

Lesson 2

If the doors of perception were cleansed,
everything would appear to man as it is -
infinite.

William Blake

Hatha Yoga: Danta Dhauti

Danta dhauti, one of the shatkarmas¹, consists of a series of simple practices which clean various organs and regions of the head. These practices are *danta moola dhauti* (cleaning of the teeth and gums), *jihva moola dhauti* (cleaning of the tongue), *kapal randhra dhauti* (washing the skull), *karna dhauti* (cleaning the ears) and *chakshu dhauti* (washing the eyes).

These practices, as well as *jala neti*¹, are concerned either directly or indirectly with the main senses of the body - hearing, seeing, smelling and tasting. As such they are important in enabling us to gain the best possible perception of the world around us. Remember, our sensory perception is dependent on the state of the associated organs. Therefore the following practices, though perhaps seeming rather trivial and simple, are a valuable aid in being able to communicate with and relate to the outside world.

The ancient yogis realized the necessity of maintaining the sensory organs in the optimum condition. This is clearly stated in the traditional text on practical yoga, the *Hatha Yoga Samhita*: "The cleaning of the teeth, mouth, tongue, ears and the nasal cavities is the first duty of the yogic aspirant and should be performed every morning without fail."

DANTA MOOLA DHAUTI

The Sanskrit word *danta* means 'teeth', *dhauti* means 'wash' and *moola* means 'root'. Therefore this practice is concerned with cleaning the teeth and gums.

Utensils

The usual utensil used today is the toothbrush. Yet many authorities have strongly condemned its use without regular sterilization. It is pointed out that toothbrush bristles become a breeding ground for germs and bacteria. During daily use these are transmitted into the mouth. Further, hard bristles tend to tear

and damage the gums, especially when the cleaning action is very harsh.

In India today the traditional method of cleaning the teeth is by means of a twig from a neem tree. The twig is usually about fifteen centimetres long and half a centimetre thick and it has good alkaline and astringent properties. The end of the stick is chewed until it forms bristles. These are then used to brush the teeth and gums. Both chewing the end of the stick and using it as a brush makes the teeth and gums strong and clean. After use the stick is thrown away.

This method is probably impractical for most people. If this is the case, then use a soft bristled brush to clean the teeth and try to clean the brush as often as possible. The gums should be cleaned with the index finger making a hard, rubbing motion over both the inner and outer gums. You should try to clean your teeth at least twice every day, and even better after each meal.

Dentifrice

The important qualities of a dentifrice are that it is sufficiently abrasive to remove ingrained stains on the teeth, germicidal to destroy bacteria, as well as being able to wash the teeth and gums.

The ancient yogis always made their own tooth powder out of catechu, alum, myrobalan and the ash of burnt coconut shells in the proportion 1:6:1:2. However, these substances are not readily available and so most of us will have to stick with the toothpastes of today, the best of which are generally available at ayurvedic pharmacies, health and macrobiotic food stores. Additionally, some excellent dentifrices are wood ash or lemon juice which can be applied on a brush, or the rind of a lemon which can be rubbed up and down on the teeth and gums. This is a particularly good method of removing tarnish from the teeth.

The importance of cleaning the teeth and gums

The importance of maintaining healthy gums and teeth is not appreciated by many people. The mouth is the gateway to the body and a favourite breeding ground for bacteria. Some of these germs proceed further into the body while many remain in food particles trapped in the teeth cavities. The vulnerable time for tooth decay and the build-up of bacteria in the teeth and gums is in the first half an hour or so after meals. It is for this reason that ideally the teeth and gums should be cleaned immediately after each meal.

Diet also has a large part to play in the health of the teeth and gums. This is illustrated by the fact that there are many cases of primitive tribes who have perfect sets of teeth, yet have never seen a toothbrush in their life. Diets which are very rich in sugar seem to have a noticeable deleterious influence on teeth and gums, because sugary foods are very quickly converted into acids, which in turn attack the enamel or protective lining of the teeth.

Regular cleaning of the teeth and gums, together with a reduction in the intake of sugary food and the adoption of a sensible vitamin-rich diet is therefore the only sure way to prevent dental decay and pyorrhoëa, as well as the accompanying toothache and bad breath originating from the mouth. Remember also that many authorities say that bad teeth and gums and infections of this area have a harmful influence on the general health of the whole body.

JIHVA MOOLA DHAUTI

The Sanskrit word *jihva* means 'tongue' and *moola* means 'root'. This practice is therefore concerned with cleaning the tongue and its root.

The tongue is a vital organ of the body, yet very few people ever seriously think about cleaning it. All of us have at some time or another noticed a thick layer of yellow slime on the upper surface of the tongue, especially when we feel a little 'under the weather'. This coating on the tongue actually consists of impurities that have been removed from the body. It indicates that there is some inner disorder or accumulation of toxins that the body is desperately trying to expel.

Failure to remove the impurities on the tongue can aggravate ailments within the body, particularly digestive problems. Remember these impurities can act as breeding grounds for bacteria which in turn can contaminate food being eaten. So regular cleaning of the tongue is very important in maintaining a healthy body. The practice is very simple and takes no more than a minute or so.

Technique

Wash the hands thoroughly, making sure that the finger nails are perfectly clean.

Join the index, middle and ring fingers of one hand so that the tips are in line with each other.

Carefully push them into the mouth and as far towards the back of the throat as is possible without retching.

Rub the root of the tongue slowly and thoroughly for a few minutes.

Simultaneously try to cough out any phlegm and other impurities that are in the throat.

This should be sufficient to remove any impurities from the tongue.

Time and duration

This practice should be performed preferably before breakfast. This is important for one might otherwise tend to retch as the fingers are pushed into the back of the throat.

Try to practise at least once every day, if not as often as time available will permit. Two minutes rubbing the back of tongue and two minutes milking the upper and lower surfaces is sufficient.

KAPAL RANDHRA DHAUTI

Kapal randhra is the upper hollowed region of the head, which can be clearly seen on a newly born baby. Therefore, this practice is concerned with washing the upper part of the head. It is a very simple process and requires little description. One must merely wash the head vigorously and thoroughly with cold water. This brings about a soothing influence in the whole brain. It is very useful when you feel tired or sluggish, as it instantly brings wakefulness and vitality.

A further variation of kapal randhra is kapal dhauti. One merely presses the temples on each side of the forehead with two thumbs,

making small circling movements. Do this for a minute or so and then repeat the same movement rotating the thumbs in the opposite direction. This again brings relaxation to the brain and is especially useful if you have a headache.

KARNA DHAUTI

The word *karna* means 'ear', and this practice is concerned with cleaning the ears.

The outer portion of the ear consists of a short tube or canal about four centimetres in length, running from the outside to the inside of the head. Inside the tube there are a few hairs which prevent insects and other foreign bodies from entering the inner regions of the head and the eardrum at the end of the canal. This outer canal also contains various glands, which secrete wax to protect the deeper structures of the ear. For perfect hearing, this outer canal must be unimpeded so that the sound vibrations in the air can cause the ear to vibrate. Sometimes the glands produce too much wax which blocks the canal; or sometimes wax accumulates, even though it is produced in correct amounts, and is not removed in the way that it should be. This can easily reduce one's hearing capabilities.

A varied assortment of methods and utensils are used to clean the ears. Some people even use toothpicks or matchsticks. These devices are not advised for they can easily damage the eardrums. The best method is to gently place the small finger in the ear canal and rotate the finger cyclically a number of times. A slight pressure should be applied against the ear walls to dislodge any unnecessary wax. Remove the finger and direct the head and ear canal downwards to allow any dry wax to drop out. Repeat the same procedure but using the index finger. There should be a layer of wax on your fingers after completing the practice. Repeat with the other ear.

Perform this practice every week or so, but make sure that your fingernails are short and clean.

Benefits

Many ear ailments are caused by blockage of the eustachian tubes. The ear is divided into three chambers: the outer, middle and inner sections. Sound vibrations are transmitted

from the environment through the outer ear and into the middle ear via the eardrum, which also separates the outer ear from the middle ear. There is no direct connection between the two chambers. For perfect hearing the pressure of air in the middle ear must be the same as that outside the body - atmospheric. This is brought about by means of the two eustachian tubes, which connect each ear to the back of the throat. These tubes are about the same diameter as a pencil lead and easily become blocked with mucus deposits. The best way to remove this type of problem is by practising jala neti, as this will help to draw out any blockages from these tubes'.

CHAKSHU DHAUTI

This practice involves washing the eyes with clean, lukewarm water whenever time permits. This can be done when taking a wash or bath, making sure that no soap enters the eyes.

EYE TONING TECHNIQUES

In this topic we are concerned with practices which bring about the best possible health of the head region and associated organs. Though not part of danta dhauti, there are various other simple techniques to help bring the eyes into optimum condition. We will briefly discuss these techniques.

One should remember that there are two distinct causes of eye ailments. Defective vision such as short sightedness (myopia), long sightedness (hypermetropia) etc. are generally caused by mental strain or excessive use of the eyes, such as during extensive book study. Eye diseases, on the other hand, are caused by pathological changes in the structure of the eye due to disturbances within the eye itself or in the body as a whole. This may be due to a build-up of toxins in the body or an inadequate diet.

Yoga practices can help to eliminate and prevent either of the two types of eye ailments. In a general sense, regular practice of asanas and pranayama are wonderful methods of counteracting eye ailments for they eliminate toxins from the body. Further, the mental relaxation that one can obtain through all yoga practices counteracts eyestrain, even while reading a book or doing work which involves

deep concentration. In this way functional defects are less likely to occur.

Jala neti has definite beneficial influences on the eyes¹. It stimulates the nerves of the eyes which in turn activates and tones the associated muscles and organs. The blood flow to the eyes is also increased for a short duration which helps to flush out impurities and toxins.

1. Palming

Sit comfortably, close the eyes and face the sun. Feel the heat of the sun warming the eyes. Keep the eyes closed and vigorously rub the palms of both hands together until they are hot.

Place the palms over the closed eyes. Feel the warmth and energy entering the eyes.

Do this for a minute or so.

Repeat 2 or 3 times.

This practice helps to revitalize and relax the eyes.

2. Distant and near viewing

Sit so that you can see the horizon or so that you can see far into the distance. Focus your eyes on the nose tip.

Then focus on an object in the far distance.

Focus on the nose tip again.

Repeat this as many times as possible, then close the eyes.

This practice is very useful for exercising the eye muscles, which brings about changes in the focal length of the lenses of the eyes.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Asanas: An Introduction

The meaning of the Sanskrit word *asana* is 'a steady and comfortable posture'. It is often believed that asanas are physical exercises. And of course this is true; they do have a profound influence on the body, but this does not convey their full significance. Each person is made up of three aspects: body, mind and consciousness, which merge together to constitute our whole being. Asanas aim at influencing all these three aspects and moulding and yoking them into one harmonious whole.

As such one should try to think of asanas not as physical poses but as states of being. Correct performance of asanas requires participation of one's whole being, with awareness of oneself in relation to the physical position and movement, the breath, relaxation of the muscles and so forth. If asanas were only physical exercises then it would be quite acceptable to think about work, breakfast or whatever while performing them. But this is not the case. The practice of asanas requires active involvement of one's entire being as fully as possible.

Health of mind and body

It is impossible to work actively in life with an unhealthy mind and body. This applies to work and play as well as to spiritual aspiration. The fundamental requirement is the healthiest possible mind and body. The ancient yogis realised this thousands of years ago and for this reason developed the system of asanas. The asanas were tested thoroughly by the personal experience of these pioneers. Asanas evolved slowly through practice, and because of this, they have withstood the test of time. The body and mind of man thousands of years ago was little different to the mind and body of man today. As such asanas are as useful in the present age as they were to the ancient originators. Many modern systems, in all fields of activity, are often based only on a few years

experience; they rarely last for very long periods and are usually modified because of inadequacies in their makeup. Asanas, on the other hand, are a well-tested system for attaining mental and physical health.

The prime aim of asanas is to help us tread the path to higher consciousness so we can begin to understand and know our relationship with existence. We cannot even consider attaining higher awareness if we are ill with disease, aches and pains or mental depression. Therefore, the initial purpose of practising asanas is to eliminate these afflictions and disturbances. Asanas loosen up the joints of the body, stretch and tone the muscles and remove poisons which tend to accumulate in various parts of the body. They also harmonize the nervous system and with a gentle massage they improve the functioning of all the internal organs such as the heart, lungs, abdominal organs, endocrinal glands, blood vessels and so on. This slowly but surely leads to the best possible physical health.

The mind and body are not really separate entities; they are two parts of the human organism. The mind is the controller or the computer and the body is the machinery. They are closely interrelated. Improvement in the general health of the body automatically helps to bring about positive mental changes.

We will point out that mental problems or tension, as well as an unhealthy body, are the prime cause of most diseases which afflict mankind. The body has remarkable auto-therapeutic powers. It naturally has great strength to resist the onset of disease by means of antibodies which counteract bacteriological growth. A body that is unhealthy and a mind that is tense tend to whittle away these powers making the body more vulnerable to illness. Asanas help the body to resist disease by bringing the mind and body into the best possible condition. A body saturated with poisons and toxins is a breeding ground for germs

and is conducive to attack by disease. Asanas help to purify the body and thereby prevent diseases occurring. Some ailments are caused by malfunctioning of internal organs - blood pressure, heart attack, diabetes and so on. Asanas prevent this happening by bringing all the relevant organs into good working condition, improving nerve connections and also by reducing chronic mental stress, the latter being the root cause of most of the problems in the first place.

Asanas not only prevent disease; they also help to eliminate many types of diseases for the same reasons as given in the previous paragraph.

The influence of asanas on one's mental outlook

The stepping stone to higher awareness and a happy life is an optimistic attitude. Asanas help to change and reorientate a person's mental outlook. How? There are various answers, which we will discuss in turn.

Firstly, asanas greatly influence the functioning of the endocrine system. This system exerts vast control over our lives. It carries out an uncountable number of indispensable functions within the body and it influences our physical appearance, emotional outlook and in fact much of our behaviour and attitude towards life. A person who has a healthy endocrine system is generally optimistic, clear in thought and positive in action. A person with a system that is out of balance will tend to be unhealthy, pessimistic and either excessively active or inactive physically and mentally. Endocrinology is a very interesting science encompassing reproduction, digestion, emotional reactions and in fact all aspects of life.

The endocrine system consists of various glands located throughout the body, which secrete special substances called hormones. Each of these hormones has a specific function to perform in the body. They act as triggers which prompt the various organs into higher or lower levels of activity as required, or in some cases such as the women's menstrual cycle they initiate and terminate various processes. These hormones also interact with and modify the activities of each other. For optimum health the entire system must be in balance and perfectly coordinated, each gland secreting the required hormone in the right

quantity at the right time. If there is disharmony in the endocrinal system then there will be a malfunction in one or more of the bodily processes and possibly in the emotional makeup of one's personality. There is such an intricate interrelationship between the various glands that one malfunctioning gland can cause disruption of the whole system. Asanas are designed to rectify overactivity or sluggishness of individual glands as well as harmonize the control centre of the system in the brain. This is why even simple asanas can sometimes bring about astonishingly quick benefits.

Endocrinal disorders are not usually organic - they are generally functional. In other words, the individual glands are capable of working correctly but don't, perhaps because of stress or misuse of the body. This can be compared to a car. If the petrol mixture is too rich, or the air and petrol intake pipes are blocked, the car will cease to work or will not run smoothly. It still has the capacity to work properly and will do so when the necessary adjustments are made. With the endocrine system the functional breakdown may be due to ineffective nerve impulses or insufficient supply of oxygenated blood, perhaps due to incorrect breathing and so on. Asanas automatically and gently rectify this condition, bringing the system into proper working order again.

This system has a major influence on our emotional makeup, which is intimately connected with our mental processes. As such, improvement of this system alone through the practice of asanas can result in profound changes in our attitude to life.

Secondly, asanas bring about harmony in the various other bodily systems. These systems are rhythmical in nature and include the blood, nervous, respiratory, digestive as well as the endocrine system which we have already mentioned. These systems are all intimately related to each other. When the proper working relationship between these bodily processes is lost there is a resultant loss of health and body efficiency. This has repercussions on our emotional and mental well-being. Asanas coordinate these various systems bringing rhythm and balance into the body-mind complex.

Thirdly, asanas have subtle influences on the body, which perhaps a physiologist would tend to deny. Surrounding and permeating

the whole body is an energy field which is normally imperceptible to our senses. In yoga this is called the *pranamaya kosha* (energy sheath) and is commonly known as the etheric body by people who have developed their psychic potential. This subject will be fully discussed later¹. However, we will say that this concept should not be taken lightly, for scientists in Russia have actually detected and photographed this energy body. There it is called bioplasma or bioluminescence. This energy travels in and around the body in specific pathways, which in yoga are known as nadis. These pathways easily become blocked and prana becomes congested in certain areas, which can lead to physical and mental disorders. Asanas encourage free flow of prana and thereby facilitate good health. Further, this energy body is intimately connected to the mind. As such the uninhibited flow of prana brought about by asanas, leads to mental equilibrium and calmness.

Fourthly, asanas automatically bring about a change in breathing. Rapid and irregular breathing signifies tension in mind and body, whereas slow, deep and rhythmical breathing indicates calmness and well-being. Asanas bring about mental and emotional equanimity by slowing down the breathing and deepening the inhalation and exhalation.

Fifthly, awareness is an essential feature of the practice of asanas. While performing asanas one should be fully aware of what is being done and not allow the mind to wander here and there. Without awareness asanas are not really asanas, no matter how well they may be physically performed. This awareness of breath movement while doing asanas draws our attention away from entanglement with superficial worries and problems, at least for a period of time. This includes relaxation of one's personality. It may be temporary, but it assists in bringing about permanent changes in a person's mental and emotional makeup.

Our emotional and mental attitudes and feelings are noticeably reflected in our physical poise and expressions. If we are angry we tend to hunch our shoulders; if we are tense and worried we frown; if we feel nervous we shake and breathe quickly and so on. Conversely, if we feel happy we simultaneously feel light and more flexible in the body. These are mental and emotional attitudes reflected

in the body. This is also a two way process - the body can induce corresponding changes in the mind. Asanas make the body relaxed, strong, light, supple, free of aches and pains and this in turn brings about emotional and mental calmness and confidence.

As we have already mentioned, asanas are very useful in eliminating diseases. This alone is conducive to mental and emotional stability. Let us take an example: constipation. This ailment is generally accepted by medical science to be caused initially by mental tension, though there are other factors such as lack of exercise and unsuitable food habits. When a person suffers from constipation there is also a feeling of heaviness, not only in the body, but also in the mind. One's thinking processes become dulled and pessimistic. Asanas help to remove constipation so that one simultaneously becomes more light-hearted and carefree. By removing or easing physical ailments, asanas also bring about a corresponding relaxation and freedom of one's personality.

All the previous factors that we have listed interrelate with each other. The overall result is a notable and positive change in one's subconscious and conscious thinking processes.

Asanas as a step to higher awareness

From the previous discussion it is clear that asanas exercise a profound influence on the mind-body complex. Regular practice of asanas helps to make one master of the mind and body, and not the slave. The beautiful, strong body aimed at in various body building systems, without a correspondingly developed mind, is as insufficient as a highly intellectual mind contained within a weak, sickly body. The ideal is to have both a strong, healthy mind and body. This is the aim of asanas as well as yoga in general.

The practice of asanas should not be divorced from the other aspects of yoga. It is an integral part of yoga techniques with the purpose of leading each of us to higher awareness. This was why the ancient originators of yoga developed asanas and other yogic practices, though this is rarely considered today. The ancient yogis aimed at transcending the normal limitations of the mind and body. Their aim was to transcend individuality and to achieve self-realization. In this context, asanas were not intended specifically to develop

the mind and body. This was a means to an end. Their aim was to make the body so perfect and the subconscious mind so calm and trouble free that these aspects of individual existence could be forgotten. Consciousness could be disentangled from the troubles of the mind and body. When the aches and pains and ailments of the body are removed and one is emotionally and mentally relaxed, then one automatically ceases to be aware of the physical body and the superficialities of the mind. In this way the fetters of individuality can be released and one's true nature - pure, infinite, all pervasive consciousness - can be realized.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3

Asanas: Rules and Preparations

Guidelines to be observed during asana practice

The place of practice should be clean, quiet and well ventilated. There should be no bad smells, dampness or cold draughts. The area should be uncluttered with furniture and other objects. Try to use the same place every day to build up an atmosphere of peace.

Take a wash or bath and go to the toilet before the practice if possible.

Wait for at least three hours after food before doing asanas. You can take food after your asana program if you wish.

If possible do neti before commencing your practice. Either jala neti¹ or sutra neti² is suitable.

The best time to practise is before breakfast, early in the morning, though other times are also suitable. In fact you will find that asanas are much easier to do in the afternoon and evening, because the body is always stiffer in the morning. But nevertheless, the morning is the best time for there are peaceful vibrations in the air, and you gain greater benefits and a good preparation for the coming day. Also in the early morning there are fewer pressing distractions to drag you away from your practice, either physically or mentally.

The duration of practice should be regulated according to your available time, though the longer the better. Don't set your aims too high in the beginning; only do as much practice as you can easily manage every day without fail. Fifteen minutes practice every day is better than one hour's practice on one day, none for three days and then again one hour's practice. Many people set themselves an unrealistic program which they do for the first few days, and then the enthusiasm slowly fades and eventually they don't practise at all. So be realistic in choosing the duration of your program, and once you have set it, stick to it regularly.

The program of asanas should be carefully chosen. The order of practising different

asanas is very important to gain maximum benefits. Certain asanas supplement each other, whereas others detract from each other. Therefore it is important to choose a systematic program. This will be discussed as the asanas are introduced.

If you feel physically or mentally tired before or during the program perform relaxation asanas such as shavasana and naukasana³. Don't use excessive force to attain the final positions of the asanas. Your muscles should be slowly encouraged to stretch over a period of time - not stretched and severely strained in one day. You are trying to develop mental control over the muscles and to do this one should try to will the muscles to relax and then they will automatically stretch.

Clothing should be as light as possible under climatic conditions, so that free movement is not impeded.

Breathing should be through the nose, not through the mouth. It should be as deep and rhythmical as possible.

A blanket or rug should be placed on the floor at the place of practice. Don't use a spongy mattress and don't practise on the bare floor.

Close your eyes as much as possible throughout the practice. This will help to intensify your awareness.

The less physical effort that is required the better. The aim is to perform asanas with as little tension or muscular effort as possible. Often we see practitioners grating their teeth while performing asanas, in the execution of the movement to and from the final pose and while in the final position one should check that the maximum number of muscles are relaxed. This applies particularly to beginners, for eventually as you gain control over the muscles this relaxation will occur naturally.

Don't hurry under any circumstances. If you lack time to complete your daily program, leave out a few asanas and do the others at a normal slow, relaxed pace.

Remember that although you should be relaxed you should not sleep or feel drowsy. You should be as wide awake as possible to gain maximum benefits. If you are sleepy, take a wash or a bath, preferably a cold one and then continue your practice.

Don't underestimate the importance of the movements to and from the final poses. They should be done slowly, smoothly, with control and in synchronization with the breath. If you feel mentally or physically tired after the program of asanas, it is a sure sign that you are doing something wrong - perhaps trying too hard or tensing the muscles too much, or tending to concentrate too hard. If you can't see the fault seek expert guidance. You should feel calmness and strength in both mind and body at the end of your practice, far more than when you started.

Don't try to stretch your muscles further than is comfortable. With persistent and regular practice the muscles will elongate, whether you are at present as stiff as a board or as supple as a piece of rubber. The mental attitude is very important in this respect. If you autosuggest to yourself that you want the muscles to stretch, then the mind will automatically take steps to prepare the body to attain what you want. Remember, it is the mind that is the controller.

There are no specific limitations on the practice of asanas with regard to age or sex. However, people who have specific illnesses should not do certain asanas. Full information on this will be given with the description of each asana. For example, a person who has high blood pressure should definitely not attempt inverted asanas, or people with a slipped disc should not try forward bending asanas. These are more obvious examples; there are many such contra-indications which will be fully discussed.

Don't practise asanas if you are ill with a cold or diarrhoea etc. At these times the body is directing its energy to specific areas to fight the illness; let it perform its duties unimpeded.

Proceed from the simpler asanas to the more difficult ones. That is why it is necessary to follow the order outlined in this book as it progressively leads from the simpler to the more advanced techniques. We have mentioned this point for we know of various people who have strained themselves by prematurely

attempting asanas that were too difficult for them.

Asanas are not competitive. If you perform your asanas in a group don't compare yourself with others. We all have differently shaped bodies and some people are able to stretch easier than others. But this is not indicative of how well a person is performing an asana, for one person may physically perform an asana perfectly, yet his awareness is jumping from here to there; while another person may not physically perform the asana very well but his awareness may be on the movements and the breath. In this case the latter is performing the asana much better than the former.

The importance of relaxing the muscles

In most systems of physical culture, gymnastics, etc., the muscles are brought into play during contraction and strengthened. During most asanas the emphasis is on stretching the muscles. The muscles cannot stretch themselves because their mode of action is through contraction. In asanas the muscles are stretched by assuming various body positions which will automatically apply an elongation to particular muscles. A muscle can be slowly and gradually stretched by practice, so that it can eventually extend well beyond its normal limitations. This elongation squeezes out stagnant blood and allows it to be replaced by pure oxygenated blood when the muscle resumes its normal shape.

To stretch the muscles it is important that they are fully relaxed. If your muscles are tense they will automatically resist any attempt made to stretch them. This relaxation of the muscles can be developed with practice as you systematically gain control over them.

Slow and controlled movements and co-ordination with breath

These are necessary to induce calmness in the body and mind. Quick and sudden movements use up excessive energy, whereas the object of asanas is to conserve energy. For this reason they are done slowly. Asanas also aim at slowing down the breathing rate to improve the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the lungs as well as to induce mental tranquillity. Muscular control is an essential feature and aim of asanas and is attained by slow movements, not by sudden jerks. The muscles

are to be stretched and this can only be done if they are relaxed; fast movements imply excessive muscular tension. During slow movements it is possible to relax the maximum number of muscles not needed for the movement.

Maintenance of final static poses

The final position is the most important part of the asana practice. During this time specific parts of the body are influenced. The body is held in such a way that certain muscles are stretched to the limit of present flexibility and certain organs are given the best possible squeeze or massage and extra blood is directed to or removed from particular regions. This period of immobility is the time when profound and beneficial changes are occurring in the body. With some asanas it is also a time when deep states of concentration can be reached if the final position is held for extended periods of time.

Correct, relaxed respiration is essential in the final static position in order to accentuate the influence of the asana on the body by increasing the massage of the internal organs and by stimulating the exchange of oxygen for carbon dioxide through the blood.

Awareness

We have already emphasized the importance of avoiding mental tension caused by forced concentration. You should be aware of your mental patterns and extraneous thoughts that occur while practising asanas, but at the same time you should try to be aware of the asana being performed. All other thoughts - a cup of tea, worries about business or whatever - will automatically evaporate. The result will be calmness and peace of mind.

What facet of the practice should one be aware of during the performance of an asana? This will be explained as we cover each asana. However, the following is a rough guide to the possibilities.

While learning the asana your attention should be on correct performance. You can also be aware of relaxing as many muscles as possible to make the asana easier to perform and more effective. You can be aware of the physical movement, or of the breath while assuming the final pose. In the final position you can be aware of your breath, mantra or

the parts of the body that the asana particularly influences.

Relaxation after completion of asanas

This is nearly as important as the asana itself. When one completely relaxes, the organs and muscles return to their normal shape. As such they are flooded with an influx of purified blood to replace the blood that has been squeezed out in performance of the asana. During this resting state the circulatory and respiratory systems also return to normal. This is necessary before one starts the next asana.

During this practice of relaxation one should try to relax the body and mind completely maintaining awareness of the body and the breath.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 3

³ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

Topic 1

Asanas: Practice

The following two asanas, although reasonably simple, are very beneficial for the whole body, particularly the back and abdomen. The nerves in the spinal cord, the vital link between the body and the brain, as well as the internal organs of digestion are stretched, massaged and revitalized.

Both of these asanas have been taught to us by animals, which perform similar body movements without having to think about them or train themselves as human beings do. They are in tune with nature and instinctively know what is best for their body.

SAITHALYASANA (ANIMAL RELAXATION POSE)

Most of us have seen various animals, particularly dogs and cats, sit on the floor, fold their rear legs under their body, stretch and tense their front limbs and then rest their heads between the front paws. In this position they are completely relaxed. This asana is so called because it imitates this action.



Technique

Place a blanket on the floor.

Sit on the blanket with the legs outstretched in front of the body. Separate the knees, moving the legs apart.

Bend the right leg and place the sole of the right foot against the inside of the left thigh, allowing the whole of the right leg to rest on the floor.

Carefully fold your left leg to the outside of the body so that the foot lies beside the left buttock.

Place your hands on your right ankle.

Relax your whole body.

Exhale.

Then as you inhale, slowly raise your arms upwards, keeping them together and straight until they are eventually vertical above the head at the end of inhalation.

Then exhale, twist the trunk slightly and bend forwards over the right knee.

Try to touch your forehead on the ground directly in front of the right knee.

At first this may be a little difficult, but with practice it becomes possible.

If you can't touch the floor with your forehead, merely bend forwards as far as possible.

Your hands should touch the floor in front of the body, with the arms kept straight, though preferably slightly bent and completely relaxed. Relax your whole body.

This is the final position.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Don't strain, but try to stay in the final position for as long as you can manage. Then as you inhale, raise the arms, head and trunk until your arms are vertical. Exhale and lower your arms.

Now adjust the body position so that the left sole presses against the right thigh, and the right leg is folded backwards.

Repeat the same procedure but now bending over the left knee.

Breathing, awareness and duration

The breathing should be as described in the technique, ensuring that it is synchronized with the body movements.

When you are fully familiar with the asana then close your eyes and become aware of the movement of the body and breath. In the final pose you should be aware of deep and slow breathing.

The duration in the final position should only be for as long as you are comfortable. With practice try to maintain the final pose for a minute or so on each side of the body.

providing this does not cause any excessive discomfort.

Benefits

This is a good asana to loosen up the legs and prepare them for meditative asanas.

Most people have very stiff spines, so stiff in fact that it is difficult to believe the spinal column is composed of thirty-one separate bones which allow suppleness in the back and neck. This asana helps to loosen up the spine and return it to its correct condition. In the final position the abdomen is compressed, which gives a valuable massage to the internal organs, especially those concerned with digestion. This massage squeezes out stagnant, impure blood and encourages it to flow back to the heart and lungs for oxygenation.

The deep breathing is most important for it accentuates the massage imparted to the abdominal organs.

MARJARI-ASANA (CAT STRETCH POSE)

Watch a cat closely and you will see that it periodically stretches its spine upwards and downwards. This asana imitates this action, and though it is very simple it is very useful in ensuring the best possible health of the practitioner. A cat yawns at the same time; you can do the same if you wish, but it is not a traditional part of the asana.

Technique

Kneel on the ground.

The knees and the feet may be separated slightly or kept together; either way is suitable for this practice.

Lean forwards and place both hands flat on the floor in front of the knees.

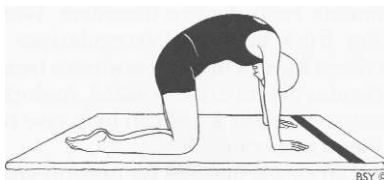
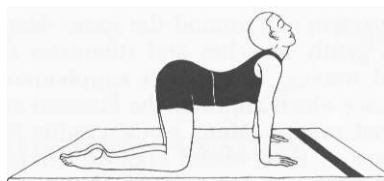
The hands should be positioned so that when your trunk is horizontal the arms are vertical; in other words the hands should be directly below the shoulders.

The thighs should be vertical.

Relax your whole body.

Arch your back upwards while exhaling so that it forms a hump.

Contract your abdomen to remove as much air as possible from your lungs. At the end of exhalation your head should be between your arms facing towards the thighs.



Then slowly depress your back and raise your head as you breathe in.

At the end of inhalation, the head should be facing upwards and the spine should be arched as much as possible in a concave curve (see illustration).

Expand your abdomen fully to fill the lungs with the maximum amount of air. Then raise your back upwards, while lowering the head and breathing out. Repeat the whole process again.

Practise as many rounds as time will permit.

Breathing and duration

Breathing should be as described, making sure that the abdomen is contracted as much as possible at the end of exhalation and expanded as much as possible at the end of the inhalation.

Try to perform the movement and breathing as slowly as possible, with full awareness. Aim to make the downward and upward movements have a duration of at least five seconds each.

This asana can be done for as long as you have time available. Ten full rounds is reasonable for general purposes. If you have any particular ailment, longer is prescribed.

Benefits

This asana supplements the previous asana (saithalyasana) in that it loosens up the spine. Those people with rigid spines and chronic back or neck ache are especially advised to do marjari-asana regularly.

The pelvic and abdominal regions are well massaged, with a beneficial influence on the internal organs. The organs of digestion, reproduction and elimination are innervated

by nerves in and around the spine. Marjari-asana gently stretches and stimulates these spinal nerves. This has a supplementary influence which improves the function of the internal organs. Many women suffer from ailments of their sexual organs. This asana has been found to be very useful in improving the health of these organs and helping to eliminate reproductive disorders. Women suffering from menstrual irregularities and leucorrhoea have achieved enormous benefits from regular practice of this asana. At the time of menstruation this asana can help give relief from menstrual cramps.

This is an excellent asana for post-pregnancy cases as it tightens the abdominal muscles and encourages the abdomen to resume its normal shape.

Asanas: Simple Meditative Asanas

In the previous lesson we described eight exercises to loosen up the body, particularly the legs, in preparation for meditative asanas and other types of asanas¹. In this topic we will explain two of the simplest sitting positions which can be used for various meditational, pranayama and kriya yoga practices to be described in this book.

Preparation for classical meditative asanas

The following two asanas are very useful in the earlier stages of practice. However, the best sitting positions are the classical meditative asanas. These are *padmasana* (lotus pose), *siddhasana* (accomplished pose for men) and *swastikasana* (auspicious pose)². Your aim should be eventually to sit in one of these classical asanas. Therefore, the exercises previously given for loosening up the legs should be continued so that the more advanced meditative asanas can be mastered in the future¹.

SUKHASANA (EASY POSE)

This is the easiest of the meditative asanas and even one should be able to sit in it. Although it may be used for meditational practices, it has one basic drawback: most of the weight of the body is supported by the small area of contact between the floor and the buttocks. After a period of time this area soon becomes a little painful. However, this can be overcome to a degree by using a cushion under the buttocks. The other meditative asanas have a larger area of contact between the floor and the body - the weight of the body is supported partly by the buttocks and also by the legs, which reduces aches and pains developing.

Technique

Place a folded blanket or rug on the floor. Sit with the legs facing forwards in front of the body.



Fold the left leg under the right thigh. Then place the right foot under the left thigh. Hold your head, neck and spine upright in a comfortable position.

Place your hands either on your knees or in your lap.

Close your eyes.

Relax your whole body.

The arms should be relaxed and not held straight.

The back should be upright and firm, but without tension.

Note: As soon as one is able to comfortably perform any other meditative asana, sukhasana should be discontinued.

VAJRASANA (THUNDERBOLT OR DIAMOND POSE)

Many people find this asana a little uncomfortable at first because it is a sitting position that few people ever use. At first the ankles and knees tend to ache, but with practice this asana will become most comfortable and almost a joy to sit in. Besides being an excellent meditative asana used by Muslims and Japanese Buddhists, it is the starting pose for a large number of other asanas.

The Sanskrit word *vajra* means 'thunderbolt'. The psychic *vajra nadi* which is greatly affected by this pose, is an important energy pathway which carries nervous impulses of the genito-urinary system from the brain. It is the

same word that has given the name Vajrayana to a form of Tantric Buddhism which utilizes sexual union as part of its spiritual sadhana. The word has various other meanings all connected with the same subject. As such vajrasana is said to enable the practitioner to gain control over the sexual functions and direct the energy towards expanding consciousness.



Technique

Place a folded blanket on the floor. Kneel on the blanket with your knees together or slightly apart. Position the feet so the big toes touch each other.

Rest your arms beside the body.

Bring the buttocks downwards onto the heels at the same time taking support with the hands on the floor.

Try to sit on your heels.

If you feel pain or discomfort in the region of your ankles and knees, push your body upwards by transferring the weight to the arms, if you are able, let the weight of your trunk be supported on your feet without any support of the arms.

Hold your head upright and the neck and back in one straight line, but without excessive backward arching of the spine.

Place your hands on top of your legs near the knees. Relax the arms and the whole body. This is the final pose.

Advice for beginners

Beginners may find it difficult to sit on their feet without the support of the arms. A good method for loosening up the legs is to support your body weight with your arms and then slowly lower your buttocks towards the feet. Bear the discomfort for a second or so and then take support of your arms again to release the tension. Then again lower your buttocks and repeat the procedure. With practice you will find that the tension disappears and eventually you will be able to sit on the feet for

longer periods without the slightest difficulty. Remember the loosening up exercises will also help you very much to make your legs more supple and allow you to sit in vajrasana.¹

Beginners who find that their legs and feet ache after a very short time in this position should return to the kneeling position and then sit on the floor with the legs outstretched. Bend one leg, hold the ankle and vigorously shake the foot until all signs of stiffness have disappeared. Repeat with the other leg. Then again sit in vajrasana.

Benefits

Vajrasana is one of the few asanas which can be performed after taking meals, as asanas in general are strictly contraindicated after food. We actually recommend that vajrasana be practised for five or ten minutes after meals. The reason is simple: vajrasana is a very relaxing position, conducive to a calm mind and body and it stimulates the digestive processes working in the stomach.

As we have already explained, vajrasana is an excellent meditative asana and in fact is the only practical meditative asana for people who suffer from sciatica or sacral infections.

Vajrasana has one notable advantage over sukhasana: one tends to automatically hold the spine straight while doing vajrasana, whereas in sukhasana there is more of a tendency to slump forwards. For this reason vajrasana is far superior to sukhasana once it is mastered.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Pranayama: Samaveta Pranayama

Within us there are various forms of energy which permeate and surround our bodies. These are closely connected with our health, thinking and the way we react to the external world. Some of these energies are well known: nervous energy, chemical energy and so on. Yet there are some which are not normally perceived in the everyday life of most people. It is these subtle forms as well as the grosser forms of energy that the practices of pranayama seek to harmonize and manipulate. The method of gaining mastery over these energies (pranas) is an indirect one, control and manipulation of respiration, though the control of energy that we derive from oxygen during breathing is direct.

This subject of prana and pranayama will be fully discussed in the next lesson¹. In this topic we will describe one of the simplest practices of pranayama called samaveta pranayama.

The Sanskrit word *samaveta* means 'together'. Therefore samaveta pranayama is a practice where one breathes through both the nostrils. This might seem to be an obvious and inconsequential statement, but the practice is so named to distinguish it from other techniques of pranayama where the flow of air is directed in one nostril by physically or mentally preventing the flow in the other nostril.

SAMAVETA PRANAYAMA

Sit in a comfortable position, preferably in one of the meditative asanas². If at this stage you find these meditative asanas uncomfortable you can sit in a chair or against a wall with the feet outstretched. The essential thing is that the spine remains erect. If necessary, wrap a blanket around you if the atmosphere is cold. Close the eyes.

Start to practise yogic breathing³.

Try to make the movement of the abdomen and the chest as rhythmical as possible, so that as you inhale there is a wavelike motion from

the abdomen to the chest and as you exhale there is a wavelike motion from the chest to the abdomen. Don't strain but try to breathe as deeply as possible, expelling and inhaling the maximum amount of air.

Keep your eyes closed throughout the practice. Continue in this way for a few minutes.

Now you will begin the practice of samaveta pranayama. At the end of inhalation, hold the breath for a second or so, without straining. Then breathe out. Your breathing should be as slow as is comfortable.

Exhale as much air as possible and then inhale. Again hold the breath for a short time and then exhale. Continue in this way for as long as you have time.

Duration of retention

Over a period of weeks slowly increase the time of breath retention from a second or so to a maximum of ten seconds. Do not hold the breath for longer than is comfortable. This is important. With practice the time of breath retention will increase automatically.

Benefits

This is an excellent practice in preparing the lungs for more advanced practices of pranayama. At the time of retention the amount of oxygen taken up by the blood and the amount of carbon dioxide which is discharged by the blood into the lungs is increased. When people breathe quickly and shallowly the exchange between the circulating blood and the lungs is very small. The increased exchange during samaveta pranayama helps to revitalize the body and improve the health.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3

² Topic 5 of this lesson for the first two simplest positions. For details on classical meditative asanas refer to Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2.

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 4

Topic 1

The Root Cause of Tension

In this and the previous lesson we have outlined simple but effective methods of inducing temporary states of relaxation¹. Remember, these short-term relaxation practices are essential in order to rest and revitalize the entire body and mind. During these periods of calmness and clear-mindedness we are able to take a more realistic look at life. When we are relaxed we are able to laugh at situations that only half an hour before made our blood boil; we realize that our neighbour, who only a short time before had made us extremely angry, is not such a bad person after all. When we become relaxed we can see the same situations in a new light. And this more understanding approach helps to bring about positive changes in our life. We clearly see the problems that cause us disruption and work out new ways of coming to terms with our environment. (This process occurs subconsciously providing we are conscious of the factors involved.) This helps to give us a more relaxed and understanding attitude towards life and other people. For this reason, even a few minutes conscious relaxation can help us to remould our life pattern along more effective and harmonious directions.

But this only touches the surface of the problem of tension and the inability to relax. The root cause lies in the mind. The cause lies with conflicts and fears which are embedded in the subconscious mind and whose nature we are not aware of. All we feel is the tension and emotional upsets that they cause to manifest in our lives. We experience the results, often without knowing the source of the problem. The unhappiness and tension is a certainty, but the reason is an uncertainty.

No matter what people say there is only one method of eliminating these subconscious impressions (in Sanskrit they are called *samskaras*) which make life a miserable affair for much of the time. The method is to know the mind. We have to explore our own mind

and come face to face with these subconscious mental impressions. This requires both time and effort. Most people cannot even consider exploring and knowing their own mind because first this requires physical and mental relaxation. This is necessary so that we can disentangle our awareness from the outer environment and petty problems and direct it inwards. And most people have so many problems that their awareness is completely involved in worries and outside distractions.

So it is a vicious circle: one has so many mental tensions and stresses making it impossible to explore the mind in order to remove the deeper problems which are causing many of the disturbances that prevent one exploring the mind in the first place. Is there a way out of this dilemma? Yes, there is and this is the subject we will discuss here.

It is a method that at first seems like a moralistic code or indoctrination. But it is only a means to an end. It is a means to bring about a little more permanent relaxation in a person's life, so that he can eventually start to explore the inner realm of the mind and remove the real source of tension. In a way, it is a method of giving a firm foundation for the meditative practices which we will introduce you to in this book.

It is such a very simple method, at least to explain, that many people tend to miss its significance. Of course to put it into practice is a little more difficult. It is a method where you try to consciously invalidate negative tension-creating thoughts with thoughts that are conducive to a relaxed and harmonious way of life. Let us take an example to illustrate more clearly. Try to imagine that you have been brought up to believe that all Eskimos are violent and ruthless. Because of this, even time you see an Eskimo, or a picture of an Eskimo, you will suffer some kind of emotional shock, perhaps not a great one, but there will be some kind of tension. If you can look at this

situation a little more critically however, and consciously start to develop the idea that he is a human being, not much different to yourself, then you will start to reduce the mental tension that arises every time you see an Eskimo. This of course is only an example and probably not a good one, for the problems that generally cause us disturbances are more personal in nature. Now this method will not remove the root conflict regarding Eskimos - this lies in the subconscious. But this consciously developed attitude will help you to relax more and eventually enable you to explore your mind and eventually remove the basic problem. This method needs to be applied consciously in all aspects of life. Of course it is only intellectualization and merely scratches the surface, but it is a valuable aid in allowing you to relax more and thereby lead you towards eliminating the deep subconscious impressions in the future. It is a tool, nothing more.

It is a method that has been preached by all the religions throughout the ages. When Christ, Buddha, Mohammed and various other religious leaders urged people to change their attitude to others, they showed deep insight into the basis of a happy, tension free life, the stepping stone to higher consciousness. When Christ said: "Love thy neighbour as thyself", it was not meant in a moralistic sense or only to bring about social harmony. This attitude is helpful in reducing mental tension and turmoil and so aiding our lives both mentally and spiritually. It is very practical advice. Of course on a higher level - love thy neighbour as thyself - is the state of realization that each person must come to when he has cleared out the mind and realized the unity of existence. But now we are concerned with its utilization at a lower level. The various injunctions of religions were aimed at bringing about mental relaxation and clear mindedness so that the individual would be able to become more aware and open to the infinite possibilities of life and consciousness. Relaxation is the door to health, happiness and higher consciousness.

Our mental computer

Let us discuss some aspects of the brain which are very much concerned with how we relate to our surroundings and other people, and whether we habitually become tense or relaxed. Your head is the home of the most incredible

computer in existence. It is a biocomputer of complexity beyond even our wildest dreams. It consists of an estimated ten to thirteen billion brain cells, known as neurons, and of an uncountable number of interconnections between these cells. The work of this computer is to receive, store, compare, analyze and direct all the data that we receive from the body and its surroundings via the sense organs of the ears, skin, eyes, nose, etc.

The brain has a memory of past experiences, of advice given to us by our parents, our teachers, our friends, and everyone and everything we have been in contact with and interacted with till the present day. These experiences determine how we react to different life situations. At any given moment data from the internal and external environment is sent via nerve impulses to the brain. A particular part of the brain called the limbic system compares this incoming information with previous experiences stored in the memory of the cerebral cortex. In the light of these memories, we respond to the data in a fixed, programmed manner. In other words, the response of our mind and body to life situations is determined by previous mental conditioning.

If the situations we encounter in life don't contradict our previous experiences then we suffer no emotional or mental tension. If, however, the incoming data from the surroundings does not fit the pattern of our memories then the limbic system starts to create tension. It is designed to do this so unfamiliar and possibly dangerous situations do not catch us unaware. We are programmed to become tense so that we are prepared for abnormal situations. It is a protective measure. Yet most of us are so badly conditioned that we respond to almost all of life situations as though they are a threat to our survival. We continually feel hatred, fear, anger and so on. We exist in a state of physical and mental tension.

Yet this over-emotional response to life situations is not necessary for twenty four hours a day. It is only necessary when we are faced with a real emergency. We need to change our mental programs, so that unfamiliar data from the environment does not automatically bring the limbic system into action. In this way we can begin to relax and enjoy life more.

Many over-reactions in life are due to subconscious memories carried over from

childhood: fear of strangers, of the dark, of insects, dislike of the opposite sex or of people from another country. These are part of mental conditioning and cause the limbic system to make us tense whenever we meet life situations that don't reinforce our mental conceptions. For example, if we have a fear of the dark and suddenly the brightly lit room we are sitting in is plunged into darkness, the reaction of fear in this circumstance is not necessary; it is a result of previous experiences stored in our memory. This is just an example, although similar reactions occur throughout our lives. One of the biggest complexes that modern man has is the fear of failure; the desire to be successful. Every person feels that he must be a great success or he will lose the respect of his friends, family and himself. This fear is only a programmed response; perhaps our parents and teachers continually indoctrinated us that the only worthwhile people in the world were those who 'made it'. As a result we are continually worried about failing; every situation we meet in life, every person we meet is a challenge, for they may show us up as failures. And so whatever we do in life is treated as an emergency, and we remain perpetually tense. It is only when we mix with close friends, who we know will never consider us as unsuccessful that we actually relax. This is a good example of how our mental programming governs our life and makes us unable to free ourselves and relax. Again this type of programming is not necessary - it exists only because of our faulty way of thinking and education.

The physiological ego

Man's brain is a continual hive of activity, although he is never aware of this, except for the tiny portion which reaches his conscious perception. All the sensory data is being processed in the subconscious realms of the mind. Data is being continuously received from all parts of the body and from the external environment via the sense organs and either acted upon, stored or ignored. Unawareness of all this activity is essential, for it allows one's consciousness freedom to deliberate on a limited field of interest. If a person was aware of all this subconscious activity he would be inundated and overpowered by the continual influx of millions of bits of information. What we are interested in is what decides which

particular information reaches conscious perception.

It is scientific research during the last few years that has thrown some light on this question. It has been found that a part of the brain called the reticular activating system, situated at the top of the spinal cord, performs this function. This system acts like a sluice gate allowing only a small percentage of the incoming data to the brain to reach conscious perception. How does it decide what should reach man's conscious attention and what should not? It allows information to arise to our consciousness only if the data reinforces or fits in with the pattern of mental conditioning, or if the incoming information is particularly urgent. So perception is dependent on what a person's mental state will allow him to perceive. Other incoming data which doesn't fit in the mental program remains in the subconscious realms of the mind and so a person is unaware of it. We perceive the world around us in accordance with the dictates of our present mental apparatus. For example, if you meet someone you dislike, then the information which tends to reach your awareness is that which confirms and reinforces your conditioned prejudices. If you like a person, then you tend to become aware of that information which confirms the friendship. We generally see the good points of our friends and the worst points of our enemies. Of course, if incoming sensory impulses tell us something different and are very powerful inputs, then this can overcome the programming. For example, sometimes we see bad features in our friends and good features in our enemies.

So you can see that our perception of the world depends very much on our prejudices. This is generally called the ego, especially in psychology; it is that which creates all the distinctive features of your 'self'. We are at the mercy of our programming. If mental programs have been written to see hatred around us, then we will interpret all phenomena in this light. If our program says that all people in general are friendly, then we interpret all actions by others as being friendly in nature.

Tension: the outcome of mental programming

Man's problem is that the outside world rarely reinforces the pattern of most of his mental conditioning. The result is that the limbic

system is continually creating mental and emotional stress responses. We remain unable to relax. Tension becomes a normal part of life. It is not the brain that is faulty; it is the narrow limitations of our mental program put into the brain that is the cause of the problem. The program is unsuitable for our environmental situation.

Our attitude towards life depends on our mind; an unsuitable, narrow, unrealistic, incompatible mental state leads to continual conflict with our surroundings and to unhappiness and stress as a consequence. An expansive, realistic mental program leads to harmonious interaction and good relationships with the environment and with other people, which must lead to happiness and relaxation. Our lives can either be an expression of joy or an expression of discontent; it depends on the content of the mind. Are we then completely at the mercy of our mind? Yes, we are, but at the same time we have the ability to throw out the contents of the mind that cause so much havoc in our lives. We can change our mental program or at least modify it by removing all the dross or unwanted parts. All that is required is the desire to reorientate our life along new pathways and to translate this desire into personal effort.

The eventual method is by exploring the mind, facing the inner contents and clearing out the rubbish. But before we can do this effectively we need to bring a measure of relaxation into our lives to enable us to relax sufficiently in the first place to direct our awareness inwards. The method to bring about an initial degree of relaxation is by consciously trying to rewrite our existing program.

REPROGRAMMING THE MIND

This is definitely possible, at least to a degree. The content of our mind is due to our environmental interactions since birth. Our mental programming has been written in response to the situations we have faced in life. It is continually being updated and modified in the light of new experiences. In this way it is possible to influence the direction in which our mind is being programmed by consciously developing attitudes such as the ones suggested at the end of this topic. Of course, we can never overcome deep-seated

mental impressions. These can only be removed or at least neutralized by the deeper exploration of our mind through meditational techniques. But the process of consciously developing attitudes to life is a positive step towards cleaning the whole mind, gaining relaxation and starting to live life joyously. The choice is ours: we can either take steps to make this world a veritable heaven on earth or we can remain as we are.

Codes for mental reprogramming

The codes we have formulated are not intended to be moralistic. They are a means to an end. To reiterate, they are suggestions by which you can start to consciously alter your attitude towards life's situations. They are intended to relax you sufficiently, so that you can eventually delve into your mind through meditational practices and thereby root out the deeper negative aspects of your mental nature.

These codes are not supposed to change your lifestyle, and we don't advise you to force them on yourself at all times. Only remember them as you go about your daily routine and their presence will help you from within, from your subconscious 'attitude centres'.

Code 1

Make the effort to begin to accept other people fully. Try not to see them merely as objects to be used for your own gratification. Try to accept others as also acting in accordance with their mental conditioning. What you see in them is only an external manifestation of their mental program. In this way they are no different from yourself, except their program may be a little different. You are now aware of your dependence on your mental conditioning; perhaps they don't realize it yet. If you can accept others more they in turn will start to accept you. Laugh at yourself, at your behaviour and at your antics.

Code 2

Accept yourself. Know that your actions are the result of your mental makeup. For this reason don't worry about your deficiencies and problems. Accept your limitations. But at the same time feel the need to clean the mind of its conflicts. It is our inability to accept ourselves that causes so much anguish in life.

Code 3

Watch your habituated reactions to people around you and to your environment. Watch how your attachment to the external can result in so much discontentment. Try to reduce your need to find happiness in outside things. This does not mean that you should not follow external attractions for this would result in suppression, which causes more harm than good. It means that you should carry on your life as it is now, but if you don't get what you want then accept it with a shrug of the shoulders, with a sense of detachment.

Code 4

Find out your greatest needs, attachments, desires, etc. Be as critical as you can. A good method of discovering your attachments is to trace the cause of your present anger or your present unhappiness back to its source and there you will find the emotional and mental attitude that caused the disturbance. Particularly notice how you react with people whom you distinctively dislike or don't get on with. These persons will help you to recognize and to eventually remove your emotional hangups. View the whole world and everyone in it as being your teacher.

Code 5

Try to live in the now. Don't live in the past by worrying about what has already happened or by reliving pleasurable past experiences. Don't anticipate the future. **Plans** can be made, but see the planning as being part of the now, not as really being for the future. Try to live each moment, each present moment as fully as possible by giving your attention to the now. In this way you will start to live life to the fullest. When you do anything, from taking a bath to eating food, or sweeping the floor to earning your living, try not to think of when it will be finished. Enjoy every action that you do at the time that you do it. Try to enjoy the fact that you exist and that an expression of your existence is in your every action.

Code 6

Don't identify yourself completely with your actions, your body or your mind. Though you are trying to change your mind, it is only part of you. It is not your consciousness - the witness that sees all events that occur in your

life. Most of us identify ourselves completely with our minds and bodies. We ignore the consciousness that lies behind everything we do. As we purify our mind and body we will begin to see and identify ourselves with this underlying consciousness.

Code 7

Try to be more open towards other people. Express your true feelings as much as possible. When we try to be what we are not, when we try to impress people and when we hide our inner feelings from others, we immediately experience mental tension and alienation. This tends to intensify our feelings of 'me against the world'. Remember also that even the most insensitive person can detect to a degree if you are trying to hide something, or if you have a guilty secret, for he might also be hiding or have hidden the same type of guilty secret.

Code 8

Remember that everyone has the potential to attain higher levels of awareness. A man's present attitude towards his environment or toward you is caused by mental programming. His present mode of living is temporary" and will change and become more harmonious if and when he starts to understand himself and his mind. All of us have unrealized potential just waiting to be tapped. Try to see this potential in all people, no matter how difficult it may be.

Code 9

Don't avoid difficult situations. Normally we shape our lives so that we interact with people we dislike as little as possible. We continually try to associate ourselves with people and situations which tune in with our emotional programming. As such we continue to live in a way that reinforces and satisfies our individual prejudices. Treat difficult situations and enemies as the greatest teachers. It is they who can show us most clearly the way in which our mental program works. It is our enemies who bring to the surface our emotional conflicts and prejudices. Very few of us are really aware of programming and conditioning. When we recognize it then we can start to deal with it.

Code 10

Try to put yourself in other people's shoes. Instead of blindly reacting in ways that you are programmed, try to see the other person's point of view. For example, if a person leaves the door open you may become angry. Instead of becoming angry ask yourself why he left the door open. Perhaps he was in a hurry. Perhaps he was thinking of some other business. Perhaps it is part of his mental programming to leave doors open; maybe he was brought up in a house that did not have doors. Also it is your programming to become angry when someone leaves the door open. Remember your reaction is purely automatic. Try to change your response so that doors that are left open don't cause emotional upsets. Apply this to other situations in your life.

Notes

¹ Shavasana, Part 1 - Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5
Shavasana, Part 2 - Topic 8 of this lesson.

Topic 1

Relaxation: Shavasana (Part 2)

In the previous lesson we explained the importance of regularly relaxing the mind and body and how relaxation techniques bring about the removal of physical and mental tension¹. We explained the importance of tensing the whole body just prior to relaxing by utilizing naukasana, as well as the first part of shavasana.

SHAVASANA - PART 2

The two parts of shavasana comprise a whole and as such the second part should be practised immediately after the first part without a break.

Technique

Your body should be in the supine position which you have already assumed for part 1. Make sure that the eyes are closed and consciously release the eye muscles. The mouth should be closed.

The teeth should not be clenched but slightly separated.

Don't press the lips together, but let them relax.

If necessary, yawn to remove facial tension.

Feel that your head is very heavy.

Now feel heaviness in the whole body. Imagine that your whole body is so heavy that it is sinking into the floor. Tell yourself that if you wanted to raise your body now you would find it impossible, because your muscles are completely limp.

Feel gravity acting on every part of your body and pulling it towards the ground.

Now watch the space or blankness in front of the closed eyes.

Imagine that this space surrounds your whole body. Your body is in the middle of that space. Try to imagine that your body is slowly sinking in that space, slowly, slowly sinking like a leaf falling from a tree. Feel your body sinking, sinking, sinking into the depths of that infinite space.

Do this for a minute or two or longer if you have time.

If thoughts arise, let them arise.

But continue to feel the body sinking.

Now become aware of your breath. Don't change the rhythm of the breath; only become aware of the flow in and out of your nostrils. When you breathe in, know that you are breathing in.

When you breathe out, be fully aware that you are breathing out.

Try to feel that it is the first time you have ever breathed; you are experiencing breath for the first time in your life.

As you breathe in, feel the health-giving oxygen entering your body, nourishing all the cells and giving you perfect health.

As you breathe out feel all the poisons leaving your body.

All the tensions, stresses, problems, etc. are flowing out of you via the exhaled breath.

Feel all anxieties leaving you with every breath.

Try to maintain awareness only of the breath, but if other thoughts arise, don't worry.

Merely carry on with your practice. Continue in this way for as long as you have time available.

At the end of the practice stretch your hands, your arms, stretch your feet and legs, become aware of the surroundings and slowly open your eyes.

If you have carried out the instructions without sleeping and with alertness, but without tension, then you should feel wonderfully refreshed.

Sleep

The biggest problem is sleep, unless of course you practise shavasana specifically to remove insomnia. It is the habit of most of us to sleep whenever we achieve a reasonable degree of relaxation. We seem to associate relaxation with sleep and tension with wakefulness. Yet the aim of shavasana is

to gain a high state of relaxation while being fully awake.

If we fall asleep halfway through shavasana we lose much of the benefits, because during sleep the mind again manifests its usual patterns of worry. By remaining awake and directing awareness to the different parts of the body and the breath in the way described, our awareness is coaxed away from its entanglement with obsessive mental anxieties. So try to stay awake, even though it is very easy to just drop off to sleep.

Awareness

Throughout the practice one should try to be aware of all the processes which we have described in shavasana. However, it is very easy to think of other thoughts and become distracted from the practice in hand. You should not suppress thoughts if they arise. Let them occur, be aware of them but simultaneously continue on with shavasana.

Benefits

People who suffer from high blood pressure, neurasthenia, diabetes or any other ailment that is directly (more directly than other ailments, that is) related to excessive stress are particularly advised to practise shavasana a few times every day.

Instructions

During yoga classes the teacher gives all the necessary instructions and the practitioner merely listens and carries them out. It is far easier to gain benefits under these circumstances. However, when you practise by yourself you should develop the idea that you are the instructor. Instead of the instructor being in the form of another person, he is now in your head. Mentally repeat the instructions to yourself and then enact them. In this way you are more likely to maintain awareness throughout the practice.

Summary of the steps of shavasana

Shavasana is a systematic technique which progressively relaxes the body and mind. Therefore the order of practice is important so that you become more and more relaxed as you work through the technique. The following is a list of the basic steps:

1. Adjustment of body position on the floor

2. Experience of contact of body with the floor
3. Feeling of heaviness and limpness of different parts of the body
4. Feeling of sinking in the space in front of the closed eyes
5. Breath awareness. If you change the details of this technique to suit personal circumstances and preferences, try to maintain this basic order of steps.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

The following recommended programs are intended as a progression from Lesson 1. The student should use his discretion in omitting the least necessary practices and adding the most necessary practices to suit the time he has available. For example, if your legs are still very stiff you should continue to practise the leg loosening exercises previously described¹, as well as doing as many as possible of the practices outlined in this second lesson.

We have not included the practices of danta dhauti, neti and eye exercises in the programs because these can become part of your daily wash and bath routines. However, we recommend that they can be practised in the program chart given on page 68.

Note The best time to practise is in the morning. However, any other time is also

suitable providing it is not after a meal. try to practise the techniques that you think you most need in any other time that you have available.

Sukhasana and vajrasana have not been included in the practice programs. We suggest you remember to practise them in your spare time. Sitting in vajrasana for a few minutes after meals is especially beneficial as it aids the process of digestion.

Whenever you feel fatigued or tense during the day, practise naukasana and/or shavasana to relax the mind and body. Make the effort to practise your program regularly every day. This is sometimes difficult but brings the best results.

Practice	Regularity
Danta Moola Dhauti	Preferably after each meal. If not, at least once daily
Jihva Moola Dhauti	Once daily in the morning
Kama Dhauti	Once a week
Eye exercises	As necessary
Jala Neti	As necessary, but at least once every week

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 hour		
Goolf Ghoornan	10 each way	2
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Utthanasana	10 rounds	3
Kawa Chalasana	–	3
Chakki Chalanasana	10 each way	3
Gatyatmak Meru Vakrasana	20 times	3
Greeva Sanchalanasana	–	3
Saithalvasana	–	5
Marjari-asana	25	5
Naukasana	3 rounds	4
Shavasana	full form	10
Breathing	–	10
		60
Program 2: duration 1/2 hour		
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Kawa Chalasana	–	2
Gatyatmak Meru Vakrasana	20 times	3
Greeva Sanchalanasana	–	4
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
Saithalvasana	–	3
Marjari-asana	15	3
Samaveta Pranayama	–	7
Practise Shavasana when you have time or before sleeping		30
Program 3: duration 1/4 hour		
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Saithalvasana	–	3
Marjari-asana	10	2
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
Samaveta Pranayama (in Sukhasana or Vajrasana)	–	5
		15

Notes

¹ Book 1, Lesson 1, Topic 3

