



## PROGRAM E-21

### THE AWAKENING

#### **What is Prana?**

Maha-prana is the vital life force existing in everything and everywhere. Without this vital life energy, there would be no life, nor any cosmos.

Pranayama is a deep esoteric technique, which despite all of its discussions, is little understood.

In esoteric kriya yoga, the process of 'controlled breathing' makes it possible to draw its maha-prana down from the cosmos, and bring it into your microcosmic being. Once this occurs, the maha-prana is transformed into prana. As it moves through the various chakras, it is 'filtered' and transformed into prana, etc.

Bringing the prana into your microcosmic being is one step. Getting it to flow into your astral body is another step. Then, not having the chakras interfere with its pure cosmic energy is quite a different step.

In order for the seeker to be able to draw in prana, the seeker needs to be aware of the fact that it exists, and where it exists.

The problem with most people is their lack of awareness of the 'things' which are beyond their five physical senses.

If the seeker breathes as one normally does, the seeker will only draw in oxygen and a very limited amount of prana.

Pranayama, with meditation on prana, can be one of the most important keys in developing your soul consciousness.

Prana is hidden from most people's view because they have been taught to believe in what the collective society believes.

### **Benefits of pranayama:**

Kriya yoga practice can improve mental and physical health, especially when linked with various pranayamas.

The practice of pranayama assists in focusing the mind and thus increasing one's ability to concentrate. Pranayama techniques create mental discipline, which in turn sharpens one's focus.

Pranayama practice also assists in lowering blood pressure, as does meditation.

According to the University of Maryland Medical Center, the regular practice of pranayama can offer relief from various conditions that cause recurring pain. These include arthritis, fibromyalgia and headaches.

The University of Maryland Medical Center also reports that some pranayamas improve blood circulation, as well as relieve stress and anxiety.

It also states that pranayama helps one breathe more efficiently, decreasing the amount of oxygen the body uses, and thus improving one's energy level.

The value, benefits and goal of pranayama are best realized by referring back to the second book of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. The key sutras relating to pranayama include: sutras #50, #51, and #52.

In my own words, Patanjali states that the seeker should regulate the breath in order to make it slow and subtle (sutra #50).

The three dense stages of pranayama are called inhalation, exhalation, and the hold (sutra #50). This leads to a steady flow of prana energy, which exists at a deeper level, below the process of exhalation, inhalation, and the two breath stops (sutra #51).

However, there is a fourth subtler stage in which there is a continuous flow of prana 'behind' the three dense stages (sutra #51).

The repeated practice of this fourth stage 'thins' the veil of karma, which clouds the inner light, allowing the seeker to experience that inner light (sutra #52).

To attain the full benefits of pranayama, it is necessary for the seeker to establish a steady and comfortable asana. Then, through the practice of pranayama, the mind can develop the ability to gain deep concentration.

In short, the *exoteric* level of pranayama is just to attain a deep state of concentration. We will talk about the *esoteric* functions of pranayama later in the program.

Several researchers have reported that pranayama techniques are beneficial in dealing with a large range of *stress-related disorders*, and that it improves the autonomic functions.

They say that *alternate breathing*, known as *nadi-suddhi pranayama*, is beneficial for cardiopulmonary functions. The regular practice of *alternate breathing* increases the para-sympathetic activity, and lowers systolic blood pressure, as well as the respiratory rate.

It has been suggested, however, that people with high blood pressure, or other medical conditions, as well as pregnant women, may have to avoid practicing pranayama. As with all yoga techniques, you should consult your doctor or health expert.

The goal of the practice of pranayama has two levels: the first level is to 'purify' the body and *nadis* of excessive toxins (phlegm). The second level is to cause the breath to become slow and long, as well as subtle.

This trains the mind to be able to attain deep concentration, which leads to the outer fringes of samadhi.

Do keep in mind that these are the goals, independent of the techniques used.

Also, you should know that pranayama has a direct effect on the vagus nerve, which stretches from the brain stem to the abdomen region. The vagus nerve affects heart rate, sweating (for purification of the body), and gastro-intestinal peristalsis (the contraction and relaxation of the intestines, which moves the contents in the intestine and purifies the body of solid waste matter).

Pranayama involving deep breathing stimulates the vagus nerve, activating the parasympathetic nervous system, which slows the heart rate, and relieves stress.

OM

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