

Cale Vāte Calam Cittam

– As is the Breath so is the Psyche.



The concept according to my teacher, oft quoted by Krishnamacharya, appears in the second verse of Chapter Two in the Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā. It follows the opening verse which introduces Prāṇāyāma albeit with caveats around certain prerequisites.

Firstly establish an Āsana as a firm seat, not as simple as it seems given the predilection for action Āsana contrasting a difficulty in remaining seated, upright and still for half an hour.

Secondly the diet needs to be sorted in terms of being nourishing (not spartan or predominantly raw) and in appropriate quantities.

It is interesting that this priority is introduced before Prāṇāyāma rather than before Āsana discussed within the first chapter of the text.

One can reflect on the significance of this in terms of Prāṇāyāma having more subtle intentions and outcomes than Āsana and therefore the impact of appropriate and inappropriate food and eating habits having more impact on the subtle body.

Thirdly we need a teacher to personally instruct us on how to practice, where to start, how to progress and what are the signs, both positive and negative to consider. This is especially important as Prāṇāyāma is a practice that is a slow burner (excuse Yoga pun on Agni and Mala).

Thus it requires months if not years of dedicated practice to begin to realise its fruits. I often say that it requires at least five years to fully appreciate the nuances of Nāḍī Śodhana.

Not so simple in these days of factory style production lines of students and group training of group teachers.

Also in these days of immediate gratification, externalised goals and Lululemon and Nike style priorities such Sādhana may not glitter very brightly both as a practice and a studio filler.

Plus one can also muse on how its difficult here for teachers to visibly display their 'skills' as an impressive inspiration to their clientele.

Prāṇāyāma is a special art and one that is at the heart of both Haṭha and Rāja Yoga techniques (the reader may wish to refer back to an earlier musing 'Prāṇāyāma within Rāja Yoga and Haṭha Yoga' on this topic).

It is also a practice that is at the forefront of the practices taught by Krishnamacharya, as is emphasised by his quote "Haṭha Yoga is Prāṇāyāma".

This is curious given that what he is mostly renowned for today is his influence on the modern world of Āsana. This influence even arouses debate these days around as to did he invent this or innovate that from, etc.

Yet when it comes to his teaching of Prāṇāyāma little is mentioned and one can see clearly how the origins of the practices that inform his teaching have remained unchanged over many, many centuries.

Finally my own observations are that there appears to be a dichotomy firstly between the obvious importance of this practice and yet it being the most neglected practice amidst the repertoire of teachers teachings (and thus personal practice?) and students learning of important tools to help transform the mind.

*"Use Āsana for problems of the body and
Prāṇāyāma for problems of the mind."*

- T Krishnamacharya

Secondly that the priority given to it by Krishnamacharya and Desikachar appears to often not be equally emphasised amongst those teachers themselves claiming to be working in, or following, or influenced by 'the teachings of Krishnamacharya'.