

## **"THEREFORE THEY ARE CALLED POETS": asceticism/aesthetics and the Prosodic Body**

"... in the beginning there was here the non-existent. As to this they say, 'What was that non-existent?' The poets (rishis), assuredly, it is they that were the non-existent. As to this they say, 'Who were those poets?' The poets, doubtless, were the vital breaths: inasmuch as before this universe, they, desiring it, wore themselves out with toil and *tapas*, therefore they are called poets." — Satapatha Brâhmana, 6.1.1

Poets were 'here' before existence, and are constitutive of existence. That's the Vedic premise, and now the premise of a dissonant world, like our own. What sets poets apart is that they are Tapasvins, they practice *tapas*. *Tapas* are disciplines, and anti-disciplines. They are asceticisms, sacrifices, adversities, penances, purifications, devotions, renunciations, mortifications, and meditations.

The root of *tapas* is *tap*, to heat, give off warmth, radiate, burn away. Think 'inner heat' or insight, seeing thought; gestation; labor; incubation; enkoimesis; brooding; birthing; solitude; self-interrogation; sexual heat or its shutoff. Gods are tapas-born. Life is a tapas of the sun; creation, tapas of rishis of whom we are the lineage holders.

But, in order to be worn through, like a rishi or rishika, entering the vibrational or vajra body and seeing existence itself as true statement, all the description in the world is of very limited good. It has to be undergone, experienced.

## **BREATH RETENTION AND THE UNSTRUCK SOUND ujjayi pranayama and intermittent hypoxia as original hearing practice +5 years longevity\***

The basis of pranayama is listening. The sound of the breath is the first mantra.

Sit stably, on a chair or, better, in *siddhasana* or a comfortable cross-legged asana.

Allow the breath to 'sound' (an ocean sound) by slightly closing the vocal cords. Keep the roof of the mouth empty and the root of the palate open and released (this will also open the heart). Focus on the sound; eyes become still, the gaze softens, breathing-rate slows down. This is the beginning of pranayama.

Exhale fully, down to the seed point in the pelvic floor at the perineum (root, mula), toning the lower abdominal muscles, completely emptying the lungs. Then inhale fully, up to the seed point in the center of the heart (crest), tucking chin to chest, gently squeezing ribs against expanded lungs. Establish an even flow, offering the exhalation into the inhalation, and vice versa. At first,

inhalation and exhalation counts should be equal. (With experience, as an alternative breathing, the exhalation can be 2x the inhalation.) If you're running out of breath, separate full ujjayi breaths with 2 or 3 easy, relaxed ujjayi breaths.

Try, as a kind of check: inhaling to a point that is 2/3 full, pause for a few seconds, then fill the lungs all the way to the crest. Likewise, on the exhalation, stopping at the 2/3 point for a few seconds, then completing the full exhalation down to the mula.

Ease, always. Never force pranayama beyond your capacity. Don't bloat or compress. Once this Ujjayi breathing becomes effortless (could actually take days, or longer) incorporate retention (*kumbhaka*) by holding the breath after complete inhalation and exhalation. Settle into a comfortable ratio-count of inhalation-retention-exhalation-retention. 4-2-6-2, 4-4-4-4 or 4-4-6-2 are good starting points to try. Or start more simply if you need to, holding only the inhalation: 4-6-6, at first. Gradually lengthen the counts. (There is a 3rd type of retention not tied to either inhalation or exhalation called *kevela kumbhaka*. Eventually try holding this breath, calm all the way down into this cessation, listen.)

At first, separate a retention cycle by 2 or 3 ujjayi breaths without retention, until there is ease in continuousness (again, could take days or longer). Start with 5-minute sessions. Always breathe through the nose only. The benefits are innumerable; increased oxygenation, circulation digestion, concentration, internal heat, etc. Patanjali said that the purpose of pranayama is not improved breathing but the gradual cessation of breathing! "As a result of the practice of the various stages of *kumbhaka*, the veil over the inner light is destroyed."

*During* breath retentions is the optimal time to listen for the subtlest sound, known as the unstruck sound (*anahata-nada*), sound that has no cause, an all-pervasive relic sound. Simply be absorbed in listening. This is a practice in itself. There is a series of subtle sounds that are, traditionally, heard in this state, preliminary to the *anahata* sound. But for now, just stay open and listen. Forget that you're not breathing. Listen also for *anahata-shabda*, a word or words arising on their own. Write self-occurring seed sounds, mantras, sentences. This is the space in which the Vedic hymns were received as *apauruṣeyā*, i.e., authorlessly. This space is also known as the *hrdaya ākāśa* the space of the conscious heart, where 'I' is everything. "Sages having meditated in their *hrdaya* have discovered by their wisdom the connection of the *sat* with the *asat* (existence and nonexistence)." (Rigveda 10.129.4.)

\* Respiratory rate is commensurate with lifespan. Giant land tortoises take 3 or 4 breaths per minute and live as long as 250 years. From the yogic perspective, each person is given an allotment of breaths equaling their longevity. 15 breaths per minute is quite average ... 2 seconds to inhale, 2 seconds to exhale, one day equaling 21,600 breaths. Considering the entire volume of the lungs, this rate is rather rapid. It can only represent shallow, upper-chest breathing (and perhaps equally shallow speaking.) By simply shifting to 4-second inhalations and exhalations, cutting the daily rate in half to 10,800 cycles, for each day lived a person would gain 1/2 day! For every second of *kumbhaka* one second is added to lifespan.