

TRATAKA: STILL EYES, STILL MIND

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ABSTRACT

The key to healthy life is having a healthy mind. We are living in a fast paced generation. Pollution, stress and unhealthy lifestyle are common problems of today's era. They have many physical and mental complications, which can be deal with purification techniques of yoga. The *Shatkarmas* of yoga are very important in order to clean body and mind. Stress can be felt anywhere we go and whatever we do. And since health and stress are related we might feel certain repercussion on body i.e.- depression, migraine, hypertension, heart problems etc. Meditation is proved to be a great way to achieve stress management, which deals more with mental health than physical. *Trataka* is one of the six karmas of yoga (The *Shatkarma*) for purification of body and mind. *Trataka* is also a type of meditation which involves continuous gazing at any object or point. It is a review study to emphasize the meditational importance of *Trataka* to combat mental stress and other disorders.

Keywords: *Trataka*, stress, meditation.

INTRODUCTION: The word *Trataka* signifies “to look” or “to gaze”. In *Trataka*, practitioner steadily looks at any object till the eyes begin to water. ^[1] *Trataka* is the last of the *Shatkarmas* of yoga. It acts as a channel between physically oriented practices and mental practices which leads to higher states of consciousness. *Trataka* is a connecting link between *Hathyoga* and *Rajyoga*. Traditionally *Trataka* is a part of *Hathayoga* but it is also a medium to achieve *Rajyoga*.^[2]

The eyes are the windows of the soul. Eye formation in human embryo begins at around three weeks and proceeds till tenth week. The retina of the eye is developed from neuroepithelium. So the retina is actually a part of brain which has grown into eyes and also has a similar structure with brain.^[3,4] And that's why limiting the movements of eye also leads to limit

different thoughts of brain and calms the mind.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES: Aim of the study is to review meditational effect of *Trataka* from various books and journals.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: This article is based on literary review collected from classical book of yoga i.e. *Hathyoga pradipika*, textbooks of *Swasthvritta* and various journals.

PHYSIOLOGY OF TRATAKA: When we practice *Trataka* using a candle flame, the light passes through the retinohypothalamic tract which activates the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN).^[5]

The suprachiasmatic nucleus is a small region of brain in hypothalamus, situated just above the optic chiasm. SCN is responsible for controlling circadian rhythms or biological clock. The SCN also sends information to other hypothalamic nuclei and pineal body to manage thermoregulation in body and production

of hormones like cortisol and melatonin. Cortisol helps in the management of stress and mood disorders, whereas melatonin regulates the biological clock or sleep – wake cycle.^[6]

Psycho-physiologically mind activity and eye movements have direct connection. Increased brain and mind activity increases eye movements which are called rapid eye movement (REM). Our *Acharyas* had far back realized reverse connection. Which means by relaxing rapid eye movement (REM) or gazing, the mind and brain is relaxed. Hence it results concentration and inner peace.^[7]

PROCEDURE OF TRATAKA: The practitioner may fix attention on a symbol (such as the OM symbol), a black dot, a flame or any point. Sit in any comfortable meditative asana keeping his head and spine erect. Body should be relaxed. The object should be placed 3-4 feet away and at the level of eye.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body and eyes. Keep the body absolutely still throughout the practice. Now open the eyes and stare steadily at the flame, try not to blink or move the eyeballs. When the eyes become tired or begin to water, close them gently and concentrate upon after image. When the image can no longer be retained, gently open the eyes and stare at the object once more. Continue the procedure for 3-4 times or 5-15 minutes.^[8]

TYPE OF TRATAKA^[9]

1. *Anatrang* (internal) *Trataka*- It involves staring the ajna chakra or internal flame visualized with closed eyes between two eyebrows.
2. *Bahirang* (external) *Trataka*- It involves staring the flame of candle, symbol like om, black dot, stars, moon, sun at the time of rise or dawn.

BENEFITS OF TRATAKA: *Trataka* helps to gain perfection in *Sambhavi* mudra. It helps to relieve eye disorders and attain divine vision / intuition.

Trataka calms the cranial nerve and makes the mind one pointed or concentrate. It vanishes unsteadiness of mind. Regular practice of *Trataka* stimulates parasympathetic nervous system and as a result respiratory rate and heart rate goes down and peripheral blood circulation increases.

Trataka also helps to take out suppressed thoughts and emotions in subconscious mind which helps to attain emotional stability.^[10] It improves concentration, memory and will power. It helps to relieve eye disorders, insomnia and stress or anxiety disorders.

DISCUSSION: Today stress and anxiety are common problems of day to day life. Many studies have proved that *Trataka* is very useful to alleviate stress and other mental disorders. It has proved that regular practice of *Trataka* improves concentration and attention.

Trataka is said to have a connecting link between *Hathayoga* and *Rajyoga*. *Hathayoga* mainly focuses on physical exercise whereas *Rajyoga* is a way to reintegration of *Atma* (self) with *Paramatma* (universe). *Hathyoga* is known as a medium to achieve *Rajyoga*. *Trataka* is a physical exercise which helps to improve concentration and mental steadiness. That's why *Trataka* is a connecting link between *Hathayoga* and *Rajyoga*.

There are many variations of *Trataka* on the basis of concentration point. When person concentrates on the tip of the flame of candle it is known as *Jyoti Trataka*. And when concentration point is between both eyebrows it is known as *Bhrumadhy*

Drishti Trataka. In *Nasagra Drishti Trataka* person concentrates on the tip of nose. In *Om Trataka* *om* symbol is used for concentration. There are many variations of *Trataka* but the main idea is always same i.e. to cut off the mind from outer world to attain inner peace and mental relaxation.

CONCLUSION: Our sensory organs have a close connection with our mind. When we limit any of our senses we give a chance to our mind to relax. Our vision is intimately connected with mind. So concentration upon a single point or object for a long time makes the mind one pointed and helps to shut out the outer world. Partial or complete shutdown of brain for a short time is a powerful form of relaxation. *Trataka* is one of among six purification technique of yoga (*Shatkarma*), which purifies thoughts of unconscious mind and gives emotional stability which helps to manage anger, anxiety, stress and other mental problems.

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