Natural Breath in the Teachings of Yogananda and Swami Kriyananda

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Abstract

Paramahansa Yogananda and his disciple Swami Kriyananda taught that breath is intimately connected to mental and spiritual states. Rather than emphasizing forceful control, emphasis is placed on the importance of natural, calm breathing as an expression of inner harmony.

Natural Breath in the Teachings of Yogananda and Kriyananda

Introduction

In yogic philosophy, breath is understood as a bridge between body, mind, and consciousness. Paramahansa Yogananda taught that breathing patterns reflect inner awareness and can guide spiritual development. His disciple Swami Kriyananda expanded on these teachings, emphasizing ease and naturalness in practice. Together, their teachings frame natural breath as both an indicator of inner calm and a pathway to deeper realization.

Breath and the Mind

Yogananda emphasized the close relationship between breath and mental activity. He taught that calmness of mind is directly linked to calmness of breath, noting that when the mind becomes still, breathing naturally slows (Yogananda, 1946/2005).

Rather than advocating forceful control, Yogananda encouraged practitioners to quiet the mind through meditation, allowing the breath to settle on its own. This reflects a central principle in his teaching: that inner stillness produces natural physiological changes.

Kriyananda (2010) reinforced this idea, explaining that when the mind becomes calm and inwardly focused, breathing naturally becomes slower and more refined without strain.

Natural Breath and Interiorization

A key idea in Yogananda's teaching is interiorization, or the withdrawal of attention from the senses. As awareness turns inward, the breath becomes subtle. He described advanced states in which breathing becomes calm and almost imperceptible (Yogananda, 1946/2005).

Importantly, this state is not created by holding the breath. It arises spontaneously as prana withdraws from outward activity. In such states, the practitioner experiences deep peace and expanded awareness.

Kriyananda similarly taught that natural breath reflects deep meditation, noting that as concentration deepens, “the breath becomes increasingly refined” (Kriyananda, 2010, p. 88).

Breath and Prana

Both Yogananda and Kriyananda taught that breath is closely related to prana, or life energy. Breath is the outward expression of this energy, and changes in prana are reflected in breathing patterns.

Yogananda explained that control of life energy leads to control of the mind (Yogananda, 1946/2005). When prana is disturbed by emotional activity, breathing becomes irregular. When prana is calm, breathing becomes steady.

Kriyananda (2010) emphasized that natural breathing indicates balanced energy. Forced breathing, by contrast, often signals tension or imbalance.

Breath, Ego, and Spiritual Awareness

Yogananda linked breath to identification with the body and ego. Restless breathing reflects outward awareness, while calm breathing accompanies inward awareness.

As the breath becomes subtle, practitioners may experience expanded consciousness and a sense of unity. These states arise naturally and are not produced through mechanical effort (Yogananda, 1946/2005).

Kriyananda described similar experiences, noting that stillness of breath corresponds with clarity, freedom, and deeper self-awareness.

Conclusion

The teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda and Swami Kriyananda present natural breath as a key indicator of inner harmony and spiritual development. Breath reflects the state of the mind and the flow of prana, becoming slower and more refined as awareness deepens.

Yogananda emphasized that natural, effortless breathing arises as a result of meditation rather than through force. Kriyananda further clarified that true spiritual progress is marked by ease, not strain. Together, their teachings present natural breath as both a reflection of inner truth and a pathway to realizing it.

References

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