

Lesson 9

Once upon a time there lived a king who had a most beautiful but rampantly wild horse. The beast could not be tamed. The king decreed that he would handsomely reward anyone who could subdue his stallion. Prompted by thoughts of wealth, many people tried. Each man matched and pitted all his strength against the horse, but none was strong enough to overcome the animal by mere force. Even the mightiest were thrown off or injured. Tired and frustrated, the contestants withdrew.

Some time passed until one day the king saw the horse meekly obeying a newcomer's instructions. The king was amazed, and demanded to know how this man had succeeded where so many others had failed. The horse tamer replied: "Instead of fighting your stallion, I let him run freely to his heart's content, following his own impulses. Eventually he became fatigued and submissive. It was then no problem to befriend your horse and gain command."

It is the same with the mind. If we fight and wrestle with the mind, we will never achieve mastery over it. The method to adopt is similar to the wise horse tamer - let the mind follow its impulses and tendencies without restriction until it becomes ready and willing to accept your authority. Give the mind free rein. Don't suppress it, merely watch and get to know it.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Disorders of Digestion

Digestive ailments are extremely common throughout the world. There are very few of us who have not suffered from a stomach or abdominal problem at least once in our lives. Yoga has much to offer in preventing or removing these types of ailments. Therefore this entire topic is devoted to the most common digestive ailments and how one can gain relief through yoga practices.

Many writers insist that the digestive system is the source of nearly all other diseases. Their reasoning is that many of the diseases and minor ailments which inflict our body are caused by autopoisoning. In other words, toxins enter the body via the digestive system from bad or dirty food or because of the build-up of waste products in the bowels which are reabsorbed into the bloodstream. Actually, we don't want to delve too deeply into this subject at this stage, but we would like to point out that in our opinion it is the mind that has the largest part to play in all types of diseases. One should remember, however, that the mind and body are intimately related, so that mistreatment of one will automatically lead to repercussions on the other. That is, if one has mental conflicts then these will reflect in one way or another within the body, possibly in the digestive system. Or to put the same idea in other words: mental problems, whether small or large, tend to weaken the body; under these circumstances the body loses its natural resistance to infection, and disease can result. On the other hand, it is possible to quote various instances where disease definitely does originate from the digestive system. For example, if one accidentally eats contaminated food then it is very difficult to assign the cause to the mind. The cause clearly lies in poisoning of the digestive system. At the same time, however, it must be remembered that the digestive system would be less vulnerable to infection if it is in the best possible health. Mental conflicts detract from this. Of course

there is a limit to this resistance. If you ate half a kilogram of cyanide it is highly unlikely that you would survive even if you were totally without mental problems. This dispute has to be approached sensibly without dogmatic assertion to support either view. The mind-body complex is an integrated unit. Each affects the other. Therefore all diseases are caused by various factors which can originate within the mind or the body. It is the same with digestive ailments - they can be caused by both mental and physical reasons though more likely a combination will be nearest the truth.

Yoga can offer much in the way of removing and preventing digestive disorders. There are many yogic techniques that clean out the digestive system, such as *kunjal kriya*¹, and there are others which will be discussed later in the book². Many digestive ailments, such as ulcers and constipation, are caused mainly by nervous tension or worries. Yoga practices in general aim at calming the mind and removing the conflict. In this way, many of these types of ailments fade away through the practice of yoga. Let us briefly discuss the most common digestive ailments and how yoga can help to remove them.

Constipation

This abnormal functioning of the bowels can manifest in three distinct ways:

1. The defecation may occur with insufficient frequency
2. Stool may be insufficient in quantity
3. Stool may be abnormally hard and dry.

Any of these definitions could be classified as constipation. However, we must emphasize that each person is different, so that one healthy person empties his bowels after each meal while another will do so once a day. There are also some people who defecate only once a week yet are considered healthy.

It is popularly believed that one must have a good motion every day or be overwhelmed by

dire consequences. This is totally incorrect and has caused more constipation in itself by making people worry without reason. If you are constipated then you will know it, for the symptoms will clearly manifest; that is, mental depression, loss of appetite, dull headache, possibly nausea, foul smelling breath, thickly coated tongue and a general feeling of heaviness and discomfort in the abdomen.

Much has been written about the constipated artist who is unable to create and the constipated scientist who is unable to think. We quote the following from the book, *A Mencken Chrestomathy* by H. L. Mencken: "There has never lived a poet in the whole history of the world, ancient or modern, near or far, who ever managed to write great poetry, or even passably fair and decent poetry, at a time when he was suffering from stenosis (restriction) at any point along the thirty odd foot, via dolorosa, running from the pylorus to the sigmoid flexure (near rectum)... He is stumped and helpless. The more he tries, the more vividly he will be conscious of his impotence. Sweat will stand out in beads upon his brow; he will fish patiently for the elusive thought; he will try coaxing and subterfuge; he will retire to his ivory tower; he will tempt the invisible powers with black coffee, tea and alcohol and the alkaloids - but he will not write his poem or iron out his syllogism, or find his way into . . . Striving in the face of such an interior obstacle is the most cruel of enterprises - a business more nerve-wracking and exhausting than reading a newspaper or watching a bad play."

While one is constipated, it is so tempting to strain the bowels, which can easily lead to haemorrhoids, hernia, prolapse of the rectum and a number of other undesirable yet common ailments. So if you are constipated, be careful that you do not overstrain.

There are two types of constipation - colic and dyschezic. Colic constipation is caused by delay in the movement of the faeces to the rectum. This is often the result of a diet that contains little or no indigestible residue. In other words, it is necessary to eat food that contains a sufficient amount of roughage or material which the digestive system is unable to digest. It is this waste product that partly stimulates movement within the large intestine. Without this, the relevant muscles become lazy.

Other intestinal ailments and pain can also curtail the normal muscular movements (peristalsis) of the intestines. Another common cause of colic constipation is obstruction within the large intestine, which slows down the rate of movement of the faeces. This is often caused by masses of hard, dry faeces. There are various yogic practices which are of great help in this type of complaint. The most important ones are shankhaprakshalana² and basti³.

The second type of constipation, namely dyschezic, is caused by difficulty or inability to defecate completely. In other words, the rectum is always filled with faeces even immediately after defecation. This is caused either by insufficient functioning of the defecation reflex and muscles or by an obstruction in the region of the rectum. This obstruction is often a foreign object; in fact such strange things as spoons and forks and cigarette lighters have been found to be the cause of this form of constipation.

Probably the most common cause of inefficient defecation is an habitual tendency to ignore the natural urge to go to the toilet, which may be caused by lack of time or privacy and by unpleasant surroundings. Under these circumstances one should make efforts to change their habits or environment if possible. There are many other causes of constipation, but the ones we have mentioned are the most frequent.

Constipation is aggravated by fear of its consequences. Also some people if they fail to defecate strictly according to their normal routine immediately start to take steps to remedy what they think is a serious state of constipation. Both these situations encourage the excessive use of laxatives. Though the use of laxatives may be necessary they should be avoided as much as possible. Laxatives in general tend to violently empty the bowels and in the long run detract from its natural functioning. Try to use mild laxatives in preference to more drastic types, if you must use laxatives at all.

If you are or have been an habitual user of laxatives and you suddenly stop, don't expect to have the same movement that you obtained through the use of laxatives. You must almost expect no bowel movement for a few days since the bowels are totally empty; don't immediately assume that you are once more

constipated. There will be a normal movement only when the bowels are sufficiently filled.

In conclusion we can say that constipation can arise because of various factors. The most common are incorrect diet, insufficient exercise, mental and emotional upsets, inconsistent toilet habits, weak abdominal muscles and consumption of too many laxatives. Here are some suggestions which may help you prevent or remove constipation.

- Don't listen to too many so-called experts. They tend to create more problems than cures, by assuming that any slight inconsistency in your toilet habits is the sign of impending doom - the onset of chronic constipation. Many people who previously did not suffer from constipation eventually do so because they are persuaded or worried into it.
- The volume of stool and the frequency of defecation can be regulated in a more normal manner by adding cereal bran and vegetables to the diet. These foods contain cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin which stimulate intestinal movement. Furthermore, cellulose and hemicellulose are partly digested by bacteria in the colon with the formation of fatty acids. These act as natural laxatives. Prune juice is useful for it contains the natural laxative diphenylisatin.
- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Reduce your dependence on commercial laxatives as much as possible.
- Try to establish a regular bowel habit at a suitable time during the day. In the morning before breakfast is to be preferred, for this is the time when you are most likely to be relaxed physically, emotionally and mentally.
- Practise asanas every morning to help in emptying out the bowels. Many asanas are useful for constipation but the following are particularly recommended: *supta pawanmuktasana*, *utthanpadasana*, *kawachalasana*, *surya namaskara*, *bhujangasana*, *marjariasana* and *shalabhasana*⁴. There are many more - in fact we can say that most asanas are helpful for treating constipation.
- There are various yogic practices that are specifically designed to clean out the digestive system. As such they are very useful for relieving constipation. The most important practices are *shankhaprak-*

*shalana*², *basti*³, *navli*, *agnisar kriya* and *moola shodhana*⁵.

There are many people who have turned to yoga in order to rid themselves of constipation. Often this was as a last resort, every other method having failed. They have usually found great improvement in their condition.

The last point to remember is that chronic tension plays a vital role in constipation. One of the basic aims of yoga is to bring mental and emotional peace into one's life. As such, all practices of yoga including asanas, pranayama and meditational practices make an indirect contribution to removing constipation. Most commercial cures aim at removing the manifestation, namely physical constipation, whereas yoga aims at the root cause - mental and emotional constipation. If this more subtle form of constipation is removed, then the physical by-product will automatically disappear.

Ulcers

There are two types of ulcers that occur within the digestive system - peptic and duodenal. Peptic ulcers occur within the stomach and are most common among women. Duodenal ulcers occur within the duodenum (the first section of the intestines after the stomach) and are more common among men. Both types seem to be the consequence of our pressurized modern living.

Ulcer sufferers are a distinct group of people. They tend to bottle up their worries and problems, afraid to let other people see how they feel. Society sets high goals which most people feel they must attain to be successful in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. To achieve these ends, they continually drive themselves too hard, taking insufficient sleep, rushing here, there and everywhere. They gulp their food at odd hours. Ulcers are often the product of this situation.

The ulcer appears as a hole or defect in the lining of the stomach or duodenum. Normally, when there is food in the stomach, nerves stimulate the release of hydrochloric acid for digestion purposes. When the digestive system is working correctly little or no acid is present in the stomach when it contains no food. However with ulcer sufferers, the nervous system is unable to relax and continues to stimulate the release of digestive juices within

the stomach. The acid tends to eat away the lining of the stomach or the duodenum. This takes place over a period of months and years and results in the formation of ulcers.

The root cause of ulcers is worry and chronic stress. People are unable to relax even for short periods. The result is the continual secretion of acid in the stomach when it is not required. It is here that yoga is indispensable. The essence of yoga is relaxation. All yoga practices, from asanas to meditative techniques are intended to remove tension in all its forms, whether physical, emotional or mental. These practices allow the nervous system and consequently the digestive system to return to normal.

Furthermore, yoga creates a deeper understanding and tolerance of both oneself and others. This encourages each of us to live a more harmonious life and develop optimism and confidence. The result is that the ulcers will either heal themselves or not occur in the first place. Therefore, we can say that yoga is the way to remove both the ulcers themselves and their root cause, mental tension.

Food poisoning and digestive infections

Food poisoning results from eating food which is contaminated with certain types of bacteria. These organisms are generally of the paratyphoid group of bacteria, salmonella and less usually staphylococci. A disease known as botulism is far more serious although it does not occur very frequently. This bacteria is generally found in canned foods that have been incorrectly processed. The body gets rid of these infections by vomiting and diarrhoea. Generally, infections are cleaned out quite quickly and the body soon recovers.

To prevent food poisoning great care should be taken to ensure that the preparation of food is carried out as hygienically as possible. Food that has been cooked and left to cool for future consumption should always be well covered and kept in a cool place. This is essential because harmful bacteria tend to multiply at the highest rate in warm food. Another important point to remember is that people suffering from cuts or sores on their hands should not touch food that is to be eaten. In hot climates and during the summer more care should be taken in connection with food and water.

Yoga cleaning techniques such as kunjla kriya¹, shankhaprakshalana², etc. help to eliminate harmful bacteria that might have accumulated in the digestive tract. Furthermore, yoga practices in general will increase the body's resistance to bacteria, and so reduce the tendency of bacterial diseases to occur. This also applies to more serious diseases such as dysentery, but if these do occur one should immediately seek expert advice and treatment. Don't delay even in the slightest.

Indigestion

This is also called dyspepsia and is caused by eating too quickly or eating under continual nervous tension. In fact, the reason that people eat rapidly is generally because they are nervous and under stress. Under these conditions the food is insufficiently chewed and broken down in the mouth for normal processing by the stomach. Furthermore, the correct quantities of saliva and gastric juices are not secreted. This results in indigestion. Yoga is once more of great help. It makes one more relaxed and therefore more able to eat food slowly and with more enjoyment.

Of course, indigestion can also be caused by eating too much food, especially if the food is rich. Yoga will not help you directly to solve this problem. You must find your own solution.

Summary

We have discussed the most common types of digestive ailments. There are many others - gallstones, pancreatitis, etc. Yoga will not remove or prevent all ailments of the digestive system. For example, if you are suffering from a serious case of hernia, then a more direct remedy is necessary. Also, if you are in the middle of a cholera epidemic, again yoga will not assure you immunity, or be the best way to recovery. Yoga will greatly help, but it is not the panacea. Yet at the same time, we have found from experience that yoga is a definite help in preventing the onset of many widespread diseases and ailments, and in providing a remedy. Most diseases result directly or indirectly from mental and emotional conflicts and physical weakness or malfunction. Yoga is a powerful system for helping to resolve mental and emotional problems and make the body stronger and healthy. As such the body is more able to resist various types of diseases

(such as dysentery) and there is more likely to be cooperation between the mind and body instead of antipathy (as there is in the case of ulcers).

Generally speaking, we feel that yoga will be of use in one way or another. In fact, there are large numbers of people who, often as a last resort, have turned to yoga in order to remove some digestive complaint, and have been most surprised at the positive results they have received.

Notes

- 1 Kunjal kriya - Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 1
- 2 Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 2
- 3 Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 2
- 4 Supta pawanmuktasana - Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 2; utthanpadasana - Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 3; kawa chalasana - Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3; surya namaskara - Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 2; bhujangasana - Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2; marjariasana - Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 4; shalabhasana - Topic 3 of this lesson
- Nauli: stage 1 - Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 3; stage 2 - Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 2; agnisar kriya - Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 2; moola shodhana - Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 1

Removal of Mental Problems (Part 1)

There is not one person who does not have some deep-rooted complex, fear, phobia or conflict. Anyone who thinks that he has no mental problems is only deluding himself and at the same time preventing his progress into higher awareness and happiness in life, for while the problems definitely exist, without acknowledging them, no steps are taken to remove them. There is absolutely no stigma attached to admitting one's mental hang-ups, though sad to say there has always been a feeling of scorn, or perhaps fear, associated with those who suffer from more obvious mental problems, such as schizophrenia and melancholia. The reason for this is not certain; perhaps we all fear the possibility that we too could easily become a mental patient. There may be a lot of truth in this, for as far as we are concerned there is not really any difference between obvious mental patients and everyone else; only that in the former, underlying problems are more intense and have consequently manifested with greater force.

The people who know that they have some deeper problems only have to remove them. This is not so easy, but not impossible and at least you have accepted that problems do exist, which is the first step. Other people who will not acknowledge their mental problems must first of all be convinced that they do in fact have them. This is the situation with most people. There is a very convincing test that will tell you whether you are as free of problems as you think you are. Ask yourself the following question: "Am I happy twenty-four hours a day, every day?" If you are not, then this indicates that you have mental problems, for if you are completely free of any mental disturbances then you would continually emanate happiness and joy like an overflowing river. This is clearly illustrated by the great yogis, sages and saints who, because they have emptied themselves of most or all of their problems, unceasingly radiate peace and joy.

The more unhappiness and dissatisfaction that you feel in your life, the more mental problems you have. Ask yourself this question and give yourself an honest answer. From your answer you can decide whether you are without mental problems or whether you do in fact have them. This doesn't mean you should not be angry or have other strong emotions, for one can still act out these emotions and also feel a sense of happiness. In fact, there are innumerable cases of great yogis and sages who have shown great anger, yet they have still maintained their feeling of joy in life. It is not the situation or the expressions you show that we are talking about; it is whether or not you feel a sense of wonder, happiness and contentment throughout your daily life. If you don't, then you have some form of mental problem. If you admit that probably you do have problems, obvious or not obvious, then you will not be alone - you will be accompanied by most of the world's population. Having admitted the possibility of underlying mental disturbances you are then ready to take steps to remove them. If you don't admit they exist, then you will probably see no need to make the effort to remove your problems. As such there is no need to read any further.

Mental problems, phobias, fears and their elimination are such an important factor in our lives that we have decided to devote a lot of space to considering this subject. We must be careful, however, for it is so easy to talk and talk in theoretical terms about causes and repercussions but fail to give any really useful practical methods for removal. As such the aim of this topic and the related discussions, in the forthcoming sections is to suggest practical methods without becoming too involved or tied down in verbal concepts'. The aim is to give you methods and guidance so that you can take steps to remove your problems, the blocks that prevent you obtaining the most out of life. And only you can do it; this applies

even if you visit a psychiatrist; he can only stimulate and guide you to remove and manifest your own problems. So we are primarily interested in practice, not words.

Yoga and mental problems

Actually the main aim of yoga as a science is to root out the cause of mental conflicts. It is these problems that act as blocks that prevent the influx of higher awareness, as well as happiness in life. It is during periods of perfect mental balance that one has his realizations, intuitive flashes and revelations, and lives in a state of increased awareness. These higher experiences don't shine through when the mind is in a state of turmoil; and by turmoil we include the deeper levels of the subconscious mind. Many people feel relaxed on a conscious level and wonder why they don't have higher experiences. The answer is simple - while they may consciously feel relaxed, the subconscious levels are certainly not relaxed. Also, one must be alert and awake. The whole system must be tuned to a high degree of sensitivity and receptivity. Most people when they feel relaxed become sleepy and drowsy. This is not the perfect condition under which the influx of higher awareness occurs.

To live in a continual state of higher awareness, one must always remain in a relaxed and receptive state. All the conscious and subconscious problems must be eradicated. So, you see, the removal of mental problems is an essential part of yoga. If yoga failed to clean out the mind, then it would fail to give the many benefits that it does, especially in higher spheres. Of course, one would still get some physical benefits from asanas etc., but these are an elementary though very fundamental and essential part of yogic life.

Yoga realizes that one must pass through the unhappiness associated with mental conflicts etc. before one can see the rainbow on the other side. This is beautifully summed up by a Zen quotation which goes as follows:

*Under the sword raised high
Is hell making you tremble.
But walk on...
Arid there is the land of bliss.*

The meaning is obvious; no matter what terrible traumatic experiences you face in life,

there is always something beyond which now seems impossible but is more likely to be unthinkable. Some people call it joy, others bliss, still others spiritual knowledge and so many other insufficient names. So you too should walk through the haze of meaninglessness, persevere, and transcend the problems that make life, as it seems now, hell on earth. Actually, many people come to yoga because they have some deep-rooted problem that they want to remove. If they did not know that they had problems, or that something was lacking in their life, they would never have started yoga; there would be no incentive. From this initial introduction come many other things that they did not dream of, beyond their present comprehension. So, in fact, mental problems, though they may be the block to higher awareness, are also the stimulus that make people want to remove them and which eventually lead many people to spiritual life. Without some form of mental problems, no one would start to tread the yogic path. So in this sense, you can consider mental problems as a positive asset that help you to do something worthwhile in life, instead of wallowing in the mire of self-complacency, self-pity and laziness. You can look at mental problems from this point of view. But needless to say, they must be removed in order to gain happiness, meaning mental health, peace and most important of all, increased awareness in life.

There is a further point also. Most people have very little idea of the function of an ashram. Of course there are many functions, but as far as the ashram is concerned, the main purpose is to allow the inmates to clean out the mind by removing their mental problems. It doesn't empty the mind of common sense, but of the complexes, blocks, phobias and neuroses that clutter it. This further emphasizes the importance that yoga always aims to removing mental blocks. Without this concern, yoga would be a very limited system to say the least. Furthermore, while yoga aims at emptying the mind of problems, it does not at the same time try to fill the mind with new dogmas, as do various other systems. All conditioning has to be removed and certainly not replaced by new conditioning. The mind must be emptied of all problems so that it can spontaneously reflect that which is already existent, but normally unknown. There is no need to fill

the mind - only to empty it. This is the essence of yoga and all other productive mind cleaning systems.

What are mental problems?

This may seem an unnecessary heading, for most people should know what mental problems are, but in fact, most of us have very limited and perhaps naive concepts regarding the meaning and scope of mental problems.

The most basic mental problem with most people is *lack of meaning*. Psychiatrists as far back as Jung recognized this basic mental problem. Jung correctly pointed out that the main motivating force in everyone's life is the need to find meaning. This is usually covered over, however, by multitudinous activities or other conflicts in life that make people forget this problem exists. Or, perhaps, it is more true to say that most people participate in so many different activities in their daily life in order to forget that they can see no meaning in their life. Most psychoneurotic problems, as well as many physical problems, are caused by the basic fact that people attach no meaning to life. Everything seems pointless and futile and the despair results in intense negative emotions which can result in the breakdown of mental and bodily functions.

Jung recognized this, for he wrote with devastating simplicity, yet directness and insight: "When conscious life has lost its meaning and its promise, then it is as though a panic breaks loose ..." This sums up the state of most people's life. They are living an empty, meaningless life, without hope. So if you are in this position, then you have a mental problem, the most basic one that a human being can have. If the sense of meaninglessness is sufficiently overpowering, then you will take steps to resolve it. And there is meaning in life, in the life of each and every one of us, but you must find it out for yourself. If you forget the present emptiness in your life, then you are escaping; if you try to cloud the question over with dogmatic assertions that there is meaning without really knowing it from the depths of your being, then you are still escaping. You must find out for yourself, through your own experience. The method is yoga. From this will come knowledge and understanding of your real nature and your incredible relationship with existence. The problem of lack of

meaning in life will automatically drop away and dissolve as you experience higher awareness and knowledge.

When you attain higher knowledge, then you can bear anything in life. You will be able to swim through the ups and downs of life with perfect ease.

There are many other more obvious mental problems, some of which you will be conscious of and others that you will not be able to recognize, for they will lie in the deeper levels of the subconscious mind. Some people are scared of insects, of certain animals, of open spaces, of closed spaces, of other people, of the opposite sex, of the dark and so on; the list is without end. Some people have sexual complexes, such as impotence; other people have a strong hatred of their mother or father, or both; others have strong feelings of jealousy towards others either specifically or generally; others have had and still feel the shock of death, perhaps of a close friend or relative. Examples can be quoted to completely fill this section. All of these problems must be rooted out if you want to achieve happiness in life.

There are some people who become neurotic because they feel that they are normal, or rather ordinary if compared to other people. There are also those who feel that they are above normal in ability and become neurotic because they are not like other people. Actually everyone has incredible potential; we are all potential geniuses. Therefore the real difference between a so-called normal person and a so-called talented person, is that the latter has utilized more of his inner potential. Nothing more. Therefore, please don't worry if you feel that you are only normal or perhaps abnormal, for we all have remarkable dormant ability; some merely manifest it more than others.

Some people say that inferiority is an integral part of man's nature. We strongly reject this, for there are many great yogis and sages who certainly don't feel the slightest inferiority; nor at the same time do they go to the other extreme and become superior in their attitude towards others. The feeling of inferiority is an emotional imbalance, which is caused by a lack of understanding of one's real nature. It results in excessive envy and competition in order for the individual to reduce the feeling of inadequacy when compared to others.

Though normally not recognized as a mental problem, we would also classify conditioning as a mental problem. In other words, those people (in fact everyone to a great degree, some more than others) who are attached to dogmas and fixed concepts, have a mental problem. Pride in one's country, skin colour, status, religious beliefs and intellectual ability are all mental problems in that people are fixed in their ideas. The mind has ceased to be a reservoir of spontaneous ideas; instead, it is a repository of fixed, rigid and stereotyped thought patterns. This is a major block and an obstacle to higher awareness. In other words, conditioning is a mental problem. Also included in this category is the tendency to accept ideas without reflection and personal experience. Many people believe almost implicitly everything that they read or hear, without ever relating it to their own experience. Believe nothing until you have tested it for yourself. This also applies to the contents of this book. Consider the opinions and ideas given, but only accept them when you have found them to be valid through personal experience. Only know and believe that the water is salty when you have tasted it. In fact, we consider blind susceptibility to ideas and attachment to already accumulated ideas as being a major mental problem. One should certainly be receptive, but not blindly naive.

There are many other problems, too many to discuss here. The reader will know some of these. They will have to be removed systematically. Most problems, however, will lie below the level of normal perception, in the subconscious. All you will know is that these cause unhappiness, depression, etc. In life without really knowing the reason or the source. These must be recognized and then eliminated. One thing we must emphasize is that all mental problems and blocks can be removed; they need not remain a permanent part of your character. All that is required is the need and effort to remove them.

Practical rationale

To bring about mental peace in your life, there must be a three-pronged approach:

First of all, one must try to prevent the occurrence of new problems and disturbances. It is no use whatsoever to empty the mind of existing complexes etc. and still leave it open

and susceptible to new adverse impressions. It is necessary to make the mind stronger and more resilient to the ups and downs of life.

Secondly, one must exhaust conscious problems; that is, the problems which you already know and recognize.

Thirdly, one must slowly discover and eradicate the subconscious problems. These are problems that cause you much pain, unhappiness and anguish in life, but which are buried deep in the unexplored realms of the mind. You feel the result of these problems in the form of depression etc. but you don't really know what the cause is. You may attribute the cause to some outside event or person, but the real cause lies deep in your mind. These subconscious problems must be recognized and then thrown out.

These three processes do not occur one after the other, as we have listed, but will take place simultaneously. They will supplement each other. For example, once subconscious problems are recognized (category 3) then they will of course automatically become category 2. Furthermore, as one progressively throws out mental problems, then one's ability to face life situations without being disturbed will automatically be enhanced. In other words, the less mental problems a person has, the more he or she is able to face life with calmness and equanimity. So these three categories are bound together as an integral approach in eliminating and preventing mental disturbances and gaining peace. They should operate simultaneously; we have only separated them for convenience in explanation.

These three categories will be discussed in this topic and later lessons also¹. In this topic we will discuss simple yet effective methods of bringing about more harmony and peace into one's life on a conscious level. These methods are in fact rather obvious and a matter of common sense, yet they are rarely applied. It is for this reason that we feel it necessary to discuss them. Removal of subconscious problems is of course the most important task, but resolving them on a conscious plane is also of prime importance. In fact, this is the first step to resolving one's deeper conflicts.

Self-acceptance

Try to accept yourself and your feelings; don't compare yourself with others; use your

particular talents and do what comes naturally; don't suppress emotions but act them out with awareness; try not to feel guilty about past events.

Almost everyone finds it difficult, if not impossible, to accept himself or herself. The mind is tormented by guilt, feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. One is unable to forget past events and feels dissatisfied with his role in life, all the time wishing for something more, with higher status, which will bring greater respect from other people. There is nothing wrong with ambition to succeed; it is a natural part of human nature but one should try to accept oneself, one's fallibilities and limitations. At the same time, some dissatisfaction is necessary, for this is the driving force that prompts each person to seek and aspire to higher levels of awareness. But you must be realistic in the assessment of your shortcomings.

People always compare themselves with others. They possibly feel inferior because they don't have what other people possess. They see a rich neighbour with three cars and television sets in every room of his palatial mansion and feel overwhelming envy. They compare and condemn themselves for not being equally prosperous.

Other people look at famous movie stars, wishing that they also had the talent to be so successful and popular. This comparison results in dissatisfaction and general unhappiness. People refuse to accept themselves and their limitations. They fail to realize that though the neighbour and actor outwardly display success, the less desirable aspects of their lives are likely to be hidden or disguised. Though the neighbour and actor may radiate success on a material level, they may be totally unhappy and depressed on a personal level. From a distance, and as outsiders, other people only see success and happiness; and it is with this superficial exterior that most people compare themselves. It is from this external display that most of us develop outer feelings of inadequacy and inferiority in relation to others. Try to accept yourself and not condemn yourself on the basis of unjustified comparison with others.

We all have specific talents, but with some people these attributes are more obvious. Furthermore, society at different times places

more values on some talents than others. If you are a good football player, or a good musician or speaker, then this is easily recognizable by other people and society in general. But, if you are able to work with children and inspire them, or to create a beautiful garden, or repair a car, or if you are a good parent, or able to understand the problems of others with compassion, then these qualities are still talents. They are less obvious talents at first glance, but nevertheless they are as substantial as any other. Therefore, try to realize that it is not only those who gain fame who have talent. You also have talent, perhaps less tangible, such as understanding and kindness, or the ability to be a good homemaker, but these are not so rapidly accepted as talents.

Try to do the work that suits your nature. Don't worry about what other people do, for they must also follow the dictates of their particular personalities. In recent times much status and respect is given to people who perform certain roles in life - actors, executives, academics, etc. For this reason, many people try to succeed in one of these desirable, high status spheres, even when the personality is unsuitable. This leads to unhappiness. Accept yourself and do that which comes naturally according to your personality. Do those things which come spontaneously, without excessive effort and which suit your temperament. In yoga, this is called *dharma*, and is regarded as an essential part of everyone's path to happiness and higher awareness. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the subject of *dharma*, one's natural duty, is discussed over and over again. Ignore status, for this is a social concept with little basis. A person's occupation does not matter, it is one's attitude that is important. A road sweeper who does his work with interest and awareness is further along the yogic path than a scientist who does his work half-heartedly and without awareness. Don't worry too much about what other people think. Remember, they are judging you from a viewpoint limited by their own prejudices and mental problems. Try to perform your *dharma*, work, actions, play or any other activity in accordance with your personality².

Learn to accept your feelings and emotions without guilt. If, for example, you have a tendency to become angry at the slightest provocation, accept that this is part of your

personality. Don't feel guilty. But next time you are angry try to be aware and witness your anger. Don't suppress anger, for this will only accumulate in your subconscious mind and eventually manifest as mental or physical illness. Don't be afraid to express your emotions, but at the same time maintain awareness of them. This applies to all emotions, not only anger. Of course, it is not always socially convenient to express these emotions (perhaps against one's employer), but as one progressively cleans out the mind through yoga, the emotions become more positive and cause less friction with others. There will be no need to suppress emotions under any circumstances for they will cease to exist in a negative sense.

Many people find it difficult to accept the basic human drives that are part of our makeup. We have sexual drives, food desires and so on. Many people develop complexes about these drives and feel that these urges or instincts are dirty or animalistic, usually after having been convinced of this by people whom they respect, but who have their own mental problems. Try to accept your drives as being a natural facet of human life. Recognize that they are not totally separate from, or antagonistic to life. The more you accept your drives the less you will be bothered or disturbed by them.

Try not to feel guilty about past events. Many people are continually overwhelmed by feelings of regret and guilt for past actions and experiences. Forget the past - it is finished. Live in the present. That which has happened is finished, so why worry about it? Use it only as a reference. Shakespeare with such simplicity vet depth of understanding summed up this attitude when he said: "What's gone and what's past, should be past grief." This also applies to mistreatment that you have received. If you feel continual resentment, then this is a disturbing factor which makes your life unhappy and tension-ridden. Try to drop this resentment - let bygones be bygones. If you don't, then it will continue to disrupt your life and the lives of those around you. Although this may seem easier said than done, at least consider dropping these grudges. If past resentments have taken a hold on your life and are deeply imprinted on your memory, then of course they are more difficult to remove. But they can, and will be removed if

you persevere with meditational practices. It is only a matter of time. This conscious consideration of your grudges is the first step.

Practise the suggestions that we have given, and you are on the path to total self-acceptance. At first it may be on a superficial level, but this is the beginning of self-acceptance in a much deeper sense. Automatically, you will find that as you come to accept yourself, you will start to accept others, regardless of their faults. You will begin to realize that most people act in the way they do only in order to be acceptable and worthwhile both to themselves and others. This applies to people who behave in the most bizarre manner; though their actions seem totally unrealistic, it is merely their way, however inadequate and strange, of coming to terms with themselves and their surroundings. Increasingly you will realize this and learn to accept others for what they are, and this will help others to accept you. This increased awareness is a positive approach to bringing about harmony in your life, both in the internal and external worlds.

Total self-acceptance comes with the advent of higher knowledge and understanding. It is possible to totally accept one's personality without the slightest qualification or reservation. When one lives in a state of meditation it is impossible not to accept oneself and others. But to attain this experience, and to continually live it, you must make a positive attempt now. The first step is to apply consciously what we have just discussed. This should be supplemented by meditational and other yoga practices, which we will discuss in the following lesson¹. In this way, one will gradually eradicate mental problems and become more tolerant of oneself and others.

Relaxation

Mental problems can only be confronted and removed when the mind is relaxed. Relaxation can be induced by:

- Regular practise of relaxation techniques such as shavasana³
- Reorientation of one's attitude using the codes as previously outlined⁴
- Progressive removal of mental problems (this is a cyclic process, for a mind with fewer problems is able to relax more deeply, and in turn throw out more accumulated deep rooted problems).

As the mind is emptied of its ingrained problems, one automatically becomes more relaxed in all life situations. Conversely, the cultivation and inducement of relaxation by various techniques helps to both clean out the accumulated dross and prevent further problems arising and causing new disturbances. Relaxation techniques are therefore highly recommended for rooting out mental problems. This is not only practised by yoga but also by other systems concerned with the mind. Psychiatry, for example, clearly recognizes the importance of relaxation; this is why good therapists either systematically relax the patient with a special technique, or induce relaxation through the atmosphere of their room and by being relaxed themselves. Relaxation is absolutely necessary if you wish to empty your mind.

The subject of relaxation has been fully discussed already and you are strongly advised to refer back to the relevant lessons³. Both topics should be carefully read for they relate very closely to the removal of mental problems. We described those techniques for inducing short-term relaxation, such as shavasana, which can be performed within a few minutes³. One will almost immediately feel the beneficial effects. These methods are really no more than forms of meditational practices, and therefore can be used for diving into the mind and disposing of its problems¹.

We also suggested that you adopt a ten-point code to help bring about a more permanent state of relaxation in life⁴. Although this code is in some ways superficial and artificial, it is designed to reduce the continual conflict and friction that most people experience with their surroundings and others. With practice and time the significance of the code will penetrate the subconscious mind and help to reorientate your attitudes to life. Most people are always tense and because of this they cannot hope to resolve their problems. This code will induce more relaxation and allow you to treat life as a psychiatrist's couch, where you progressively exhaust your inner conflicts. We would also like to remind you that relaxation is essential in order to explore the mind and confront your problems. Without relaxation this is impossible, and because most people are continually tense they can never, under normal circumstances, come face to face with

their deeper conflicts. A reasonable degree of relaxation, even for half an hour, is a necessary prelude to recognizing your problems. So relaxation, brought about by any method is of prime importance.

Finally, we should like to emphasize that deep states of relaxation for long periods of time, whether during eating, sleeping, working or whatever, can only come when the mind is reasonably clear of problems. The more one empties the mind the more one is able to relax under all conditions and tribulations. Moreover, the more lasting and deeper the relaxation, the easier it is to clean the mind. They go together like the sun and the moon. Relaxation leads to a less troubled mind, and a less troubled mind leads to greater relaxation. It is a circular relationship. But this relationship must be initiated some time, if you want to experience positive and wonderful changes in your life.

Summary

We have not outlined definite techniques in this topic, for we feel that consideration of the headings described, namely 'Self-acceptance' and 'Relaxation' requires time. Moreover, putting them into practice in daily life on a conscious level and with sincerity also takes time. Although we have already discussed relaxation it is more than likely that you have not had the opportunity to put the techniques we gave into practice³. This applies particularly to the ten-point code. For this reason, we suggest that you spend some time in thinking or rethinking about the code and apply it in your life⁴.

In the following two lessons, we will discuss more tangible methods of identifying and exhausting mental problems, both conscious and subconscious¹.

Notes

¹ Removal of Mental Problems: Part 2 - Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 2; Part 3 - Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 1

² For further details on the subject of dharma refer to Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 1

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

⁴ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 7

Asanas: Practice

The two asanas that we will subsequently describe are excellent asanas for improving the health and strength of the lower back. They are called *shalabhasana* (locust pose) and *ardha shalabhasana* (half locust pose). Many beginners may find shalabhasana a little difficult at first because it requires contraction of the lower back muscles,, a function that is rarely utilized in day to day activities. If you find shalabhasana too difficult, or even impossible, you should perform ardha shalabhasana instead. This is a far easier asana and will prepare your back muscles for eventual mastery of shalabhasana.

SHALABHASANA (LOCUST POSE)

This asana is so called because the legs are raised in the final position to imitate the tail of a locust. It is also commonly known as the grasshopper pose for the same reason. It is an excellent backward bending asana which has a specific influence on the organs, muscles and nerves of the pelvis, abdomen and chest. It is also particularly noteworthy for the fact that it is one of the few asanas that gives a direct massage to the heart.

Shalabhasana complements bhujangasana (cobra pose), for bhujangasana exercises the top part of the body, while shalabhasana correspondingly exercises the lower half of the body¹. For this reason try to perform them one after the other.

Technique

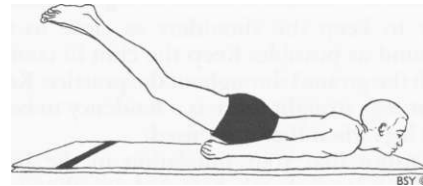
Place a blanket on the floor.

Lie flat on the ground, face downwards.

your legs should be straight with the feet together; the soles should point upwards.

The arms can be placed either beside the body or under the body; the palms can face downwards, upwards or may be clenched.

The choice of the position of the hands and arms is left to the discretion of the practitioner



through his own personal experience.

Keep the chin in contact with the ground throughout the practice.

The shoulders should be as near as possible to the floor and remain so throughout the practice.

Relax the whole body. Close your eyes.

Breathe out deeply.

Then inhale deeply, hold your breath and raise both legs, keeping them together and straight. The elevation of the legs is produced by applying pressure on the arms and contracting the lower back muscles.

Hold the legs in the raised position while retaining your breath.

Try to stretch your chin in front of you as much as possible but maintaining contact with the ground (this will give the best possible stretch to the neck muscles and nerves).

Hold the final position for as long as you can without straining.

Then slowly lower the legs and exhale.

This is 1 round.

Relax the whole body.

Allow the breathing rate to return to normal.

Then breathe out deeply, breathe in deeply, and raise the legs again to repeat another round.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Exhale deeply and then inhale deeply while lying flat on the ground. Retain the breath while raising the legs and holding the legs in the final position. Exhale after you slowly lower the legs and breathe normally while relaxing the body.

Be aware of the breathing and movement throughout the practice. While resting between rounds remain aware of your breathing pattern and the relaxation of the whole body.

You can practise shalabhasana as many times as you wish, though three rounds is a reasonable number. Without straining, try to hold the pose for as long as possible.

Points to remember while doing the asana

Try to keep the shoulders as close to the ground as possible. Keep the chin in contact with the ground throughout the practice. Keep your legs straight there is a tendency to bend the legs when they are raised.

Ensure that your inhalation in the lying position immediately before doing the asana is as deep as possible. This ensures that you obtain the best possible massage of the abdomen, lungs and heart.

Try to allow the abdomen to sustain most of the body weight.

Limitations

This asana, compared to most other asanas, requires a greater degree of physical effort. As such, people who suffer from coronary thrombosis or high blood pressure must take care. They should preferably practise ardha shalabhasana as a substitute. Furthermore, if you suffer from hernia, peptic ulcer, intestinal tuberculosis and other similar ailments we advise you not to do this asana.

Shalabhasana has often been found useful for people who suffer from mild sciatica and slipped disc. However, you should take care, especially if your condition is serious.

Benefits

Shalabhasana stimulates the whole autonomic nervous system, particularly the parasympathetic outflow. Remember the parasympathetic system and the sympathetic system are opposing systems of the autonomic nervous system. They maintain equilibrium of the different organs of the body. In general, the sympathetic system directs the body energy externally. That is, the muscles are prepared for external activity, the heartbeat and respiration rate are increased, the digestive system functions at a lower level, eyesight and hearing improves - the emphasis is on extroversion. In particular, it prepares the body to face

emergencies or danger. The parasympathetic system acts in reverse; it allows the internal organs to carry out their functions, reducing the energy that is directed for external actions. One becomes more introverted.

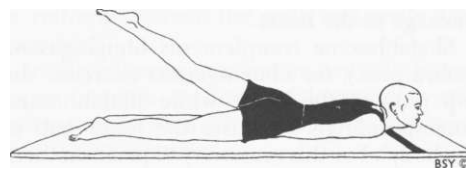
It is essential that the autonomic nervous system is kept in efficient order. Shalabhasana does this by stretching the nerves and improving the blood circulation, allowing new oxygenated blood to circulate. The parasympathetic nerves are particularly prominent in the region of the neck and pelvis. Shalabhasana profoundly affects both of these areas simultaneously.

All the abdominal organs are massaged. This massage is accentuated by the deep inhalation and retention of breath. Furthermore the pressure in the abdomen due to the weight of the body is transmitted to the lungs and heart via the diaphragm, improving the functioning of both these vital organs. For further details on this aspect refer to sarpasana which gives the same benefits in this direction¹.

This asana has been found useful for relieving sciatica and mild forms of slipped disc.

ARDHA SHALABHASANA (HALF LOCUST POSE)

This is much easier than shalabhasana and it gives almost the same benefits. Beginners should do this asana if they find shalabhasana too difficult.



Technique

Take the same starting position as given for shalabhasana.

Close your eyes and relax your whole body. Breathe out deeply.

Then breathe in deeply, retain the breath and raise your left leg.

Both your left leg and right leg should remain straight throughout the asana.

Try to use your right leg as little as possible to help raise the left leg; let it relax.

Use the back muscles as much as possible, assisted by the arms to raise the left leg.

Keep your chin stretched forwards on the ground, and your shoulders as low as possible. Keep your left leg raised in the final position while holding your breath.

Try to hold the final position for as long as possible without strain.

Then lower the leg and breathe out slowly.

Allow your respiration rate to return to normal while resting on the ground.

Then repeat the same procedure with the other leg.

Breathing and duration

This is the same as shalabhasana, except that it is done before and after raising one leg, not two.

This asana is easier than shalabhasana so you can do it for a longer period of time. We suggest that you raise each leg three times alternately.

Further details

The left leg should be raised first. This is necessary so that the abdominal pressure is applied firstly on the right side of the abdomen, which in turn pressurizes and massages the ascending colon of the large intestine situated on the right side of the body. In this way the large intestine is massaged in the same order as the action of intestinal peristalsis. This is a great help in removing constipation.

Awareness, sequence, limitations, benefits and points to remember while doing the asana are the same as given for shalabhasana.

Notes

Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

Topic 1

Pranayama: Practice

In Lesson 8 we introduced you to antar kumbhaka (inner retention) as the third stage of nadi shodhana pranayama¹. We emphasized that you should slowly develop the ability to hold the breath for longer periods of time. This allows the body to make corresponding adjustments to meet the new operating conditions of the respiration cycle. For this reason, we advised that the practitioner limit his or her inner retention to no more than a count of ten (about ten seconds) for the first stage of antar kumbhaka practice¹.

If you have been practising nadi shodhana stage 3 regularly and find that you can easily retain your breath for a count of ten throughout continuously repeated rounds, then now start to slowly increase the duration of the retention. Aim to eventually make your ratio of one round as follows: 1:4:2: 1:4:2 for inhalation: retention: exhalation: inhalation: retention: exhalation. The last ratio given was 1:2:2: 1:2:2. All the details previously given will still apply, but with the gradually increased duration of retention. Don't try to achieve the final ratio in one day; take your time and progress gradually, measuring your progression by the easiness and calmness with which you perform the practices. Gasping for breath and easily becoming tired indicate that you are not ready to increase your ratio. "Slowly, but surely" is the motto to remember in pranayama, and in fact yoga in general. Remember also that the actual duration of the retention will depend on the duration of inhalation and exhalation, which will have been fixed in the previous practices of nadi shodhana 1 and 2².

If you have been practising nadi shodhana but find difficulty in holding your breath for more than a few counts, then continue with the ratio given previously¹. Don't try to make undue haste - let the wisdom of your body set the pace. If you have not been practising pranayama regularly then you should master

the more fundamental stages 1 and 2 before attempting antar kumbhaka². This is important.

The times of practice that we have given in the suggested practice programs are the bare minimum. Try to devote more time every day to doing nadi shodhana. If you can spend half an hour daily, diligently practising nadi shodhana, you will reap wonderful benefits.

Notes

¹ Nadi shodhana: Stage 3 - Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 4

² Nadi shodhana: Stage 1 - Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4; Stage 2 - Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 4

Mudras: Shambhavi Mudra

Shambhavi mudra (eyebrow centre gazing), the technique we will shortly describe, is very similar to *agochari mudra* (nose tip gazing). The main difference is that the eyes are

focused on the eyebrow centre instead of the nose tip. It gives fundamentally the same benefits and the two mudras are equally as good as each other. They are both an integral part of *kriya yoga* and should therefore be mastered to a reasonable level of proficiency before starting to learn and practise *kriya yoga*.

Though this technique is called a mudra, it is also a meditative practice in its own right. As such the practitioner can perform *shambhavi mudra* (or *agochari mudra*) for a prolonged period of time to gain the same benefits and experiences as other meditational techniques.

SHAMBHAVI MUDRA (EYEBROW CENTRE GAZING)

Shambhavi is the name of the wife or consort of *Shambhu* (Shiva). She has many other names, such as *Parvati*, *Shakti*, etc., all of which have special significance in Indian mythology. It is believed that *Shambhu* taught *Shambhavi* the practice of *shambhavi mudra* and urged her to practise it diligently if she wanted higher awareness. It is said that the practice of *shambhavi mudra* will stir *Shambhu* (superconsciousness) and make him appear before you.

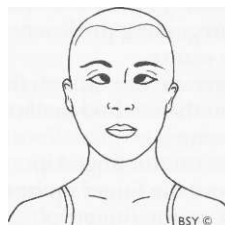
The practice is also known as *bhrumadhya drishti*. The word *bhrumadhya* means 'eyebrow centre', and *drishti* means 'gazing'. This name describes the practice exactly - eyebrow centre gazing.

Scriptural references

This practice (like *agochari mudra*) is widely quoted in the yogic scriptures. For example, in the *Gherand Samhita* it states: "Direct your eyes towards the middle of the eyebrows. Reflect on your real nature. This is *shambhavi mudra*, the most secret of all tantric scriptures." (3: 59)

The same text devotes the next few verses to showering praise on this mudra. Among other things it says: "The man who diligently practises and knows *shambhavi mudra* becomes Lord Shiva himself. He becomes *Narayana* (*Vishnu*), the sustainer of all and also *Brahma*, the creator of the universe."

This means many things, most of which are understandable only when one knows the significance of the Hindu gods. But we can say that one of the meanings is that one can transcend the fetters of the individual ego through practising *shambhavi mudra* for a sufficiently long period of time. Through this one is able to expand awareness and see a significance and essence behind everything. Furthermore, one realizes that one's real nature is far more than we can normally conceive.



Technique

Take a comfortable sitting pose.

Straighten the back and head, place the hands on the knees and practise *jnana*, *chin* or *chinmaya mudra*².

First of all close your eyes for a short time and relax the whole body. Then open your eyes and try to focus both eyes at the eyebrow centre.

Of course it is difficult to actually fix the eyes on the eyebrow centre for it is out of the normal field of vision.

However, you must direct your eyes inwards and upwards so that they point as much as possible in the direction of the eyebrow centre.

It is important that both eyes converge towards this centre.

If this is done correctly you will see two curved images of the eyebrows, which merge with each other. They will meet at a point at the top of the nose and form a solid V-shaped point. You have to be aware of the V point, for this is the approximate location of the eyebrow centre.

If you don't see this V formation, then this is a sure indication that your eyes are not converging as they should.

Be sure not to strain the eyes, but only practise for as long as you feel no discomfort.

If you experience discomfort, relax the eyes for a few seconds and then continue the practice.

In this manner you will slowly increase the duration of eyebrow centre gazing.

When you hold the final position of the eyes for a minute or so without the slightest effort, you can enquire about your real nature.

Carry on in this manner for as long as you have time.

Method of converging the eyes

Shambhavi mudra should be practised after mastering agochari mudra for it is a little more difficult. The ability to perform nose tip gazing is a great help in gaining proficiency in gazing at the eyebrow centre.

Place one finger at the tip of the nose (if necessary repeat the method that we described for nose tip gazing.)¹

Focus both eyes on the fingertip.

Then slowly move the finger upwards keeping the eyes 'glued' to the fingertip.

If you do this properly you will find that you can quite easily practise shambhavi mudra. Your eyes will automatically be drawn upwards to focus on the eyebrow centre.

Internal Shambhavi Mudra

When you have mastered shambhavi mudra with the eyes open you can try the same practice with the eyes closed. It is a more powerful practice, for the awareness is less likely to be externalized. It is an excellent method of introspection. The only drawback is that it is far easier to relax the eyes, stop doing shambhavi mudra and not realize it. In the external form of shambhavi one can easily tell if the eyes are directed upwards or not by

noting the V formation at the eyebrow centre.

In the inner form one must always be aware of the practice to ensure that the eyes are still facing upwards.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 3

Meditation: Trataka (Stage 2)

In the previous lesson we described outer trataka on a flame followed by inner trataka on the resulting after-image'. The technique that we will shortly outline is a more advanced form of the same basic practice. It involves two extra techniques which make it more powerful in inducing mental peace and one-pointedness.

TRATAKA - STAGE 2

When one has practised trataka stage 1 for some time and has gained reasonable familiarity and competence in its practice, one should leave stage 1 and proceed to stage 2. The most important thing is that you should be able to gaze at the outer object for some time without any tendency to blink the eyelids. If you still find that your eyes flicker throughout the practice, it is far better that you continue stage 1 until you gain mastery in this respect. Furthermore, if you still don't see any after-image during inner trataka, you should also continue stage 1. If you don't see any after-image be sure not to worry, for it takes time with most people; nevertheless, slowly but surely at some stage in their practice they begin to discern an image. At first it is faint, but gradually over a period of days and weeks it becomes clearer.

General preparatory details

For general information on the choice of object of awareness, position of the object in relation to the sitting position and the posture itself, refer to the previous lesson: Trataka - Stage 1¹.

Technique

In line with the description of trataka stage 1 that we have given we will take the candle flame as our object of awareness.

There are four stages in the practice, each of which must be done in turn.

Stage 1: preparation

Take a comfortable pose, preferably one of the meditative asanas².

Adjust yourself and remove all sources of discomfort, so that you feel no necessity to move throughout the whole practice; it is far better to make adequate preparations now than to move your body during the practice.

Close your eyes.

Practise kaya sthairyam for a few minutes³.

Be aware only of the body.

Make a resolve that you will not move your body for the entire practice.

Then proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: outer gazing

Open your eyes.

Gaze directly at the tip of the wick of the candle.

Practise outer trataka.

Try not to blink or move your eyes in any way.

Be totally absorbed only in the candle flame and wick.

If you are beset by extraneous thoughts, let them come; be aware of them and then gently remind yourself that you are practising trataka. In this manner keep your attention focused on the flame and wick.

Continue in this manner for about 3 minutes. Then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: breath awareness

Perform khechari mudra⁴.

Become aware of your breath, while simultaneously maintaining awareness of the candle flame.

Practise ujjayi pranayama⁴.

Now you must use some imagination.

While breathing in, imagine that you are drawing your breath from the candle flame to the eyebrow centre and through to the back of the head.

You have to split your awareness, so that it dwells on both the candle flame and the movement of the breath.

Be also aware of the sound of your breath. When you breathe out you have to imagine that the breath flows from the back of your head, pierces the eyebrow centre and then returns to the candle flame. Throughout the eyes should not flicker. Carry on repeating this process, breathing in and out as you try to feel, to imagine, the air moving backwards and forwards from the flame, through the eyebrow centre to the back of the head and vice versa. All the time you should be simultaneously aware of both the candle flame, the breath and its sound. Eventually, if you practise with sufficient intensity and awareness, you should find that the air seems to naturally and actually move along the path between the flame and the back of the head. Continue this practice for a few minutes. Then do stage 4.

Stage 4: inner trataka

Close your eyes. Gaze at the after-image. Gaze at the inner-image in the same way as you did the outer object. Be aware of both the internal candle flame and the breath. If the image is not clear, don't worry; merely be aware of whatever you can see. As you breathe in, feel the breath moving backwards from the flame in front of the closed eyes to the back of the head. Try to feel that you are drawing the image backwards. As you breathe out, imagine that the breath is being pushed forwards to the closed eyes. Carry on in this way. Inhale and almost pull the image and the breath backwards. Exhale and push the image and the breath forwards. All the time your awareness should be on the image and the breath. Continue khechari mudra and ujjayi pranayama throughout. Because you are practising ujjayi you should hear a continuous sound emerging from the region of the throat; try to be also aware of this sound, but integrate it with the movement of the breath from the eyebrow centre to the back of the head. In this way imagine that the sound arises as the breath moves to and fro through the head.

Try to become totally absorbed in the practice. Continue until the image becomes vague or disappears.

Then open your eyes and repeat stage 2 for a few minutes, if possible without flickering your eyes (those who wish to practise breath awareness continuously can miss stage 2 and start the next round with stage 3.)

Then proceed to stage 3 and repeat the whole process. Continue in this manner for the duration of the practice.

At the end of the practice keep your eyes closed for a few minutes and merely watch the black space (chidakasha) in front of the closed eyes. Be a witness to any thoughts or psychic visions that may arise.

Then open your eyes and blow out the candle.

Division of practice

The longer one is able to practise the internal steps of the practice the better. In other words, if you find that you can easily retain a clear inner-image, reduce or even eliminate the external steps. Of course, if you cannot see a clear after-image you should increase the duration of the external steps.

The number of rounds or repetitions depends entirely on your ability to retain the inner-image. Those who are more proficient will perhaps only need to do one round, for they will be able to hold the inner-image throughout the duration of the practice. Beginners, on the other hand, will have to do a number of repetitions according to their proficiency and the duration of the practice.

Awareness

As much as possible maintain awareness of the candle flame, the movement of the breath and the resulting sound, depending on the step being practised.

Further details

For other information on benefits, precautions, or problems to be overcome refer to the previous trataka lesson¹.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6

⁴ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

There are thousands of yogic practices. It is possible to write books about them for the next twenty years and still find more. The number is inexhaustible. However, in this course we are not really interested in flooding you with uncountable techniques, for this is more likely to overwhelm you than help you. It is possible to become fatigued by a continuous stream of techniques, so much so that one ceases to practise even one of them. It is far better to know one and practise it, than know thousands and practise none of them.

Having said this, however, we must point out it is necessary to describe a reasonable number of techniques, so that each reader can find techniques that suit his particular taste and temperament. So far in this book we have given you quite a large number and variety, far too many for you to practise on a regular basis. You must exercise discretion and choose the techniques that suit your taste, and practise them. If there is a particular technique that you especially like, then do it regularly. You

are the one to choose. Of course, you can follow the recommended programs for this automatically leaves out techniques that cannot be performed due to lack of time. But at the same time don't feel obliged to stick rigidly to the program we offer. If we omit a practice that you like then you must arrange that practice into your own program and practise it daily.

Only if you have mastered *trataka* stage 1, should you proceed to stage 2'. The same applies to *shambhavi mudra*; start to practise it if you have the time, when you have perfected *agochari mudra*². Remember that both these mudras are an integral part of *kriya yoga* and as such should be perfected before you attempt the practices of Book III.

Try to put into practice the suggestions regarding conscious reorientation of your life along new directions, as the first step to confronting and exhausting mental problems.

Continue with *nadi shodhana pranayama* as described in this lesson.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 1/2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	to suit time	10
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana or Ardha Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Meru Vakrasana	2 each side	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:	—	
Stage 2	—	5
Stage 3	—	10
Trataka: Stage 2	—	30
Shambhavi Mudra	—	10
		90
Program 2: duration 1 hour		
Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana or Ardha Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Meru Vakrasana	2 each side	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	5
Stage 3	—	10
Trataka: Stage 2	—	20
Shambhavi Mudra	—	5
		60

Program 3: duration 3/4 hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana or Ardha Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3	—	5
Trataka: Stage 2	—	20
		<hr/> 45

Program 4: duration 1/2 hour for physical fitness

Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana or Ardha Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Meru Vakrasana	2 each side	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3	—	7
		<hr/> 30

Try to find some time to practise Trataka for at least 20 minutes every day, preferably before sleep.

Notes

1 Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

2 Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 5

