

A study on *Prana Dharana* (Breath Meditation Technique) in Context of *Vigyan Bhairava Tantra*

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Abstract

The Vigyan Bhairava Tantra (VBT) is one of the most important spiritual texts of the world. It is a text that shows you how to expand your mind or awareness and liberate the energy from the clutches of matter. In VBT the emphasis is on practical methods to focus the mind and awareness. The Vigyan Bhairava Tantra (VBT) contains 112 Meditation Techniques called 'DHARANA' for self realization. Dharana is an essential stage in order to avoid uncharted flights of awareness. It gives training and a direction to the mind and awareness. Dharana we called 'concentration' and the concentration means one pointedness. Just as we need a sharp pencil to write with or a sharp knife to cut with, the mind also must be sharpened through the practice of concentration. In the yogic tradition, dharana belongs to the internal stage of raja yoga which is the path of mental discipline. Practice of Dharana refines the perception enables us to tune with your real state of being. Dharana is the way prescribed to refine the antahkarana. Prana means a subtle life force, which provides energy to different organs (including mind) and also controls many vital life process (e.g. circulation, respiration etc.). I have selected four shlokas of VBT which gives us the techniques (Dharana) for awareness to your breath called Prana dharana, through which we can find out the true self or consciousness. It helps us to reach the inner joy and enlightenment. Awareness of the pranic flows is the medium for these preliminary dharanas. In fact neither the body nor the mind can function without prana. Therefore by become conscious of our prana we can effectively control the body and mind. One has just to become aware of certain points in the breathing. These points are the basis of these techniques.

Key words: *Vigyan Bhairava Tantra*, Breath Meditation Technique, *Prana*, *Dharana*

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Introduction

The word **Tantra** is made up of two syllable, **tanoti**, which means 'expansion' and **trayati** which means 'libration' 'The final aim of tantra is to give man absolute knowledge (Satyasangananda, 2003, p16).

The **Vigyan Bhairav Tantra** is a key text of the **Trika** school of **Kashmir Shaivism**. It is a discourse between the god **Shiva** and his consort **Devi** or **Shakti** , It briefly presents 112 meditation methods or centering techniques (dharanas). These include several variants of **breath awareness**, concentration on various centers in the body, **non-dual awareness**, chanting, imagination and visualization and contemplation through each of the senses. (Osho, 1998)

About the text

The text is a chapter from the **Rudrayamala Tantra**. This literally means the tantra of union between Rudra and his Shakti, which in modern terms represents the **union of consciousness and energy**. (Satyasangananda, 2003, p10) The text appeared in 1918 in the Kashmir Series of Text and Studies (*KSTS*). The Kashmir Series published two volumes, one with a commentary by **Kshemaraja and Shivopadhyaya** and the other with a commentary, called **Kaumadi**, by **Ananda Bhatta**.

In relation to **yoga**, the system of tantra and more especially VBT, takes up the spiritual journey from a higher point. **It does not impose the codes of conduct and other preliminary steps of yoga, but simply asks one to select a point of dharana and dive deep into it**. OSHO says that the very words VIGYANA BHAIKAVA TANTRA mean "the technique to going beyond consciousness." VIGYANA means consciousness, BHAIKAVA means the state which is beyond consciousness, and TANTRA means the method: the technique to going beyond consciousness. All these techniques of Shiva's are simply turning

the mind from the future or the past to the present.

Dharana

The word dharana literally means 'to hold' or 'to possess'. The state of dharana is attained when you are able to hold or possess something to the exclusion of all else in chidakash, the space of consciousness. Success in dharana leads to 'dhyana' or meditation, which is the state of complete and spontaneous absorption in the object of dharana. (Satyasangananda, 2003, p29) **Dharana is one-pointed focus on something** and dhyana is the state of total unbroken awareness of that.

Dharana (Meditation Techniques) comes from the word **dhri**, 'to hold firmly'. Dharana is a type of concentration where the mind is confined within a limited sphere defined by the object which is being concentrated upon. Dharana consists in keeping the mind continuously engaged in the consideration of the object and to bring it back immediately after the connection is broken. The objective is to reduce the frequency of such interruptions leading to their complete elimination, ultimately with complete focusing of the mind on the object. (Shankar, 2002)

Dharana trains the awareness to hold onto whatever object has been chosen without fluctuation. It is not a process of thinking, but of seeing, the mind plays no part in this process. Dharana is a process of mental training that enables the aspirant to focus and direct the awareness as he desire, without any interference from the indriyas or senses. The state of dharana, which is the basis of all the practice in VBT, is also described in the textbook of yoga. Dharana is defined as:

"Deshbandhas chittasya dharana" PYS 3/1
"Binding the mind at one place is dharana."

Patanjali has stated this definition of Dharana. The natural meaning of this sutra is "Deshbandh

of chitta is Dharana". Chitta i.e. the mind is extremely wavering; to engage it in a particular area is Dharana.

What is Prana Dharana?

Prana is the vital force that sustains not only the body, but also creation at every level. The **Sanskrit word prana** is a combination of two syllables, **Pra** and **na**, and denotes constancy, a force in constant motion. Prana exists in sentient being as the **energy that drives every action**, voluntary and involuntary, every thought, every level of the mind and body. (Niranjanananda, 2009)

Breath is an external manifestation of the force of prana. It is one of the medium we take cosmic prana within. Breath is the flywheel that regulates the entire machine of the body. According to the second chapter of **Bhagavad Gita**, the wise man is one who has experiential knowledge of prana, for without practical knowledge, reading the scripture is mere window-shopping. (Rama, 1998, p65)

According to Rama (1993, p49) Prana is the energy which underlies all activity, physical and mental. Rama (1993,p35) states according to traditional yoga psychology, the breath not only influence the body and the mind but can serve as a powerful instrument for inducing states of higher consciousness. Gore (2005, p130) advocate the term "**prana dharana**" in which one passively observe the incoming and outgoing flow of breath. This is the technique by which one can learn to focus his attention consciously. So Prana dharana means to aware of your own breath. According to Kimbrough, (2005, October) "The breath is always with us and we can learn to use it to calm and to concentrate on the consciousness. In Yogic Text **Hath Yoga Pradipika (2.2)** it is mentioned that **When prana moves, chitta (consciousness) moves.** So there is strong connection between Prana (breath) and Chitta (Consciousness). By create awareness to our breath (*prana*) we can calm down our unnecessary thought pattern and can feel a state of stillness, where the consciousness exists in its pure form.

In context of Prana dharana the Breath meditation is the key meditation in the Buddha's own spiritual life. He uses the Breath for his contemplation (Nirvana). (Tan, 2003, p137) Buddha called it **Anapana (Pali)**. (Mindfulness on breathing) which is the primary part of **Vipassana Meditation**. So **Prana dharana (Breath meditation)** is the important aspect of in all Meditation techniques or DHARANA which I explain here according to Vigyan Bhairava Tantra (VBT).

Breathing Meditation Techniques or Prana dharana according to VBT

The Prana (breath) is an important aspect for dharana in VBT and also in other tantric and yogic practices. Breath is life, and it is also the very force of creation. The awareness of upward flow prana and downward flow of apana can be accentuated by, the movement of the breath in the body.

Many meditation techniques may attempt to quiet the mind, by focusing the mind on a single point. It is easier to still the mind, by concentrating on something, than by not concentrating on anything. **The breath is being well known as one of the easiest ways to concentrate the mind.** That is why the meditations involving breath mention here.

1st Technique

The supreme energy breath goes upwards with exhalation and downwards with inhalation. By concentrating on the two place of its origin, one acquires the state of fulfillment.VBT/24

This verse and the next three verses are asking us to concentrate on the gap between two breaths. There is a gap between our inhale and exhale. There is another gap between our exhale and inhale. We are to focus our attention on these two gaps. This is what is meant by concentrating on the two place of its origin. The breath originates from this pause.

Why the origin (the gap) of the breath is important? The breath is pure energy. She is the

Supreme Goddess herself. She originates from God and return to God. By concentrating on her origin, one is concentrating on God himself.

IInd Technique

Concentrate on the two place where the breath turns from inside to outside and also from outside to inside. O Goddess, in this way, through the Goddess, the essential form of God is realized. VBT/25

This meditation is a slight variation of the previous one. Instead of focusing on the origin of the inhale and the exhale, one should focus on the turning of the breath. Turning of the breath is the area where the inhale is ending, there is a gap, and then the exhale starts. The focus of attention in this versus is larger. It encompasses not just the gap, between two breaths, but also a little on either side of it- where the inhale is ending and the out breath is beginning and also where the exhale is ending and the inhale is starting. In a complete breathing cycle, the breath turns twice from inside to outside and again from outside to inside.

IIIrd Technique

At the center where the breath does not enter or the breath does not go out, all thoughts disappear. The form of energy becomes visible, and through her the form of God appears.VBT/26

Verse 26 is not a separate meditation practice. It is as same as the meditation that has been given in verse 24. It is repeated again for emphasis. It is a simple and powerful technique for stilling the mind. When we are still, silent, we reach to the God. At the center of the gap between two breaths we are completely still. We are not even breathing. By being aware of that middle state, that stillness, all thoughts disappear. Because our body is completely still at that time our mind also become still. When our mind becomes still the form of God appears.

As you become aware for the stillness the gap between two breaths the mind becomes more and more still. Fewer thoughts will arise, and you will start feeling more peaceful and joyful.

Finally, if the mind is stilled long enough, one reaches the state of enlightenment.

IVth Technique

When by itself the breath is retained after inhalation or exhalation- then in the end, through energy known as peace, peace is reveled.VBT/27

When we put our awareness on breath, gradually breath will slow down. The cycle time of our breath is increase. The span of our breath increase, and we breath fewer times per minute and our mind calms down and we feel more peaceful. Gradually, the span of each breath keeps increasing. It takes us longer to breath in and longer to breath out. The gap between breaths was also in increasing order. The breath becomes subtle and more subtle. Finally a stage may achieved when the breaths stops altogether, that is the stage this verse refers to.

Discussion

People have wondered for centuries, what it is about the '**breath**' that makes it such a powerful meditation technique. Basically **the mind is attracted the rhythms**. It is easier to focus the mind on a rhythm, and **breath is the most natural rhythm found in life**. VBT says that it is possible to reach the most heightened state of consciousness by directing your total awareness, not fragmented awareness, to any of these points (Satyasangananda, 2003, p84) of Breath meditation as I described here in the shlokas.

Any great artist, musician mathematician, scientist. Businessman, sportsman, politician, statesman, siddha or saint attain perfection in their field only became they are adept dharana. Great achievements wound not be possible unless they were able to focus the awareness on their chosen field. Without focus and concentration the mind, it is not possible to accomplish even to day to day task. (Satyasangananda.2003, p58)

Dharana (concentration) is the first stage of meditation. The second stage is dhyana, unbroken

concentration or absorption (Sturgess, 2004) Dharana is the practicing to keep alive the mind, intelligence and consciousness in a single state of attention and recalling that intense state of attention when they get distracted. (Iyengar, 2000, p 15). Dharana is a therapy at the mental level also, as it harnesses, focuses, energizes, directs and ultimately liberates the mind. Through this practice the mind is directed away from negativity towards positive experience and expression.

Conclusion

The practice of dharana, affects all the level of our being, physical mental, emotional, psychic as well as spiritual. It removes the blocks and obstacles from every level. On account of this, we also drive a feeling of well-being, dynamism, confidence and immense power within from the practice (Satyangananda, 2003, p60)

So we can say that **dharana is very important for our spiritual evolution as well as total well being.** Swami Niranjanananda (1999) states "A concentrated mind is a relaxed mind. Concentration is vital for everything that you do in life because **it prevents the mind from wandering aimlessly** in all directions. Without concentration you can achieve nothing."

Therefore **Dharana is important not only for spiritual experience, but also for our day to day life, so that we can be healthy, happy, and balanced individuals.** Dharana helps us to focus better, it is an active process. Here we fix our minds on one object and observe how it does not remain steady. We focus our mind and witness the change at the focal point. In the practice of these four Prana Dharana we are not alter the breath in any way, but to become aware of the certain points of our Prana that is breath and focus the mind on it. The Kashmiri masters are very used to with these meditations. According to his philosophy, **the gap between breaths is special; it is moment of complete stillness. And that is the state where we found 'God,' that is pure consciousness. So, therefore it can be concluded as the Prana dharana (breath meditation) can helps ones to achieve the silence state of mind. This state is known**

as 'dhyān', the continuous awareness towards the supreme soul or a state of pure consciousness. This is pathway to achieve completeness and joy. It is an approach towards holistic health.

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