

Lesson 18

Fortunate was Christ, who was crucified; fortunate were Socrates and Mansoor. What about Mira and Dayananda? How unfortunate are we, when we find ourselves allured by praises and favours, flowers and merits? Misfortune unsurpassed! When trials come at our door, we cry out aloud to help kick them away. Yea, we only kick divine chances. So do thou understand!

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Bhakti Yoga (Part 4)

This is the concluding discussion on bhakti voga¹. You may be wondering why we are spending so much time and space on this subject. Bhakti is the means to harmonize and channelize the turbulent emotions. Much is said about harmonizing the body and mind. Most books on yoga are written on this subject. This integration of mind and body, of action and thought, has been the main theme of this book so far. Yet very little is ever said about harmonizing the emotions and integrating them with one's action and thoughts. These emotions are very powerful forces. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve mental and physical stability if the emotions are rampant. It is like trying to tame a wild tiger by pulling its tail. It cannot be done. How can a person attain mental peace if his emotions are like a stormy sea? There has to be a simultaneous process of harmonizing and integrating the body, mind and emotions, one's actions, thoughts and feelings. This is the only sure way of achieving fulfilment in life and expanding awareness.

The subject of stabilizing the emotions in man is usually forgotten or treated lightly as if emotions are non-existent. The attitude seems to be if the emotions cannot be tamed then pretend they don't exist, like the ostrich that buries its head in the ground when it senses danger. This may make it feel safer, but it does not prevent it being eaten by a lion. So if you want to harmonize your life, then it is useless being like the ostrich, and pretending that the emotions are non-existent. This attitude will lead nowhere, for the emotions are ever present. You may gain mental peace for short spells of time, but this tranquillity will be disturbed by the monsters of emotions when they show their ominous heads from the depths. Suppressed emotions eventually bubble to the surface and create disruptions. To gain lasting peace in life it is not sufficient to attain perfect physical health and some control

over the thoughts. The emotions must also be transformed so that they are in accord with every action and thought. Without gaining emotional harmony and one-pointedness it is impossible to gain mental and physical harmony.

You will now perhaps understand why we are spending so much time in explaining bhakti yoga. It is the most powerful means of harmonizing the emotions so that they work with the individual and not against him, so that they are used for constructive purposes.

The bhaktas of different religions

Every part of the world, every culture and every religion has had its share of bhakti intoxicated bhaktas. The religion of Judaism has had the bhaktas of the Old Testament and the vibrant followers of Hasidism. Christianity has had these plus bhaktas such as St. Teresa, St. Augustine, St. Francis and many more. Islam has had bhaktas such as Rabia of Basra, Junnuna Misri of Egypt, Attar, Rumi, Farid, Tabriz and many others. In India there has been an endless list of well-known bhaktas. Even Buddhism, which seems at first glance to have nothing in common with bhakti, has produced its fair share of ecstatic bhaktas.

Most of these great bhaktas initially worshipped the supreme consciousness in a particular form. It was from this that they realized the nature of that which is beyond form, and in fact that which is both beyond the formless and the formed, yet an integral part of everything. The common feature of all these well-known bhaktas is their compassion for all people and all things, no matter what circumstances prevailed. This applies to the bhaktas of all religions, though actually they are beyond any specific religion.

Most religions are predominantly bhakti in nature and teaching. An obvious exception is Buddhism, which is mainly a raja yoga and jnana yoga system. However, Buddhism too

has a well-known offshoot which chants the holy name of *amitabha*. And this bhakti aspect of religions is not surprising, for devotion is a powerful and natural expression of man. The state of highest consciousness is not the monopoly of any one religion - it is the culmination of all religions. It is only the name, the object of worship and the specific method that is different. The culmination of highest consciousness and the expression of bhakti is the same. All the scriptures only discuss the starting point and the mechanics. They cannot talk about the culmination, except in allegorical form. Religions are a method. Whether one worships Christ, Krishna or whoever, it does not really matter. They all signify the same thing and devotion to any of these incarnated forms can lead to higher states of awareness.

There are many artists who expressed bhakti through their work. Many poems, paintings and sculptures were produced by bliss-intoxicated bhaktas. Their masterpieces are an attempt to express the ineffable. Michaelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, William Blake, Rabindranath Tagore, the incredible tantric artists and sculptors of India and many more in all parts of the world tried to express and depict their feeling of divine love. The beauty and sensitivity of their masterpieces clearly shows this. Great works of art are not really made, they are divinely inspired by revelatory experience. They are an expression of the heart. They don't really require effort, they happen.

Next time you look at a work of art, or listen to a beautiful piece of music, think of the motivating force behind its composition. What was the reason for the inspiration? Next time you hear a story of a great sage, saint or yogi, reflect on the driving force behind his actions. What is it that made his actions so perfect and powerful? If you don't know what this force is, then we will tell you: it is overwhelming bhakti.

Christianity

Christianity and Judaism are mainly bhakti religions, though there is much esoteric data hidden in the *Bible* and other texts, and in various sects, japa is widely practised by various groups. An important mantra is *Kyrie Eleison*. Constant chanting, verbal or mental, with remembrance throughout the day and night, can lead to one-pointedness of mind and

transcendence. Such is the power of mantra combined with devotion.

Prayer is an important part of Christianity, as it is with most other religions. Prayer combined with devotion helps to purify the mind and reduce the power of the ego. This too can lead to greater levels of awareness. In a text called the *Philocalia* (a collection of early mystical Christian writings) St. Nilus says that the method of transcendence is the: "... collection of the mind from its wandering and quietly leading it to the heart by way of breathing, and by repeating the prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me', in harmony with the breath. This leads to unification with the one, the single and unifying, directly in a union which transcends reason." This is a method of bhakti yoga combined with breath awareness. It can be done while sitting for meditational practice or during everyday activities.

In Christianity, the focal point for bhakti is Christ. Most of the great Christian saints have made this clear and it is written in the mystical books. Christ also indicated the path of bhakti for his disciples.

The following are a few selected quotations of Christ: "Love thy neighbour as thyself." "Love thine enemy." This is urging aspirants to worship the supreme in other people. "No man cometh unto the Father (supreme consciousness) but by me." Although to some people this may sound dogmatic, its meaning is that devotion to Christ can lead to spiritual evolution. The very essence of Christianity is centred on devotion to the form, life and teachings of Christ.

The Old Testament of the *Bible* also strongly preaches the path of bhakti. For example it says in no uncertain terms: "Seek ye ever the face of God, and seek ye Him in all things, tarrying not until ye find him". (*Psalms* 104, 4) "Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy soul and with all thy strength." (*Deuteronomy* 6, 5)

There have been many great Christian saints. One of the best known is St. Francis of Assisi, born in Italy at the end of the 12th century. It is he who said that 'idleness is the enemy of the soul'. And he practised what he preached for he continually did karma yoga, whether it was sweeping the floor or helping the poor. He was a great bhakta and his words have inspired many:

*All my will is burnt up with love,
Is united to love,
Is transformed into love,
Is consumed and consecrated by love.
Neither the fire nor the sword
Shall separate me from love.
Suffering and death never may rise
To the heights to which love doth lure me on
Outside the mystic union with love.
All created things are restless.
By love the soul is raised,
Is exalted, elevated above everything.*

This clearly shows the path and the culmination of bhakti. He also said: "With all thy heart love the love which loves thee, love the love which desires thee, and has created thee to draw thee wholly to Himself." He expressed his bhakti to everything - the birds, the animals, fellow humans - everything was included in his circle of bhakti. He referred to the sun as brother sun', regarding it as the image of the supreme. The moon and the wind were his sisters, as was everything else. He was definitely an intoxicated bhakta.

There are various books on bhakti in Christianity. A particularly practical one is the *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross. It is a bhakti scripture from cover to cover and gives sensible advice on the pitfalls on the path of bhakti. It also prescribes the ten steps on the bhakti path, which are very similar to those given in the Indian text, the *Srimad Bhagavatam*¹.

There are notable modern bhaktas. An example is Kahlil Gibran who wrote:

"Who knows that your neighbour is your better self wearing another body? See that you love him as you would love yourself." "It is in your longing that you shall find the son of man (self-realization). For longing is the fountain-head of ecstasy, and is the path to our father (the supreme consciousness)."

Islam

Islam is almost entirely a devotional religion. It has produced Sufism which is noted for its intense bhaktas. Sufism emphasizes the use of dancing, music and singing. Its followers do prescribed dancing steps while chanting mantras. This purifies the heart and accentuates the feeling of bhakti. Awareness is heightened and the mind becomes more one-

pointed. The ego drops away and so in turn does the veil of delusion. This leads to eventual transcendence and realization.

The most well-known mantra used in Islam is *la ilaha illallah* which means 'there is no god but God'. This is repeated over and over again like japa. In Islam this process is called zikr and it is said that the *zikr* (remembrance), the *zakir* (person who remembers) and the *mazkur* (remembered one) become united through intense practice and devotion. This is exactly the same as in yoga and many other systems.

Eventually, with intense bhakti there arises an effortless flow of awareness to the object of devotion. This is called *fana*, and is comparable to dhyana or meditation. This eventually leads to *baqua* which is called samadhi in yoga. This is the exact parallel of raja yoga but in the field of bhakti yoga. Always there is emphasis on the ascent of devotion so that it can receive the descent of grace. This is similar to the concept used in the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

There are innumerable well-known bhaktas in Islam and Sufism. As an example we will give a few quotations of Rabia of Basra, who was born in the 8th century in what is now Iraq. When she was a young girl she suffered from hunger, slavery and beatings. Nevertheless she became a bhakta and said:

*Beloved,
My aspiration is but one . . .
To remember thee and thee alone . . .
I have made thee the companion of my heart.
The groaning and the yearning of the lover
will continue
Until the heart has found its rest in the beloved.*

She also said: "One mark of the awakened mind is that it is centred in the supreme and will not wander after anything else. The mind that is absorbed in the service of the one has craving for nothing else."

We will end here with one poem by the Sufi Attar:

*Joy - joy - I triumph
Now no more I know
Myself as simply me.
I burn with love.
The centre is within me
And its wonder
Lies everywhere about me.*

*Joy - joy - no mortal thought can fathom me.
I am the merchant and the pearl - both.
Lo, time and space lie crouching at my feet.
Joy - joy - when I would in a rapture
Plunge into myself and all things know.*

Bhakti in Hinduism

There are vast numbers of sects and subjects, some of which are closely related and others that seem very different. All together they form a mixture that makes the Hindu religion seem confusing. As an illustration, we intend to briefly discuss one bhakti sect which worships Krishna. This will indicate the general trend of bhakti yoga in India².

Much of the doctrine of the vaishnavites (followers of Vishnu, including Krishna) is concerned with Krishna as a child in the town of Brindavan by the Yamuna River. The stories of his childhood pranks are recorded in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Stories of other parts of his life are given in scriptures such as the *Bhagavad Gita*. He is worshipped and adored by the gopis (cowherd girls) who were Krishna's greatest followers. They were intense bhaktas. Everything that they did, touched and saw was permeated with Krishna. They wallowed in his eternal sport which is unceasing and everywhere. It is said in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* that: "In every branch, leaf, flower and fruit I see Krishna and nothing else. Doors and walls have been transformed into mirrors. In every direction I see thee and thee alone. Pebbles, stones and lumps of earth have all been turned into so many looking glasses."

On one level of understanding the gopis represent the senses. These are directed entirely towards Krishna. The whole mind and heart is centred on Krishna, whether awake, sleeping, working, eating or whatever. This leads to spiritual awakening. On another level, the gopis symbolize Shakti - the manifested form of consciousness. In the *Padma Purana* Krishna says: "Sri Radha is my beloved - know her to be the supreme goddess. Surrounding her are thousands of her female companions (the gopis). Just as my own form is eternal, they too are eternal. My parents, friends, the cows and cowherds of Brindavan and Brindavan itself are eternal and made of pure consciousness and bliss." (*Patala Khand* 2:73-75) This means that worship of Krishna by the gopis and the devotion of any other person towards

Krishna (or any other deity) is of utmost intimacy because they are really worshipping the essence that is within.

The spiritual path shown by Krishna is the path of intense bhakti. It doesn't ask one to become an ascetic and practise austerities. One must only make the heart and mind unceasingly one-pointed. The story of Krishna's childhood also depicts the path that every person must pass along on the road to enlightenment and the obstacles that must be overcome.

Many people deny the historical authenticity of Krishna's life but actually this is totally irrelevant. The pastimes of Krishna are not intended to be historical. They are intended to transcend history. The games of Krishna, the *lilas*, portray and symbolize higher truths and encourage one to become a bhakta as a means to higher knowledge. If you are a bhakta, then Brindavan is really in your heart. You should become one of the gopis, with total devotion to Krishna or any other person, deity or symbol which acts as a magnet for your devotion. Listen to the music of Krishna's flute - this is the eternal, inner nada of each and everything in the universe. Krishna is the consciousness in each person, separate but also the same.

The essence of devotion to Krishna is summed up in the *Uddhava Gita* when Krishna says: "All the desires, which are rooted in the heart of the sage who worships me with the yoga of devotion (bhakti yoga), gradually wilt away and when he realizes me, the knot of ignorance which is lodged in the heart is destroyed. All his doubts are annihilated and his stock of karma is exhausted. Therefore, by bhakti yoga my devotee gains all that is gained by the other paths of yoga and by austerities, dispassion, charitable acts and pilgrimages."

The other bhakta systems of India follow the same basic pattern but with different deities and background.

Indian bhaktas

If we wrote about most of the known bhaktas of India then we would easily fill the rest of this book. It is possible to write an encyclopaedia on them. To give you an idea of the aspirations of these bhaktas we intend to give selected quotations from two great bhaktas - Kabir and Ramakrishna.

Kabir is one of the most famous bhaktas of India. The word *kabir* means 'great', and this

exactly describes this exuberant bhakti poet. He is often called *Kabirdas*, which means the slave or servant of the supreme.

He was born near Benares in 1440. His whole life was an expression of bhakti. He earned his living as a weaver. He sang countless songs, many of which have been recorded by his disciples. They all generate an atmosphere of devotion and bliss and are widely sung throughout India. And still, even though they were written hundreds of years ago, they continue to transmit overwhelming devotion and feeling. When these songs are sung the whole atmosphere is charged with the devotion of Kabir. The air becomes vibrant; the heart starts thumping with joy. This occurs even for those who do not understand the language.

For Kabir everything is blissful, as he sings in the following song:

*The supreme dances in rapture
And when his great joy
Touches the body and mind
They cannot contain themselves.
He holds all that is
Within his eternal bliss.*

Though he sang thousands of songs, he emphasized time and time again that it is impossible to talk or write about the supreme consciousness - it can be only tasted and felt. It is only in this way that you will know the sweetness of bliss. He sang:

*Since the day when I met my Lord,
There has been no end to the play of our love;
I see with my eyes open and I smile
And I behold his beauty everywhere.
I utter his name, and whatever I see,
It reminds me of him.
Whatever I do, it becomes his worship,
Wherever I go, I move in him.
All I achieve is his service and grace.
When I lie down, I lie prostrated at his feet.
It is only he that I adore - none other,
My tongue no longer utters useless words,
It only sings his glory day and night.
Whether sitting or standing,
I can never forget him
For the rhythm of his music beats in my ears.
Kabir says: I am totally immersed in the
intoxicating bliss that transcends pleasure and
pain.*

Remember, this is only a translation. In the original language, with music and amid a large group of people singing, the power of devotion is electrifying.

Kabir was a practical man. He advised aspirants to: "... go to the master, receive the word (mantra) and worship the Lord. This leads to liberation, declares Kabir most emphatically."

*As the oil is in the oil seed
And the fire in the flint
So the supreme is within thee, unrevealed.
Follow the guru's simple and true instructions.
Keep strict vigil at midnight and so find him.*

Kabir was not a person of blind faith. He had transcended all religious barriers. In his poems he continually tries to show people that there is no contradiction between Hinduism and Islam. He had reached the culmination of all yogic paths. Knowledge and devotion were the result of expanded awareness. He sang:

*The inward and the outward have become
as one sky;
The infinite and the finite are united;
I am drunk with the sight of this all.*

If you want to know more we suggest you read a book which gives translations of Kabir's songs. We recommend *Poems of Kabir* translated by Rabindranath Tagore.

The second bhakta we will briefly discuss is Ramakrishna. He was born near Calcutta in 1836. He is a good example to show that illumination does not depend on education. He was illiterate, yet through bhakti, merged with highest knowledge. Because of this, his power of intellect became very powerful, and many highly educated people would sit and listen to his words. The educated came to an uneducated person for guidance and wisdom; this almost seems to defy understanding. Many of his disciples, such as Vivekananda received extensive education, yet they adopted Ramakrishna as their guru. Higher awareness does not depend on formal education.

Ramakrishna worshipped the form of the supreme as Kali, the divine mother. She represents the dissolution of life, pain and darkness, as well as loving kindness, protection and bliss. Kali is both loving and stern. He

continuously reflected on her image and attributes, day and night. His bhakti was such that he could not stop thinking of her. Eventually, he saw her everywhere and in everything. This was his path to illumination.

He was often asked by people: what is the way to the supreme? His answer was sharp and definite: bhakti yoga. He said time and time again that bhakti yoga is the best sadhana for the *Kali Yuga* (Dark Age) of the present. His bhakti is illustrated by the following statement he made to a disciple:

*To my divine mother I prayed only for pure love.
At her lotus feet I offered a few flowers
and I prayed:
Mother! here is virtue and here is vice;
Take them both from me.
Grant me only love, pure love for Thee.
Mother! here is knowledge and here is ignorance;
Take them both from me.
Grant me only love, pure love for Thee.
Mother! here is purity and impurity;
Take them both from me.
Grant me only love, pure love for Thee.*

Ramakrishna, like Kabir, was a practical man. He said: "So long as passions are directed towards the world and its objects, they are enemies. But when they are directed towards a deity, then they become the best of friends to man, for they take him to illumination. The desire for worldly things must be changed into longing for the supreme; the anger which you feel for fellow man must be directed towards the supreme for not manifesting himself to you . . . and so on, with all other emotions. The passions cannot be eradicated, but they can be turned into new directions."

A disciple once asked him: "How can one conquer the weaknesses within us?" He answered: "When the fruit grows out of the flower, the petals drop off themselves. So when divinity in you increases, the weaknesses of human nature will vanish of their own accord." He emphasized that the aspirant should not give up his practices. "If a single dive into the sea does not bring you a pearl, do not conclude that there are no pearls in the sea. There are countless pearls hidden in the sea. So if you fail to merge with the supreme during devotional practices, do not lose heart. Go on patiently with the practices, and in time you

will invoke divine grace." It does not matter what form you care to worship. He said: "Many are the names of the supreme and infinite are the forms through which he may be approached. In whatever name and form you choose to worship him, through that he will be realized by you." He indicated the importance of surrender on the path of bhakti when he said: "As dry leaves are blown hither and thither by the wind, without any choice of their own, so a bhakta also moves in harmony with His will." And to further illustrate surrender he uttered: "Not I, not I, Thou . . . Thou."

Ramakrishna saw the supreme in everything. He once said: "I have come to the stage of realization in which I see the supreme is walking in every human form, manifesting himself like through the sage and the sinner, the virtuous and the vicious. Therefore, when I meet different people, I say to myself: the supreme in the form of a saint, the supreme in the form of a sinner, the supreme in the form of righteousness, the supreme in the form of unrighteousness."

While discussing Ramakrishna, it is worthwhile mentioning his disciple Vivekananda. He was a great sceptic who believed and accepted nothing. He was a jnana yogi and he followed his natural inclinations. But his path of non-acceptance eventually led him to experiences that transformed him into a bhakta. In his speeches and books he continually praised the divinity that he saw around him.

Buddhism

Bhakti is rarely associated with Buddhism. But actually Buddha himself was the epitome of a bhakta. He was said to be ever blissful. He was even known as the 'compassionate one' which surely implies bhakti. Wherever he went he radiated love. Though he did not preach bhakti yoga as a method, he himself was a perfect example of an intoxicated bhakta. The same also applies to Buddhism; it does not teach bhakti yoga as a path, for it is easily misused and can lead to blind superstition, but its prescribed paths eventually lead to the experience of bhakti.

It is said that Buddha urged his disciples to have faith. But this is not blind faith in dogmas or the scriptures. It is faith in the existence of a higher reality, of the possibility of attaining liberation and knowledge.

One of the Buddha's basic teachings is that the world is full of suffering. This is not a statement of despair but is a means to wake people up to their current way and quality of life. It was intended to give people a kick so that they questioned their unhappiness and started to seek higher levels of being. The aim of Buddhism is the same as all other systems - supreme knowledge. It is only the methods that appear to differ. Yet its methods are basically raja yoga and jnana yoga. The culmination of these practices leads to the knowledge of equality and sameness of all people and all things. This is called *samata jnana* in Pali. This leads to all embracing compassion for everyone. This is bhakti, not the path, but the experience. Also one of the well-known dhyana Buddhas symbolizes bhakti. This is *Ratna-Sambhava* - the jewel born, who represents the outgoing love that arises because of the realization of the essential unity of all things and beings.

There is a very popular Buddhist bhakti sect in Japan called Jodo - the Fair Land School. They worship *Amida* (Amitabha, the infinite light) a personification of the source of all revelations and intuitions. Amida is associated with forty-eight vows, one of which is that he will not attain enlightenment until, by his enlightenment, all other beings will also gain enlightenment. Worship of Amida helps to break down ego motives and to have respect for the well-being of others. The mantra *amitabha* is repeated over and over again. This is the same method as other forms of bhakti yoga and is a form of japa yoga. Keeping Amida continually enshrined in his heart, the aspirant is compelled to think of others and not become lost in his own experiences. Remembrance of Amida helps to break down selfishness. Of course, it has much more significance, which we will not discuss here.

It is worthwhile giving a short story from the life of a great Jodo bhakta called Shoma. He was a poor labourer who lived in Japan in the 19th century. The following story is recorded in a book on his life: "He once went to a Buddhist temple in the countryside. He entered the main door and immediately relaxed and rested in front of the shrine of Amida. One of his friends was astonished for he thought that Shoma had no respect for Amida. Shoma replied: 'I am back in my parent's home,

and for you to think as you do, you must be a stepchild'."

Shoma was totally happy in the embrace of the great compassionate heart of Amida. This story is very similar to the stories of bhaktas in other religions: the surrender of the devotee to the divine.

There are many more examples in Buddhism, but we have said enough. However, we would like to point out that Zen Buddhism and certain sects of Tibetan Buddhism emphasize the importance of a guru. In fact, there are many stories, such as that of Milarepa, where the disciple undergoes great hardship under the instructions of a guru. It is difficult to imagine that the disciple would be able to tolerate such hardships without bhakti for his guru.

A summary of bhakti yoga

We have written much about bhakti yoga. But the flow of ideas on the subject kept coming and coming. There seems to be no end, and even now there are countless other things that could be said. But at this point it is time to stop, and give you a chance to follow the path of bhakti yoga for yourself if you are devotionally inclined.

Each of us has emotions. They are a normal part of the human makeup. But few people can direct and focus these emotions in one direction and towards positive and constructive purposes.

Each person is looking for a suitable object or person on which to express and focus their emotions. This occurs either consciously or unconsciously and is the case with both the obviously emotional person and the seemingly unemotional person. It is in this search for a suitable focal point for emotions and feeling that people rush wildly after so many things in life, and as a result their emotions are needlessly dissipated. Others, who have met with severe and traumatic rebuffs in their efforts to express emotions, tend to suppress them. This is a great problem in life and there is only one positive method of solving it: one must try to focus all the emotions on one thing. The emotions have to be channelled in one direction. Some people do this by directing all their emotions into their work. There is nothing wrong with this, providing you follow as closely as possible the principles of karma yoga³. If

you don't then the emotions will rebound and once again cause you disturbances. The best method is to direct all one's emotions towards one subject or object of veneration. One should try and convert emotions into devotion and surrender and dedicate all one's aspirations to the object of devotion. One should offer all the fruits of actions, either spiritually or mentally. This is bhakti yoga, but it is not easy.

Bhakti yoga is often regarded as being very different from other forms of yoga, but this is not really true. In hatha yoga, the mind is made one-pointed by awareness of the breath or different parts of the body. In raja yoga the mind is made one-pointed by awareness of a fixed symbol or a psychic centre. In jnana yoga the mind is made one-pointed by total absorption in an enquiry. In karma yoga the mind becomes concentrated by complete absorption in one's work. In bhakti yoga the same result, namely one-pointedness of the mind, is achieved through love and devotion. If there is devotion towards one thing, then all the energy of the mind will also flow in the same direction. Love is probably the strongest force for concentrating the mind. The greater the love then the greater the concentration.

All the paths of yoga lead to dhyana (meditation). Bhakti can intensify the effectiveness of other paths of yoga, for if you feel devotion towards something, then your attention and interest will automatically flow in that direction without any effort. There will be a natural attraction towards the object of love. For many people, it is difficult to maintain awareness of the breath or the psychic centres or whatever during hatha yoga and raja yoga practices, because there is no natural attraction. The awareness is distracted in other directions, preventing success in one's yogic sadhana. But if you feel devotion and love for an object, then you will have no choice but to be aware. The object of devotion will overwhelm your whole being. This is the way to success in yoga.

Remember, if you are not devotionally inclined then don't force yourself to follow the path of bhakti. If you are a doubter, then please remain a doubter. Don't try to become a bhakta. But if you are a doubter then let the doubt be so overwhelming that it forces you to make an effort to seek answers to life and your own nature. If your doubt is strong

enough then it will force you to practise some of the paths of yoga, though not bhakti yoga. Or your doubt will force you to find some other means to either confirm or remove your scepticism.

In this case your doubt can be positive. But if you doubt and take no steps to find answers from personal experience, then nothing will be gained. By all means doubt . . . doubt everything. Accept nothing. This is a good method of clearing away the cobwebs of false thinking from the mind. Eventually you may be surprised to find that you have become a bhakta spontaneously.

Bhakti yoga is one of the most powerful methods of inducing meditation. If you are swept away by a powerful current of bhakti, then you will find that meditation will arise naturally. It will come about as a natural consequence of having a concentrated mind. So if you feel devotion whether it is tangible or intangible, let it be the supercharger that launches you into the realms of superconsciousness. It is said that there are two types of fools: the ignorant fool and the fool who is saturated with bhakti. But the happiness of the bhakta is infinitely greater than the ignorant fool, because it is based on love and knowledge. So if you follow the path of bhakti yoga, you may find that you have become a fool . . . but a wise, blissful one.

Intense bhakti will induce the joy of meditation. One becomes the perfect receptacle of the divine nectar. You will come face to face with yourself. Do you know the root of the word 'personality'? It comes from the word persona. It means 'a mask', or 'an appearance'. Therefore, your personality, your individuality, is a mask, a shell of something much greater. Bhakti yoga is a method of seeing behind that mask, of seeing behind your limited personality. Follow the path of bhakti, and then . . .

Notes

¹ Bhakti Yoga: Part 1 - Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 1; Part 2 - Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 1; Part 3 - Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 1

² For more information on the subject of tantra refer to Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 6

³ For full details on karma yoga refer to Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 1

Asanas: Practice

Balancing asanas are an important group of asanas which we have not yet introduced in this course. These asanas develop the coordination between the muscles of the body, so that the individual is able to perform physical movements more gracefully and more efficiently. Many people lack synchronization between the muscles. The different muscles seem to hinder more than help each other. This means that more effort and energy are required to do less work. To attain a specific movement of any part of the body, there has to be perfect timing between the relevant muscles and between the nerves that activate the muscles. Some muscles and nerves must even act in opposition, partially blocking the required movement, so that the resulting movement is graceful and well directed. All movements of the body, no matter how small, are controlled by means of various nerve pathways to the brain. These nerve pathways ensure that the muscles relax or contract to exactly the correct degree to attain perfect muscular response and thereby perfect movement.

The brain centre that controls all movements of the body is called the cerebellum. It is located at the back of the head behind the top of the spine. All asanas help to develop and harmonize this centre by encouraging control of body movements. That is, to practise asanas it is necessary to develop a greater degree of muscular control, which has repercussions on the brain centre itself. Balancing asanas, however, have a direct influence on the cerebellum, for a good sense of balance and coordination is required to practise them. Without a reasonable sense of balance it is difficult to do these asanas. Therefore, by practising and perfecting them the cerebellum is developed. And this improvement in the functioning of the cerebellum results in better coordination and health in the whole body. All the different functions of the body are

harmonized so that they work together instead of against each other.

These balancing asanas are also useful for inducing mental stability. To maintain equilibrium in the final pose, mental concentration is necessary. One's whole attention must be directed towards maintaining physical balance, which helps to remove stress and nervousness and to bring about a state of mental equanimity. When you have a well-integrated mind you will gain perfect control and coordination of the muscles and movements of the body.

Since sense of balance is rarely developed in everyday life you may find the following simple looking asana a little difficult. This means that your cerebellum is not functioning as well as it could. The body is very adaptable and through practice you will find that balancing asanas gradually become easier and easier. In this way you will improve the efficiency of the cerebellum.

GARUDASANA (EAGLE POSE)

Garuda is the bird that transports Lord Vishnu throughout the celestial realms. This asana is 'the eagle pose' because it resembles garuda or an eagle.

Technique

Take a standing position.

Raise the right leg and twist it around the left leg; if you have muscular legs you may find this a little difficult.

Ideally, the right thigh should lie in front of the left thigh and the right foot should rest on the calf of the left leg. But it is only people with slim, flexible legs who will be able to achieve this. Other people must do the best they can. Now fold the two arms at the elbows.

Twist the left arm around the right arm.

Tie to place the palms together so that they resemble the beak of an eagle, or garuda.

This is the starting position.



Gaze at a fixed point in front of the body.
 Slowly bend the leg and lower the body as far as you are able, while maintaining balance.
 Only lower the body as far as is comfortable.
 Keep your eyes fixed on the point in front of the body throughout.
 This is the final pose.
 Maintain the final pose for a short time.
 Then slowly return to the starting position.
 Repeat the practice with the right arm wrapped around the left arm and the left leg wrapped around the right leg.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Breathing should be normal throughout the entire practice.

One's attention should be fixed on a point in front of the body. The best place is a black spot on the wall in front of and at the same level as the eyes. Awareness of a fixed point is the secret of doing balancing asanas.

There is no limit to the time spent in the final pose.

Benefits

This asana helps to bring about mental and physical harmony for the reasons given in the introduction. It strengthens the muscles of the legs, tones the nerves and loosens the joints. It helps to alleviate sciatica and rheumatism in the legs and arms. It also helps to relieve hydrocele if it is done regularly and for a reasonable duration. It also develops poise and grace in the body.

Bandhas: Uddiyana Bandha

Uddiyana bandha is a very beneficial practice and an integral part of kriya yoga. Therefore, it must be perfected before undertaking the more advanced practice of kriya yoga.

Uddiyana bandha looks difficult, especially if you have never seen it demonstrated before. However, it is much simpler to do than it looks. But it must be done correctly.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *uddiyana* means 'to raise up' or 'to fly upwards'. The word *bandha* means to 'hold', 'tighten' or 'lock'. This practice is so called because the physical lock applied to the body causes the diaphragm to rise towards the chest. Another reason for the name is that the lock helps to direct prana into sushumna nadi so that it flows upwards to sahasrara. Sushumna nadi is the subtle pranic pathway within the spine which passes through the main psychic centres (chakras). The awakening of these centres implies a progressive expansion of awareness, until the cosmic awareness (sahasrara) is attained. This is why uddiyana bandha is useful for helping to expand awareness. For this purpose, it is systematically combined with specific pranayama practices.

Scriptural references

Uddiyana bandha is mentioned in a large number of scriptures. These include the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the *Gherand Samhita* and the *Baraha*, *Yoga Sikha*, *Yoga Kundalini*, *Dhyana Bindu*, *Yoga Tattva* and *Chudamani Upanishads*. We don't intend to give all of the quotations from these texts for they are very similar. We will merely give a few examples. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* gives the most detail: "That lock which causes the prana to fly up the sushumna is called uddiyana by all yogis." (3:55) "The practice to be described causes the bird (of prana) to fly upwards after taking a period of rest." (3:56) In other words, the latent prana is directed into the sushumna.

"Drawing the abdomen backwards and upwards in the navel region is called uddiyana. It is the lion which challenges the elephant of death." (3:57) That is, the practice helps to transcend normal states of awareness so that one gains insight into the nature of existence and mortality and the purpose of life.

"The practice of uddiyana bandha described by yogis is very easy to do. Regular practice makes even an old man youthful." (3:58) Uddiyana bandha revitalizes the whole body and can help to lead to states of meditation that can make even an old man feel young.

In the *Baraha Upanishad* it says: "The breath follows life in the same way that a shadow follows an object. Uddiyana is the practice that makes the ever restless breath fly upwards ..." "To practise uddiyana seriously, the diet should be good and taken in small quantities." This last statement is particularly important if uddiyana is combined with regular and intense practices of pranayama.

We could give many more pages of quotations but we have given enough to show the importance and traditional method of doing uddiyana bandha.

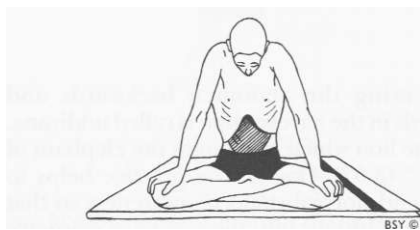
Position

The best position in which to do uddiyana bandha is any meditational asana such as padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana¹. The important thing is that the knees rest firmly on the ground so that the final lock can be maintained correctly. This is also the position necessary for practising kriya yoga. If you cannot sit in any of these positions then you can sit in vajrasana¹. But if this is the case, then we advise you to regularly practise leg loosening exercises so that you can eventually sit in any meditational asana². This is important for kriya yoga.

Uddiyana bandha can also be done in a standing position. This will be described at the end of this topic.

Preparatory practice

An excellent preparatory practice for developing uddiyana bandha is agnisar kriya¹. If you can do agnisar kriya without the slightest difficulty then you should have no difficulty doing uddiyana bandha.



Technique

Sit in any meditational asana with the knees flat on the ground.

Place the palms of the hands flat on the knees; this is important to allow the arms to apply pressure in the final pose.

Close the eyes.

Relax the whole body.

Exhale as deeply as possible by accentuated contraction of the abdominal muscles and the chest; the lungs should be emptied as much as is possible.

Hold the breath outside.

Do jalandhara bandha⁴.

Then try to take a false inhalation. That is, expand the chest as though you are breathing in, but without actually allowing air to enter the lungs.

This false inhalation will automatically raise the diaphragm and enable the abdomen to become concave in shape, being raised inwards and upwards.

Note: there is no need to contract the abdominal muscles; in fact they should remain passive at this stage.

In this position the palms are pressed firmly against the knees and the arms straightened. This is the final position.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time while holding the breath out.

Then slowly relax the chest; that is, release the false inhalation; this will automatically allow the abdomen to reassume its normal shape. Then release jalandhara bandha and bend the arms.

Inhale slowly.

This is 1 round.

Repeat the process when the breathing has

returned to normal. Don't strain under any circumstances.

Points to remember during the practice:

- Try initially to empty the lungs as much as possible by accentuated contraction of the abdominal muscles and the chest.
- Make sure you apply jalandhara bandha before doing the final position of uddiyana. It is jalandhara that prevents air entering the lungs during the false inhalation.
- It is the false inhalation that gives the final contraction of the abdomen. The abdominal muscles should remain passive. Many people contract the abdominal muscles in the final position - this is wrong.
- Don't allow air to enter the lungs when you make the false inhalation.
- When you release the final pose, firstly relax the chest then release jalandhara bandha and finally breathe in. This order is important to prevent injury to the lungs.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Take a deep exhalation before taking the final position. Hold the breath outside while taking the final position, while remaining in the final position and while returning to the starting position. Inhale on completion of the practice.

Beginners should be aware of doing the practice correctly and achieving perfect co-ordination between the various steps involved in taking the final position. When you have mastered the practice, be aware of the breathing process and mental counting in the final position. This applies especially if uddiyana is integrated with pranayama⁵.

You can practise as many rounds as you wish, but you must not strain. Beginners should do only a few rounds initially and then slowly increase the number when their system becomes accustomed to the practice.

The final position of each round should be held for as long as you can comfortably hold your breath.

Sequence

The best time to do uddiyana bandha in your practice program is after asanas and pranayama, and before meditational practice. Uddiyana can also be combined with pranayama and mudras.

Time of practice

Early in the morning before breakfast is the best time.

Limitations

People who suffer from high blood pressure, heart problems, peptic or duodenal ulcers, colitis and other serious abdominal problems should not do this practice. Pregnant women should not do this practice, though they can perform it after childbirth to strengthen the abdominal muscles and reshape the abdominal area in general.

Precautions

The stomach must be empty before attempting this practice. Wait for four to five hours after eating your meal. If possible try to evacuate the bowels before doing the practice.

Benefits

The benefits are almost the same as for jalandhara bandha⁴. The entire abdomen is squeezed like a sponge. This pushes out all the stagnant blood. All the inner organs are revitalized. It can help to alleviate or prevent a large number of abdominal ailments including indigestion, constipation, diabetes, colitis and so forth if they are not too serious and chronic.

The adrenal glands are regularized thereby giving energy to a lethargic person and relaxation to an anxious or overwrought person. The solar plexus is also normalized. This centre is sometimes called the abdominal brain and it is the centre of energy in the whole body. This centre directs the correct flow of energy to all the different organs,

Uddiyana bandha normalizes this centre and thereby helps to regulate the energy level in the whole body.

In the final position the air in the lungs is pressurized by the upward movement of the diaphragm and the false inhalation. This helps to open out the alveoli in the lungs and improves lung efficiency. At the same time the heart is given a good massage, which improves its functional efficiency.

Uddiyana bandha also has many subtle influences on the pranic body. The navel is the area of the manipura chakra, which is the centre of prana in the body. Physical stimulation of this area has repercussions on the more subtle

flows of prana and its distribution throughout the body. Uddiyana also redirects prana into the sushumna nadi. This helps to expand awareness and induces meditation.



Alternative technique

Uddiyana bandha can also be done in a standing position. This is generally easier for beginners. The technique is as follows:

Stand with your feet about half a meter apart. Bend forwards and bend the legs slightly at the knees. Place your palms on the knees. Exhale deeply; try to empty the lungs as much as possible.

Then bend your head downwards and press the chin against your chest in jalandhara bandha.

Make sure your arms are straight.

Then make a false inhalation (expand the chest as though breathing in, but not actually taking in air).

Straighten the legs slightly.

This movement will automatically draw the abdomen upwards and inwards to form uddiyana bandha.

Hold this position for a comfortable length of time. Then release the expansion of the chest and bend the legs, release jalandhara bandha and finally breathe in.

This method gives basically the same benefits as uddiyana bandha performed in a sitting position. However, the sitting form is preferable because it is more suitable for combination with meditative and pranayama practices.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2; Vajrasana - Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 4

Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 2

⁴ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

⁵ Topic 4 of this lesson

Topic 3

Pranayama: Practice

Now it is time to integrate uddiyana bandha with nadi shodhana pranayama¹. But we don't want you to strain. You should only combine them if you can do the previous pranayama practice easily and without effort². There should be no intense exertion. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it says: "If inhalation, exhalation and breath retention are done slowly and rhythmically, then you will achieve success." (2:18) Take note of this advice and follow it.

shodhana pranayama and uddiyana bandha separately. That is, practise uddiyana bandha as described in this lesson¹, and nadi shodhana pranayama as previously described². Or as an alternative you can reduce the duration of inhalation, exhalation and retention. We emphasize again: take care not to strain. If you feel any suffocation then stop the practice.

NADI SHODHANA - STAGE 4 WITH UDDIYANA BANDHA

Uddiyana bandha, like all the bandhas, is associated with control of prana. It acts directly on the navel area (manipura chakra) which is the centre or storehouse of prana. It is therefore a very important technique. Stimulation of the navel area can lead to redistribution of prana throughout the entire body, and can lead directly to tranquillity and clarity of mind. It renders the mind in a fit state for meditative techniques and the spontaneous occurrence of meditation. Combined with pranayama, it becomes an especially powerful practice.

Current practice

In the previous two lessons on pranayama we suggested that you practise a ratio of 1:8:6:2: 1:8:6:2 for inhalation: inner retention: exhalation: outer retention: inhalation: inner retention: exhalation: outer retention respectively. These were combined with jalandhara bandha with both inner and outer breath retention. If you have mastered this stage then proceed to the next stage.

New practice

Using the same ratio practise uddiyana bandha during external breath retention only, combined with jalandhara bandha.

If you find this new practice too difficult then we suggest that you practise nadi

Notes

¹ Topic 3 of this lesson

² Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 3

Meditation: Nada Yoga (Part 2)

In the depths of our being there are innumerable sounds at different levels of vibration and subtlety. These sounds are always present but they are rarely perceived because the mind is continually extroverted, totally attracted and addicted to outside objects and events. The purpose of nada yoga is to perceive these inner sounds so that one is eventually able to hear the ultimate sound.

In this second topic on nada yoga¹ we want to explain the subject a little further and give an alternative technique.

Scriptural references

Chapter 4 of the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* discusses nada yoga in great detail. We don't intend to quote all the verses here for this would take too many pages, but it is worthwhile giving a selection. We suggest you read the full text for yourself.

"The great yogis of the past explained many ways of attaining samadhi through their own experience. (63) For those who are unable to understand the subtle essence of things, Gorakhnath taught the method of nada yoga. (65) The yogi should sit in muktasana (siddhasana) do shambhavi mudra and listen carefully to the inner sound in the right ear. (67) One should close the ears, eyes, the nostrils and the mouth. Then by listening to the nada one should explore the crystalline passage of the sushumna (the psychic realms). (68)

There are four stages of attainment in the practice: beginning, continuation, ripening and culmination. (69) In the beginning stage the brahmagranthi (psychic block associated with the mooladhara chakra) is pierced and bliss appears from the voidness. A sound like tinkling ornaments can be heard in the anahata chakra. (70) Then the vishnugranthi (psychic block associated with the anahata chakra) is pierced and bliss arises together with the sound of the bheri and vimarda (two kinds of musical instruments). (73) In the last stage the prana

enters the ajna chakra and pierces the rudra granthi (the third of the psychic knots) and the sound of a vina (lute) and a flute can be heard. (76) He who is wise closes his ears with his hands and listens carefully to the inner nada with one-pointed mind and achieves perfect stability. (82)

In the beginning of the practice of nada yoga one hears all types of sounds. In advanced stages these sounds become more and more subtle. (84) No matter what sound, the mind becomes dissolved in it if there is attraction. (89) The bee removes the honey from the flower without being distracted by the smell. In the same manner, the mind which is attracted to the nada is not distracted by other thoughts. (90) When the mind becomes fixed on the nada then it becomes unmoveable like a bird without wings. (92) Those people who want to experience samadhi should leave all other thoughts and carefully listen to the inner nada. (93) The awareness should be fixed on the sound until it becomes soundless. This is the state of superconsciousness." (101)

The different levels of nada

It is impossible to specify the nature of the nada as it extends into more subtle regions of being. They have to be personally experienced. However, as an indication of the direction that nada will lead to, the following fourfold classification has been given in the ancient texts:

1. *Vaikhari*: This is the grossest form of sound that we hear in the world around us. It is produced by striking two objects together and is the type discussed in physics. This is the plane of the spoken word. This is the starting point of nada yoga practice from which one must retread the path through the more subtle realms of nada.

2. *Madhyama*: This form of nada is more subtle than vaikhari. The word madhyama means 'in the middle', so called because it is

midway between the grossest nada and the more subtle nada. It is at this stage that nada begins to assume form and to crystallize from the formless subtle layers of nada. In nada yoga sadhana the aim is to hear sounds associated with this level.

3. *Pasyanti*: This nada can be seen but not heard. The sound has different specific colours which can be seen by inner vision. It exists in the deeper layers of the mind beyond the range of audible nada.

4. *Para*: This is transcendental sound. This is the point of origin of nada. It is the nada that is heard in states of super consciousness. It is way beyond normal levels of perception. It is nada that has such a high rate of vibration that it is beyond the classification of vibration. It is silent sound. It is associated with the state of samadhi. It is called the *anahata nada* - the unstruck sound and is beyond all conceptualization.

Many ancient texts also give a guidance to the actual sounds that can be heard during the practice of nada yoga. In the *Hamsa Upanishad* it gives the following list:

1. *Chini nada* - the sound is like the sound of the word 'chini'.
2. *Chini-chini nada* - the sound is like the word 'chini-chini'.
3. *Ghanta nada* - the sound of bells ringing.
4. *Shankha nada* - sound of a conch being blown.
5. *Tantri nada* - sound of a lute (tantri) or vina.
6. *Tala nada* - sound of cymbals.
7. *Bansuri nada* - sound of a flute.
8. *Bheri nada* - the echoing sound of a drum.
9. *Mridanga nada* - the sound of a double drum.
10. *Megna nada* - the roar of thunder, the ultimate sound.

Remember that the sounds are psychic, therefore, you should not take this list too seriously - it is merely an indication. You must perceive the sounds for yourself. The sound that you hear will depend on the depth to which your awareness has penetrated the ocean of your being.

NADA YOGA - PART 2

The method that we will shortly describe is similar to the method described in the previous

lesson¹. The main differences are that this practice is not preceded by a vocalized humming sound and that it is combined with retention of breath. Each of the practices has a specific use. The first method utilizing bhrumari pranayama is most suitable for beginners and for those who are overwhelmed by outer and mental disturbances. The loud humming sound helps to drown out these distractions and make the mind more concentrated so that one can eventually perceive the inner sounds. The method described here is more suitable for those who have a reasonably harmonized mind and who are not beset by distractions. It is the more advanced practice of the two.

Definition

The method to be described has various names. It is called *shanmukhi mudra*, which literally means 'the attitude of the seven gates'. It is so called because the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and the mouth are closed during the practice. These are the seven doors of outer perception. It is through these doors that one receives data from the outside world. These doors are closed to allow the awareness to be directed into the mind. The practice is also called *baddha yoni asana* - 'the locked source pose'. Here the word locked refers to the closing of the seven orifices of perception. Another name for the technique is *yonimudra*, which means 'the invocation of the source'. That is, it is a method of merging with the source of nada.

Sitting position

One should sit in any comfortable meditative asana, preferably padmasana, siddhasana or siddhayoni asana². The hands should be raised in front of the face with the elbows pointing sideways. The ears should be closed with the thumbs, the eyes with the index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers and the mouth should be sealed by placing the ring and small fingers above and below the lips respectively. The fingers should gently but firmly close the seven doors.

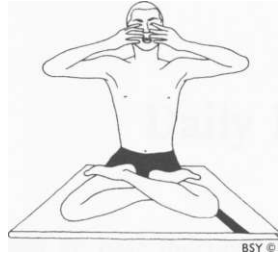
Technique

Take the prescribed sitting pose.

Relax the whole body.

Hold the spine and head upright.

Throughout the practice, the middle fingers



should release the nostrils during inhalation and exhalation; without this it will be impossible to breathe.

Inhale deeply and slowly.

At the end of inhalation close the nostrils with the middle fingers.

Retain the breath (antar kumbhaka).

Try to hear sounds at the region of the back of the head (bindu), in the middle of the head or the right ear.

At first you will either hear many sounds or none, it does not matter, only listen.

Hold your breath for as long as is comfortable. Then release the pressure of the middle fingers and slowly breathe out.

This is 1 round.

Breathe in again, close the nostrils, and retain the breath.

Listen to the inner sounds.

Then after some time release the nostrils and breathe out.

Continue in this way throughout the practice. During the period of breath retention your whole awareness should be directed to the perception of inner nada.

At first there may be a confused jumble of sound, but gradually you will hear a sound; this may take a few days or a few weeks, but it will be perceived.

Many people hear the sound in the right ear, it does not matter.

When you hear a distinct sound be totally aware of it. It will become clearer and clearer. Keep your awareness fixed on the sound.

Listen very carefully.

If your sensitivity is sufficiently developed then you will hear another sound in the background;

it may be faint, but perceivable. Leave the first sound and transfer your awareness to perception of the fainter sound.

In this way you will transcend the first sound. Eventually this second sound will overwhelm your whole attention.

Again, with practice and enhanced sensitivity you will hear another sound begin to emerge. It will be faintly perceptible behind the louder second sound.

Direct your awareness to this new sound.

Carry on in this manner: perceive a sound and then discard it when you can perceive a more subtle sound.

The more subtle the sound that you can perceive, the deeper you will delve into the depths of your being.

Note: do not expect to hear subtle sounds on your first attempt. Practice is necessary. Eventually you will develop the knack of transcending first the gross external sounds and then the progressively more subtle sounds. Don't dwell on any of the sounds for too long. This is not the purpose of the practice. The aim is to leave each sound and to go deeper. Don't become lost or distracted by the beautiful sounds on your journey.

Breath retention

This technique gives greater benefits if you can retain your breath for extended periods of time. Those people who have been regularly practising nadi shodhana pranayama over a period of time will find this practice easy and very effective as a means to introspection. If you cannot hold your breath for a long time, we suggest that you practise the easier technique of nada yoga¹.

Point of awareness

Generally the awareness should be fixed at the back of the head (bindu). However, if you hear a distinct sound in any other area, such as the right ear or the middle of the head, then this is acceptable. Those who are devotionally inclined can try to listen to the nada in the heart region (anahata chakra).

The important thing is not so much the point of awareness, but that the awareness is fixed on progressively more subtle sounds.

Benefits

This is a powerful yet simple method of revealing the mysteries of your inner being. Total absorption on the nada can lead to dhyana. One soars into the heights of the inner space. Any of the basic benefits that we have enumerated for other meditative practices can be obtained from nada yoga sadhana.

Additional practices

Nada yoga can be combined with many other yogic techniques. For example, it can be integrated with vajroli mudra and moola bandha³. If you already know these practices then you can incorporate them at once, otherwise you can incorporate them with nada yoga when we describe them later.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ For details on moola bandha refer to Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4; for details on vajroli mudra refer to Book III, Lesson 32, Topic 1

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have described uddiyana bandha, garudasana and the second part of nada yoga practices, along with the fourth and final discussion on bhakti yoga. Those who are not bhakti inclined should try to practise karma yoga and some of the other techniques outlined in this book.

We suggest that you integrate nadi shodhana pranayama with uddiyana bandha as described in this lesson, if you are able, otherwise practise them separately.

In nada yoga, you can either continue to practise part 1, do part 2, or combine them both. Choose for yourself.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Garudasana	1 each leg	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Uddiyana and Jalandhara Bandha	—	15
Japa	—	20
Nada Yoga	—	20
Chidakasha Dharana	—	16
		120

Program 2: duration 1 1/2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Garudasana	1 each leg	4
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Uddiyana and Jalandhara Bandha	—	15
Japa	—	10
Nada Yoga	—	15
Chidakasha Dharana	—	9
		<hr/> 90

Program 3: duration 1 hour		
Surya Namaskara	—	7
Shavasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Garudasana	—	3
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Uddiyana and Jalandhara Bandha	—	10
Nada Yoga	—	15
Chidakasha Dharana	—	5
		<hr/> 60

Program 4: duration 1/2 hour (for general health)		
Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Sarvangasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Uddiyana and Jalandhara Bandha	—	10
		<hr/> 30
