said that “may we remain healthy and fit and live our life with extra ordinary exuberance till the hundredth year of life.”

All these words sound great but here arises an important question-whom should one regard as a healthy person? In simple terms, it is believed that someone who is mentally well-ordered and physically fit should be regarded as a healthy person. However, it is a very lop-sided idea of healthiness. In fact, a real meaning of health is connected with our activeness. A person whose body and mind operate in a synchronized manner can be regarded as a healthy being. We often observe that after encountering any diseases, this activeness gets reduced and as a result of that, our body gets affected. In our native tradition of healing aka *Ayurveda*, a text called *Shushruta Samhita* holds a very key position wherein it is said:

“A person in whom all three elements i.e., Vat, Pitt and Kaph are in proper balance, whose stomach functions properly, bodily metals which are seven in totality are in proper balance, different bodily activities take place at proper time and whose ten organs and their master i.e., the soul remain in blissful state is regarded as a healthy person.”

Can one find such person in present time? It is seen that people become more pessimistic and despondent in present age and qualities such as seriousness, concentration and

reciprocity are getting reduced from a so-called modern man. Instead, we see all around us stress, hypersensitivity, over excitement, despondency, anxiety etc. In the midst of these evils, a person cannot remain calm and composed and, instead, remains often physically and mentally perturbed. How can we bring an individual out of such situation, is a very distressing question, however it is not impossible to find its answer.

In this body which is made of five cosmic elements, the place of mind is at the loftiest peak. The body is basically inanimate while the mind is made of vital force. In *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, the importance of mind is nicely elaborated. A book titled as *Niroga Sadhan* by Mahatma Gandhi also reiterates the similar ideas. In one of its passages he says, "In the West, there is a group of people who firmly hold the view that all bodily diseases are basically rooted in one's mind. Hence, one who has a pure mind seldom gets sick and by chance if he does, in that case, he recovers soon. It proves that our mental health affects significantly our physical health. If our mind becomes clean and pure, the body naturally becomes free from all diseases."

The mind is a place where different thoughts and ideas, be it good or bad, erupt. As long as our mind functions and operates in proper direction, we remain in natural flow achieving different goals. We remain in harmony with the internal peace as well. Hence, there is a proverb-'where there is will, there is a way.'

Lord Buddha also reflects his view by saying that the effect of our mind is tremendous on our body. Whatever we are now is a result of our thoughts erupted at a particular point in our mind. Therefore, think positive and store positive thoughts in your mind." Another equally important scholar says, "Our work is a flower of our thought and happiness and sorrow are the fruits of it."

Moreover, wherever a person is found to be happy and healthy, the reason behind it will be in his mind. Hence, the only instrument to derive happiness is our mind. If a person can master over his mind with different practices, he can achieve mental as well as physical health easily. However, the question lies here-how can one win over one's mind? How can we get hold on it? The answers to these questions lie in different techniques of relaxation.

Our ancient sages and seers also used to live a long and healthy life by deploying such relaxation methods to get hold over their mind. In present era, a human being becomes victim of different diseases and disorders. This list includes bronchitis, cancer, diabetes, obesity etc. which disrupt the peace of life. Along with that, there are psychological problems as well which include anxiety, despondency, stress etc. that create upheavals in the life of a modern man. In such situation, by using different relaxation techniques such as *Pranayama*, *Yoga*, different physical exercises can be of great value to restore peace of mind and body.

In order to get over from different perturbing situations, there have been end numbers of such relaxation techniques used by different people in different civilizations to stay calm and composed physically and mentally. Some of them are as follows:

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| • Progressive muscle relaxation | Running |
| • Rhythmic Movement & Mindful Exercise | Walking/ Swimming/Dancing/Rowing |
| • Climbing | Sublime Meditation |
| • Visualization | <i>Vipashyana</i> Meditation |
| • Yoga | Deep Meditation |
| • Taichi | Mantric Meditation |
| • Self massage | Sleep Meditation |
| • Repetitive prayer | Blissful Meditation |
| • Autogenic training | Zen Meditation |
| • Biofeedback | Fourth state (<i>Turiya</i>) Meditation |
| • Qigong | Osho Meditation |
| • Self hypnosis | <i>Kapalabhati</i> ¹ |
| • Music | <i>Anulom-Vilom</i> ² |
| • Meditation | Bee-humming |
| • Conscious Meditation | Chanting of Om |

In *Pranayama*, the process of ceasing one's breath is called *kumbhak*. In *Hathyoga Pradika*, there comes a description of eight types of *Kumbhak* which are as follows:

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| • <i>Suryabhedan</i> ³ | <i>Ujjayo</i> ⁴ |
| • <i>Bhastrika</i> ⁵ | <i>Bhramari</i> ⁶ |
| • <i>Sitkari</i> ⁷ | <i>Murcha</i> ⁸ |
| • <i>Shitali</i> ⁹ | <i>Plavini</i> ¹⁰ |

¹ Kapalabhati, also called breath of fire, is an important Shatkarma, purification in hatha yoga. The word kapalabhati is made up of two Sanskrit words: kapāla meaning 'skull', and bhāti meaning 'shining, illuminating'

² Anulom vilom is a form of alternate nostril breathing, which translates as 'with the grain' is considered to be the best form of pranayama.

³ The different kinds of Kumbhaka are an extension of the basic breathing exercise. While doing Surya bhedana air should be drawn in slowly, through the right nostril

⁴ While performing Ujjayi air should be drawn in such a way that it goes touching from the throat to the chest thereby making noise while passing. It should be controlled and then let out through the left nostril.

⁵ In Bhastrika first one needs to sit in Padma asana posture after which the feet is crossed and placed on both thighs. The mouth is closed so that the air passes through the nostrils. It should be filled up to the lotus of the heart, making noise and touching the throat, the chest and the head. It should be expelled again and filled again and again. The air should be drawn through the right nostril by pressing the thumb against the left side of the nose, thereby closing the left nostril; and when it is filled it should be closed with the fourth finger and kept confined. This should go out through the left nostril.

⁶ In Bhramari the air is filled with force and making a peculiar noise and expel it slowly, making noise in the same way.

⁷ Sitkari is performed by drawing air through the mouth and the tongue is between the lips.

⁸ The Murchha is a process that involves closing the passages with Jalandhar Bandha firmly at the end of Puraka, and drive out the air slowly that gives the mind great comfort.

With the help of the said relaxation techniques, a person can lift one's consciousness upward and can achieve all kinds of development.

Pranayama

There lies a connection between the mind and other physical elements. In the Upanishads which are the crux of Vedic tradition, the nature of relationship between the mind and other elements is nicely explained. It is mentioned that with the help of different penances, it is possible to resolve internal knots of disturbance. In the same tradition, the vital force of the body is regarded as a principle which plays as a link between the mind and other physical elements. This vital force is also believed to be the main source behind the creation of material world. It is further said that different materials are its physical revelation whereas the mind is its ideational revelation. In *Prashnopanishad*, there comes a reference to *Varishth Pran*¹¹ which is further divided into five parts i.e., *Pran*, *Apan*, *Saman*, *Udan* and *Vyan*.

These different forms of vital force have a definite role to play. They include- digesting the food, circulating essential juice in the body, regulating the discharge of stool and urine and breathing process. An art of bridling this vital force is regarded as *Pranayama*. With the help of this technique, one can sublimate the negative energy of mind in a very positive creation and thereby channelize one's vital force into productive activities along with achieving mental and physical fitness.

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⁹ In Sitali the tongue is slightly protruding out of lips when the air is drawn inwards. It goes out through nostrils.

¹⁰ In plavini the belly is filled with air and the inside of the body is filled with air, the body floats on the deepest water, like a leaf of a lotus

¹¹ It literally means a main vital force which is further divided into five different categories.

ડો.વિનુભાઈ પટેલ. (૨૦૧૭) સર્વાંગી સ્વાસ્થ્ય સરળ જીવનશૈલી. સ્વાસ્થ્ય સેવા ટ્રસ્ટ ઉસ્માનપુરા અમદાવાદ ગુજરાત