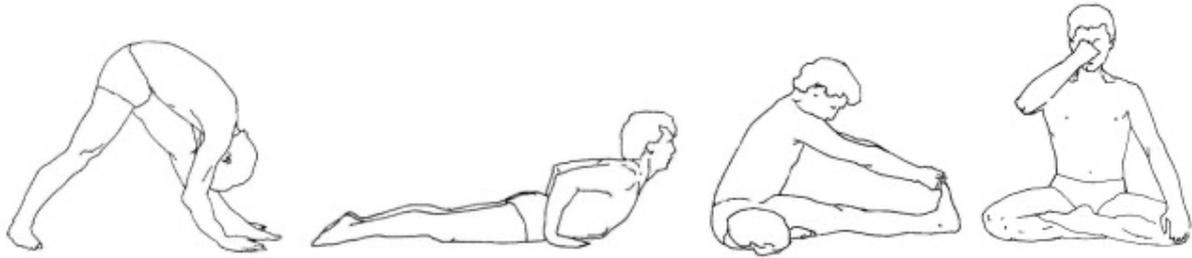


The breath can be a key towards unlocking the mystery of the relationship between.....



In looking at how to deepen (rather than broaden) our personal practice, choosing to focus on exploring the breath can be a key towards unlocking the mystery of the relationship between body, breath, mind and that which is both beyond and within.

*"Yoga is more about exploring
the movement of the mind, whilst
Āsana is more about exploring
the movement of the body.
The vehicle common to exploring both
is the movement of the breath.
The yoking of all three is towards the goal of
experiencing the source of all movement."*

Here, from the viewpoint of T Krishnamacharya, an avenue for deepening an exploration into the potential of the breath within our practice can be through a systematic and progressive slowing in the cyclic patterning of our breath. To access this deepening we may have to reconsider our practice, not just in terms of what we do with our body, but also what we do with the breath within the various Yoga practices associated with our body.

However, this means firstly knowing what our breath rate per minute is within the various elements that comprise our Āsana practice. For example, we would need to have acquired some basic information around what is the length and how is the stamina of our breath, in say standing back extension Āsana such as Uttānāsana or Utkāṭāsana, or prone front extension Āsana such as Bhujāṅgāsana or Śalabhāsana.

*"Explore how the Breath can:
– Challenge Standing Āsana.
– Support Lying Āsana.
– Develop Inverted Āsana.
– Stimulate Prone Backbend Āsana.
– Refine Sitting Āsana.
– Channel Sitting Mudrā.
– Transcend Seated Prāṇāyāma."*

Without the input arising from these preliminary components, it is not really possible to propose an appropriate Vinyāsa Krama for the breath, in terms of firstly, establishing a starting point, secondly, establishing an aim and thirdly, what are the number of steps necessary to build a potential bridge to guide the practitioner between the starting point and the aim.

Here also, it could be considered that, until we have an understanding of these initial responses of the breath to both an individual Āsana, as well as groups of Āsana, we have no clear strategy in the building of a developmental pathway towards progressively slowing the number of breaths per minute within all the Āsana aspects of our Haṭha practice.

Furthermore, looking beyond Āsana. Without this initial sense of the links between the realities and the potentials of the breath in Āsana according to each and every student, how will we be able to correlate the map with the journeyer, if we wish to personally explore and skilfully progress from the grosser to the subtler aspects of Haṭha Yoga?

*"Because of the different uses of breathing,
he strongly believes that the beginning of Prāṇāyāma is in Āsana.
Āsana, and Āsana alone,
with proper breathing techniques,
leads you to the idea of Prāṇāyāma."
– TKV Desikachar on 'The Yoga of T Krishnamacharya'*

In other words, what is the relationship of the breath within the triad of the spine, the internal fire and the psychic activity, as we expand and refine our exploration of Haṭha Yoga from the practice of Āsana, through to including the practice of Mudrā and the practice of Prāṇāyāma?

*"In the beginning, the breath in Āsana
sets the direction for our Prāṇāyāma practice.
As we develop this, the breath in Prāṇāyāma
sets the direction for our Āsana practice."*

So where to start in this progressive slowing in the cyclic patterning of our breath? As with many Yogawise, the journey starts with exploring the breath in and throughout the practice of Āsana. However for many also, the concept of systematically and progressively lengthening the breath and evaluating its possibilities within each and every Āsana may be less familiar.

Hence, underpinning these practice principles are a number of core concepts within the Viniyoga toolbox, such as in an adult practitioner the priority of mastery of the breath as an indicator of a mastery of the form.

*"Once you lose the breath in Āsana,
effort becomes force."*

These principles can be explored through contrasting breath lengths in different categories of Āsana, such as comparing the possibilities with the breath in back stretch Āsana, with the breath in front stretch Āsana, with the breath in inverted Āsana. Or, looking at how to systematically cultivate a longer breath over a period of a few months within a single Āsana, or single category of Āsana.

*"Most importantly,
he also has gone to the final limits of the use of the breathing in postures.
He found, and he insists,
that breathing is an essential tool in the practice of Āsana.
Varying the way to breathe, varying the length of the breath,
using different combinations of postures and breath,
he has proven that it is possible to modify postures
to meet the requirements of individuals.
For him, breathing is like the steering wheel of a car."
– TKV Desikachar on 'The Yoga of T Krishnamacharya'*

What might we do with this within a wider perspective of a systematic and progressive slowing in the cyclic patterning of our breath? This is where we turn our attention from considering the length of the breath, towards considering how this will translate into the number of breaths per minute within Āsana. Of course this will vary somewhat according to the category and intensity of the individual Āsana or groups of Āsana.

However, within these variations we can detect a consistent baseline within the rise and fall of our daily, seasonal or lifestyle fluctuations. A further developmental factor here is the relationship with the breath within the different aspects of Haṭha practice, as in the relationship of Āsana to Mudrā, and the relationship of both Āsana and Mudrā to Prāṇāyāma. Here, each is seen as a progressive potential for refinement of the length and the subtlety of the breath, both being reflected through the mirror of breaths per minute.

For example, when working with Āsana we can start with four breaths per minute, then with Mudrā slow it to three breaths per minute and finally with Prāṇāyāma, slow it again to two breaths per minute.

An accomplished practitioner may be working with three breaths a minute in Āsana, two breaths a minute in Mudrā and one breath a minute with Prāṇāyāma.

Whereas a less experienced practitioner may be working on five breaths a minute in Āsana, four breaths a minute in Mudrā and three breaths a minute in Prāṇāyāma.

The starting point does not matter and is something that is appropriate to the history, health and training of the student. What is more important is that no matter where we start from, the journey into the mystery of the breath and its relationship to the slowing of psychic activity, it is initiated through the progressive slowing of our breathing patterns within Āsana.

*"Ultimately our experience of the Āsana is refined
through the mystery of the breath,
rather than the mastery of the form."*

This mystery becomes both the map and the journey within the longer term developmental refinement of the practice limbs of Āsana, Mudrā and Prāṇāyāma within the evolution of Haṭha Sādhana towards Rāja Sādhana.