

Lesson 11

When the three bandhas (jalandhara, uddiyana and moola bandha) are well perfected the rechaka and pooraka (inhalation and exhalation) do not function, the flow of senses gets purified and kevala kumbhaka takes place. Therefore experience the vidya (pure knowledge) in the form of kevala kumbhaka.

One should practise the above while fixing the mind in the anahata chakra with total awareness, until at last the breath and the mind become motionless. It is then and there that the spontaneous kumbhaka known as kevala kumbhaka is experienced.

There are innumerable varieties of kumbhakas described in hatha yogic tradition, but none can equal the kevala kumbhaka, because in no other kumbhaka does the prana become steady.

Adishankaracharya, *Yogataravali* (8-10)

Removal of Mental Problems (Part 3)

Strangely enough, many people regard anxiety or mental dissatisfaction as the first step, as the prelude to seeking higher awareness or spiritual life. Actually there is a lot of truth in this belief, for it is only when one feels discontentment, emptiness and unhappiness that one seriously starts to look for something more meaningful in life. Often anxiety in the form of uncertainty of human existence is the driving or motivating force which impels people to seek higher states of consciousness, and eventually enlightenment. Without some form of anxiety, each person complacently wallows in the insecure world of ignorance. For most people, dissatisfaction is the incentive to try to find out the 'truth', if indeed it exists in the first place. Other people tread the path to higher awareness for a different reason, perhaps to remove physical problems, to develop greater self-control or whatever. But actually the cause is basically the same, namely dissatisfaction with the present conditions, the status quo, and aspiration towards something more. So in this sense mental disturbances can be considered in a positive manner as the motivating force that actually makes people leave their habitual patterns and seek new means of expression and a more joyous and knowledgeable way of life.

So your unhappiness or dissatisfaction, even if it is only a slight murmur in the background and hardly heard above the din and turmoil of daily life, is in a way doing you a favour. It is giving you a kick or a jolt out of habituated routines and patterns of thought and giving you the incentive to direct your interest elsewhere. Most people drain away their energy and interest in excessive worldly pursuits. It is totally squandered when at least some of it could be channelled and used in more positive directions and by this we mean inner exploration and development. We certainly don't say that you should not act in the world, for this is part of life. You must act your role on the

world stage to the best of your ability, but at the same time each person should channel some of his or her energy towards the internal world. Half an hour of yoga practices every day is a beginning and is the way for you to directly contact your inner dormant potential and resources.

It is overindulgence in the blind drives of everyday life that prevent you turning your attention inside and realizing the incredible depths of your being. It is only when things start to go wrong in your relationship with the outer environment, or when you seek something more, that you seriously begin to think about exploring yourself. Even though your problems may cause you much anguish, in a way they are your best friends, for they will force you, push you to find new levels of experience that are at present completely beyond your comprehension. They will impel you to seek realms of being that are now totally unimaginable. We don't say impossible, for if something is impossible it is still imaginable; we mean levels that are beyond the impossible because they are beyond present concepts.

Therefore you should devote some time every day to introspection, leaving aside if possible all the responsibilities, cares and interests of day to day life. During this time try to find the deeper problems that make your outer life unhappy and eventually discover experiences that the mystics have endlessly talked about. To merely try to introspect during yoga practices is not easy, for you are conditioned to continually escape back into the everyday worries and interests, instead of facing yourself. But with practice and perseverance you will be able to relax more and gradually eliminate the subconscious problems and then really tap your inner resources. All that is needed is effort, perseverance and aspiration. During meditational practices, you will probably find it impossible to sit in one place for more than a few minutes, without

feeling the strong impulse to get up and do something. You have been trained and habituated since birth to be doing something. Persevere and these tendencies will subside. Gradually you will overcome your habitual tendency to lose yourself in an everlasting stream of outside activities and pursuits. Slowly but surely, you will confront yourself, your inner drives and eventually arrive at a deeper understanding of your incredible, real nature. But first you must confront your subconscious problems. You must first cross the river, and perhaps get wet before you reach the other side. You must first of all pass through, experience and expel your mental problems, before you can know peace, joy and knowledge. You have to pass through hell before you can reach heaven.

Helping the world situation by helping yourself

Ramana Maharshi was once asked how one could most effectively start to help the world and create a more harmonious and peaceful brotherhood of man. Ramana Maharshi told him that he must first of all change himself and that this approach is the most positive step that anyone can take to contribute towards increasing world harmony. Whether the questioner accepted the answer or even understood it is uncertain. Perhaps he thought it a selfish attitude. But as far as we are concerned Ramana Maharshi's reply was perfect. He knew what people have failed to see throughout the ages and today, that the way to improve the condition of the world as a whole is to first of all improve the condition of oneself. This is not egoism, but common sense, for how can someone really hope to positively contribute to the improvement of the world situation if he is in a sad situation himself. It is almost like a person who emanates unhappiness and who is continuously scowling trying to preach to others what the joy of happiness is all about. There is no impact and no influence, for there is total hypocrisy in the act. One can only spread peaceful vibrations in the world if one individually radiates peacefulness. This is the only way. To solve other people's problems you must first of all solve your own.

We see the unstable world situation as a large mental problem, the sum total of the

population of individual mental problems. The humanized world is unstable because most of the people in it are unstable. So by trying to solve your mental problems you are making a positive step not only to bring happiness to yourself but to the whole world. The more you harmonize yourself, the more you will act as a beacon of harmony and peace to the world. You will be giving your most valuable contribution to your environment by sorting out your own problems. This preoccupation with your own mind is neither antisocial nor escapism. It is the way to offer the most important offering you can to the world at large. There is a further factor: namely, that the more you solve your conflicts and know yourself the more you will automatically want to help others. You will have no choice - it will arise spontaneously together with love of your fellow man, no matter how grotesque he may often seem.

The following is a very apt, sharp and eloquent summary of the world situation given by Robert Linssen in the book entitled *Living Zen*: "Humanity could be compared to two and a half thousand million greyhounds rushing in pursuit of a mechanical hare on a racetrack. These human greyhounds are taut, overtense, avid and violent, but Zen (yoga) tries to teach them that what they think is a real hare is only a mechanical hoax. The moment man fully realizes what is implied by this truth he 'lets go' and the bitterness of his struggles and violence are succeeded by relaxation, peace, harmony and love.

"The consequences of such a release are immense, not only for the physical, nervous and mental health of a man as an individual, but also for humanity as a whole."

Crisis during the mind cleansing process

As you start to purge the dross in the subconscious mind, you may possibly go through periods of nervous, emotional and mental troubles. There may even be occasional eruptions, in the form of various illnesses in the body. This is, in fact, to be expected, for problems have to manifest themselves before they can be exhausted. Perhaps you won't pass through these minor crises; it depends on your problems. But if you do face them, remember that they are no more than a passing phase, a temporary reaction, and that when

you pass through the cloud you will feel much lighter and greatly relieved.

You may initially experience more illnesses than normally, such as colds etc. Again this is a readjustment reflected in the body due to the inner change brought about by the mental cleaning. Don't worry, for eventually your health in every way will undergo a miraculous improvement for the better. You will perhaps go through wonderful periods of elation followed by periods of depression. You will reach heights and then drop into the depths. Eventually, however, this wide fluctuation will disappear and you will become more and more stabilized. You might become very sensitive to other people and detect subtle insinuations etc., maybe of a derogatory nature. Gradually, however, you will become stronger and more tolerant of other people's bitterness and criticism. You will start to understand why they act in the way that they do and they will cause you no further upset. Sensitivity will grow together with mental strength.

We have warned you of difficulties so that you are prepared for them. It is more than a possibility that your progress will be smooth and without any bumps. More than likely you will experience far less unhappiness and emotional upsets than you already experience at present. It depends on the individual. If, however, you feel that the experiences that you have are too overwhelming, then seek the guidance of a competent and experienced yoga teacher or any other person who has been through the path that you are currently going through.

One thing we assure you of is that any traumas you may pass through are more than compensated by the change that will actually take place in your being as you progress. You will slowly merge into a state of joy, serenity, knowledge and understanding. You will radiate these qualities like the sun radiates light. This is the subject of the next heading.

The mind as a perfect reflector

The aim of cleaning out the personal mind of its accumulated dross and removing inner turmoil is to transform it into a perfect instrument of perception and also to make it a perfect analyzer of data and a perfect instrument for translating thoughts into action. This of course takes time, but the following descrip-

tion is intended to give you an idea, though inadequate and incomplete, of how the personal mind should work if it is not clogged with defects.

One will be in a continual state of meditation, whether sleeping, eating, working or whatever. There will be no feelings of anxiety under any situation. The normal and obsessive ego-centred drives or self-interests will disappear. One will automatically understand others and feel more for them. They will be seen in a new light. The fragmented and opposing attitudes and opinions of individuals will no longer seem contradictory, but will supplement each other and merge together in harmony. One will start to see oneness, unity, perfection and concord, instead of individuality, separateness, differences, imperfections and discord. Outer events will be clearly perceived, but without the usual negative and adverse repercussions. External impressions will seem to flow into the mind, be smoothly absorbed, digested and answers will occur spontaneously and flow out of the mind. There will be no conflict, blocking or effort; no mental constipation. Things will just happen.

Everything will run as it should, without the usual accompanying hustle and bustle. Each reaction will be perfectly appropriate to the given situation. The external events will be the same, but one's relationship to them will be totally different. Instead of being continually upset by the ups and downs of life, one will glide through them with a feeling of joy. Ideas that were previously seen to be mutually exclusive, irreconcilable or antagonistic are seen to be part of a whole and really in unison with each other. Each philosophy or belief is seen to be partially true and no more than an incomplete explanation of something that is beyond words and conceptions. Each creed or set of concepts is seen to be applicable at a particular level of awareness and understanding.

One will live in the eternal now with total absorption. A mind devoid of problems automatically fixes itself on the work at hand. It is not disturbed or distracted elsewhere. There is perfect concentration. No effort is necessary. Efficiency and perfection are the natural outcome. Worry, fear, anger, depression, jealousy no longer interfere with concentration or total living of life. Work and play become one; there ceases to be

differentiation between them. The common feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction, unhappiness melt away as though they never existed and as though they are totally unnatural. Even the usual oppressive and melancholy fear of death or illness will cease, for these will be seen in a new and higher light of understanding.

One will continue to perform one's duties, not less enthusiastically as one would expect, but more enthusiastically, joyfully and zestfully. Tension is widely felt to be a spur, a stimulus to prod or goad people into activity. Well it is, no doubt of this, but it is a very ineffective and limited one. A calm, tensionless mind leads, contrary to common supposition, to a person who is a human dynamo, throbbing with vitality and enthusiasm. One does not languish in a state of indifferent laziness, because of lack of mental tension. One starts to live life to the full, undergoing a veritable rebirth. One interacts with other people and situations with totality, whether in excitement, anger, love and all other human expressions. But all these emotions no longer influence the inner being as they did before. The experience of life is heightened, contrary to popular conceptions of the higher stages of yoga. The freer the mind is of problems, the greater the ability to enjoy and experience life to the full.

Everything is seen as being basically friendly, even worst enemies. As such, the mind is no longer bombarded with negative, mentally disturbing vibrations. Instead, one becomes a generator of good will, friendliness, power and knowledge. Instead of feeling crushing and oppressive loneliness, as most people do, one feels and knows an intimate relationship with everything, feeling the oneness in a far deeper sense than can ever be conveyed in words. Instead of enduring the feeling of alienation and isolation, a small cog in a big wheel, one will know and feel one's incredible relationship, significance and importance in the scheme of existence. How can one possibly feel mental or emotional upsets under these circumstances? It is impossible, for one will relate to and experience everything in a new and wonderfully clear light, glowing with joy instead of being pale and tarnished with dejection.

This long description has been given not to impress you or to fill up these pages, but to show you that removing your mental problems

will have vast implications and repercussions on your life. Of course, the experiences we have described will happen in the future, but it is possible for you, and anyone else who cares to make the effort to explore the mind, to know and understand it. All that is required is effort - nothing more. It sounds simple, but continual perseverance and effort will be necessary. But once you begin to spring-clean the mind, then you can only benefit; by becoming more aware you will be able to tune in with higher knowledge. The choice is yours. Either polish the reflecting surface of your mind or allow it to remain disordered and unable to reflect or receive that which is beyond.

TECHNIQUES

Previously we said that we considered conditioning as a mental problem, in fact one of the main causes of misery in life¹. This is a point that we cannot emphasize enough. For this reason our first topic is concerned with deconditioning.

1. Deconditioning

Yoga aims to slowly remove fixed and rigid habits, dogmas and conditioning, so that the individual is adaptable to new situations and perfectly receptive to new experiences. Most people live a robot, automated existence with stereotyped responses to situations and people. There is absolutely no spontaneity. Since birth we have been conditioned and trained to act in fixed and automatic ways to given situations. We are like Pavlov's dogs: ring a bell and we begin to salivate. This may seem a little exaggerated, well perhaps it is, but we are trying to convince you of how most people lack freedom and spontaneity in their actions. Look around you at the activities of others, or even better, look at your own actions. You will find that many of them are deeply ingrained habits. And these are only the obvious ones.

It is a fact that the more aware one becomes, the less habitual one becomes. A peaceful, trouble free and deconditioned mind has incredible powers of clarity, perception, decision, that can adapt itself to any situation. Furthermore, a deconditioned mind responds perfectly to a given situation, and the forth-

coming actions are those that are relevant to the circumstances. There is tremendous agility and flexibility of mind. Whereas a conditioned mind will respond according to its own limited dream world interpretation of the situation, or according to its habitual programmed response. The resulting action is very rarely the best possible in view of the circumstances.

There is a wonderful example of conditioning given in Zen Buddhism. The master asked his disciple a question. When the disciple answered, the master was satisfied. On another day the master asked the same disciple exactly the same question. The disciple remonstrated that he had previously been asked the same question. The master acknowledged this fact, but nevertheless, asked the disciple to answer his question again. The disciple duly did this, giving exactly the same answer as he had before. The master became very angry and the disciple could not understand this, so he asked the master why he was pleased on the first occasion and yet angry on the second occasion, even though the answer was the same. The master explained that every moment in life is a different situation and therefore if one is truly spontaneous one will respond according to the new situation. The disciple had frozen and merely reproduced a stereotyped answer from past memory. He was not living in the present, but was following the dictates of his conditioning.

How does a man become conditioned? The answer is simple. Since childhood one learns to react to outside impulses in a certain manner. This results in a certain physical action, speech, mental activity, etc. When the actions are repeated over and over again then they become habit and one becomes conditioned. The more we accumulate these habits, the more rigid and automatic our life becomes. Instead of responding spontaneously, we become a walking robot that does whatever it is programmed to do with little relationship or consideration of the life situations as they really are. One lives in one's own little dream world. Swami Sivananda has summed up this process perfectly in the following poem:

*Sow a thought and reap an action.
Sow an action and reap a habit.
Sow a habit and reap a character.
Sow a character and reap a destiny.*

There are some people who believe that our entire life is totally conditioned by our personality and that there is little we can do about it. Actually this is true, but only at low levels of awareness. The more aware one becomes the less one is conditioned. The great saints, sages and yogis were definitely not conditioned, for they are living in and experiencing that which is beyond conditioning. They live in the realms where destiny and free will have no meaning. Anyone who tries to predict the actions and reactions of a person in higher consciousness is in for a great surprise. His actions and responses are unpredictable. The reason is very simple - they are not conditioned in the way that most people normally are. If you ask him a question, the answer will more than likely be unexpected. Ask another person and you will probably know beforehand exactly what they will answer. Feed in the outer impression and the automatic response will result. Most people are conditioned by ingrained and deep-rooted habits of thought and action.

How can one start to eliminate this conditioning? The answer is through yoga; in fact, one of the main purposes of yoga is to dissolve conditioning so that one becomes a spontaneous and receptive human. Remember, by spontaneity we don't mean automatic reactions; we mean perfect perception and receptivity to the environment, inner and outer, so that when one performs actions they are in complete harmony with everything around and within and beyond. Remember also that it is impossible to either force or create spontaneity; it can only happen as a natural consequence of a free and uninhibited mind. By practising meditation, the conditioning and habits will slowly but surely be expelled. The mind will be slowly reverted to its original and normal function, namely a perfect reflector.

There are further methods. While acting in daily life try to reflect on your actions. When you perform an action or think in a certain way, ask yourself why you acted in that particular manner. Is the action a conditioned response, without relevance to the given situation? Once you begin to recognize your conditioning you will unconsciously start to take steps to remove it. Recognition is the important thing. Most people don't realize that they are acting like robots. The same is

with all your beliefs. Question them realistically. "Are they valid, or am I holding on to those beliefs without any real conviction or reason? I have the belief that all people who leave doors open are idiots. Why do I have such a belief?" It is the same with all our desires. "Why do I have such a strong desire to eat five bars of chocolate every day? Why do I take such great pains to impress my neighbours?" The list is endless and you must consider the question yourself. But reflection is important for the process of deconditioning the mind of habituated actions and patterns of thought. Don't suppress your actions under any circumstances but at least try to recognize them and reflect on them.

At first you will notice little effect on your life, yet slowly but surely you will feel a great sense of freedom in your activities. The more the mind is emptied not only of conditioning but all types of problems (though these are really no more than forms of conditioning) the more aware you will become. If one has a higher experience, even for a few seconds, then this taste will act as a wonderful incentive and dispeller of conditioning. Personal experience is the best way of removing conditioning. But for the mind to have these experiences of higher knowledge it must first become less clouded with limited patterns of thought. Meditational practices, reflection and any other method you think suitable will help to decondition your mind. Notice that we did not say recondition, for that would be replacing the existing patterns in your mind with another cloud or set of limitations. And this is totally defeating the aim. It is not necessary to add anything to your mind, only empty it of the mental disturbances and conditioning that are obscuring its clarity. What you seek is already there; all you have to do is to clear the mind sufficiently to contact it and know it.

2. Disidentification

Simultaneous with the removal of mental problems, the mind must be made stronger and less vulnerable to outside impressions and crises. It must be strengthened so that adverse, outside events no longer disturb its functioning. Of course, as the mind becomes progressively emptied of its problems, then automatically it will become more resistant to external influences. However, there is another

excellent method of bringing this about called detachment. It does not mean that one becomes like a vegetable and avoids the ups and downs of life or refrains from interpersonal relationships. No, not at all. It means that though one reacts and acts out external roles, activities and feelings of life, love, hate, anger, etc., they should be seen as something outside oneself. These external activities should not be allowed to affect you in a deeper sense. You must be aware of them as though you are a witness.

In life you must be like a rubber ball, and not like a glass ball. Most people are like a fragile glass ball; they crack, shatter or go to pieces every time they are bounced by a difficult life situation. Become like a rubber ball: resilient, so that everything that happens to you has no deeper influence. Though you will face difficult situations and crises, they should not affect you or upset your inner self, but only in a superficial sense. If you throw a rubber ball on the ground it will rebound without any detrimental change on its inner composition. You must be like this rubber ball, resilient, yet strong, flexible in all situations, and yet without allowing the play of life to touch the inner core of your being. This may be easier said than done, but the method of watching life situations as though they are something different to yourself is a great aid. It is only a technique to gain inner stability, nothing more.

You must try to disidentify yourself as much as possible with your body, emotions and mind. Be aware of everything that happens. Act like a witness, only without identifying yourself with anything. Overidentification with the body, emotions and mind will lead to painful and undesirable physical, emotional and mental experiences. You must try to watch all activities from the centre of consciousness. In this way sorrowful events of life and any other events will not leave a mark on your being. They will occur as though they are something different and apart from your being. The ripples and waves will disturb the surface of the lake, but leave the depths still, calm and undisturbed. Though it is difficult, one must aim to be aware, as an observer under all circumstances, including even the most tumultuous, agitated or disturbing conditions. It can be done quite easily during

asanas, pranayama, etc. but during everyday activities effort and practice are required.

As we have already pointed out much unhappiness in life is the result of overidentification with the body, emotions and the mind. The same applies to overidentification with your work, or your role in life. A process of disidentification is necessary, as a method of obtaining tranquillity in life.

It is a strange thing that if people are asked what they are, they will usually reply "I am an engineer" or "I am a doctor" or "I am a secretary" or perhaps "I am a housewife." They will answer according to what they identify with in life, what their role, work or preoccupation is in life. Some may answer that they are a combination of things - perhaps a mother, a wife and a secretary during the daytime. Yet these things are not what they really are, but only a statement of what they do.

Let us take an example to show how this identification can lead to unhappiness and mental disturbances. Consider an actor. He totally identifies himself with his role as an actor: a fine physique, features, an engaging personality and a manly and melodious voice. He takes great care to keep himself in good condition, in keeping with his role. He may even practise exercises as a means of staying in good shape. Yet, inevitably, nature takes its course and as the years pass he will notice clearly that his youthfulness is disappearing. He painfully realizes that he is losing his distinctive actor's features. His physical condition declines, his face loses its freshness, his voice will lose its depth. He will probably look at himself in the mirror every day, perhaps for hours on end, becoming despondent and may even take futile steps to check or counteract the decline by taking a facelift etc. He will become depressed, for his conception of himself is fast disappearing in front of his very eyes. He may even think of suicide or have an emotional breakdown. His overidentification with his youthful, handsome physical appearance is rebounding causing him deep unhappiness and despair.

This is an extreme example. In fact, this is the reason that we chose it as an illustration. But the reader must agree that there is a lot of truth in what has been said, if one considers the number of actors and actresses that have in fact committed suicide. Yet this over-

identification applies in almost every person's life. Consider a mother. She identifies with her role; she sees herself only as a mother, nothing else. Yet eventually her children will probably leave home as young birds will leave the nest. If she has totally identified with her role of mother, then she will suffer much unhappiness. It is the same with all roles that one assumes in life; if one overidentifies with them, then they will definitely cause anguish and emotional upset when the role finishes or changes.

Identification with the body, emotions and the mind is so common that one rarely or never questions its validity. One says, "I am thirsty" when what one really means is "the body is thirsty". The 'I' is overidentified with the body. One says "I am angry" or "I am depressed," when it is really the emotional system that feels these things. One says "I think that two plus two equals four," but actually it is the rational sphere of the mind that thinks. And so on. Although these identifications are involved with limitations of language, it is still obvious that we clearly overidentify with functions of ourselves, and not the real 'I'. We are not asking you to change your way of speaking, only that you realize that you are continually creating false identifications. Though you are forced by the construction of our language to continually state these identifications, in a deeper sense don't associate yourself with them.

It is possible to distinctly watch the activities of the body, emotions and mind as a spectator. If you have never experienced this then you have missed something that is very revealing. There is something more permanent that is observing. The body, emotions and the mind are merely instruments of something deeper, and they are certainly not the real 'I'. It is that which witnesses that is the 'I'. It is this that one should identify with. If you can do this then your body and mind will function more efficiently, unhampered by prejudices, fears, etc. You will attain wonderful physical and mental health.

Therefore, if you want to gain more relaxation and flow with the current of life, without being in a continual state of strife with the impressions of the environment, then you must realize that your roles in life are only actions. Nothing more. They are not you. You must continue to do them, but look at them

realistically. Consider yourself as an actor performing the roles. Your deeper self or nature will be the audience, while the body and mind will carry out the roles.

Next, you must try to disidentify with your body, emotions and personal mind. You should be aware of them. This is not easy and at first will only be intellectual, but with practice you will find that you identify with them less and less. This is not surprising for the witness is consciousness. You are not creating anything, merely allowing that which is already there to reassert itself in your being.

Conclusion

There are a large number of techniques for cleaning out the mind and inducing tranquility. In psychiatry there are methods such as initiated symbol projection, dream interpretation, picture association, narco-analysis, etc. We have given the ones that we think are most practical and effective. Don't make the mistake of thinking that the subject of cleaning out the mind is finished, for the whole aim of yoga is directed towards this very end.

In the first part, we mentioned the basic problem of lack of meaning in life¹. This is a problem that will certainly dissolve and disappear in the course of making progress in yoga. But you must find this out for yourself and not take our word for it. There is another factor. We strongly advise you to follow your own aspiration in life. As much as possible express your talent through work or play - artistic, organizational, etc., as this also helps to eliminate mental strife, for one becomes caught in a flow of concentrated activity. If you are flowing with the current then you are not concerned with the eddy currents or obstruction at the river's edge.

In fact, we see external expression as a necessary part of exhausting mental problems and of yogic life in general. But as much as possible it should be karma yoga, selfless action, so that one does not become too ego-centred and self-preoccupied².

Man, both in the past and in present times, has devoted most of his attention to mastering outer events, caring little for the inner events. This is the reason he has so many problems, for there has to be knowledge of the inner environment to achieve peace of mind and higher awareness. There has to be a progres-

sive movement towards harmony, both in the internal and external worlds. Internal problems must be progressively erased from the subconscious mind. Any higher experiences will hasten this process until one wipes the accumulated 'dust' of past conditioning and impediments from the mind. Then you will know what Christ meant when he talked about: 'the peace that passeth understanding'.

Notes

¹ Removal of mental problems: Part 1 - Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 2; Part 2 - Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 1

Hatha Yoga: Laghoo Shankhaprakshalana

An intestinal system which is permanently overloaded and blocked brings about adverse, disagreeable and dampening consequences on a person's life¹. If you suffer, or have previously suffered from constipation, then there is no need to convince you of its negative repercussions; you would already know from your own bitter experience. Laghoo shankhaprakshalana is an excellent, yet simple, method of encouraging a good bowel movement, and for generally washing out the intestines. It is particularly useful for people who suffer from constipation, though it can also be utilized to thoroughly flush out the digestive system. It can be done daily as part of your early morning routine, or it can be performed occasionally whenever it is justified. The practice only takes a few minutes to carry out, yet this short time is usefully spent, for the practice will help you to remove torpor and dullness from your life, and to replace it with energy, interest and optimism.

Terminology

The Sanskrit word *laghoo* means 'short', 'condensed' or 'concise'. The word *shankha* means 'conch' or 'shell' and *prakshalana* means 'to wash' or 'to clean thoroughly'. The word *shankha* is intended to represent and describe the intestine, with its cavernous and coiled shape. Therefore, the combined term *shankha-prakshalana* means to completely wash the intestines. This is, in fact, the name of a more comprehensive technique².

The method we will describe here is the shortened form - laghoo shankhaprakshalana - which can be done very quickly and with little preparation. Furthermore, the two practices have slightly different purposes: shankhaprakshalana is intended to completely empty and clean the whole digestive system, whereas laghoo shankhaprakshalana is intended only to encourage normal functioning of the intestines.

Advantages over laxatives

Laghoo shankhaprakshalana is not intended to act in the same way as laxatives. Laxatives artificially stimulate the nerves of the intestines, so that peristalsis (the wave-like motion in the intestines) is prompted to rapidly propel the stool through the intestines to the bowels for expulsion. Although this does empty out the bowels, at the same time it leads to gradual weakening of the nerve reflexes. Furthermore, laxatives tend to completely empty the bowels and this is not nature's intention. In a healthy intestinal system there is always a residue of stool in the bowels. It is here that water is reabsorbed into the body to prevent dehydration. Moreover, this residual stool contains myriads of bacteria, which help to protect the body from infection and also help to produce certain vitamins of the B complex. Strong laxatives sweep out all the stool, thereby preventing reabsorption of water, and preventing the bacteria from performing its normal function. Therefore, though laxatives give short-term benefits, they can lead to gradual deleterious effects in the body.

In laghoo shankhaprakshalana, salt water is used, not a laxative. The salt water acts as a lubricant and loosens up the stool. Let us take an analogy. If you have engrained crust, stains or coating on the inside of a pot, you first of all let it soak for some time in hot water. This loosens up the encrustation and eventually allows it to be easily removed. The salt water acts in a similar way within the intestines leaving them clean and free from obstruction.

The salt water does not directly stimulate the nerves. Normally, it is movement and bulk of stool that acts as a trigger which, in turn, stimulates the nerves which activate peristalsis. The salt water encourages the hardened or blocked stool to move, which prompts the nerves to carry out their normal functions. No direct nerve stimulation is involved as is the case with laxatives. A further point worth

noting is that the salt water does not in itself lead to complete evacuation of the bowels, which is one of the major drawbacks associated with laxatives. If you are currently using some form of laxative, we suggest you adopt laghoo shankhaprakshalana in order to reduce this dependency.

Equipment

All that is required is a pitcher of lukewarm salt water and a glass. In the practice you will be required to drink about six glasses of water. Therefore, about two litres of warm water should be sufficient, though you can use your discretion as to the amount of water required. The salt should be added in the proportion two teaspoonsful per litre of water. Make sure the salt is clean, and fully dissolved in the water.

It is important that you use salt water, so that the water is not absorbed through the intestinal walls into the body. The aim is to ensure that the water passes from the stomach throughout the length of the intestines without any absorption whatsoever. If you use water without salt, then all the water will be quickly absorbed in the early part of the intestines, without ever reaching the bowels. The salt water creates a high osmotic pressure, much higher than pure water, preventing absorption and allowing the salt water to flush through the system.

Asanas

You will be required to perform five special asanas during the practice. These are tadasana, tiryaka tadasana, kati chakrasana, tiryaka bhujangasana and udarakarshanasana³.

Place of practice

This depends on circumstances and climatic conditions. If you live in a warm country, you can practise in your backyard or on the lawn. Otherwise, practise in your bathroom or in the room where you normally practise your asanas.

Time and sequence

You should practise when your stomach is empty. As such, the best time is early in the morning.

LAGHOO SHANKHAPRAKSHALANA

Prepare the warm salt water.

Quickly drink 2 glasses of water.

Then practise the following asanas³:

tadasana - 8 times

tiryaka tadasana - 8 times

kati chakrasana - 8 times

tiryaka bhujangasana - 8 times

udarakarshanasana - 8 times.

The sequence should be as we have given.

Then drink 2 more glasses of the warm salty water.

Repeat the 5 asanas, 8 times each.

Finally drink 2 more glasses and again repeat the asanas.

Having drunk 6 glasses, now go to the toilet. Don't strain whether you have a bowel movement or not. If you don't have a movement, it will come later.

Frequency

If you suffer from constipation, then you can practise every day. Otherwise, practise once or twice a week or whenever you have the time to spare.

Limitations

People who suffer from ulcers, whether peptic or duodenal, should only practise laghoo shankhaprakshalana under expert guidance. People with high blood pressure should take care if they practise alone; again it is best to practise under expert supervision.

Precautions

After completing the practice wait for half an hour before eating.

We emphasize again, that you should not, under any circumstances, try to force a bowel movement. This is the easiest way to develop piles. The bowel movement should be natural.

Benefits

People with digestive problems such as constipation, flatulence, acidity, indigestion and other digestive maladies are advised to practise this technique. Laghoo shankhaprakshalana is an excellent method of purifying the body, and of preventing or helping to remove a diverse number of ailments. We suggest that you seek expert guidance to find out whether it will help to remove any ailment that you have.

Our body is composed of about seventy percent water; our kidneys filter between fifteen and twenty gallons of water every day. Most of this purified water is circulated into the bloodstream, while the waste materials of our body are eliminated in the urine. The structure and health of our body is wholly dependent on a plentiful supply of water - not merely water, but clean, fresh water. Therefore, if you want to take positive steps to keep your body in the cleanest, healthiest condition, or remove existing impurities, there is no better way than to drink plenty of water every day. Try to make this a habit.

Notes

¹ Disorders of digestion: Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 1

² Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 2

³ Topic 3 of this lesson

Topic 1

Asanas: Shankhaprakshalana Asanas

The following five asanas are to be specifically used in the intestinal cleansing practices of shankhaprakshalana¹ and laghoo shankhaprakshalana²:

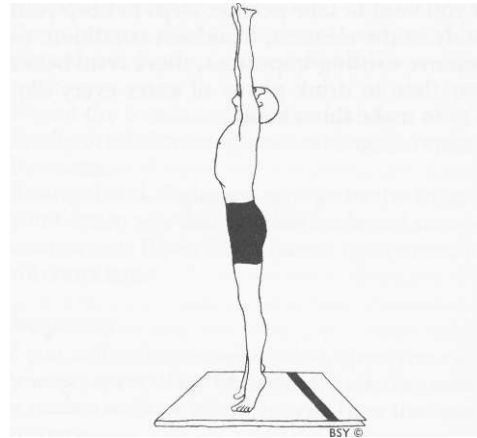
1. Tadasana
2. Tiriyaka tadasana
3. Kati chakrasana
4. Tiriyaka bhujangasana
5. Udarakarshanasana

This series of asanas has a special role to perform in these practices, for they systematically open the various intestinal valves between the stomach and the bowels. That is, these asanas, when performed in the given sequence, progressively open the pyloric valve (at the outlet of the stomach), then the ileocecal valve (at the exit of the small intestine) and finally the valve (or sphincter) which forms the anus³. Therefore the prescribed sequence of asanas is important, and they should be done in the order listed. In this way, the salt water is encouraged to flow from the beginning of the intestines to the rectum. It is for this reason that these asanas are especially incorporated into the two cleansing practices. Other asanas can also be used, but our experience in the ashram, and that of yogis throughout the ages, has shown that these five particular asanas are the most suitable.

These asanas also give benefits in their own right, apart from association with these cleansing processes. These will be described in the following text.

TADASANA (PALM TREE POSE)

The Sanskrit word *tnda* means 'palm tree' and therefore, not surprisingly, the English translation of this pose is the 'palm tree pose'. It is also often known as the heavenly stretch pose, because this is exactly what you do in this asana: stretch the body upwards towards the heavens.



Technique

Stand erect with your feet about 15 cms apart. Keep your eyes open throughout the practice. Gaze at a point directly in front of, or above you; this can be on the wall, ceiling, or if you are practising outside, in the distance.

The object of your attention is not important, but you must keep your gaze fixed on it throughout the entire practice.

Interlock the fingers of both hands.

Then hold your arms directly above your head. Gently adjust your hands so that the palms face upwards.

Then stretch your whole body upwards as far as possible.

Straighten your arms, but keep the hands interlocked.

Raise yourself on tiptoes, all the time trying to stretch up as high as you can.

At first, it may be difficult to maintain balance, but with practice it becomes easier; the important thing is that you keep your gaze fixed on the chosen point.

Remain in the final position for a few seconds. Then lower the body and bend and relax the arms. Allow the backs of your hands to rest on top of your head.

This is 1 round. Rest for a second or two. Then repeat another round, stretching your whole body, arms and legs, as much as you can.

Breathing and awareness

Breathe in deeply as you raise the body. Hold your breath in the final raised position, and breathe out as you lower your body. The breathing should also be coordinated with the raising and lowering of the hands.

Direct your attention to any fixed point. Some people prefer to look at a point in front of the body, either at a distance or a near point, while others prefer to watch their raised hands. Choose for yourself. However, we have found that it is easier to maintain balance if you look at a fixed point in front of you.

Number of rounds

For shankhaprakshalana and laghoo shankhaprakshalana do eight rounds. Otherwise, for general health purposes, you can practise as many rounds as you wish. Tadasana should be done after sirshasana (the headstand pose) as a counterpose. In this case, one should stay in the final position for as long as possible, breathing slowly and deeply.

Benefits

This asana develops a sense of balance. The whole body is stretched, which loosens up the entire spinal column from top to bottom. Furthermore, the abdominal organs and muscles are toned up.

TIRYAKA TADASANA (SWAYING PALM TREE POSE)

Technique

Stand erect with the feet about 15 cms apart. Stretch your arms above your head, fingers interlocked, in the same way as described for tadasana.

Throughout the practice keep your gaze fixed on a point in front of your body.

Stretch your whole body and raise yourself on tiptoes.

Maintain this stretched position, and bend your body to the right.

Then bend your body to the left, keeping your arms in line with the trunk.

This is 1 round.



Try to bend your body from the waist.

Do a number of rounds, all the time keeping the body stretched and balanced on the balls of your feet.

Then relax your body and stand with your feet flat on the ground.

Some people may find it difficult to balance on tiptoes for the entire practice.

These people can do the asana while standing firmly with their feet flat on the floor. When they develop a better sense of balance, they can start to do the practice on tiptoes.

These people however, should try to balance on their tiptoes for at least a few seconds each time they do the asana, as this will help them to develop the sense of balance.

Breathing

The breathing pattern should be normal.

Mistakes to avoid

In this asana keep your body and head facing forwards.

Awareness, number of rounds and benefits

These are as given for tadasana.

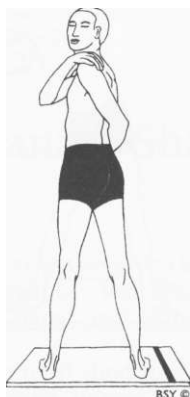
KATI CHAKRASANA (WAIST ROTATING POSE)

The Sanskrit word *kati* means 'waist' and *chakra* means 'circle', 'wheel' or 'rotation'. Therefore, in English this asana is the 'waist rotating pose'.

Technique

Stand erect with the feet about half a metre apart.

Let your arms hang limply beside your body. Then twist your body to the right, keeping the position of your feet and legs fixed.



As you twist, allow your arms to rotate and to entwine your body (like a creeper around a tree); that is, allow your right arm to swing behind your back and your left arm to swing over your right shoulder.

Your arms and back should be relaxed as much as possible throughout the practice.

At the end of the twisting motion, also rotate your head as far as possible in the same direction as the twist of the back.

In the final position, your left hand should rest on your right shoulder; your right hand should be in contact with the left side of your waist; and your eyes should gaze backwards over your right shoulder.

Stay in this position for half a second or so.

Then twist your body in the opposite direction so that eventually you are gazing over your left shoulder, and your arms are wrapped around the body in the opposite sense to that already described.

Again, stay in the final position for half a second. This is 1 round.

In the same way practise a number of rounds. Remember your arms should not be stiff while doing the asana - think of them as two lengths of rubber hanging from your shoulders; in this way, they will passively encircle your body as you rotate your shoulders from the waist. Perform the whole movement smoothly, without jerking or stiffness.

Breathing and awareness

The breathing pattern should be normal.

Keep your awareness on totally relaxing your arms, and on the sense of swing as you rotate your body.

Number of rounds

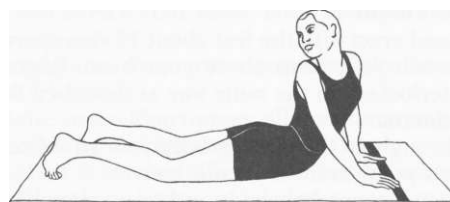
Practise eight times for shankhaprakshalana and laghoo shankhaprakshalana; otherwise, as many times as you wish.

Benefits

This asana tones up the waist, back and hip joints. It is particularly useful for removing spinal stiffness. Though it is a simple asana, the mere relaxation and swinging movement of the upper part of the body induces a wonderful feeling of lightness. In fact, we feel this asana can be used to remove physical and mental tension when you have little time to spare. Also, if you have been sitting or standing in one position for a long period of time, you will more than likely feel very stiff. This is an excellent asana for quickly and effectively removing this stiffness.

TIRYAKA BHUJANGASANA (TWISTING COBRA POSE)

The word *tiryaka* means 'triangular' or 'diagonal', and *bhujanga* means 'cobra'. The word *tiryaka* is used here for two good reasons. Firstly, because in the final pose one gazes over the shoulder diagonally across the back of the body at the heel on the opposite side. Secondly, because one gazes over each shoulder in turn at the heels, the direction of the gaze from each shoulder forms two sides of a triangle, while the width between the shoulders forms the base or third side of the triangle. However, this is a bit complicated for translation, especially if you try to associate it with a cobra. One English name of this asana is the 'twisting cobra pose'.



Technique

Lie on the floor facing downwards.

The balls of your feet should be in contact with the ground; the feet can be together or slightly separated.

Place your hands so that they are below and beside both shoulder blades, (that is, so that the hands are about half a metre apart). Straighten your arms, and raise your shoulders and head off the ground.

Let your back remain limp and passive.

As you raise your body, simultaneously twist your back slightly to the right.

Turn your head and gaze over the right shoulder at your left heel.

Your back should remain totally relaxed.

In the final position, your arms should be straight.

Don't strain, but try to twist your head and back as much as you can in the final position, keeping your navel as close as possible to the ground.

Stay in the final position for a second or so.

Then face forwards again.

Bend your arms and lower your body.

Repeat exactly the same procedure, but twisting the body and head to the left side, and looking at your right heel over your left shoulder.

Having completed this, return to the starting position.

This is one round.

Practise more rounds according to your capacity and available time.

Breathing and awareness

Breathe normally in the starting position. Breathe in as you raise your body. While in the final raised position hold your breath and as you lower the body to the ground breathe out.

While raising and lowering the body, be aware of breathing and relaxation of the back, together with movement of the body. Try to synchronize the breathing with the body movement. In the final position direct your attention to the opposite heel.

Mistakes to avoid

Many people stiffen their backs and raise the abdomen off the ground when they move into the final position. This is wrong. Allow your back to relax, so that it sags towards the ground in the final pose. This relaxation enables greater movement of the trunk.

Number of rounds

Refer to kati chakrasana.

Limitations

Those people who suffer from peptic or duodenal ulcers, or hernia, should not do this asana.

Benefits

For full details of the benefits obtainable from this asana refer to the description of bhujangasana⁴.

UDARAKARSHANASANA (ABDOMINAL STRETCH POSE)

The word *udara* means the 'stomach' and 'abdomen', and *akarshan* means 'to stretch' or 'massage'. Therefore this is known as the 'abdominal massage pose'.



Technique

Take a squatting position, with your feet about half a metre apart.

Place your hands on your knees.

Turn to the right side, pushing your left knee to the ground.

Don't move the position of the feet, though you can allow the heels to rise.

Keep your hands on your knees throughout the practice.

Twist your head and back as far as possible, and gaze over your right shoulder.

Allow your back to relax.

Stay in the final position for half a second or so.

Return to the squatting position.

Repeat the same procedure, twisting your body in the other direction, pushing your right knee to the floor and looking over your left shoulder.

Then return to the starting position.

This is 1 round.

Do a number of rounds.

Note for beginners

Beginners and those people who have a stiff back, may find difficulty maintaining balance. Under these circumstances lean against a wall when you take the squatting position. Your heels should be about twenty centimetres or so from the wall. This will give you support, but at the same time allow you to twist your body in the way described for the asana.

Breathing and awareness

The breathing should be normal. Maintain awareness of the movement.

Number of rounds

Refer to kati chakrasana.

Benefits

This is a very useful asana for people with abdominal ailments, because it alternately compresses and stretches the digestive organs, nerves and muscles.

If you suffer from constipation, we recommend that you practise this regularly, as it helps to encourage the normal functioning of the large intestine and the anal sphincter.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 2

² Topic 2 of this lesson

³ For clarification refer to the diagram of the digestive system - Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 1

⁴ Book I; Lesson 4; Topic 2

Pranayama: Practice

Here we will briefly discuss the technique of *kevala kumbhaka*. The Sanskrit word *kevala* means 'only', and *kumbhaka* means 'breath retention' or 'cessation'. The word *kevala* is directly connected with the word *kaivalya* meaning 'onlyness', but is another name for *samadhi*, *nirvana* or supreme enlightenment and union. Therefore *kevala* and *kaivalya* mean that experience which is beyond duality,

beyond mere conceptions, beyond words. Any description of the experience immediately distorts it and can never adequately convey its essence. For this reason, the words *kevala* and *kaivalya* are used as a suitable nondescription of the indescribable.

Kevala kumbhaka is the spontaneous cessation of breath that occurs with the state of *samadhi*, attained through *pranayama* and the meditational methods of *raja yoga*. If *kevala kumbhaka* arises, then *samadhi* must also simultaneously occur. One goes with the other.

Other forms of *kumbhaka* (such as *antar kumbhaka* in *nadi shodhana* stage 3) are known collectively as *sahita kumbhaka*¹. The word *sahita* means 'combined with something'. In other words, these other types of *kumbhaka* are combined with and brought about by other practices; they require effort to perform them and do not arise spontaneously; they are not directly related to *samadhi*. These *kumbhakas* are performed in order to induce the spontaneous occurrence of *kevala kumbhaka*, where one becomes perfectly receptive to the inflow of higher consciousness.

The *bandhas* (*jalandhara*, *uddiyana* and *moola*) are powerful techniques of inducing *kevala kumbhaka*, especially if they are combined with *pranayama* practices².

NADI SHODHANA - STAGE 3 (NEW RATIO)

Having mastered the ratio given in the previous lesson (namely 1:6:4:1:6:4) you should now proceed to the next ratio which is 1:8:6:1:8:6 for inhalation: inner retention: exhalation: inhalation: inner retention: exhalation³.

Remember, if you have not yet mastered an earlier stage then persevere until you gain proficiency. Don't proceed to a more advanced stage prematurely. If possible try to increase the time that you practise *pranayama* daily, beyond what is prescribed in the suggested practice program. The more you practise, the more proficient you will become and the greater will be the results.

However, don't strain. You should slowly gain mastery over the breathing process.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 4

² *Jalandhara bandha*: Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3;
uddiyana bandha: Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 3;
moola bandha: Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

³ Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 5

Trataka and Concentration

Concentration is the essence of trataka. And it is through powerful concentration that one makes progress in yoga¹.

The power of concentration

What is concentration? It is one-pointedness of mind, the ability to hold, to focus one's attention on one point, without wavering. Perfect concentration leads to meditation. In meditational practices, such as trataka, concentration leads to complete mental attention on one object, form or thought to the exclusion of all others. There is no distraction from the environment or other peripheral things.

Why is deep concentration so powerful? This can be best illustrated by comparing the mind of an average person to a light bulb. The rays of light go in all directions; the energy emanating from the centre filament is dissipated, spread in all directions. If you stand five feet away from the bulb you will see the light, but will not feel any direct heat, even though there is intense heat at the centre of the bulb in the filament. In the same way the mind of the average person has vast dormant potential and power at its source, its centre, but this is dissipated in all directions. The mind thinks of a continuous stream of things, one after the other, without dwelling on one subject or aim in any depth. The power is present in each person, but it is not focused and utilized.

In recent years science has produced something that was once the main topic of science fiction novels - the laser. It is an apparatus that lines up all the rays of light from a source so that they are in unison with each other, so that they vibrate together in perfect harmony. The original source of light need not be great, not even as great as the average light bulb filament that we have just mentioned, yet if you stood five feet away from a laser source, the beam would almost instantaneously burn a hole straight through your body. This is the power of concentrated light. Concentrated

thought, though unlikely to bore a hole in the body, also has vast power. A concentrated mind acts as an irresistible instrument of action; it leads to efficiency in all one's activities in the outside world; it is a dynamo which generates vitality and enthusiasm in every direction. A concentrated mind also has the ability to be a sensitive receiving instrument; it becomes receptive to higher vibrations, to heightened perception. It becomes a receiver of the influx of higher awareness, bliss and knowledge. All this is normally beyond the range of the average mind for it is too disturbed and distracted by a continual inner chatter of thoughts. Concentration is the key that will unlock the door to higher states of awareness.

Physiology of trataka

Most people have heard of the pineal gland. It is a small pea-sized gland above the top of the spine, in the centre of the head between the two ears (technically it is located between the two cerebral hemispheres and above the cerebellum). This small body has yet to be understood by modern science, and does not seem to have any specific physiological function. Yoga, on the other hand, together with various spiritual systems throughout the ages, both eastern and western, says that this gland is the link, the antenna for higher vibrations. When it is stimulated or awakened then one can start to tune in with more subtle patterns of existence.

It is significant that the eyes are connected directly with the pineal gland, via the sympathetic nervous system. This much modern physiology has determined, together with various other factors which have recently come to light. The centre of the sympathetic nervous system, as well as the parasympathetic, is the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus is also the centre of wakefulness and pleasure together with sleep and pain. Therefore the eyes, the pineal gland, the sympathetic nervous system,

the hypothalamus and the wakefulness of an individual are all intimately connected with each other, directly or indirectly. Mental concentration of any type will tend to bring these systems into a high level of sensitivity. This, as we have already pointed out, allows the infiltration and flow of higher consciousness through the pineal gland.

In *trataka* the whole system is stimulated and awakened by concentration through the eyes. This induces higher sensitivity of the pineal gland and directly - via the sympathetic nervous system - greater wakefulness in the individual. This is why *trataka* is such a powerful technique; it directly influences the pineal gland. Furthermore, all other disturbing thoughts, which reduce receptivity, are blocked out, at least temporarily, because of the intense concentration. All these factors help to lead the individual to higher experiences.

Other techniques perform the same function; they induce concentration and sensitivity in the human system, and in particular the pineal gland, though sometimes in a more direct manner. *Pranayama*, for example, directly influences the hypothalamus, which is the centre of respiration; in this way wakefulness is induced and receptivity amplified. This is possibly the mode of operation of certain types of drugs. They somehow render the system, including the pineal gland, more sensitive to higher vibrations.

Choice of object

We have already discussed how you should choose your object for *trataka*². The following quotations by Swami Satyananda, in the book *Steps to Yoga*, clearly emphasize what has already been explained: "We can give any pattern to the mind. We can shape it in the pattern of a woman, a man, or a pot, or a watch or a body. When we concentrate on Krishna, our mind assumes the form of Krishna which gradually becomes consumed in self-consciousness, resulting in *nirvikalpa samadhi*."

"When the mind merges in the form of the *Ishta Devata* (personal deity), the sense consciousness is withdrawn."

"You should select that object which would at once magnetize your mind and compel it to withdraw itself from all other objects."

"When the mind is merged in the one form, the light in us manifests itself."

"Concentration is the key to open the gates of that great power. When you successfully concentrate on one idea or form, you enter *dhyana* (meditation). Whether you are a devotee of God or an atheist, you can realize the glory through meditation. A person having faith in God can meditate on any choicest form of God, through which he will attain realization. An atheist can choose a flower, or a star, or the nose tip, between the eyebrows, or the heart and so on. The result will be the same."

Therefore, choose your object carefully and then practise earnestly.

Note also that though we have described the technique of *trataka*, where one creates the image in front of the eyes, there is absolutely no reason why you should not mentally create a picture at the heart centre. Many of the ancient yogic texts recommend this place for creation of the image. In the *Katha Upanishad* it says that one can create an image at the heart, such as an inner-image the size of the thumb. You must therefore experiment for yourself and find the best object and the best location. Don't feel limited to the objects and techniques that we have given, for this is only intended as a guide.

Awareness and concentration

Though the immediate and primary aim of *trataka* is to develop concentration, you should not force yourself to concentrate. Concentration must arise spontaneously. Try to maintain awareness of the object of *trataka*. That is, allow extraneous thoughts to arise, but while simultaneously being attentive to the object. You must split your attention between distracting thoughts and the object. Don't become lost in the stream of invading thoughts, but merely watch them with a feeling of disinterest. If you do this, then the unwanted thoughts will automatically subside, and concentration will arise. Of course, on occasions your mind may be more agitated than usual; you should still follow the same procedure, though it may be difficult to attain any degree of concentration. This awareness is important, for if you try to force the mind to concentrate you will only create more tension and less concentration. So be aware. Don't battle with the wandering mind, for you will lose. Tame the mind and mould it into a state of concentration by adopting the attitude of awareness.

Conclusion

Trataka is a very powerful, yet deceptively simple practice. When you are able to concentrate on an object then that object becomes the focus, the form of your consciousness. In other words, if your object is a candle, then this does not merely represent your consciousness, it is your consciousness. We don't expect you to understand this, we are merely pointing it out to you. All you have to do is to practise trataka and merge your being into the object, form or thought and disappear into it like an arrowhead into a target. Practise for yourself and discover your own experience.

Notes

¹ Trataka: Stage 1 - Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6
Stage 2 - Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 6
Stage 3 - Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 7

² Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

Meditation: Practice

There is no limit to the number of possible meditational practices. Any theme can be used as the focal point of your attention. The most essential stipulation is that you must choose something that will easily hold your attention. If this is not the case then you will gain little or nothing from the practice.

So far in the book we have given methods which are based on traditional techniques given in the yogic and tantric texts. In this topic we will introduce you to another possible theme for meditative purposes.

The following are poems written by famous mystical poets. You may already be familiar with them. Poems, especially ones of a spiritual nature, can be used as an object of meditation. They are trying to express something that the poet has realized. He is trying to convey the inexpressible through the inadequate medium of words.

If you read a poem a thousand times and try to analyze it logically or from the viewpoint of everyday experience, then you will gain nothing - only a headache. First try to understand the surface meaning of the words and then reflect on their deeper significance. If you only come up with an intellectual understanding that you can easily discuss with another person, then discard it. Reject it, for the poem means far more. Let the content of the poem gravitate to deeper levels of your being. Develop an intense need to know what the poet is really trying to express. If you find the answer you will definitely know; it will hit you like a thunderbolt. It will shatter all your previous conclusions, convictions and understanding.

You can think about the real meaning of the poem at any time of the day. In fact if you really have a strong need to find the meaning, then the reflection, the enquiry will continue all the time below the level of everyday consciousness. It will continue without your awareness. However, the best time to consciously reflect on the meaning is when you

are relaxed and receptive. We suggest you practise immediately after your yoga practice program or perhaps before sleep.

Choose any of the following poems (or any other). Reflect on its deeper significance but try not to be blocked by mere intellectual understanding. If you think you understand its meaning, and feel that the meaning is obvious, then you have not really understood.

REFLECTION ON A POEM

Poem 1

*To see a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wildflower
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.*

William Blake

Poem 2

*When I open my eyes to the outer world,
I feel myself as a drop in the sea;
But when I close my eyes and look within,
I see the whole universe as a bubble
Raised in the ocean of my heart.*

Inayat Khan

Poem 3

*That is full, this is full.
From full, the full is taken,
the full has come.
If you take out the fullness from the full,
the fullness still remains.*

Ishavasya Upanishad

Poem 4

*Man has a real existence,
But it has nothing to do with place;
He has continuance,
But it has nothing to do with beginning and end.*

Taoism

Choose any poem that appeals to you, which fascinates you. Reflect on it. What does it really mean? And remember if you think you know the meaning, it is almost a certainty that you don't. Only if you start to jump with joy and bliss, could it be that you have unfathomed the knowledge contained within.

Daily Practice Program

If you suffer from constipation then you should definitely try to practise laghoo shankhaprakshalana, either occasionally or on a daily basis. It is such a simple practice and it can help to make your 'burden' lighter throughout the rest of the day.

Try to bear in mind and practise what we have said about deconditioning and dis-identification, as well as the previous methods

of alleviating mental problems¹. Remember effort and need are required on your part; no one else can remove your problems for you. You must work them out, and remove them yourself.

Continue your practice of trataka and if you have spare time, reflect on one of the poems we have given for a few minutes.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 1/2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	1 each way	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:	—	
Stage 2	—	5
Stage 3 (new ratio)	—	14
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3	—	30
Reflection on poem	—	5
		<hr/> 90

Program 2: duration 1 hour		
Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	1 each way	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:	—	
Stage 2	—	4
Stage 3 (new ratio)	—	10
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3	—	30
Reflection on poem		5
		60

Program 3: duration 3/4 hour		
Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	1 each way	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	—	
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3 (new ratio)	—	7
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3		15
		45

Find time to reflect on the meaning of one of the poems given.

Program 4: duration 1/2 hour (for general health) is as for the above Program 3, excluding the practice of Trataka.

Notes

- ¹ Removal of mental problems: Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 2; Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 2