



Prāṇāyāma – Where to Start? Part Three

In the previous two articles we discussed Krishnamacharya's teachings around his understanding of and approach to the viniyoga or application of Prāṇāyāma.

Firstly in terms of Āsana being the starting point for exploring the breath in order to set a starting point and as a guideline for the direction of our Prāṇāyāma.

Secondly the importance of considerations around Prāṇāyāma as a process in terms of being in it for the long haul rather than only looking at practices which offer immediate fruits after a single practice or class.

The second post also commented on the need to leave more than enough time during our Yoga practice for Prāṇāyāma, rather than it being the token twiddle at the end of the practice.

I would like to use this post to consider how we need to add a structure within which we can build content. Without a structure our practice in this area can easily become random in terms of length or haphazard in terms of consistency.

So where to start with building a framework for adding actual content? Here we need to consider the relationship of the length of time we commit in practicing Āsana in proportion to the length of time we are going to commit to sit with Prāṇāyāma.

Krishnamacharya taught models for linking the proportions of the components of practice. These proportions varied and changed according to our age, but always at the heart of the practice was, as S Ramaswami once described it, "a decent dose of Prāṇāyāma".

This process towards incorporating a fixed window exclusively for the practice of Prāṇāyāma needs a personal commitment towards learning the art of Prāṇāyāma as being different, though linked, to Āsana. Whatever art we wish to embrace making (we don't ever find) time for requires exactly that. So where to begin? Here we can look at the relationship between Āsana and Prāṇāyāma in terms of relationship between the time devoted to each art.

Again as with any new art one can devote too much time and then find ourselves struggling to fill it. So the proportions between the time devoted to each of these two arts will vary according to our experience. Thus in order to create a structure to offer a window of opportunity we need to look at time and percentages.

For example a starting point could be to devote 20% of the total practice time to sitting for Prāṇāyāma. Here we would have a situation where:

- 25' Total time offers 20' Āsana and 5' Prāṇāyāma
- 40' Total time offers 32' Āsana and 8' Prāṇāyāma
- 50' Total time offers 40' Āsana and 10' Prāṇāyāma
- 75' Total time offers 60' Āsana and 15' Prāṇāyāma

This would be considered a good reference for a beginner to the art. For a more experienced student the percentage could be upped to 25% and then we would have a situation where:

- 40' Total time offers 30' Āsana and 10' Prāṇāyāma
- 60' Total time offers 45' Āsana and 15' Prāṇāyāma
- 80' Total time offers 60' Āsana and 20' Prāṇāyāma
- 100' Total time offers 75' Āsana and 25' Prāṇāyāma

Of course these figures are not to be taken exactly, they just relate to a window of commitment where there is time to sit and explore, without the distraction of form, the arts of the breath.

This starting point offers a starting point for a longer term Vinyāsa Krama, leading eventually to an artistic ability with a playing of the breath with the fingers in the same way we would play the keyboard of a piano, with dexterity and melody.

Future posts in this series will look at how we can add content to that first window in terms of the length of the breath and the relationship between the inhale and exhale. In other words a suggestion for a starting point for our 5' of Prāṇāyāma practice.