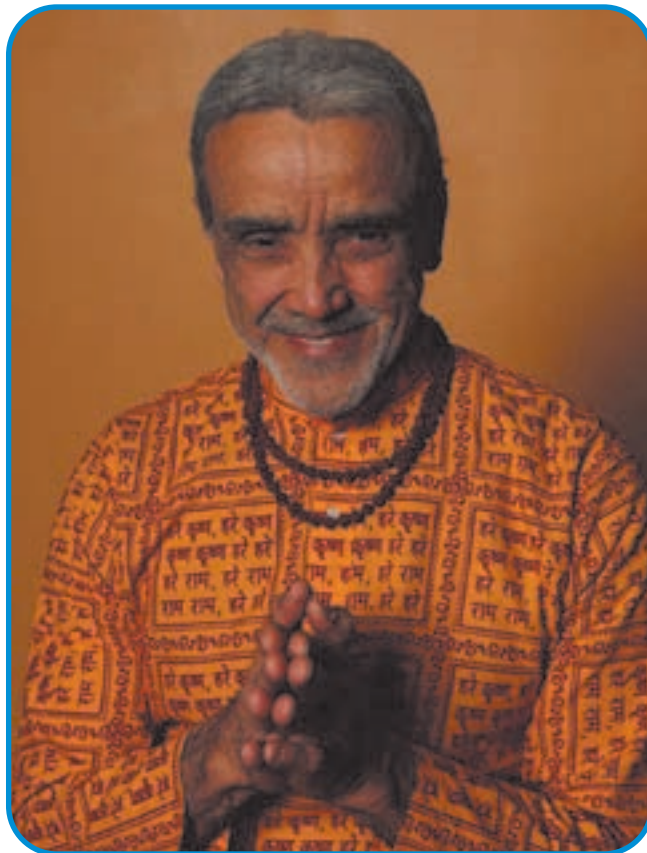


the practice of pranayama



May Lord Ganesha
protect and guide us
in the practice
of pranayama

PRANAYAMA is the fourth limb or step of Astanga Yoga (the classical Eight-Limbed Path). Prana is energy or Vital Life-Force. It is intense vibration, though there are different levels of intensity. Some vibrations are so intense that we rec-

B Y S R I D H A R M A M I T T R A

ognize them as radiation. Others are so extremely subtle that they are beyond the grasp of the human mind. Yama means control. So, pranayama is controlling the Vital Life-Force. We learn through study of the yogic scriptures that pranayama is one of the main practices, because without prana, nothing exists. Indeed, everything moves because of prana, and everything attains name and form due to prana. Even the mental patterns which are the thoughts are generated by the vibration of prana, and thoughts then materialize because of it.

According to the yoga system, every time you are born, you are born with a set number of breaths. If you spend your life full of doubt, this causes pain and suffering, which in turn leads to lack of self-control. Then, the breath goes out of rhythm. This results in depression, anxiety,

anger and greed. You may have already noticed that when you're angry, you breathe very fast. If you have Asthma, you breathe very fast all the time. You use up your quota of breaths, and then you're done and you go. The ancient ones discovered that through the practice of pranayama and meditation, you are able to slow down the breath. Just by gaining spiritual knowledge, you'll grow calmer and have fewer doubts. With knowledge, you grow calmer automatically, and this affects the senses, as well. If you breathe at a rate of 16 or more breaths per minute, there is a perpetual longing for activity (rajas).

There are many different kinds of breathing exercises (pranayama). Some are done to warm you when you're cold, others to help you feel positive when you are not, another when you feel restless, and so forth. Many breathing exercises address a specific state, but overall there are the main pranayama exercises that join prana and apana at the navel region. With constant practice and the correct locks (bandhas), the joined prana and apana break the gate at the base of Sushumna Nadi, the main energy chan-



nel, and the prana begins to travel up to the head. Along the way, the Major Chakras (psychic energy centers) ignite, and begin to function full-force until the end of the journey is reached and you have Divine Perception. This is not the only way to find enlightenment, but the pranayama techniques are good because they speed up the process. Do lots of pranayama, eat healthfully, observe yama and niyama (the ethical rules and observances of yoga – the first and second steps of Astanga Yoga), and then you make progress very fast and you don't need to be re-incarnated hundreds of additional times. Like all religions, if you observe the ethical rules and surrender to the Almighty One, automatically you are ready. Then, prana and apana join, the gate opens and the prana goes up.

This is a very slow process that takes many lifetimes for most people. Do some practice, sacrifice some of your happiness from the outside world, and then it goes very fast. Reading of scripture, devotional singing (kirtan) and Karma Yoga (selfless service) work also. These three paths are the easiest and most painless. In this case,

you don't need the postures or breathing exercises at all. So, discover what your tendencies or dharma's are and do the practices that work for you a little every day. Remember, the secret to success is constant practice. Be nice to everyone, fulfill your obligations, speak truth, and you are sure to achieve radiant success in yoga. Be receptive to the grace of God.

Legendary yoga master Sri Dharma Mittra founded one of the early independent schools of yoga in New York City in 1975. Sri Dharma is the model and creator of the "Master Yoga Chart of 908 Postures", author of Asanas: 608 Yoga Poses, and two DVD's, Maha Sadhana Level I: A Shortcut to Immortality and Level II: A Stairway to Bliss. Sri Dharma continues to disseminate the classical science of yoga through daily practice for the public,

Maha Sadhana intensives and "Life of a Yogi" Teacher Trainings at the Dharma Yoga West Temple in New York City. To learn more on Sri Dharma Mittra please visit: www.dharmayogacenter.com.

CROSSWORD ANSWERS

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