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THE YOGA INSTITUTE, Santa Cruz, Bombay 400 055.

©1979

Owner : The Yoga Institute, Bombay-400 055.

Published by Dr. Jayadeva Yogendra for The Yoga Institute,  
The Yoga Institute, Santa Cruz, Bombay-400 055 and printed by him  
at The Examiner Press, Meadows St., Bombay 400 023.

Regd. No. MH-BYN-18

# YOGA

## INSTITUTE

VOLUME XXV

SEPTEMBER 1979

NUMBER 2

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THE YOGA INSTITUTE  
SANTA CRUZ, INDIA

*Annual Subscription: Rs. 12; £1.50; \$ 3.00*

*Subscription to any Volume begins in August. Published on the 20th of each month*

## A WRONG VIEW ABOUT THE DIRGHA AND SUKŚMA STAGES IN PRANAYAMA

*Traditionally speaking, in prāṇāyāma effortless-ness in breathing cannot be increased, unless slowness in breathing is also increased*

WHILE translating the Yogasūtra, Chapter II. 50, dealing with Prāṇāyāma, the well known Orientalist Ballantyne, renders the expression *dirgha-sūkṣma* by "long or short". Such renderings by Indologists and Orientalists, become confusing. Even worse, it is inappropriate, as the following consideration will show. It appears that Ballantyne was ignorant of the technique of practising *prāṇāyāma*.

The use of the word 'or' in the rendering 'long or short' shows that the two stages, namely *dirgha* and *sūkṣma* are taken by the translator, as alternative, i.e. *prāṇāyāma* attains either the 'long' stage, or the 'short' stage. This means that while some practitioners acquire only the 'long' stage, others acquire only the 'short' stage of *prāṇāyāma*. The traditional exposition of *prāṇāyāma*, does not support the explanation. Any person can acquire both of these two stages of *prāṇāyāma*, if he follows the process correctly.

According to us, it is highly inappropriate to use the word 'short' for *sūkṣma*, though *dirgha* may be rendered by 'long'. The two words 'long' and 'short' bear opposite meanings; 'long' is contrary to 'short'. The use of the two words 'long' and 'short', would show that *prāṇāyāma* has two mutually opposite developed stages, a view which is untenable. No Yoga practice can attain such development, as are mutually opposite. This shows that if *dirgha* is rendered as 'long', *sūkṣma* cannot be rendered as 'short'. According to us *sūkṣma* may be conveniently rendered by the word subtle, or fine, or by any other word showing a kindred sense.

The distinctive character of these two stages of *prāṇāyāma* has been shown by the commentators clearly. The stage called *dirgha* seems to be based on the factor of 'time', while

the stage called *sūkṣma* on the factor of 'effort'. To be explicit: When breath can be held for a very long time easily, accompanied by calmness in the mind, and pleasing feeling (often called *sukhasparśa* in the treatises on yoga) in the body, then the *prāṇāyāma* is said to attain the stage called *dirgha*. Similarly, when air passes through the nostril, so slowly that it does not produce any sensation in the tip of the nose (or in other words, the flow of the air becomes so low that it does not make even a thread placed on the nose move), then the *prāṇāyāma* is said to attain the stage of *sūkṣma*. In fact, these two words speak of two kinds of development of *prāṇāyāma* in different directions. Thus it is clear, that these two stages are not of opposite nature.

To attain the *dirgha* stage, one is required to practise 'slow breathing', with a particular kind of observation as shown in *Yoga Sūtra* II. 50; similarly to attain the *sūkṣma* stage, one is required to exert effort, as least as possible. Experience shows that, between these two methods, namely 'slowness in breathing' and 'lowness (*alpatva*) of effort', the former is easier than the latter. Practitioners of *prāṇāyāma* should note that though these two methods are not of one kind, yet both of them are to be applied by the practitioners from the beginning. Both the methods are mutually helpful. 'Slowness in breathing', cannot be brought about if effort in breathing is not lessened; similarly the amount of effortlessness cannot be increased, if slowness in breathing is not increased.

Traditionally, we know that the *dirgha* stage of *prāṇāyāma* is accomplished at first, and then the *sūkṣma* stage. That the traditional view is valid, can be proved by experiment. It appears that Patañjali placed the word *dirgha* before *sūkṣma*, to indicate the aforesaid fact. This shows that the word '*dirgha-sūkṣma*' must be dissolved as आदौ दीर्घः ततः सूक्ष्मः i.e. *prāṇāyāma* practised according to the method prescribed in *Yoga Sūtra* II. 50, at first attains the stage called '*dirgha*', and then the stage called '*sūkṣma*'. That is to say, that the expression '*dirgha-sūkṣma*' speaks of two developed stages, one appearing after the other.