



Perception of Breathing: A component of *Preksha* Meditation

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Abstract: *Shvash* means breathing. Normally human being breathes fifteen times in an average in a minute including both - inhalation and exhalation. However, during the outburst of emotions or anxiety, the breathing rate increases to twenty to twenty five breaths per minute and may increase further in the intensity of the emotions. It is believed that rapid breathing is often harmful to the health and may disturb the blood circulation.

Meditation (*dhyana*) becomes more effective in the above cases if it is built upon *asana* (physical posture), *pranayama* (breath control), *pratyahara* (control of the senses, moving the focus to the inside), and *dharana* (concentration). We know that during inhalation, the lungs get filled with the air and the diaphragm is lowered and in turn expands the abdomen. In contrast, during exhalation the lungs contract along with the abdominal muscles. If we add our attention with the breathing, we can see the breath as well as perceive our consciousness. Regular practice of perception of breathing imparts physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits to the practitioner.

Key words: *Shvash-Preksha*, Perception of Breathing and *Preksha* Meditation.

Introduction

Shvash-Preksha is a part of the *Preksha Dhyana*, a component of Jain Yoga. *Preksha* means 'to perceive' and *dhyana* means 'meditation'. The word '*Preksha*' is derived from the root word '*iksha*' that means 'to see'. Prefix '*Pra*' is added to make *Pra+iksha*. Now the meaning is 'to perceive carefully and profoundly being free from attachment and aversion'. In *Preksha Dhyana* one has to observe the internal phenomenon of his or her body. The practitioner has to transform carefully from the Gross Body to '*taijas sharir* (Electrical Body) followed by '*karma sharir* (Micro Body).

Basic components of *Preksha Dhyana* are (1) *Kayotsarga* (2) *Antar yatra* (3) *Shvash-Preksha* (4) *Sharir Preksha* (5) *Chetanya Kendra preksha* (6) *Leshya Dhyana* (7) *Bhavna* (8) *Anu Preksha*. Out of these, *Shvash-Preksha* is most vital for efficiency of respiration. It is important to note that while *Vipassana* teaches one to simply observe his or her breathe as it is and not to regulate it, but *Preksha* meditation teaches to relax the body by using one's breathing as a tool.

Technique of Perception of Breathing

The perception of breathing follows two stages -

- I. Perception of Deep Breathing
- II. Perception of Alternate Breathing

Perception of Deep Breathing

It includes

- Regulation of breathing – making it slow, deep and rhythmic.
- Allowing of abdominal muscles to expand during inhalation and contract during exhalation.
- Concentration of mind is fully on naval region. Perception of each inhalation and exhalation through the expansion and contraction of the abdominal muscles.
- Practicing slow and rhythmic breathing and perceive it.
- After a few minutes, attention is to be shifted to the junction of both the nostrils. Remaining aware of each and every breath in and out is essential.

Perception of Alternate Breathing

It includes

- Regulation of breathing making slow and rhythmic.
- Taking some time for inhalation and exhalation.
- After full exhalation, inhalation through left nostril and exhalation through right nostril. Then inhalation through right nostril and exhalation through the left nostril. These compose one round.
- Mind and the breathing should accompany continuously.
- This breathing exercise can be performed with breath holding inside and outside, but must be under expert's supervision and doctor's guidance.

Scientific observation of *Shvash-Preksha*

Breath is life. Every activity is closely related to breathing.

- ✓ Breathing is the source of energy.
- ✓ Respiration helps the body to throw out toxic CO₂.
- ✓ Right way of respiration reduces ill-health. Full respiration includes:
 - Moving diaphragm up and down
 - Contraction and expansion of intercostal muscles

- Moving clavicle muscles up and down
- ✓ Slow and deep breathing helps in
 - Reduction in wear and tear in the whole body.
 - Decrease in work - load of the heart.
 - Stoppage in unnecessary increase in blood pressure.
 - Increase in muscular rest.
- ✓ Slow, silent and full exhalation helps air to go out automatically
 - Contraction of abdominal muscles pushes the diaphragm upside. This action helps to remove further air from lungs. More vacating the lungs means more fresh air can be inhaled.
- ✓ Benefits of proper breathing consist of
 - Receiving of adequate O₂.
 - Proper gaseous exchange increasing functional property of cells.
 - Breath holding capacity boosts up exchange of gases in lung.
 - Cleaning of lungs through right breathing.
 - Improved suction capacity of lung by slow and long breathing.
 - The controlling power of the heart and the lungs through the right coordination of blood circulation the most efficient. This *Pran-dhara* increases the resistance power of the body and helps the body to remain free from disorders.

Spiritual perspective of *Shvash-Preksha*

- ✓ The powerful means of feeding of *pran-urja* is breath. Breathing is related to *pran* and *pran* to the subtle *pran* which is related to subtle body – the *karman-sarir*.
- ✓ O₂ in breath is transformed into energy. If the energy of *pran* is not there, then the consciousness can last no longer. So the deeper we breathe in, the more *pran*-energy we obtain. Breath is a part of the infinite power i.e. the consciousness the soul.
- ✓ Breathing is a support of meditation. One solution for controlling mind is the *pranayama*, the controlling process of breathing. Control the breath, mind gets controlled. Then the fickleness of the mind disappears. The simple solution to become spiritual is to connect the mind with the *shvash*.
- ✓ *Shvash* is pure, natural and pious support. We cannot have any *raga-dvesha* towards it.
- ✓ Breathing has a closer relation with the body and the mind. If there is breathing, there is life. Seeing the vibration of breathing, body, pran, and karm is seeing vibrations of the soul. *Shvash* manifests the consciousness. When the mind is restless, the breath is also restless. They influence each other very much.

During perception of breathing, we learn controlling, slowing down, and lengthening of breathing. “See yourself, through yourself” i. e. see the soul by the soul. This is the basic slogan of

the *Preksha Dhyana*. Here mind observes the breath. Mind, breath and consciousness remain together.

Some Research Works

Most of the research works relating to *Preksha* Meditation includes four to five components. Among these most of the researchers prefer *Kayotsarg*, *Anteryatra*, *Shvash Preksha* and *Jyoti Kendra Preksha* (Perception of White Colour at the Center of Enlightenment).

Preksha meditation is a powerful method for awakening and expanding consciousness as well as for strengthening the vital and psychic energy (**Acharya Mahaprajna, 2004**).

Gaur and Dayama (2008) concluded that sportsmen who participated four month of PM significantly improved the 14 personality factors out of 16.

Deshpande, Nagendra & Raghuram (2008) observed improvement in mood, quality of life and anxiety scores.

Some of the proven health benefits of meditation are decreased levels of stress and tension, decline in hospitalization as well as need for out-patient medical care, decreased rates of disease, decreased overall health care costs, reduced use of alcohol and other drugs, enhanced energy, strength and overall feelings of well-being, improved vegetative functioning, improved quality of sleep, decreased pain levels, looking and feeling younger and increased longevity (**Manocha, Black and Wilson 2012 & Goyal et al.2014**).

A thirty minutes PM module administered included Mahapran Dhavani, *Kayotsarg*, Long breathing and Perception of colour in a study by **Sanchetee, Jain and Agarwal (2017)**.

Gaur and Gusain (2017) reported that one month PM practice is beneficial in improving Mental Health of Employees of the organization that may lead them to happy personal and work life.

A significant increase in alpha waves was observed at 4 months of PM practice in young novice students. This increase was observed at 4 months and not at 2 months suggesting that longer practice of meditation is needed to bring out significant improvement (**Pragya and Sanchetee 2018**).

Conclusions

Breath is regarded as the bridge between the body and the consciousness. So it is essential for all of us to learn and practice the correct way of breathing, the vital force of life. Regular practice of perception of breathing imparts physical, psychological, and spiritual benefits to the practitioner. Regulation of blood pressure, reinforcement of the vital energy, regulation of the nervous system and the endocrine system, purification of the blood and promotion of good health are some examples of physical benefits.

Preksha Meditation is a cost-effective, non-invasive intervention with minimal risk of adverse effects and can be safely recommended for promotion of health. Perception of breathing provides peace of mind, enhances mental concentration, alleviates restlessness and anxiety and improves working efficiency of the mind and the body. This establishes control and balance of emotions, mitigates of negative traits such as ego, anger, and greed and improves outburst of emotions. Perception of alternate breathing is a scientific technique in which alternate breathing is practiced to help us establish the state of equanimity and lead a healthy life.

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