Trataka: the Serene Consciousness

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ABSTRACT:

Trataka is a Yogic practice, which means to gaze steadily. It is the practice of meditation that involves staring at a single point such as a small object, black dot or candle flame. It is primarily used to purify the mind and provides the strength to concentrate but it also improves eyesight and stimulates the brain via optic nerve. It acts as stepping stone between physically oriented practices and mental practices which lead to higher states of awareness. Trataka is explained in Shatkarma. Shatkarma is combination of six karmas of purification. The six types of karmas are: Dhauti, Basti, Neti, Trataka, Nauli and Kapala Bhati. Among those Shatkarma, Trataka destroys the eye diseases and removes sloth, etc. It is traditionally associated with Hath Yoga but it can also be used to achieve Raja Yoga. It forms a bridge between Hath Yoga and Raja Yoga. Yoga is a traditional method of meditation of ancient India which has explained about Shatkarma.

Keywords: Trataka, Yoga, Shatkarma, Hath Yoga, Raj Yoga

INTRODUCTION

Trataka is gazing steadily without blinking at an object placed directly in front of the eyes such as a minute object, black dot or candle flame, without winking, until tears begin to flow. Trataka is explained in Shatkarma. Shatkarma is combination of six karmas of purification. The six types of karmas are: Dhauti, Basti, Neti, Trataka, Nauli and Kapala Bhati.¹ Among those Shatkarma, Trataka destroys the eye diseases and removes sloth, etc.² It is traditionally associated with Hath Yoga but it can also be used to achieve Raja Yoga. It forms a bridge between Hath Yoga and Raja Yoga. Yoga is a traditional method of meditation of ancient India which has explained about Shatkarma.³ Trataka can improve vision by promoting mental focus and by strengthening and relaxing our eyes muscles. Such muscles are responsible for controlling the eyeballs movements towards the upward, downward, left and right directions. The main issue of the present period is stress and undesirable ways of living. Excessive use of computers, cell phones and television screen lead to strain on eyes which leads to Refractive errors. Refractive error (RE) is one of the most common ocular conditions affecting all age groups. Most REs can be easily corrected at the primary care level with spectacles. Spectacles are only palliative. Trataka is beneficial to one's vision. It avoids refractive error and the need for spectacles in everyday life if practiced on a regular basis. Trataka has ability in gaining mental health and eye vision.
enhancement. At the time of practicing Trataka, the eyeballs should remain steady and the eyelids should not flicker. No object except the one on which Trataka is to be performed should be seen, and the mind should not wander hither and thither but be merged in observation of the object. Throughout this process-The eye receives light and converts it into energy. A picture created on the retina at the back of the eye during the time of gazing. The optic nerve transports it to the visual cortex, which controls the visual side of the brain and is located in the occipital region. It stimulates inactive brain centres, charges neurons, and connects them to the rest of conscious consciousness. The relation between the eye muscles and the brain helps to enhance vision and concentrating ability. Trataka is a Sanskrit word which means “to look” or “to gaze”. It serves as the bridge between physically focused activities and mental practices that contributes to higher level of consciousness. As, it can help in eye problems. It will avoid refractive errors and the need of spectacles in everyday life if practiced on regular basis. In this article the preliminary practice of Trataka are discussed that could be practiced by every Yoga seeker and even by every individual for better eye and mental health.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Reference of Trataka is very limited in ancient literature. This review article is based on a literary review compiled from the classical book of Yoga, Hath Yoga Pardipika, Swasthwritta textbooks and various journals.

DISCUSSION
Trataka types
Trataka is of three types:
1. External Trataka or “Bahiranga”
2. Internal Trataka or “Antaranga”
1. External Trataka consists of gazing at a particular symbol or object with eyes opened and focusing on the same stimulus until tears drop from the eyes. The point of concentration is usually a symbol or object which activates the inner potential and can absorb the mind. The object most commonly used is candle flame for External Trataka. The purpose of focusing the eye during External Trataka is to arouse the internal vision and to make that vision steady by stopping the eye movements. It also builds Dharma.
2. Internal Trataka or “Antaranga”
When the practice of external Trataka is mastered, then the practitioner able to gaze into the void; it’s the internal Trataka. Practicing Bahiranga Trataka on candle flame is beneficial to practice Antaranga Trataka because even after closing the eyes, the impression of the flame remains for some time and Trataka can easily be practiced. In this Trataka, the Practitioner concentrates the mind on an internally imagined object with closed eyes.

Guidelines and technique for Bahiranga Trataka
• Practice in a dark room which is free from dirt and insects.
• Place a candle 2-3 feet away in front of you with the flame at eye level.
• Ensure the flame is still and does not flicker at all.
• Sit in a comfortable meditative pose, preferably in Siddha Yoni Asana, and place the hands on the knees in either jnana or chin mudra.
• Relax your whole body and close your eyes.
• Practice Kaya Sthairyam (steadiness of the body) for a few minutes. Then open your eyes and gaze at the middle portion of the candle flame, just above the wick.
• Try to keep the eyes perfectly steady. Do not blink. Try to keep the mind empty.
• Lower the eyelids if the eyes become tired. When tears begin, close the eyes and again start with full concentration at the candle flame.
• Keep the mind completely devoid of thought. Only be aware of the object of concentration. When thoughts come, let them pass and remain uninvolved.
• Practice for fifteen to twenty minutes unless the guru has advised you to do it for a longer period.
• Trataka can be done at any time, but it is more effective when performed on an empty stomach. The most suitable time is between four and six a.m. after asana and pranayama practice.
• If you want to delve deeper into the mind, Trataka should be done late at night before going to bed and before meditation.

Guidelines and technique for Antaranga Trataka
• Prepare yourself in the same way as for Bahiranga Trataka.
• Keep your eyes closed throughout the practice and concentrate on your symbol.
• If you have no symbol, then try to visualize a point of light, like a twinkling star.
• Try to see the object clearly and steadily in the dark space in front of the closed eyes. Practice for 5-20 minutes.
• This practice has to be cultivated and it can take a long time.
**Benefits of Trataka**

Some of the benefits associated with Trataka are:

- Improves vision
- Improves memory and intelligence.
- Enhances self-confidence.
- Calms the mind as it provides inner peace.
- Helps to overcome mental, behavioural and emotional ailments.
- Helps to overcome stress and gives deep relaxation.
- Helps in sleep-related disorders such as headache, insomnia, nightmares, etc.

**CONCLUSION**

Trataka is a process of curbing the mind’s oscillating tendencies. It benefits not only the eyes as well as beneficial for physiological and mental functions. The purpose of the Trataka is to make mind completely one pointed that is ekagrata. Ekagrata unlocks the inherent energy of the mind and channelizes it to the dormant area of consciousness. One pointedness of mind results into strong will power, improve memory and concentrative ability. Physiologically Trataka relives eye ailments such as eyestrain and headache, myopia, astigmatism and even early stages of cataract. The central principle of Bahiranga and Antaranga Trataka is to disconnect the mind from the distractions and to achieve relaxation of mind as well as to enhance vision.

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