How does Ramayana explain complex concepts of Yoga, including Prana, Guna, Shakti, Consciousness, Chakras and much more?

The first thing we learn in any Yoga class is breathing. A serious Yoga teacher tells us that the controlled breathing is called “Pranayama”. All physical exercise focus on breathing. Nonetheless, breathing to get more oxygen is not Pranayama. Hence, we must ask, what is Pranayama?

Pranayama is the 4th and the most important step of Yoga. Without being successful in Pranayama, further progress on the path of Yoga is not possible. Pranayama is a composite word of “Prana” and “Ayama”. The experts tell us that Prana is the “Life Force”. However, this term too explains nothing at all!

Prana is a form of the energy that maintains autonomous activities having neutral sensations. Yoga defines ten types of Prana in the body; of those ten activities, five activities are major and five are minor activities. Our heart-beat and digesting food are two of the five major Prana activities.

Besides maintaining all the autonomous activities, Prana has one more critical role – to activate the locked-up Energy at the Muladhara Chakra at base of spine. For this reason, when we are doing Pranayama, we direct our breath to the base of the spine. The word “Ayama” means an extension. From heart, we push our breath to the stomach. From stomach, we push the breath to base of spine. Along with breath, Prana gets extended, and it reaches to the base of spine. Remember that Prana is a form of the energy. Just as one fire can ignite the other fire, Prana activates the energy at the base of the spine.

As you can see, learning about just one concept - Pranayama becomes technical and difficult. Yoga has many such concepts like Energy, Consciousness, and Ahamkara (Ego), Intellect, Mind, three Guna, etc. We have to learn one concept at a time. **These concepts relate to each other in a specific way. We need to learn those relationships.** A student may make a mistake in understanding a concept or relating these concepts with each other. It could be a costly mistake.

**Ramayana explains Yoga concepts and their relationships in a story.** The characters represent fundamental concepts of Yoga. For example, Shri Ram represents Consciousness, Sita represents Energy, and Hanumana represents Prana, etc. Let us see how easily we understand Prana from the character of Hanumana.

Hanuman is a representation of Prana. There are five types of major Prana. Curiously, Hanuman has a five-faced form. We take Prana from the air, and in Ramayana, he is a son of Air god (Vayu). One of the crucial roles of Prana is to find dormant Shakti (Energy) locked up in the Muladhara chakra. In Ramayana, we see that job of Hanuman was to find Sita, who was locked up in Lanka.

In Ramayana, Sita went through fire because she represents Energy, and fire is a form of Energy. Physics tells us that Energy cannot be created or destroyed. Sita was not born normal, and she vanished into the earth. Thus, Sita represents Shakti (Energy). In Yoga’s terminology, Energy unites with Consciousness. Therefore, Shri Ram represents Consciousness.

In Yoga, we learn that the Energy lies dormant in Muladhara Chakra because our Ahamkara does not let it go. We know that Ravana abducted Sita and took her to Lanka. Therefore, Ravana represents our Ahamkara and Lanka represents Muladhara chakra. The root letter of Muladhara Chakra is Lam, from which we get Lanka (m is missing in English).

In Samkhya, we learn that there are three Guna – Rajas, Tamas, and Sattva. A Tamas Guna dominated person has a tendency of overeating, oversleeping, and overindulgence in sensual pleasures. This person resists any call to action. Kumbhakarna represents Tamas Guna. He eats for six months and sleeps for the remaining six months.

One of the very interesting points of Tamas Guna is that it has a momentum. It means that even if an overweight (as an example of Tamas dominated person) starts exercising, his weight does not drop right away. His weight will go up before it goes down. In Ramayana, even after Kumbhakarna’s hands are cut-off, they keep moving. Even after his head is cut-off, his body crawls long distance. It tells us even if a person overcomes Tamas Guna, it will continue to exert its power for some time as it has a momentum.

Through Vibhishana, Ramayana explains Sattva Guna. They attract it towards Consciousness and spirituality. It tries to search for God or higher power or purpose. Rajas and Tamas Guna do not know any balance. They do not check themselves. Sattva Guna seeks to balance all of them together. We see that Vibhishana is trying to balance Ravana.

Rajas Guna pushes us into action, whether physical or mental. In Ramayana, Ravan is a highly active demon. Therefore, he represents Rajas Guna.

Shri Ram defeats Ravana but does not become king of Lanka. Shri Ram neutralizes Kumbhakarna. He befriends Vibhishana, uses him, and rewards him too. However, Shri Ram steps away from Vibhishana too and goes to Ayodhya. In other words, Consciousness is not the same as these three qualities of nature. It is “above and beyond” them and will always remain that way. Gita mentions it, and Ramayana helps us understand it.

When Ravana brought Sita to Lanka, Mandodari did not approve of his action. Mandodari is rational about these events. She advises her husband not to take the wrong course of action. Giving advice and keeping composure in a distressing situation shows the Rationalizing Intellect (Buddhi).

In Samkhya, we learn that the Ahamkara and the Rationalizing Intellect together create the Mind. By substitution of words, we get - Ravana (Ahamkara) and Mandodari (Rationalizing Intellect) together gave birth to (creation) Indrajit (Mind).

Indrajit as the mind fits perfectly with the character of Indrajit. Indra word comes from Indriya, which means sense organs. The mind can control the sense organs, which is why his name means “one who won Indra (who represents sense organs).”

In Ramayana, Lakshmana kills Indrajit. Lakshya means focused. Lakshmana represents Devoted Mind. Hence, we Indrajit represent an “Opposite of Devoted Mind” component of mind. Ramayana teaches us a lot about the mind from the character of Indrajit, and how to defeat it.

In Ramayana, we see that Shri Ram represents both normal Consciousness and Universal Consciousness. To know “who am I?” Universal Consciousness becomes normal Consciousness. To honor this wish, Energy separates from Universal Consciousness and gives rise to creation. In Ramayana, Sita separates from Shri Ram as per his wish and then she gave birth to his kids. It explains the troublesome question about Shri Ram, why he left his pregnant wife.

Look at any image or idol of Shri Ram. It is a beautiful depiction of the secret message given to us through Ramayana.

If we find the Energy (Sita), the Consciousness (Shri Ram) will come searching for Energy (Sita), and we will find the Consciousness (Shri Ram).

If we have a Devoted Mind (Lakshmana) on the Consciousness (Shri Ram), it will lead us directly to the Consciousness (Shri Ram).

Optionally, we can find the Prana (Hanumana), by doing Pranayama. The Prana (Hanuman) will find the Energy (Sita) in Muladhara Chakra (Lanka), and we will then find the Energy (Sita) within our body. When the Consciousness (Shri Ram) comes down to find the Energy (Sita), it (He) will reveal itself (Himself) to us automatically.

Yoga tells us that when we do Pranayama, our body generates a lot of heat. In Ramayana, we see that after finding Sita in Lanka, Hanuman sets a fire in Lanka. Thus, burning of Lanka is an important warning sign give to Yogis. Ramayana offers extensive guidance on Pranayama thru character of Hanumana. Let us take a few more examples.

Doing Pranayama means taking Prana from Anahata Chakra to Muladhara Chakra. In between, there are Manipur and Swadhisthana Chakras. In Ramayana, we see that Hanuman increases and decreases his body size. It refers to Pranayama. While going to Lanka, Hanuman touches the molten gold-colored mountain called a Mainak. Manipur Chakra has a downward-facing golden-hue triangle in the middle. Next, Surasa, a snake-like animal attacks Hanumana. Surasa meaning good taste. It is a reference to the Swadhisthana Chakra because is associated with a sense of taste and a sense organ, tongue. Next, Hanumana tears intestines of demon Simhika with his nails. It is a reference to bleeding that may occur because of Pranayama. This is also a warning sign to a Yogi.

Energy activated because of Pranayama affects the Manipur and Swadhisthana Chakras. It may create an imbalance in a person, by making him power-hungry as an effect of Manipur Chakra or sex-obsessed as an effect of Swadhisthana Chakras. For this reason, we see that Hanuman is a devoted and celibate person. It gives a suggestion to a yogi to adhere to these qualities.

We force the Aapana upwards by applying a Mula-Bandha and force the Prana downwards by breathing air deep into the stomach. When these two forms of Prana meet, it creates a connection that facilitates the Prana’s entry into the Muladhara Chakra. It is an essential precondition for descending of Consciousness (Shri Ram) towards Muladhara Chakra (Lanka), defeat Ravana (Ahamkara) and ascend of both Energy and Consciousness (Sita and Shri Ram) together to Sahastrara (Ayodhya). When these events happen, the Yogi experiences Samadhi – the 8th and final step of Yoga.

Now we see that Ramayana has four different layers. 1) The principal characters that are key elements of Yoga 2) Their relationships to each other like Shri Ram (Consciousness) defeats Ravan (Ahamkar) 3) Various warning signs like burning of Lanka 4) Indirect references to Chakra.

The third layer is the most important layer of Ramayana. Sage Valmiki gave countless such warning signs in Ramayana. Thus, Ramayana is a map or a guide to a Yogi!