

Prana Vidya

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 Topic image

An ancient advanced yogic meditation technique.

The word *vidya* comes from the Sanskrit root *vid*, to know, and means 'knowledge'. During the period of the Upanishads *vidya* was used to mean meditation or *dhyana*. The word *prana* means 'life force'. So *prana vidya* literally means 'knowledge of the life force'. It can also be said to mean 'meditation on the life force' or 'discovery of the life force'. Prana vidya is a system of meditation by which we acquire knowledge of that particular aspect of consciousness known as prana, the life force that permeates the entire body. Prana vidya is the culmination of many years of yoga practice. Its theory and techniques are ancient but they have been revised by Swami Satyananda Saraswati to make them practical for the people of today.

The aim of prana vidya

The immediate aim of prana vidya is to awaken and manipulate prana consciously. By developing subtle awareness the practitioner is able to perceive and gain knowledge of the nature of prana, which in turn leads to new dimensions of awareness. Prana vidya is concerned with both the expansion of consciousness and the awakening of prana that eventually leads to meditation and perfect union--yoga. Healing is, in this light, only of secondary importance. In fact, prana vidya involves the awakening of the total personality and leads to self-realization or *moksha*, its ultimate goal.

What is prana vidya?

In prana vidya the practitioner extracts the life force essence, or prana, and sends it to various parts of the body. The practice enables the concentrated deeper force of consciousness to be carried to different parts of the body sequentially. It is somewhat similar to the practice of yoga nidra, the difference being that in yoga nidra the mind is taught to jump from one part of the body to another, whereas, in prana vidya the aim is to allow the awareness to flow to different centres in the body along specific channels or *nadis*. (*Nadi* literally means 'flow'.) The awareness of the different parts of the body gained through yoga nidra is combined with an awareness of the psychic pathways flowing to these parts.

Prana vidya is a technique that includes expansion, contraction, localization and visualization of pranic consciousness. Contraction of prana is used to calm down the turbulent tendencies of the mind. This contraction corresponds to an upward flow of prana and serves to concentrate the mind and still its chatter. Expansion of prana, on the other hand, is used when the mind is dull. In this case the flow is downwards. Localization of pranic consciousness is used to direct prana to a specific region of the body by means of the will; this is made much more powerful if the movement of prana is visualized. The two factors of awareness and visualization actually harness the power of the pranic energy. This power is then directed by pure willpower.

What is prana?

Prana is a Sanskrit word constructed from the syllables *pra* and *an*. *An* means 'movement' and *pra* comes from the prefix meaning constant. Therefore prana means 'constant motion'. This constant motion commences as soon as we are conceived in our mother's womb.

In the physical body we have two types of energy. One is known as prana shakti, and the other as manas or chitta shakti. Prana represents vital energy or dynamism while manas shakti represents mental energy.

This means that in every organ of the body there should be two channels supplying energy. Modern physiology describes two types of nervous systems, a sensory or information system, and a motor system, in addition to the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. These two systems are inter-connected in each and every organ of the body. In the same way, every organ is supplied with mental and pranic energy.

Prana is light or illumination. Sometimes you may be able to see this light; sometimes you may just have a dim, faint glimpse of it, or just memories of it. Prana is neither heavy nor light, neither hot nor cold. It has no sensation. It is not something that you feel after sitting in padmasana or siddhasana for half an hour. It is nothing like this. Prana has been described as a kind of complex, multi-dimensional energy consisting of a combination of electrical, magnetic, electromagnetic, ocular, thermal and mental energies. The five principle sub-divisions of prana, which exist in different parts of the body, have varying densities of ionic fields. They may be visualized as swirling clouds of differing colours and hues. These pranic clouds are free to expand or contract with or without the influence of any external factors.

Individual prana can be connected through another individual to cosmic prana or *mahaprana*, but the prana of the individual have first to be purified, because they are mixed with the consciousness of the physical body, with the mind, and with matter as a whole. When prana is separated from matter through the practices of yoga, the practitioner is able to perceive his body and his prana as two separate things. When prana is completely detached from physical matter, the individual prana becomes one with cosmic prana.

The nadis (energy network)

The pathways of pranic current, which flow throughout the body, are known as nadis. Nerves and nadis are two different things. Nerves relate to the body whereas nadis relate to the pranic, vital body, as well as to the more subtle bodies or *koshas*. Nadis should be considered as a process that is in constant movement. They provide energy, and operate within a vast communication network of fibre-like links carrying prana back and forth in every direction. According to the yogic texts, there are seventy-two thousand or more nadis through which prana and consciousness are distributed throughout the body.

Psychic breath

The psychic breath is the first key to prana vidya, and is the integration of the physical breath with awareness. In the initial stage of psychic breathing the only requirement is becoming aware of the breath without trying to affect its natural flow. Once this is achieved, the movement of breath is to be experienced in the form of ujjayi pranayama. Awareness of the deep sound and vibration we create during ujjayi (where the throat is gently contracted) and its movement during inhalation and exhalation completes the process of psychic breathing. Psychic breathing is an integral part of prana vidya and must be mastered to the point where it becomes extremely subtle and spontaneous.

Psychic passage

The second key to prana vidya is the psychic passage. This is any pathway in the body through which awareness, breath and prana are directed in one stream of combined force. We can make a psychic passage anywhere, to or from any part of the body. Once the passage is visualised, the psychic breath can be moved anywhere in the body using ujjayi pranayama. This will bring about an actual pranic transfer.

Psychic centres

The third key to prana vidya is the psychic centres or *chakras*. Chakras are vortexes of subtle prana located

at specific points in the spine. They were realised or 'seen' by the yogis in ancient times through psychic introspection. The practitioner has to become aware of how each chakra influences the activity of pranic energy, and what experience takes place when the various chakras are awakened. With the techniques of prana vidya the chakras can be awakened quickly.

Psychic sound

The fourth key to prana vidya is the psychic sound. According to nada yoga, sound manifests within as well as outside. The practice of nada yoga involves the withdrawal of auditory perception, so that we no longer hear external sounds. We observe any sounds that arise spontaneously from within the psychic space in the centre of the head, known as *chidakash*. The sounds begin in a very subtle way, and gradually the intensity increases. These sounds include the tinkling of bells or notes of a stringed instrument. The ultimate sound is the profound, throbbing, transcendental sound of the mantra Om.

Psychic symbol

The fifth key to prana vidya is the psychic symbol, which is experienced through the practice of concentration. This symbol can be any object on which we can fix our mind. It can be an abstract symbol, a scene from nature, a geometrical figure (*yantra*), the sun or moon, or anything that attracts us. By concentrating on the image of the symbol, we gradually develop the ability to see it internally, as clearly as we see it outside.

Benefits of prana vidya

The benefits of prana vidya are felt on the physical, psychological and spiritual levels. The first benefit is a complete charging of the body. You will feel that you have been reborn because you will be so fresh, relaxed and full of vitality. There is an improvement in the functioning of all the inner organs, the digestion, endocrinal system, respiratory system, circulatory system, heart, brain, muscles, nerves, etc. Prana vidya creates the expansion of consciousness in terms of attaining mental clarity, developing greater awareness and the ability to cope with all the situations of life. It gives finer control over the fluctuations of emotions, and increased rationality. The state of one pointed concentration or *dharana* is achieved spontaneously. However, it should be kept in mind that the ultimate goal of prana vidya is enlightenment.