

Importance of Pranayama in Well-being

As India and the world is awakening to the exceptional benefits of pranayama or control and regulation of the breath, some light ought to be shed on the origins of this phenomenon. The relevance of traditional breathing practices becomes pronounced when viewed against the spiraling instances of anxiety related disorders in modern life.

The word 'pranayama' is a compound of prana and ayama, which implies 'restraint' in yogic texts. Patanjali's Yogasutra defines breath control as stopping the flow of inhalation and exhalation. In contrast to the current obsession with bodily postures in yogic practice, the defining aspect in traditional texts is pranayama. Pranayama in the classical tradition was not merely a breathing exercise but a disciplined method of regulating internal balance. This underlying principle of physiological and psychological regulation can be observed consistently across texts from the Yogasutra (200 BCE-400 CE) to the Hatha Pradipika (15th c). In the contemporary context, this aligns with the modern understanding of autonomic control and stress reduction. Thus, pranayama functions as a preventive health mechanism rather than a mere supplementary practice.

Control of breath is one of the oldest documented forms of spiritual discipline. An explanation for breath manipulation is provided in the Chandogya Upanishad. An ascetic advises his son, 'Just as a bird tied by a string flies off in all directions and, on not reaching any other place to stay, returns to where it is tied, similarly, the mind flies off in all directions and, on not reaching any other place to stay, returns to the breath. For the mind, is tied to the breath'.

Patanjali's Yogasutra notes that pranayama should only begin after asana (physical posture) has been mastered. Focusing mainly on mental discipline, the aim is to still the mind so that it becomes fit for concentration.

Dattatreya yoga shastra (13th.c) is a Hatha yoga text, framed as a dialogue between sages Dattatreya and Sankriti. It was the first to incorporate Patanjali's eight-fold yoga with physical techniques such as mudras (energy flows) and asanas (postures). The text underlines Kevala kumbhaka or absolute retention, unaccompanied by breathing which is mastered as a result of holding one's breath.

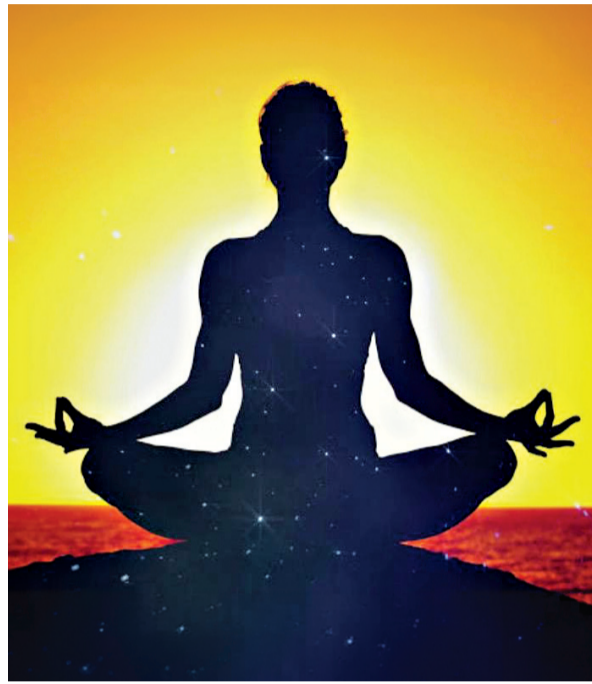
The Hatha Pradipika of Svatantrama represents a radical shift in how the body is evaluated. It represents a combination of several influences like the Natha sampradaya tradition and tantric thought. The section on pranayama is vital as it considers breath imbalance as a cause for disease. A key contribution of this work is its exploration of treating illnesses through different breathing techniques, assigning specific pranayamas to particular diseases. The Hatha Pradipika emphatically states that practice must begin with the easier techniques leading



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to higher intensity techniques like the bhasrika. The text presupposes guidance from a competent teacher to prevent improper practice.

While the classical texts articulated these methods through the language of prana, nadis, and agni, their underlying concern was the regulation of internal balance. Breath was understood as the mediator between the mind and the body. Its significance lay in enhancing vitality, emotional stability and metabolic rhythm. In today's context, this emphasis on balance and disciplined regulation finds resonance in the modern understanding of autonomic control, stress response and physiological equilibrium.

According to modern day scientific research, pranayama can be instrumental in helping several health conditions.

Oxygen consumption is used as a means to understand the metabolic activity of the body. Studies based on the effects of ujjayi pranayama coupled

with short and prolonged breath retention have reported increase in oxygen consumption. Hypertensive patients who follow sukha pranayama even for a short duration report a significant reduction in pulse pressure, and mean arterial pressure. Anuloma Viloma (breathing through alternate nostrils) curbs anxiety and stress in all those prone to such issues. Studies on the correlation between breath regulation and longevity are also being pursued.

The nuances of pranayama and the perils of doing it incorrectly without guidance should be spelt out. One may accrue the benefits of guided pranayama by joining yoga communities. One may also learn through the online medium. The well-known Bihar School of Yoga in Munger runs the 'Satyananda Yoga for everyone' series on its official website which is a boon for beginners. This free of cost online programme with detailed videos teaches the intricacies of breath regulation. Similarly, the Iyengar Yoga Centre in Rishikesh and Pune as well as the Patanjali Yoga Kendra in Rishikesh have a range of online and offline courses operational throughout the year which one may opt for depending on one's convenience.

India which is poised at this juncture to be a global leader must recognize and reclaim the powerful practice of pranayama that lies at the core of attaining spiritual prowess. In order to make this practice a household phenomenon, the accent has to be on improving the scale and quality of implementation. Systematic introduction of breath regulation in schools, workplaces, healthcare systems, and its popularisation through consistent public awareness campaigns can transform it from a niche wellness practice into a universal life skill.

The National Educational Policy 2020 has made room for the inclusion of yoga into school and college curricula to increase the concentration span of students. Schools can mandate a short 10 minute pranayama session as part of the morning assembly. Corporate organisations can adopt brief breaks between work shifts where the employees rejuvenate themselves with the help of certain asanas or pranayamas. Breath regulation can be even introduced as part of short duration protocols in flights to combat fatigue that arises from long journeys. Making use of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) schemes, public awareness should be promoted through TV and radio in smaller towns and rural areas.

As individuals and institutions must perceive breath regulation not merely as a wellness practice, but as a crucial tool for preventive healthcare. Strengthening its integration into education, healthcare frameworks and daily routine with correct guidance and discipline would ensure the continuation of this civilisational knowledge to serve individual well-being and collective resilience.

Fable with Moral

Yudhishtira's journey to heaven

(Mahabharata, Book 17, Mahaprasthanika parva)



The story of Yudhishtira and his canine companion from the Mahabharata is perhaps the most poignant lesson on integrity and compassion.

At the end of their earthly journey, the Pandavas climbed the Himalayas approaching the celestial gates of swarga (heaven). Unable to complete the difficult expedition, Draupadi and four of the brothers fell. Yudhishtira being the only exception, continued. Throughout the arduous climb, a stray dog followed him faithfully.

When Yudhishtira finally reached the gate, deity Indra appeared in his golden chariot to escort him to heaven. However, Indra stopped the dog, stating that animals had no place in the celestial realm.

Yudhishtira refused to enter. He told Indra that the creature has abandoned everything to follow him. To abandon

a devoted soul for his own happiness would amount to a great sin. He said that he did not seek a heaven where there was no room for the loyal. Indra tested him, pointing out that Yudhishtira had already left his brothers behind. Yudhishtira calmly replied that he could not help the dead, but he could choose not to betray the living.

At that moment, the dog transformed into Dharma, the God of Righteousness. It was the penultimate test. Yudhishtira's unwavering commitment to Dharma (duty) proved that true virtue lies in protecting those who depend on us, regardless of their status.

Moral of the Fable

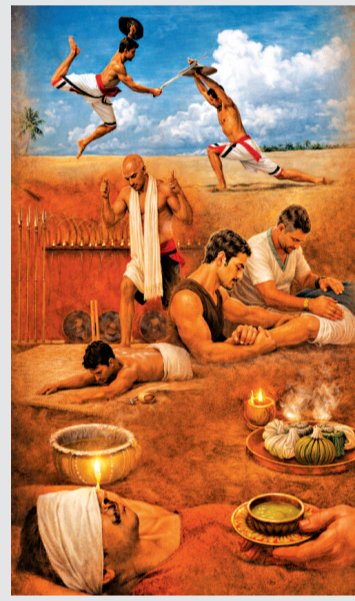
We should be loyal to those who stand by us in tough times. True integrity is refusing to compromise one's principles even for the ultimate reward.

Did you know?

Beyond its combat prowess, Kalaripayattu is a profound healing system. At its core lies Marma Kalvi, the mastery of 108 vital points where the life force (uyir) resides.

Its medical tradition, Kalar Maruttuvam, includes several specialized treatments. Some of these are: Chavitti Uzhichil (deep-tissue foot massage), Kizhithirumu (heated herbal bundles for joint inflammation), Kaduva (bone setting and realignment of displaced joints or fractured limbs), Marma Thirummu (energy manipulation at blocked vital points), Pichu (warm oil-soaked cloth application for chronic pain), and Lepamam (herbal paste to reduce swelling).

Thus, Kalaripayattu is not just a martial art; it is a centuries-old science of holistic body restoration.



Wisdom Word Search

S G N A H A R A H I K A
W A A L I B W L X P A N
A L T Q M I O J A S A V
S R A X A N Y A I L K I
T P A I V J N I D R A V
H A J P T A T Q P I O R
Y A T R Y R A G A Y T D
A Y M A T O I V S O L H
I F P N E G Y H N G Q A
T K A A P Y A L A A D T
E S G P R A N A I S U U
A H Y U R V E D A O I W

WORDS TO FIND

Ahara, Arogya, Ayurveda, Dhātu, Nidra, Ojas, Prana, Sattva, Swasthya, Yoga

AHARA - Nourishment intake shaping both physical health and mental state.

AROGYA - From a (absence) + roga (disease): a state of physical well-being and freedom from illness.

AYURVEDA - From ʔyus (life) + veda (knowledge): the science of balanced living.

DHATU - Fundamental bodily tissues that sustain structure, strength, and vitality.

NIDRA - Restorative sleep essential for healing, memory, and equilibrium.

OJAS - Vital essence derived from proper digestion, associated with immunity and vigor.

PRANA - Life force carried through breath, sustaining bodily and mental functions.

SATTVA - Quality of clarity, harmony, and mental balance in consciousness.

SWASTHYA - Being "established in oneself"; holistic well-being of body and mind.

YOGA - Union of body, mind, and breath through disciplined practice.

Marvels of India

SUSHRUTA

Ancient Indian Stalwart of Medicine and Surgery
Sushruta (Varanasi, sixth century BCE) was an ancient Indian physician and surgeon who made trailblazing contributions in plastic and cataract surgery. He authored the Sushruta Samhita: a foundational treatise on Ayurveda that exemplifies Bharat's integration of surgery, anatomy and holistic healing. It is deemed one of the most important surviving ancient treatises on treatment. It details over 300 surgical procedures and 120 instruments, reflecting unparalleled medical insight.



Master of Surgical Techniques and Precision

He describes complex operations like rhinoplasty (nose reconstruction using cheek flaps), cataract surgery with specialised needles and lithotomy for stone removal: all performed with antiseptic techniques using wine and alkaline solutions. He classifies surgeries into excision, scarification, and probing, emphasising precision and minimal invasion, centuries before modern surgical standards.

Innovative Anatomy and Anatomical Training

He advocated dissecting cadavers, preserved in water or honey, for anatomical study, detailing 500 muscles, 40 tissues and 300 bones. The training involved hands-on practice on watermelons, clay models and dead animals, highlighting a scientific rigour that made ancient Bharat a lighthouse of medical sciences.

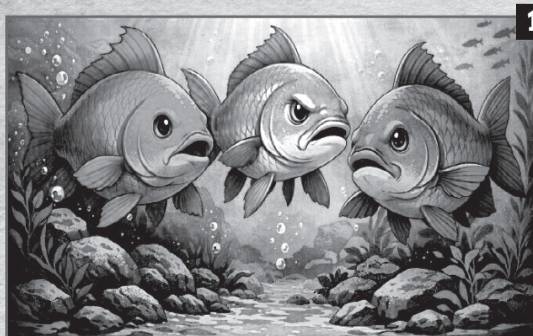
QUIZ Health, Nutrition & Well-being

Questions	Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
1 Which one of these ancient Indian health systems is said to have primarily originated from the Dravidian civilization?	Ayurveda	Unani	Siddha	Homeopathy
2 Kapha, Vata, and Pitta are the foundational concepts in the traditional medical system of Ayurveda, where they represent the primary components of an individual's constitution and personal metabolic tendencies. Which ancient text mentions them in a detailed manner?	Charaka Samhita	Bhagavati Sutra	Saundarananda	Yogasutra
3 Which one of these Indian classical dances is preferred for strengthening, toning, and building endurance in the thigh muscles?	Sattriya	Manipuri	Kuchipudi	Bharatanatyam
4 Whose health is considered the foundation for overall well-being of an individual as per our traditional Indian health systems?	Muscles	Gut	Nerves	Lungs
5 Which foods are good for gut health as per the Unani health system?	Samosa & Icy Drink	Salty Banana & Lemon	Fish & Milk	Red Meat & Coffee

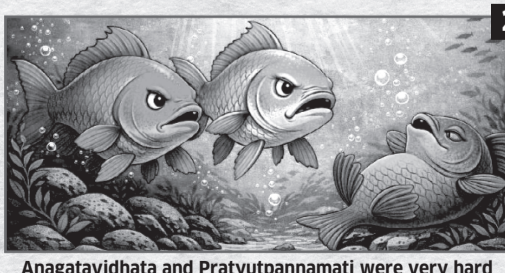
ANSWERS: 1 - C, 2 - A, 3 - D, 4 - B, 5 - B

panchatantra

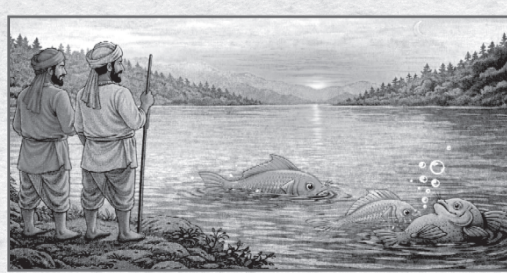
The Three Fishes



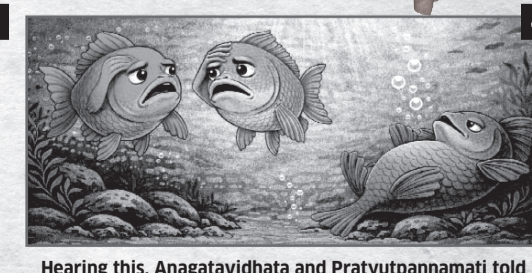
1 Once upon a time, in a lake, there lived three very large, fishes, Anagatavidhata, Pratyutpannamati and Yadhavishya.



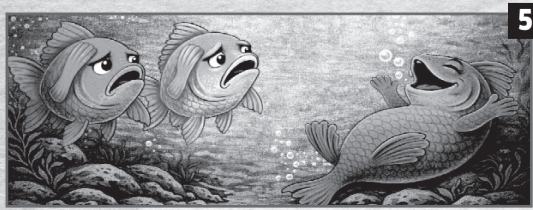
2 Anagatavidhata and Pratyutpannamati were very hard working and practical in their approach, whereas Yadhavishya believed more in fate and had a laid back approach to life.



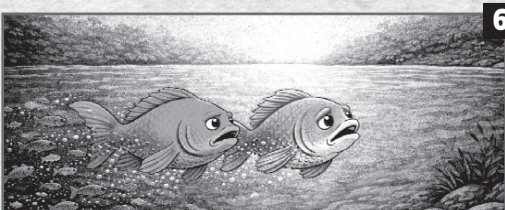
3 One evening, two fishermen were passing near the lake and talking among themselves, "This lake is full of good fish; let us come back tomorrow and catch some fish."



4 Hearing this, Anagatavidhata and Pratyutpannamati told their friends, "We are in a great danger. Tomorrow the two fishermen will come to catch us. We should leave from here and go to the other end of this lake and hide ourselves."



5 Hearing them, Yadhavishya laughed and said, "You cowards! Why should we leave this place? We have been living here for a long time. So far none of our friends have been fished out by anyone. If we are fated to die nobody can save us. Therefore, my decision is not to go."



6 But Anagatavidhata and Pratyutpannamati quickly swam to the other side of the lake with some of their friends.



7 The next morning, two fishermen came to the lake as planned and cast their nets. Poor Yadhavishya along with many other fish who believed in luck were caught in the net.



MORAL OF THE STORY: Those who leave things to fate and believe in luck destroy themselves.