

Sūtra 34 प्रच्छर्दनविधारणाभ्यां वा प्राणस्य ॥३४॥

Prachchhardana-vidhāraṇābhyāṃ vā prāṇasya

Or, by expulsion and retention of breath [the mind may also be calmed].

प्रच्छर्दन	<i>prachchhardana</i>	expulsion, exhalation, expiration
विधारणाभ्यां	<i>vidhāraṇābhyāṃ</i>	to restrain, to control, retention
वा	<i>vā</i>	or
प्राणस्य	<i>prāṇasya</i>	of breath

In this *sūtra* the method of *prāṇāyāma* is introduced as a method of purifying the mind and removing mental distractions in order to achieve the state of *ekāgra chitta* (one-pointed mind).

The breath that stays within is called *prāṇa vāyu*. That *prāṇa vāyu*, when expired through the nostrils slowly and smoothly in a continuous flow, is called *prachchhardana*. When that exhaled breath is restrained outside and then taken in carefully, slowly, and smoothly, it is called *vidhāraṇa*.

In this method of exhalation and inhalation of air, the mind remains fixed on the movement of the breath. Normally, the mind is not aware of the body's natural process of exhalation and inhalation. Breathing becomes *prāṇāyāma* when the mind remains aware of the movement of the breath and when the inhalation and exhalation are slow, smooth, and controlled.

The mind, body, and senses become active and restless because of the movement of *prāṇa*. When the activity of the *prāṇa* slows down, the mind, the senses, and the body also calm down. The mind is like the flame of a lamp, and the *prāṇa* is the wind. Just as wind makes the candle flame flicker, so the *prāṇa* makes the mind restless. When the mind is in an active state, it can identify with the outer world. But, when the *prāṇa* is stilled, the mind is stilled. Awareness turns inward, and the state of *ekāgratā* (one-pointedness) ensues.

The *sūtra* gives emphasis on *prachchhardana* (slow and smooth expiration with mental awareness) because in exhalation the mind remains in a thoughtless stage. The *sūtra* doesn't mention inhalation because this practice emphasizes exhalation, which is the most effective method in calming the mind.

Inhalation is a thinking state. But when the inhalation is controlled with mental awareness, the mind will be separated from the outer world. In this way, the ego will be singled out since it cannot express itself through the mind in the outer world. Then, the ego starts merging in its real form, the pure "I."

Some commentators say *vidhāraṇa* means retention of breath. In that case, the breath is retained for a short time after exhalation, and then inhaled slowly and smoothly.

The following is a description of two methods of *prachchhardana vidhāraṇa prāṇāyāma* (practice of controlled exhalation):

1. Sit in a comfortable posture with head, neck, and spine straight but relaxed. Exhale the air out very slowly, smoothly, and continuously with complete mental awareness. *Uddiyāna bandha* (navel lock) should be used. After the full exhalation, control the inhalation. Don't let the air rush in, but inhale slowly and smoothly with the awareness of inhalation.
2. Sit in a comfortable posture with head, neck, and spine straight but relaxed. Exhale the air out very slowly, smoothly, and continuously with complete mental awareness. After the full exhalation, retain the breath out with complete concentration as long as comfortable. Don't let the air rush in, but inhale slowly and smoothly with the awareness of inhalation.