

Path of Fire and Light

Advanced Practices of Yoga

SWAMI RAMA

■ CHAPTER THREE

Swarodaya: The Science of Breath

No science that explains life in the universe is so parsimonious, grand, and complete as the science of breath. It is said in the yoga texts that the breath (prana) is the inseparable power (*shakti*) of the universal life force, the supreme of all created things, and the life principle of the universe. Prana is the substratum in which all causes and effects are held like beads on a thread. As spokes are held in the hub of a wheel, all things are sustained in the breath. It is the universal force that breathed forth or exhaled the universe, and that will, in the end, inhale the universe back into itself. In its extent and scope, prana is as incomprehensible as the ocean of infinity.

In Chapter I the word prana was defined as breath. Prana also means energy. The word prana itself comes from the Sanskrit root "pra," meaning first, and "na," which means the smallest unit of energy, so prana itself means the first breath, or the most basic unit of energy. Prana is the universal force and all action is merely a change of the phase or aspect of prana. Prana is brought

Cherry Grove - Doreen
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into existence and kept in activity by the center of consciousness.

Prana is the life principle, the dynamic or working force in human beings and in all life forms. It is the power which is the support of the body and all its moving life forces. The nadis, the subtle energy paths of the body, are channels for prana. The body is the support for the nadis. When prana is in motion and flows through the nadis, consciousness arises. Greater consciousness, light, wisdom, and truth, which are all-pervading but latent, are awakened by regulating the motion of the pranic vehicles.

The science of breath has its foundation in the desire to control and understand the prana. This science of breath is of the highest importance to any student of yoga, and is the most useful, comprehensive, and interesting branch of yoga. It is said in yoga texts that the wise should study the regulation of prana if they desire to suspend the activity of the mind or concentrate their will upon the achievement of yoga. Control of the breath leads to health, an increase in strength and energy, good complexion, increased vitality, the growth of knowledge, and the extension of the life span.

It is the breath and prana that maintain the constituents of the body, such as the blood, flesh, and marrow. Prana is the impetus and origin of movements of diverse kinds. It restrains the mind from undesirable objects and concentrates the mind upon objects that are desirable.

Prana causes the ten senses of perception and action to perform their appropriate functions. It bears all the sensory impressions and sensations to the mind. Prana is the force which holds together the elements of

human being, prana divides itself into five major functions called *vayus*, which are prefixed with a special term according to their individual function. These are *prana vayu*, *apana vayu*, *samana vayu*, *udana vayu*, and *vyana vayu*.

Vayu is usually defined as air, one of the five constituents of the universe. At a more subtle level, vayu is not merely air, but the medium in which air exists and the force by which it is held together. Vayu comes from the root "va," which means motion, or that which flows. Just as vayu is the vehicle for the manifestation of desires, inclinations, and motions, so is air the vehicle for vayu. Modern science divides air into various elements such as carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, and nitrogen. However, in the practice of pranayama, the sadhaka must also be aware of other subtler qualities of air, including its function, energies, and place of residence.

In the terrestrial sphere, there are actually forty-nine types of vayu. The modifications of prana that reside in the body take on various names according to their functions, but all are known by the generic term vayu. Ten of these forty-nine are responsible for directing and administrating our mental and physical activities. Of these ten, the five named above—prana, apana, samana, vyana, and udana—are most important from a yogic point of view.

The most important nadis in the body (fourteen) are either weak or strong according to the amount of prana that flows through them. By controlling vayu as it moves through the nadis, an aspirant gains extraordinary force and energy. As indicated in Chapter I, it is the purpose of pranayama to bring vayu under control. Until

the body and assists in the very cohesion of atomic particles. It gives form to the embryo in the womb. The flow of breath and prana in the body furnishes the proof of the existence of life. Prana is the cause of speech, touch, sound, and scent, and is the origin of joy and cheerfulness. It ignites the internal fire which maintains warmth and metabolism. Prana also expels all impurities. It penetrates all the channels of the body, both gross and fine, and disposes of all disease. Prana, through the breath, achieves all these functions when the breath is balanced and undisturbed. It is the motion of the prana in the nadis (channels) that awakens consciousness, which is all-pervading but veiled.

Prana is lost from the body in exhalation, excessive exercise, the elimination of waste, the emission of semen, the process of childbirth, and in times of great emotion. If prana is not regulated, the system does not receive an adequate supply of oxygen. The absence of appetite may also indicate an imbalance in prana.

If prana recedes from any part of the body, whatever the cause, that part loses its power of action. Death is caused by the outgoing of prana; the gasps of a dying man are considered to be like a reversed breath. At death, the prana exits by way of either the eyes, ears, nose, navel, rectum, urethra, or fontanel, leaving an impression at the site of its exit. Its tendency is to leave the body from the site where the mind dwells instinctively or where the innermost feelings reside.

The Vayus

The universal life force, the prana, when present in human beings, gives birth to the breath. On entering the

he brings vayu under control, he cannot attain freedom from the snare of births and deaths. Therefore, the aspirant who desires liberation persists in his practices.

In the *Prana Gopana Tapani Upanishad*, one reads, "Air, which is one element, becomes five on entering the world and is so manifested in each body." The first of these functions is prana vayu, the subtle vayu that nourishes life. Prana vayu is concerned with respiration and the function of the heart. The more prana the body takes in, the stronger and longer is one's life.

The second is apana vayu, which acts to eliminate waste matter from the system, as in urination, defecation, gestation, and ejaculation. The third is samana vayu, and its purpose is to separate the food nutrients from the waste elements. The fourth, udana vayu, is upward-running, involved with speech, and with forcing air out of the lungs. The fifth, vyana vayu, helps supply energy to the senses and the blood and deals with the entire body. It coordinates all the pranic vehicles and allows for the general motion of the body. Among these functions, prana and apana are the most significant, because they perform the foremost work in the body.

Prana Vayu

Prana vayu governs the region between the larynx and the base of the heart. Its specific locus, or seat, is the heart, and its energy has an upward motion. Thus, it is sometimes called the ascending air. To take anything into oneself requires the work of prana, and so the processes of inhalation, swallowing, or even of opening one's mouth are the result of the power of prana. Prana also involves the process of taking in sensory impressions, so

prana affects the organs located at the eyes, ears, nose and tongue.

Prana vayu is described as having the color of a blooded gem. The prana within gathers at the navel and from there it is distributed throughout the whole body. It functions with great power in the head, especially at the tip of the nostrils, but its strength is also reflected throughout the body, down to one's toes.

The energy of prana is utilized in the assimilation of food during digestion, and in the action of the vital organs, especially the heart. It also works to maintain a proper temperature for the body in response to extremes of heat or cold. On the mental side, it involves the processes of taking in information, assimilating, and integrating it.

Apana Vayu

Apana vayu has its primary influence below the navel, and its seat or primary abode is said to be in the rectum. Apana is the aspect of the life force which involves the ability to throw off, eliminate, and eject what is not needed or useful to the system. Apana governs the functions of the kidneys, colon, rectum, bladder, and genitals. It circulates from the navel to the toes, although it moves primarily in the rectum. The better and more efficient one's elimination processes, the better the control of the apana vayu. When apana and prana are both purified, the quantities of urine and excrement decrease. When apana is not functioning properly there is poor elimination of all wastes, exhalation may not efficiently eliminate waste gases, and hence, the blood may be unable to receive adequate oxygen. On the mental side,

disorders of apana tend to slow one down. When apana is not regulated one lacks motivation or inclination. He feels lazy, sluggish, heavy, dull, and mentally befuddled.

Samana Vayu

Samana governs the region between the heart and the navel, and regulates all the metabolic activity involved in digestion. Its specific seat is said to be the navel and intestines, and it affects the pancreas, liver, and stomach. Its work is to digest the food, and separate the nutrients from waste.

When samana vayu is in disorder, a person may eat well and have a good appetite, yet be unable to properly assimilate food. When this happens, the nutritive and waste elements in food are not properly separated and the body may retain toxins. Then the breath becomes short and one may develop a gastric disorder. This may occur in those who fast excessively and then abruptly begin to eat, or in those who are convalescing.

On the mental level, samana separates desirable from undesirable thoughts and gives one the power of discrimination. When it is imbalanced, one may be delirious, delusional, or unsound of mind. Samana vayu is also considered to be an organizing force.

Udana Vayu

Udana is the opposite of prana in its function. It forces air out of the lungs and body, and is concerned with speech and the production of sound. Udana rules the body above the larynx and is located in the throat.

When udana is unregulated, speech is uncoordinated and one cannot speak properly. Imbalances in udana

may also cause shortness of breath or other respiratory irregularities. It also causes the voice to break or crack and prevents one from developing a sense of pitch. Vomiting is also governed by udana, and imbalances in this vayu may produce the desire to vomit.

Vyana Vayu

Vyana pervades the entire body and is a coordinating, connecting force in the body. It has no specific locus or seat. Its function is to connect and coordinate all the other powers, such as the ability to have sensory awareness throughout the body. It controls the cutaneous system (the skin), and thus, goosebumps and perspiration are experienced because of it. Vyana vayu also governs the senses of touch, taste, sight, and hearing. Because of vyana, one can coordinate the body's movements and move all its parts through nerve impulses. Vyana also controls the muscular system and governs the relaxation and contraction of all muscles, both voluntary and involuntary. Vyana coordinates balance, the cerebrospinal system, and generally deals with the way we react to and interact with our environment.

When vyana is imbalanced, there is a lack of coordination and balance in the body. In such a condition the coordination between body and mind is also lost. On the mental level, the thought process is inconsistent and the thoughts are ever-changing. Derangements in vyana may also involve disruptions in the ability of the body to perceive sensations.

The yoga texts also describe other supplementary vayus. *Naga vayu* performs the function of belching and produces clarity of mind. *Kurma vayu* governs expansion

and contraction, such as the opening and closing of the eyelids. Kurma is also connected to the sensory nerves. *Krikala vayu* induces hunger and thirst, and causes sneezing. *Devadatta vayu*, like vyana, pervades the whole body. It remains with the body for some time after death. *Dhananjaya vayu* governs the ability to hiccup. These last five vayus operate on a physical plane only and regulate the physiological functions of the material body. They are not given special emphasis or consideration in yogic training. One additional vayu that is mentioned is *maha vayu*, which is related to mental functioning. Pranayama is the means of controlling the vayus, the five divisions or vehicles of the breath. Therefore the wise should study the regulation of prana if they desire to suspend the dissipated activity of the mind and concentrate their will upon the goal of yoga, self-enlightenment. ■

The Solar and Lunar Breaths and Their Relationship to the Tattvas

The swarodaya is an esoteric tantric text, which deals with the science of breath and the tattvas. It is highly complex and its advanced knowledge is not comprehended by most students. Only one who has perfected pranayama practice can make use of the knowledge contained in the swarodaya. A small part of that complex body of knowledge is provided here, in order to acquaint the student with the swarodaya and to encourage the study of the tattvas as the student becomes competent on the path of yoga. The whole aim of this text is to explain the qualities and attributes of the tattvas and to describe how and why they are used.

The whole science of breath is complex and subtle. For example, the science posits that a day will be auspicious if ida flows both in the morning and at noon, and if pingala flows in the evening. If the solar nostril, pingala, flows at sunrise and then the lunar breath becomes ascendent, that individual will be especially effective in performing his actions. Likewise, it is said that if ida flows at sunrise on the second day of the bright fortnight (when pingala, the solar breath, should flow), then the internal life force begins to work and the individual becomes intuitive.

Pingala (Sun)

When pingala flows dominantly, one should undertake actions that require strength or are normally hard to perform, such as studying abstruse subjects or carrying out strenuous tasks. Traditionally, actions such as hunting, climbing trees, harvesting, riding, exercising, swimming in rivers and lakes, climbing hills, or doing strenuous physical work are best undertaken at this time.

The digestive fire and the digestive processes are also enhanced during the flow of pingala. Thus, one should eat solids while pingala flows, not while ida predominates. After eating, one should lie on the left side to activate the flow of the right nostril. It is also stressed that one should perform the eliminatory function of defecation when pingala flows. Sleep is also best when pingala is predominant. The flow of pingala is also considered to be the most appropriate for sexual intercourse or all acts which are temporary. Aggressive or negative acts, such as going to war or engaging in fights with

enemies, are also said to be best conducted during the flow of pingala. Traditionally it is said that one should not travel in a southerly or westerly direction when pingala flows.

Ida (Moon)

Ida is described as the nostril which should be active when one undertakes all good and prolonged actions. Activities such as traveling long distances (except north and east), beginning to erect monuments or houses, undertaking new studies, planting seeds, accumulating goods, enjoying pastimes, doing charity, or being treated medically are encouraged at that time. It is said, however, that one must also make sure that the proper tattva is working at these times. All acts where calmness of mind is required are said to be best done during the flow of ida. These include marriage and meetings with superiors. The recitation of mantras and the performance of siddhis are best accomplished during the left flow. While generally one is encouraged to eat while pingala is active, the texts also indicate that hot or spicy foods, as well as oily, pungent, salty, or sour foods, should be taken when ida flows. It is also said that the body can eliminate toxins from food when ida flows. Taking in liquids and eliminating fluids through urination are both done during ida's flow.

Sushumna (The Wedding of Day and Night)

When the breath appears to flow sometimes through ida, and sometimes through pingala, or when both nostrils appear to flow evenly, then one can tell that sushumna is flowing. When sushumna flows, the occasion

is unsuitable for external actions, and only meditation and contemplation should be done. When the breath is in sushumna, intuitive knowledge is received well. Determining the activity of the tattvas is also important in determining what actions should be done and when. When ida and pingala are flowing full and the tattva is not congenial, then there can be no success. Success is only to be had when the tattva is congenial to either ida or pingala.

Sandhi is the period when the breath is changing from one nostril to another, and there is a change in the predominant tattva. Determining the status of the tattvas is useful in considering what kinds of acts may be beneficially performed. This knowledge also helps one to avert illness and maintain sound health. The length of the flow of the breath helps one to know which tattva is active: one can detect the length of the flow by feel alone once the comprehensive knowledge of this science is attained.

Beginners use a feather or powder suspended in the air. The tattva can be determined when khechari mudra is applied. By applying *yoni mudra* the color of the predominant tattva appears in the mind. One can meditate on the tattvas to assure their full influence and power, and to arrange their flow as one wishes. One's ability to change the tattva depends on his success in lengthening or shortening the breath at will. For example, if the apas tattva is to be brought into action, then the breath should be allowed to flow only sixteen finger-breadths, no more and no less. Success in maintaining the proper regulation of breath requires constant practice.

Prithivi Tattva

Prithivi is the earth tattva and the force of solidity. It is said to enable one to be steady for a long time. It is associated with the muladhara chakra and its color is yellow. The breath forms the shape of a quadrangle when in prithivi. It is said that the flow of prithivi tends to endurance, and that it flows neither fast nor slow. Using the body as a metaphor to describe the tattvas, prithivi is considered to be the feet. Prithivi is said to have moderate motion and slight heat. The force of prithivi flows to the end of the sternum, twelve finger-breadths down. Prithivi rids the body of desire, makes the body substantial, and brings sound health. It causes prana to gradually increase during the day.

The aspirant should do acts which are expected to last a long time when the breath is in prithivi. Prithivi is associated with success, especially when ida is active. In terms of food, prithivi is related to the digestion of sweets. When pingala is in prithivi, one should eat oats or buttermilk. When ida is in prithivi, one is encouraged to take rice, milk, and fruits. Prithivi is also associated with pleasure, growth, affection, playfulness, and laughter. Success is attained in strenuous activities when pingala is active.

Apas Tattva

Apas is the water tattva, and its force is contraction. It is said to make one calm. It is associated with the svadhishtana chakra and its shape is semi-circular. The color visualized for apas is white. The flow of apas is downward. Apas is associated with the knees. It is a cooling force. It has a rapid motion, and gives success in

IV

Working with the
Emotions



The Dualistic Barrier

AS WE HAVE DISCUSSED, boredom is very important in the practice of sitting meditation; there is no other way to reach the depths of meditation practice except through boredom. But at the same time, we must look further at the desire for credentials. Even experiencing boredom or relating with boredom could itself be another game, another way of creating a sense of comfort, a sense of security in the practice of meditation. Something else must be dealt with in addition to experiencing boredom, and this something else is the daily living situation involving love and hate, depression and so forth, the subtle but fundamental emotions.

Although we may be able to accomplish smoothly the vipashyana practice of relating with the breathing, still we cannot ignore this large area of potential and unexpected disturbances. You may finish an ideal sitting meditation period in which you experienced boredom, and then you go out into the living room and decide to make a call to your friend and realize that you haven't paid your telephone bill and the telephone is disconnected. And you get outraged: "But that's not my fault, my wife misplaced the bill," or "They have no right to do this," or whatever.

Little things like that happen all the time. If we experience such situations, then we begin to realize that our practice is credential-oriented, that there is a belief in some kind of basic harmony. The problems of everyday life are a way of destroying our credentials, our comfort and security, and they present us with an opportunity to relate with our emotions.

Although we may be able to see the simplicity of the discursive thought process, still there are very strong emotions with which it is extremely difficult and quite challenging to work. In working with the emotions we are dealing not only with the fifth skandha, "consciousness," but also with the fourth skandha, "concept," "inception." The emotions are composed of energy, which can be likened to water, and a dualistic thought process, which could be likened to pigment or paint. When energy and thought are mixed together they become the vivid and colorful emotions. Concept gives the energy a particular location, a sense of relationship, which makes the emotions vivid and strong. Fundamentally, the reason why emotions are discomforting, painful, frustrating, is because our relationship to the emotions is not

quite clear.

At the level of the fifth skandha the structure of ego has become so efficient that there is a conflict between the administration of ego and the central ignorance itself. It is as if the king's minister had become more powerful than the king himself. This seems to be the point where emotions become painful, because you are not quite certain what your relationship to your emotions is. There is tremendous conflict, a feeling that you are being overpowered by your emotions, that you are losing your basic identity, your center of command.

So the pain of emotion, sense, form, and concept, and relationship is always ambivalent. However, if a person is actually able to relate fully and thoroughly with the emotions, then they cease to become an external problem. One is able to make very close contact with the emotions and the war between your emotions and yourself; you and your projections, you and the world outside, becomes transparent. This involves removing the dualistic barriers set up by concepts, which is the experience of shunyata, the absence of relative concepts, emptiness.

Actually, we do not see things completely as they are. Generally we perceive something, and then we look. Looking in this case is the act of imposing names and associations on things. Seeing things means accepting what they are, but looking means unnecessary effort to make sure that you are safe, that nothing is going to confuse you in your relationship to the world. So we create our security by putting things into categories, naming them, by using relative terms to identify their inter-relationships, how they fit together. And this security brings temporary happiness and comfort.

This very crude way of finding landmarks in terms of our projections is very childish, and one has to repeat the same game again and again. There is no attempt to deal with projections as exciting and fluid situations at all; instead the world is seen as being absolutely solid and stiff. Everything is frozen movement, frozen space, solidified. We see the world as having an extremely hard facade, a metallic or plastic quality. We see the colors as they are, but somehow they are plastic colors rather than rainbow colors. And this solid quality is the dualistic barrier that we have been talking about. Which is not to say that a person should not feel the texture of a stone



or a brick as solid. The physical situation of solidity has no relation to psychological solidity. We are dealing here with mental solidity—harshness, a metallic quality. Actually, it is extremely interesting that we see only our own solid version of the world. So perception is very much individualized, centralized on self-consciousness.

It is impossible immediately to experience shunyata—that is, absence of concept, absence of the dualistic barrier. We must start with a simple practice in the beginning, and then we begin to perceive the transparent quality of thoughts and emotions. Then we must also try to step beyond the relational situation of transparency—that is, the sense of "you," seeing the transparency of thoughts and emotions. In other words, the thought process and the emotions are transparent and they are taking place in the midst of nowhere, in space. That spacious quality, when everything operates and occurs in space, is the positive space of skillful means, of working with everyday life-situations. In fact, the creativity and the positive aspect of the emotions and life-situations can only be seen through experiencing the space rather than the product. If a person's relationship to space is developed properly, perceived properly, then there is no hesitation at all.

We are speaking here of becoming one with the emotions. This is different from and in contrast to the usual approach of suppressing them or acting them out. If we are suppressing our emotions, it is extremely dangerous because we are regarding them as something terrible, shameful, which means that our relationship to our emotions is not really open. Once we try to suppress them, sooner or later they are going to step out and explode,

There is another possibility. If you do not suppress your emotions, then you really allow yourself to come out and be carried away by them. This way of dealing with the emotions also comes from a kind of panic; your relationship with your emotions has not been properly reconciled. This is another way of escaping from the actual emotion, another kind of release, a false release. It is a confusion of mind and matter, thinking that the physical act of practicing emotions, of putting them into effect, supposedly will cure the emotions, relieve their irritation. But generally it reinforces them, and the emotions become more powerful. The relationship between the emotions and mind is not quite clear here.

So the intelligent way of working with emotions is to try to relate with their basic substance, the abstract quality of the emotions, so to speak. The basic "isness" quality of the emotions, the fundamental nature of the emotions, is just energy. And if one is able to relate with energy, then the energies have no conflict with you. They become a natural process. So trying to suppress or getting carried away by the emotions become irrelevant once a person is completely able to see their basic characteristic, the emotions as they are, which is shunyata. The barrier, the wall between you and your projections, the hysterical and paranoid aspect of your relationship to your projections, has been removed—not exactly removed, but seen through. When there is no panic involved in dealing with the emotions, then you can deal with them completely, properly. Then you are like someone who is completely skilled in his profession, who does not panic, but just does his work completely, thoroughly.

We have been discussing how to deal with conscious-



ness, the last stage of the development of ego, and we have also dealt with the prior stage of concept. When we speak of "dealing" with them, it is not a question of eliminating them completely but of really seeing them and transmuting their confused qualities into transcendental qualities. We still use the energies of thought, the energies of the emotions and the energies of concept. Generally, when the idea of ego is presented, the immediate reaction on the part of the audience is to regard it as a villain, an enemy. You feel you must destroy this ego, this me, which is a masochistic and suicidal approach. People tend to think this way because, usually when we speak of spirituality, we tend to think that we are fighting the bad; we are good, spirituality is the ultimate good, the epitome of good, and the other side is bad. But true spirituality is not a battle; it is the ultimate practice of non-violence. We are not regarding any part of us as being a villain, an enemy, but we are trying to use everything as a part of the natural process of life. As soon as a notion of polarity between good and bad develops, then we are caught in spiritual materialism, which is working to achieve happiness in a simple-minded sense, on the way to egohood. So the dualistic wall is not something we have to destroy or eliminate or exorcise. But having seen the emotions as they are, we have more material with which to work creatively. This makes it quite clear that the notion of samsara is dependent upon the notion of nirvana, and the notion of nirvana is dependent upon the notion of samsara; they are interdependent. If there were no confusion, there would be no wisdom.

Lion's Roar

THE "LION'S ROAR" is the fearless proclamation that any state of mind, including the emotions, is a workable situation, a reminder in the practice of meditation. We realize that chaotic situations must not be rejected. Nor must we regard them as regressive, as a return to confusion. We must respect whatever happens to our state of mind. Chaos should be regarded as extremely good news. There are several stages in relating with the emotions; the stages of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and transmuting. In the case of seeing the emotions, we have a general awareness that the emotions have their own space, their own development. We accept them as part of the pattern of mind, without question, without reference back to the scriptures, without help from credentials, but we directly acknowledge that they are so, that these things are happening. And then hearing involves experiencing the pulsation of such energy, the energy upsurge as it comes toward you. Smelling is appreciating that the energy is somewhat workable, as when you smell food and the smell becomes an appetizer, whetting your appetite before you eat. It smells like a good meal, it smells delicious, although you have not eaten it yet. It is somewhat workable. Touching is feeling the nitty-gritty of the whole thing, that you can touch and relate



symbolizes the idea of having no back. Every direction is a front, symbolizing all-pervading awareness. The fearlessness covers all directions. Once you begin to radiate your fearlessness, it is all-pervading, radiated in all directions. In the traditional iconography certain Buddhas are represented as having a thousand faces or a million faces, looking in all directions in panoramic awareness. Since they look everywhere, there is nothing to defend.

The lion's roar is fearlessness in the sense that every situation in life is workable. Nothing is rejected as bad or grasped as good. But everything we experience in our life-situations, any type of emotion, is workable. We can see quite clearly that trying to apply the reference point of credentials is useless. We have to really work into the situation completely and thoroughly. If we are extremely interested in eating food, really hungry, there is no time to read the menu because we want to eat. We really want to relate with food. So forget about the menu. It is an immediate interest, a direct relationship.

The basic point of the lion's roar is that, if we are able to deal with emotions directly, able to relate with them as workable, then there is no need for external aid or explanations. It is a self-maintained situation. Any help from outsiders becomes credentials. So self-existing room for speculation or rationalization. Everything becomes obvious and immediate, workable. And there is no chance or time or space to speculate on how to become a charlatan, how to con other people, because the situation is so immediate. So the idea of charlatanism does not appear at all, because there is no room for the idea of a game.

Working with Negativity

WE ALL EXPERIENCE negativity—the basic aggression of wanting things to be different than they are. We cling, we defend, we attack, and throughout there is a sense of one's own wretchedness, and so we blame the world for our pain. This is negativity. We experience it as terribly unpleasant, foul-smelling, something we want to get rid of. But if we look into it more deeply, it has a very juicy smell and is very alive. Negativity is not bad *per se*, but something living and precise, connected with reality.

Negativity breeds tension, friction, gossip, discontentment, but it is also very accurate, deliberate and profound. Unfortunately, the heavy-handed interpretations and judgments we lay on these experiences obscure this fact. These interpretations and judgments are negative negativity, watching ourselves being negative and then deciding that the negativity is justified in being there. The negativity seems good-natured, with all sorts of good qualities in it, so we pat its back, guard it and justify it. Or if we are blamed or attacked by others, we interpret their negativity as being good for us. In either case the watcher, by commenting, interpreting and judging, is camouflaging and hardening the basic negativity.

Negative negativity refers to the philosophies and rationales we use to justify avoiding our own pain. We would like to pretend that these "evil" and "foul-

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"something" aspects of ourselves and our world are not really there, or that they should not be there, or even that they should be there. So negative negativity is usually self-justifying, self-contained. It allows nothing to pierce its protective shell—a self-righteous way of trying to pretend that things are what we would like them to be instead of what they are.

This, secondary, commenting kind of intelligence of double negativity is very cautious and cowardly as well as frivolous and emotional. It inhibits identification with the energy and intelligence of basic negativity. So let's forget about justifying ourselves, trying to prove to ourselves how good we are.

The basic honesty and simplicity of negativity can be creative in community as well as in personal relationships. Basic negativity is very revealing, sharp and accurate. If we leave it as basic negativity rather than over-laying it with conceptualizations, then we see the nature of its intelligence. Negativity breeds a great deal of energy, which clearly seen becomes intelligence. When we leave the energies as they are with their natural qualities, they are living rather than conceptualized. They strengthen our everyday lives.

The conceptualized negativity, the negative negativity, must be cut through. It deserves to be murdered on the spot with the sharp blow of basic intelligence—*prajnaparamita*. That is what *prajna* is for: to cut through intelligence when it changes into intellectual speculation or is based upon a belief of some kind. Beliefs are reinforced endlessly by other beliefs and dogmas, theological or moral or practical or business-like. That kind of intelligence should be killed on the spot, "uncompassionately." This is when compassion should not

be idiot compassion. This intellectual energy should be shot, killed, squashed, razed to dust on the spot with one blow. That one blow of basic intelligence is direct compassion. The way to do this does not evolve out of intellectualizing or trying to find a way to justify yourself; but it just comes as the conclusion of basic intelligence and from a feeling of the texture of the situation.

For instance, if you walk on the snow or ice, you feel the texture of it the minute you put your foot down. You feel whether or not your shoe is going to grip. It is the feeling of texture, the richness of texture that we are talking about. If it is negative negativity, then there will be certain ways to squash or murder it. Somehow the energy to do this comes from the basic negativity itself, rather than from some special technique or ability for assassination. There is a time to be philosophical and a time to be soft. There is also a time to be "uncompassionate" and ruthless in dealing with these frivolous situations.

Frivolousness refers to the extra and unnecessary mental and physical acts with which we keep ourselves busy in order not to see what actually is happening in a situation. Whenever there is a frivolous emotional situation and concept growing out of it, then this ground should be completely extinguished with a direct blow—that is, by seeing directly what is not right and wholesome. This is what is called the Sword of Manjushri, which cuts the root of dualistic conceptualization with one blow. Here a person should really be "uncompassionate" and illogical. The real objective is just to squash the frivolousness, the unwillingness to see things as they actually are, which appears rational. Frivolousness does not really get a chance to feel the whole ground. It is preoccupied

with reacting to your projections as they bounce back at you. True spontaneity feels the texture of the situation because it is less involved with self-consciousness, the attempt to secure oneself in a given situation.

It is obvious that, when you are really squashing frivolousness, you should feel pain, because there is a certain attraction toward the occupation of being frivolous. By squashing it you are completely taking away the occupation. You begin to feel that you have nothing to hold on to any more, which is rather frightening as well as painful. What do you do then, after you have extinguished everything? Then you must not live on your heroism, on having achieved something, but just dance with the continuing process of energy that has been liberated by this destruction.

The tantric tradition of Buddhism describes four actions or *karma-yogas*. The first is the action of "pacifying" a situation if it is not right. Pacifying is trying to feel the ground very softly. You feel the situation further and further, not just pacifying superficially, but expressing the whole, feeling it altogether. Then you expand your luscious, dignified and rich quality throughout. This is "enriching," the second karma. If that does not work, then "magnetizing" is the third karma. You bring the elements of the situation together. Having felt them out by pacifying and enriching them, you bring them together. If that is unsuccessful, then there is the action of "destroying" or extinguishing, the fourth karma. These four *karmas* are very pertinent to the process of dealing with negativity and so-called problems. First pacify, then enrich, then magnetize, and if that does not work, finally extinguish, destroy altogether. This last is necessary only when the negative negativity uses

a strong pseudo-logic or a pseudo-philosophical attitude or conceptualization. It is necessary when there is a notion of some kind which brings a whole succession of other notions, like the layers of an onion, or when one is using logic and ways of justifying oneself so that situations become very heavy and very solid. We know this heaviness is taking place, but simultaneously we play tricks on ourselves, feeling that we enjoy the heaviness of this logic, feeling that we need to have some occupation. When we begin to play this kind of game, there is no room. Out! It is said in the tantric tradition that, if you do not destroy when necessary, you are breaking the vow of compassion which actually commits you to destroying frivolousness. Therefore, keeping to the path does not necessarily mean only trying to be good and not offending anyone; it does not mean that, if someone obstructs our path, we should try to be polite to them and say "please" and "thank you." That does not work, that is not the point. If anyone gets abruptly in our path, we just push them out because their intrusion was frivolous. The path of dharma is not a good, sane, passive and "compassionate" path at all. It is a path on which no one should walk blindly. If they do—Out! They should be awakened by being excluded.

At the very advanced levels of practice we can go through the negative negativity and turn it into the original negativity so that we have a very powerful negative force that is pure and unselfconscious. That is, once having squashed this negative negativity altogether, having gone through the operation without anesthesia, then we re-invite the negativity for the sake of energy. But this could be tricky.

If the pure energy of negativity is involved with any

form of ground, then it is always regarded as the property of the secondary, logical energy of negative negativity. This is because of our fascination to relieve the basic negativity, to recreate the comfort and occupation of basic negativity. So there should not be any reliving of the occupation at all. Occupations should be completely cleared away. Then the energy which destroys the reliving of occupation turns out to be logical energy transmuted into crazy wisdom—conceptual ideas, let loose. That is to say, there are no more conceptual ideas, but only energy run wild. Originally there were conceptual ideas and then they were cut through altogether, so that you no longer regarded light and dark as light and dark; it becomes the non-dualistic state.

Then negativity simply becomes food, pure strength. You no longer relate to negativity as being good or bad, but you continually use the energy which comes out of it as a source of life so that you are never really defeated in a situation. Crazy wisdom cannot be defeated. If someone attacks or if someone praises, crazy wisdom will feed on either equally. As far as crazy wisdom is concerned, both praise and blame are the same thing because there is always some energy occurring . . . a really terrifying thought.

Crazy wisdom could become satanic but somehow it doesn't. Those who fear crazy wisdom destroy themselves. The negative destruction they throw at it bounces back at them, for crazy wisdom has no notion of good or bad or destruction or creation at all. Crazy wisdom cannot exist without communication, without a situation with which to work: whatever needs to be destroyed, it destroys; whatever needs to be cared for, it cares for. Hostility destroys itself and openness also opens itself. It

depends on the situation. Some people may learn from destruction and some people may learn from creation. That is what the wrathful and peaceful deities, the *mahakalas* and the buddhas, symbolize.

The four arms of the mahakala (in the *thangka* which accompanies this chapter) represent the four karmas. The whole structure of the image is based on energy and complete compassion devoid of idiot compassion. In this particular *thangka*, the left arm represents pacifying. It holds a skull cup of *amrita*, the intoxicating nectar of the gods which is a means of pacification. Another arm holds a hooked knife which symbolizes enriching, extending your influence over others, feeling the texture of the ground and the richness. The hooked knife is also regarded as the sceptre of the gods. The third arm, on the right, holds a sword which is the tool for gathering energies together. The sword need not strike, but just through its being waved around energies come together. The fourth arm holds the three-pronged spear which symbolizes destruction. You do not have to destroy three times, but with one thrust of this spear you make three wounds, the ultimate destruction of ignorance, passion and aggression simultaneously.

The mahakala sits on the corpses of demons, which represents the paralysis of ego. This is very interesting and relates to what we have already discussed. You must not make an impulsive move into any situation. Let the situation come, then look at it, chew it properly, digest it, sit on it. The sudden move is unhealthy, impulsive and frivolous rather than spontaneous.

Spontaneity sees situations as they are. You see, there is a difference between spontaneity and frivolousness, a very thin line dividing them. Whenever there is an im-



pulse to do something, you should not just do it; you should work with the impulse. If you are working with it, then you will not act frivolously; you want really to see it and taste it properly, devoid of frivolousness. Frivolousness means reacting according to reflex. You throw something and when it bounces back you react. Spontaneity is when you throw something and watch it and work with the energy when it bounces back at you. Frivolousness involves too much anxiety. Once you are emotionally worked up, then too much anxiety is put into your action. But when you are spontaneous, there is less anxiety and you just deal with situations as they are. You do not simply react, but you work with the quality and structure of the reaction. You feel the texture of the situation rather than just acting impulsively.

The mahakala is surrounded by flames representing the tremendous unceasing energy of anger without hatred, the energy of compassion. The skull crown symbolizes the negativities or emotions which are not destroyed or abandoned or condemned for being "bad." Rather they are used by the mahakala for his ornaments and crown.

V Meditation in Action

enough space and freedom for the universality and simultaneous uniqueness of humankind. The *Yoga Sutras* and the *Bhagavadgītā* are two examples of sacred teaching texts that are both universal while speaking to the specificity of the human experience. These texts cannot be memorized and then quoted indiscriminately. They are too precise, too distinct. Instead, they require time of the reader. Time to process. Time to reread. Time to integrate into the understanding of everyday circumstances. These texts also bring us back to an essential function of education: learning how to learn.

A Decolonized Approach to Critical Thinking

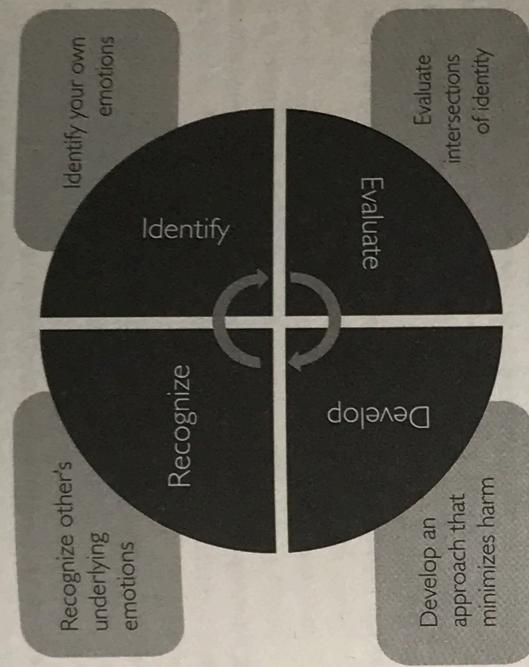
Who do you follow on social media channels? It is well documented that we build our echo chambers by following personalities and friends who agree with us. This can express itself as white female yoga practitioners, for example, following folks who look like them. The intention behind the question is to provide an impulse for people to begin to follow folks who don't look like them and don't necessarily share their perspective. There is, however, so much (junk) to sort through across social media, so what is so bad about just sticking with what is familiar?

One common concern I hear from students is that they feel overwhelmed with choice, and there is a particular anxiety that arises in making the wrong choices when trying to get things right. Marginalized and minoritized people reiterate time and again that we are not a monolith. If you follow five Yoginis of South Asian heritage, you will find great diversity of thought. This will be similar for any group of minoritized people, just as it is for members of dominant culture. The human desire is to find that easy fix, the one book or podcast or social media profile that offers all the answers. And with those answers, you will never have to worry again about making a mistake, because so-and-so said so. This is the type of learning that the education system set us up for. But we have to move through the discomfort of uncertainty and accept that for most things in life, and especially in deconstructing systems of oppression, there is no black and white. There is no easy fix.

Maybe there is another way.

I would like to offer a model of critical thinking. Critical thinking, as a discipline, may conjure associations of "logic", "rationality" and "scientific rigour". Those terms may feel intimidating to some, invigorating to some and oppressive to others. The following model is offered more as a type of

RIED



Above: The RIED four-stage critical thinking model for a reflective approach to managing conflict and building consensus for equitable and inclusive solutions.

Pronounced *red*, this four-stage model is cyclical rather than linear. It may be that you move forward on a continuum or have to go back a step after finding new answers. The cycle may even need to be repeated several times, even for the same event or circumstance, due to the number of parties and competing interests involved.

Recognize

Recognize others' underlying motivations. Without understanding these, or at least trying to, you may come to the wrong conclusions. What may prove challenging in this step is that what people say is not always the whole truth. That is not necessarily malicious or manipulative. Depending on their own practice, they may or may not have access to what is driving their actions in any given moment.

For example, if you were in conversation with a studio owner/manager and discussing the lack of *visible* diversity in one of your regular classes, you might ask yourself such questions afterwards:

- ↳ Was the owner listening?
- ↳ What was the owner's breathing pattern?
- ↳ What did the owner's body language communicate about their state of presence?
- ↳ How long have they been running this studio?
- ↳ How has the discourse shifted since they opened it?

These types of questions provide context. Context is important; however, our perceptions and interpretations of context are greatly influenced by our personal positionality and location in wider society.

Identify

Identify your own assumptions. In any given moment, we are all working under particular assumptions. It is a necessary function of survival. The brain has to make thousands of decisions every day. Without assumptions, the brain would be overwhelmed by the time we finish brushing our teeth after waking. At the same time, we need to slow down, in critical moments, to identify the assumptions upon which we are leaning.

Sticking with the example above, you might ask yourself some of the following questions:

- ↳ How well do I know the owner?
- ↳ How comfortable am I with this subject?
- ↳ Did I feel I was able to convey my message clearly and easily?
- ↳ What surprised me in this conversation? What does that say about my expectations going into the meeting?

If you find yourself in a reactive state, it is better to pause and ground yourself before asking yourself these questions. If time and distance are not sufficient for you to settle, you may want to talk it out with someone who you trust to simply listen, rather than offer feedback or advice.

Evaluate

Evaluate the intersections of social identities. This step is integral to the model as well as to finding new ways to work and engage that do not replicate the systems of oppression which cast a shadow over every aspect of our lives. Power is built into the social constructs of our identities because dominant culture, both subtly and overtly, has established what is deviant behaviour and what is acceptable (the norm).

At this stage, you may find that it becomes necessary to re-visit the previous stages with the insights gained here. Relying on the original example, your perception or analysis of the conversation will change depending on:

- ↳ your race/ethnic background versus the owner's race/ethnic background
- ↳ your gender and gender expression versus the owner's gender and gender expression
- ↳ the language in which the conversation was held and how that relates to you and the owner's first language
- ↳ your role as an employee/freelancer/other stakeholder of the studio
- ↳ your race/ethnic background in relation to the race/ethnic background of the visibly missing students (or gender, disability, etc.)

And the intersections don't stop there. Keep in mind that intersections are not inherently one-way hierarchical streets. This stage notably calls for the practice of sitting with discomfort and abiding in the grey.

Develop

Develop an approach that minimizes harm. Through society's norms and the role of rewards in our education systems, we have been trained to seek neat boxes of perfection, where everything can be tidily filed into categories of our choosing. This is harmful. The extent of that harm goes beyond what is experienced daily in yoga and wellness spaces.

To minimize harm, we must first acknowledge that it is possible to cause it, even in a yoga or wellness space. Reciting empty phrases of "love and light" and "yoga means union" causes harm. Conflict avoidance causes harm. Acting out of fear causes harm. Actions steeped in the desire to look *not racist* cause harm. Taking up space rather than making space for those

who have historically been denied it causes harm. Justifying detrimental impact with good intentions causes harm.

Instead, we have to let go of the desire to file things and people away in finite categories. We must remain humble so that we are listening more than we speak. We must practise patience in the middle of paradox.

In an article for the *Washington Post*, American civil rights advocate and leading scholar of critical race theory Professor Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw explains that, “The better we understand how identities and power work together from one context to another, the less likely our movements for change are to fracture.”¹³ With the above framework, I am not offering a cookie-cutter recipe to learning and effecting change. The REID critical thinking model demands of its users an openness to self-enquiry, compassion and experimenting. You may not complete the exercise with a definitive answer; however, you will have learned something. Take that learning forward. Change does not come all at once. It comes with patience, perseverance and practice.

Mindfulness of Thought

In this chapter, I have offered a perspective on how education systems have primed us for a narrow model of learning. For the learning and unlearning that is required of us to decolonize our yoga (teaching) practice, the REID critical thinking model introduces a dialogue between the cognitive, the emotional, the conditioned and the experienced. Unlike many critical thinking models, there are no perfected decision trees or arrow models that lead to one clear answer. That may feel unsatisfying.

We spend one-third to one-half of our waking life not living in the present. We think somewhere between 6,000 and 65,000 thoughts a day and this model is asking us to think more! We cannot stop thoughts. The mind is meant to think in the way that the heart is meant to beat. We can, however, develop a wiser way of working with our thoughts, so that they may slow. So that we are not consumed by our thoughts or ruminating for an extensive amount of time on negative experiences. In the same way that, in wiser relationship with the heart, we are able to slow the heart rate in times of fear or anxiety.

The following practice can be understood as a meditation on mental processes. In developing mindfulness of thought, it becomes possible to work better with REID, including in the moment as a conversation or encounter unfolds.

Practice Break: the 3Rs

Let us move into the practice. You can practise on your own or in a group.

Start by coming into a seated posture that feels comfortable to you. If you choose to sit in a chair or on your sofa, bring your feet firmly to the ground. Have the feet slightly apart so that the hips can relax. If your feet do not touch the ground, use a pillow or folded blanket to bring the floor to you. If you choose to sit on the floor, use a cushion so that the knees are able to relax toward the floor. Your palms, placed comfortably on your thighs, can face upward for opening or face downward for grounding.

Allow your body to settle. Notice if you need any final adjustments before coming into stillness.

Soften the gaze or close your eyes, depending on your environment and how you are currently feeling. It is not necessary to have the eyes completely closed. If you are feeling tired or sleepy, you may want to keep your eyes slightly open.

Bring your awareness to your breath as an anchor for attention. Do not try to control or alter the breath. Simply allow yourself to rest in the awareness of your breath. If your breath is not available to you in this moment, bring your awareness to your connection to the ground.

After some time, open your awareness to the sensations of the body. After a while, further open your awareness to the sounds around you. If this becomes too much or too distracting, reduce your field of awareness to the sensations of the body.

Observe your patterns of thought – without judgement.

Notice that thoughts will continue to come and to go. Observe the nature of your thoughts without judgement and without attachment.