

## Lesson 22

If the pingala nadi is flowing during meditative practices then one will experience events that are concerned with the outside world. If the ida nadi is flowing then a state of mind will arise called *lava*, a state of unconsciousness or total absorption in thought processes. When the sushumna is flowing during meditative practices then one is more likely to experience those planes which are real, which are pure, which are on the path to real knowledge. Therefore, if you want success in your meditational practices make sure that the sushumna is flowing.

Swami Satvananda Saraswati



## The Balance of Life (Part 1)

In this topic we will bring in many seemingly unrelated subjects. Yet, as you will see by the end, they are all intimately connected. Everything which we will discuss has the greatest relevance to the unfolding of your potential, whether physical, mental, psychic or beyond. We want to integrate and harmonize the opposing principles contained in the following concepts:

1. Ida and pingala
2. Flow of the left and right nostril
3. Introversion and extroversion
4. Knowledge and action (jnana and karma)
5. Meditational practices and external work
6. Prana and consciousness
7. Shiva and Shakti

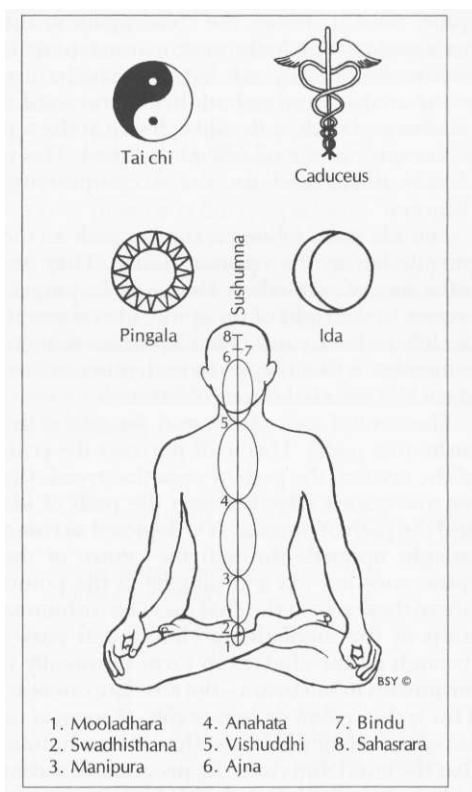
All these subjects may appear to be totally unrelated, but as we will show, they all constitute parts of a whole. If you understand them correctly, they will clearly show you the path which you must tread to spiritual awakening. If you misunderstand them, then it is possible that you will take the wrong path and either stay at lower levels of awareness or descend from a higher to a lower one. Many people have done this and are still doing it.

The central theme of this discussion is *ida* and *pingala*. These two principles were conceived and symbolized by the sages of the past. These wise men understood *ida* and *pingala*, the two currents of human aspiration, through personal experience. They clearly saw that the concepts of *ida* and *pingala* applied to all levels of being, from the grossest to the most subtle. The concept spans the apparent chasm between the physical and the spiritual.

Let us discuss the implications of *ida* and *pingala* at the different levels of meaning.

### Symbolism of the *ida* and *pingala*

The *ida* and *pingala* are called *nadis* (the Sanskrit word *nadi* means 'flow'). In this context, the flow can be physical, nervous, psychic, mental and that of awareness. Under-



standing of *ida* and *pingala* is usually confined to the physical, nervous and pranic (bioplasmic) aspects within the human framework.

Though there is nothing wrong with this limited viewpoint, it is nevertheless a gross oversimplification which misses much of what the ancient yogis were trying to tell us. The *ida* and *pingala* mean much more than is widely known. In this chapter we want to give a brief description of all the different levels of meaning behind the symbolism of the *ida* and *pingala*.

The two nadis are depicted entwined about the spine or central axis, criss-crossing each other at the chakras<sup>1</sup>. *Ida* and *pingala* begin at

the same point: the mooladhara chakra of the perineum (see diagram).

The mooladhara chakra corresponds to the stage of human development where awareness begins to unfold<sup>2</sup>. From this chakra the pingala makes a semicircular curve upwards on the right side of the spine. It crosses the spine again at the swadhisthana chakra and proceeds on a similar curved path on the left side of the spine, until it crosses the spine again at the manipura chakra. In the same manner, pingala continues upwards, crossing the spine in turn at the anahata and vishuddhi chakras until it reaches and ends at the ajna chakra at the top of the spine in the middle of the head. This is clearly illustrated on the accompanying diagram.

The ida path follows a similar path as the pingala but in the opposite sense. They are reflections of each other. That is, as the pingala crosses to the right of the spine, ida crosses to the left and vice versa. The important thing to remember is that they cross each other in turn at each of the chakras, as illustrated.

The central axis of ida and pingala is the sushumna nadi<sup>3</sup>. This nadi portrays the path of the mystics, the path of yoga that treads the narrow razor's edge between the path of ida and the path of pingala. It is depicted as rising straight upwards through the centre of the spine, meeting ida and pingala at the points where they cross at the chakras. The sushumna starts at the mooladhara chakra and passes through all the chakras in turn. Eventually it terminates in sahasrara - the absolute oneness. This is the realm, or non-realm, of *nirvana* or *kaivalya* (onlyness). It is within the sushumna that the kundalini rises, the progressive ascent of knowledge associated with higher states of awareness as the chakras are opened up. All these terms have already been discussed.

(ida), *yamuna* (pingala) and *saraswati* (sushumna) after rivers in India, the last being a mythological junction where the two other rivers actually join in Prayag, Allahabad. The ida and pingala indicate time, while the sushumna is the devourer of time, since it leads to the timeless or eternity.

The ida and pingala have many meanings. The following list indicates a few of these characteristics.

#### Ida

breath flow through  
left nostril  
parasympathetic  
nervous system  
introversion  
awareness  
mind  
moon  
subjectivity  
white  
tha  
negative  
coolness  
inactive  
yin  
female

#### Pingala

breath flow through  
right nostril  
sympathetic  
nervous system  
extroversion  
energy and action  
prana  
sun  
objectivity  
red  
ha  
positive  
heat  
active  
yang  
male

There are many more possible characteristics that could be listed. On the spiritual path, it is the integration and harmony of opposites at all levels that is important. The aim is to combine the opposites associated with duality so that they perfectly merge. This is the meaning of the sushumna. It indicates balance and fusion of the opposite principles of ida and pingala. To illustrate this, we will take a few examples from the list we have already given:

Ida	Sushumna	Pingala
tha	hatha	ha
coolness	temperateness	heat
subjectivity	absolute	objectivity
yin	tao	yang
inaction	actionless action	action

In spiritual life all mutual opposites must be balanced as one progressively expands awareness. This is symbolized by the crossing of ida and pingala at the chakras. The chakras represent the progressive higher levels of awareness.

#### Physical implications

The ida and pingala operate on the physical level. Ida corresponds to the flow of breath through the left nostril, and pingala to the flow through the right nostril. These two flows of breath in turn are directly associated with the functioning of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, which regulate and maintain equilibrium of the different

functions of the body. They are antagonistic; if one predominates, the other is subordinate. One system tends to conserve energy while the other tends to expend it; one system tends to prepare the body for external action, while the other tends to rest the body and direct energy to internal processes. In general, the sympathetic nervous system speeds up the processes of life, such as the heartbeat, the breathing rate and raises body temperature. The parasympathetic nervous system, on the other hand, slows them down, conserving the body's reserve energy. They function night and day, governing the output of the heart, the blood pressure and the speed at which the body's organs operate. Most of these functions are carried out automatically; because of this, we are rarely aware of the activity of these two vital counterbalancing systems.

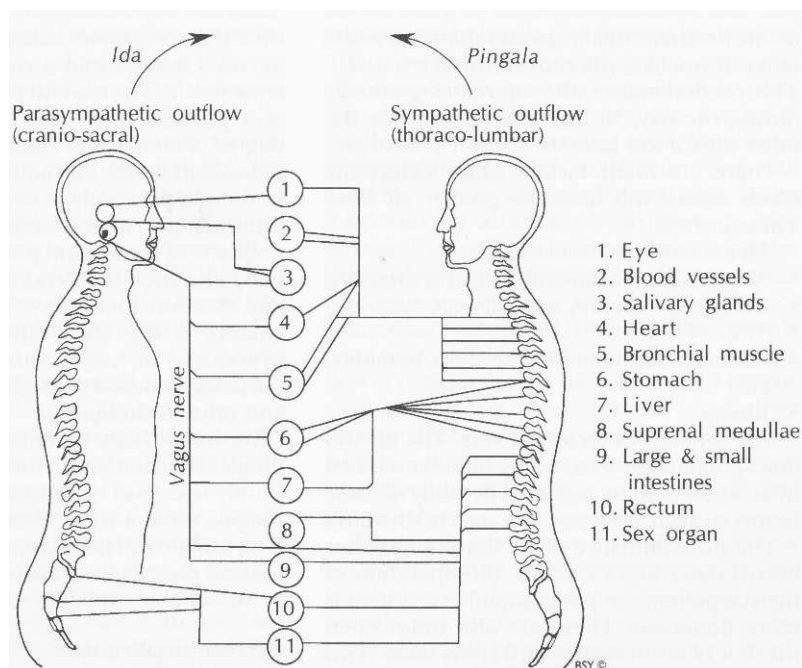
The flow of breath through the left nostril tends to stimulate all the physical organs and nerves associated with the parasympathetic nervous outflow; the flow of breath through the right nostril stimulates organs and nerves of the sympathetic nervous outflow.

This diagram illustrates only the main nerve connections. There are many more, as well as numerous interconnections between the different nerve pathways. If you are interested in looking deeper into this subject, we recommend you consult a textbook on physiology.

To clarify the diagram, the following list shows how stimulation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nerve outflows affect the different organs.

The following chart is an oversimplification, but it illustrates that the sympathetic system tends to mobilize the forces of the body for external action while the parasympathetic system tends to mobilize the forces for internal functioning. *Ida* is the parasympathetic outflow; *pingala* is the sympathetic.

The functions associated with the sympathetic nervous system tend to come into play when the breath flows predominantly through the right nostril. Conversely, all the functions associated with the parasympathetic nervous system tend to come into operation when the breath flows predominantly through the left nostril. At any time in the day, the flow



**Chart 3: Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Outflows**

Organ	Sympathetic Outflow	Parasympathetic Outflow
eye	<i>Stimulation gives:</i> dilation of pupil	<i>Stimulation gives:</i> constriction of pupil
blood vessels of head	constriction (increases brain efficiency)	–
salivary glands	–	secretion of saliva (digestion)
heart	rate quickens	rate slows
bronchial	relaxation	constriction
muscles	air intake increases	air intake reduces
stomach wall	relaxation (digestion stops)	contraction (digestion begins)
liver	mobilization of glycogen (for sudden energy needs)	–
suprarenal medullae	secretion of adrenaline (to face emergencies)	–
small intestinal walls	relaxation (tends to stop digestion)	peristaltic contraction (stimulates digestion)
large intestine (colon)	relaxation (prevents bowl evacuation)	peristaltic contraction (empties bowels)
rectum	constriction (stops emptying of bowels)	peristalsis (emptying of bowels)
sex organs	constriction of blood vessels	dilation of blood vessels

in one nostril is usually greater than that in the other. If you like, you can test this for yourself. This predominance also alternates gradually during the day, so that after some time the other nostril will have the greater flow of air.

There are many factors which determine which nostril will have the greater air flow. These include:

- Mental and emotional states
- Activity, whether physical, mental or strenuous
- Influence of moon, sun, planets, stars, etc.
- Time of day
- Climatic conditions (temperature, humidity, etc.)
- Illness

The number of factors is vast. The air will flow spontaneously according to the combined interaction of these factors. The study of these factors is called *swarayoga* (the yoga of rhythms).

The predominance of air flowing in either nostril determines whether the operation of the sympathetic or parasympathetic system is more dominant. There are also times when the flow of air in each nostril is the same. This occurs when this predominance of flow is changing from one nostril to the other. At this

time there is perfect balance between the two nervous systems and a condition of physical equanimity. The ida and pingala are balanced at a physical level. But this also leads to a degree of mental and emotional balance in the individual because the mind is intimately related to the physical body. They are part of a total interrelated system. Therefore, balance of the two flows of the ida and pingala in the physical body also implies a tendency towards mental and emotional harmony. This time of perfect balance is the ideal time for meditational practices. In yoga, this balance can be purposely induced through asanas, pranayama and other techniques<sup>4</sup>.

We have briefly described how the ida and pingala function within the physical body. This is only one level of functioning. The ida and pingala are not to be identified only with the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. The ida and pingala have meanings at other levels as we will now explain.

### **Psychic implications**

The ida and pingala principles also apply at the pranic and mental levels of being. They

represent the two distinct forces within the human environment. In a sense, they represent the positive and negative aspects - the ebb and flow of human existence. They do not represent two specific psychic passages as is often understood, but rather the total pranic and mental currents. Ida represents the mind and pingala represents the pranic body.

The Chinese, thousands of years ago, developed the concept of *yin* and *yang*. These two principles correspond exactly to the ida and pingala principles. The Chinese also developed the healing system of acupuncture based on the flow of prana within the body. Modern researchers in Russia have photographed these pranic flows, calling the energy bioplasma. This energy is also used in the science of psychic healing (sometimes called spiritual healing). In all these cases it is the pingala aspect of man's psychic being that is being utilized . . . that is prana.

The mind corresponds to the ida aspect of man's psychic realm. It is within this ida aspect that man can develop the so-called supernatural powers such as clairaudience, clairvoyance, telepathy, etc. These powers are merely a part of the vast potential that lies within the grasp of each human being. The negative repercussions of prematurely unfolding and utilizing these powers for selfish ends will be discussed later.

It should be remembered that the mental and pranic forces in man, the ida and the pingala on a psychic level, are inextricably interrelated. The mind has direct repercussions and influence on prana and vice versa. It is only for convenience of explanation that this division is made; don't take it too literally or seriously. This also applies at other levels. Try to regard all aspects of man, physical, pranic and mental, as being inseparably joined and fused to form a whole unit. Try not to become caught in the net of misconceptions by considering that these aspects are watertight, independent departments.

The pingala is associated with action, while the ida is associated with thought. This tendency towards a predominance of thought or action is related to the predominant flow of breath in the left or right nostril, in the same manner that the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are intimately related to the same flows.

In the duration of the twenty-four hour day, there should be an overall balance between the two flows of ida and pingala. That is, the flow through the ida should predominate for about twelve hours, and the pingala also for about twelve hours. Remember, this does not mean that one flow will predominate for a single stretch of twelve hours, but that the total time is twelve hours, composed of smaller durations. If these intervals are equal, then it means that there is a balance between thought and action, between extroversion and introversion<sup>5</sup>.

During daylight hours, the pingala generally predominates. This certainly applies to people who have to use a lot of physical exertion in their occupation; but it also applies to people who do a lot of mental work, for thought has to be translated into external action. Of course, ida will also flow, but it will tend to be subordinate to the pingala flow. Work generally implies dealing with other people and outside events; pingala will therefore tend to predominate during the daytime.

In order to maintain balance of the ida and the pingala, ida will tend to predominate during sleep at night, which counteracts the predominant pingala flow during the daytime.

It is also worthwhile pointing out one reason why people who practise yoga tend to need less sleep. Whereas the average person is totally absorbed in his or her work, the sincere yoga practitioner tends to do everything with a greater sense of detachment; that is, he maintains an attitude of introversion even during strenuous work, maintaining a greater balance between introversion and extroversion throughout the day. This implies greater balance between ida and pingala. Other people need more sleep to compensate for the greater flow of pingala during the daytime. Of course, even great yogis tend to need some sleep because there is always some imbalance. In addition, there are many other factors (moon, sun, climate, etc.) which affect the ida and pingala flows.

If one is excessively worried about work (or any other external preoccupations), and if one is pushing the body beyond its limits, then pingala will tend to predominantly flow day and night. If this imbalance continues over a long period of time then the entire physical and pranic body will become disharmonized.

The result will be illness. This is the situation of large numbers of people in the modern competitive world; they are too active and tense. This is one of the reasons for the prevalence of diseases such as cancer.

On the other hand, a person who broods a great deal, who continually dwells on his problems and who does little work or has little outside interests will have a predominance of ida. He also will suffer eventually, whether from lack of physical exercise, or mental problems such as neurosis.

Thus balance between the ida and pingala is essential. There must be equilibrium between introversion and extroversion. When this is not the case, the human system eventually takes steps to compensate this imbalance. This is manifested in illness, fatigue, depression or whatever. This is a natural law; if you break this law of the body then you must pay the penalty. If you feel tired, then rest; if you feel active then work or play hard. Try to follow the natural rhythm of your body and mind. It is when the body is pushed too hard, because of ambition, fears, desires or whatever, that imbalance occurs. Listen to your body and mind and follow its laws. This is not easy, but through the practise of yoga it becomes progressively easier.

There are a large number of factors which influence the physical, pranic and mental aspects of man, both in the internal and external environment. Any generality that is made about these factors has a tendency to be inadequate. To attribute the predominance of the ida flow or the pingala flow to any one specific cause is also totally inadequate. One has to understand the totality of a situation to obtain a true picture. This requires a high level of intuitive understanding and is the reason why so few people follow the path of swara yoga. We have given no specific details on the factors that determine the dominance of flow in the ida and pingala; we wish merely to indicate the general principles involved and their basic meaning and implications.

### **Spiritual implications**

We have explained the basic meaning of ida and pingala in terms of the physical body, pranic body and the mind. In all cases, you will notice there is the suggestion of a passive and a dynamic mode - an inward looking and

outward looking principle. In the physical sense, the passive, inward directed mode is ida in the form of the parasympathetic nervous system, the internalizing forces of the body; this is counterbalanced by pingala in the form of the dynamic, outward looking aspect of the sympathetic nervous system. In the psychic realms, ida corresponds to the mind and mental forces of man, and pingala corresponds to the pranic or bioplasmic body. In a much wider and all embracing sense the pingala corresponds to universal prana, shakti or the energy of manifestation and the ida with awareness. This is clearly indicated in many scriptures such as the Upanishads and Tantras. The physical, pranic and mental aspects are included and encompassed by this higher definition. This universal prana is *prakriti* - the power behind all manifestation, force, energy and matter. Awareness is the witnessing principle, the actionless aspect that is associated with consciousness, *Shiva* or *purusha*. This wider, more comprehensive definition of ida and pingala has vast implications and significance on the spiritual path as we will shortly explain.

We have already said that the ida and pingala are depicted diagrammatically as crossing each other at the ascending chakras. This has a most important meaning for the spiritual aspirant. It means that as one opens up the potential of the mind there should always be a balance between inner awareness and action, inner knowledge and external expression in the world. If one of these aspects predominates then there is imbalance. This is why spiritual awakening should be slow and progressive, to allow one's actions to match one's level of inner understanding, one's expression and relationships in the outside world to match and balance the inner expansion.

As one becomes more and more aware, so one's actions must be modified accordingly. In this sense, the chakras represent something like a stage of rest where one recuperates and balances action with understanding. Failure to do this leads either to a block to further progress, or a fall. This is to be the main subject of the rest of this discussion.

At the level of the ajna chakra ida and pingala merge and become one. This is very symbolic. It represents the stage where the differences between prana and consciousness are broken down. They are seen to be one and the same



thing. The principle of ida merges with the principle of pingala to become one.

#### **The deeper significance of hatha yoga**

Hatha yoga is the best known of the yogic paths because it is the yoga that deals directly with the physical body. It is therefore a path that everyone can relate to and see an obvious reason for practising, but this is, once again, a gross oversimplification. Hatha yoga has far more implications than physical fitness alone.

*Hatha* is composed of the two syllables *ha* and *tha*. The syllable *ha* means 'the sun' and *tha* means 'the moon'. Therefore, hatha yoga is concerned with attaining harmony between the sun and moon aspects of our being. The moon implies ida nadi which is often called the *chandra nadi* (chandra - moon). The sun represents the pingala nadi, which is often called the *surya nadi* (surya - sun). Hatha yoga is intimately concerned with everything that we have so far discussed in this topic - the balance between ida and pingala. Remember that ida and pingala have many levels of meaning as we have tried to show under previous headings. Hatha yoga is concerned with balancing the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. It is concerned with balancing flows in the psychic realms of being; with balancing the tendency of mental introversion and extroversion. In the highest sense, it is concerned with balancing and harmonizing inner awareness with external expression and relationships and of inaction with action. Hatha yoga is concerned with balance at all these different levels of being, making it an elevated path of practice, with far more implications than are usually attributed to it. Keep this in mind the next time you practise hatha yoga.

#### **The path of ida**

This is the path of mental unfoldment, when one becomes aware of the inner potential of the mind. If one is totally concerned with this path, then there is a tendency to unleash mental (psychic) powers, which are often used for selfish ends.

Many of the scriptures clearly state that concern only with this path of ida can eventually lead to a block on the spiritual path, and can even lead to a downfall. Many occult schools, operating without a competent guru, follow this path. They develop psychic powers amid

an atmosphere of selfishness. Inner awareness is developed, but there is always a limit. Many people who are concerned only with this path develop neuroses and psychoses because they confront their inner seed problems (samskaras) too quickly and too suddenly. They don't allow the samskaras to be exhausted through interaction with the outer world through work etc. This is also generally the case with drugs. They open up inner psychic awareness too quickly and can cause many (though not all) people to be suddenly overwhelmed by their inner complexes, phobias, etc. There is also a tendency for many drug users to become concerned only with personal experiences and pleasure. This is the path of ida. This one-sided development eventually becomes an obstacle to further unfolding of one's potential on the spiritual path. Drugs used under the guidance of a competent master are something totally different. In this case, the master will take care to guide his disciple along both the ida and pingala paths, so leading to spiritual awakening.

Hitler, and other black magicians, and in fact numerous people throughout the world were on this path of ida and many are now treading it. They unlock psychic powers for selfish reasons, using these powers to harm others. This is called black magic. Any person who misuses these powers pays the penalty; they reap their own punishment - eventual loss of their powers.

We should point out that knowledge of the inner world is part of the spiritual path, an essential part. But over concern with exploring the inner world to the exclusion of all else can be a block. It can lead to a certain stage after which there will be no progress. One will either find that one's efforts to explore the mind will lead to states of unconsciousness (laya) or one will be tempted to misapply one's knowledge, depending on the individual and the degree of success in exploring the mind. We urge you not to tread this ida path to the exclusion of all else. Balance it with pingala, the path of external expression. It is only in this way that you can work out and remove your problems and selfish motives and attitudes towards others. It is only in this manner that you can gradually develop understanding, love and positive relationships with other people and the world in general.

### **The path of pingala**

This is the path that most people in the world are now following - the pravritti marga - the path of external action and enjoyment. It is the path of trying to attain knowledge through understanding of the outside world. Little significance is attached to understanding the inner world. It is the path where one acts in the world mostly for personal gain and one's own welfare. One tries to manipulate other people and the immediate environment for one's own satisfaction and motives. This may be done blatantly, subtly, innocently, unconsciously, even insidiously, craftily or whatever, but always there is a personal motive. Total concern with the outside world, the path of pingala alone, is an obstacle on the spiritual path.

Before a person can seriously start to tread the spiritual path, however, it is usually necessary to be completely immersed in the pingala path of external activity. From experiences in the world, from exhaustion of ambitions, from gaining satisfaction through the attainment of personal aims and finding that they give little increase in happiness, will come a stage where one starts to question one's relationship with life, asking questions such as: What am I? Where am I going? What is this life all about? What right have I to consider myself as being more important than others? Is this life really functioning according to the law of the jungle? and so forth. Of course, there are very few people who don't ask these questions. But generally they are quickly forgotten in the rush to satisfy one's needs, in the rush to become more successful than one's neighbour and in so many other activities that keep people busy twenty-four hours a day, whether in physical action, thought or dreams. Only when one reaches a certain stage do these questions about life start to have some intensity. When these questions are asked seriously then a person will take positive steps to find answers. At this point aspiration really begins. This is the start of spiritual awakening where the pingala path is supplemented by the ida path. One begins to combine outer activities with inner awareness.

Ida and pingala paths are usually depicted as starting from the mooladhara chakra. But with respect to spiritual life, it is probably truer to say that pingala extends into the lower

chakras, the chakras associated with instinctive life in man, animals and lower life forms. The ida, however, does start at mooladhara, for it is here that individual awareness starts to unfold. Below mooladhara there is no awareness, but external actions do exist. Therefore, pingala really has a nebulous beginning below mooladhara where life functions in its most primitive, basic and simple forms. This is only a concept but worth noting and remembering.

### **Integration of ida and pingala**

The main purpose of this topic is to emphasize the importance of integrating and balancing the ida and pingala. By combining both paths, one's potential is unfolded in a balanced manner. Inner potential and awareness are expanded with a corresponding change in the actions and relationships with the external environment. This combination leads to a progressive effacement of ego-centred motives and identification, which in turn leads to the rising of the kundalini through the chakras. One's power and knowledge are increased according to the expansion of awareness. The word kundalini does not mean mere power; it means power and potential combined with awareness, understanding and a sense of identification with other people. This understanding is necessary so that one acts for the good of others as well as oneself - for the overall good of everything. The kundalini rises up sushumna, the middle path, the balance between ida and pingala. It rises in accordance with the level of ego effacement. This occurs for a short duration during intense meditation practices or more permanently through a total harmonization of one's life at all levels.

At the ajna chakra, ida and pingala join and also end. This implies that after this point, the barriers and differences between the inner and the outer realms of existence are broken down. They combine to become one harmonious whole. This is symbolized by the sahasrara and is nirvana.

The integration of ida and pingala is profoundly important. It is impossible to make progress on the spiritual path beyond a certain point unless one slowly erases the power of the ego. This is done by harmonizing inner life with outer life. This will not happen overnight. It must be progressive and spontaneous. The distinctive characteristic feature of a great yogi

or a saint is a lack of ego. They have not achieved their illumination while maintaining a strong sense of individual ego. One cannot exist with the other in the same way that total darkness cannot exist at the same time as total daylight. But don't worry if you are very egotistical. Accept the situation. You are not alone. But if you have aspirations to tread the spiritual path then question all your ego motives. You need not stop acting egotistically, merely know that your actions are self-centred. This in itself will slowly help to reduce ego-centred actions and thoughts. It will not remove the ego, but it will help to reduce it. The ego must exist at all stages of spiritual life until the culmination has been attained.

The best way to progressively reduce the power of the ego is to combine the ida and pingala paths; integrate your duties and work in the world with meditational practices. This will help you to gain understanding of the inner world. The knowledge that you gain of the inner world will automatically reduce your egotistical tendencies in the outside world, and your new relationships with the external world will in turn help you to go deeper into the realms of the inner being. The ego will be slowly whittled away.

In spiritual life it is essential to balance inner awareness with external expression. Ida must be in balance with pingala.

### **Selfishness and selflessness**

Selfishness and selflessness are mutually exclusive. Where there is one, there cannot be the other. If a person is selfish in an action or thought, then he cannot also be selfless. One leads to awakening of human potential while the other prevents it. Selfishness is an obstacle, while selflessness is a necessity. But of course, selfishness cannot be wiped out instantaneously; it takes time. This is the purpose of yoga practices (sadhana). As you expand awareness and change your attitudes correspondingly in the outside world, then your ego motives will gradually reduce.

This is directly related to the ida and pingala. If you concentrate too much on ida (introversion) then your ego will not reduce. You will make little headway in realizing your potential beyond a certain point. If you are totally involved in the outside world, without any inner awareness, then again there will be

no drastic changes in your ego-centredness. This is the case with most people. In the first case, people tend to be absorbed in getting 'high' on psychic experiences, which eventually leads to self-centredness. In the second case, people tend not to have the incentive to change their ego-centred attitude to others, even if they recognize them in the first place. It is only when the ida and pingala are balanced that there is a reasonable balance between inner unfoldment and outer expression; it is here that the ego identification becomes less.

This balanced attitude towards life is very important, and is clearly stated in the scriptures. Christ said: "Look within", but he did not mean people to lose themselves in psychic adventures. He said look inside but also "Love thy neighbour" and "Love thy enemy". This important point is often missed or forgotten. The Mahayana Buddhist system emphasizes that you should not seek nirvana (liberation) for your own benefit. You should seek nirvana for the sake of other people. This is embodied in the ideal of the *Bodhisattva*. It is very easy to miss the significance of this idea. The Mahayana Buddhists say that a person should not be satisfied until he has gained liberation of all other beings. Of course, this is rather an impossible task, and is not really intended to be taken literally. The purpose of this ideal is to indicate that spiritual awakening should not be and cannot be egotistical. It cannot be a personal thing; it is not possible. The spiritual path does not mean that you only unfold your own nature and potential; it means that you simultaneously understand and tune in with the nature of others.

The implications of the sayings of Christ and the precepts of Mahayana Buddhism are that one should have aspiration for awakening one's potential, but that one should not become lost in continual thoughts of personal self-development and progress. There has to be a balance between ida and pingala. You have to develop inner awareness, relate this to the outside world and change your attitude to other people and things along harmonious lines. One must develop understanding of both oneself and others and try to follow the rule: "Do to others as you would wish them to do unto you."

The balance of the ida and pingala is the 'middle path'. It is basically the same path that

Buddha advocated but put in different words. This balanced attitude towards life, both internally and externally, will bring greater selflessness. It will arise spontaneously through understanding brought about by the simultaneous development of inner awareness and outer expression. It arises through simultaneous balancing of the ida and pingala at all levels. This is the way to unfold the potential that is your heritage. Bear this balance in mind and apply it as much as possible. Practise meditational techniques etc. in the inner world combined with karma yoga in the outside world. This is so important.

#### Summary

We have discussed the meaning and implications of ida and pingala at the following levels:

1. *Physically* in relation to the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, and in turn the organs and functions of the entire body. Balance of ida and pingala at this level helps to maintain or bring about perfect health.

2. *Mentally and pranically* with regard to energy flows and direction of thoughts. Overstimulation of either the ida or pingala aspect of the psyche can bring disharmony. There must be balance.

3. *Inner awareness and outer expression.* Failure to develop inner awareness and also rejection of external actions both act as obstacles on the path to higher understanding and bliss. There must be detachment from both inner and outer events, but with continued participation in the world and simultaneous development and intensification of inner awareness.

Balance of ida and pingala at all levels is most important if you want to gain good health, if you want peace of mind, and if you want to attain understanding of your own being<sup>6</sup>.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The chakras have been fully discussed in Lessons 19, 20 and 21

<sup>2</sup> Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2

<sup>3</sup> Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2

<sup>4</sup> For further details refer to Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 2

<sup>5</sup> For more information refer to Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 3

<sup>6</sup> For the second part of this discussion refer to Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

## Anahata Chakra

The anahata chakra is the fourth chakra, coming after the mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura chakras. It is located in the heart region of the spine.

### Definition

The word *anahata* means 'unstruck' or 'unbeaten'. Therefore, the anahata chakra is the centre of unbeaten sound. That is, the cosmic sound (*shabda brahman*) is heard at this centre ... a sound that does not arise as a result of two objects hitting each other as do other sounds. The sound that is heard is uncaused.

This chakra is also widely called the *hridaya chakra*, heart centre, because of its location.

### Attributes

This centre is widely regarded as the centre of consciousness (*jivatma*) in man. Because of this, many sects say that this is the best place to concentrate during meditational practices. In the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali (3:34) it says: "The Atma is realized by reflection at the heart centre (anahata chakra)." In this context, one can create a mental image at this centre in the *hridayakasha* (ethereal space at the heart centre), chant a mantra, continually repeat an enquiry about a certain aspect of existence (as in *jnana yoga*) and many other practices. This centre is so powerful for it is the seat of emotions. These emotions when purified and one-pointed are transformed into devotion. Opening of this chakra produces intense feelings of *bhakti*. One's emotional or devotional power flows in one constant stream, in one direction, transforming the being of an individual. The mind becomes overwhelmingly one-pointed which leads to transcendence.

The anahata chakra is the level where one begins to accept and love everyone and everything unconditionally. One begins to perceive that though people and objects may have gross aspects and differences, they are really embodiments of perfection. One begins to love people

and the objects of the world for what they are. One begins to accept their nature, with its faults and positive qualities, and to realize that everyone and everything is acting according to its *swadharma*. All things are performing specific roles, like actors on a stage, in accordance with inherent qualities. A lion acts like a lion because it is designed to act like a lion. A stone acts like a stone because it has been designed to be like a stone. A human acts in a specific manner because of the inherent human design. This design is *swadharma*.

The attributes of a person at the level of understanding of the anahata chakra are described in the *Shut Chakra Nrupana* (verse 27) as: "Foremost among the yogis he is ever dearer than the dearest beloved husband of a woman. He is wise and performs noble deeds. His senses are under control. His mind is concentrated and ever engrossed in reflection on Brahman. His inspired speech flows like a stream of clear water ..."

At the level of the anahata chakra, one begins to become more creative, whether in the field of science, art, music, poetry or whatever. Many of the well-known creative people of the world functioned at this level or higher.

Above this chakra level there is progressively less identification with limited human existence. One starts to transcend individual identification. One's identification expands. This is one reason why the *jiva* (individual embodiment of consciousness) is said to reside at anahata.

### The ananda kanda

Just below the anahata chakra there is a minor centre called the *ananda kanda*, the root of bliss. It is here that many people create an image of their *ishta devata* (personalized deity) and worship mentally. It is a centre where devotion is intensified.

At this centre there is said to be a celestial tree. In the traditional scriptures it is called

*kalpa vriksha* (wish fulfilling tree), *kalpaka* and *kalpa taru*, all with the same meaning. It is said to be in Indra's heaven and that it grants all wishes. Of course, this belief is wrapped up in so many stories and myths, but it represents a great truth: that at the level of anahata chakra one tends to receive what one wishes for. This is a strange thing, but nevertheless an aspect of the ascent into the realms of higher understanding. One's wishes will tend to bear fruit if the sankalpa (wish or resolve) is strong enough. This applies to both positive and negative wishes. Therefore, a person at this level must be careful not to make negative resolves otherwise there will be destructive and painful results. For example, it is possible to bring about severe illness by mere thought (sankalpa). However, the law of existence makes it generally impossible for people with negative attitudes to ascend to this level. There has to be a degree of self-purification before one rises to the level of the anahata chakra, otherwise negative thoughts and ambitions could easily destroy and cause great harm.

In some tantric texts the kalpa vriksha is also called chintamani. The Sanskrit word *chinta* here means 'thoughts' and *man* means 'jewel'. Therefore, *chintamani* means 'the jewel of thought'. It is said that the chintamani is a tree growing in the middle of a divine lake. The divine lake is located in the middle of a beautiful garden. The garden is said to be the abode of divine beings. The meaning of this scene is that people who live at the level of anahata chakra have a divine awareness, and that whatever they wish will happen.

We don't ask you to believe the implications behind this centre called the ananda kanda; it is better to tread the tantric-yogic path and discover the experiences for yourself.

### Symbolism

There are various ways of symbolizing the anahata chakra. The diagram that we have given is one. The central figure is a blue lotus with twelve petals. In many traditional diagrams the petals are inscribed with the following Sanskrit letters: ^ (kam), T (kham), ^ (gam), (gham), (nam), ^f (cham), (chham), (jam), ff (jham), ^f (nam), Z (tam) and (tham). We have omitted these letters in our diagram for the sake of simplicity. In the centre of the lotus there are two interlaced triangles, which

together form a hexagon (Star of David). The upward pointing triangle indicates the direction of higher understanding and awareness - the spiritual path. The downward pointing triangle indicates the direction of descent into lower states of awareness and understanding. The anahata chakra is a midway point on the path between mundane levels of existence at the mooladhara chakra and transcendental levels at the ajna and above. The upward pointing triangle indicates Shiva (consciousness) and the downward triangle represents Shakti (the power of manifestation and creator of limitation and individuality). At the level of the anahata there is perfect balance between these two aspects of existence in the individual. The upward pointing triangle indicates the path of nivritti, the return to the source of being; the downward facing triangle means the pravritti path, the path of entanglement in the world of illusion. There are also many other meanings behind the two triangles.

At the bottom of the lotus there is the mantra (yam). This is the bija (seed) mantra of the anahata chakra.

In the centre of the diagram there is a candle flame, which symbolizes the spark of life and consciousness that exists in all things and which is particularly luminous in man. It represents the jivatman (the divine light in man). In some traditional diagrams of the anahata chakra the flame is represented by a lingam instead. It is called the *bana lingam*, and is said to be golden in colour and lustrous like ten thousand suns. Both the lingam and the flame have the same meaning as the *akhanda jyoti* (eternal flame) that is kept burning day and night in many ashrams. The light of consciousness spreads out in all directions - it is unlimited. This is symbolized in the diagram by the four rays radiating out in four directions.

The anahata chakra is the centre of devotion; therefore, the colours of the given diagrams have been printed to convey an emotional tone. Incidentally, one of the greatest symbols of the anahata chakra is Hanuman, the monkey deity of the Indian scripture called the *Ramayana*. It is he who shows total devotion to Rama in every action and thought. It is this devotion and identification that leads directly to transcendence.

Much more can be said about the symbology of the anahata chakra, especially with regard

to deities etc. We leave you to see more in the symbolic diagram.

#### Location

Anahata chakra is located in the spine directly behind the heart; though perhaps directly behind the centre of the chest is a more exact description.

At first the mental location of the anahata chakra is quite difficult. A useful aid in developing sensitivity to the exact point in the spine is as follows: place one finger at the centre of the chest; place the other hand behind the back and try to place a finger on the spine at the same horizontal level as the finger in the front of the body. If necessary use a mirror or the help of another person to find exactly the right position. Then apply a greater pressure on the spine with the finger. With the eyes closed, feel the sensation of pressure and try to locate the exact position.

With time and practice this will help you to find the exact location of the point of the anahata chakra.

#### Anahata kshetram

The point on the front of the chest in front of the anahata chakra trigger point is called the *anahata kshetram*. It is widely utilized in kriya yoga practices. You should be able to mentally locate this point as well as the chakra trigger point in the spine. The following practice will help you to be able to do this.

#### ANAHATA SHUDDHI (PURIFICATION OF ANAHATA)

The method of locating the anahata chakra and kshetram is called *anahata shuddhi* - the purification of the anahata. It is very simple and the procedure is as follows.

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Hold the back straight, but without strain.

Close the eyes.

Be aware of the expansion and contraction of the chest as you breathe in and out.

Feel as though the breath is being pulled in and out at the chest (anahata kshetram) as the chest expands and contracts.

As you breathe in, feel the breath being pulled from the anahata chakra trigger point in the spine through the anahata kshetram and outwards in front of the body.

As you breathe out, feel the breath being pushed inwards through the anahata kshetram to the anahata chakra in the spine.

Try to feel the exact locations of the chakra and kshetram.

Continue in this way for about 10 minutes.

Then synchronize the mantra Aum with the breathing process: Aum with inhalation and Aum with exhalation.

Feel the breath and the mantra piercing the chakra and kshetram in the same way as already described.

Continue in this manner for the time that you have assigned for the practice; at least 10 minutes is recommended.

#### Integration with Ajapa

In this topic we have described ajapa stage 3'. As the breath moves up and down between the navel and the throat, feel the piercing of the manipura and anahata kshetram. With practice this will become very distinct.

#### CHAKRA SHUDDHI (PURIFICATION THE CHAKRAS)

##### Location of the other chakras

Over the previous three lessons we have given techniques for locating and gaining sensitivity to the mooladhara<sup>2</sup>, swadhisthana<sup>3</sup>, and manipura trigger points<sup>4</sup>, and the corresponding kshetram. If you can now locate these points easily and clearly, then you can start to practise *chakra shuddhi* instead. This practice is very simple and is as follows:

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Close the eyes.

Begin with the mooladhara chakra.

Centre your attention at mooladhara chakra<sup>2</sup>.

Mentally chant Aum 21 times, synchronizing the chanting with the pulse beat at mooladhara.

Then repeat the same thing first with the swadhisthana chakra and then the kshetram; chant Aum mentally 21 times at each location in coordination with the pulse<sup>3</sup>.

Then repeat the same thing with the manipura chakra and kshetram<sup>4</sup>.

If you have time, repeat the whole process, starting again from mooladhara.

If you wish you can use a mala to record the 21 chants at each location. Tie a knot after the twenty-first bead. Then rotate the mala at each location until you reach the knot; then reverse

the rotation back to the sumeru bead<sup>5</sup>. It is important however that most of your attention is on feeling the mantra vibration at the chakra and kshetram sites, the minimum being directed to the rotation of the mala.

We suggest you practise this technique from now onwards to develop sensitively to the chakra and kshetram locations. If you have difficulty in feeling these sites then continue with the individual chakra practices described previously.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Topic 5 of this lesson

<sup>2</sup> Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2

<sup>3</sup> Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 3

<sup>4</sup> Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3

<sup>5</sup> Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5



## Asanas: Sirshasana (Part 2)

Sirshasana is not dangerous if it is developed gradually over a period of time, and providing the basic rules are carefully followed. Many people are apprehensive, suspicious and disinclined to do it.

It is often pointed out that it seems unnatural to invert the body for a period of time and if it were necessary then we would walk about on our hands. Well, maybe. But man is also designed to do a lot of physical exercise and not sit in one position for protracted lengths of time. Vigorous and regular exercise speeds up the blood circulation and ensures that the brain receives sufficient well oxygenated blood. Exercise also prevents blood stagnating in the lower parts of the body such as the legs; lack of exercise, which is the characteristic of modern city dwelling man, leads to varicose veins, haemorrhoids and general inefficiency of the organs of the body.

So sirshasana is in a sense an unnatural method of combating an unnatural lifestyle. Apart from this, however, sirshasana is an excellent method of bringing about calmness and concentration in preparation for meditative practices.

### Scientific experiments

Various experiments have been conducted to measure the changes that occur within the body during the practice of sirshasana. These confirm scientifically what we have discovered from personal experience.

X-rays taken during the practice of sirshasana have shown a considerable shift of the diaphragm, changes in the longitudinal and transverse dimensions of the heart, and widening of the arteries and veins leading to and from the lungs, especially in the upper lobes. The significance is that more blood is travelling to and from the lungs, increasing oxygenation. The upper lobe which usually is not well oxygenated by a normal breath, is washed free of stagnant blood.

The tests clearly indicate that the amount of air breathed per minute (minute ventilation) during the performance of sirshasana was considerably reduced. The frequency of respiration (the number of breaths per minute) was lowered. Oxygen consumption by the tissues increased and the amount of oxygen exhaled was less, indicating that the transfer of oxygen to the blood is greatly increased.

There was an increase in the leucocyte (white blood cell) count, implying that the body's ability to withstand and resist infection is increased as the white blood cells are used to destroy bacteria and other foreign objects in the body.

These tests are significant and apply if the individual is completely relaxed. If the practitioner is tense or stressed while performing sirshasana, then it is possible to obtain contradictory results.

From these experiments we can conclude that sirshasana allows for a greater possibility of adaptive mechanisms in respect to circulation and respiration.

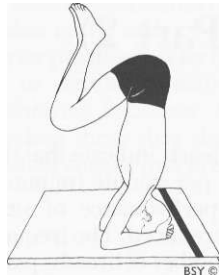
In the future, no doubt, more intricate experiments will be carried out to record and map out the actual blood flow changes in the brain; how the blood flow to the pituitary and pineal is modified and how it improves their functional efficiency; how other organs of the body are influenced and so forth. The influence of sirshasana on brain waves would also be an interesting scientific experiment. There is much scope for these kinds of tests and they would put the physical benefits obtainable from sirshasana on a firm scientific basis.

### SIRSHASANA (HEADSTAND POSE) - PART 2

#### Technique for the last three stages

The most difficult aspect of mastering sirshasana is raising the body into the final pose. Once this is achieved then staying in the final

pose presents little difficulty. If you have perfected the first three stages, then you are ready to master the last three stages<sup>1</sup>.



#### **Stage 4: raising the legs**

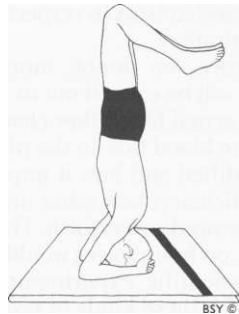
When you can raise your feet off the ground in stage 3 without losing balance, then you are ready to do stage 4.

Slowly raise your legs upwards, taking care to adjust your centre of balance accordingly; that is, the position of the trunk has to be slightly adjusted to counterbalance the weight of the legs.

Fold the legs upwards and backwards so that the heels move towards the buttocks.

This movement is accomplished by contracting the muscles of the lower back.

Take care that you maintain equilibrium and you don't fall backwards.



#### **Stage 5: elevating the knees**

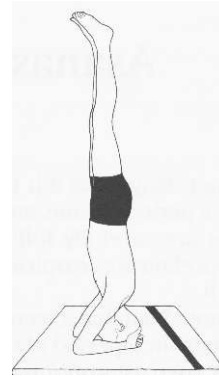
At the end of stage 4 the knees still point downwards.

Keeping the heels near the buttocks, slowly raise the knees upwards.

In the final position of stage 5 the knees should point directly upwards, with the feet pointing downwards.

Make sure that the spine and thighs are in line,

straight and vertical. Then proceed on to the final stage.



#### **Stage 6: final pose**

Slowly raise the feet so that they point upwards and the legs become straight.

The whole body should lie in one straight line. This is the final pose of sirshasana.

Make sure that you feel perfect balance; at first you may tend to wobble a little, but with practice you become very stable in the pose, as stable as in the standing position.

Relax the whole body as much as possible.

Close the eyes.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time.

Then return to the starting position on the floor in the reverse order stages 6 to 1.

#### **Points to remember in the technique**

- Don't move the head or arms after stage 1. If you do so you may lose balance. If you feel discomfort then you should return to the starting position, make any adjustments and then again perform the asana.
- If you lose balance make sure that you land on the ground in the way previously described<sup>1</sup>.
- Keep the whole body vertical in the final pose; don't incline it backwards, forwards or sideways.
- Try to relax as many muscles as possible in the final position.
- Don't point the toes upwards in the final pose for this contracts the leg muscles and will impede free drainage of blood from the legs. Relax the feet and legs.

- Try to ensure that most of the weight of the body is supported on the head in the final position and not the arms. The arms should be used mainly to maintain equilibrium. At first you may be inclined to use the arms to provide much of the support for the body; there is nothing wrong with this, but over a period of time try to gradually let the head take the main supportive role.

### **Returning to the ground**

You should return to the starting position by doing the stages in reverse order. The body should be lowered slowly and with control. Don't let the body drop down, try to come down so gently that the feet make no sound when they touch the floor.

### **Breathing, awareness and duration**

In the starting position breathe in. Hold the breath inside while raising the body to the final pose. Breathe slowly and deeply in the final position. Breathe in deeply and then hold the breath as you lower the body to the starting position.

While raising and lowering the body, the attention should be on correct movement, synchronization of the different movements and on maintaining balance. In the final position you can be aware of breathing, or the centre of the head, or you can visualize any psychic symbol in front of your closed eyes. You can choose anything. Beginners, however, should direct their awareness to maintaining balance.

Experts who are in perfect health and who have been doing sirshasana for many years, can practise for up to thirty minutes. But we don't recommend this to most people, especially beginners. Prolonged duration by inexperienced people could cause more harm than good. Furthermore, we strongly recommend that anyone wanting to do sirshasana for more than five minutes at a time should consult a yoga school or ashram for guidance.

Beginners should start with no more than thirty seconds. This duration can be gradually increased by about ten seconds a day (about

minutes. At this point you should seek expert advice. This slow increase in duration is important, for it allows the blood vessels in the brain to slowly adjust and accustom themselves

to the extra blood pressure that occurs in the final pose. Also, the neck muscles must be slowly strengthened; in fact the entire body must be gradually accustomed to the inversion of the body. You must use your common sense in deciding how long to remain in the final pose. If you feel the slightest fatigue, trembling, head strain or general anxiety then stop doing the asana.

Eventually you should aim to stay in the final position for at least three minutes, since it takes a minute or so for the inverted position to bring changes in the body, especially the blood flow to the brain and the drainage of blood from the legs. Under no circumstances should you strain or stay in the final pose for longer than is comfortable.

### **Counterpose**

More than most other asanas, the counterpose to sirshasana is essential to return normality to the body functions. Various types of counterposes are recommended by different people. Some people advise tadasana, others shavasana and some say that the body should be massaged in a standing position. We recommend the following procedure: remain in the kneeling position for about thirty seconds with the head on the ground after having lowered the body from the final pose, then do tadasana for about a minute<sup>2</sup>. While doing tadasana, try to remain balanced on tiptoes for the whole minute, with the eyes focussed on a point on the wall in front of the body. If you wish, you can practise shavasana for a few minutes after tadasana<sup>3</sup>.

### **Sequence**

The order in which sirshasana should be done in the daily practice program depends on various factors.

If you only do asanas without pranayama and meditative techniques, then practise sirshasana at the beginning of the program. This will increase attentiveness so that you gain the most out of the other asanas. If your practice program includes pranayama and/or meditative practices then you should do sirshasana immediately after the other asanas. The reason is that the other asanas loosen up the body so that you are less distracted by physical aches and pains during pranayama and meditative practice. they also enhance

awareness and wakefulness. Sirshasana then intensifies the awareness so that one gains the most out of the subsequent practices of pranayama and meditation.

Beginners should generally do the practice after other asanas when their system has been purified and balanced.

#### **Time of practice**

Sirshasana can be done at any time during the day, but it should not be done for at least three or four hours after meals and for thirty minutes after vigorous physical exercise. The ideal time to practise is early in the morning before breakfast.

#### **Persons who should not do sirshasana**

There is a wide range of people who should not attempt sirshasana. They include sufferers of the following ailments:

- High blood pressure
- Weak or malfunctioning heart
- Cerebral or coronary thrombosis
- Arteriosclerosis
- Weak eye blood vessels
- Conjunctivitis and chronic glaucoma
- Any form of haemorrhage in the head
- Otia (inflammation of the ears)
- Chronic catarrh (sirshasana can help in the early stages, but can aggravate the condition in the later chronic stages)
- Slipped disc (if you have a slipped disc it is very difficult to raise the body to the final pose)
- Extremely impure blood, since the impurities could be directed into the brain. If you are not sure about the condition of your blood then you should seek expert advice. One sure indication of impure blood is chronic constipation and excessive spots and pimples.
- Kidney problems, since this could possibly imply that your blood is not being efficiently cleaned of waste materials.

This is only a brief list. There are many other types of ailments which preclude the practice of sirshasana. Again if you are not sure, contact a yoga school or ashram for proper guidance.

Before attempting to practise sirshasana, make sure that you are not one of the people who should not do it.

#### **Temporary restrictions**

Sirshasana should not be done under the following circumstances:

- If your bowels are excessively full.
- If you feel physically tired.
- If you have a headache or migraine. These conditions are often associated with a slightly elevated blood pressure in the brain; if you do sirshasana then the condition will be aggravated.
- Directly after eating a meal (three to four hours should have elapsed before attempting the practice)
- Until thirty minutes have elapsed after intense physical exercise, as the blood will contain excessive impurities associated with by-products of muscular activities. These impurities must firstly be eliminated from the blood in the normal manner through urination, perspiration or respiration. Sirshasana can be practised after other asanas since these do not build up the toxic levels of the blood; in fact if they are done correctly, they will reduce blood impurities.
- During pregnancy or menstruation.
- Sirshasana should be immediately terminated if you develop a headache, feel dizziness, perspire profusely, become very hot, have palpitations of the heart or if you feel generally uncomfortable.
- Also discontinue the asana if you feel any suffocation.

These rules may seem rather numerous, but they are necessary so that you don't harm yourself.

#### **General advice**

There are no specific age restrictions for practising sirshasana, but elderly people should be careful.

In the final pose, you may initially experience partial blockage of the nose. Try to persevere and you should find that the breathing becomes easier after a short period of time. Don't breathe through the mouth. If breathing is too difficult then terminate the asana for a minute or so and then repeat.

Like all asanas, it is not necessary to use excessive energy to practise sirshasana. Intense effort is a definite sign that you are either doing sirshasana incorrectly or that you should not be doing it in the first place. Try to perform it with as much relaxation as possible.

### Benefits

The benefits obtainable from regular practise of sirshasana are extensive. The following is merely a summary.

Perfect health of the brain cells allows the brain and in turn the physical body to function efficiently and to full capacity. The thought processes are allowed to manifest more vividly. Sirshasana directs an enriched oxygenated supply of blood to the brain cells. This blood

flow is at a slightly increased pressure due to action of gravity. Blood vessels are very elastic and can dilate or constrict according to the prevailing blood pressure. Therefore, the higher blood pressure in the brain dilates the blood vessels and opens out those that have become closed or blocked. This means that the entire brain and all the billions of cells receive more nourishment. Consequently all the cells are rejuvenated and thereby work more effectively. The extra flow of blood under a slightly elevated pressure also flushes out accumulated toxins and general waste material from the brain cells. This is analogous to cleaning accumulated dirt in a blocked pipe by using a strong flow of water, it may take only a few minutes to clean a pipe in this manner, and the improvement in the normal flow through the pipe is great. It is similar with the brain; though sirshasana may be done only for a few minutes every day, it can rejuvenate and revitalize the entire brain. In turn, the whole body health can be greatly improved.

Such ailments as headache and migraine are believed to be partly caused by compression of certain blood vessels in the brain. Sirshasana helps to relax and strengthen these vessels and thereby prevent the occurrence of these ailments. Note, however, that sirshasana should not be done during the actual time of headache or migraine. These ailments are also associated with mental tension, so sirshasana helps to prevent these ailments by inducing calmness.

The increased blood flow to the brain revitalizes all the nervous centres and the controller of the endocrinal system, the pituitary. In this way, sirshasana helps to rectify various types of glandular and nervous disorders. It can have a significant and positive influence in relieving diabetes. As we have already pointed out, the probable root cause of diabetes is the pituitary gland<sup>4</sup>. The symp-

tom of the disease manifests in malfunctioning of the pancreas. It is believed that with sufferers of diabetes, the pituitary secretes too much diabetogenic hormone. Medically, it is very difficult to interfere with the functioning of the pituitary gland, and so modern medicine is forced to treat diabetes with insulin. Sirshasana, however, acts directly on the pituitary gland by improving the blood supply and this has been found to be a great help in combating diabetes. This is especially true if sirshasana is supplemented with other relaxation practices of yoga which reduce the tension level that interferes with the normal working of the pituitary. So if you are a diabetic, and there are no further serious ailments, then we suggest you start practising sirshasana as well as other yogic techniques.

Sirshasana has also been found to be a great help in combating sexual disorders such as prostate problems, hydrocele, leucorrhea, spermatorrhea and all general menopausal and menstrual ailments. If you refer to the previous discussion on the endocrinal system, you will appreciate how all the complex sexual functions are controlled by the pituitary gland<sup>4</sup>. Sirshasana helps to relieve sexual disorders in a number of ways.

- It improves the efficiency of the pituitary and the hypothalamus (the brain centre that in turn controls the pituitary gland).
- It drains blood from the associated sexual endocrinal glands (ovaries or testes) and the associated sexual organs; this also improves their functional efficiency.
- Sirshasana combined with relaxation or meditative techniques of yoga helps to calm the mind. Anxiety is the greatest factor in causing sexual disorders. Calmness of mind automatically leads to perfect health of the sexual functions.

If you suffer from any sexual problems then we suggest you start practising sirshasana along with other yogic practices.

The regular practice of sirshasana also acts directly on the thyroid gland in the same way as sarvangasana<sup>5</sup>, helping to balance the metabolic functions and bring about wakefulness and alertness, but without excessive nervousness. Malfunctioning of the thyroid gland can result in many ailments either directly or indirectly. Sirshasana helps to bring perfect health to this vital gland.

Sirshasana helps to improve the operation of the sensory organs. That is, it can help to improve eyesight, hearing and the senses of smell and taste. The eyes require a large supply of oxygen in order to work perfectly. The extra supply of blood during sirshasana helps to bring this about. Besides making the sensory organs more healthy, sirshasana also directly influences the brain centres that interpret and control the sense organs. Various types of ailments such as myopia, astigmatism, catarrh and general bad hearing have been found to improve by regular practise of sirshasana.

The condition of the skin of the face can also be improved through regular practise of sirshasana. Pimples and wrinkles are often caused by inadequate removal of waste materials and insufficient nourishment from the blood. Sirshasana directs an oxygen rich flow of blood to the facial skin thereby improving the complexion.

There are a number of people who claim to have transformed grey hair into its original colour through the practice of sirshasana. There are also people who now have a good growth of hair through the same practice, having been partially bald before. This is not really surprising since greying of hair and balding are often due to bad blood circulation in the scalp. Sirshasana does not only direct enriched blood to the brain, it also sends it to the scalp. However to gain this kind of spectacular result sirshasana must be practised for a long period every day, longer than we would recommend for the average person. If you wish to do sirshasana for this purpose then we suggest you seek expert guidance.

While the upper part of the body receives an extra supply of blood, the lower parts are drained of blood. This has beneficial repercussions, since there is a tendency for blood to stagnate in the legs, in the pelvic and abdominal organs. This drainage removes impure stagnant blood so that it can be replaced with pure, oxygenated blood after terminating sirshasana. Two very common ailments are varicose veins and piles (haemorrhoids) caused by accumulation of blood in the legs and anus respectively. This places great pressure on the blood vessels and in time causes them injury. Regular practise of sirshasana relieves pressure on the vessels for a short time and is a great help in alleviating either of these ailments.

Sirshasana revitalizes the pelvic and abdominal organs, improving their associated functions: digestion, elimination, etc., and can help to remove related ailments. The drainage of blood from these organs is also increased by the deep breathing and thereby the massage from the diaphragm acting upwards against the weight of the organs. This action actually squeezes out the blood.

During inhalation the diaphragm has to move upwards against the weight of the abdominal organs, strengthening the diaphragm since it has greater resistance than normal. Furthermore, this increases the air pressure in the lungs slightly and thereby opens up and uncrumples the alveoli (air cells), improving the oxygen-carbon dioxide exchange within the lungs, which means that the body receives more oxygen and removes more unwanted carbon dioxide. This supplements the health benefits obtained from the improved blood circulation to the brain.

Sirshasana gives many more benefits. Also with many ailments, the influence is more subtle or indirect; as such it is difficult to attribute the effect directly to sirshasana. Practice improves the sense of balance and helps to relieve neurasthenia (caused by malfunctioning of certain nervous centres in the brain). Memory power, intellect, concentration, etc. are all mental functions, yet it is through the brain that they are expressed.

#### **Opening up the dormant pathways of the brain**

As one treads the path of yoga, or any other mind expanding system, the body and mind become progressively purified. This also includes the brain. Furthermore, dormant nervous pathways are opened up to take greater flows of nervous impulses; this occurs in conjunction with the modification of the pranic pathways within the human framework. Sirshasana helps to open up these brain channels and to facilitate the expanding of brain capacity. The capacity of the brain is heightened in order to receive and cope with more intense flows of energy and awareness. The brain becomes a more efficient instrument.

#### **Sirshasana and meditation**

Sirshasana improves the blood flow to the pineal gland. Compared to other organs of

the body, this tiny gland has the second largest blood supply per unit weight (first is the kidneys). Stimulation of this gland, by improving the blood flow or otherwise, helps to increase awareness of the more subtle realms of your being. Sirshasana directly stimulates this gland and thereby intensifies awareness. As such sirshasana if done for prolonged periods of time can be considered as a meditative practise in its own right. Because of other factors, however, we don't suggest that you practise sirshasana for more than a few minutes without guidance. Therefore, you can use sirshasana, practised for short periods, as a method of intensifying awareness and making perception more subtle in preparation for other traditional meditative techniques.

The brain is a switching station between your individuality and the more subtle layers of the mind. The more efficient the brain becomes the more able it becomes to tune in with more subtle layers of existence. In this sense we say that each individual has vast untapped potential. All yogic practices, and in particular sirshasana, gradually make the brain more sensitive.

## Notes

- 1 Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 4
- 2 Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 3
- 3 Shavasana: Part 1 - Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5
- Part 2 - Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8
- 4 Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 1
- 5 Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 2

## Pranayama: Practice

In this lesson we have given a long discussion on Ida and pingala, which should clearly indicate the importance of these two polarities of being. On a physical-pranic-mental level, balance can be greatly influenced by practices of pranayama, specifically nadi shodhana pranayama stages 1 and 2'. These are preliminary stages, but they are nevertheless important techniques for ensuring balance between ida and pingala. If you have the time, and only if you do, we suggest that you practise these two stages before the more advanced stages of pranayama and meditative practices such as ajapa. This will help you to gain the most out of these practices, if the flow in the two nostrils is balanced however, it is not necessary to practise these balancing techniques.

### MAHA BANDHA (THE GREAT LOCK)

Uddiyana bandha combined with jalandhara, as previously described, and moola bandha is called *maha bandha*. The method is as follows: Practise uddiyana bandha combined with jalandhara bandha<sup>2</sup>.

Then contract the perineum as described in the practice of moola bandha<sup>3</sup>.

This is the final position.

Retain your breath for as long as comfortable.

Then release moola bandha, uddiyana and finally jalandhara bandha.

This is 1 round.

### MAHA BANDHA COMBINED WITH NADI SHODHANA

If you have mastered the previous pranayama technique, then you can now incorporate it with maha bandha<sup>4</sup>. The method is exactly the same, but instead of doing uddiyana and jalandhara bandha, you now do maha bandha, with external breath retention (bahir kumbhaka).

The previous ratio was 1:8:6:2:1:8:6:2 for inhalation: inner retention: exhalation: outer retention: inhalation: inner retention: exhalation: outer retention. Maha bandha is performed during outer retention only. If you can comfortably perform the bandha with this ratio then do so, but it must be without any strain. If necessary adjust the ratio according to your own capacity. Experiment, find out the ideal ratio and practise it.

### Relevance to kriya yoga

Maha bandha is directly utilized in kriya yoga practices; therefore, mastery is essential. We urge you to practise it regularly, but without straining. This will be a valuable preparation for kriya yoga in Book III.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4; Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5 and Book I Lesson 5, Topic 4

<sup>2</sup> Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 3

<sup>3</sup> Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

<sup>4</sup> Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 4



## Meditation: Ajapa Japa (Stage 3)

The main difference between japa and ajapa is that japa generally functions on the conscious plane of the mind, whereas ajapa reaches down into the subconscious plane. At this present moment, while reading this book, you are conscious of the external world and of the surface levels of the mind. But the mind is also functioning at other levels below the level of conscious perception. The subconscious mind is a turmoil of fears, worries, tensions, desires, etc. We generally only experience the reflection or manifestation of these deeper aspects of the mind when they rise to surface perception. Ajapa is a method of consciously perceiving these hidden levels of the mind. The practice of ajapa makes one's sensitivity and perception more subtle so that one begins to explore the mind.

### AJAPA JAPA - STAGE 3

#### Continuous practice

We are teaching the practice of ajapa which is done for a fixed duration every day. If you are inclined, there is no reason why you should not try to do ajapa twenty-four hours every day. But we warn you: it is difficult and requires sustained effort. If you wish to adopt this twenty-four hour a day sadhana then there is no need to slow down the breathing rate as described in stage 1 and 2<sup>1</sup>. Only try to be aware of the breath and the sound *Soham*, that it makes. It does not matter whether the breath is fast or slow; only be aware of it and the associated mantra. It can be done while walking, talking, eating, working, sleeping or whatever you do in your daily life. Everyday activities are continued but with a background of the *Saham* mantra.

This is an extremely powerful technique that has been utilized by many of the great yogis such as Kabir Das. It is a method that is widely mentioned in many well-known scriptures such as the *Yogasiksha Upanishad* and the *Kularnava*

*Tantra*. In the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* it says: "The breath comes out with the sound *Ha* (Ham) and is taken in with the sound *Sa* (So). Thus each individual continuously repeats the mantra Hamsa . . . Hamsa . . . Hamsa (Soham . . . Soham . . . Soham). Therefore, this mantra is repeated throughout the day. This is called *ajapa gayatri* and can bring liberation to yogis." (v. 31, 32, 33)

This indicates the power of continuous ajapa. This is further emphasized in the *Kularnava Tantra*: "The more you repeat this mantra (Soham or Saham), the greater the fruits both temporal and spiritual. Therefore, with intense effort, in all conditions, at all times, you should repeat the mantra." (chapter 3)

Continuous repetition makes the mantra penetrate the deeper layers of the mind, and the mind becomes harmonized and one-pointed, leading to meditation. If you have the determination, then follow the advice given in the scriptures. It is by no means an easy undertaking, but the fruits of your effort will be to unlock the potential of your mind.

#### Technique

It is important that you don't proceed to stage 3 until you have mastered the two previous stages, spending at least two weeks to one month on each stage<sup>1</sup>. This is important, for one stage automatically leads to the next.

In stage 1 the mantra *Soham* was synchronized with breathing. In stage 2, the mantra *Hamso* was merged with breathing. In stage 3 *Ham* and *So* will be regarded as totally separate entities, *Ham* being synchronized with exhalation and *So* with inhalation. The method is as follows:

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Hold the back straight, but relaxed.

Become aware of the breathing process, making it slower and deeper.

Do ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra<sup>2</sup>.

Be totally attentive to the breathing.  
 Do this for a few minutes.  
 Then imagine that the breath is moving upwards and downwards between the navel and the throat.  
 Imagine that you are pulling, sucking the air upwards from the navel to the throat as you inhale.  
 Imagine that you are pushing the air downwards from the throat to the navel as you exhale.  
 Continue in this manner for a few minutes.  
 Then merge the mantra *So* with inhalation.  
 And *Ham* with exhalation.  
 Don't be aware of either *Soham* or *Hamso* . . . only be aware of the mantra *So* with the incoming breath and *Ham* with the outgoing breath; *So* and *Ham* should not be continuous or joined with each other; they should be completely separate entities.  
 At the end of inhalation *So* stops.  
*Ham* starts at the beginning of exhalation.  
*Ham* stops at the end of exhalation.  
*So* starts at the beginning of inhalation.  
 With the upward moving breath - inhalation hear the sound *So*.  
 With the downward breath - exhalation - hear the sound *Ham*.  
 Maintain this awareness of the individual mantras and the up and down breathing process for about 5 minutes, then stop the practice and become aware only of the chidakasha (the space in front of the closed eyes)<sup>3</sup>.  
 Only be a witness to whatever happens in front of the closed eyes.  
 If you see images or you don't, it does not matter; only watch as a spectator.  
 This is the way to confront the contents of the subconscious mind. After a few minutes, recontinue the awareness of the two individual mantras and the upward and downward movement of the breath.  
 After 5 minutes or so, again become aware of the chidakasha.  
 After a minute or so return to the practice of ajapa: mantra and breath awareness.  
 Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available.

#### **Khechari Mudra and Ujjayi Pranayama**

You will probably find that you forget to do these two practices during ajapa. Try to

maintain them throughout the practice. If you become tired, especially with khechari mudra, then release the tongue lock for a short time, but it should be recommenced. These two practices are very important.

#### **Ajapa and kriya yoga**

This is a reminder that ajapa is an essential preliminary practice for kriya yoga. If you have not started doing ajapa yet and you want to practise kriya yoga in the near future, then we urge you to begin practising ajapa on a regular basis. If you don't you will find kriya yoga very difficult. . . you will fail to reap the benefits. It is important if you are serious about practising kriya yoga to find the time to practise ajapa every day.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 5; Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 5

<sup>2</sup> Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

<sup>3</sup> Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 5

## Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have introduced you to the anahata chakra. We suggest you practise it regularly in the manner described to locate the trigger point and the kshetram. Over the last few lessons we have given techniques for

locating the trigger point and kshetram of the mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura chakras. If you can reasonably clearly locate these points, then we suggest you leave these techniques and practise chakra shuddhi. If you cannot locate these points clearly then continue with the practices that we have already given.

Start to practise ajapa stage 3 and try to feel the breath and mantra piercing the anahata and manipura kshetrams.

If you have mastered stages 1, 2 and 3 of sirshasana then you should proceed to stages 4, 5 and 6. Please don't attempt the final stages until you have fully mastered the three preliminary stages. This is important.

Now incorporate maha bandha with nadi shodhana pranayama as explained in the text.

Practice	Minutes
<b>Program I:</b> duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	4
Shashankasana	4
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Yoga Mudrasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana	4
Sirshasana - Stages 4, 5, 6	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Maha Bandha	15
Anahata Shuddhi	20
Chakra Shuddhi	15
Ajapa japa - Stage 3	19
	120

**Program 2: duration 1 1/2 hours**

Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	3
Shashankasana	4
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana	4
Sirshasana - Stages 4, 5, 6	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	
with Maha Bandha	10
Manipura Chakra location	10
Anahata Shuddhi	15
Chakra Shuddhi	10
Ajapa japa - Stage 3	9
	<hr/>
	90

**Program 3: duration 1 hour**

Suiya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Shashankasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana - Stages 4, 5, 6	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	
with Maha Bandha	10
Anahata Shuddhi	10
Ajapajapa - Stage 3	10
	<hr/>
	60

Try to find the time to practise Chakra Shuddhi.

**Program 4:** duration 1/2 hour for general health  
benefits

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana - Stages 4, 5, 6	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	
with Maha Bandha	10
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	30

Try to find the time to practise Ajapajapa  
and Chakra Shuddhi

