

Lesson 8

Just as Ananta (the serpent king) is the support of the whole earth, so too the support of all tantra and yoga is the serpent Kundalini.

If the guru's grace awakens Kundalini then she rises up, piercing all the lotuses (psychic centres) and the psychic knots: vishnugranthi, brahmagranthi and rudragranthi.

Then prana enters sushumna which is the highway of spiritual life and so the mind floats free of all supports and transcends the influence of time.

Sushumna, shunypadavi, brahmarandhra, mahapatha, shmasana, shambhavi and madhyamarga - all these are the different names of the same sushumna. To awaken the goddess Kundalini who is sleeping at the entrance of sushumna one should practise mudras.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika (3:1-5)

Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism is a controversial subject. Many people consider the possibility of becoming vegetarians, yet they are usually bombarded with conflicting viewpoints that take one extreme or another. It is generally discussed dogmatically, emotionally and with too much emphasis on moral aspects. This is a great pity, for many people, who would willingly become vegetarians if presented with a few reasonable and convincing advantages of vegetarianism over non-vegetarianism, are instead frightened away, often with a strong impression that vegetarians are fanatics.

The extreme advocates of vegetarianism urge everyone to immediately abstain from eating meat, in terms that suggest that if we don't we will 'drop into the fire of Hades'. They believe meat is an unnatural food. This, of course, is a matter of opinion, for meat has been eaten by man for countless generations throughout known history and long before. It therefore seems a little presumptuous to consider that meat is an unnatural food. How can it be unnatural if man can live off it and obtain many useful nutrients required by the body?

Other groups suggest that it is immoral to eat meat, for it necessitates destroying life. However, this implies that the law of nature is wrong; that lions, tigers and other carnivorous animals are committing 'sin'. This opinion cannot be correct, for it is a rule of physical existence that certain forms of life sustain themselves by killing and eating other forms of life. It is not immoral when a lion kills and eats a zebra; it is designed to act in this way. It is natural for a lion to kill and totally unnatural for a lion to start eating grass.

All arguments can continue in a circular path and this controversy is no exception, for the extreme follower of vegetarianism will say: "We agree that it is natural for certain animals to kill, but man is a more highly evolved being and it is a sign of this higher evolution that

one leaves meat eating." Well maybe, but is a banana plant superior to a lion because it does not eat meat? Of course this is a nonsensical comparison, only meant to illustrate that one can argue in circles while trying to justify vegetarianism from this point of view. Remember also that every form of life from man to plants destroys other forms of life; we are continually destroying small organisms, bacteria, etc. without even knowing it. The destruction of animals for meat eating is merely an obvious example. It is only for this reason that it is controversial. So we feel that any moralistic approach to meat eating is to be discarded as untenable, or at least highly disputable, and certainly is not a valid reason for most people to become vegetarian.

The non-vegetarian extremists assert that meat is an essential part of man's diet, which is needed to supply the body with proteins. They strongly state that without a regular intake of meat a person's health will drastically decline. What is forgotten here is that meat is not the only source of protein. There are many other foods available that can provide the body with its protein requirements.

It is also worthwhile pointing out that if we are able to choose to be vegetarian or non-vegetarian, then we are fortunate. Diet for much of the world's population is often more a matter of eating what is available than being able to choose a particular diet from a wide variety of foods. In some cases, all that is available is meat; for example, Eskimos through absolute necessity eat an exclusive diet of flesh. Are we to accuse the Eskimos of immoral habits because of their situation? On the other hand, people in other parts of the world are too poor to include meat in their diet. Are these people to be praised for being 'moral' or being vegetarians when they are merely following the dictates of necessity? So if you have the good fortune to be able to choose your eating habits, realize that it is a

privilege and be sure not to condemn others for not eating the same food as you do.

In this topic we will consider the subject of vegetarianism mainly from the point of view of nutrition and health. Because we are vegetarians, we will of course be biased on the subject. Yet because some of us in the ashram were once non-vegetarians, and have known the trauma of being subjected to and overwhelmed by zealous advocates of vegetarianism, we will try not to 'push vegetarianism down your throats.' We will present a few basic facts to you, the same facts that eventually persuaded us to adopt the vegetarian way of life. We will leave you to decide for yourself if these are valid reasons for seriously adopting vegetarianism.

What is vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism?

The term vegetarianism is applied to a number of different dietary habits. The generally accepted definition and understanding of vegetarianism is that it involves abstention from eating animal flesh and related products. However, various forms of vegetarianism have arisen because of conflicting opinions regarding the suitability of eating eggs, dairy products and fish.

Strict vegetarians do not eat eggs, while many other people who also consider themselves vegetarians do. Eggs are often objected to on the grounds that they are carriers of life. However, it is worthwhile pointing out that in fact most eggs are unfertilized and so incapable of producing life. Other people eat fish and also claim to be vegetarians.

to eat any type of dairy product, including milk. In India, where a large proportion of the population is vegetarian, milk is widely consumed, together with its derivatives, such as clarified butter (ghee).

The definition of vegetarianism depends on individual interpretation. However, for the purpose of this discussion we will define it as abstention from eating animal flesh of any type. The term non-vegetarian will therefore be used to describe persons who include animal flesh in their diet.

To be or not to be a vegetarian

The main argument in favour of eating meat is that it is an excellent source of first class protein,

which is essential for proper growth and maintenance of the body. This beneficial property of meat is undeniable, but there are other factors not so favourable which should also be considered.

Modern methods of rearing animals for slaughter and human consumption often result in an end product which is contaminated with various chemicals. The use of artificial methods of stimulating an animal's growth is becoming alarmingly prevalent throughout the world. Hormones and other substances are administered to the animals in their food and by injection, along with other antibiotics and vaccines. These remain in the flesh after the animal is slaughtered and are eaten by the usually unsuspecting consumer. Exactly what effect these substances have on the human body will not be discussed here, for they are still the subject of present day research and of the future. But we do feel that these extraneous toxins must have some influence on our body, and are probably detrimental to health and well being.

Apart from all these artificially introduced substances, the flesh of dead animals is a wonderful breeding ground for germs. This can be dangerous if the meat is not cooked properly. Furthermore, meat contains natural waste materials and toxins, a by-product of every animal's normal living. When the meat is eaten, these waste products are taken into the human body and in turn must be expelled. Of course, the body is usually quite capable of doing this, yet at the same time this imposes an extra burden on the kidneys and the other organs of elimination. ~~Therefore~~ strict vegetarians go as far as to refuse

Another important factor is that animal flesh contains adrenaline. This is a powerful hormone and stimulant, which is released into the blood during times of emergency. In other words, whenever an animal faces a possibly dangerous situation, adrenaline is immediately injected into the bloodstream, which in turn triggers the whole body to a state of tension and readiness for action. It is a necessary safety mechanism that is also an important part of the human body. Now when an animal is killed it is in a state of fear. A large amount of adrenaline is pumped into the blood, prior to death, and is retained in the flesh. As far as we know this adrenaline retains its potency and when the meat is eaten the effects are passed

on to the consumer. That is, the adrenaline from meat acts on the human system as though it came from the human adrenal glands under conditions of fear or stress. Whether the potency of adrenaline is destroyed by cooking is uncertain, but we feel it is a valid possibility that consumption of adrenaline in meat can lead to accentuated states of stress, which can only be detrimental to one's health.

The putrefaction of meat is another important consideration, especially in hotter climates. Meat, particularly liver, putrefies very rapidly, far more rapidly than non-flesh foods. This process produces highly noxious poisons formed by the bacteria present. These bacteria invade the large intestine by the billions after consuming meat, which in turn produces more and more toxic substances. This leads to disruption of the digestive processes and poisoning of the system, creating favourable conditions for infection and disease. Vegetarianism reduces this tendency.

Many diseases, particularly heart ailments would seem to be closely associated with heavy meat eating. For example, Eskimos seem to exist quite happily on an exclusive diet of meat. However, what is rarely appreciated is that they do not generally live for more than thirty years. Furthermore, the occurrence of heart ailments and arteriosclerosis is very high among these people.

Constipation has also been closely connected with meat eating. People who have become vegetarians have often noticed a great improvement in their bowel movement. Meat eating (especially over-consumption) has been associated with a wide variety of other ailments.

However, we cannot attribute the cause of these ailments solely to meat eating, for vegetarians also suffer from them. There are many other factors involved. We do feel, however, that a vegetarian diet helps to reduce the likelihood of certain diseases occurring.

So far, we seem to have devoted most of this discussion to pointing out the disadvantages of eating meat. This is necessary, for it is only the disadvantages associated with eating meat that indicate the advantages of vegetarianism. If there are no drawbacks to meat eating then for most of us there would be little reason to become vegetarian. If there were positive benefits to eating meat then it would seem justified to continue. But what are the

advantages of eating meat? It is doubtless a reasonably good source of protein, but as we will point out later, there are better vegetarian sources. Meat does contain the vital minerals iron and phosphorus, together with some of the vitamin B complex. However, these can be obtained quite adequately from other vegetarian foods. So while we would like to give a list of the advantages of meat over other forms of food, we feel that there are not many known at present.

At this stage it is worthwhile clearing up a common misconception. Many people believe meat to be an excellent source of energy; without it we will wallow in a state of lethargy. Due to this reason many people eat enormous amounts of meat. Actually meat, like other protein foods, is not the ideal type of food for providing the body's energy demands. The best foods for providing energy are the carbohydrates and fats, such as bread, cereals, butter, etc. The body has a certain protein requirement in order to build up and rejuvenate all worn out cells. If more than this amount is taken into the body through digested food, the body merely utilizes the excess for providing its energy needs. This is not very economical, for protein foods, including meat, generally are far more expensive than foods containing carbohydrates and fats. Also, the proteins that are used in this manner tend to leave certain residues or 'ashes' in the body as a by-product, which have to be eliminated by the kidneys, placing a greater load on these often overworked organs. So, in fact, meat and other high protein foods are not the best foods to obtain your energy requirements. Also, note that your daily protein needs are surprisingly low under normal conditions of health (60 gm) and so it is not necessary to consume large amounts of protein food, whether meat, milk, nuts or any other form of protein source.

What happens if one replaces meat by vegetable substitutes? Of course one will avoid the disadvantages connected with eating meat that we have already described. Furthermore, it is easier for the digestive system to process vegetarian food. There are less waste products for the body to eliminate after digestion compared to meat eating. This is itself a convincing argument for vegetarianism, for if the body can assimilate the food more easily

there is less effort involved. The digestive system will be less likely to break down or suffer ailments, and at the same time will be able to resist the onset of disease. Furthermore, the body will be able to conserve more of its energy, utilizing it for other purposes. One will tend to become healthier and have more zest in everyday life.

Throughout history many sages and yogis have advocated vegetarianism as the preferred way of life. This has not only been the case in India; some of the Greek philosophers, such as Archimedes, urged people to become vegetarians. They said this for a good reason, knowing that there is a definite relationship between what we eat and our state of mind. This is not surprising for the mind and body are intimately connected. This is clearly shown when we consider the rapid and direct influence that alcohol has on human behaviour both emotionally and mentally; the same too with various drugs. It is a fair assumption to say that the food we eat also has profound repercussions on our emotional and mental attitudes. Throughout the ages, it has been said that meat eating is conducive to internal tension and disharmony, whereas vegetarian food tends to promote inner calmness.

This doesn't mean that eating certain types of food will automatically make you calm; far from it, for your mental state is mainly dependent on inner conflicts and problems. But eating certain types of food in preference to others is conducive to attaining relaxed states of mind. Deeper relaxation of the mind, however, can only come by cleaning out all the inner dross. So by becoming a vegetarian, we feel that one is laying down a firm foundation for a harmonious and happy life. And this is the stepping stone to higher awareness. This does not mean you cannot attain higher states of awareness if you are non-vegetarian; this cannot be true, for some systems use meat as an integral part of their ritual under specific circumstances and there have been meat eating sadhakas, but vegetarianism is a help, though perhaps a small one, in starting to tread the path to higher awareness.

If you are still not yet convinced that vegetarianism is preferable to non-vegetarianism, there is one more factor that may sway your mind. The cost of meat is generally far more than most vegetarian foods, and so by

becoming a vegetarian it is possible to obtain a highly nutritious diet at less expense.

The how of vegetarianism

Before even considering discarding meat from your diet, it is important to know what foods to eat in order to maintain the body's protein supply. It is often a surprise to many people to discover that there are numerous excellent vegetable sources of proteins, some of which contain, weight for weight, more protein than any meat. Soya bean for example, is a remarkable food that has been used by the Chinese and other Oriental people for centuries. Nearly forty percent of soya bean is pure protein. This is about twice that of meat and four times that of eggs, wheat and other cereals. There are many other fine foods that contain a high percentage of protein, the most well-known being nuts of all types, lentils, sunflower seeds, milk, yoghurt, cheese and other dairy products.

One thing is certain, you will always obtain your protein supply if you eat a reasonably varied vegetarian diet. People often say that vegetarian food is tasteless and monotonous compared to non-vegetarian food. This is often true, but only because of the unskilful preparation of the dishes and the lack of imagination on the part of the cook. There are various vegetarian cookery books available, giving a wide variety of dishes that are every bit as tasty as non-vegetarian cooking.

Yoga and vegetarianism

It is assumed by many that vegetarianism is an integral part of yoga practice. This belief is only partially true, for while yoga views vegetarianism as the most beneficial system of nutrition, it does not for an instant insist that all practitioners of yoga become vegetarians. Vegetarianism does find a place in yoga only insofar as it is the preferred nutritional system whereby total body health can be obtained in preparation for the higher forms of yoga. Non-vegetarians are, however, heartily accepted as practitioners of yoga.

Yoga advises but does not preach vegetarianism. One of the basic aims of yoga is to tune the body to a high degree of sensitivity and this is more easily achieved by abstaining from meat. Remember, yoga aims to bring about mental peace and tranquillity as well as

physical relaxation. This is also more easily obtained if one does not eat meat. Further, meat has a tendency to be a greater repository of toxins and waste products than vegetarian food.

In conclusion

If you are not sure whether you can obtain all your nutritional needs of the body from a vegetarian diet, then you should not become one. But if you study any charts given on this subject you will clearly see that all the body's requirements - fats and carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals - are obtained in more than adequate quantities in vegetarian foods. If you are still not convinced, then consider the practical experience of vegetarians. The fact that innumerable people are vegetarians and have been for aeons in many parts of the world as a way of life, shows that vegetarianism does not lead to nutritional deficiency. On the contrary, it leads to wonderful health and a new lease on life.

We feel that Manu, the codifier of laws in ancient India, summed up the most sensible approach to the whole subject when he said: "There is no wrong in eating meat or drinking wine, but abstention therefrom gives many benefits."

Meditation and the Mind

Any definition of the mind is bound to be very limited and arbitrary. For example, modern psychology roughly divides the mind into three parts: the conscious, subconscious and unconscious. It is very easy to regard these definitions as fixed quantities or specific areas of the mind. Furthermore, one is inclined to gain the impression that the subconscious (below consciousness) and unconscious (beyond consciousness) regions of the mind are strictly and permanently inaccessible to conscious perception. This is a common belief but totally wrong. All regions of the mind are accessible to our awareness. That is, the so-called unconscious mind is only unconscious because of severe limitations in the freedom and scope of our awareness. Similarly, the subconscious mind is only below our conscious perception due to lack of awareness. If we develop our awareness, then the unconscious mind and the subconscious mind would no longer be unreachable and unperceivable. This is the case with someone who is self-realized; all the realms of the mind are within reach of his awareness. For him no part of the mind is truly unconscious or subconscious. This is important and applies to everyone; we are only unconscious of different parts of the mind because of restrictions and imprisonment of our awareness within a confined field.

We should be careful not to assume that any scientific, religious or philosophic division of the mind has any relationship with truth. It is merely an arbitrary division and classification. The mind is an indivisible whole. In a garden we might plant different areas with different vegetables and call them different plots; nevertheless this partition is only for convenience. These plots of land, no matter what vegetables they contain, are still an integral and inseparable part of the whole garden. Similarly, any classification of the realms of the mind is only a means to describe different aspects within the mind as a whole.

The purpose of this topic is to divide the mind into separate parts, but only as a means to describe how meditational practices relate to phenomena within the mind. In this way we hope to throw practical light on the nature of the mind and understand its relation with meditation.

It is generally assumed that the mind is that which is contained in the brain. This seems so obvious that few of us ever question its truth. Various great philosophers have said that the area or extent of the mind is either infinite or microscopic. Thus there are three possible theories of the mind: that the mind is atomic in size, brain-sized or macrocosmic in size. Let us consider these three speculations.

The brain-enclosed mind

Most people tend to take it for granted that the mind is identical with and imprisoned in the brain. When we think, we assume that the process occurs within our head. If we indicate to someone that we are thinking, we point towards the head. Strangely enough, the feeling or emotional aspect of our personality is often regarded as being elsewhere. In other words, our emotional nature, which is intimately linked with our mental nature, is often said to be in the region of the heart. There are even some particular primitive tribes that assign no specific place in the body for the thinking process. We are not trying to imply that nothing happens in the brain. Far from it. The brain is a multi-dimensional biocomputer but at the same time we must be open to new and more plausible possibilities. For example, recent scientific experiments in various countries have indicated that thoughts can go beyond the confinement of the brain. Scientists have found that if a man has strong negative emotional thoughts, he can quickly influence people in his surroundings. Tests have been conducted in a room full of people who were relaxed both emotionally and mentally, where

there was a noticeable atmosphere of friendship present. Then another man entered the room, who was disturbed mentally and emotionally. The atmosphere quickly changed. Many of the people in the room had to leave after a few minutes; they could not stand the new negatively charged vibrations. This outcome indicates that the scope of the mind is beyond the confinements and restrictions of the brain. In other words, our mental faculties seem to extend beyond the walls of the brain and the body.

Even if we accept that our mind can extend outside the brain, we all still retain the belief that people have a separate mind. This is a logical conclusion if we assume that the mind is encased within the brain. Yet some people have conceived of the individual brain as being more of a receiver than a source. That is, the brain is a focal point for occurrences beyond the brain. The brain still sorts out mental data in relation to the needs of the body, yet at the same time it is an instrument for something infinitely greater.

The infinite mind

Large numbers of mystics, yogis and other wise men throughout history have conceived and emphatically declared that the mind transcends the limitations of the physical brain. In modern psychology this possibility was clearly put forward by Jung when he postulated that an enormous part of the mind was the unconscious, or collective aspect. He suggested that within the collective unconscious part of the mind there are an infinite number of mental contents common to all of us. He suggested that each person has the ability, though rarely developed, to contact data that is available to everyone. An often quoted analogy is given of a large number of islands in the sea. Each of these islands is in fact the top of a mountain which has its base in the seabed. From the surface of the sea the islands or mountain peaks have individuality. Yet from the viewpoint of the seabed the islands or individuals are seen to have their function in a common base. In other words, the islands which appear separate are actually connected with each other

by the seabed. Yet because we cannot see this common connection, we automatically assume that the islands are totally separated and different from each other. It is the same with

the mind. Everyone sees himself as an island and looks at other islands, other people, and sees separateness. This individuality does exist from a superficial point of view. This is why people have different personalities - different tastes, different likes, dislikes and other individual attributes that define the unique character of a person. However, if we could dive deeper into our mind, we would make the incredible discovery that the mind of each of us, in its deeper aspects, is one and the same thing. There is no difference. We are not saying that they are similar; we are saying they are one and the same.

Our immediate response to this idea on a rational level is that it is impossible. This reaction is understandable because we see our character as the island; we don't see ourselves in our deeper aspect, the sea bed. We feel, through conditioning, that our mind is only in our head. The acceptance of this unity of mind in each person (i.e. collective unconscious) implies that the mind transcends the physical boundaries of the head and this is difficult to believe. In fact we don't want you to see this on a rational level. Instead of an intellectual discussion we would much prefer you to practise meditational techniques and find out for yourself

Most people are scientifically inclined, therefore let us approach this possibility of an all pervading mind from a scientific point of view. Scientists in recent times have been trying to fathom atomic structure. They found that various scientific models of the atom and its paths could no longer fit experimental and observed facts. The existing and widely accepted theories, such as Bohr's model, began to break down in the light of experience.

Various experiments showed that the electron is not a material particle; it is something more, even more than a wave pattern. Before these experiments the electron was regarded as the building block of the universe - the ultimate particle, in fact. Old theories have had to be discarded, not only of the atom but of the cosmos. Scientists, in a way more characteristic of mystics, have begun to pose the possibility that the materialistic universe that we see with our eyes is not the ultimate reality. What seems obvious to us is being disowned by progressive thinkers. They have suggested that underlying the material

universe is some deeper reality. It is even suggested that our present assumptions regarding the nature of time and space are incorrect and unrealistic.

Some mathematicians, working with more intangible concepts, have suggested that the material universe is permeated by a universal medium or substratum. This medium is pervaded by waves of inconceivable frequency and velocity, well beyond even electromagnetic waves of the highest known frequencies. It is suggested that these so far undetected waves pulsate throughout the whole substratum.

From this theory atomic scientists are more able to understand the behaviour of atomic particles. They can foresee the possibility that an atomic particle is no more than a build-up of these wave amplitudes one upon the other. We cannot and do not see these waves. What we do see is the manifestation in the form of what we call matter. We tend to assume that this matter is more solid than we think, but actually it is our senses that interpret matter as matter. In accordance with the ideas of some modern scientists, what we see as matter seems to be no more than an accumulation of waves. In other words the physical universe which we perceive and which seems so real is no more than a gossamer substance without solidity. It is the manifestation of the underlying, hidden substratum. Is it the 'dream of Brahman' that Indian yogis exclaim is the nature of the manifested universe?

Is it asking too much to suggest that this substratum is the same as the seabed in relation to the islands? In other words, that each of us physically and mentally, on a superficial plane, is no more than a manifestation of the underlying, all pervading and infinite substratum. That is, we are implying that this underlying medium is the same as the cosmic mind. Each person is intimately connected with this hidden cosmic mind and not only has access to its infinite potential, but each of us is essentially the same in essence! The mind of each of us is exactly the same thing; however, to know this we must explore its depths. This is the realm of meditation.

Various eminent scientists have now declared that the universe is beginning to look more like an all encompassing mind than anything else. Some of them have even suggested that all atomic particles are nothing but mind-stuff.

In this respect they are echoing the affirmations of various mystics throughout the ages. Let us take a few examples. It was the well-known poet Emerson who wrote:

*Substances at base divided,
In their summits are united.
There the holy essence rolls,
One through the separated souls.*

This is echoed in the ancient yogic text called the *Yoga Vashishtha*: "Know that there is a mental mechanism everywhere. It resides within each particle; it extends into space; it is within the heart of a vegetable; it functions as fluid within a leaf; it rains as a cloud; it lies as a stone; it plays in the waves of the ocean; it penetrates massive mountains; and it assumes the shape of the size of an atom." (III: 40, 21-23) And it was Shakespeare in *The Tempest* who wrote with sublime simplicity: "We are such stuffas dreams are made on . . ."

In our previous discussion on prana we described scientific research and discovery into the essence of the bioplasmic or pranic body¹. You will remember that the Russian scientists conducted practical experiments which clearly revealed the existence of a field of force around and within the body. They called it bioplasma; we call it prana. Others have called it the aura, among other names. This subtle body was photographed by means of high frequency Kirlian photography. Without use of a high frequency electric field, we are not able to see the highly complex pranic field.

Yet when photographed under the prescribed conditions it manifested as the highly complex and organized iridescent bioplasmic or pranic aspect of our being. Though within the realm of supposition, it is more than a possibility that as higher and higher frequency electrical fields are utilized, so we will see more and more subtle aspects of our existence of which we are at present unaware.

It seems more than a possibility that the pranic body and the yet scientifically undiscovered higher frequency substances are the link that each of us has with the cosmic substratum or mind. In fact this seems more than a supposition, for Russian scientists dealing with the subjects of telepathy and other psychic phenomena, have actually measured changes in the state of the bioplasmic body

during psychic events. In other words, they were able to detect changes in the bioplasmic body of a telepathic receiver when he was receiving messages from a telepathic transmitter who was often many hundreds of miles away. These experiments seem to lead us to the conclusion that each person has the capacity to directly connect with other people through the medium of the cosmic mind.

In fact many psychics, clairvoyants, etc. have said that there is an etheric energy body (pranic body) which connects the brain cells with the cosmic mind. Others have put it differently by saying that this etheric body is the means by which the life energies of the universe and the collective unconscious can communicate with the physical body. It seems that we are far more intimately connected with each other and can communicate directly with each other in a far deeper sense than is often considered. Each individual has vast powers. However, these faculties are rarely utilized; in fact, we tend to sneer and be sceptical of any truth in telepathy, clairaudience, clairvoyance and other psychic powers.

The aim of meditation is to dive deeper into this substratum so that we can intimately contact and be aware of its potential. When we do so, it seems to whisper to us subtle answers to the seemingly unsolvable riddles of the universe. This is perhaps why we can experience intuitive flashes; it is a time when we contact the basic substratum of existence. In psychological terms we could say that it is a time when we connect our awareness with the collective unconscious. Within this storehouse is contained all the knowledge that ever has been and ever will be.

This underlying matrix is the background of existence, inanimate and animate. Nearly all life forms seem to see and know only the material world around them. It is only in evolved forms of life, such as man on the planet earth, who have the ability to occasionally contact this underlying foundation of existence. We have the gift, though rarely used, to look behind the scenes. We have the potential to look behind the curtain of maya (usually translated as illusion, but better translated as misperception or misunderstanding of reality). Each of us is able to transcend our physical limitations and experience knowledge, bliss and timelessness, where beginning and end

have no meaning and where there is no past, present or future. This is the aim of meditation: to dissolve into the underlying essence of all things.

We emphasize that we don't expect you to believe or accept what we have written. Why should you? We want you to try meditational techniques and find out what meditation is all about for yourself.

The Atomic Mind

The mind has also been conceived as being atomic. This seems an obvious contradiction to the infinite mind speculation but, as we will see, this is not so. It is only recently that scientists have begun to appreciate the wonder and complexity of each cell in our body. They have built a complicated model representing the structure of the so-called DNA molecule, known as the molecule of life. They believe this molecule to be the storehouse and transmitter of characteristics of a mother and father to their child. It is contained within the sperm and ova, and indeed in every cell in the body.

It is the DNA molecule that determines the characteristics of each person. It fixes or decides the colour of our eyes, hair, height and so many other features and traits which determine our life. It fixes our sex and growth pattern. That is, it decides the way in which we live in everyday life; it is the blueprint that fixes our mode of living. Of course other factors such as the environment and interaction with other people will simultaneously influence our lives. Nevertheless the DNA molecule is a primary influence.

Scientific thinkers are exclaiming in awe that there is far more retained within the DNA molecule than we can imagine. They declare that within each DNA molecule there is the total information, experience and knowledge of our evolutionary past. They say that every cell contains a memory of everything that has happened in each individual's past. This includes when life existed only in the primordial mud in the form of germs and basic amoeba. It includes the story of how life developed in the sea and finally emerged on to the land. It contains the most incredible data which few of us have ever experienced during our lives. It also includes a memory of the experience when the individual was in his mother's womb, when he was born, and he grew up. All this informa-

tion - the collective unconsciousness in fact - is contained in each and every cell. It sounds as though it is fiction, but it is precisely what the most prominent scientists of today are suggesting.

Are we to conclude that each cell is the centre of the mind, that it is atomic in nature? This incredible potential of each cell relates very closely to the idea of the infinite mind. As we pointed out, many scientists conceive of infinite vibrations or waves permeating the substratum of the whole universe. We suggested that this substratum is no more than the cosmic mind. Certain scientists have suggested that an atomic particle is no more than a particular accumulation of these vibrations in one place. In the same way, each atomic particle has access to the whole knowledge and potential of the cosmic mind. If we accept this, then we can say that each cell is no more than the points where these wave amplitudes reinforce each other. That is, each cell is intimately and directly connected with the underlying cosmic mind. In this sense, the atomic mind and the cosmic mind are really one and the same thing. There is no contradiction.

Actually mystics throughout the ages have always declared that infinite knowledge exists within each of us. They have said: "As above, so below." (*Hermetic saying*)

"What is here is there; what is not here is nowhere." (*Visvasara Tantra*)

"... that which appears without only appears so because it exists within." (*Shaivite maxim*)

The mystics have affirmed that each of us is a miniaturized version of everything, of the whole universe. To know this, however, one must dive into the depths of the mind; the method of exploration is meditation.

Modern psychological classification of the mind

We have spent some time describing three theories of the mind. It was not meant to convince you of anything; only to open your eyes to new possibilities beyond the normal realms of thought. Also we wanted to show that previously irreconcilable scientific ideas and mystical or yogic ideas are fast approaching each other. Only a few years ago they seemed so distant and contradictory in most cases, yet now they are beginning to say essentially the same thing.

In order to explain or at least indicate the direction that meditational practices will take in relation to the mind, we will adopt a modern psychological division of the mind. Remember, it is only arbitrary in definition, it is a means to an end and not intended to describe the mind as it really is. However, it is a very convenient system to adopt for a reasonably clear explanation and understanding.

The mind is divided into four realms: the lower or instinctive, the rational, the illuminative and the collective unconscious. Let us define these divisions in turn.

The lower mind: This section of the mind is concerned with coordination and activation of the different parts and organs of the body. It synchronizes the systems of respiration, circulation, digestion and other processes. It is the computer which ensures that all the different parts of the body function harmoniously so that the body acts as a coordinating unit.

It is also the source of our instinctive urges such as hunger, thirst, procreation, self-preservation and other basic drives. These instincts are often so powerful that they overwhelm the rest of the mind. This part of the mind is the source of our complexes, phobias, conflicts and other mental problems that can make life miserable. These obsessions are generally charged with intense emotions. It is the storehouse of the compulsions that motivate most of our actions.

The rational mind: This is the part of the mind from which we generally operate during the waking state. This part is the most accessible to our awareness. It is the reservoir of rational thinking, for it is here that data accumulated from everyday experience is stored. It is also the region where the incoming data is analyzed and compared with previous memories so that logical deduction or thoughts arise to conscious perception. In fact, the very thoughts that we are thinking right now are probably from this part of the mind. It is the problem solving realm of the mind, which gives us answers as we require them. Most of this problem solving occurs without our awareness. For example, many of us have had a question which defied answers at a certain time, yet without our knowing it, the problem was being tackled in the rational part of the mind, so that at a later time the answer suddenly flashed to

conscious perception. Or one tries to remember someone's name and cannot, then suddenly it surfaces at a later time. This is the work of the rational or logical mind.

The illuminative mind This is often known as the realm of superconsciousness or of genius. It is from this part of the mind that we receive intuitive flashes or inspirations. Without this region the great artists would not have been able to create their masterpieces nor scientists to receive insight into the phenomena of the universe. It is from here that the great saints and yogis gain their revelations, deeper knowledge, bliss and transcendental experiences.

Very few people are aware of this part of the mind. We tend to be imprisoned by the chains of the rational lower mind. This region has been generally and sadly neglected by psychologists in the past. It is only recently that there has been a wide interest in this area. For example, notable psychologists such as Frankl and Maslow are propounding height or depth psychology, and have made steps to investigate this aspect of the mind scientifically.

The collective unconscious: This is the part of the mind that was brought to light in psychological circles by Jung. It is that part of the mind which contains a complete record of our evolutionary past. It is a realm of unimaginable and immeasurable depth that contains the information and activities of our ancestral past. It is the reservoir of archetypes that has accumulated or perhaps guided us over the period of millions of years, though we could say that it is beyond definition in terms of time. Some people regard it as the inner equivalent of the story of creation and the universe. In short, it is an infinite blueprint of the inner and outer cosmos. Actually, whether it is outside or inside is a debatable point, as we have indicated in the description of the infinite and the atomic mind. Certainly it is that which links all of us together.

We must emphasize again that this classification is only a means to describe the mind. It is not intended that this description represents the mind in real terms, for this is impossible.

The lower and rational aspects of the mind contain the traits that define our individual personality. The superconscious and collective unconscious realms are, on the other hand, suprapersonal. That is, they transcend indi-

duality and are the common ground of all of us. Actually, the superconscious division can probably be regarded as an integral part of the collective unconscious, but we have divided them for convenience of description. The superconscious realm is that part of the collective unconscious from which we get our most sublime illuminations. The rest of the collective unconscious contains the accumulated experience of existence: that which is beautiful and that which is ugly, that which seems relevant and that which seems irrelevant to our lives. Of course these are subjective responses, for the collective unconscious is really neutral in its nature; it is no more than a recording of that which has happened and that which is. It is the voice of the universe without personal preferences. It is designated good or bad only by our individual tastes, likes and dislikes.

The reader should be careful not to assume that the collective unconscious and the superconscious aspects of the mind are fenced in and situated in a certain location. It is in a sense everywhere, under, above, within and without; it transcends the individualized mind.

Further, there is an increasing tendency to understand that the collective unconscious (cosmic mind) not only contains the blueprint of the past but also the blueprint of the future. Thus, each of us has the potential not only to be aware of our ancestral past, but of the future, of things to come. We don't ask you to believe this, but this easily explains the widely experienced phenomena of prophecy. A person who tells future events is merely a person who manages to be aware of this particular part of the collective unconscious.

The reader should also take care not to presume that there is a rigid demarcation between the personal and impersonal aspects of the mind. This division in fact does not exist; each merges into the other as imperceptibly as the earthly atmosphere blends with and fuses into the surrounding space.

Meditation and illumination of the stratas of the mind

Having spent much time and space playing around with words in an effort to describe a convenient concept and model of the mind, we will now consider meditation and its relationship with different mental phenomena.

The aim of meditational practices is to direct our normally extroverted awareness into the domains of the mind. Consider the personal levels of the mind (i.e. the instinctive and the logical) as represented by the face of a wall. The bottom half depicts the instinctive mind and the upper half the rational mind. The area outside the wall stands for the suprapersonal mind, the superconscious realm being above and the collective unconscious below. It is night time, so you can not see the wall or the surroundings; however, you have a torch and the light beam represents your awareness. The beam is small in diameter so that it does not light up the whole wall and surroundings, only a small area of the surface. During normal wakefulness the beam of our awareness only lights up the rational part of the mind or the upper part of the wall. Therefore, we operate on a predominantly logical level throughout life. Our awareness moves from one thought to the next but within the confines of the rational mind.

During meditational practices the aim is to direct the beam of awareness downwards, so that it lights up the lower mind or even the suprapersonal mind beyond the area of the wall. Many people, when they make a little progress in meditational practice, start to see grotesque visions and apparitions, monsters and devils, or they suddenly come face to face with deep rooted conflicts, complexes and phobias. They are most surprised and often upset when they see these phenomena, for they did not previously conceive or know that they existed within their mind.

At this state the light of awareness is directed downwards to the lower level of the mind - the instinctive mind. The awareness leaves its usual arena and starts to highlight the instinctive nature, with its desires, obsessions, hatreds and prejudices. We experience the manifestation of our problems continually for they surface during everyday life in the form of emotional outbursts, anger, depression, restlessness and many other stressful life reactions. However, we do not normally know their root or source. When one's awareness explores the lower mind, we confront the seed of these problems. When they are known they can be removed; in fact they automatically drop away.

Before one can transcend the lower mind and direct the beam of awareness outside the

limitations of the wall or the personal mind, these disturbances and memories have to be exhausted. The lower mind has to be purged of its clutter and unwanted dirt. One's awareness is almost drawn towards the lower mind as iron filings are attracted to a magnet; it is almost as though one's awareness is compelled to explore it and clean it out. Or, more likely, the lower mind acts as a veil that prevents us seeing into the deeper aspects of the mind. It is only when this fog of problems is removed that we can experience what is beyond.

It is only when the beam of awareness looks beyond the wall to the unconscious and the superconscious realms that meditation begins. We transcend both rational and instinctive thought. We enter the sphere of suprapersonal experience - the domain of our ancestral experiences and intuitive, inspirational flashes. This is the land beyond words, which defies rational explanation. Only personal encounter can convince you of its truth.

The culmination of meditation is enlightenment, where one is overwhelmed with the light of truth; when one knows the joy of knowledge that sages have known throughout the ages; when one realizes the reality behind existence along with one's own identity and that of others. One realizes the core of existence is the Self, that each of us is a limitless storehouse of knowledge and energy.

The inner and the outer world

Passive meditational techniques allow one to dive into the inner depths of the mind. The more one cleans out the personal lower mind, the happier one will become in interaction with the outside world during day to day life. One will harmonize with external activities instead of fighting with them. One will be peaceful instead of continually tense.

The deeper one delves into inner realms, the more one sees reality in the outside world. One will realize that there is actually little or no difference between the outer and inner realms of existence. The difference only appears to be because of logical thinking and the lack of understanding of our real nature. It was Christ who said: "When the outside becomes the inside, then the knowledge of Heaven has come".

Many people have the misconception that meditational practices that are introspective in

nature lead one away from participation in worldly activities. This is far from the truth. In fact, just the opposite is true - one's external actions, that is, the surface expressions of inner nature, will be far more powerful and intense. The deeper one explores the inner domains, the greater the force of expression in external activities. One's whole life, work, play, etc. will be executed with joy, efficiency and strength. One will be able to accomplish things that seemed previously well beyond one's ability. Knowledge of the inside leads to knowledge of the outside. Higher awareness of the world inside the mind leads to higher awareness of the world outside of you.

Eventually passive meditational techniques become superfluous. They are no longer necessary when one lives in a continual state of meditation. One's activities become a continuous, joyful and spontaneous experience of meditation. No longer is there conflict between the outer and the inner world.

Knowledge and meditation

There are different types of knowledge. The knowledge that most of us have is rational knowledge, derived from the logical region of the mind. We nearly always act from this part of the mind and assume that the highest and only form of knowledge is rational. In fact, intellectual knowledge is almost worshipped

by people throughout the world, yet it is only relative knowledge derived from a limited number of facts and figures. From this we deduce theories, concepts and other ideas. This is the way we reason in scientific, technological and philosophical fields.

Each of us makes the mistake of assuming that logical answers are infallible. We are habituated to believing that logical answers are the only answers. We fail to realize the fallacy that because the facts from which we derive the answers are limited, so also the answers in turn must be inadequate. It is so easy to fall into the trap of believing that all the facts are in front of us, and hence the conclusion we reach through reasoning is absolutely correct. The natives of darkest Africa a few centuries ago must have automatically assumed that all men were dark skinned, for they had never seen a person from another race. Then they saw the white skinned explorer, which destroyed their simple logical deduction.

Then they had to say that men were both dark and light skinned, but then they met yellow skinned men and again they had to update their rational thoughts on the skin colours. It is the same with scientific theories. They are always being changed in the light of new data that becomes available. When Newton expounded his theory of gravitation it became an almost infallible law. Even today in schools it is regarded as the truth, yet many years ago Einstein proved that it was incorrect. Newton's theory was shown to be wrong in the light of new information. This is continually happening, yet all of us tend to assume that rational deductions are infallible.

It is the same with everyday rational thinking; it is only correct in relation to the facts that we have in front of us. We make decisions all day in rational terms, but they are only true in a relative sense. For example, a man asks the way to the farm where Mr. Smith lives. We give directions with certainty and clarity, yet we are totally wrong, as the man eventually finds out. The Smith family, unknown to us, moved to another part of the country one week before. Had we known this we could have given a more correct answer, but we did not and so our logical deduction was completely wrong. In a strange country far away, the inhabitants have an unusual method of giving directions. Their sense of logic is slightly different to other people in surrounding countries. Ask them where Mr. Smith's farmhouse is and they will reply something like the following: "You walk for half an hour down this road until you see a brown cow in the field; there you turn right and walk until you meet Mrs. Brown going for her early morning stroll. Keep on walking and the house that you want will be the one that you see when you hear an owl hooting good luck." The person has made the same journey himself once, and because of his particular form of reasoning he assumes that your experiences on the journey will be the same as his. You will have great trouble finding the house that you seek, let alone finding the cow in the first place. Yet this is a logical deduction, but in a severely limited sense. The man giving the directions is not aware of the fact that his experiences on the journey will be different from yours. Logical or rational knowledge is relative and can only give relative truth.

There is another form of knowledge that arises in the form of a feeling or an emotional response. We occasionally feel that something is true. It is not tangible in a mental sense but is a vague sense of knowing something. This is very often mistaken for intuitive knowledge.

The next type of knowledge is called transcendental knowledge, which is attained in states of meditation. It is known in the form of intuition or illumination. The difference in this type of knowledge is that it comes from a totality of a situation. In other words, the whole arena of information is available and from this the answer is comprehended. In a sense it is like rational knowledge, but instead of a few facts, all the information is there to be utilized. This intuitive form of knowledge apprehends the totality of a situation; it sees the whole picture, nothing is missing. This comes from the superconscious realms of the mind during states of meditation. Rational knowledge is often warped by personal preferences and prejudices. Intuitive knowledge is independent of all personal traits and projections.

How is this possible? How are we able to contact deeper, intuitive knowledge during meditation? Any explanation is bound to be insufficient, but if you refer back to the picture we painted at the beginning of this topic regarding the infinite mind, a superficial understanding is possible. Normally we are aware only of our limited, personal and rational mind. This is the island rising above the sea. Yet beyond and deeper than this personal mind is the suprapersonal aspect of the mind, the seabed, from which all the islands arise. It is the realm of higher and more subtle vibrations that permeate the cosmos and existence. They are always present, yet during normal states of awareness they are not perceivable. During meditation a direct link is made between one's awareness and these higher domains of the mind. From this comes higher knowledge encompassing everything that needs to be known. Meditation allows the deeper significance and nature of life and existence to reveal itself.

Summary

The aim of this topic is to try to show that there is far more to each of us than is commonly believed. We don't realize how much we underestimate ourselves in every way.

We have attempted to show that it is possible to contact the deeper aspects of mind and find out about ourselves through meditation. Most of us spend our lives totally extroverted failing to realize that an ocean of bliss and knowledge exists within each of us, merely waiting to be discovered. It is always there and we are always in contact with these deeper aspects, but we don't know it. Our level of awareness is insufficient. The method to be aware and know this intimate link is meditation.

We have also tried to convey that meditation does not require you to change your present living habits in any drastic manner. All you need to do is to practise yoga with sincerity, regularity and aspiration.

One thing that we have not emphasized is that without effort nothing will be gained. Practice is essential.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3

Mudras: Meditational Hand Positions

The position of the hands while practising a meditational technique is important. At first it may seem to be an insignificant aspect of meditative practice, yet it has been found by the rishis and yogis throughout the ages and by people today that the wrong position of the hands can severely curtail successful meditative practice. This is particularly the case with beginners, but as one starts to master the mind and body, the position of the hands will have little influence.

However, in this book we are concerned with aspirants who have yet to know the experience of meditation, therefore we emphasize the necessity of placing the hands in a suitable position.

There are large numbers of hand positions called *hasta mudras*. We don't intend to describe them all for this is unnecessary; we will merely concern ourselves with a few which have been found to be applicable and helpful for meditational practices.

JNANA MUDRA (PSYCHIC GESTURE OF KNOWLEDGE)

The Sanskrit word *jnana* means 'intuitive knowledge' and the word *mudra*, for the purpose of this discussion, means 'attitude'; thus this hand position is known as the 'attitude of intuitive knowledge'.

Technique

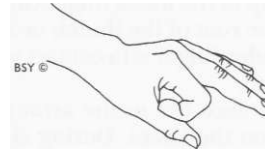
Sit in any meditative asana.

Fold the index fingers of both hands so that the tips touch the inside root of their corresponding thumbs.

Straighten the other 3 fingers and separate them slightly.

Place the hands on the knees, with the palms downwards.

The 3 unbent fingers and the thumb of each hand should point downwards towards the floor in front of the knees.



Relax your arms and hands.

Now prepare yourself for meditational practice.

Alternative

Jnana mudra is often performed with the tip of the thumb and the index finger in touch with each other. In other words, the thumb and the index finger form a circle. This variation is equally as good as the basic position we have just described.

Symbolic significance

This mudra is not only very comfortable for meditative practices, it also has various symbolic meanings. The following is the most common: the straight fingers, small, ring and middle, represent the three categories of nature. That is, nature is divided into three arbitrary aspects: *tamas* (inertia, laziness, darkness, ignorance, etc.), *rajas* (action, passion, movement) and *sattwa* (understanding, purity).

These three states have to be transcended one after the other, in order to pass from darkness into light and from ignorance to knowledge. The bent index finger represents the individual manifestation of consciousness (*jivatma*).

The thumb symbolizes the all pervading consciousness or reality. The individual (index finger) is bowing down to supreme consciousness (thumb) and acknowledging its unsurpassed power. Yet at the same time the index finger and the thumb touch each other, which shows that though they seem separate, in fact the individual being is one with the supreme. It symbolizes yoga at its culmination.

CHIN MUDRA (PSYCHIC GESTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS)

The Sanskrit word *chin* means 'consciousness'; therefore this hand position can be translated as the 'attitude of consciousness'.

Description

This mudra is very similar to jnana mudra. Again the tip of the index finger can be either placed at the root of the thumb or so that the tip of the index finger is in contact with the tip of the thumb.

The difference lies in the arrangement of the hands on the knees. During chin mudra the hands are placed so that the palms face upwards with the backs of the hands resting on the knees. The unbent fingers should also point forwards away from the body. The symbolic meaning is the same as jnanamudra.

CHINMAYA MUDRA (GESTURE OF MANIFESTED CONSCIOUSNESS)

The Sanskrit word *chinmaya* means 'manifested consciousness'; in other words, the phenomenal world around us that has arisen from the underlying consciousness.

Technique

Hold the fingers in the same way as depicted for jnana mudra.

Fold the 3 straightened fingers so that the tips touch or point towards the palm. The position of the thumb and index finger remains the same, whether the tips are in contact or if the tip of the index finger presses the root of the thumb. Both are correct.

Place the hands on the knees, palms upwards or downwards.

Symbolic significance

The four folded fingers represent the finite aspects of the world around us. The closed fist shows that the phenomenal world seems to be severely limited, blind and unconscious. The thumb pointing forwards indicates the consciousness and the transcendental aspect of existence that pervades everything. It is often regarded as different to or separate from the material world, yet in fact the manifested universe is really identical with and permeated with consciousness. The material world is linked

intimately with consciousness. This is indicated by the contact between the index finger and the thumb.

Furthermore, the folded fingers represent the physical, bioplasmic and mental aspects of life. These are not the complete aspects of man, for there is also consciousness. All of these aspects are intimately linked, yet it is the consciousness that is transcendental and capable of contacting infinity and the whole. This is indicated by the thumb, which points away from the finitude symbolized by the four fingers.

Again this mudra symbolizes yoga - the realization that the individual (four fingers) is identical to and connected directly with consciousness. The four fingers can also represent the gradual unfoldment of higher states of awareness. That is, the little, ring and middle fingers represent different facets of the material world, from stones and trees to animals and birds, all becoming increasingly aware. Eventually there is man, who seems to be no more than mind and body yet as far as we know, man alone can develop awareness sufficiently to know his integral identity with consciousness. This again is shown by the joining of the thumb and index finger.

General comments

There are many other hand mudras. Many ancient yogis and sages are depicted while displaying a characteristic mudra. These mudras have symbolic meaning, neuropsychic implications, and they also have the power to evoke forces within the individual. In other words, the individual dwells on and tries to experience the indescribable meaning contained within a mudra. In this way it is possible to call up inner forces which otherwise lie hidden and dormant. This is why mudras are so powerful.

Neuropsychic influences

If the reader has read the chapter on prana he will appreciate the significance of the bioplasmic or pranic body¹. Though we cannot normally detect this more subtle aspect of our being, prana is nevertheless continually flowing within the physical body.

Some of this prana is discharged from the tips of the fingers. The hand mudras are methods of redirecting the prana or bioplasmic

energy inwards; that is, the fingers and the hands in contact with the knees close some of these circuits. The prana is kept within the body instead of being lost.

Performance with meditative asanas

These hand mudras should be done in conjunction with meditative asanas². Choose any mudra.

In the meditative asanas such as vajrasana and veerasana, the mudras can still be practised. However, in the case of vajrasana the hands will be placed on the upper part of the thighs instead of the knees, and in veerasana the hands have to be placed either one on top of the other or on the feet.

Notes

- ¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3
- Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Topic 1

Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana (Stage 3)

So far in the first two stages of nadi shodhana pranayama we have described alternate manipulation and control of breath through the two nostrils¹. In other words, the aim has been to direct the flow of breath through each of the nostrils separately. There are various good reasons for these practices. Firstly, the ability to control inhalation and exhalation is increased and the breathing rate is decreased at will. From this comes improved respiration, which results in more vitality and better health, as well as greater calmness in daily life situations. Remember that the breathing rate is directly related to emotions. In general, fast unrhythmical breathing is associated with anxiety, anger and other debilitating, negative emotions, while slow, rhythmical breathing is connected with relaxation, friendship, well being and other positive emotions. Practice of stages 1 and 2 nadi shodhana pranayama can help to bring about a more harmonious attitude and way of life.

There are other important benefits obtainable from the first two stages of nadi shodhana. As previously explained the breathing process is intimately linked with the flow of prana within the pranic body². The alternate breathing helps to unblock the channels through which this prana flows. Furthermore, the flow of prana through ida (moon) nadi and pingala (sun) nadi is balanced. These two channels play a large part in determining whether one thinks, on the one hand, or performs externally orientated activities; that is, whether one is extroverted or introverted. For good health it is essential that there is a reasonably equal balance between these two opposite modes of being during the day and nadi shodhana stages 1 and 2 help to bring this about¹.

Another important benefit of balancing the flows of breath in the two nostrils is that the ida and pingala flows are simultaneously equalized. This leads to peace of mind, a rare occurrence in the modern world. Furthermore,

this condition of balance is conducive to the spontaneous occurrence of meditation.

Nadi shodhana stages 1 and 2 are also essential to prepare the lungs and the nervous system for the next stage, namely breath retention. Without developing the ability to breathe slowly and with control, breath retention in the way practised in pranayama is impossible. It is easy to hold the breath once, but to hold the breath a number of times successively with intermittent inhalations and exhalations requires practice. This is one of the functions of the practice of nadi shodhana so far introduced: to accustom the body for the higher practices involving breath retention.

NADI SHODHANA STAGE 3 - ANTAR KUMBHAKA

The inner retention of breath is called many names in Sanskrit: it is known as antar, antaranga, abhyantara or poorna kumbhaka. We will adopt the name *antar kumbhaka*, where the word *antar* means 'inner' and *kumbhaka* means 'breath retention'. In other words, antar kumbhaka is the practice where the breath is held inside the lungs.

Antar kumbhaka has a marked influence on the flow of prana throughout the pranic body. Since there is a close relationship between the pranic body and mind, antar kumbhaka in turn allows one to gain some control over the mind. Unfortunately, most people have a mind that is in a continual state of disturbance and fluctuation. Antar kumbhaka slows down the tumultuous mind and transforms it into a state of peaceful one-pointedness, a prerequisite for the state of meditation.

Scriptural references

Kumbhaka is widely mentioned in the ancient yogic texts for it is a very important practice. The ancient text called the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* in particular, discusses it at great length.

The following are a few extracted quotations: "He who can do kumbhaka for some time will increase digestive fire and hear the internal cosmic sound (nada). The body will become purified and free of disease."

"During kumbhaka the mind becomes steady and one experiences timelessness. One is able to concentrate intensely on the trikuti (the eyebrow centre)."

The last statement especially indicates the importance of kumbhaka as a premeditational technique. By doing kumbhaka one's concentration is automatically intensified.

The text emphasizes and warns people who practise kumbhaka to be careful: "A ringmaster tames a wild animal slowly and systematically. In the same way, one should gradually tame the prana in the body through the practice of kumbhaka. If one tries to break in and master a wild tiger or elephant too quickly without sufficient care, one can easily be injured. Similarly, if you try to control the prana in the body too rapidly and forcefully then this will also cause harm."

We also endorse the warning and will discuss this point subsequently.

There are many other ancient texts that give useful information on the subject of kumbhaka. However, since we will fully discuss the subject ourselves and in our own words we see little point in quoting them for this will only lead to needless repetition. One point worth noting, however, is that the classical raja yoga scripture called the *Yoga Sutras* defines *pranayama* as no more than kumbhaka. It says: "... pranayama is the cessation of inhalation and exhalation."

This is a very limited definition of pranayama and disagrees with the definition given by various other texts; for example the *Gherand Samhita* gives various different practices of pranayama, including kumbhaka as one of them. However, the limited definition of pranayama as kumbhaka by the author of *Yoga Sutras*, Rishi Patanjali, does show the great importance of this seemingly simple technique.

Preliminaries

Take a comfortable sitting position. If you have been practicing the first two stages of nadi shodhana pranayama for a reasonable period of time and feel that you have comfortably mastered them, then you can disregard

stage 1¹. On the other hand, if you have not been practicing regularly over a period of some months then practise stage 1 first for some minutes. The practitioner must use his discretion in this respect and determine his own capabilities.

Practise nadi shodhana stage 2 until you establish a harmonious and relaxed breathing rate where the exhalation is twice as long as inhalation. This should be continued for a minimum of a few minutes.

Technique

After completing the preliminaries begin stage 3 as follows:

Breathe in slowly through the left nostril keeping the right nostril closed.

The duration of inhalation should be the same duration of inhalation reached at the end of stage 2.

At the end of inhalation, close both nostrils and retain the air in the lungs.

If you wish you can slightly contract the glottis to imprison and firmly hold the air within the lungs.

Hold your breath (kumbhaka) for a short duration without incurring the slightest strain or discomfort.

Then breathe in slightly through the right nostril and then slowly breathe out through the right nostril. This slight inhalation at the end of inner retention (antar kumbhaka) helps to bring the respiratory muscles back into action again and releases the locked condition of the glottis.

The exhalation should not be in one gasp but must be controlled, the duration being twice that of inhalation (i.e. the same as the duration achieved at the end of stage 2).

At the end of exhalation, breathe in through the right nostril, keeping the left nostril closed. The duration should be the same as the previous inhalation through the left nostril.

Then again do antar kumbhaka for a short, comfortable length of time.

Breathe in slightly through the left nostril and then breathe out through the same nostril.

The exhalation should be twice that of inhalation.

The end of exhalation through the left nostril terminates 1 round.

Breathe in through the left nostril to start the second round.

Continue in this manner for as long as time permits and for as long as you feel comfortable.

Timing ratio

The ratio duration of inhalation, kumbhaka and exhalation is important and changes as one progressively develops the ability to hold the breath for longer periods of time. For the initial stages of practice keep the duration of inhalation and exhalation the same as practised in stage 2, maintaining the 1:2 ratio. During this time slowly increase the time of antar kumbhaka, starting with a few seconds and increasing by a second every few days according to circumstances. Don't progress too quickly or hold the breath for a long period in the beginning for this will gain nothing in the long run. If you perform a mighty retention in the first round, for example, it is more than likely that you will start gasping for air in subsequent rounds and will not be able to maintain the same long kumbhaka. Progress slowly but surely.

As a rough guide you should aim during this stage of practice to increase the period of antar kumbhaka so that it is the same as the period for exhalation. In other words, if for example you exhale for a count of ten, then over a period of time, whether weeks or a month, try to reach such a stage that the kumbhaka also takes a count of ten.

Thus at the end of this stage try to make the ratio of duration of one round as follows: Inhalation - 1: antar kumbhaka - 2: exhalation - 2: inhalation - 1: antar kumbhaka - 2: exhalation - 2. That is, 1:2:2:1:2:2.

Some people will find it easy to attain this ratio; others will require more time. Whatever the case, don't rush, for there is plenty of time. Those who find it easy to reach this ratio should start to increase the duration of inhalation, kumbhaka and exhalation, keeping the ratio fixed. Other people should persevere with their practice taking as long as is necessary to master it.

Awareness

We emphasize again that awareness of breath and mental counting is essential. This is necessary to relax the mind by withdrawing it from its normal rut of problems and to make it one-pointed. At the same time awareness of counting is vital in order to keep track of the

ratio of inhalation, kumbhaka and exhalation and to alter it where necessary.

Precautions

Though antar kumbhaka is a seemingly simple and straightforward practice, it does have vast repercussions on the body and mind. You must be alert to any adverse reactions. These can take a variety of forms from excessive spots on the skin to the inability to sleep. In the first case the kumbhaka is rapidly purging the body of inherent impurities; because of the rapidity, the poisons are causing numerous spots to erupt on the skin as they are expelled. In this case reduce or even stop the practice of kumbhaka for a short time to allow the body to cleanse itself more slowly. In the second case, kumbhaka is in a sense overcharging your body and mind above its normal level of activity. Reduce or stop your practice for some time. There are many other possible adverse reactions that can occur. Be alert to them and if you need advice seek the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

The usual reason for any kind of adverse reaction is generally too much practice in the early stages. Be moderate in the time you spend daily doing pranayama, especially kumbhaka. For the first six months you should do no more than 10 minutes. If you want to do more and your constitution is adequate then probably you can with great benefit. If you are not sure about your practice then once again we advise you to consult someone with experience.

We emphasize that the duration of antar kumbhaka should be slowly increased without any strain, so that the body mechanisms are slowly accustomed to the new level of functioning. If you have not practised stages 1 and 2 of nadi shodhana pranayama we strongly recommend that you do them for a month or so before you attempt serious practice of antar kumbhaka.

Sequence

In accordance with other forms of pranayama the best time to practise is after asanas and immediately prior to meditation practice.

Benefits

A large percentage of diseases are caused by disruptions and disturbances within the pranic

body and mind. Nadi shodhana pranayama, especially when it incorporates antar kumbhaka, is a powerful and direct method of bringing about harmony into these areas. As such when one approaches antar kumbhaka practice sensibly and avoids adverse reactions, it can have a wonderful influence on preventing and removing a wide variety of diseases. It is especially effective in tackling the more obvious psychosomatic disorders such as asthma, diabetes, etc. for it results in stillness and peace of mind.

The practice of antar kumbhaka is excellent for the mind. It is a great aid in introducing clear thought and concentration. We therefore highly recommend kumbhaka for those who are engaged in a lot of mental work and who require mental and physical vitality.

Pranayama, especially kumbhaka, helps to eradicate impurities from the body. This is clearly stated in the quotation that we have already given from *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. Our body is continually throwing out impurities from itself. Because of bad eating habits, emotional stress, inefficiency of internal organs, etc., the purification process becomes inadequate. This results in the accumulation of waste products and in disease of one form or another. Pranayama, especially kumbhaka, aids this purification process and thereby is a great help in attaining the best possible health. So swift is this purification that occasionally the body manifests sores etc. to cope with the extra elimination of poisons. This is partly the reason for the so-called adverse reactions of this type.

Notes

¹ 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

² Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3; Book I, Lesson 4; Topic 3

Mudras: Agochari Mudra

In this lesson we will describe stage 1 of the meditational method of *trataka*¹. The mudra that we will shortly describe, *agochari mudra*, is an excellent form of *trataka*. It is for this reason that we have introduced it at this stage in the book. Furthermore, this mudra is an important and integral part of *kriya yoga*, therefore it should be practised and perfected before undertaking some of the *kriya yoga* techniques.

At first *agochari mudra* will seem a little strange and difficult, for it requires a fixed gaze at the nose tip. The eyes have to assume a position to which they are normally unaccustomed. But with practice the eye muscles will adapt themselves to their new role, strengthening the eyes and in turn improving the eyesight. *Agochari mudra*, if practised for some time with awareness, can induce high states of concentration and tranquillity of mind.

AGOCHARI MUDRA (NOSE TIP GAZING)

The word *agochari* literally means 'unknown', so it is possible to call this mudra the unknown mudra. However, in this context *agochari* comes from the Sanskrit word *agocharam*, which implies something that is beyond sense cognizance. In other words, this mudra is a mudra that allows one to transcend or go beyond normal awareness.

Another name for this mudra is *nasikagra drishti*. The word *nasikagra* means 'nose tip' and *drishti* means 'to gaze'. Therefore, this alternative when translated gives an exact description of the technique, namely 'nose tip gazing'.

It is worthwhile pointing out that this mudra is one of the oldest recorded yogic practices. It is depicted in the ancient ruins of Mohanjodaro, which was a flourishing society many thousands of years ago, even before the Vedas were recorded. The great archaeologist Sir John Marshall, who did much exploration of

this ancient site, says the following: "It (the statue) represents someone seemingly in the pose of a yogi . . . the eyelids are more than half closed and the eyes are looking downwards to the tip of the nose." So the ancient sculptor and the people of that time must have had some respect for this practice to depict it in stone for posterity.

Scriptural references

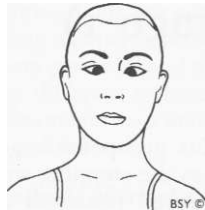
This practice is mentioned in a number of ancient yogic texts. It seems so simple and inconsequential that one might easily regard it as insignificant. But in fact if it is done for a long time with intensity it can induce high states of introspection and in turn, meditation. The sublime and inspiring *Bhagavad Gita* refers to nose tip gazing in the following *sloka* (verse): "Holding his body, head and neck erect and motionless, the aspirant should gaze at the tip of his nose without once turning around." (6:13) This verse is included in the chapter describing the method that one should adopt in order to purify and steady the mind to make it one-pointed. The *Bhagavad Gita* says that by sufficient practice and by keeping the mind in a continual state of balance and concentration one attains meditation and higher illuminative knowledge.

Technique

Sit in any comfortable meditative pose². First of all close your eyes and relax your whole body. Then open your eyes and focus on the nose tip.

Don't strain your eyes, but try to hold both eyes on the tip of the nose. If the attention of both eyes is truly directed inwards to the tip of the nose then you should see a double outline of the nose. These two outlines become one and solid where they merge with each other. The two outlines cross each other at the nose tip to form a V-shaped point. You should direct your gaze at this point. If you don't see this V-

shape then it means that your eyes are not both fixed on the nose tip. In this case adopt the method of converging the eyes outlined below.



At first you will find that you can hold your attention on the nose tip for a few seconds. Continuation of the practice becomes a little uncomfortable.

Be sure to release the position of the eyes for a few seconds and then repeat the practice. In this manner you will gradually increase the period of time of actual nose tip gazing as the eyes progressively become accustomed.

Under no circumstances should you strain the eyes. Proficiency in the practice should be developed over a period of weeks.

When you can gaze at the nose tip for a minute or so without the slightest difficulty then become aware of your breath as well as your nose tip.

Feel the breath moving to and fro through the nose.

At the same time you will hear a slight sound as the breath moves through the nasal passages; also be aware of this sound.

Try to be completely absorbed in the practice to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

Maintain awareness of the nose tip, movement of the breath and the accompanying sound. Continue in this manner for as long as you have time.

Method of converging the eyes

The biggest obstacle in the beginning is the inability to converge both eyes on the nose tip.

There is a method of overcoming this problem: hold up one finger in front of your eyes at a distance of about 45 cms.

Fix both eyes on the finger; at this distance it is easy.

Then slowly move the finger nearer and nearer to the nose, all the time keeping the eyes fixed on the finger.

Continue to slowly bring the finger closer to the nose until it touches the nose tip.

The eyes should still be focused on the finger. Then merely transfer the attention of the eyes to the nose tip and remove the finger.

You will now find that both of the eyes converge on the nose tip.

If necessary ask a friend to tell you if this is indeed the case.

Eventually this method becomes superfluous and you will find that the eyes can be fixed on the nose tip at will.

Awareness and duration

Though the eyes are open, this practice is a method of introspection. If you are doing the practice correctly then your awareness should be only on the nose tip and the flow and sound of the breath. Under these circumstances the open eyes are not aware of the outside world. The eyes are concentrated and in turn the mind too.

This practice can be done for as long as you up to five minutes.

Time of practice

This technique needs no preparation so can be practised at any time of the day. If you wish you can even practise while sitting on a bus or a train. It is ideally practised early in the morning and late at night, especially before sleep, for it induces calmness of mind as a preparation for deep, restful sleep.

Benefits

The benefits are essentially the same as given for *trataka*¹. If your mind is in a state of disturbance and turmoil or if you feel angry then practise this technique. It is especially suitable in this respect, for it can be done at any time during the day when you are most likely to meet stressful and disruptive situations. Most other techniques require preparation and a special place of practice.

Notes

¹ Topic 6 of this lesson

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Meditation: Trataka (Stage 1)

All meditational practices aim initially at establishing concentration of mind as a prelude to meditation. To attain this state, various different methods are adopted. One of the most direct, simple and yet at the same time effective, is the technique of trataka. The mechanics of the practice are easy to learn and understand. It can be practised by everyone and the benefits are enormous. Even beginners, with a little effort and persistence, can gain much from it in a short period of time with some kind of noticeable experience. And most importantly it can lead directly to meditation.

In this lesson and the following two lessons we will introduce the three main stages of trataka, progressing from the simpler form to the more advanced forms¹. The word *trataka* means 'steady gazing'. The practice of trataka involves gazing at a point or object without blinking the eyes. It is a method of focussing the eyes and in turn the mind on one point to the exclusion of all others. The object can be either external to the body, in which case the practice is called *bahir trataka* (outer gazing), or the object of awareness can be internal, in which case it is called *antar trataka* (inner gazing). Through this method, all the attention and power of the mind is channelled into one continuous stream. This allows the latent potential within the mind to spontaneously arise.

Trataka as a world wide method

Trataka is described in numerous scriptures, although it is usually known by other names and varies according to traditions. In the classical hatha yoga text, *Gherand Samhita*, it is classified as one of the shatkarmas². Because the other five practices of the shatkarmas (neti, dhauti, etc.) are concerned only with cleansing the body, trataka seems to be completely out of place - an anomaly in fact. However, it is regarded as the last of the shatkarmas and is

included in this group for a good reason, namely to act as the stepping stone between physically oriented practices and mental practices that lead to higher awareness. In a sense, trataka acts as the bridge between hatha yoga and raja yoga.

Tantra, probably the most all inclusive spiritual system ever developed and the root of yoga, utilizes trataka on a wide scale in its many practices, whether using symbolic diagrams, deities or objects as a focus of worship or awareness. Trataka in one form or another is utilized by almost every religious and spiritual system, though often heavily disguised. In Hinduism, an integral part of the religious practice is to sit in front of a picture or a statue of Krishna, Rama, Shiva, the symbol Aum and so on. Though many will regard this as a form of worship, and of course it can be if the worshipper is sincere, it is actually a form of trataka for the aim is to concentrate the mind on the external deity. From this comes mental peace and a meditative state. Furthermore, many Hindus have the ability to create at will internal visualizations of the outer objects and perform inner trataka.

In Christianity the same thing is done, though in a less obvious manner. In a church there are idols of Christ, there are candles and there is always the symbolic cross. These objects act as focal points for trataka, though of course it is not known by this name. All of these forms have a deep-rooted symbolic meaning which generally acts below the level of normal awareness. In other words, these symbols correlate with and stimulate experiences and memory that is contained in what Jung called the collective unconscious. Therefore these objects of awareness invoke experiences and knowledge of which you are normally unaware.

In Tibetan Buddhism, trataka is often done on various deities, on Buddha and various geometrical figures known as yantras or

mandalas. Even Zen Buddhism utilizes trataka, though possibly of a more abstract type, such as staring at a blank wall. The practice of trataka is not confined to yoga. It is universal and has been used throughout the ages as a method of transcending normal experience. Trataka is simple, yet very powerful and this is the reason why so many different systems and religions have used it in one form or another as a means for spiritual upliftment

Different methods of trataka

Trataka consists of three different modes of practice:

1. Outer (bahir) trataka only
2. Outer and inner (antar) trataka combined.
3. Inner trataka only

Outer trataka can be practised alone, though in fact it is generally combined with inner trataka for the best results. The technique that we will discuss in this lesson and the next will be a combination of both outer and inner trataka. The most effective, though more difficult technique, is inner trataka practised by itself - the third stage of trataka practice¹.

1. *Outer trataka alone*-. This can be practised on almost any object, a few suggestions for which are given subsequently. Agochari mudra is an excellent form of outer trataka³. Because most people are habituated to being continuously extroverted during their lives, they find it almost impossible to close the eyes for more than a few seconds, unless they are intending to sleep. Outer trataka can be utilized under these circumstances. The most useful purpose of outer trataka, however, is to train the eyes so that they can gaze at an object for a long time without flickering the eyelids, so that one can gain a clear inner after-image for the purpose of inner trataka.

2. *Outer and inner trataka combined*: This is the form of trataka that we will describe in this topic and the following lesson¹. One first of all gazes at an external point or object for some time, then closes the eyes and gazes at the after-image of the same object. Again any form can be used, though a bright object is most suitable, for this imprints a clear picture on the retina of the eyes, which can be clearly seen when the eyes are closed. While the stage of outer trataka does help to concentrate the mind, the main function is to produce a clear inner-image. This after-image acts as an almost

overwhelming object of attention during inner trataka. If it is bright and clear enough it will, in a sense, fascinate your awareness so that you can be aware of nothing else. This is exactly what is required for it leads to concentration of mental forces and in turn meditation.

The method of outer and inner trataka combined is especially useful for those people who have great difficulty in creating an inner-image at will, without an external counterpart. Those people who can easily create a steady and distinct inner-image without the assistance of an outer material object can practise inner trataka alone.

3. *Inner trataka alone*: This form of trataka is most conducive to introspection and exploration of the mind, for there is no contact with the outside world as there is with the other two modes. However, the other two forms, are most suitable for general practice and especially for beginners. The reason for this is that most people have a disturbed mind that is in continual conflict and turmoil. Under these circumstances it is generally difficult to create an inner image that is sufficiently overwhelming to capture the attention of the mind. If the mind is disturbed and you practise inner trataka, you will generally find that the ever wandering mind quickly forgets the inner image and becomes sidetracked onto other thoughts. As a result you will fail to gain the most benefits from the practice. Under these conditions it is far better to practise outer trataka or outer trataka combined with inner trataka, for the clarity and more tangible nature of the outer object will be more likely to hold the attention of the mind to the exclusion of other thoughts.

You should definitely do inner trataka when you can create a clear inner image and when you feel that your mind has attained a reasonable degree of equanimity and steadiness. This state will come if you practise yoga with sincerity and enthusiasm. Inner trataka is a powerful method of developing awareness of the deeper aspects of the mind and awakening its incredible potential¹.

Choice of object of awareness

Your choice of object can be almost anything. You must decide what is suitable for yourself. However, we recommend that the object has some meaning for you. In this way, there is

more likelihood of maintaining your awareness on the object during trataka. To give you an idea, below is a list of commonly used objects⁴:

- A candle flame
- A cross
- Aum symbol
- A flower - such as a rose or lotus
- Black dot on a white sheet of paper
- The rising sun (not the midday sun)
- The moon
- A star
- Shivalingam
- Nose tip
- Eyebrow centre
- Another person's eyes
- The sky
- Water
- Ishta Devata (personal deity)
- Yin and yang symbol
- Crystal
- Yantra or mandala
- Your own shadow
- Darkness
- Picture or statuette of Buddha
- Picture or statuette of Christ
- One's eyes in a mirror

There are many more possibilities. You can choose anything as your object, but once you decide, try not to change, for this will decrease the effectiveness of trataka. In other words, if you spend time developing your awareness of one particular object and then suddenly change, then you must in fact start from the beginning again to allow your mind to assimilate the new object. The mind has to mould itself around a particular object so that it is almost automatically attracted and drawn towards it. This takes time in general and it is really a waste of effort to suddenly start moulding the mind around another object. Choose carefully and then try to stick to your decision. If you feel that you want to change after a period of time, and this is a common temptation, seek expert advice before you actually do so.

We have found a candle an excellent object for trataka, especially for beginners. The reason for this is that its brightness seems to rivet, to hold one's attention. It has an almost magnetic effect on the eyes and on one's awareness. Furthermore, it leaves a very clear after-image when one practises inner trataka. Even those people who would experience great

difficulty in mentally creating an after-image for other objects should be able with a little practice to see a clear inner picture of the candle flame. For this reason we will use a candle as the object of practice in the method of trataka we will shortly describe.

Posture

Trataka should be practised while sitting in the most comfortable, yet steady position possible. Any sitting position can be taken, even sitting in a chair. However, the preferred asanas are padmasana, siddhasana, etc., which tend automatically to hold the body in the steadiest position without effort⁵.

TRATAKA - STAGE 1

Position of object for outer trataka

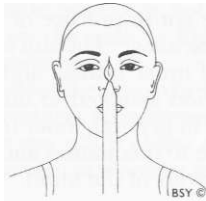
This is important to gain the most from the practice, if the object is too far away then it is more difficult to hold the attention of the mind; furthermore, it is far less likely to leave a clear and absorbing after-image during inner trataka. If the object is too low then there is a tendency to stoop forwards while sitting; this is not conducive to a steady position and also produces discomfort and backache. If the object is too high then the neck will become stiff. We have found from experience that the best position of the object is at the same horizontal level as the eyes and at an arm's length from the eyes.

Of course you can adjust the position of the object to suit your preferences; our suggestion is only a guide, though we have found that it is suitable for most people. Some people prefer the object to be at eye level but much closer to the eye. There is much to be said for this, especially if the object is small. You must experiment for yourself.

The above, needless to say, does not apply to many objects, such as the sun, the moon, the nose tip, the eyebrow centre, etc., the position of which cannot be altered for nature has already fixed it. Nevertheless, the previous general comments apply to a wide range of objects from a candle to an Aum symbol.

If you have some form of eye defect you should try to position the object so that there is no double image and no blurred outline. You must be able to see a clear shape of the object. It is best if you avoid wearing spectacles

- wear them only if necessary. For instance, if you are doing trataka on the moon and you are short-sighted then you will merely see a yellow blob. Under these circumstances spectacles will be necessary. However, the practice of trataka without glasses will help you to reduce your dependence on them, though this takes time and much practice.



Technique

The method is divided into two parts: outer trataka on the candle and then inner trataka on the after-image.

Those who wish can merely do outer trataka, while others can do both, one after the other. The choice is yours.

Light the candle and place it on a small bench or table so that the flame is at eye level when you sit on the floor.

Sit on the floor and adjust your position so that the candle is at an arm's length from your eyes and directly in front of you.

Adjust your position so you are comfortable with the spine erect.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Practise *kaya sthairyam*⁶.

Let your entire body become like a statue.

Make the resolve that you will not move your body throughout the whole practice; if you do then you will immediately distract your awareness away from the practice.

Preparation is important, so totally absorb yourself in your body; try to think of nothing else.

Practise *kaya sthairyam* for a few minutes.

When you are ready, open your eyes.

Gaze intently at the flame, directing your attention particularly to the top of the wick.

Don't look at anything else but the flame and wick. Try not to blink your eyelids or move your eyeballs.

Don't strain the eyes. If you must blink, then blink. With practice you will find that you will be able to gaze without blinking for a long period of time.

The important factor is that you relax your eyes as much as possible; if they are tense then try to relax them. It is tension of the eyes that causes them to flicker.

Many people try too hard not to blink, which creates tension and makes it even more difficult to control this blinking movement.

Don't try so hard and you will find that the eyes automatically cease to flicker.

Keep your awareness on the candle flame and wick.

Centre your awareness in this way so that you lose awareness of your body.

If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the practice in hand.

Initially continue this gazing for about 2 or 3 minutes.

Then close your eyes.

Everyone has looked at the sun for some time, closed the eyes and then seen a clear impression made by the light on the retina of the eye.

Likewise, try to visualize the after-image of the candle flame in front of your closed eyes.

If you don't see an after-image don't worry; all that is required is practice; for the meantime, merely try to create and visualize the flame.

There will be a tendency for the image to move upwards or downwards; try to steady the image.

Try to be totally aware only of the after-image.

If any psychic visions, extraneous thoughts or other experiences arise, merely act as a witness. Don't react to them in any way; just let them come and watch them with disinterest.

Continue in this manner as long as the after-image is clear.

When the image begins to fade, open your eyes and again gaze at the candle flame and wick.

Focus your awareness on the external flame, nothing else.

Continue this outer gazing for about 2 or 3 minutes, again without blinking or flickering the eyes if possible.

Then once again close the eyes and gaze at the inner image, for as long as it is sharp and distinct.

Continue to repeat inner trataka and outer trataka, one after the other for as long as you have time available.

Then just before you finish close the eyes and watch the dark space in front of your closed eyes.

Watch any activities that may occur there, taking care to remain a witness only, without any involvement.

Be aware of any thoughts that arise.

Practise this for a few minutes.

Then open your eyes and blow out the candle.

Steadiness of gaze

As we have already mentioned, it is important that one tries not to blink or flicker the eyes while doing outer trataka. This is necessary to produce a clear after-image for inner trataka. Without a steady gaze it is difficult to discern a clear inner image and this is the main reason why beginners often fail to perceive an inner image.

Furthermore, steadiness of the gaze is directly related to steadiness and concentration of mind. There is an intimate connection between these two. Great sages with a calm, peaceful mind are often distinctive for their piercing eyes, their eyes don't seem to blink very much. So in trataka, by steadying the eyes you are automatically relaxing and concentrating the mind.

Often people are told not to flicker or blink their eyes under any circumstances, whether they feel discomfort, whether their eyes start to water profusely or whatever. We don't agree with this practice, for it only creates tension making it even harder to comfortably keep the eyes steady. We have already pointed out that while the aim is not to move the eyes, if you must move them through discomfort, then do so. At first, beginners may find that this practice is very difficult and perhaps be able to gaze only for a few seconds before they feel the need to blink the eyes. Don't worry, with practice you will slowly develop the ability to gaze for long periods of time without the slightest movement.

The same applies to inner trataka on the after-image. At first the image will move due to movement of the eyeball while the eyes are closed. With practice you will be able to keep the eyes still and maintain a fixed image. Remember, the knack of mastering trataka lies in relaxing the eyes as much as possible.

Duration of inner and outer gazing

Continue to gaze at the flame for as long as you can without flickering the eyes. Beginners should aim at about two or three minutes.

With practice increase the time up to five and ten minutes in one stretch.

Inner gazing can be practised for as long as you can clearly see the after-image. Beginners who cannot see an image should try to create or discern an image for a minute or so and then open their eyes. Advanced practitioners may find that they can see an image almost indefinitely. In this case, practise inner trataka throughout the entire practice or for as long as you can see the image. The aim is to increase the duration of inner trataka and eventually reduce the period assigned to outer trataka. This is because in general, inner trataka is far more conducive to meditation and awareness of the deeper layers of the mind.

Duration and time of practice

To gain noticeable benefits try to practise for at least fifteen minutes every day; more if possible. You can practise at any time, though early in the morning and late at night are the ideal times. If possible practise at both these times. Arrange your program so that there are no outer disturbances.

Warning

Everyone has accumulated complexes and problems stored in the mind. The aim of yoga is to clean out the mind of this accumulated dross. Trataka is an excellent method in this respect for it helps you to become aware of your problems. However, it is possible for your problems to manifest too rapidly, with possible mental upsets. If you find this occurring, stop your practice and seek expert advice.

Benefits

Trataka develops the power of concentration enormously, which is of immense use in everyday life. Furthermore, the focussing of mental energy towards one point leads to peace of mind, for it stops the continually fluctuating tendency of the mind. Trataka is an excellent method of obtaining meditative experience and unleashing some of the dormant potential of the mind.

The power of memory is hampered in many of us by mental disturbances, which seem to cloud over our ability to recall events when we require to remember them. Trataka helps to improve our memory by calming the mind.

All people with nervous tension, insomnia, etc. are recommended to do trataka on a regular basis. Also those people with weak eyesight and weak eye muscles will gain much benefit from trataka.

In India, trataka is often used as a means to gain psychic powers such as telepathy, clairvoyance, etc. But we don't recommend that you practise it for this reason, whether you believe in these powers or not, for they are a distraction on the path to higher awareness and self-knowledge.

We have described trataka using a candle flame as the object of awareness. Remember, you can use any other object of your choice, practising trataka in a similar manner.

Notes

- 1 Trataka: Stage 2 - Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 6;
- stage 3 - Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 7
- 2 Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2
- 3 Topic 5 of this lesson.
- 4 For further details on the use of symbols refer to Book III, Lesson 31, Topic 1
- 5 Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2
- 6 Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have introduced some excellent new practices. We have not given any new asanas for we have already described a sufficient number to keep you busy and to cater for your practice requirement.

The hand mudras should be practised during meditation; no extra time is required. Choose the one you prefer and practise it. Try also to perfect a suitable meditation asana.

Nadi shodhana stage 3, trataka and agochari mudra are all important techniques to be included in your program. Again we repeat if you are short of time divide your routine into two separate sessions - morning and evening. By now you will have realized that for an integrated program of asanas, pranayama and meditational techniques more than half an

hour is necessary. However, not all people have this time to spare or even want to practise yoga for other than physical reasons. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this - it is your choice. However, from now onwards the half hour program will be intended for those persons who are interested primarily in maintaining good physical health and a reasonable degree of mental peace and stability.

Those people who have the time to spare and want to gain benefits beyond the physical body, in particular to clean out and explore the mind, should practise for as long as they have time available, preferably morning and evening. The other three programs, namely 1 1/2, 1 hour and 3/4 of an hour, will be orientated towards this end.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 1/2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	to suit time	10
Shavasana	—	4
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Mem Vakrasana	2 each side	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	5
Stage 3	—	10
Trataka	—	30
Agochari Mudra	—	10
		<hr/> 90

Program 2: duration 1 hour		
Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	4
Stage 3	—	8
Trataka	—	20
Agochari Mudra	—	8
		<hr/> 60

Program 3: duration 3/4 hour		
Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3	—	8
Trataka	—	20
		<hr/> 45

Try to fit in Agochari Mudra, perhaps 5 immediately before you begin Trataka.

Program 4: duration 1/2 hour		
Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3	—	8
Agochari Mudra	—	5
		<hr/> 30

Trataka is such a valuable practice that you should try to find time to practise it for at least 20 minutes on a regular basis.

