

## Lesson 23

What is the meaning behind the ida and pingala? It is trying to tell you a great secret of spiritual life. It is trying to tell you that there should not be attachment to the inner phenomena of the mind; nor should there be attachment to the phenomena of the outside world. One has to centre right in the middle where there is pure awareness. This awareness is neither in the inside world nor in the outside world ... it is in the middle and beyond both. Therefore, try to be detached both internally and externally. It is only in this way that there will be the jump into the realm of pure awareness ... the sushumna ... the subtle, blissful vortex or tube that passes through all the chakras. This centring of the ida and pingala and detachment to both the inner and outer world is not easy. In fact, you cannot make it happen consciously. It can only happen spontaneously. But at least bear it in mind in your daily life encounters and when you practise yoga techniques. It is this centring, this razor's edge between the ida and pingala principles that is the essence of spiritual life.

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## The Balance of Life (Part 2)

Many people are very concerned with the chakras and practising techniques that unlock the potential that they represent. There is nothing wrong with this, but what is usually forgotten is that the awakening of these chakras is associated with balance of the ida and pingala. The ancient sages associated the chakras with the ida and pingala for a good reason, knowing that forceful attempts to awaken the chakras, without corresponding balance of the ida and pingala, could do more harm than good. Many people who have done too much sadhana without taking care to balance and harmonize inner and outer life have found this to be true at their own expense. They have either had bad experiences or have become very ill. So we emphasize: have aspiration to unlock the potential of the chakras, but at the same time try to make sure the ida and pingala are balanced at all levels. Don't be in too much of a hurry to make progress. The process should be slow but sure. This will allow your body, mind and emotions to adjust themselves to new and more refined levels of functioning.

### **The path of darkness and the path of light**

In the Indian scriptures, concern only with the ida, or concern only with the pingala, is called the dark path - the path of the *pitara*s (ancestors). This is the path of delusion.

Simultaneous awakening and balance of the ida and pingala is called the path of light - the path of the *devas* (divine beings). This is the path where there is simultaneous expansion of inner awareness combined with corresponding action in the outside world.

This is such an important topic that it is mentioned in many texts. For the purpose of illustration and explanation, we will give quotations from the *Ishavasya Upanishad*: "Those who only follow the path of avidya (action in the outside world) enter into blinding darkness. Conversely, those who are engrossed

only in vidya (inner knowledge of the mind or more specifically meditational practices) also enter into blinding darkness." (verse 9) This is a clear statement that should be remembered: both those who try to open up the ida (inner world) alone through meditational practices and those who are concerned only with the pingala (worldly activities), remain deluded.

The same idea is further expanded in the next verse: "The wise have told us that meditational practices alone and external activity alone will each give a different result." (verse 10) A certain level of understanding is attained through total concern with worldly activities; another level of understanding is attained through total concern with exploration of the mind through meditational practices. But each eventually becomes a block to further progress. The text continues: "He who knows both vidya (the inner world) and avidya (the outer world) crosses the abyss of death through avidya and attains immortality through vidya." (verse 11) These three verses are probably the most important verses in the entire literature of the Upanishads.

Both extroversion and introversion must be practised together. Neither must be rejected. One must simultaneously do meditational practices to unfold inner awareness and also work. There should be continual observation of and alertness to the inner process of the mind, while simultaneously acting in the world. This is the path of light, the path of the *devas*. Balance is given to both the ida and pingala. One becomes a man of inner knowledge while acting in the world. Both karma yoga (the yoga of action) and dhyana yoga (the yoga of meditation) are combined and integrated into one's life.

Let us explain the meaning of the word 'death' given in verse 11. It does not mean death in the usual sense of the word. It means the death of delusion - the death of *laya* (loss of awareness) during meditational practices.

This laya is the greatest block during meditational techniques; it is the obstacle of unconsciousness. People reach a certain stage in their practices where they are unable to maintain awareness. They get lost in a hazy reverie or fall asleep. To progress in unfolding one's dormant potential and to tread the spiritual path, one must pass beyond this laya.

The method of overcoming this obstacle is by doing karma yoga and by interaction with the outside world. This laya is excessive *tamas* in one's nature. By intense karma yoga one can elevate one's nature so that it becomes more *rajasic*. This will counteract the tendency for laya to occur in meditative practices. It is through work in the outside world that one will exhaust one's *samskaras* (problems and negative attitudes, etc.). It is these *samskaras* that cause this unconscious state to arise. They tend to clog the mind and prevent clarity. It is through karma yoga and interaction with other people and life in general that one recognizes and eventually removes one's problems. It is by doing karma yoga that one is able to cross the barrier of unconsciousness - the 'abyss of death' (according to verse 11). When the mind has been harmonized and purged of gross phobias, problems, neuroses, etc., then one can maintain awareness to cross the sea of laya (unconsciousness). It is after this point that one starts to explore the superconscious realms of being.

What is the meaning of gaining 'immortality through vidya' in verse 11? It means that when one has crossed the 'valley of death' - the tendency to become unconscious in meditation - then one expands awareness to an unlimited degree. One is able to transcend the fetters of existence and eventually merge into a state of *samadhi*, the state of immortality, beyond the limitations of the mind.

Verse 11 contains the essence of spiritual life. It emphasizes that the serious spiritual aspirant should be both extroverted and introverted, practising meditation or watching the process of the mind to develop inner awareness, while simultaneously working in the world to resolve any mental and emotional problems. This is the path of light where the *ida* is balanced with the *pingala*. It is this path of light that leads to the rising of the *kundalini* within *sushumna*. It is this path of light that leads to spiritual awakening.

The path of light (*devayana*) and the path of darkness (*pitriyana*) are also mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* (chapter 8:23 onwards), where they are called the northern and southern paths of the sun. It has the same profound implications. In the *Prashna Upanishad*, the sage Pippalada gives a similar analogy and the same message in response to a question by his disciple Kabandhi. There are many other scriptures that discuss the same theme. If you are interested, look in the ancient texts yourself for confirmation.

Work or inner knowledge?

If we have a pair of hands, a pair of legs and good health, how is it possible not to work? If we have the tools then they should be used. Yet many people are misguided into thinking that if one wants illumination, or to tread the spiritual path, then one should stop work, or perhaps reduce one's work and be solely concerned with the inner workings of the mind. Many people have said that work (*karma*) and knowledge are mutually exclusive; that if you want illumination then you will have to leave all work and practise meditation day and night. All these ideas are totally wrong and have arisen through misinterpretation of the scriptures and the sages. Not only is this idea wrong, but if followed then it will lead to frustration, lack of progress and blockages on the spiritual path. Many people have made this mistake and are still making this mistake. So make sure you supplement your meditational techniques with some form of action.

It is very easy to see how this misconception about work has arisen. Like many misunderstandings, it has arisen through the inadequacy of words to define more subtle implications and the fact that words can be interpreted in different ways according to the feelings and dogmas of the individual. The Sanskrit word for work is *karma*. Many of the ancient texts clearly state that karma does not lead to illumination, but here karma does not mean work as such; it means rituals and worship performed without feeling or awareness. And this is absolutely true. This type of karma will not lead to illumination, only dullness and ignorance.

The word karma also means any kind of work that is done blindly and instinctively, without awareness. This too will lead nowhere

on the spiritual path. One should not stop working: continue to work, to do karma, but while trying to maintain awareness. This is achieved by the aspiration and wakefulness of the individual. This awareness during work is also slowly intensified by doing prescribed yogic techniques such as asanas, pranayama, meditational practices, bhakti yoga and so forth. To maintain a balance of the ida and pingala aspect it is necessary to combine karma yoga with dhyana yoga. To continue to act in the world is essential for spiritual awakening, but one's work and actions should be done with as much awareness as possible. Work is the means to recognize one's problems; it also helps to express and remove them. So don't think of rejecting work or action, but remain detached and transform mere work into karma yoga. Try not to be affected by the ups and downs of work, and don't stop working.

This subject of work and action combined with meditation is the main theme of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the classical yogic text par excellence. It constantly emphasizes that one should never renounce actions, only their fruits. One should only renounce attachment to actions and work. The *Bhagavad Gita* urges the spiritual aspirant to work according to the dictates of his dharma (role in life that comes naturally, that suits one's abilities) but at the same time one should try to become more aware of the inner psychic world through meditational practice. In this sense, the *Bhagavad Gita* is really discussing the balance of the ida and the pingala, without actually mentioning them by name. The whole theme of the *Bhagavad Gita* is balance of ida and pingala.

The importance of action and work in spiritual life is clearly illustrated by the following experience related to us by Swami Satyananda: "Before being initiated as a swami I used to lapse into a state of unconsciousness; I could never go past this state of laya. Eventually I went to seek the guidance of Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh. The first thing he told me was: You have to work; you have to work out your samskaras (mental impressions)'. He could have said: 'Go and practise meditation for a few years in a quiet place,' but he did not. He said: 'work', for he knew that this is the only way to resolve inner disharmonies. Swami Sivananda knew that meditative practices have

to be balanced by external action; the ida and pingala have to be balanced. The mind has to be opened up and purified through both work (karma yoga) and meditative practices.

If you come to this ashram you will also be expected to work throughout the day. This is not to provide cheap labour for the ashram or for the sake of the ashram upkeep, for there are many other people available and willing to do the work necessary for the smooth functioning of the ashram. You will be expected to work for your own sake, for your spiritual progress. This work is one of the most important aspects of ashram life, and actually the biggest problem is not finding people to do work, but finding enough work to keep people busy. This work is important in gradually purifying the mind, especially in the early stages of spiritual life.

Many people try to completely absorb themselves in meditative practices. They cease to take an active part in the world and often retire to a quiet retreat. Many people, sincere and genuine people have done this for years and they have achieved nothing, apart from frustration and disillusionment. They have followed only the ida path. They have failed to gain the illumination that they so desperately wanted. They did not realize that illumination cannot come until one's karmas have been worked out. One has to exhaust and express the inherent desires and ambitions, otherwise they merely remain in a dormant state in the mind. The samskaras - latent problems, drives and attachments to the enjoyments of the world - have to be worked out. This can only be done by interacting and working in the world, by following the principles of karma yoga to the best of your ability. This is the means to clean the mind of its latent problems. This is the pingala aspect. At the same time one should also follow the path of ida, by trying to be aware while working and acting, and by trying to expand inner awareness through meditational practices. This is the way to spiritual unfoldment. It is not by becoming a hermit and rejecting the world.

### **The path of the wise**

If you consider all great illumined sages, saints and yogis you will see a common pattern; they always combined the inner knowledge of the mind with outer actions. Though they had

spiritual illumination they still continued to express themselves in the external world; they always worked, but while maintaining inner awareness. This is the difference between the average person and the sage. The average person acts without awareness, while the sage keeps a continual flow of awareness. Most people perform actions (the realm of Shakti) with little or no awareness (the realm of Shiva). The sage acts, gives expression to his individuality (Shakti) but while maintaining the awareness of the totality (Shiva). He merges the logically opposite aspects of individuality and universality, of action and inaction, of Shiva and Shakti.

Let us consider a few well-known sages to illustrate the common principle of balance and harmony of the ida and pingala. Christ was illumined, yet he continued to act in the world. He taught his disciples, apostles and followers and travelled all over Galilee. He acted with total awareness. St. Teresa was an illumined saint, but she did not stop working, she did more and more work and urged her followers to do the same. Kabir was an illumined bhakta, but he continued to earn his living by weaving and expressed his illumination through his ecstatic songs. All these people lived both in the world and beyond the world, combining these two seemingly contradictory modes of being.

Buddha was illumined, but he did not stop acting in the world. He is usually depicted sitting in padmasana or sometimes lying on one side. But this does not mean that he remained motionless like a corpse after his illumination under the bodhi tree in Gaya. Had he done this then the system of Buddhism would never have arisen. His compassion compelled him to teach. Furthermore, he urged his disciples to teach the 'Dharma' to others; he instructed them to work for the good of man. Mohammed was a husband and a father with many duties. He was an active man, but amid his external activities, he expanded his inner knowledge. He was illumined in a cave on Mount Hira. He continued working, but combined his work with awareness, balancing the ida and pingala aspects of his being. Krishna and Rama were both active. In fact, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna urges Arjuna time and time again to know the meaning of action within inaction, to be totally

aware while acting with intensity. Krishna did not tell Arjuna to escape from the battlefield at Kurukshetra and go to the Himalayas to meditate and practise austerity. No, Arjuna was told to fight, but with awareness.

Ramana Maharshi was illumined and although he never did very much intense work, he taught and guided his disciples, working in the ashram that grew up around him, preparing food and so forth. Swami Sivananda was the same. He did not stop work, but continued to express himself in many different ways, from writing books to working in the ashram. Endless other examples could be given of other sages who continued to act in the world. There seem to be no exceptions, they all combined illumination with external work. They all worked in the world, but with awareness of the underlying nature of everything.

A point to remember is that illumined people can work in the world in a subtle way that is not obvious to gross understanding. Though a great sage may not appear to do very much physically, he may be expressing himself powerfully at more subtle levels. This applies to sages who seem to do a lot of work and those who don't.

All the sages that we have mentioned and the countless ones that we have not mentioned through lack of space, continued to work in the world. They integrated the realm of the phenomenal and relative (*samsara*) with the transcendental (*nirvana*). They combined the limited with the unlimited. They acted as a crossroad between the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal. They balanced the inner with the outer, they balanced the ida with the pingala.

Zen Buddhism continually emphasizes this balance of the outer with the inner. The Zen masters strongly imply that spiritual life should be in the world of everyday events and they practised what they preached. This is perfectly illustrated by the following Zen story given in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, compiled by Paul Reps: "Hyakujo was a Chinese Zen master. He worked with his disciples even when he was eighty years of age. He would work in the garden, clean the ground and prune the trees. The disciples were not very happy to see the old master work so hard, but they knew that he would never stop. They decided to hide his tools. For three days the master took no food.

Then the disciples realized that he was angry and that they had better return the tools. As soon as the tools were returned the master again ate food. In the evening he told his disciples: 'No work, no food'."

Follow the example of these illumined sages. Don't reject work. Change your attitude to work, try to be more detached, renounce the fruits mentally and be aware, but don't stop. If you are lost and totally involved in external actions, as are most people, then take steps to unfold inner awareness (ida). Start to practise yoga. On the other hand, if you are excessively introverted with a tendency to brood about your problems and deficiencies, then we suggest that you try to take more interest in the outside world (pingala). Do intense one-pointed work, but try to be aware at the same time. The important thing is that there should be balance between the ida and pingala. Follow the example of the wise, for this is the way to open up your potential and understanding.

### **The right and left hand path of tantra**

In tantra, much is said about the left hand path (*yama viarga*) and the right hand path (*dakshina marga*). There are many misconceptions about these terms. It is often said that the left hand path is somehow decadent and immoral and the right hand path is preferable. This is a misunderstanding, because actually the left hand path is for those aspirants who are firmly established in spiritual life. It is the path for more advanced sadhakas and comes after they have trodden the right hand path.

It is commonly accepted that there are seven stages of sadhana on the path of tantra (sometimes nine are given). These are called *acharas* and represent progressively higher levels of understanding and practices associated with progress along the spiritual path. We will not describe these different *acharas* here, for this is not the purpose of this discussion. What we want to point out here is that four stages are included within the realm of *dakshina marga*. This is also called *pravritti marga*, the path of external action. Here, the emphasis is on the pingala principle, though ida is also developed. This is the path that most people in the world are treading.

In tantra, the aspirant on the *dakshina marga* is preparing for the higher stages where the mind is more receptive and able to pass beyond

the obstacle of *laya* that we discussed previously (refer to the heading entitled the 'Path of Darkness' and the 'Path of Light'). It is a path for those who are predominantly *tamasic* in nature. It is concerned mainly with outer action as a means to purify the mind of problems, phobias, neuroses, selfishness and so forth. Some inner awakening does occur but the emphasis is on *karma yoga*. It is concerned with initially harmonizing the mind and body. It is a combination of the *ida* and *pingala* paths, but with a strong emphasis on the *pingala* aspect. This allows the individual to recognize his more gross problems and to understand his relationship with other people so that he can eventually expand inner awareness.

A guru will usually make new disciples follow this *dakshina marga* and there are many well-known stories that illustrate the arduous life that a disciple must pass through. Those people who have read the biography of Milarepa will remember how his guru Marpa made him work day and night on many projects. His guru made him build houses and then destroy them when they were completed. Milarepa almost despaired. For many years Marpa refused to teach any of the traditional teachings and practices which Milarepa so ardently desired. Instead he made Milarepa work and work on so many seemingly useless projects. This is an extreme example of the right hand path.

There are also many Zen and Tao stories which illustrate this same path. For example, an aspirant goes to a sage and asks for instructions, initiation or whatever. For many years the sage makes the disciple clean the floors, work in the kitchen and many other tasks. Possibly, the sage does not teach the disciple even one conventional spiritual practice or give even one concrete, recognizable instruction. All the disciple does is work, work and work. This is the right hand path. It is the stage where the disciple removes his most obvious blocks. And what is most important during this period, awareness (the *sushumna*) starts to spontaneously awaken.

When an aspirant is sufficiently harmonized, then he can start to tread the *vama marga* - the left hand path. Actually a better name for the left hand path is the *vipareeta marga* (the reversed path) or the *nivritti marga* (the path of ascent or return to the source). This indicates

the stage in spiritual life where one is ready to awaken the inner awareness of the mind to a greater extent. Here the ida is given more emphasis, but one still follows the pingala path, the path of action. One starts to make greater progress in expanding inner awareness (ida) but while simultaneously balancing this with karma yoga (pingala). The left hand path of tantra consists of three aharas or stages and are generally associated with a guru-disciple relationship. It is this vama marga that leads eventually to higher understanding and realization of one's fullest potential. It is this path that eventually leads to that which is beyond both the ida and pingala - the sushumna flow to sahasrara.

Here in tantra you will see that the balance of ida and pingala is implied. This applies throughout all the stages, from the progressive transition from the right hand path to the left hand path. The system of tantra is really a science. It is exact in its methods and sure of its aim. It has been tested and developed over the last few thousands of years by countless sages. It is for this reason that it brings results.

#### **Ida and pingala in other systems**

Don't make the mistake of assuming that the symbology of ida and pingala is confined to yoga and Indian mysticism. The ida-pingala principle represents a universal truth. It is therefore a part of every spiritual system in some form. Often the same idea of balance is conveyed by completely different symbols, but usually the symbology is strikingly similar.

Many ancient systems depict the route of spiritual life as a path or series of steps. Often the moon (ida) is shown in one corner and the sun (pingala) in the other. Sometimes spiritual life is depicted as a winding path which ascends the side of a high mountain. Again, the sun and the moon are shown. The mountain is symbolic of the sushumna. This symbology is very common in medieval European secret or mystical societies.

The cross in Christianity has many meanings, but surely one of them implies balance. All opposites are harmonized and equalized at the centre. Furthermore, if you use a little imagination, you can see that the cross is really very similar to the yogic symbol for ida, pingala and sushumna. The left side of the cross is ida, the right side pingala and the vertical line or

post is sushumna. Their meeting point is ajna chakra. The upper line or sushumna continues on to the sahasrara (oneness). At the crossing point, in the middle of the cross (ajna) there is no ego. It was on the cross that Christ was crucified, meaning that he lost his sense of ego, which he sacrificed at the centre. There are many meanings hidden in the cross and this is just one of them.

Those people who are familiar with the tarot cards will remember that some of the cards show two pillars on each side of the pictures, these include 'the Pope', 'the hanged man' and so forth. The two pillars are ida and pingala. They imply that balance in all aspects of life is necessary for spiritual life. Also many of the cards depict the sun and moon, again indicating the ida and pingala aspects of spiritual life.

Alchemical pictures are particularly notable for their clear illustrations of ida and pingala. Like yogic symbolism, ida is often represented by the moon and pingala by the sun. Other symbols are also used, such as the phoenix, the deer, the lion and so forth, with various meanings, but always the emphasis is on balance. The nocturnal world (internal knowledge) is shown merging with the sunlight world (external expression). All seemingly irreconcilable opposites are shown unified. This harmony and integration of opposites leads to regeneration or transmutation of the individual into higher states of receptivity and being. This regeneration of man is called the philosopher's stone, where his whole nature is refined so that it shines with dazzling luminosity. The average person is like an uncut diamond, dull and lustreless. When the diamond is cut and polished it radiates knowledge and bliss. This arises when the ida is balanced by the pingala at all levels of being.

Many of you have heard of the Goat of Mendes, also known as Baphomet. This is a very evocative mythical figure that tends to induce strange sensations in the psyche of many people. It is a hermaphrodite figure of human form with a goat's head. It symbolizes transcendental magic. Pictures of Baphomet show a black moon in the bottom left hand corner, with Baphomet's arm pointing downwards. The black moon symbolizes the ida path used for selfish purposes. The pointing arm indicates that the misuse of psychic



powers, such as in black magic, will eventually lead to a downfall and adverse personal repercussions. It seems that all people who tread the ida path for selfish reasons have a tendency to crash and pay the penalty. If you care to read *The Occult*, a book by Colin Wilson,

you will be firmly convinced of this fact. All the famous occultists whom he mentions suffered through misuse of their powers. They rarely find happiness in life.

The other hand of the Baphomet points upwards to a white moon in the top right hand corner. This shows that the path of ida can lead to spiritual ascension, if psychic powers are not used for selfish purposes.

The ida and pingala pathways are also shown in pictures of Baphomet. But they are only depicted rising from mooladhara chakra through swadhisthana to manipura chakra.

They ascend no further. This is open to many interpretations. In the context of the diagram we understand this as meaning that selfishness in outer activities (pingala) or in inner psychic abilities (ida) will prevent the individual rising above the level of understanding represented

by the manipura chakra. You may possibly have a better interpretation.

Hermes was the ancient Egyptian personification of wisdom. He is also associated with Hermes Trismegistus who is believed to have originated the science of alchemy. There is much confusion between history and myth, but this doesn't concern us here. Hermes is usually depicted holding a unique rod in one hand, with two wings at the top end and entwined with two serpents. This is called a *caduceus* and is illustrated on the right hand side of the diagram under the heading entitled 'Symbolism of Ida and Pingala' in part 1 of this discussion<sup>1</sup>. This symbol is no other than the ida, pingala and sushumna of yoga. If you count the number of intersections of the two serpents you will find that there are six. These represent the junction of ida and pingala at each of the six chakras from mooladhara to ajna. The two wings at the top of the caduceus are the exact equivalent of the two lotus petals that symbolize ajna chakra in yoga, the highest chakra where ida and pingala merge to become one. This mystical symbol is the exact equivalent of ida, pingala and sushumna of India.

Incidentally, this caduceus is the official symbol of the medical profession. In this

context it is called the *Staff of Aesculapius* (the wand of Hermes and Mercury). This may seem a little fanciful but actually the adoption of this symbol is perfectly logical. Medicine is concerned with balance, for it is imbalance that causes disease. Balance means good health while imbalance implies illness or bad health. This balance or lack of balance applies at all levels of subtlety; it is directly associated with ida and pingala. Illness can be caused by physical, pranic and mental imbalance. In a wider sense, illness is caused by spiritual imbalance. In the extreme sense, we can say that only a person who has achieved the highest stage of spiritual life, unitive life, is truly healthy. The balance of ida and pingala is the prime concern of any system of healing, including medicine, which is why the caduceus is used as the symbol of medical science.

The ancient Egyptian worship of Isis, the gnostic system of Abraxas and many other old systems were very concerned with the balance of ida and pingala. This is very clear from the surviving symbols of these ancient cults. The same applies to systems that are still active, such as the Rosicrucians and Freemasons - balance of opposites is of prime importance.

In the story of Genesis in the *Bible* mention is made of the tree of good and evil and the tree of life. This is open to many different interpretations, but we see the tree of good and evil to be the ida and pingala, the tree of life being the sushumna. This is confirmed by the fact that the cult of ancient Persia, the cult of Mithra, had a similar symbol. It is widely accepted that much of the *Bible* was influenced by this Persian cult, or conversely that the system of Mithra was influenced by the Old Testament. There is a well-known symbol of Mithra where two snakes - good (*ahura mazda*) and evil (*ahriman*) - face each other and devour the cosmic egg. The egg is in the mouth of each snake. The egg represents perfect harmony at the highest level - sahasrara. These two snakes and the tree of good and evil in the *Bible*, represent the ida and pingala, the opposing forces or aspects of existence. When the egg is consumed by the ida and pingala snakes then there is perfect fusion in the sahasrara, where all opposites are resolved.

This idea of balance is common to every spiritual system. It is symbolized in many different ways. We have only given the exam-

pies that are obviously very similar to the ida-pingala symbol. There are innumerable other symbols that say the same thing in a different way. An obvious example is the yin-yang symbol of China - the t'ai chi. This is also shown in the previously mentioned diagram in part 1<sup>1</sup>. It has basically the same meaning as ida-pingala. Yin is female and earthly, while yang is male and heavenly. They represent opposite forces or aspects at all levels from the physical to the more subtle, from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic. There is nothing that does not come under their influence. Ida and pingala can be applied to everything. The same is true of yin and yang. Harmony between them leads to health and implies that one's inner being is perfectly in tune with the outside world; disharmony means illness, unhappiness and disequilibrium in one's being and relationship with the outside world. When there is harmony and balance of ida and pingala at the highest level, one blends with the sahasrara (oneness). When there is harmony and balance of yin and yang then the result is Tao. Both are beautiful, expressive symbols crossing language boundaries and time. They apply to everyone in any race, place and era. Moreover, words can so easily be misunderstood and corrupted but symbols retain the purity of the meaning, for they only reveal themselves when one is ready to understand.

#### **Ida and pingala implications in summary**

We have defined the meaning and implications of ida and pingala along a few basic lines. But actually, if you care to think about it, you will find that the ida-pingala principle applies to all aspects of life. It implies moderation in all activities - in food, between work and play, between mental and physical activities. It implies a balance between passivity and dynamism, ambition and no ambition, between sleep and wakefulness, like and dislike, effort and no effort, victory and defeat and between considering that things matter and that they don't matter. One's whole life should be lived according to the principle of ida and pingala balance. This principle is not merely a useless philosophical concept; it is an indicator, a guideline for living one's whole life in a harmonious manner. It points out that one should live right in the centre, untouched by opposites.

In spiritual life there should be a continual process of adjustment. The awareness of the inner world is expanded and from this the relationships and understanding of the outside world are adjusted. It is a continual process of synchronizing the ida and pingala principles so that they are always balanced. But this balance point should slowly rise so that one's being progressively passes through the ascending chakras. The ida (inner awareness) is matched with the pingala (outer awareness and expression) so that they balance each other at each of the chakras in turn. This is the spiritual path.

The path of spiritual life should not, and cannot, be a selfish thing. Though you may be treading the spiritual path as an individual, it really includes everyone and everything else. If you are seeking spiritual awakening for purely personal motives, then this is an immediate block - it does not fit. It is like trying to be part of a family, or a member of a club, or working in an office, without the slightest consideration of others. It cannot be done. If you live in a family, then you can only be a perfect and integrated member by harmonizing your inner being and simultaneously having concern for other members of the family. It is the same with the spiritual path, when done for personal motives it is immediately self-defeating. There has to be the aspiration for self-perfection combined with interest in the welfare of all other people and things. This is implied in the balance of ida and pingala; it is the balance between inner knowledge and external expression. This is the middle path. There has to be regard for oneself and others. This is essential.

The aim is to maintain awareness (sushumna) while conducting the affairs of the world. In a sense, there has to be perfect balance between sleep and wakefulness. This is called *yoga nidra* (sleepless sleep); one should be asleep to the world while acting perfectly in it, but awake to the realm of consciousness. This is action in inaction, the union of Shiva and Shakti. It is not easy, but this is the aim.

Finally, we can say that the balance of ida and pingala implies equanimity ... equanimity in all spheres of being.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1

## The Ida and Pingala Balance

We have written much on all aspects of ida and pingala in the topic entitled "The Balance of Life"<sup>1</sup>. Here we want to describe simple yet effective techniques for balancing ida and pingala in pranayama and before meditational practices. These techniques are important, for when there is balance of ida and pingala, then one will gain the most out of the yogic practices.

Many people think that in meditational practices one only needs to sit and close the eyes, and one will be instantly transported to the realms of bliss. But this is most unlikely. Mere closing of the eyes, even in padmasana, will probably at the most lead to a little peace, a psychic movie show, but more likely a deep sleep. There should be balance between the ida and pingala before starting meditational practices.

### Sushumna, ida, pingala and meditation

Why is this balance of ida and pingala so important in relation to meditational techniques? The answer is simple: so that one's being functions on the path of sushumna<sup>2</sup>.

Ida and pingala both indicate the realm of time. That is, they represent the inner psychic realms and the outer world respectively, both of which are under the sway of time. Meditation is concerned with the timeless and therefore the ida and pingala should be balanced. In this way, the kundalini is able to flow up the sushumna and one enters the realm of timelessness. In the scriptures it is said that the kundalini is the devourer of time: "One should control the sun (pingala) and moon (ida) because these are the day and night of time; the secret is that the sushumna (the passage of the kundalini) is the eater of time." (*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* 4:17) That is, when the ida and pingala are balanced in all senses, then time is dissolved.

Meditational practices are concerned with resolving dualities. Balance of the ida and pingala implies a degree of resolution of

duality; in fact balance of the ida and pingala throughout the entire spectrum of the chakras implies total non-duality, which is the aim of spiritual aspiration. Balance of the ida and pingala, by reducing the feeling of duality, leads to the opening up of the sushumna which is the direct line to sahasrara. Though very basic and simple, the techniques that we will shortly explain help to break down all differences between the inner and outer, bad and good, etc. This is the sushumna path that is necessary for success in meditational practices. This is clearly stated in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*: "One should think neither of the outside world nor the internal world; in fact one should not think any thoughts." (4:57)

This thoughtlessness can only arise when the ida and pingala are balanced. This is why ida and pingala are so relevant to meditational practices. This fact has been illustrated beautifully in the following story: "There were two birds, one black and one white. They were tied to a peg with two ropes. They constantly tried to fly away to freedom but were unable to do so because of the rope that secured them. Ultimately they became tired and slept peacefully near the peg."

These two birds represent the ida and pingala; they correspond to the flow of breath in the left and right nostril respectively. The alternate functioning of the ida and pingala prevents one moving into higher awareness. So long as they operate there will be no success in yogic practices. It is only when the two birds (ida and pingala) are tired and they retire to the centre that sushumna awakens and meditation arises.

### Biorhythms

Women and men follow a monthly rhythm. With women it is associated with the menstrual cycle and changes of mood. With men it is associated mainly with a fluctuation of mood. There is also a twenty-four hour rhythm which

induces changes in hormone secretion, blood pressure, body heat and so forth.

Modern scientists have now begun to realize that there is also a 90-minute rhythm. They have called it the *ultradian* rhythm and it relates to periodic swings of mood, mental alertness, stomach contractions and many other physical and mental changes. This last rhythm is directly related to ida and pingala and it is manipulation of this rhythm in order to induce meditation that is the main aim of hatha yoga and the practices that we will shortly describe.

#### **Ida, pingala and the air flow in the nostrils**

There is a direct relationship between the ida and pingala and the air flow through the two nostrils. The *Rudra Yamala Tantra* states: "On the left and right side of the sushumna are the ida and pingala. These go straight upwards, alternating from left to right. Having pierced all the chakras (the main ones in the spinal region) they proceed to the nostrils."

It is because of this relationship that one can manipulate the flow of breath through the nostrils in order to bring balance in the ida and pingala at more subtle levels. On a gross level, the ida and pingala correspond to the breath in the left and right nostril respectively. This gross aspect has a direct relationship with the more subtle realms of ida and pingala in the mind and pranic body. Thus gross manipulation of the breath flowing through the nostrils has vast repercussions on a more subtle level of one's being. This is the basis for most standard hatha yoga practices that attempt to control ida and pingala. The other forms of yoga attempt to gain the same control at more subtle levels without physical means.

#### **Balancing the air flows in the nostrils**

The ideal condition for meditative practice occurs when the flow of air in each nostril is the same. This balance arises when the predominance of flow in the left nostril changes over to predominance in the right nostril or vice versa. This changeover occurs periodically in accordance with the ultradian rhythm that we discussed briefly. This cycle is said to repeat itself every 90 minutes, but in fact there are many other factors involved which tend to greatly modify it, making it shorter or longer and subject to extreme variability. This variation or fluctuation is especially noticeable with

people who live in busy towns and cities who are subjected to a continuous stream of external stimuli and social pressures. The rhythm tends to be more constant and nearer the 90-minute cycle with people living closer to nature in villages and the quieter parts of the world.

The best time for meditative practices occurs naturally for a few minutes throughout the day and night, when the ida breath flow changes over to the pingala breath flow or vice versa. But most people never notice this changeover because they are too busy. Therefore, they rarely take the perfect opportunity to utilize this short period of time to become aware of their being. This does not mean that you will automatically start to meditate at this period; it means that this is the ideal condition under which one's being, is most receptive to the meditative state - pure awareness.

In nadi shodhana pranayama and other yogic practices, the two breath flows are artificially rendered equal, helping to induce the ideal situation for meditation. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the two breath flows be balanced before attempting any meditative techniques. Under this condition there is a balance between wakefulness to the outside world and total absorption or sleep in the inner psychic world of the mind.

### **PRACTICES OF HATHA YOGA**

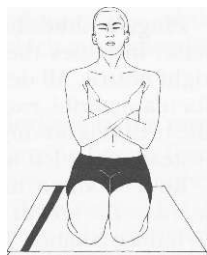
Probably you already know most of the following techniques. In fact, the asanas and pranayama are almost certainly an integral part of your daily practice program. But it is more than possible that you don't realize that these simple techniques are intended to balance ida and pingala. Actually, all hatha yoga practices are intended to balance ida and pingala, but it is the following ones that do it most directly and obviously.

#### **Technique 1: Padadhirasana**

In English, this asana can be called the 'breath balancing pose'. It is very simple, yet it is most effective in balancing the ida and pingala flows before starting pranayama practice.

Any method that applies pressure under the armpits has a direct influence on the flow of breath through the nostrils. If you don't believe this, then try it for yourself. If firm pressure is applied under the right armpit,

then the left nostril will tend to flow. If a firm pressure is applied under the left armpit, then the right nostril will tend to flow. This has been scientifically verified in laboratories, but you can quickly test it for yourself. Allow at least a minute or so before expecting any positive results, though changes may occur within a few seconds. The reason for this relationship between the nostrils and the armpits is not certain, but it is probably associated with nerve reflexes.



In padadhirasana, pressure is simultaneously applied under both armpits. This, not surprisingly, brings about a balance of the air flows through the right and the left nostrils. The technique requires little explanation and is as follows:

Sit in any comfortable pose; traditionally the asana is done in vajrasana as shown, but this is not essential<sup>3</sup>.

Cross the arms in front of the chest.

Place the right hand under the left armpit with the thumb upwards in front of the right shoulder.

Place the left hand under the right armpit in the same manner.

Close the eyes. This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Practise until the breath flows become equalized.

Throughout the practice be aware of the breathing process and try to imagine that the flows are equal; this will increase the efficacy of the asana.

### Technique 2: Nadi Shodhana Pranayama

If you have been following the previous lessons then this practice will require little introduction - it has been a constant theme. All the four stages are directly concerned with balancing ida and pingala. It is the most direct approach, for the flow in the nostrils is controlled by physical manipulation of the nostrils.

We don't intend to explain the practice here, as this has already been done extensively. However, you may have forgotten much about the practice, therefore, the following is a brief reference guide to refresh your memory:

**Stage 1<sup>4</sup> and Stage 2<sup>5</sup>:** These first two stages should be practised by beginners. They are excellent methods of bringing about balance in ida and pingala.

**Stage 3<sup>6</sup> and Stage 4<sup>7</sup>:** The third and fourth stages are for more advanced practitioners and should not be done without first of all perfecting the first two stages.

Throughout this course we have emphasized that nadi shodhana pranayama is the ideal technique to practise before meditative practice. The reason is simple: it directly brings ida and pingala into balance.

### Technique 3: Neti

The practices of jala neti and sutra neti are both very useful for balancing the breath flows in the two nostrils<sup>8</sup>. If you find that your nose is very blocked, then the best way to remove and to bring a degree of balance into the breath flows is to do either jala neti or sutra neti, or preferably both, one after the other. Jala neti will remove most of the gross mucus, while sutra neti will stimulate nerves within the nostrils to induce ida-pingala balance.

We suggest you try these two practices before you start your daily practice program, preferably before commencing pranayama practice, and note any improvement.

### Technique 4: Yoga Danda

A traditional method of tantra is to use a special T-shaped crutch. In Hindi it is called a *kubadi*. The crutch is designed so that when a person is in a sitting position on the floor, the horizontal beam rests firmly under and supports the armpit with the bottom of the vertical pillar on the ground. It is usually made of wood, and if you are sufficiently interested then you can easily make one for yourself if you have a rudimentary knowledge of carpentry.

The yoga danda is used as follows:

1. If the left nostril flow is predominating, then the crutch is placed under the left armpit. This will pressurize that armpit and produce the same results explained in technique 1. In this case, after a short time, the right flow will become greater.
2. If the right nostril flow is predominating, then the crutch is obviously placed under the right armpit to induce a greater flow of the left nostril.

3. When one feels that the flows are reasonably equal, then the crutch can be placed in front of the body. Both elbows can be rested on the horizontal beam, with the arms folded or in any other suitable position. This will tend to induce perfect balance of the ida and pingala air flows for the following pranayama or meditational practices.

This practice is really a refinement of the padadhirasana (described in technique 1). In padadhirasana there is a tendency for the arms to become tired after a short period of time. The yoga danda can be utilized to bring about the same results for a long period of time without any tendency to become fatigued.

#### **Technique 5: Anuloma Viloma**

This technique is an excellent method that is normally classified as a meditational technique<sup>9</sup>. It brings balance of ida and pingala through mental suggestion. One imagines that the breath flows alternately through the two nostrils in turn. At first they will probably be unequal, but after some time the mental suggestion and imagination will bring about the change physically. At the same time, the practice will induce deep states of relaxation, but without being lost in a stream of thoughts and psychic pictures. This is a simple practice that has a notable feature compared to most other meditative techniques; while inducing relaxation, it simultaneously brings balance between ida and pingala, so that one does not become lost in thoughts or sleep. The very mechanics of the practice is such that ida and pingala are automatically balanced.

#### **Technique 6: Ida and Pingala Shuddhi**

These two practices are very similar to anuloma viloma; in fact, they supplement one another.

**Ida shuddhi** (purification of ida nadi) is a simple method of increasing the flow of breath through the left nostril. The method is as follows:

Sit in a comfortable pose. Close the eyes.

Imagine and feel the breath flowing in and out through the left nostril.

Synchronize the mantra Aum with both inhalation and exhalation.

Continue for about 5 minutes; or if you wish you can count the number of breaths from 108 down to 0.

**Pingala shuddhi** (purification of pingala nadi) increases the breath flow through the right nostril. All details are the same as given for ida shuddhi, except one must imagine that the breath is flowing through the right nostril instead of the left nostril.

Both of these techniques can be used to increase the breath flow in one nostril in order to induce balance. Ideally, these two practices are done one after another prior to practising anuloma viloma, in order to increase sensitivity to the breath flows through the nostrils.

#### **Technique 7: Asanas in general**

Asanas in general will tend to balance ida and pingala, especially if they are done in a systematic manner, correctly, and as a part of a regular practice program. This is not really surprising, since most asanas have a symmetrical influence on all parts of the body. Most tend to apply an equal pressure on the armpits. Also, if asanas are done correctly, then one will keep the eyes closed and fixed on the breath, an inner symbol or any other suitable object of attention which includes introversion, the flow of ida. But at the same time there must be a degree of extroversion in order to execute and maintain the physical position of the asana; in this manner, the pingala aspect is also simultaneously included. This tends to develop balance of ida and pingala, without too much extroversion or conversely too much absorption in mental and psychic fantasies. It is for this reason that asanas, when perfected, are indeed meditative techniques. This is one reason why asanas are so useful in bringing about good health - a factor that is usually overlooked when trying to explain how asanas bring about benefits.

#### **Technique 8: Adjustment of lying position**

As we have already explained, pressure under the right armpit will induce flow of breath through the left nostril, while pressure under the left armpit will induce flow through the right nostril. In the same way and for the same reasons, the right nostril will tend to flow if one lies on the left side of the body, while the left nostril will flow if one lies on the right side of the body. Again you can test the truth of this statement for yourself.

This technique can be used before sleep or while practising any meditational technique in

the lying pose, for they have many subtle effects apart from those which are noticeably physical.

#### **Technique 9: Physical blockage of the nose**

An obvious method of changing breath flows is to put a piece of cotton wool or any other suitable material in one of the nostrils. That is, to induce flow in the right nostril the left nostril should be blocked, and conversely, to induce the flow of breath in the left nostril, the right nostril must be blocked. If you wish you can try this method, but we recommend any of the other methods as preferable, since they are less forceful. We certainly are not suggesting that you block both nostrils as a means to balance ida and pingala!

#### **Warning**

We don't want you to tamper with breath flows of the ida and pingala during the day or night apart from during your yoga practices. Of course, most of us are too busy to concern ourselves with these flows during everyday duties, but we are giving you a warning just in case you are one of the few people who have a lot of spare time. The body and mind automatically adjust the ida and pingala breath flows to that which is required for the prevailing situation.

For example, at night there is a tendency for the body to lie in the position that encourages the correct flow, either of ida or pingala. The body is a very sensitive instrument, though few people realize this fact. If the ida needs to flow then automatically there is the tendency to lie on the right side; if the pingala needs to flow then there is the tendency to lie on the left side. This is one of the reasons why people continually change their sleeping position during the night. Your body has a built-in sense - don't interfere with its natural functioning during the day and night; let it follow its own dictates.

But, immediately before meditative practices and during yogic practices in general, it is justified to manipulate the flows to obtain balance. This is a temporary interference with the body; any of the techniques that we have described can be used. For the rest of the day, you should let the ida and pingala flows follow their own laws.

#### **General advice**

We have described these practices since they are an important part of hatha yoga. They quickly help to balance ida and pingala as a means to gain the most out of one's meditational practices. Of course, balancing the breath flows through the nostrils is most unlikely to balance ida and pingala at all levels rising up to ajna chakra, but at the same time it is a great help.

It is not necessary to do all the techniques that we have described; merely one or two of your own choice. If you are already doing a full program of asanas and pranayama every day before meditational practice then it is probably not necessary to utilize any of the more specific techniques that we have outlined. Only use one of these methods if you feel it is justified in your particular situation. You must use your own discretion and common sense in this respect.

#### **Kriya yoga and ida-pingala balance**

Probably the most powerful method of balancing ida and pingala is kriya yoga. The individual techniques are carefully arranged so that they bring ida and pingala into balance. In the first kriyas great care is taken to keep the awareness balanced between the internal realm of the mind and the external realm of the material world. The first kriyas are primarily concerned with fixing awareness between the devil and the deep blue sea, the razor's edge between extroversion on the one hand and introversion on the other hand. This will be more fully explained in Book III when we outline in detail the different kriya practices and their effects on the body and mind.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Balance of Life: Part 1 - Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1; Part 2 - Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

<sup>2</sup> For detailed explanations of the meaning and implications of the sushumna refer to Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2

<sup>3</sup> Vajrasana - Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

<sup>4</sup> Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4

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

<sup>6</sup> Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 4

<sup>7</sup> Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 4

<sup>8</sup> Jala neti - Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2; Sutra neti - Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 3

<sup>9</sup> Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 5

## Topic 5

# Vishuddhi Chakra

In the last four lessons we have described the following chakras:

1. mooladhara<sup>1</sup>
2. swadhisthana<sup>2</sup>
3. manipura<sup>3</sup>
4. anahata<sup>4</sup>

The first two are generally associated with the attributes of *tamas*. The third and fourth chakras are associated with the qualities of *rajas*. In this topic we will introduce the first of the *sattwic* chakras, the *vishuddhi chakra*. The word *sattwa* means purity, understanding, peace and other qualities that lead to and are an expression of both inner harmony and harmonious interactions with other people and the outside world in general.

Vishuddhi chakra is located in the throat region and comes immediately above the anahata chakra in the ascending order of the chakras.

### Definition

The Sanskrit word *vishuddhi* means 'purification', therefore this chakra is usually translated as 'the purification centre'. It is the centre that purifies and harmonizes all opposites. It is also called *vishuddhikaya chakra* which has the same meaning. This chakra is also widely called 'the centre of nectar' because it is the level of being where poison and nectar, good and bad, are united into a common experience of bliss.

Vishuddhi chakra is sometimes called the *hharati sthana* - the centre of speech, because of its location in the throat region. Bharati is the goddess of speech.

### Mythology

There is a beautiful story in the Indian scriptures that clearly illustrates the process of the vishuddhi. The story is as follows:

It is said that in the primordial past, the *suras* and *asuras* were continually fighting each other. The *suras* are beings that represent the forces of good and light in the world and

within each individual. These are the forces which help a person to overcome all obstacles and tread the spiritual path. In Christianity the equivalent would be angels; other religions have other names for them and for the opposite tendencies which lead to ignorance or tie a person to low levels of understanding. These are the forces that act as obstacles on the spiritual path. They can be roughly translated as demons or devils. These two forces can be understood and interpreted in many ways, and on many different levels of subtlety, but we leave this to the reader. Let us return to the story.

Both the *suras* and *asuras* tried to dominate and destroy each other. Eventually Vishnu tried to resolve the conflict by suggesting that they stir up the primordial ocean (called the ocean of milk representing the world and the mind) and equally divide the contents between them. This seemed to be a fair solution and Vishnu's plan was adopted. The primordial ocean was stirred up and many things arose to the surface for sharing and distribution.

Everyone was very happy until a gruesome poison rose up to the surface. Neither the *suras* nor the *asuras* wanted it, but they could not throw the poison away because it would cause harm. There seemed to be a dilemma. Eventually Vishnu approached Shiva who was in deep meditation and asked his advice. Shiva merely picked up the poison and drank it in one gulp. It caused him absolutely no harm. Because of this action Shiva is widely known as *nilakantha* - blue throated, where blue refers to poison.

This action is very symbolic and very meaningful. It indicates that at higher levels of awareness or meditation, at and above the level of vishuddhi chakra, even poison (the negative aspects of existence - bad, evil, war, destruction, etc.) can be integrated as part of a whole. All aspects of existence, whether poison or nectar, are part of the total scheme of being.



When a person functions at the level of the vishuddhi chakra and above, then all concepts of good and bad fall away. They are seen in a higher light, from a wider viewpoint. Thus Shiva, because of his elevated state of being, was able to absorb even the poisonous aspects and experiences of life and transform them into a source of bliss.

Incidentally, there is also a bird in India called the nilakantha because of its blue throat (in English it is called the blue jay). Also the peacock is often associated with the ability to absorb poison and transform it into nectar. The peacock can eat almost anything without harming itself. This also applies to the yogi whose level of being is at the vishuddhi chakra; all experiences, good or bad, are sources of bliss. Everything becomes nectar - blissful.

#### **Nectar and bindu**

It is said that a divine fluid flows and cascades downwards from a higher point called *bindu* to vishuddhi. This fluid is symbolic and represents *sachidananda* (truth, consciousness and bliss) which originates in the sahasrara, the source of all being, but manifests through bindu<sup>5</sup>. Bindu can be considered as a gateway between sahasrara and individual existence - the gateway between the infinite and finite.

This divine fluid has many different names, in English it can be called *ambrosia* - the food of the gods; the elixir of life. It is widely called *amrita* - the nectar of immortality. In the Vedas it is known as *soma* (nectar); in the Tantras it is called *madya* (divine wine). Many Sufi poets refer to the 'sweet wine' which brings instant satisfaction; they are not talking about the wine made from grapes, but the wine of bliss. The wine used in Christian ceremonies also symbolizes the same bliss; exoterically it represents the blood of Christ, but really it refers to the blissful nature that was the essence of Christ and is the essence of all beings. In the *Bible* Christ says: "But whoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14) This is not ordinary water; it is the divine fluid of bliss that descends from bindu to vishuddhi chakra.

Every religious system and every system concerned with opening up the potential contained within each being has its own

symbolism for the unspeakable feeling of bliss. The meaning is the same.

#### **Lalana chakra**

The *lalana chakra* is a minor chakra that is closely associated with the vishuddhi chakra. It is located in the root of the palate at the back of the mouth. It is this centre that is referred to in the following quotation from the *Bible*: "But God clave a hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived . . . (Judges 15:19) Again, the water is not the liquid water, but bliss.

After the nectar leaves the bindu, it is stored in the lalana chakra before reaching vishuddhi chakra. Lalana chakra is sometimes called the *kala chakra* - the centre of division, because it is the centre where the nectar from bindu divides into either good or bad experiences in life. When vishuddhi chakra, combined with lalana chakra, is not awakened, life tends to be painful and unhappy. The nectar becomes poison. But when the vishuddhi and lalana chakras are awakened, then the nectar remains in the form of bliss. Life becomes a source of joyful experiences. Such is the importance of the vishuddhi-lalana chakras.

Incidentally, the purpose of the well known practice of khechari mudra is to stimulate and awaken this lalana chakra<sup>6</sup>. Though it is a physical technique it induces more subtle changes on a psychic level.

#### **Attributes of vishuddhi**

This is the centre or level of awareness where the world begins to become like one's own home. One becomes open to all experiences, whether good or bad. The stage of the world and life in general is regarded as the provider of experiences that lead to greater understanding. Instead of fighting with life, one begins to flow with the current of life. One ceases to continually avoid or ignore bad experiences or facets of life and seek good experiences. Instead there is the tendency to let things happen in the way that they must. The nectar and the poison are both consumed. Everything and everyone becomes magical. Instead of feeling neurotic and antagonistic towards the world and other people, one begins to relax and flow with all situations. One begins to tune in with other people.

More and more, one will see sense and intelligence behind all things and actions. This is the centre where all people and all things are seen as a cosmic whole, with everything working in harmony with everything else.

It is said that below vishuddhi it is possible to fall and lose one's level of harmony and understanding. At the level of vishuddhi and above, this possibility of fall no longer exists. It is the chakra that lies on the threshold of spiritual realization and higher knowledge. In the *Shat Chakra Nirupana* it says: "This chakra (vishuddhi) is the gateway to liberation for he who wishes to know the real meaning of yoga and whose senses are purified and controlled." (verse 30) It is said that a person who opens vishuddhi chakra knows all the scriptures without needing to read them. That is, a person at this level of understanding comprehends the meaning behind the scriptures through his own experience and intuition. He becomes compassionate, peaceful and full of bliss.

### Symbolism

The vishuddhi chakra is symbolized by a purple lotus flower with sixteen petals. Traditionally, each of these petals is inscribed with one of the sixteen Sanskrit vowels – Am अं, Aam आं, Im इं, Eem ईं, Um उं, Uum ऊं, Rim ऋं, Reem ॠं, Lrim लृं, Lreem लॄं, Em एं, Aim ऐं, Om ओं, Aum औं, M' and Ah:. We have omitted these letters in our symbolic diagram of the chakra.

In the centre of the lotus flower is a white circle in which there is a drop of nectar; one drop among many drops that stream down from bindu to vishuddhi. In the drop is inscribed the bija (seed) mantra for the vishuddhi chakra – Ham ह्रं. Many traditional diagrams also portray a white elephant and various deities. We have omitted these for simplicity and also so that the diagram is not confined to one religious system. Most of the traditional deities have little symbolic value for most people outside India.

### Location of chakra and kshetram

Like swadhisthana, manipura and anahata chakras, vishuddhi chakra also has a reflection on the front surface of the body called the *vishuddhi kshetram*. This is utilized in the practices of kriya yoga.

The positions of the chakra and kshetram are as follows:

*Vishuddhi kshetram* is located on the front surface of the throat in the region of the Adam's apple and the thyroid gland.

*Vishuddhi chakra* is located in the spine directly behind the kshetram.

The kshetram can be easily located for it is pin-pointed by the bump or protrusion at the throat. The chakra is more difficult to locate. We suggest that you look in a mirror, place one finger on the Adam's apple and use a finger of the other hand to locate the region of the spine that is directly behind the Adam's apple. Eventually you should be able to feel the exact location with the eyes closed, but a little practice is required. This is the purpose of the following simple practice.

### PRACTICES

#### Vishuddhi Shuddhi

The following practice is very simple. *Vishuddhi shuddhi* - 'the purification of the vishuddhi'.

Sit in a comfortable position.

Hold the back straight and close the eyes.

Become aware of the breath.

Fold your tongue back into khechari mudra<sup>6</sup>.

Do ujjayi pranayama<sup>0</sup>.

For a minute or so be aware of the sound of the breath at the throat.

Let your breathing become slower and deeper. Then with inhalation, imagine that the breath is being drawn in through the vishuddhi kshetram at the front of the throat.

Feel that the breath passes through the kshetram and eventually pierces vishuddhi chakra in the spine.

With exhalation, feel the breath move forwards from vishuddhi chakra trigger point towards the kshetram and eventually outwards in front of the body.

This is 1 round.

Continue for at least 5 minutes or longer, if you have time available.

Daily practice in this manner will gradually develop your sensitivity to vishuddhi chakra and kshetram.

#### Location of the other chakras and kshetrams

Besides the practice that we have just described for vishuddhi, you should also continue to do practices that increase your sensitivity to mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura and anahata chakras and kshetrams. This will

maximize your sensitivity for kriya yoga practices to be introduced in Book III.

If you can easily locate the other chakras and kshetrams then you should practise the method of chakra shuddhi<sup>4</sup>. That is, you have to chant Aum in time with the pulse 21 times at each of the chakras and kshetrams. Preferably you should also use a mala, since this will be a valuable preparation for kriya yoga practices.

If you have difficulty in locating the centres then continue to practise the specific techniques prescribed for each centre in the previous four lessons.

#### Notes

- 1 Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2
- 2 Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 3
- 3 Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3
- 4 Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2
- 5 Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 5
- 6 Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

## Meditation: Ajapa Japa (Stage 4)

Nowadays there is an overwhelming tendency for human endeavour to be completely absorbed in the outside world. Everything in society, in education and so forth is orientated towards outside aspiration and activity. In fact, any tendency to be introverted is widely regarded as abnormal. The direction of man's life is almost totally fixed on the pingala path. This results in disequilibrium in life because the pingala is not supplemented and balanced by the ida path of introspection. This is one of the main reasons for so much mental turmoil and dissatisfaction in the world today. Attention is continually directed outwards, so that one never knows the nature of the inner world. And balance between the inner and outer realms, ida and pingala is essential in order to find spiritual bliss and knowledge.

The whole aim of yoga is to find this balance between ida and pingala. Many methods are utilized. One of the simplest yet most effective is ajapa. Continuous practise of ajapa puts you in tune with the breath and the associated mantra. The breath is a continual reminder that you must be aware of yourself in relation to the outer and inner world. And while you are alive, the breath never stops. It is therefore the continual reminder. If you use it, it will make you more harmonized and sensitive. You will attain perfect balance between excessive introversion and excessive extroversion; you will find there is a balance between becoming totally lost in the outside world of material objects and becoming totally lost in the inner world of fascinating psychic events. Perfect balance of ida and pingala implies that the sushumna functions. This leads directly to meditation.

### AJAPA JAPA - STAGE 4

#### Technique

In stage 1 we merged the mantra *Soham* with the breath<sup>1</sup>. In stage 2 the mantra *Hamso* was merged with the breathing process<sup>2</sup>. In stage

3 the mantra was split into separate parts *So* and *Ham* which were individually synchronized with respiration<sup>3</sup>. In stage 4, to be described shortly, *So* and *Ham* will be merged with the breathing process so that they form a continuous cycle . . . *So-Ham-So-Ham-So* and so forth. The sound of *So* should merge with *Ham* so that there is no break in the cycle. Before *So* ends, *Ham* should start and before *Ham* ends, *So* should start. If you have done the previous three stages you will find that this fourth stage comes naturally. If you have not done the preparatory stages then you will find stage 4 difficult if not impossible.

The technique of stage 4 is as follows:

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Close your eyes.

Relax the whole body and adjust yourself so that you feel no need to move.

A good preparatory practice is *kaya sthairyam*<sup>4</sup>.

Do *khechari mudra* and *ujjayi pranayama*<sup>5</sup>.

Become aware of the breathing process.

Make the breathing longer and deeper.

Maintain complete attention on the breath.

It is most important to know that you are doing the practice.

Know that the breathing process is taking place.

After a few minutes feel the breath moving between navel and throat.

Inhalation ascending from the navel to the throat.

Exhalation descending from throat to navel.

Be totally aware of the breathing process; this is essential.

After a few minutes synchronize the sound *So* with inhalation and *Ham* with exhalation.

Let the mantra be an endless repetition: *So-Ham-So-Ham-So-Ham* . . .

*So* should merge with *Ham* and *Ham* should merge with *So*.

These two sounds should not be regarded as separate but as continuations of each other.

The last part of *So* joins with *Ham*.

The last part of *Ham* joins with *So*.  
The *So* sounds on the upward cycle of breath from the navel; towards the end of the cycle before reaching the throat, the sound of *Ham* should begin.

The sound *Ham* occurs on the downward cycle of exhalation from the throat; towards the end of the cycle, just before the navel, the sound *So* should begin.

Halfway through *So* turn your attention to *Soham* and halfway through *Ham* turn your attention to *Hamso*.

In this manner, the mantra *Soham* becomes an unbroken sound ... the mantra and breathing become a constant stream.

There should be no break.

Carry on in this manner for a few minutes, about 5 minutes.

Then practise chidakasha dharana<sup>6</sup>.

Watch the space in front of the closed eyes. Merely be a witness to whatever arises, if anything, on the mind screen.

After about 3 minutes, return to the practice of ajapa: awareness of the mantra and respiration.

After another 5 minutes, again repeat chidakasha dharana.

Continue to alternate between ajapa and chidakasha dharana for the duration of the time that you assigned for your practice.

### Preparatory stages

The practice of the earlier stages 1, 2 and 3 is essential for mastery of stage 4. You may find that there is little difference between the 4 stages, but the difference, no matter how small, is very important. If you have not practised stages 1 to 3, we suggest that you spend at least two weeks doing each stage before attempting stage 4. If you don't do the preliminary stages then stage 4 will give little or no benefits.

### Nadi Shodhana Pranayama

To gain the most benefits out of ajapa we suggest that you firstly practise nadi shodhana pranayama. This not only brings about deep relaxation of the mind and body, but intensifies the awareness of the breathing process.

### Psychic passage

In this lesson we have given instructions for the location of the vishuddhi chakra and its

reflection<sup>7</sup>. In previous lessons we have given instructions regarding the location of the manipura and anahata chakras and their reflections<sup>8</sup>. This means that you are now ready to imagine that there is a psychic passage between the manipura reflection (manipura kshetram) at the navel and the reflection of vishuddhi chakra (vishuddhi kshetram) at the front of the throat. The passage will also pass through the anahata kshetram.

In ajapa stage 4 you should feel that the breath and the mantra are ascending and descending within this psychic passage. You should feel the inhaled breath being drawn up from manipura kshetram, piercing anahata kshetram and ending at vishuddhi kshetram. The exhaled breath should move downwards, be pushed downwards, in a similar manner.

This modification of the practice relates directly to kriya yoga.

### Notes

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

<sup>2</sup> Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 5

<sup>3</sup> Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 5

<sup>4</sup> Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6

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

<sup>6</sup> For full details of chidakasha refer to Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 5

<sup>7</sup> Topic 3 of this lesson

<sup>8</sup> Manipura chakra - Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3  
Anahata chakra - Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2

## Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have spent much space describing the implications of ida and pingala. These two simple principles represent the essence of spiritual life and aspiration. The techniques that we have given for physical control of ida and pingala will not balance ida and pingala at all levels. At most they will only balance the grosser levels, but they are nevertheless a great help in improving the quality of your meditative practices.

We therefore suggest that you familiarize yourself with the hatha yoga techniques for balancing ida and pingala and utilize one or two of them in your daily program. If you practise nadi shodhana every day then this is probably more than enough to meet your needs. Otherwise we suggest that you practise padadhirasana before your meditative prac-

tice, or if you have time you can integrate anuloma viloma into your meditative practice. Any of the other techniques can be adopted if the circumstances demand it.

If you have mastered ajapa stage 3 then you should now proceed to ajapa stage 4.

Start to practise vishuddhi shuddhi in order to develop sensitivity to the position of vishuddhi chakra and kshetram trigger points. Also you should continue the practice of chakra shuddhi for the other four chakras: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura and anahata.

We have not given any detailed descriptions of any new asanas apart from padadhirasana, because we want you to perfect and slowly increase the duration of sirshasana.

You should continue nadi shodhana pranayama with maha bandha<sup>1</sup>.

Practice	Minutes
<b>Program 1:</b> duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	3
Shashankasana	4
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	15
Chakra Shuddhi	20
Vishuddhi Shuddhi	20
Ajapa Japa - Stage 4	20
	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	3
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	10
Chakra Shuddhi	15
Vishuddhi Shuddhi	10
Ajapajapa - Stage 4	10
	<hr/>
	90

**Program 3:** duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Shashankasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	10
Vishuddhi Shuddhi	10
Ajapajapa - Stage 4	10
	<hr/>
	60

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

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	10
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	30

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 4