

Lesson 34

When the sankalpa and vikalpa are rooted out, the karmas influence no more, desires and illusions are removed by the unbroken practice, then only does the ever blissful state of yoga nidra dawn. The state which is other than the three present states, enjoyed by the yogis in a relaxed way, is called turiya; then only the omnipresent nidra in the form of pure consciousness illumines. Therefore, always enjoy that nidra which is not a form of prakriti but is the manifested form of purusha.

Adishankaracharya, *Yogataravali* 25/26

Kriya Yoga Practice

KRIYA 14: CHAKRA BHEDAN (PIERCING THE CHAKRAS)

The word *chakra* means 'psychic centre', and *bhedan* means 'to pierce'. The practice of *chakra bhedan* can be translated as 'piercing the chakras or psychic centres'. It is the fourteenth kriya and comes immediately after amrit pan¹.

Out-of-phase breath awareness

In most of the kriyas we have taught so far breathing is synchronized with awareness of the arohan and awarehan psychic passages. That is, with inhalation awareness ascends the frontal arohan passage and with exhalation awareness descends the spinal awarehan passage. The characteristic feature of chakra bhedan is that the breathing is not perfectly synchronized with the awareness of the two psychic pathways. Instead, the relationship is as follows:

Inhalation from swadhisthana downwards to mooladhara and then upwards in the frontal arohan passage to vishuddhi, passing through the intermediate kshetrams in turn.

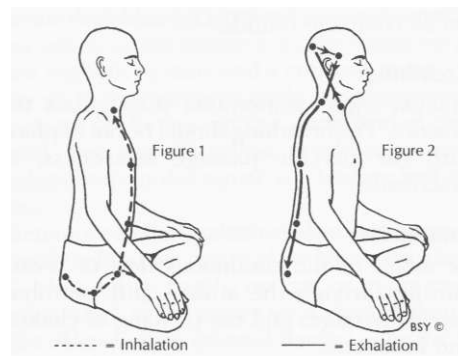
Exhalation upwards from vishuddhi to bindu and then downwards in the spinal awarehan passage to swadhisthana, passing through the intermediate chakras in turn. The breath is rotated through the two psychic pathways, but slightly out of phase.

Sitting position

The best sitting poses are padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana². If you cannot do these asanas then any other comfortable sitting asana will suffice. It is best if you remain in the same asana that was utilized for the previous kriya.

Continuity

When you have finished amrit pan, the previous kriya, immediately start chakra bhedan. Do not move your body or let your mind wander.



Technique

Remain in your sitting position, head upright facing forwards.

Keep your eyes closed.

Continue khechari mudra and ujjayi pranayama³.

Exhale.

Fix your awareness at the swadhisthana chakra in the spinal awarehan passage.

Then while inhaling, move your awareness downwards from the swadhisthana chakra to the mooladhara chakra.

Then move upwards through the following kshetrams in the front of the body:

1. swadhisthana
2. manipura
3. anahata
4. vishuddhi

This whole process is shown in figure 1 of the above picture.

Be aware of each centre one after the other and feel them being pierced by the breath. Don't stop at any centre.

Let your awareness and breath be like a long, thin thread.

Inhalation ends at the vishuddhi kshetram.

Immediately start exhalation, with awareness moving upwards to bindu . . . and then descending through the following chakras in the spine: ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura,

swadhisthana. The entire process is depicted in figure 2. Exhalation should end at the swadhisthana chakra.

This is the end of 1 round.

Immediately start the second round. Inhale from swadhisthana to mooladhara and then up the frontal passage.

Your breath and awareness should go round and round . . . continuously without break.

Do 59 complete rounds.

Breathing

Practise ujjayi pranayama throughout the practice. The breathing should be out of phase with the psychic passage awareness, as described.

Awareness

Be aware of the continuous flow of breath moving through the arohan and awarehan psychic passages and the piercing of chakras and kshetrams.

Number of rounds and duration

You should practise 59 rounds. If however, you find that you become too introverted then immediately leave chakra bhedan and start the next practice.

Between 20 and 30 minutes will be required to do 59 complete rounds.

KRIYA 15: SUSHUMNA DARSHANA (INNER VISUALIZATION OF THE CHAKRAS)

The word *sushumna* has profound implications in yoga and spiritual life. Among other things, it indicates balance between:

1. The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems of the physical body.
2. The cooling and heating currents of the pranic body.
3. Introversion and extroversion of the mind.

The sushumna is the middle path between the ida and pingala aspects of life. It is the razor's edge along which one must tread in order to progress in spiritual life. If you stray off the sushumna path then you will get lost, remain in ignorance and cease to open up the potential and knowledge contained within your being. It is the only route to self-realization. For a deeper explanation refer to our previous discussion entitled 'The Balance of Life'⁴.

In the physical body, sushumna is symbolized by a thin thread passing up the centre of the spine, passing through the principal chakras in turn, starting from mooladhara chakra and culminating in sahasrara.

The word *darshana* in the context of this kriya means 'vision'. Therefore, the practice of *sushumna darshana* can be translated as 'the vision of the sushumna passage'. It is the fifteenth kriya and comes immediately after chakra bhedan.

The practice is based entirely on mental visualization. Many people will find it difficult. Please don't worry; only do your best.

Diagrams for visualization

In the practice you have to visualize symbolic pictures of the chakras, one after the other and then all together in the following order⁵:

1. Mooladhara
2. Swadhisthana
3. Manipura
4. Anahata
5. Vishuddhi
6. Ajna
7. Bindu
8. Sahasrara

We suggest that you refer to the diagrams of the chakras given previously³.

Remember that any diagrams you are using are only symbolic; they are our symbolic representation of the chakras. If you have your own system or prefer a more traditional system of diagrams, then these can also be used in the practice of sushumna darshana. You are not obliged to use the diagrams that we have given.

Composite chakra chart

To develop the capacity to internally visualize the chakras, it is worthwhile making a chart with all the chakra diagrams together. We suggest the following.

Take all the chakra diagrams from the previous lessons, removing the white background⁵. Carefully fix or glue them all on a long sheet of vivid yellow background paper, one above the other in the listed order, mooladhara at the bottom and sahasrara at the top. The size of the yellow sheet should be such that there is a thin border on all sides, bottom and top, of each diagram. Finally glue a wide strip of black paper around the outside

edges of the yellow background sheet. This combination gives perfect colour matching.

Hang it on the wall. From our own experience we strongly suggest that you spend half an hour making yourself a copy.

Development of internal chakra visualization

You can use the chakra chart as an external method of helping you to develop the capacity to visualize the chakra diagrams internally. The method is as follows:

Place the chart on the wall so the centre, about the area of the manipura chakra diagram, is approximately one meter above the ground. Sit in a comfortable pose so that your eyes are about an arm's length from the chart. You must practise *trataka*⁶.

Gaze at the mooladhara chakra diagram without blinking the eyes for a few minutes.

Then close the eyes and try to visualize the same diagram internally.

If you have no success, again open your eyes and gaze intently at the mooladhara diagram. After a few minutes, again close the eyes and try to visualize the same diagram on the mind screen.

If you cannot visualize anything then open your eyes again.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available.

On the following day repeat the same process with the swadhisthana chakra diagram. Repeat exactly the same process with each chakra in turn on successive days.

On the eighth day you should be trying to visualize the sahasrara.

If you have not been able to visualize the chakra diagrams, and this will more than likely be the case, spend another eight days trying to visualize each diagram in turn . . . one day's practice per diagram.

Continue in this manner for some weeks or months. It is an excellent *sadhana* in itself.

Eventually you should find that your capacity for visualization starts to awaken.

Sitting position

Remain in the same sitting pose as was used for the previous practice of chakra *bhedan*.

Technique

Remain in a comfortable sitting pose. Keep the eyes closed, back straight, head upright.

Breathe normally.

Be aware of the area of the mooladhara chakra trigger point.

Try to visualize the mooladhara chakra diagram. See the 4 red lotus petals and the snake coiled around the lingam at the centre.

Then be aware of the swadhisthana chakra trigger point at the base of the spine.

Try to visualize the associated symbolic picture. See the dark blue background and the 6 vermilion petals; in the centre is a calm ocean on a dark night lit by stars and a crescent moon.

Now go to the manipura chakra trigger point; be aware of the area in the spine behind the navel. See the 10 yellow petals on a red background; in the centre is a blazing ball of fire.

Then move to the anahata chakra in the spine directly behind the centre of the chest. Visualize 12 blue lotus petals on an orangey-red background; in the centre see a glowing flame - the *akhandajyoti* (eternal flames) - see the 2 interlaced triangles.

Go to the vishuddhi chakra in the spine behind the throat.

Visualize 16 purple lotus petals on a green background; in the centre is a white drop from which nectar is dripping.

Move upwards to the ajna chakra at the top of the spine. Visualize 2 silvery lotus petals on a red background.

On one petal there is a sun, on the other a full moon. In the centre is a lingam and an Aum symbol.

Proceed to bindu at the back of the head.

Visualize the big drop of nectar on a dark blue background.

Finally reach sahasrara in the crown of the head.

Visualize the thousand petals radiating outwards from the centre point to infinity without limit.

As the culmination of your practice, try to visualize all the diagrams together. This is very difficult and few will be able to do it.

If you can visualize the diagrams but not together, try the following as an alternative.

Try to see the mooladhara and swadhisthana diagrams together.

Then the next day try to add the manipura visualization to the previous two.

When you succeed in this add the next chakra diagram.

Proceed in this manner until you have built up the entire column from mooladhara to sahasrara.

Then proceed to the next practice, whether you can visualize all the chakras together, or not at all.

Breathing

Forget your breathing. Let it do its own thing. There is no relationship between breath and visualization.

Duration

If you can visualize some or all of the chakra diagrams then you can spend up to half an hour or more with the practice.

If you cannot visualize the diagrams then spend about ten minutes trying to develop the capacity.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

⁴ Balance of Life: Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1 and Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

⁵ Mooladhara - Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2; Swadhisthana - Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 3; Manipura - Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3; Anahata - Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2; Vishuddhi - Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 3; Ajna - Book II, Lesson 24, Topic 2; Bindu - Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 5; Sahasrara - Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 1

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

Asanas: Practice

EKA PADA PRANAMASANA (ONE-LEGGED PRAYER POSE)

The word *eka* means 'one', 'single'; *pada* means 'leg' and *pranam* means 'prayer'. This asana can therefore be translated as the 'one-legged prayer pose'.



Technique

Stand upright with the two feet together. Face forwards and gaze at a fixed point on the wall in front of your eyes. Bend one leg and place the sole in contact with the thigh of the other leg. Using your hands, adjust the heel so that it is close to the perineum. Raise your hands and place the palms together in front of your chest. Keep your eyes on the fixed point. This is the final pose. Breathe normally. Stay in the final pose for a minute or so, taking care to maintain balance. Then lower the folded leg to the ground. Bend and raise the other leg and repeat exactly the same process.

Awareness

Keep your attention on the fixed point in front of you throughout the practice.

Further details

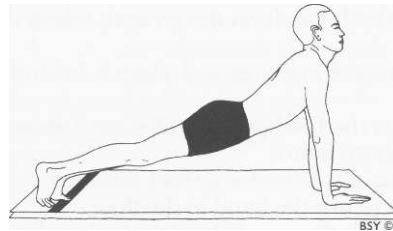
Refer to 'General Details' given later.

SANTOLANASANA (BALANCING POSE)

The word *santolana* means 'balancing', 'to balance'. This asana is therefore directly translated as 'balancing pose'.

Technique

Kneel on the ground. Lean forwards and place the hands on the floor in front of the body. Adjust the position of the hands, backwards or forwards, until both thighs and straight arms are vertical, the trunk being horizontal. This is the starting position (identical to the starting position of marjariasana)¹.



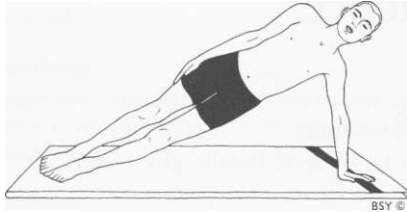
Stage 1

Raise your buttocks. Straighten your legs. Move your shoulders forwards, keeping the arms straight, while lowering the buttocks so that the legs and trunk lie in one straight line. This is the final pose of stage 1 and is shown in the preceding figure. Stay in this pose for a short duration. Then move on to stage 2.

Stage 2

Carefully raise one arm. Roll your body to one side so that your chest faces forwards. Rest your uppermost arm along the trunk and

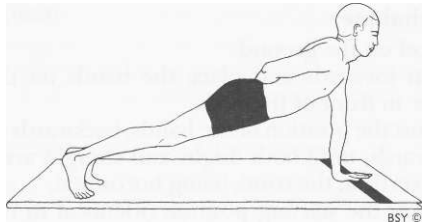
thigh. This is the final pose of stage 2 and is shown in the following diagram. Then return to the original, face downward position.



Roll over on to the other side of the body in the same manner.

Return to the face downward position.

Then proceed to stage 3.



Stage 3

Place both hands on the ground; take a short rest.

Then raise one arm and place it behind the back.

This is the final position of stage 3 shown in the above figure.

Maintain balance for a short duration.

Then return the hand to the floor.

Raise the other arm behind the back and repeat the same procedure.

Eventually return to the face downward position, both hands on the floor.

Move on to stage 4.

Stage 4

Raise one leg.

Stretch it backwards and upwards.

Both hands should remain on the ground at this stage. Hold the head upwards.

This is the final pose.

Maintain balance for a short duration.

Then lower the leg to the ground.

Repeat with the other leg.

This is the end of the entire practice.

Breathing, awareness and other details

Breathing should be normal throughout. Fix your attention on maintaining balance. Refer to 'General Details' later.

PADA ANGUSHTHASANA (TIPTOE POSE)

The word *pada* means 'leg' and *angushtha* means 'toes'. In English it is usually called 'the tiptoe pose' which is probably better than its Sanskrit name.

This asana looks quite easy but it is actually quite difficult to perform. Try it and you will find out. It requires a very good sense of balance.



Technique

Take a squatting position.

Raise your heels and balance on tiptoe.

Lower the heels slightly to make the thighs horizontal.

Adjust the heels of one foot so that it presses into the area of the perineum.

Carefully place the other foot on the thigh of the opposite leg.

If you find your balance, place the two palms together in front of the chest.

Stay in the final pose for as long as you can comfortably maintain balance.

Then place the raised foot back on the floor again.

After a short period, repeat the practice raising the other foot.

Hints

- Utilize your arms while trying to obtain the exact position of balance. That is, lower and raise the hands on and off the ground according to need.
- In the beginning practise near a wall which can be used to give support. Eventually,

however, the practice should be done in the middle of the room.

- While trying to find balance gaze at a fixed point directly in front of the face on the wall. Don't gaze downwards, since this brings loss of balance.

Breathing and awareness

Breathing should be normal throughout. All your attention should be on balance.

GENERAL DETAILS

Duration

Practise for as long as time permits and for as long as you feel comfortable.

Time of practice

All three asanas can be practised at any time during the day. There are no restrictions.

Limitations

There are no obvious limitations on people who should not practise these asanas. You must use your own discretion.

Benefits

These three asanas help to bring nervous equilibrium. They develop the sense of balance and develop coordination between different parts of the body. They all develop the power of mental concentration, which is needed to perform them.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 4

Topic 5

Ujjayi Pranayama with Aum

Ujjayi pranayama is the psychic breath¹. Combined with Aum it is an excellent relaxation and premeditative technique. It is easy to learn and can be practised by all, young and old, at any time of the day or night. You can use whatever position you find most comfortable, as long as the spine, neck and head all form a straight line. Lying down in shavasana is recommended, but no sleeping please². In this practice you must learn to snore without sleeping.

Technique

Relax your whole body and adjust your position so that you don't have to change it at all during the practice.

Close your eyes.

Be aware of the breath flowing in and out of the nostrils.

Move your awareness down to your throat.

Feel the breath in your throat.

Contract the glottis.

Breathe deeply and softly. Your breathing should sound like the gentle snoring of a sleeping baby.

You should have the feeling of breathing through the throat only.

Integrate Aum with each inhalation and exhalation.

As you inhale mentally chant Aum.

As you exhale mentally chant Aum.

Go on practising ujjayi and mentally repeating Aum.

Duration

With practice this technique can be done for hours, although five or ten minutes should be long enough to remove tensions and to relax or prepare you for additional meditational practices.

Benefits

This practice, though it is so simple, has subtle influences on the whole body as well as the

psychic plane. It calms the nervous system and removes all worries and troubles from the mind.

People who suffer from insomnia should have a quiet, deep sleep if they practise this technique in bed at night. They should lie in shavasana, without any pillow to elevate the head, obstructing the breath from passing through the already contracted glottis.

This practice is also very useful for people with high blood pressure, as it reduces the heartbeat.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

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

Yoga Nidra (Part 2)

Is yoga nidra a method of indoctrination? This is a question that many people ask. This doubt can only be removed through time, practice and a deeper understanding of the mechanics and purpose of the technique. It can be a method of indoctrination if it is used incorrectly and taught by the wrong teacher. You have to be careful when choosing your teacher.

When practising yoga nidra as a means to induce sleep, it is definitely not a form of indoctrination. In fact, it is the opposite. The purpose of yoga nidra is to free the mind of conditioning, ignorance, false concepts, etc., not to further entangle it. Its purpose is to expand, open and awaken the individual mind, not to constrict it further. Yoga nidra will eliminate obstructions, not build them up.

The only part of yoga nidra that is slightly suggestive of indoctrination is the *sankalpa* (resolve), but it is a strict rule that the practitioner should choose his or her own *sankalpa*. The teacher should play no part in this stage of yoga nidra but remain quiet, allowing the practitioner to repeat the *sankalpa* to himself. This prevents indoctrination.

If you think that you are being indoctrinated in any way then immediately stop the practice and find a new teacher. This is important, since negative suggestion, and in fact suggestion in any form planted in the subconscious mind, can cause more harm than good.

The role of the teacher is to guide the practitioner through the practice and to stimulate potential that already lies within the practitioner's mind. There is absolutely no need to inject suggestions. The instructor should guide, not indoctrinate.

Yoga nidra does not require belief in anything . . . only practice.

Avoidance of sleep and maintenance of awareness

Yoga nidra means sleep with a state of inner awareness. There is a big difference between

ordinary sleep and psychic sleep in yoga nidra. In sleep there is no awareness, whether internal or external; in yoga nidra, on the other hand, there is wakefulness to the internal environment. No difference, however, will be detected by an external observer.

The essence of yoga nidra is awareness. You should try to avoid sleep (unless you suffer from insomnia and use it as a means to induce sleep). Before you begin, it is a good idea to mentally repeat to yourself: "I am going to relax myself completely but I am not going to sleep." This resolution can be repeated at various times throughout the practice. Sleep is very difficult to control in yoga nidra because one becomes so relaxed. Even if you have slept for ten hours, you will easily drop into a state of slumber in yoga nidra. This resolve will help to maintain awareness.

Sleep is not yoga nidra. You have to maintain second to second awareness, keep alert and sharp, but without excessive tension. You must find the balance between too much effort and no effort. One leads to more tension and the other to sleep.

When you practise you will find that there will be fluctuation between periods of awareness and unawareness. Gradually as you master the practice and the mind becomes progressively calmed you will be able to maintain awareness. You will maintain inner awareness even though the external perceptions have been gradually dimmed. You will cross the threshold and experience spontaneous internal awareness, the purpose of yoga nidra. From this point you will be able to observe the subconscious and superconscious aspect of the mind. At this stage the techniques of yoga nidra, utilized to attain this state, can be discarded.

The method of maintaining awareness is to fix your attention on the sound of the instructor's voice and the mechanics of the practice. This is the only way to avoid sleep.

Sankalpa

The Sanskrit word *sankalpa* can be translated as 'resolve' or 'resolution'. It is an important technique and stage of yoga nidra and a powerful method of reshaping one's personality along positive lines.

The sankalpa takes the form of a short mental statement which is impressed on the subconscious mind during yoga nidra. It is a method of changing one's lifestyle, achieving ambitions and of removing negative blocks and mental conflicts.

Past thoughts have led to our present personality, attitudes, etc. Present thought will determine future behaviour. By means of a thought in the form of a strong sankalpa it is possible to change one's destiny.

If you think about it, you will realize that every person becomes great because of sankalpa, whether conscious or unconscious. They have a burning need to achieve something. Their sankalpa brings about a restructuring of the mind and personality. This in turn brings about realization of their aims in the outside world. The small seed of sankalpa, once planted, can grow and produce many fruits. Such is the power of sankalpa. The use of sankalpa in yoga nidra can also be a factor in remodelling your life.

During the practice of yoga nidra the mind is very receptive and sensitive to autosuggestion in the form of sankalpa. It is possible to plant the seed of sankalpa deep in the subconscious mind. Once planted the sankalpa gathers together the vast forces of the mind in order to bring about its fruition. At first the sankalpa is merely a conscious resolve, but eventually it becomes a very powerful subconscious force. This deeper force will eventually manifest itself again at a conscious level and bring about changes in your personality and in your life.

It is important, however, that the sankalpa is firmly impressed on the mind. Many people make resolves, but they rarely bring results. The reason is simple, the resolve is not planted deeply enough; instead it tends to operate at an intellectual level on the surface of the mind. Often the resolve is made when the mind is disturbed and when you feel generally unhappy and dissatisfied. At this time the mind is not ready to receive the resolve. For success, the sankalpa needs to be planted with strong willpower and with feeling. It should also be

planted when the mind is ready to accept and absorb it. Such a time is during yoga nidra.

Choice of sankalpa

You should choose your sankalpa carefully. It should be something that is very important in your life. Do not choose something that is superficial such as "I will get a new car" or "I will become more successful than my neighbour." There are so many other superficial examples that could be given. Choose a sankalpa that will totally change your whole life.

If you want to remove a bad habit, be careful, as bad habits are usually symptoms of something that lies much deeper. That is, bad habits tend to be the safety valve of deeper tensions in the mind. If you suppress one habit, for example smoking, then you will find that another habit arises to take its place. This can be compared to an air-inflated mattress: if you press down one area, then another area will rise upwards. It is similar with tensions of the mind - if you suppress one habit then another will quickly replace it. It is for this reason that we do not generally recommend that you use a sankalpa to try to rid yourself of bad habits. It is better to choose a sankalpa that will change your whole life so that it becomes more harmonious, happy, joyful and fulfilling. When this occurs, so-called bad habits will tend to spontaneously evaporate without effort or suppression. So do not choose sankalpas such as "I will stop smoking," "I will stop drinking," "I will stop womanizing," "I will stop being angry" and so forth. Instead, choose a more profound sankalpa of the type that we have suggested later.

The sankalpa should be clear. Don't choose vague sankalpas such as "I will become free from all evil traits" or "I will try to develop positive, virtuous qualities" and so forth. These are vague and meaningless. They will not penetrate the subconscious mind and will certainly not bring changes in your life.

We also do not advise you to choose a sankalpa that suppresses any natural drives. For example, many people hear that celibacy is a desirable trait in yogic life. This is not completely true, though it does have its place at the right time. Practised at the wrong time, however, it can cause more harm than good. Many people, because of excessive indoctrina-

tion and wrong guidance, become obsessed with the idea of becoming celibates. This is done either consciously or unconsciously. If this drive is in conflict with your natural inclinations then it can cause psychological and physiological harm. This is only one example, there are others. Please don't choose a sankalpa that interferes with natural drives.

You must choose your own sankalpa. The following are a few suggestions of what we call positive, harmonizing sankalpas that can help to lead you towards a happier life if they are repeated regularly and with sincerity.

I will become perfectly healthy.

I will become positive and dynamic.

I will practise yoga every day.

I will succeed in my work.

I will become more aware.

I will find my guru.

And so forth. Choose according to your needs and inclinations. One man, who practised yoga nidra for many years had the sankalpa: "Make me useful."

Do not be in a hurry to decide upon your sankalpa, and choose it yourself. Don't change it once it has been chosen until it brings fruits, and only choose one sankalpa.

At first you may experience little or no result from your sankalpa. But be patient. Do not expect changes overnight. Time is required, depending on the nature of the sankalpa and the depth at which it is planted in the mind. It depends greatly on sincerity and your deep-felt need to reach the goal of your sankalpa. Also, as you practise yoga and progressively clean out the mind, through yoga nidra and other methods, sankalpas become increasingly powerful. In fact, there comes a stage in the life of an advanced yogi when all sankalpas bring fruition. This is symbolically called the *kalpa vriksha* (wish fulfilling tree) in yogic texts and arises when a person reaches the stage of understanding represented by the anahata chakra¹. However, don't worry too much about this aspect of sankalpa; we have only mentioned it for your interest.

Your life can be completely changed by sankalpa. Vast numbers of people have used sankalpas, either consciously or unconsciously, and have attained their aims. We suggest that you consciously choose a sankalpa and allow it to transform your life.

Rules for using sankalpa

To successfully utilize the power of sankalpa in yoga nidra you should follow the rules below.

- *Clarity.* The sankalpa should be stated in a short, simple, clear sentence form. The same words and the same sentence structure should be used until the sankalpa brings fruits. Use minimum words.
- *Repetition.* The sankalpa should be repeated over and over again in your mind.
- *Sincerity and feeling.* You should repeat the sankalpa with sincerity and feeling. You should say it from the heart, not merely from the mouth. Mere intellectual repetition will not allow the sankalpa to be impressed on the subconscious mind. The sankalpa can only be sown deeply in the mind with a strong emotional impetus. Lack of sincerity will also prevent implantation of the sankalpa; be sincere when you repeat your sankalpa.
- *Time.* Your sankalpa should be repeated at the beginning and end of yoga nidra. It can also be practised before sleep and immediately after waking up in the morning. These are the best times since the mind is most receptive. The sankalpa, however, can also be repeated during any spare time in the day.
- *One sankalpa.* Choose only one sankalpa and stick to it until it brings results. Do not change it.

Rotation of awareness

An important part of the practice of yoga nidra is the rotation of awareness through different parts of the physical body. It is specifically designed to withdraw perception from the outside world, induce introspection and also deep relaxation of the mind and body.

According to yogic scriptures there are seventy-six physical centres in the body. Technically, they are called *angasthanas* (limb or organ locations) and *adhara* (physical bases or centres). The latter are mentioned in the *Yoga Chudamani Upanisad*. These centres include both the outer limbs such as the hands, arms, legs, etc. as well as the internal limbs such as the heart, lungs, stomach etc. Most of these centres will be listed when we describe the full practice of yoga nidra.

Yoga nidra induces a state of pratyahara (sense withdrawal) in which perceptions of the

outside world in the form of taste, smell, hearing, seeing and touch sensations are stopped. This enables awareness to be directed inwards. The sense impressions are not cut off immediately, however, since for most people this is completely impossible. Instead the practice of yoga nidra is so designed that one's awareness is slowly weaned away from the outside world. In the practice of rotating one's awareness through the different parts of the body the eyes are closed. This prevents sight perception. If one is aware of the different parts of the body, then one will also cease to smell and to taste. Three of the five sense organs will be closed. Only sense impressions from the instructor's voice and the mental touch sensations of the physical limbs will be perceived. The field is narrowed. The mind is rendered one-pointed.

Another important thing to remember is that it is difficult to rotate awareness through the different physical centres and be immersed in the normal chattering thoughts of the mind. Either the internal dialogue of thoughts continues and you forget to rotate your awareness through the centres, or you consciously rotate your awareness and cease to be absorbed in bubbling thoughts. You either do one or the other. If you are practising yoga nidra correctly then your chattering thoughts will stop.

In later stages of yoga nidra, rotation of awareness through the physical centres is discarded. If you have been aware throughout the practice of yoga nidra then you will cease to be aware of the physical body, for the sense of touch will be cut off. The only remaining link with the outside world is the sound of the instructor's voice. This too can be easily cut if the teacher ceases to speak. If he chooses the right time then you will be suspended in a state of pratyahara. You will be ready to begin dharana as the preliminary for dhyana.

The purpose of rotating awareness through the different parts of the body is to enable the body to be transcended. The mind becomes one-pointed and very relaxed. This induces simultaneous relaxation of the entire physical body. Consequently the whole body-mind is rested. Tensions are soothed away.

Rules for rotating awareness

To gain optimum benefits from the practice you should follow the rules given below:

1. *Perception.* You should perceive each physical centre using the following means: (i) feeling the sensation arising from that particular part of the body, (ii) mentally pronouncing the name of that part of the body once, after the instructor's pronunciation, (iii) visualization of that part of the body. That is, you should create a mental picture.

One of the above, any two, or all three together can be utilized to perceive each physical centre. If you have difficulty with visualization, then we suggest that you combine mental pronunciation of the name with perception of the sensation from that particular part of the body. If you find visualization easy, then combine it with perception of sensation, without naming any part. You must choose your own method of perception according to ability and preference.

2. *Instructions.* You should be simultaneously aware of two things: (i) the sound of the instructor's voice, (ii) the part of the body named.

Follow the practice of yoga nidra according to the instructions given by the teacher.

3. *Rotation.* Your awareness should move from one part of the body to the next according to the instructions given. You should be aware of the existence of each centre in turn, mentally touching each point. The rotation of awareness must be rhythmical and with minimum effort. Let your awareness 'flow' from one limb to the next. Or it should 'jump' from one centre to the next with the same rhythm as the ticking of a clock.

Don't let your awareness dwell on any part of the body for longer than prescribed by the teacher's instructions. Even if you don't clearly perceive, for example, 'the right thumb' you should immediately proceed to the next limb without delay.

4. *Speed.* The speed of rotation should be chosen to suit the circumstances. In the beginning the mind of the practitioner is likely to be straying here and there. At this stage rotation should be reasonably rapid in order to prevent this mental distraction. Later in the practice, when the mind is more one-pointed, the rate of rotation can be slowed down. The teacher must use intuition.

In any circumstances, the rotation should not be excessively fast or slow. If it is too fast, then the practitioner will not be able to follow

the instructions and perceive each part of the body. He will more than likely fall asleep. Conversely, if the instructions are too slow and monotonous, then he will also fall asleep with boredom. You must be careful.

5. *Circuit*. There are various different circuits through which the awareness can be rotated. It can be a short circuit through the main limbs such as the legs, arms, etc. or it can be a longer rotation that includes the fingers, toes and so forth. As one becomes more sensitive, the rotation can also be passed through the internal organs such as the heart etc. The circuit can be chosen according to preference and available time.

Try to choose one circuit and stick to it when you practise yoga nidra. This will fix a pattern in your mind and your awareness will flow automatically from one centre to the next without effort. If you continually change the order of your circuit, this flow will not be spontaneous. Once you have settled on a specific sequence try not to change it.

6. *Number of rounds*. Complete rotation of awareness through one circuit of the parts of the body is one round. You can practise 1, 2, 3 or more rounds according to the depth of relaxation required and the time available.

7. *The body*. Do not move the body throughout the entire practice. Only be aware of each part without the slightest physical movement.

Try to regard your body as an object that is not part of your being. Feel that the body is outside and separate from yourself, merely an object of study. This too will increase the depth of relaxation.

Visualization

Mental visualization is an important part of yoga nidra practice. Its purpose is to stimulate the subconscious and unconscious levels of the mind. This helps to evaporate suppressed feelings and memories, and thereby clean the mind of tensions. At a deeper level, the use of specific symbols can induce perception of the unconscious layers of the mind, those aspects of your being that are currently hidden and unknown to you. Inner visualization helps to awaken your inner potential and bring knowledge.

All of us have this ability to visualize. In fact, we do it every night when we dream. Dreams are pictorial expressions of the subconscious

mind, and sometimes the unconscious mind. They take the form of symbols and stories and they all have significance. Most of them arise merely to release pent-up inner tensions and conflicts; others may have universal significance and symbolize a truth of existence.

In yoga nidra we attempt to induce dreaming, but dreaming with two main differences:

1. The dreams are controlled, selected and guided. Ordinary dreams are completely random.
2. The dreams are experienced consciously. Most ordinary dreams in sleep are unconscious.

In yoga nidra, the selected, conscious dreams are induced by visualization in accordance with the instructions of the teacher.

The teacher should choose the symbols or objects of visualization very carefully. They should be chosen so that they help to remove tensions from the mind of the practitioner by stirring up old memories. In some cases this mental stirring up with symbols may cause some initial emotional upset, perhaps as one relives a past, long forgotten painful event. Once this initial emotional shock is experienced, the tension is exhausted and there is greater harmony in the mind. Sometimes the symbol that causes the release of pent-up tension can seem to be insignificant to another person. Let us give an illustration.

A lady was doing yoga nidra. Her teacher told her to visualize a red car. There was an explosion in her mind. Immediately she started shaking with emotional shock, but after a short time she felt very relaxed. Later she explained to her teacher what had happened. She had been in Nazi Germany. When she was very young her father and mother had been taken away by the Gestapo in a bright red car. She never saw her parents again. From that age onwards she forgot (or rather suppressed) the memory of the incident. Yet, in seed form, the emotionally loaded memory had remained firmly impressed on her mind. It caused her endless unhappiness in life, though she did not know it. All she knew was the unhappiness that it caused. The mere mention of the words red car while she was in the perceptive state of yoga nidra induced remembrance. She actually relived the past, the time when her parents were being taken away from her. She felt and expressed the emotional shock during yoga

nidra. After a short time the emotional contents of the memory were exhausted. She felt very relaxed. This was the start, only the start mind you, towards a happier life.

This is one example of the mechanism of releasing deeper tensions of the mind in yoga nidra through visualization. All the tensions of the mind, minor or major, can be removed in a similar manner, though generally their manifestation will not be as obvious as the example that we have just given. Most tensions evaporate more smoothly.

When most of the tensions have been removed from the mind, then it should be possible to hold one image in the mind. This is called dharana where one visualizes one symbol to the exclusion of all others. This is a more advanced stage of yoga nidra and leads to dhyana.

Rules for visualization

The object to be visualized should be spoken by the instructor. The sequence and nature of visualization can be one of two types:

1. Visualization of objects one after the other in rapid succession. Sufficient time should be allowed during the sequence for actual visualization by the practitioner.
2. Visualization in the form of a story. The story and associated verbal description should be given by the instructor.

Each of these methods can be utilized in yoga nidra. There is a vast, in fact, an endless number of variations. An example of object visualization will be given in the following yoga nidra technique 2 and an example of story visualization will be described in technique 3².

The teacher should select all symbols carefully, even seemingly harmless ones. With some people, one should scrupulously avoid descriptions of gruesome objects such as spiders, snakes, deep water and so on. These symbols also have their place in yoga nidra, but they should only be used when the practitioner is ready. Discretion in the choice of symbols for the given situation only comes with the gradual awakening of the faculty of intuition.

Most people find visualization the most difficult part of yoga nidra practice. This is because of fluctuation in the mind and because we do not develop our dormant capacity to visualize. Don't worry if your visualizations are unclear or, perhaps, non-existent. Only

try. With practice, visualization becomes easy and spontaneous. If you practise yoga nidra regularly this faculty will gradually unfold and this capacity to visualize will, in turn, help you to experience deeper states of relaxation, and perhaps even deeper perception and insight into the nature of things.

Reflection

At the end of yoga nidra the mind is very receptive and one-pointed. This is a good time for reflection and enquiry, that is, the practice of jnana yoga³. You can choose any subject for your enquiry, but a good one is: "Who am I?" Ask yourself this question with sincerity, or select any other profound question.

Alternatively, your enquiry can follow the steps: "I am aware of my body," "I am also aware of my thoughts." "Who is it then that is watching all this?" Select your own enquiry along these lines. Don't give up the enquiry in your life until you find the answer.

Some of you may have an ishta devata (personal deity) or a psychic symbol, which holds much significance in your life. The end of yoga nidra is also an ideal time to concentrate on your personal symbol or deity. It can lead to meditation.

Return to normal awareness

At the end of yoga nidra the instructor should give a definite statement that the practice is finished. This should be done before the practitioner moves his body or opens his eyes. A good statement to finish yoga nidra is as follows: "*Hari Aum Tat Sat, yoga nidra is completed.*"

Don't suddenly finish the practice, stand up and perhaps start talking with your neighbour. The process should be gradual so that your mind fully adjusts to the outside surroundings. Keep your eyes closed after hearing the final statement. Slowly move your hands and feet. Be aware of external sounds. Then after a minute or so slowly open your eyes and raise your body. The teacher should give instructions accordingly.

This definite statement and the gradual awareness of the surroundings is a safety measure to prevent people confusing outer and inner perception. Some people, having finished yoga nidra too quickly, found that they walk around in a dream state for many

hours after the practice. They did not know whether they were coming or going. Don't worry, however, this occurrence is rare.

YOGA NIDRA - PART 2

For general details on body position, clothing, etc. please refer to the practice section in the first lesson on yoga nidra⁴.

Technique 2

The practice is made up of the following stages:

1. Starting pose and naukasana
2. Preliminary physical relaxation
3. Simple breath awareness
4. Sankalpa
5. Rotation of awareness
6. Object visualization
7. Sankalpa
8. End

Stage 1: starting pose and naukasana

Please lie flat on your back in shavasana⁵. Let your arms rest on the floor beside the body.

First we practise naukasana (boat pose) to remove gross physical tensions⁵.

Breathe in deeply.

Hold your breath and raise your arms, legs, head and shoulders off the ground.

Stretch and tense the whole body as much as possible.

Stay in this raised, tensed position for as long as you can comfortably hold your breath.

Then lower your body, breathe out and completely relax.

This is 1 round. Do 3 rounds.

Then adjust your body so that you feel perfectly comfortable.

Adjust your clothing.

Scratch yourself.

Adjust your head.

Make yourself so comfortable that you will feel no urge to move your body during the practice of yoga nidra.

Close your eyes and keep them closed throughout the practice.

Place your arms beside your body with the palms upwards.

Adjust your legs so that they are straight and slightly apart.

After this point don't move your body. From now onwards the practice is entirely mental.

Stage 2: preliminary physical relaxation

Be aware of your whole body.

If you are able, visualize your body.

Feel heaviness in your whole body.

Imagine that your whole body is very heavy.

It is like a heavy lump of rubber.

Feel heaviness in your right leg . . .

Left leg . . .

Right arm . . .

Left arm . . .

Feel heaviness in your whole body.

Repeat this process 1 or 2 times.

Then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: simple breath awareness

Become aware of your natural breathing.

As you breathe in, know that you are breathing in.

As you breathe out, know that you are breathing out.

Be completely aware of the process of breathing . . . nothing else.

As you breathe in count 1.

As you breathe out count 2.

Continue in this manner until you reach a count of 50.

Then proceed to the next stage.

Stage 4: sankalpa

Please repeat your sankalpa with intensity and feeling.

If you have not chosen a sankalpa then proceed directly to the next stage.

Feel your whole body and mind vibrate with the mental repetition of the sankalpa.

Say the sankalpa at least 3 times, more if possible.

Say it from your heart, not from your mouth.

Then proceed to stage 5.

Stage 5: rotation of awareness

Now we will rotate awareness through the different parts of the body . . .

We will take a trip through the body.

Remember: you must be aware of each part of the body in turn.

Either you can feel the sensation from each part of the body . . .

Or you can create a mental picture of that part of the body . . .

Or you can mentally name that part of the body once.

Choose for yourself.

Please remain alert and aware of the instructions.

Don't try too hard.

First be aware of your right hand ... then right hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, all the fingers together, the palm, back of the right hand, wrist, elbow, right shoulder, armpit, right side of the waist, right buttock, right thigh, knee, calf, ankle, heel, sole, top of the right foot, big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all the toes together ...

Be aware ...

Now the left side ...

Left hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, all the fingers together, the palm, back of the left hand, wrist, elbow, left shoulder, armpit, left side of the waist, left buttock, left thigh, be aware of the left thigh, knee, calf, ankle, heel, sole, top of the left foot, big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all the toes together ...

Be alert ...

Now the back ...

Right buttock, left buttock, both buttocks together, right shoulder blade, left shoulder blade, both shoulder blades together, the spine from top to bottom, back of the head, top of the head, forehead, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, eyebrow centre, right eye, left eye, right ear, left ear, right cheek, left cheek, the nose, upper lip, lower lip, both lips together, the chin, the throat, right side of the chest, left side of the chest, the whole chest, the navel, right side of the abdomen, left side of the abdomen, the whole abdomen ...

Be aware ...

Now the major limbs ...

Whole right leg, whole left leg, both legs together, right arm, left arm, both arms together, the head ...

The whole body ...

The whole body ...

The whole body.

Please maintain awareness.

This is the end of 1 round.

Do 1 or 2 more complete rounds according to time available.

Do not move your body.

Be aware.

Right hand, right hand thumb ... etc.

Do 2 or 3 complete rounds.

Stage 6: object visualization

Try to visualize the following objects to the best of your ability:

Shivalingam ... standing Christ... Buddha in meditation ... a burning candle ... look into the centre of the flame ... a pyramid ... banyan tree ... a car moving along a road ... the car is red... coloured clouds... red clouds ... white clouds ... grey clouds ... full moon ... a dog ... a playful cat... an elephant... a horse ... the rising sun ... a big pond ... a lotus ... the bank of a fast flowing river ... a small sailing boat... an aeroplane in flight... a bird in flight... a red triangle ... a golden spiderweb covered in dew ... a dead body ... a cross over a church ... a temple bell ringing ... an old house ... a goat... a shining symbol of Aum ... chimney smoke rising on a cold winter's day ... a glowing fire inside a house ... torrential rain ... snow-capped mountain ... birds flying across the sunset ... waves breaking on a deserted beach ... hear the pounding of the waves ... be aware of the immensity of the sea ... be aware of a calm sea on a warm summer's day ... feel the calmness yet hidden power within the sea ...

This is like your mind.

Stage 7: sankalpa

Please repeat your sankalpa, the same sankalpa that you repeated at the beginning of yoga nidra. Say it at least 3 times with feeling.

Stage 8: end

Completely cease all practice.

Be aware of your mind.

Say to yourself mentally: *HariAum Tat Sat, this is the end of yoga nidra.*

Slowly move your hands.

Slowly move your feet.

Be aware of the outside sounds.

Open your eyes.

If you feel relaxed, and you have time available, you can remain in the lying position, otherwise raise your body to the upright pose².

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2

² Book III, Lesson 35, Topic 4

³ Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 1

⁴ Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 5

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

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have introduced two new kriyas - chakra bhedan and sushumna darshana (kriya nos. 14 and 15). If you have the time, integrate them into practice program. If you do not have the time, choose either program 2, 3 or 4 instead.

the power of mental concentration as an aid to both meditation and day to day life.

The benefits of yoga nidra are well worth your spending time each day practising it, especially in the evening after returning home from work.

Try to master one of the balancing asanas included in this lesson. They will help increase

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours 44 minutes	
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Kriya 5: Shabda Sanchalana	30
Kriya 6: Maha Mudra	10
Kriya 7: Maha Bheda Mudra	10
Kriya 8: Manduki Mudra	5
Kriya 9: Tadan Kriya	7
Kriya 10: Naumukhi Mudra	5
Kriya 11: Shakti Chalini	5
Kriya 12: Shambhavi	11
Kriya 13: Amrit Pan	5
Kriya 14: Chakra Bhedan	20
Kriya 15: Sushumna Darshana	10
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Program 2: shortened kriya practice

Practise as many of the above kriyas as you can.

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Ujjayi with Aum	10
Yoga Nidra	20
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	60

Program 4: duration 1/2 hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	4
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	3
Matsyasana	3
Ujjayi with Aum	6
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	30