

## Lesson 4

By practise when the function of prana ceases then mind achieves steadiness and nirvana dawns. (5/78/46)

When prana ceases its movement the air becomes still. In the same way, when the breath is stilled the mind will also become still. (6/69/41)

O Ram, by the cessation of prana, cessation of mind likewise takes place. Even as the shadow follows the body, so does the mind follow the prana. (5/13/83)

O Ram, he who is able to control the prana can be master of all kinds of siddhis and achieve liberation. (6/80/83)

*Yoga Vashishtha*



## Hatha Yoga: Kunjal Kriya

This is a technique for cleaning the digestive tract from the stomach to the mouth. It involves drinking warm, salty water until the stomach is full and then voluntarily expelling it through the mouth. This may seem a little repulsive to some people, especially if done intentionally, but actually kunjal kriya is a simple practice and all that is vomited is salty water containing impurities from the stomach. As such there is no unpleasant taste, smell and nausea accompanying the action as there is during times of sickness. It is these uncomfortable sensations that all of us find repulsive. Without these disagreeable factors the practice of kunjal kriya becomes simple and not at all unpleasant.

The biggest obstacle in trying this practice for yourself is your mental concept of what is involved. Try to throw away your prejudices and read this chapter with an open mind. Then attempt the practice once yourself, either alone or under the guidance of a yoga teacher. If you find from personal experience that what we say is true, then you will more than likely continue to do this kriya regularly.

### Is this a natural process?

Vomiting is normally the last resort of the stomach to throw out impure, excessively rich or heavy food. It is a natural physical process but only as a last resort. To purposely vomit is in a sense unnatural but we have found from experience, as did the ancient yogis who originated the technique, that it can do much to improve the functioning of the stomach and in turn the whole physical body. If we treated the stomach with more care then it would not be necessary to do kunjal kriya, but most of us sadly mistreat our stomachs. It is under these circumstances that intentional vomiting becomes most useful as a means of removing the impurities that contaminate the body.

### Terminology

The practice is known by various names. When the vomiting is induced by tickling the back of the throat it is called kunjal kriya or vaman dhauti. Both *kunjal* and *vaman* mean 'vomiting'; *kriya* means 'practice' and *dhauti* means 'wash'.

When the water is expelled by muscular contraction of the abdomen, it is called kunjara kriya or gaja karma. Both the words *kunjara* and *gaja* mean 'elephant'. The word *karma* in this context means the same as kriya, namely practice or action. Therefore, in English this technique is called the elephant action. It is so called because it imitates the ability of an elephant to suck in water and to expel it at will, though actually an elephant expels water from the trunk, not from the stomach.

### The stomach

The stomach seems to cause us more problems than any other organ in the body. We are able to forget most other organs while they carry out their duties, but the stomach often reminds us of its presence, especially when it is not working properly. Most people treat the stomach with little respect. They tend to stuff it with all types of food without consideration for its delicate nature. This kind of treatment is the root cause of many ailments which disturb us both physically and mentally.

Let us briefly consider the mechanism of the upper part of the digestive tract, the alimentary canal. The food that we eat is first of all masticated in the mouth, or at least it should be. It then passes along a narrow flexible tube called the oesophagus into the stomach.

The stomach is a bag-like organ located below the heart. When it is empty it resembles a medium-sized sock. It is capable of expanding quite considerably when filled with the food that we eat. It has thick, muscular walls which are far thicker than any other part of the digestive tract.

The purpose of the stomach is to churn and to break down the food before it enters the intestines. In the walls of the stomach there are multitudes of glands (an estimated 35,000,000) which secrete digestive juices. These are of various types and are called gastric juices. During the course of the day several litres are poured into the stomach to digest the food we consume. An important constituent of these digestive juices is hydrochloric acid. This is essential for complete digestion of food, but it can also cause us many problems such as hyperacidity and ulcers.

The food spends several hours in the stomach, depending on the nature of the food: simple and easily digestible food stays a relatively short period while certain types of food such as meat stay for a longer time. The food is progressively broken down to a more convenient form for the intestines to handle. When the food attains a suitable consistency it is passed to the small intestines through the pyloric valve at the lower end of the stomach. In the intestines the nutrients in the food are absorbed by the bloodstream and the waste products proceed to the anus for expulsion from the body.

The importance of this system needs no emphasis. It should be kept clean and in the healthiest possible condition if it is to retain its efficiency and to remain free from disease. Kunjal kriya specifically does this as well as removing acidity. It is therefore a panacea for those who have digestive ailments and for those who want to maintain the health that they already have.

#### **Preparation of water**

The water can be either with or without salt. We leave this to the practitioner's choice. The deciding factor depends on why you are doing the practice. Salt water inhibits the secretion of acid in the stomach, therefore those people who are trying to alleviate hyperacidity should definitely put salt in the water. For other purposes both unsalted and salted are suitable. If you add salt to the water a reasonable proportion is one teaspoonful per litre of water. However, the proportion is not critical and more or less can be added at your discretion.

We recommend that the water be lukewarm, about body temperature. However, again this is flexible. Water can be taken directly from

the tap but it should not be too cold. This is important for during the practice the stomach will be filled with a large volume of water; if it is too cold it could easily chill the body. Prepare about three litres of warm water per person, this should be more than sufficient. Needless to say the water should be clean.

Do kunjal in the bathroom. If the weather is warm it can be done in the garden.

#### **Posture**

During expulsion of water it is best to stand and bend forwards keeping the trunk and head horizontal. This facilitates the free flow of water from the stomach.

#### **KUNJAL KRIYA**

Quickly drink one glass of water.

Then take another glass and drink it as rapidly as possible.

Continue drinking glasses of water until you think you cannot possibly take another drop. Then take just one more glass. This may be a little difficult but it is essential to fill the stomach as fully as possible.

Under these circumstances the urge to throw out the water from the stomach hardly needs to be stimulated, it may even occur spontaneously.

6 medium sized glasses of water are about the average number required to fill the stomach. Then from a standing position lean forwards over a wash basin, bowl or convenient place in the garden.

Make sure the trunk is as horizontal as possible. Then open your mouth as wide as possible and place 2 or 3 fingers (the middle 3) on top of the tongue.

Slowly and gently slide the fingers along the surface of the tongue towards the back of the throat, while simultaneously pressing the root of the tongue.

This should induce the water to suddenly and effortlessly gush out from the stomach.

If there is no expulsion of water then it means that the tips of the fingers are not sufficiently far enough down the throat or that you are not pressing the tongue.

Though your first reaction is to tense the body and resist the urge to expel the water you should try to relax and allow for a free flow of water from the stomach; this is difficult at first

but becomes easy with practice. During expulsion of water the fingers should be removed from the mouth. When the flow of water ceases, again place the fingers in the mouth and repeat the process. Continue in this way until there is no more water in the stomach. This is indicated when tickling the back of the throat does not bring up any more water. Now you have completed the practice. If necessary do jala neti to clean out the nose.

#### ADVANCED VARIATION: KUNJARA KRIYA

This method does not rely on tickling the back of the throat and tongue. It relies instead on squeezing the water-filled stomach by contracting the abdomen. It is a little more difficult than the previous method and requires some practice. We will not describe it in detail for it does not give any worthwhile advantages over the simpler method.

#### Technique

Fill your stomach with water.

While standing, bend forwards and place the hands on the knees.

Open the mouth.

Slowly breathe in making a whispering *ah* sound from the deeper parts of the throat.

Simultaneously contract the upper part of the abdomen, just below the ribcage. At the end of inhalation, retain the compression of the abdomen and exhale.

If this is done correctly the water should gush out of the mouth in a steady stream.

It is important that one relaxes the body during expulsion so that the water is not impeded. This method is for those people who have a reasonable control over their body muscles.

#### Time and frequency

The time of practice depends on the prevailing climate. It should not be done outside if the weather is cold. This is important, for kunjara removes much of the mucus lining of the stomach and thereby temporarily renders the stomach more vulnerable to chilling. After a short time, however, the mucus film regenerates itself and thereby gives the stomach the necessary protection. If you practise indoors and your home is reasonably warm then the

outside weather has little influence and you can practice kunjara regardless of the climate.

The best time to do the practice is early in the morning, before breakfast. However, if the atmosphere is cold inside and outside your house, you should practise later in the day when it becomes warmer. One should wait at least half an hour after completing the practice before taking food. This allows sufficient time for the stomach to re-line itself.

Normally this kriya should not be done after meals. Wait for at least four hours. This allows the stomach to perform its duties and empty itself of its contents. This process takes at least four hours (depending of course on how much food you eat) and if you do the practice prematurely you will vomit the food you have eaten. There is a similar technique which does this purposely (vyaghra kriya) but this is under specific circumstances. We will discuss this practice at the end of this topic.

Many people do this practice every morning without fail followed by jala neti. They consider this routine essential for maintaining their best possible health. If you have the time we also recommend daily practice as it can certainly do no harm and gives many wonderful benefits. If you have limited time try to do it as often as possible, at least once a week.

#### General advice

The biggest hurdle to overcome with this practice is the disgust we attach to the idea of vomiting. When you try it for the first time and even on the second and third occasion you will have to use a little willpower to actually carry it out to the full. It is very easy to drink only one glass and persuade oneself that the stomach is now full; or to make plans to do the practice and then postpone it at the last moment until another day under the guise of some suitable excuse. But once you become accustomed to the idea and have tried it a few times it is no more difficult than cleaning the teeth and does not take much more time.

Don't try to vomit once the stomach is empty. As soon as the vomiting reflex brings up no water this is a sure indication that you have cleaned out the stomach. If you persist unnecessarily you will more than likely produce soreness of the throat as well as experiencing an unpleasant taste. One often sees brown or yellow traces in the expelled water, especially

on the first few attempts at doing the practice. Don't worry for this is no more than dead blood cells, fermented food particles and mucus from the stomach. As you progressively clean the stomach over a period of a few days, the water will become cleaner and cleaner, a sure sign that the stomach is being thoroughly cleaned.

Many teachers say that the best way to induce expulsion of water is to touch the uvula (the small grape-like pendant hanging from the soft palate above the root of the tongue). We don't advise this as from experience we have found that it tends to cause retching and not a smooth elimination of water. We suggest that you press the root of the tongue. If you find that you really cannot remove the water from your stomach, don't worry. Though you will lose the benefits of kunjal it will not cause any harm. The water will merely pass through the system in the normal way. It may give a looser than normal bowel motion and if you suffer from constipation this is not such a bad result.

### **Limitations**

Most people can do this practice. However, it should not be attempted by those suffering from hernia of the stomach or abdomen, high blood pressure and heart problems.

Though kunjal kriya helps to remove excess acidity from the stomach, a factor very much associated with ulcers, we don't advise you to try to do this practice under these circumstances. It will probably do more harm than good.

If you have any doubts about whether you should or should not do kunjal kriya we recommend that you seek the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

### **Benefits**

This technique gives the best possible wash to the digestive system from the stomach to the mouth. As such it helps remove all diseases of this region which are the result of a build-up of toxins or general impurities. It also helps to eradicate bad breath, the accumulation of phlegm in the throat and sore throats.

Most of us at one time or another have had stomach problems. There are various causes - eating too much food, eating food that is too rich, bad or that is impure, as well as over-secretion of gastric juices, particularly acid,

due to emotional upsets or sustained stress. Kunjal cannot change your food habits and certainly cannot remove mental and emotional tension. However, it can help to keep the stomach in good order by washing it clean of impurities. The salt water also reduces the secretion of acid from the glands in the stomach. These in general are rendered more efficient thus allowing better digestion of food. All these are important factors in preventing indigestion, obtaining the best possible assimilation of nutrients into the body as well as eliminating other digestive ailments.

Whenever you feel a little queasy in the stomach, perhaps early in the morning, we certainly recommend kunjal to bring relief.

There is another factor that makes kunjal so useful. There is a tendency for the residue of undigested food to lie in the bottom of the stomach after all the easily digested food has passed to the intestines. This is particularly the case if one has a distended stomach, for the bottom of the stomach is more than likely below the level of the outlet to the intestines (pyloric valve). This acts as a reservoir in which fermentation takes place. When one eats the next meal this residue is mixed with incoming food and can pass into the intestines. This can contaminate and poison the system, for much of it will be absorbed into the bloodstream from the intestines. Kunjal kriya throws this fermented waste out of the stomach before it can cause harm. As such kunjal is a sure way of preventing autopoisoning of the body.

People who suffer from biliousness inform us that kunjal gives them marvellous relief. When they expel the water it is green in colour, which indicates the presence of bile. Actually the bile is secreted from the gall bladder into the intestines below the stomach, but somehow or other it often finds its way up into the stomach, especially if it is over-secreted. Kunjal brings wonderful relief by eliminating the accumulation of this nauseating and bitter tasting bile.

Asthmatics find kunjal a wonderful practice. Why this is so is not certain for there is no obvious connection between the lungs (the site of asthma) and cleansing the stomach with water, but we do know that it does bring relief. This is confirmed by the large blobs of phlegm which are thrown out by asthmatics during kunjal. Possibly expulsion of water from the

stomach simultaneously stimulates a nervous reflex action in the lungs, which in turn expels mucus secretions from the bronchial tubes. This helps to remove blockages in the respiratory passages of the lungs and brings great relief to the asthma sufferer by allowing him to breathe more easily.

People who suffer from asthma should and can perform kunjaj when they are actually having an attack. It is found to terminate the spasm. In this case it is essential that the stomach is completely filled with water to obtain the best results. Though it may be difficult to drink the water down quickly because of shortage of breath, you must try; with determination it can be accomplished. One should actually resist the urge to vomit so that the stomach can be filled to the brim - bloated in fact. The bronchial tubes, which tighten and contract during an attack of asthma, relax as soon as one expels the water. This brings much needed and instant relief.

#### VYAGHRA KRIYA

This practice is also called baghi kriya. Both *vyaghra* and *baghi* mean 'tiger'. This technique is therefore known as the tiger action of regurgitation. It is a similar practice to kunjaj but a large portion of semi-digested food as well as water is expelled from the stomach.

The tiger has been observed to gorge itself with its prey and then regurgitate the remnants of the food from the stomach three or four hours later. There is a good reason for this. It is the portion of the food which is most difficult to digest that stays in the stomach longest. The most nutritious and easily digestible portions quickly pass through the stomach into the intestines. The remainder contains far less nutrition and requires a lot of energy and activity by the digestive organs to eliminate it. The expenditure of the body is probably far greater than the gain. The tiger, therefore, vomits this unrequired portion and so saves overworking the intestines.

The ancient yogis had taken heed of this sensible habit of the tiger and utilized it for their own benefit. They took their food in the normal way and then three hours later expelled the remaining undigestible or difficult to digest portion. This saved them many intestinal ailments and discomforts and allowed the

energy in the body to be directed towards more useful purposes. Vyaghra kriya was also practised most effectively by the later emperors of the Roman Empire, who used it to avoid indigestion after their famous orgies.

#### Technique

Perform the technique of kunjaj kriya, filling the stomach with water.

When the water is expelled it will simultaneously empty the stomach of the undigested particles of food.

Try to prevent food particles from entering the nose.

Do jala neti after the practice to ensure that the nose is cleared<sup>1</sup>.

It should be done about 3 hours after food. If you eat impure food or overload the stomach it can be done much earlier.

#### Benefits

This prevents burdening the intestines with undigestible food. However, it has another more obvious use. If we eat bad, rotten, rich or bulky food the stomach often causes us to vomit. It is a natural process of the body. However, this is the last resort of the body for it usually tries to digest the food that we have dumped in the stomach. This leads to a lot of heaviness, discomfort and it takes many hours for the digestive system to settle down. The easiest way to prevent this unnecessary disruption of intestines is to vomit as soon as possible. This sounds a little distasteful but it takes only a minute or so and it prevents much discomfort.

The modern day remedy for indigestion or eating too much rich food is to swallow a tablet. Yet the natural and least harmful way is to vomit. We therefore recommend vyaghra kriya to those who want to bring their digestive system quickly back into shape again.

#### Notes

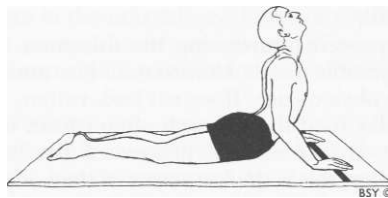
<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

## Topic 1

# Asanas: Practice

### BHUJANGASANA (COBRA POSE)

Bhujangasana emulates the action of the cobra raising itself just prior to striking at its prey. We have already discussed ardha bhujangasana, which is the preparatory pose for mastering bhujangasana<sup>1</sup>. If your back is stiff then you should do ardha bhujangasana just before doing bhujangasana. Otherwise bhujangasana alone is sufficient.



#### Technique

Lie flat on the stomach with the legs straight and the soles of the feet uppermost.

Place the palms of the hands flat on the floor below and slightly to one side of the shoulders; the fingers should point forwards and the arms should be bent with the elbows facing backwards.

Rest the forehead on the ground.

Close the eyes. Relax the whole body, especially the lower back.

This is the starting position.

Breathe out slowly and deeply.

Then as you breathe in raise the body in the way we will describe.

Slowly bend your head backwards so that the chin eventually points forwards and the back of the neck is compressed. Feel the stretch of the front part of the neck.

Now the arms must be brought into play.

Slowly raise the head and shoulders off the ground by progressively straightening the arms.

Feel the flexion of the back roll down the spine starting from the neck region and working

towards the lower back; try to feel the flexion of each individual vertebra throughout the movement. Remember, it is the arms that execute the movement.

Keep the back and legs as relaxed as possible.

Try to keep the navel in contact with the ground; if the navel is raised too high then the bend tends to be at the knees and not the back.

Continue slowly to arch the back as far as flexibility will allow.

In this position the back of your head should point towards your feet.

Your arms may or may not be straight - it depends on the flexibility of your back

You will feel tension in the face and will be tempted to open your mouth; try to relax the facial muscles and keep the mouth closed

You will feel a pleasantly painful sensation in the lower back; this is a good sign that you are doing the asana correctly. Hold this final pose for as long as comfortable.

On exhalation return to the starting position

in the same way that we have just described, but in the opposite order. The movement should be slow and synchronized with the breath.

Remember, at the end of the movement the nose should brush along the floor so that eventually the forehead rests on the ground. Relax the whole body.

#### Final position for beginners

Beginners, especially if they have stiff backs will probably find it difficult to stay in the final position for more than a few seconds. They should perform the asana as follows:

Raise the body while inhaling as already described.

Hold the breath in the final position for a short period of time without strain. Make sure the back and legs are as relaxed as possible.

Then lower the body while exhaling. Repeat this movement a number of times.



**Final position for those with supple backs**

This form of the final position gives the most benefits. We advise everyone to adopt it when their back becomes sufficiently flexible.

Raise the body in the way already described.

In the final position first of all breathe in and out normally a few times.

Ensure that the back is relaxed.

Then inhale deeply, while simultaneously pushing the shoulders a little further backward in line with the spine.

We emphasize that the back must remain relaxed throughout. It should take no part in executing the movement. If you tense the back muscles then this directly opposes the aim to accentuate the arch of the back. It is the lower back that one tends to tense.

One's awareness should be directed to relaxing this area as much as possible. If this part of the back is relaxed then the rest of the back will almost certainly follow suit.

During this inhalation feel the flexion of the lower back.

Then exhale and let the navel sink further downwards.

This will occur automatically, producing a not disagreeable twinge of pain in the lower back. This will further arch the back. Try not to resist this flexion by tensing the muscles.

Then breathe in and repeat the process again.

Do this a number of times and then return to the starting position while exhaling.

**Mistakes to avoid**

The most common error is to raise the abdomen off the ground. This is wrong for it bends the legs and not the back. If this is done then the asana fails to give many of its benefits. Often the hands are placed either too far in front of or behind the shoulders. The position can be adjusted according to the flexibility of your back, but normally the hands should be placed beside the shoulders.

Many people let their mouth sag open. Keep the mouth closed but without tensing the facial muscles. Often the head is allowed to drop forwards. This reduces the influence of the asana on the neck region. Hold your head as far back as possible. Some people tend to treat this asana as though it is one in a series of physical jerks. Amidst gasping and straining of all the body muscles together with facial contortions they attempt to force their back to

arch. This is totally wrong. Relax the body as much as possible.

**Awareness and duration**

One should be aware of breathing and movement throughout the practice. Make sure that the breath is synchronized with the movement as this helps to obtain the best possible benefits from the asana. Be aware also of the back and its relaxation, particularly the lower back. In the final pose be aware of the flexion of the lower back.

Three minutes is a reasonable time to spend performing this asana whether you stay in the final pose or whether you repeat the movement several times. However, you can use your discretion in choosing a suitable duration of practice.

**Sequence**

This asana gives the most benefits if it is preceded or followed by a forward bending asana.

**Limitations**

Those people who suffer from peptic ulcers, hernia, intestinal tuberculosis or hyperthyroidism should not do this asana. If you have any other complaint that you think may preclude practice of bhujangasana seek the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

**Benefits**

This asana increases the flexibility of the back and massages the abdominal organs. It gives many other similar benefits.

In particular it influences the kidneys and the adrenal glands. The kidneys purify our blood. During bhujangasana they are compressed thereby removing stagnant blood. On resumption of the starting position the kidneys are irrigated with a fresh supply of blood. A massage of these important organs is normally difficult for they are comparatively inaccessible. Bhujangasana overcomes this difficulty, improves the efficiency of the kidneys and thereby the health of the whole body. The adrenal glands, situated on top of the kidneys, also receive a good massage and so are encouraged to work more efficiently. These glands secrete various hormones which have vast repercussions on our mind and body. The secretion of adrenaline which affects our degree of tension

or relaxation is regulated. This helps give our mental and physical constitution more stability. Cortisone is another major hormone secreted by the adrenal glands. This has been found to be closely associated with the occurrence of rheumatism. Bhujangasana helps to maintain and encourage the correct secretion of this hormone and has been found very useful in alleviating rheumatism.

Various ailments and general unhealthiness of the body occur through stiffness of the spine. Remember the spine is the major channel which carries all nervous impulses from the brain to the body. A stiff spine interferes with this system by impeding nerve connections. Efficient nerves require a good blood supply. If the spine is stiff then the back is not flexed sufficiently to squeeze out stagnant blood. Bhujangasana loosens up the spine, removes impure blood from the back region and tones up the nerves. The overall result is better communication between the brain and the rest of the body, leading to increased health.

This asana massages the organs of the abdomen and pelvis such as the stomach, pancreas, liver, gall bladder and sexual and eliminative organs. In particular we recommend it for treating female disorders such as leucorrhoea, dysmenorrhoea and amenorrhoea as it notably tones the ovaries and uterus.

Those people who suffer from a slipped disc or sciatica can also benefit from this asana, but they should be careful. Many people suffer from chronic backache or neckache by sitting in one position for a prolonged period of time or by having a generally stiff and unhealthy spine. Bhujangasana acts as a useful remedy.

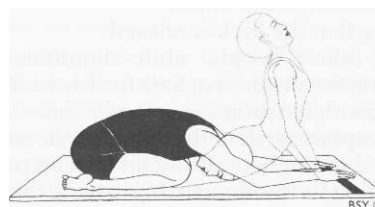
The thyroid gland is also regulated. This has a large part to play in maintaining a healthy body and its optimum condition is essential.

Bhujangasana expands the chest, which improves one's breathing habits.

#### SHASHANK BHUJANGASANA (STRIKING COBRA POSE)

This is an excellent asana combining both shashankasana and bhujangasana to give a smooth and pleasant movement. In this way it combines the benefits of a backward bending asana (bhujangasana) with a forward bending asana (shashankasana)<sup>1</sup>.

This does not mean that shashank bhujangasana can replace the other two asanas, for specific benefits are gained from their final static position; shashank bhujangasana is more useful for limbering up the spine by its dynamic action than anything else.



#### Technique

Assume the final position of shashankasana with the arms outstretched in front of the shoulders<sup>1</sup>.

The hands should remain in the same position throughout the whole practice.

Now inhale slowly and deeply while lifting the buttocks off the heels and pushing the body forwards.

Slide your nose and chest so that they just brush the surface of the floor as your body moves forwards.

Gradually transfer the body weight on to the palms as you move further forwards.

Try to arch your back downwards throughout this movement.

At the end of the movement straighten the arms so that the head, chest and shoulders are raised off the ground. Unlike bhujangasana you may find that the navel is not in contact with the ground - this doesn't matter for it depends very much on the starting position of your hands.

Allow the back to relax and sag downwards. Stay in this position for a few seconds. Raise the buttocks and push them backwards while breathing out.

Don't try to reverse the previous movement, but keep the arms straight. At the end of the movement the buttocks should sit on the heels and once again you will have assumed the starting position.

Relax the whole body for a short time, taking a few breaths.

#### Breathing, awareness and duration

Inhale on the forward movement. Exhale on the backward movement. Ensure that the

breathing is synchronized with the physical movement.

One should be aware of coordination of movement and breath. Practise up to a maximum of ten times.

### Sequence

This asana should be practised directly after shashankasana.

### Benefits

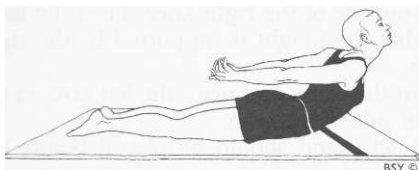
This asana gives similar benefits to bhujangasana and shashankasana<sup>1</sup>. However, the other asanas give their benefits by maintaining the final pose; shashank bhujangasana acts mainly by alternately flexing the spine.

It is particularly useful for toning the female reproductive organs. It is an excellent asana for post-pregnant women to strengthen and tighten the abdominal and pelvic region. It is especially useful for relieving menstrual disorders. It massages and tones the abdominal and pelvic organs and is found to be helpful in promoting good elimination.

The entire back is loosened up, the nerves are stimulated and the back muscles are made pliable. It has been found to be useful in eliminating backache and neckache.

### SARPASANA (SNAKE POSE)

This is a wonderful asana for the heart and lungs as well as the back.



### Technique

Place a blanket on the floor. Lie flat on your stomach (prone position).

Fold your arms behind your back clasping the wrist of one hand with the fingers of the other hand.

Rest the forehead on the ground.

The legs should be straight and together with the soles facing upwards. Relax the whole body.

Breathe normally for a short time.

Then inhale deeply and slowly, expanding the chest and abdomen as much as possible.

At the end of inhalation slowly bend the head backwards.

When you have bent the head backwards as far as possible slowly start to raise the shoulders and upper back. The movement is executed by contracting the back muscles and tensing the arms.

Raise the body as high as you can without causing any strain.

Hold the final pose while continuing to retain the breath inside.

Ensure that the weight of the body is supported on the soft part of the abdomen - the belly.

The legs should be as relaxed as possible and should remain on the floor throughout.

After a comfortable length of time slowly lower the body to the floor while exhaling.

Completely relax the body in the starting position.

Allow respiration to return to normal. Then repeat this asana up to 5 times.

### Breathing, awareness and duration

Inhale while in the starting position; this should be as deep as possible for this has much influence on the benefits obtained. Retain the breath while raising the body and maintaining the final pose. Exhale while lowering the body to the ground again. Remain aware of breathing and the movement. Stay in the final pose for as long as you can retain your breath.

### Limitations

Those people who suffer from stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, heart troubles or hernia should not do sarpasana. Seek expert guidance if you are unsure about whether you should or should not do this asana.

### More difficult variations

If you have strong back muscles and find the previous basic technique easy try the following more difficult variations. The methods are the same as already described but the positions of the arms are different as follows:

1. Outstretch the arms on each side of the body as though they are wings.
2. Interlock the thumbs and hold the arms straight and on each side of the head, so that the legs, trunk and arms lie in one straight line.

The arms are raised at the same time as the head and shoulders during execution of the

asana. These variations apply a greater pressure on the abdomen and enhance the benefits.

### Benefits

This asana helps to strengthen the spinal muscles and gives a good massage to the abdomen and pelvic organs. The benefits in this respect are similar to bhujangasana.

Sarpasana has a particularly notable influence on the lungs. The two lungs are composed of millions of alveoli (air cells) which facilitate the exchange of oxygen for carbon dioxide. The oxygen is taken into the body and the carbon dioxide is removed from the body. If these tiny air cells remain active and the lungs elastic then the lungs retain their general health and efficiency. The natural way of maintaining a healthy pair of lungs is regular, deep respiration. This successively inflates and deflates the tiny alveoli and at the same time stretches the elastic tissue of the lungs.

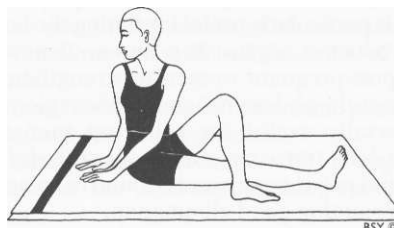
Many people, sad to say, do not breathe properly. They do not utilize anywhere near the maximum usable capacity of the lungs. Consequently the alveoli tend to become unhealthy through under-activity or inactivity. Sarpasana is a useful asana to help rectify this situation. In the final pose the breath is retained inside the lungs and a large proportion of the body weight is supported on the abdomen. This raises the pressure within the abdomen, which in turn pushes the diaphragm towards the chest. This pressurizes the air within the lungs and helps to uncrumple and open out inactive alveoli allowing them to resume their normal duties. The effective surface area of exchange in the lungs is in this way increased. This improves the removal of carbon dioxide from the body and the intake of oxygen for distribution to all parts of the organism.

The heart also benefits from sarpasana as the increased pressure within the chest cavity applies a good massage to the heart. Normally, ofcourse, it is impossible to massage the heart for it is imprisoned by the ribs. Sarpasana overcomes this obstacle and tones the heart and strengthens its muscles. The whole body is dependent on a good supply of blood and sarpasana helps in this way to improve one's physical health.

### MERU VAKRASANA (SPINAL TWIST)

An important though small group of asanas are those that twist the spine. Meru vakrasana is one of the simplest of this group. It supplements the backward and forward bending asanas that we have already described.

The Sanskrit word *meru* means 'mountain'. In India the spine is known as the *merudand*, which means 'mountainous stick', for the vertebrae of the spine jut out like a range of mountains. The word *vakra* means 'curved'. The asana is so called because it twists the spine while accentuating its curvature.



### Technique

Sit on the floor with the legs stretched out in front of the body.

Place your hands slightly behind and to the side of the buttocks.

Adjust the fingers so that they point outwards. Lean on your arms for support.

Lift your left foot off the floor and place it on the outside of the right knee. Pivot the body so that the weight is supported by the right arm.

Twist the trunk and place the left arm on the right side of the body.

The left hand should be placed beside the right hand with the fingers pointing outwards. Face backwards on the same side as the hands. Relax the whole body.

Make sure that the spine is straight throughout the asana though you can lean backwards as desired.

Gently twist the spine and place the right hand further behind the back. Don't strain but try to place your right hand as far as possible to the left side of the body.

The right arm can be bent if desired. Twist the head further backwards. Again relax the spine. Then using the right arm as a lever, gently twist the spine a little further. This leverage of

the right arm allows the spine to be twisted passively. Relaxation of the spine allows the best possible twist.

If necessary the left arm can be adjusted to provide balance.

Stay in the final pose for a short period of time, breathing normally.

Then return to the starting position. Repeat on the left side of the body.

If you have a stiff spine don't strain by trying to twist further than its flexibility will allow.

#### **Awareness and duration**

In the final pose be aware of breath, relaxation of the spine and the application of torsion to the spine.

Do two or three times on each side of the body. Stay in the final position for as long as you wish.

#### **Benefits**

This asana twists the whole spine from top to bottom. As such it loosens up all the vertebrae, helps to relocate displaced vertebrae and tones all the nerves within and surrounding the spine.

The massage of the abdomen applied by this asana helps to keep all the internal organs in good shape and it has been found to be useful for relieving backache, neckache, lumbago and mild forms of sciatica. It is also a useful preliminary asana to prepare the back for the more difficult spinal twist asanas.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 2

## Topic 1

# Pranayama

The definition of pranayama is usually given as breath control. Though this may seem a fair interpretation in the light of the practices involved, it does not convey the full significance of pranayama. If one bears in mind what we have already said about prana and the bio-plasmic body, one can appreciate that the primary aim of pranayama is to bring about control of far more than one's breath<sup>1</sup>. Though oxygen is a form of prana, pranayama is more concerned with influencing the more subtle forms of prana. As such one should not make the mistake of regarding pranayama as merely breathing exercises. Of course the practices do improve the introduction of oxygen into the physical body and the removal of carbon dioxide. Of this there is no doubt, and this in itself brings about wonderful physiological benefits. But pranayama actually utilizes the breathing process as a means to manipulate all forms of prana within the human framework whether gross or subtle. This in turn has repercussions on the mind and the physical body.

We are not interested in quibbling about word meanings. However, we would like to point out that the word pranayama is generally mistranslated. Prana, as we have already explained, means far more than breath. It is usually taken that prana+yama gives pranayama. Actually this is incorrect. This mistake arises because of the inadequacy of the English alphabet as well as translation of the word by scholars who have no familiarity with the basic aims of pranayama. In the English language there are only twenty six letters, whereas in Sanskrit there are fifty two. This easily leads to haphazard transliteration, for large numbers of Sanskrit letters have no equivalent.

The word *yama* does mean control and is used by Rishi Patanjali who wrote the traditional and illuminating yoga text called the *Yoga Sutras*. He used the word to mean various ethical and personal controls or rules. But the

word that is joined to prana to form pranayama is not yama. It is ayaama. In other words: praana + ayaama gives praanaayaama. The word ayaama has far more implications than the word yama. In a Sanskrit-English dictionary you will find that *ayaama* is defined as follows: stretching, extending, restraining, expansion (of dimensions in time and space).

Thus pranayama means to extend and overcome one's normal limitations. It provides the method whereby one is able to attain higher states of vibratory energy. In other words one is able to activate and to regulate the prana comprising the human framework and thereby make oneself more sensitive to vibrations in the cosmos and within. Pranayama is a method of refining the makeup of one's pranic body, one's physical body and also one's mind. In this way it is possible for a practitioner to become aware of new dimensions of existence. By making the mind calm and still, consciousness is allowed to shine through without distortion.

Pranayama brings new levels of awareness by stopping or restraining distractions of the mind. In other words, it is the continual conflict within the mind that prevents us from experiencing higher states or dimensions of awareness. Pranayama practices reduce thoughts, conflicts, etc. in the mind to a minimum and can even stop the mind processes completely. This restraint of mental activities allows one to know higher levels of existence. Let us take an analogy. If we stand in a room and look at the sun through a dirty window then we don't see and feel the rays of the sun in its purity. If we clean the window then we see the sun in its true glory. The mind in its normal state is the dirty window. Pranayama cleans the mind and allows the consciousness to come through unobstructed. It becomes obvious that pranayama means far more than breath control.

### Scriptural references

Pranayama is an important part of yoga practices and as such is mentioned in almost all traditional texts on yoga. We don't intend to quote all these references but will confine ourselves to a few that have a particular relevance to the general aspects of pranayama, leaving specific references until we discuss the practices in detail.

Let us refer to the authoritative *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, an ancient classic on yoga. In our previous discussion on prana we emphasized the relationship between prana and life<sup>1</sup>. This is clearly stated as follows: "When there is prana in the body it is called life; when it leaves the body it results in death."

This is exactly what modern scientists have clearly stated - that organic objects are pervaded by bioplasmic energy (which the ancients deemed to call prana) and when this energy leaves the body organism death will occur. That ancient yogis could know about prana without the aid of sophisticated instruments says a lot for their awareness of life and existence. The following *sloka* (verse) is also very enlightening: "When prana fluctuates then the *chitta* (mind) also fluctuates; when the prana becomes steady then the *chitta* also becomes steady." (2:2)

This will be fully discussed shortly. It means that when the pranic body is not functioning properly then the mind is simultaneously disturbed; when the flow of prana is harmonized then the mind is also brought into equanimity. Again this close relationship between these two aspects has been investigated and conclusively found to be as the ancients foretold. The practices of pranayama are intended to bring about calmness in the mind by harmonizing the pranic flow in the body.

Pranayama is concerned with removing congestion in the pranic passages (*nadis*) so that the prana flows smoothly and without hindrance. This is referred to in various slokas. We will quote the following as an example: "If pranayama is practised correctly then the entire pranic body will be well-integrated and the prana will flow easily through the *sushumna* (the most important nadi in the whole body), for pranayama will remove all blockages which tend to impede free flow of prana. This will give rise to steadiness of the mind." (2:41-42) This is exactly the same aim as in acupuncture:

the removal of irregularities in the flow of prana. The aim is the same but the means are different.

However a warning is given: "Pranayama can remove all diseases if it is done correctly; if it is done incorrectly then it can actually cause illness." (2:16) This is why one should slowly and systematically develop one's ability to perform pranayama techniques over a period of time. In this course we will introduce you to the various practices step by step in order that you gain the optimum benefits without any unpleasant side effects.

### Different methods of regulating prana

There are various methods of manipulating and influencing the flow of prana throughout the whole psychic body. The Chinese developed the two systems of acupuncture and tai chi chu'an to bring the pranic system into balance<sup>1</sup>. In the system of tai chi chu'an a series of dynamic movements are utilized. There are various systems in vogue today, though it is said to have been originated by San Fung Chang. The movements are so designed to bring the negative and positive forces (yin and yang) of the pranic body into balance and coordination. This in turn calms the mind and allows the state of meditation to spontaneously flower.

In yoga the practices of pranayama and asanas are utilized to bring about the same results. Asanas manipulate and harmonize the energies in the physical and pranic body as well as the mind. If asanas are performed correctly then pranayama is automatically done without effort. In this way there is a direct influence on the human framework via both the physical and pranic body. In pranayama, on the other hand, regulation of the mind and body is accomplished through manipulation of the pranic body by means of the breath. Both pranayama and asanas aim at the same thing. Pranayama has the greatest influence on the mind, however, for it acts through the pranic body which is more intimately linked to the mind than is the physical body.

If one practises the various meditational techniques, then the aim is to bring about relaxation of the mind through the medium of the mind itself. This in turn has repercussions on the pranic body and in turn on the physical body.

In kriya yoga all these different approaches are combined. One simultaneously practises physical movements, specific static body positions and pranayama as well as various meditational practices. This is why kriya yoga is so effective in bringing about changes in one's being.

#### The nadis or psychic passages

The nadis are pathways along which prana or bioplasmic energy travels. In acupuncture these pathways are known as meridians (at least in modern western terminology). Various ancient yogis said that there are seventy two thousand nadis in the psychic body. Others said the number is in the region of three hundred and twenty thousand. Whatever the number, we can definitely say that they are numerous.

Of these nadis three are particularly important. They are known as the ida, pingala and sushumna. The most important one is the sushumna, which runs within the spine<sup>2</sup>. It should not be confused with or identified with the physical spine that we are normally aware of. This nadi runs from the region of the perineum (between the anus and sexual organs) to the region of the brain. It connects the mooladhara chakra (chakra meaning pranic or psychic centre) in the perineum to ajna (mid-brain) chakra at the top of the spine passing through various other chakras en-route. Again these chakras should not be regarded as physical entities; they are part of the bioplasmic or pranic body. As such they are located within but are not of the physical body.

Emanating from the left side of the mooladhara chakra and passing through the intervening chakras in turn in a curving, criss-crossing path, finally ending up on the left side of the ajna chakra, is the ida nadi. Emerging from the right side of the mooladhara chakra and passing in a similar but opposite sense to that of the ida nadi, up to the right side of ajna, is the pingala nadi.

The ida and pingala nadis are the pathways of the two different aspects of prana. They represent the two opposite poles of the same energy. The ida is denoted as being negative and is also known as the *chandra* (moon) nadi. The pingala, on the other hand, is positive and is often called the *surya* (sun) nadi. Associated

with these two nadis are various attributes or qualities. Some of these are as follows:

Quality	Ida	Pingala
Breath	left nostril	right nostril
Temperature	cold	hot
Sex	female	male
Activity	mental	physical
Energy	negative	positive
Planet	moon	sun
Tao	yin	yang

These two nadis are associated with the two nostrils: pingala with the right and ida with the left. The ancient yogis, with their detailed awareness of the human body, found that the flow of breath did not pass equally through each nostril. In fact at any given time it was more than likely that the flow of air through one nostril would be greater than the other nostril. This is an aspect of our body that even physiologists have never seriously researched. No one seems to have asked the question: "Why have we got two nostrils?" There should be a good reason and perhaps it is directly related to ida and pingala. Incidentally, the reader can test this for himself taking care to remove all mucus from the nose. Merely block each of the nostrils in turn and you should find that the flow is greater through one than the other. If you don't find this to be so, then try at a later time for occasionally the flows are equal.

The yogis of antiquity discovered that when the left nostril had the predominant flow of air then the pranic flow in ida nadi was also predominant. And when the right nostril had the greatest flow the pingala had the greatest flow of prana. The flow of air through the nostrils and consequently the pranic flow continually alternates. Under normal conditions the flow through the left nostril is predominant for about an hour and then the right flow becomes predominant for about an hour. During changeover from one to the other, flows are equal and the prana flows through the sushumna nadi. This generally lasts for a few minutes. These flows can also be artificially altered in response to individual needs. The study of these flows, their meaning and implications in life is the subject of the science of swara yoga<sup>1</sup>.



Each of us fluctuates between periods of mental and physical activities. Generally, because of the type of work that each of us does we tend to either do too much mental work or too much physical work. We are either too introverted or too extroverted. There are times when we attempt mental work yet find it more difficult than usual. We generally force ourselves and end up with a headache or in a bad mood. At other times we want to do some physical work yet our mind is not on the job; we are thinking of everything else but the physical work involved. At other times just the opposite is the case - mental work comes easily and without effort; or conversely we can do physical work with zest and enthusiasm. There are auspicious times when we are tuned in to certain types of work. If we are introverted then we are more likely to successfully undertake mental tasks; if we are extroverted then we are more likely to accomplish physical or active work with more success.

A sure indicator of which type of work is suitable is the predominant flow of air in the nostrils. If the right nostril has the greatest flow then we are most likely to be actively inclined. We are more suited to physical work. The mind is extroverted and the body generates more heat. If the left nostril has the greatest flow then the mind is introverted and any kind of mental work can be undertaken. During sleep ida is dominant. If pingala is flowing it is normally more difficult to sleep. Ideally during meal times pingala should flow. If it doesn't then the digestive processes may not be as efficient as they should be.

These two aspects of prana, which are particularly characterized by the flows in the ida and pingala nadis, represent the two most obvious characteristics of each human: the abilities to think and act<sup>2</sup>. The flow of breath through these nostrils and the flow of prana through their corresponding nadis greatly influence our lives. Generally the flows are involuntary, but it is possible to manipulate the flows using willpower and various yogic techniques. One of these techniques is pranayama, in particular nadi shodhana stage 2<sup>3</sup>.

One can make either of the air flows predominate for a specific reason. For example, if there is work to be done but we feel sleepy, it is possible to muster the necessary physical energy by artificially activating the flow of air

in the right nostril and curbing the flow in the left nostril. This in turn ensures that pingala is dominant and that ida is subservient. However, under ideal circumstances the flow in each nostril should be dominant for a total of about twelve hours over each daily cycle of twenty-four hours. Under these circumstances one is neither too physically or mentally active.

In yoga practices the usual aim is to make the flow in each nostril exactly the same. Again, this is done by means of pranayama. When the flow of air is equal in each nostril then the flow in the ida and pingala nadis is also the same. Under these conditions prana begins to flow in the sushumna, the most important nadi in the bioplasmic body. This is the most auspicious time for the spontaneous occurrence of meditation. In fact, it is said that prana must start to flow in the sushumna for the experience of meditation to take place. Without this, meditation cannot occur. Under these circumstances one is neither too physically restless nor bombarded with excessive thoughts. One is content in the middle point between the two extremes. This is why pranayama is so important in yoga. It is an excellent tool in preparing the body and mind so that they become a perfect receiver of higher awareness. Pranayama practices help to prepare the ground for meditation.

#### **Modes of pranayama practices**

While controlling the breath in pranayama practices there are four important activities. These are:

1. *Pooraka* (inhalation)
2. *Rechaka* (exhalation)
3. *Antar* or *antaranga kumbhaka* (retention of breath after inhalation; i.e. with lungs full of air)
4. *Bahir* or *bahiranga kumbhaka* (retention of breath after exhalation; i.e. with lungs emptied as much as possible).

The different practices of pranayama involve various techniques; but they all basically utilize the four listed above. There is also another mode of pranayama which is called *kevala kumbhaka*. This is an advanced stage of pranayama which automatically occurs during high states of meditation. During this state the pressure in the lungs becomes the same as atmospheric pressure. Respiration ceases and the lungs stop their activity. Under these

circumstances the veil which prevents us seeing into the deeper aspects of existence is lifted and we obtain an intuitional apprehension of higher truths.

The most important part of higher pranayama practices is really kumbhaka, or retention of breath. In fact, in the ancient texts pranayama is also known as kumbhaka. However, to be able to perform kumbhaka with some degree of success there must be a gradual development of one's control over the function of respiration. As such, in most of the practices of pranayama, there is a lot of emphasis on inhalation and exhalation, which are also important in revitalizing the physical and pranic bodies. As such we will introduce all aspects of pranayama practice that will be of use to the reader and will include all the four modes we have already mentioned.

#### **The role of pranayama in meditational techniques**

Pranayama is an essential prelude and integral part of kriya yoga and various other meditational practices. Control of one's breath leads to control of prana. In turn, control of prana implies control of one's mind. By regulating the flow of prana in the body one can tranquillize the mind and free it, at least for some time, of the incessant conflicts and thoughts that make higher awareness difficult. By manipulating prana in the psychic body one is able to make the mind a suitable vessel for meditational experience.

Pranayama is an indispensable tool. Meditation can be experienced without pranayama, but pranayama is the supercharger that makes meditation possible for most people. For verification of this let us refer to Ramana Maharshi. He said: "The principle underlying the system of yoga is that the source of thought on the one hand and of breath and vital forces on the other, is one and the same. In other words, the breath, vital forces, the physical body and even the mind are all no more than forms of prana or energy. Therefore, if any of them are effectively controlled then the other is automatically brought under control. Yoga aims at influencing the *manolaya* (subsistence of the mind) by means of the *pranalaya* (subsistence of the breath and vital forces), which is brought about by the practice of pranayama."

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3

<sup>2</sup> For further details on the sushumna nadi refer to Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2.

For further details on ida and pingala nadis refer to Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1.

<sup>3</sup> Topic 5 of this lesson.

## Pranayama: Rules

The reader should abide by the following rules.

The posture for pranayama can be any comfortable sitting position, preferably on a blanket placed on the ground. The two meditative asanas, sukhasana and vajrasana are particularly suitable at this early stage<sup>1</sup>. Later as your body becomes more supple we will introduce you to the best meditative asanas for pranayama practice - padmasana, siddhasana, etc.<sup>2</sup>. Remember the body should be relaxed and the back kept straight without any strain.

The clothing worn should be as light and as loose as circumstances will permit. This is important so that the abdomen is allowed to expand unrestricted during deep inhalation. In particular don't wear any belts or corsets etc. Try to keep yourself warm during the practice. Though accentuated respiration generates increased body heat it is usually a good idea to wrap a blanket around yourself.

The place of practice should be clean, quiet and properly ventilated so that the air within the room is well-oxygenated and free of obnoxious smells. However, there should be no gale-force draught. The room should be free of all types of insects. If possible try to practise in the same place every day so that you gradually build up a quiet and conducive atmosphere for your daily yoga practices.

The best time for practice is early in the morning after asanas and before meditation. One should practise at least half an hour before taking food and four hours after food. For this reason before breakfast is a particularly suitable time. Pranayama can be performed at other times during the day but it is more difficult to meet all the restrictions. The evening is a reasonably good time to practise providing one can abide by the restrictions on food.

Concerning food, it is very difficult to practise pranayama correctly if the stomach and intestines are completely full. This prevents the contraction and expansion of the

abdomen during deep respiration. There is a saying by the ancient yogis: "Fill half your stomach with food, one quarter with water and the remaining quarter with air." In order to gain the most benefits from pranayama reasonable moderation in eating is essential.

It is best to empty the bowels as much as possible. Again this allows less restricted and greater movement of the abdomen during respiration.

Nasal blockage makes it very difficult to practise pranayama. One should definitely not breathe through the mouth unless a particular pranayama practice requires it. Therefore, jala neti should be done when necessary before beginning the practice<sup>3</sup>.

Awareness is an essential part of pranayama. It is important to be aware of the mechanics of the practice and not allow it to become automatic. If the mind becomes distracted, and it possibly will, don't become frustrated or try to suppress the wandering tendency; only try to realize that your attention is elsewhere. This is difficult, for when our attention is elsewhere we are normally so involved with the distraction we don't realize that we have ceased to be aware of the pranayama practice. All is forgotten, until some time later we realize our mind is not on the practice. Merely becoming aware of the distraction will direct our attention back to the mechanics of pranayama.

Violent respiration is not advocated during pranayama. Many people teach pranayama as though the lungs are a pair of heavy duty mechanical pumps. The lungs are strong but they are also sensitive and should be treated with respect. Respiration should be controlled and without any strain. If you have to utilize any excessive force or strain then you are not doing pranayama correctly. Beginners, in particular, should slowly and systematically develop more and more control over the respiratory functions. If one tries to master pranayama in a week by forceful inhalation,

retention and exhalation then more harm than good will result. The motto is 'slowly but surely'.

If there is any discomfort while doing pranayama then it should be stopped immediately. If this discomfort continues then seek the advice of a competent yoga teacher.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

<sup>2</sup> Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

<sup>3</sup> Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

## Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana (Stage 2)

Nadi shodhana pranayama stage 1 should be continued<sup>1</sup>, but now it can be supplemented by the second stage of nadi shodhana.

This practice is also commonly known as *nikha poorvaka* (simple preliminary practice) and *bhal bhati* (forehead bellows). In English this practice can be called the alternate nostril pranayama, for air is inhaled through one nostril and exhaled through the other.

The importance of equalizing the flow of air in the nostrils has already been fully discussed<sup>2</sup>, and nadi shodhana stage 2 in particular helps to develop this desirable condition.

### Scriptural references

This is an important practice and is mentioned in a large number of ancient yogic texts. The following from the *Gherand Samhita* is the most direct reference: "Inhale through the ida (left nostril) and exhale through the pingala (right nostril). Then inhale through the pingala and exhale through the chandra (left nostril). The pooraka (inhalation) and the rechaka (exhalation) should be done without the slightest hurry. This practice will help to eliminate the problems of cough and cold." (57 & 58)

### NADI SHODHANA - STAGE 2

Sit in a comfortable sitting position; sukhasana or vajrasana are most suitable for this purpose, together with other meditative asanas that we will introduce later<sup>3</sup>.

Be calm and relax your whole body.

Hold your head and back upright but without straining.

Place your hands on your knees or in your lap. Close your eyes.

Be aware of your breath.

Set yourself the aim of totally involving yourself in the forthcoming practice.

After a minute or so begin the practice.

Lift your right hand in front of your face (or your left hand if preferred).

Adjust the fingers to form nasagra mudra<sup>1</sup>.

Close the right nostril with the thumb.

Inhale through the left nostril.

Breathe as deeply as possible utilizing the abdomen and chest to fill the lungs to the maximum.

Don't strain however; it must be a relaxed practice.

At the end of inhalation close the left nostril. Open the right nostril and exhale.

The exhalation should be slow and the lungs emptied as much as possible.

At the end of exhalation keep the right nostril open and then slowly inhale.

After completing the full inhalation close the right nostril.

Open the left nostril and exhale.

This is 1 round.

Do a few more rounds in the same way maintaining awareness of the breath.

After a few rounds start to mentally count the time of inhalation and exhalation.

Each interval of counting should represent approximately 1 second: 1 (sec) - 2 (sec) - 3 (sec) - etc.

Try to keep the timing of the counting fixed; it is very easy to speed up the counting when one is short of breath.

Then adjust the duration of inhalation and exhalation according to the instructions given under the next heading.

Do not force the breath in any way.

Continue the practice for as long as time permits.

Be aware of the breath and the mental counting throughout the practice.

### Duration of respiration

For the first stage of practice the duration of inhalation should equal the time of exhalation.

In other words if you breathe in for a count of five then you should also exhale for a count of five. However, begin with whatever count you find comfortable whether it is two or ten or

any other duration. No strain whatsoever should be involved in the practice. Over a period of weeks or months, however, slowly try to increase the duration of inhalation and exhalation, at the same time keeping them equal. For example, if you start with a duration of three seconds for inhalation and exhalation, try to increase this to four when you are able. This duration should be increased not only over the weeks of practice, but with each actual sitting. In other words start your practice with a comfortable duration, then after a short time you will automatically find that your breathing will last longer. Increase your counting and duration as much as is comfortable.

The relative duration of inhalation and exhalation will be changed for the next stage<sup>4</sup>.

#### **Awareness and duration**

Try to maintain full awareness of breathing and mental counting. This is important in order to reap the maximum benefits from pranayama. However, don't worry if your attention continually wanders. Just try to be aware that it is wandering and gently bring it back to the practice being performed.

Try to practise at least ten to fifteen minutes daily (this time also includes nadi shodhana stage 1).

#### **Sequence**

Nadi shodhana stage 2 should follow directly after stage 1. They should be done after asanas and before relaxation or meditation.

#### **Precautions**

At the slightest sign of discomfort reduce the duration of inhalation and exhalation. If necessary discontinue for the day. Make sure that you don't force in any way and that there is no haste whatsoever. It should be done as though you have all the time in the world.

#### **Benefits**

The benefits are the same as we have already described for nadi shodhana stage 1 so we will not repeat them here<sup>1</sup>. However, nadi shodhana stage 2 is much more powerful and effective in balancing the air flow through the two nostrils. For this reason it is particularly useful before relaxational and meditational techniques. It develops a state of harmony in the individual so that he is neither too lethargic

nor too active, too dull or too excitable. The pranic currents or poles (sun and moon) are brought into balance with each other, thus increasing the health of the whole body-mind complex.

#### **Notes**

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

<sup>2</sup> Topic 3 of this lesson.

<sup>3</sup> Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2.

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

## Meditation: Practice

Though we have called the following technique a meditational practice it is really a continuation of the previous technique, which was intended to develop your awareness of the body<sup>1</sup>. The subject of meditation will be fully discussed at a later stage<sup>2</sup>. This practice, like all meditational techniques, is excellent for inducing deep relaxation. It can be utilized instead of shavasana<sup>1</sup>.

It is important to maintain full awareness throughout the practice. This is not so easy because one tends to fall asleep, or become involved in the continuous stream of thoughts that invade your perception. But whatever happens you must not create more tension by trying too hard or suppressing thoughts. Let them arise but be aware of them. Awareness of them is sufficient in itself to help redirect your attention back on to the practice.

### Posture

One can either lie flat on the back in shavasana<sup>3</sup>, or sit in a meditational asana such as sukhasana or vajrasana<sup>4</sup>. It is easier to relax in the lying position, but it is also easier to fall asleep. Unless it is performed prior to sleep at night it is important to remain awake and aware. With practice a sitting position will become comfortable and there is less likelihood of falling asleep. However, the choice is left up to the practitioner.

If you sleep every time you do this practice then you should wash your face with cold water before starting and should certainly practise in a sitting position.

### PRACTICE

Take a comfortable lying or sitting position. Cover yourself with a blanket if necessary. Relax your whole body and adjust yourself if you feel any discomfort. Close your eyes; for a minute or so be aware of your whole body.

Completely relax, but remain aware.

Then become aware of the heartbeat inside your chest.

Feel each beat pumping blood throughout the entire body.

Try to feel the whole body pulsating with each beat.

If you find this difficult don't worry; with practice it will become easier and easier.

The heart continues its duties without rest day and night throughout your life. We are rarely aware of it.

Now for a change become aware of this organ and realize that it never ceases its beating, pumping action.

Transfer your awareness to the pulse in the wrist of either arm.

Again this may be difficult at first but it will become easier with practice.

Soon you will hear the pulse and heartbeat like a drum being beaten.

Be aware of the pulse.

If you cannot feel the pulse don't worry.

Now try to simultaneously feel coordination between the heartbeat and the pulse and feel them occurring as one.

After some time try to feel the pulse in different parts of the body: the neck, the head, the legs, the abdomen and any other place you can think of.

At first this may be a little difficult, but it will definitely become easier if you persevere with your practice.

Eventually you will be able to become aware of the pulse in any part of the body at any time you wish.

Be aware of your body pulsating in harmony with your heartbeat.

Let this absorb your whole attention.

After some time be aware of your breath.

Feel the air entering the nostrils.

Taste the air. Imagine it is the first time you have ever breathed.

Respiration, like blood circulation, never stops.

However, because it is possible to consciously control breathing to a degree one is more often aware of it than of the heart and blood circulation.

Feel the air flowing in and out of your nostrils.

As you breathe in mentally count 1.

As you breathe out mentally count 2.

Continue counting in this way to a count of 40.

Your breathing should be natural; don't breathe deeply or slowly.

Throughout the practice maintain awareness of both the breathing and the mental counting.

When you have counted 40 transfer your awareness to the throat.

Feel the air moving in and out of the throat.

This might be a little difficult at first but try. When you can feel the breath moving in the throat then start to mentally count each inhalation and exhalation. Inhale - 1.

Exhale - 2. Inhale - 3 and so on.

Count to 40.

Be aware of the breath and the counting.

Now transfer your awareness to the chest.

As you breathe in feel the expansion of the ribcage.

Simultaneously feel that air is being drawn into the lungs.

As you breathe out feel the contraction of the ribcage.

Simultaneously feel the air being squeezed out of the lungs like air from a balloon.

Do this for a minute or so and then start to count each inhalation and each exhalation in the same way as previously explained.

Count up to 40 with continual awareness of the expansion and contraction of the chest and the feeling of air entering and leaving the lungs.

After this become aware of the abdomen.

Feel the rising and falling movement of the belly (the rectus abdominal muscles).

Breathe normally; don't try to force the breathing by making it deeper or slower if any effort is required.

Merely breathe as your body dictates.

As you breathe in try to feel the air being drawn into your body.

As you breathe out feel the unused waste products being expelled from the body.

When you are ready start to count the inhalations and exhalations as already explained.

Inhale - feel the expansion of the abdomen -

mentally counting 1.

Exhale - feel the abdominal wall drop - count 2.

Continue in this same way up to the count of 40.

Be aware of the breath, abdominal movement and counting throughout.

When you have finished this slowly become aware of the surroundings.

Gently move your body and open your eyes. This is the end of the practice.

If you have managed to remain aware of all the different aspects of this practice then you should feel totally relaxed.

### **Duration and time of practice**

This practice should take about ten minutes. It can be lengthened and shortened according to the time available simply by increasing or decreasing the number of times that you count the inhalation and exhalation.

It can be practised after asanas and pranayama in the morning or evening or at any other time during the day. We recommend it when you feel tired or tense. If you have any problem sleeping then you can do it before going to bed at night.

### **Instructions**

This meditation is a reasonably long practice and it is very easy to fall asleep or lose track of the practice. If you have a friend who is also interested in yoga ask him or her to act as your yoga teacher using the instructions that we have given as a guide. Take it in turns to act as the instructor.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 6

<sup>2</sup> Meditation - An Introduction: Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 4.

Meditation - Rules for Practice: Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 5.

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

<sup>4</sup> Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5



## Daily Practice Program

We have discussed a number of very useful practices in this lesson. This means that we are now much more able to map out a composite program with all the practices closely inter-related with each other.

In the following practice program (overleaf) Kunjal kriya is not included, for the individual must choose for himself how often it needs to be done. It can be performed either before or after your daily program of practices, together with jala neti<sup>1</sup>.

There is no pranayama included in the fifteen minute program. This has been omitted due to lack of time. However, pranayama is an essential part of yoga sadhana and should ideally be practised for at least half an hour daily. This may necessitate getting out of bed a few minutes earlier in the morning, but the benefits you will gain will make this more than worthwhile.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
<b>Program 1: duration 1 hour</b>		
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	2
Simha Kriya	—	3
Marjari-asana	15	3
Bhujangasana or Sphinx pose	—	3
Supta Pawanmuktasana	3 each stage	5
Sarpasana	3	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	—	2
Meru Vakrasana „	2 each side	3
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	7
Stage 2	—	7
Meditation practice	—	10
		60

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<b>Program 2:</b> duration 1/2 hour		
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Bhujangasana	–	3
Shashankasana	–	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	–	2
Sarpasana	2	2
Marjari-asana	15	3
Meru Vakrasana	1 each side	2
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	–	5
Stage 2	–	5
Try to find the time for the meditation practices in order to make your daily practice program complete.		30

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<b>Program 3:</b> duration 1/4 hour		
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Bhujangasana	–	3
Shashankasana	–	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	–	2
Sarpasana	2	2
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
		15

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2