

## PRANA

Translating prâna as "life breath" rather than "breath" goes some way towards indicating its broader dimension. Prâna is the power within breath and the vital force in every being'. As cosmic energy, it pervades everything. It is a vital substance not yet covered by scientific classification, though it should be noted that the modern physicists "discovery that all is energy" recalls statements on the origins of the universe and its evolution made by Yogic philosophers many centuries ago. Prâna is the life-force within and about us. It operates in the working of our respiration, circulation, digestion, and other body processes, and is at the same time the universal life-force in which we share. An ocean of energy is at our disposal and through Yoga we can learn how to tap it.

Vivekananda, in his Raja Yoga, expressed this concept with characteristic eloquence:

In an ocean there are huge waves, then smaller waves, and still smaller, down to little bubbles; but back of all these is an infinite ocean. The bubble is connected with the infinite ocean at one end, and the huge wave at the other end. So, one may be a gigantic man, and another a little bubble, but each is connected

with that infinite ocean of energy which is the common birthright of every animal that exists.

Wherever there is life, the storehouse of that infinite energy is behind Air is strongly charged with prana, and it is potently present in sunlight and in the foods we eat, especially those that are sun-ripened. Air being the most vital of all foods, improved breathing methods mean a richer supply of prâna, that is, of life itself. Disease is unlikely to gain a hold in a body whose tissues and organs are charged with prana.

These, coiled and latent, are sources of physiological and psychic power, which pranayama helps to activate. This comes within the practice of Kundalini Yoga, also called Laya Yoga, which will be discussed in a later section.

In Yogic breathing, prâna - both as breath and as vital cosmic force - is gathered and utilized to physiological, mental, and spiritual advantage. The spiritual side is only a peripheral concern of Yoga of Vitality, but one is reminded of it by Tennyson's words, 'Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.' The poet was referring to the personal God of Christianity, but for the pure Yoga of the upanishads one must substitute Brahman,

the impersonal Absolute, in pure consciousness the ground of Being.

In breathing we make our most intimate contact with the cosmic life force, which is why the Yogis consider breath control to be of primary importance, and why breath is given dominion over the senses and other physiological processes in Yoga's classic texts and in the sublime upanishads.