



# Can Yogic Breathing & Backward Bending Asanas Enhance Learning A Study Of Prääyāma On Sustained Attention In Elementary “TYPE D” PERSONALITY

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Part I

The Connection between Breath and Mind (Prääa and Manas) According to Yogic Tradition

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## ABSTRACT

Prääa is the vital energy of the universe, and according to yogic tradition, is the source from which we draw substance through the breathing process. Yogis, ancient masters of the inner science, teach that the breath is the essential link between body and mind, an energizing subtle body that integrates different levels of our being into a functional whole. For yogis, the nostrils are control mechanisms that not only serve breathing purposes, but also provide a means, through the practice of prääyāma, to improve our health, to change our state of mind, and to attain higher states of consciousness. Science has only recently begun to explore the impact of voluntarily regulated yoga breathing on the human framework. Findings suggest that by systematically regulating the speed and rhythm of breathing through the voluntary nervous system, that the autonomic functions, and thus neurological functions, can also be influenced.

Thus, enables the possibility for a shift from unconscious to conscious control of the bodily functions. The results of this research lend support to the yogic claim that self-mastery through the use of the breath can lead to steadiness

and enhancement of mind. The current inquiry seeks to illustrate both yogic and scientific approaches to the understanding of the relationship between breath and mind.

## Conclusions

Yogic tradition says that the mind and body do not directly interact. Rather, they relate to each other by an intermediate layer of functioning, which is *prāëa*, or the vital energy of the human framework associated with the breath. Recent scientific inquiry has also begun to corroborate this by linking the breath to physical and psychological functioning. Yogis, however, for thousands of years, have been using this knowledge through the practice of *prāëäyāma*.

Yoga texts describe that by extending and expanding the dimension of *prāëa*, and thus gaining mastery over it, internal awareness and consequently control over the mind-body complex is possible. The mechanism for this interaction is through the *pañca prāëas* through which the sense-organs, and thus, physical activities become endowed with life through the breath. With progression in *prāëäyāma*, the yogi is able to disconnect his consciousness from identification with the limited sense organs, and develop control over them (instead of the sense organs controlling him!). Thus he is able to bring the constantly fluctuating tendency of the mind away from the automatic reactions to likes and dislikes, and under conscious control. When steadiness of mind is achieved and works in conjunction with the intellect, the power of discrimination between what is right and what is wrong is enhanced. Thus self-mastery through the use of the breath is one method of Yogic wisdom that leads to steadiness of mind. This self-control, says Kaöha Upaniñad, is the key to spiritual progress, and has far reaching implications for human development through education, as will be considered in the following section.

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