

## Lesson 3

That which does not exist shall never be.  
That which exists shall never cease to be.

*Bhagavad Gita (2:16)*



## Simha Kriya: The Lion's Yawn

This practice is also known as simhasana and simha mudra, and in the yoga upanishads as *simhagarjanasana* (roaring lion pose). We have already described methods of cleaning and revitalizing the various different organs of the head, such as the nose, eyes, etc.<sup>1</sup>. Simha kriya supplements these previous practices by giving an excellent massage and stimulation to the organs of the throat, in particular the tonsils. These two insignificant looking guardians of the throat have a decisive role to play in maintaining good health.

### The tonsils

If you open your mouth and look in a mirror you will see two masses of spongy tissue seated at the back of the mouth in front and on each side of the throat. These are called the tonsils. Similar masses are to be found at the back of the nose (called the adenoids), on the back of the tongue and also scattered over the walls of the throat. These all form part of the lymphatic system and are known as lymph nodes.

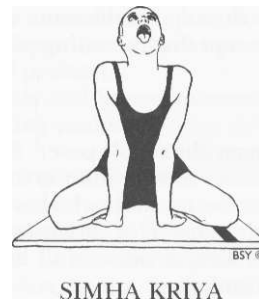
One of the functions of the lymphatic system is to eliminate toxins from the body. As such it performs an essential role, for it is in the accumulation of toxins that germs breed resulting in disease. Poisons and bacteria that are mopped up in the system are trapped and concentrated in the lymph nodes, including the tonsils, prior to expulsion from the body. This bacteria is neutralized by antibodies which are produced within the lymph nodes.

Sometimes, however, the build-up of toxins within the system becomes too great and this overwhelms the lymph nodes. Under these circumstances the nodes themselves become infected. In the case of the tonsils the result is a painful inflammation and fever known as tonsillitis.

The normal medical practice, which fortunately is losing favour, is to remove these tonsils when they start to become inflamed. This does not solve the problem because the

real reason for the inflammation is an over-toxic blood system. In fact in the long run removal causes more problems than it solves, since these small organs are vital in protecting the body against the onset of disease. Yoga approaches this ailment in a more natural manner. Through asanas and pranayama the entire body is purified of poisons and the occurrence of tonsillitis and other ailments connected with the lymphatic system become less likely.

Simha kriya in particular influences the tonsils. It stimulates the blood flow to the tonsils and thereby flushes out accumulated toxins. As such it is a powerful technique for preventing and often removing tonsillitis.



Place a blanket on the floor.

Sit in vajrasana<sup>2</sup>.

Separate the knees about 45 cms. The toes of the feet should be in contact. Lean forwards and place the hands on the floor between the legs.

The hands should be side by side with the fingers pointing backwards.

The elbows should point backwards. Straighten the arms fully and arch the back; this is important in giving the maximum stretch to the front of the neck.

Tilt the head backwards sufficiently so that there is a comfortable amount of tension in the neck.

The eyes should be kept open during the practice, with the gaze directed at the centre of the eyebrows or at a point on the ceiling in front of you.

Keep the mouth closed. Fold the tongue backwards so that the tip presses hard against the soft palate at the top and back of the mouth.

Inhale slowly and deeply through the nose.

At the end of the inhalation release the tension of the tongue, open the mouth and extend the tongue outwards and towards the chin as far as possible.

Exhale slowly. Simultaneously produce a clear, loud and steady vocal sound from the throat; in other words an *aaah* sound. If one wishes the tongue can be also moved from side to side while emitting the sound.

At the end of exhalation, again press the tongue against the upper palate of the mouth.

Close the mouth and breathe in.

This is 1 round. Do as many rounds as time permits.

#### VARIATIONS OF SIMHA KRIYA

There are a number of variations of simha kriya. The following are the same as the basic technique except that the sitting positions are different.

##### Variation 1

Sit in sukhasana (the simple pose)<sup>2</sup>. Simha kriya performed from this position is the simplest and most suitable for those who have difficulty sitting in vajrasana. This variation should be discarded as soon as one can sit in vajrasana without discomfort.

##### Variation 2

Sitting in padmasana (the lotus pose). This is a more difficult variation and will be understood more fully when we cover padmasana<sup>3</sup>.

This practice is particularly beneficial if one faces the sun so that the rays go into the back of the mouth.

##### Awareness and duration

Throughout the practice one should be aware of the eyebrow centre or a point on the ceiling. While inhaling also be aware of the pressure of the tongue on the palate and breathing. While exhaling also be aware of the sound and vibration produced in the throat.

For general health purposes practise up to three minutes daily. It can be practised at any time. For specific ailments increase the number of rounds.

##### Benefits

The tonsils depend on a good blood supply for efficient functioning. The blood often becomes congested in this region especially when one's system is particularly toxic and during tonsillitis. Simha kriya massages the throat region and squeezes out stagnant, impure blood so that it returns to the kidneys for purification. At the end of practising simha kriya, the muscles and blood vessels of the throat are relaxed. This allows a freshly oxygenated supply of blood to circulate in this region, which has a wonderful rejuvenating effect on the tonsils, helping to improve the health of the whole body as well as removing the causes of tonsillitis.

In the throat there are many other vital organs. These include the thyroid glands, the pharynx, the larynx, the salivary glands as well as the auditory system in general. All of these receive a wonderful massage in the same way as described for the tonsils. Since these provide essential functions of the body, the improvement in their health through the simple practice of simha kriya can have vast repercussions on our lives.

All nerves connecting the body to the brain must pass through the neck region. It is a vital crossroad. Also in the throat region there are various nerve plexuses which control the organs of the throat. Simha kriya stretches these nerves and removes stagnant blood, allowing an influx of fresh blood. This together with the stimulation that the nerves also receive results in better nerve connections to the brain and in turn increased efficiency in the glands and organs of the body.

Simha kriya is a useful practice for preventing and removing pharyngitis, laryngitis and general throat ailments.

##### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 1

<sup>2</sup> Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

<sup>3</sup> Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

<sup>4</sup> For details on the thyroid gland refer to Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 2.

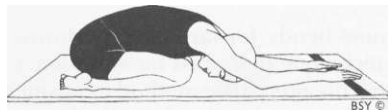
## Asanas: Practice

### SHASHANKASANA (POSE OF THE MOON OR HARE POSE)

The Sanskrit word *shashank* means 'moon' - hence the name of the asana. It is also commonly called the hare pose because in the final position it imitates a bounding hare.

One often wonders why it is called the moon pose for it does not appear to have any obvious connection or resemblance to the moon. However, the reason is simple. The word *shashank* is derived from the two words *shash*, which means 'hare' and *ank*, which means 'lap'. Why? Because it is said that the dark patches on a full moon resemble the shape of a hare with the moon in its lap. We leave this to the reader's imagination.

There is another reason for the name the moon pose. The moon symbolizes calmness and peace. It emits soothing vibrations, and who among us has not felt tranquillity when gazing at the moon? Shashankasana is a wonderful practice for dissolving even the most overwhelming anger.



#### Basic technique

Place a blanket or thin rug on the floor. Sit in vajrasana<sup>1</sup>.

Place the hands on the knees and comfortably straighten the back.

Relax the whole body.

Close the eyes. Inhale and at the same time slowly raise the arms, keeping them straight.

The inhalation and movement should be slow. At the end of inhalation the arms should be vertically above the head; those who wish can move their arms a little further behind the head accentuating the stretch of the chest.

Slowly exhale and bend forwards.

The arms, trunk and head should remain in one line.

At the end of exhalation the forehead and arms should rest on the floor in front of the knees (see picture).

Those who find this impossible should lean forward as far as is comfortable. Relax the whole body taking care that the arms are fully relaxed.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Be aware of the breath and the rhythmical pressure of the abdomen against the thighs.

Breathing in feel the abdomen rising against the thighs.

Breathing out feel the abdomen moving away from the thighs.

This is the final position. Stay in the final position for a comfortable length of time.

Then inhale and raise the trunk and arms to the vertical position.

Slowly exhale and lower the arms and return to the starting position.

#### Breathing, awareness and duration

Inhale while raising the arms from the starting position. Exhale while lowering the arms and trunk to the final pose. Breathing should be deep and slow in the final position. Inhale while raising the arms and trunk. Exhale while returning to the starting position. The breath should be synchronized with the physical movements.

One should be aware throughout the practice. While moving from the starting position to the final pose and when returning to the starting position, be fully aware of the breath and movement. In the final position be aware of the breath.

Beginners should slowly increase the duration in the final pose until they can comfortably hold it for about three minutes. Those who wish to calm their anger and frayed nerves should especially increase the time spent in the final position.

### **Mistakes to avoid**

Many people fail to keep their head, arms and trunk in one straight line when lowering themselves to the final position. If possible the arms and forehead should touch the floor at about the same time. The head, arms and trunk should also remain in one line when raising the body from the final pose.

Often the arms are kept straight in the final pose. This is incorrect for it means that the body is not fully relaxed.

### **Benefits**

Shashankasana is a reasonably simple asana yet it gives many benefits. Most people have very stiff backs. Shashankasana stretches the back muscles and separates the individual vertebrae from each other. This releases pressure on the discs that keep the vertebrae apart. Often nerve connections emanating from the spinal cord are squeezed by these discs giving rise to various forms of backache and sciatica. The separation of the discs during shashankasana helps to relieve these pains and encourage the discs to resume their correct locations. The stretch imparted to the back muscles removes sluggish and depleted blood. On completing the asana fresh blood is soaked up into the muscles in the same way that water is absorbed by a sponge. This regenerates both the back muscles and the all important spinal nerves.

The deep breathing in the final position applies a gentle yet powerful massage to the abdominal organs. As such this asana is very useful in helping to remove and prevent various abdominal disorders such as constipation and indigestion.

This asana tones the pelvic organs and is found beneficial in alleviating sexual disorders. Women will find this asana advantageous.

All of us become angry. It takes a mere second to feel anger but far longer to regain normality. Deep and slow breathing helps to calm anger. Shashankasana induces this and quickly brings about relaxation. Breath awareness accentuates this process by withdrawing our thoughts away from the cause of our anger. The by-product of emotional upsets such as anger is over-stimulation of the adrenal glands. These two glands inject adrenaline directly into the bloodstream causing overactivity of the bodily functions and stress. Shashankasana

regulates these organs, helping to bring about a relaxed mind and body.

This is a very comfortable asana. In fact it is so comfortable that we know of some people who can sleep in this pose and often do.

### **VARIATIONS OF SHASHANKASANA**

There are other forms of shashankasana. The most useful are the following:

#### **Variation 1**

Take the same starting position as the basic technique - vajrasana.

Hold the arms behind the back and clasp the right wrist with the left hand. Relax the whole body and close the eyes.

Exhale and slowly bend forwards until the forehead touches or is near the ground.

Repeat the same procedure as already described for the final position of the basic technique. After some time slowly raise the trunk while inhaling and return to the starting position.

*Note:* Apart from the technique all other details are essentially the same as given for the basic form of shashankasana.

#### **Variation 2**

This variation is very much the same as variation 1.

Instead of holding the arms behind the back, the fists are placed in front of the soft portion of the abdomen just below the navel.

The knuckles point towards and touch each other.

One now bends forward and performs the same technique described for variation 1.

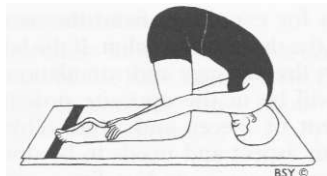
*Note:* This alternative method intensifies the massage imparted to the abdominal organs in the final pose. It is particularly recommended for relieving abdominal ailments such as constipation and flatulence. Apart from this particular characteristic this variation gives all the benefits of the basic shashankasana.

#### **Variation 3: Pranamasana (bowing pose)**

Sit in vajrasana. Grasp the lower part of the calves just above the ankles with your hands. Bend forwards and place the crown of your head on the floor in front of your knees.

Your head should rest on a folded blanket.

Raise your buttocks until the thighs are as vertical as is comfortable.



Breathe normally with awareness.  
This is the final pose.  
Remain in this position for a comfortable length of time.

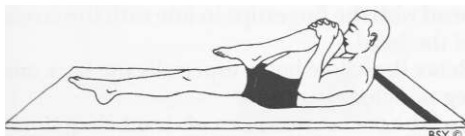
*Note:* This variation particularly directs an extra supply of blood to the brain. As such it is helpful in removing tiredness and mental fatigue and certain types of headache. People who suffer from high blood pressure or vertigo should practise with caution.

#### SUPTA PAWANMUKTASANA (LEG LOCK POSE)

The Sanskrit word *pawan* means 'wind' and the word *mukta* means 'release' or 'free'. Hence this is a wind releasing pose because it is very useful in removing wind or flatulence from the intestines and stomach. It is especially useful for beginners for though simple, it gives many benefits. Even the most unhealthy person can do this asana.

#### Technique

Place a blanket on the floor. Lie flat on your back. Relax the whole body.



#### Stage 1

Bend the right leg and bring the thigh and knee as near as possible to the chest.  
The other leg should remain straight.  
Place the hands over the knee and interlock the fingers.  
Gently pull the knee nearer the chest.  
Relax the whole body keeping the straight leg, back and head on the floor.  
Breathe in deeply and slowly while simultaneously raising the head and shoulders.  
At the end of inhalation the forehead, nose, chin or neck should touch or be as close as

possible to the right knee.

Hold your breath for a short time in the raised pose.

Then exhale slowly and lower the head and shoulders to the floor to resume the starting position.

This is 1 round.

Inhale while again raising the body and repeating the procedure.

Do a number of rounds.

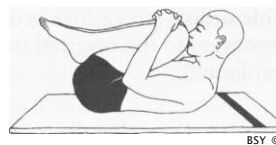
Then straighten the bent leg and relax the whole body for a short time.

#### Stage 2

Bend the other leg towards the chest and repeat the same procedure as given in stage 1.

Do the same number of rounds.

On completion, straighten the left leg and relax the whole body.



#### Stage 3

Now fold both legs to the chest.

Repeat the same procedure as stage 1.  
Afterwards relax the whole body with awareness on breath.

#### Breathing, awareness and duration

Breath should be deep and synchronized with the movement as described in the technique. This is important for it accentuates the massage of the abdominal organs. This asana will give the most benefits if one holds the breath while in the raised position for as long as is comfortable.

One should be aware of the breath and the compression of the abdomen throughout the practice.

For general health benefits do three to five rounds of each stage. For specific ailments such as removal of wind, more rounds can be performed at one's discretion.

#### Sequence

This asana can be done at any time except after meals. However, it is particularly beneficial when done early in the morning before going to the latrine, for it effectively stimulates the

nervous action of the bowels and gives a good motion. It is therefore a useful method for ensuring that the abdomen is emptied as much as possible before beginning one's yoga practices.

#### **Simpler alternatives**

If you suffer from back problems, obesity or certain other ailments you may find the previous method difficult or uncomfortable. If you cannot do it then it is a great pity for it gives many benefits. For this reason we suggest a simpler alternative which gives essentially the same benefits though to a lesser degree.

All the stages are performed in the way already explained, except that the head and shoulders are not raised off the ground. Instead, breathe slowly and deeply with the legs bent to the chest. Hold this position for as long as comfortable, performing each stage in turn. Once this simple procedure is mastered you should progress to the original technique previously explained.

#### **Benefits**

This asana gives an excellent massage to the abdomen. In this pose the abdominal muscles are tensed and simultaneously the internal organs are compressed by the folded legs. This increases the circulation of the blood and stimulates the nerves which connect the organs to the brain or nerve complexes. As such it helps in no small way to relieve various types of abdominal ailments associated with malfunctioning of inefficient organs.

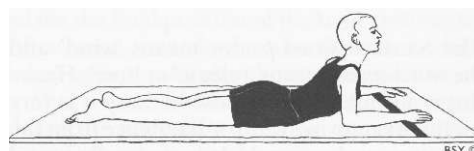
This asana is particularly useful for removing constipation and flatulence. Food moves from the stomach through the intestines during digestion. The intestinal tract is divided into two sections, the small and the large intestines. Most of the digestive processes occur in the small intestine. After this the waste matter proceeds to the large intestine (colon). The large intestine is about five feet in length and rises upwards on the right side of the body (ascending colon), crosses horizontally in the region of the navel (transverse colon) and then goes downwards on the left side of the body (descending colon). It terminates in the anus. For this reason it is important that pawanmuktasana is first performed with the right leg bent so that waste matter is encouraged to pass in the proper direction and more easily to

the anus for expulsion, from the ascending colon to the descending colon. If the left leg is bent first the massage and stimulation of the bowels will be in the opposite order to the movement of faeces and wind. This is an important aspect and needs to be done correctly to gain maximum benefits.

This asana also tones up the back muscles and spinal nerves.

#### **SPHINX ASANA**

In English this asana is known as the sphinx pose because the front of the body in the final pose very much resembles an Egyptian sphinx. It is also known as *ardha bhujangasana*, the half cobra pose. It is a simple asana and is a preparatory pose for *bhujangasana* (the cobra pose), which will be fully described in the next lesson<sup>2</sup>.



#### **Technique**

Lie flat on the floor, face downwards. Extend the feet so that the heels and soles face upwards. Rest the forehead on the ground. Bend the arms and place the forearms flat on the floor. Place the palms downwards on each side of the head with the fingertips in line with the crown of the head. Relax the whole body, especially the back and leg muscles. Breathe out deeply. Then while inhaling slowly raise the head and shoulders by bringing the upper arms to the vertical position. The elbows should remain on the ground. Perform the movement by using the arms only: keep the back muscles relaxed throughout the practice. Remain in the final pose for a comfortable length of time breathing slowly and deeply. Be aware of the breath and the relaxation of the back muscles. Then breathe out while lowering the body. Relax the whole body. Then repeat the movement.



**Awareness and duration**

The awareness should follow the breath and relaxation of the back muscles. Do the asana according to available time. About three or four minutes is sufficient.

**Benefits**

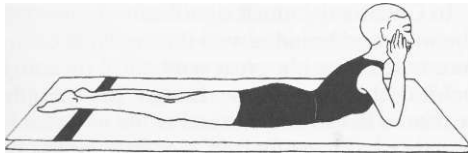
This is an especially good asana for those who have a particularly stiff back. It is a good preparation for bhujangasana which requires more flexibility of the back. The benefits are the same as for bhujangasana though on a lesser scale<sup>2</sup>.

**MAKARASANA  
(CROCODILE POSE)**

This asana is very similar to the sphinx asana. It is an asana that many people do naturally. We think it is worthwhile mentioning because it is so beneficial for those who suffer from slipped discs or other spinal disorders, as well as asthma and other lung ailments.

**Technique**

Lie flat on the stomach with the head and shoulders raised off the ground. The head is cupped in the palms with the elbows resting on the ground. Relax the whole body and close the eyes. Be aware of the natural and rhythmic breathing pattern. If you like you can also count the breath.

**Benefits**

If you suffer from any spinal or lung ailments we suggest you lie in makarasana for as long as possible; the longer the better. You can even read a book in this asana. This position encourages the spine to resume its normal shape and releases compression of the spinal nerves (sciatica). The chest is also expanded allowing an increased amount of air to enter the lungs, which is a great help in alleviating congestion and other ailments of the respiratory system.

This asana can also be used as a simple meditational pose by those persons who find sitting asanas impossible.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

<sup>2</sup> Book I, Lesson 4; Topic 2

## Prana: An Introduction

There are many misconceptions about prana and pranayama. *Prana* does not specifically mean air or breath, though many people interpret the word in this way. The word *pranayama* has far wider implications than the usual definition - 'breath control'. It is important to understand these terms, even on an intellectual level, so one knows exactly what is the purpose of pranayama.

### Religious and traditional aspects

In the ancient scripture called the *Satapatha Bralimana* it is written: "Prana is the body of the Self (supreme consciousness)." In other words, prana is the vehicle or the medium of consciousness. In this sense prana can be equated with the Hindu concept of prakriti, meaning the manifest constituents of the universe in the form of matter and energy. From modern science we know that matter is really no more than an expression of energy. As such we can say that prana means energy. This prana or energy, whether it is the mind, body, matter or any form of energy, acts as the medium for carrying consciousness. Without prana, consciousness would be totally unable to express itself in the phenomenal world to manifest myriads of life forms in the universe. Prana is the active aspect of existence and consciousness is the all-pervading, inactive and witnessing principle. For life to exist both must be present.

In other scriptural texts of India there are various other definitions, but all of them point to basically the same concept. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* prana is said to be the internal matrix, and *vayu* (loosely defined as air but actually also meaning life force, energy, wind), the external matrix of energy. In this context we see this as merely a division of the same energy, the prana here being designated as that energy which lies within the body and makes up the mind-body complex at its various levels of subtlety. It is this aspect with which we

are interested during the practice of pranayama.

In tantric and various other scriptures, energy or prana is symbolized by the all powerful divine mother Shakti or Kali and various other goddesses. It is regarded as the feminine aspect of existence, the fertile ground on which consciousness (represented by various gods, notably Shiva) can take root, grow and manifest in the universe. Shakti or prana is the womb of existence. The main theme of tantra is the unification of Shiva and Shakti so that consciousness can express itself perfectly through the medium of energy, prana. Shiva is the sight and Shakti is the eye; Shiva is the hearing and Shakti is the ears. Prana and its control is integral in all these systems, but it is known by different names.

Was the concept of prana known by other cultures and religions? The answer is emphatically yes, for the principle is not manmade; it is a basic aspect of existence. And so it should not surprise us that it is widely mentioned in the various cultures and religions of the world. Let us consider a few examples.

In Christianity much significance is given to the wine and bread served during Holy Communion. There is a great symbolical meaning behind this ceremony though few people realize it. Bread is the bread of life and that is exactly what it symbolizes - energy, prana or the life principle of the universe. Wine symbolizes spiritual enlightenment, the intoxicating bliss of all knowing consciousness. This is why these two items are taken and eaten in the ceremony: their combination represents the unity of the two aspects of existence, namely the union of consciousness with energy.

There are large numbers of other references to prana in the *Bible*. For example, in Corinthians (10:17) it is said: "For we being many are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread." Bread here does not mean prana or energy, but means con-

sciousness. In other words the passage can be read as follows: "For we being many (humans) are really one consciousness and one body (of prana or universal energy), for we are all partakers of that one consciousness." This clearly shows the agreement between yogic, Christian and ancient Indian concepts.

In ancient China the concept of universal energy was prevalent. Instead of prana they called it *ki*. Like yogic thought, they had a very high and unitive understanding of man and his relationship with the universe. They considered that the whole universe is permeated with energy and that each of us being intimately linked to the universe is a powerhouse of energy. According to the Chinese, the universal energy is comprised of two continually and mutually interacting principles called yin and yang. These create matter and all its transmutations as well as manipulate all the various forms of energy. The manifested universe was seen as a harmonious whole and subject to change through the ceaseless interplay of the complementary and eternally changing yin and yang. Yin and yang can be considered as the negative and positive forces, the two poles of the manifested whole. The energy or prana of the universe is symbolized by a diagram (in yoga we would say a yantra or mandala) in which the yin and yang aspects are depicted as forming the two interdependent and interlocking parts of the whole, each containing within itself the germ or potential of the other. These principles are encompassed or held together by the Tao - Consciousness.

Be careful not to consider this as mere theory. This very concept is utilized in the system of acupuncture, which was practised in China thousands of years ago and continued in present day China. The success of this system of curing diseases depends on the concept of yin and yang. If the yin and yang principles did not have some approximation to the actual situation regarding energy in the universe and in the human body then acupuncture would be incapable of achieving the good results that it does. Even modern materialistic China has had to accept the ancient theory to explain the practical results that they obtain in millions of patients, with a wide variety of diseases.

Throughout history there has been a wide acceptance of the universal energy, prana. Modern science has also postulated that the

basic substance of the infinite cosmos around us is energy. In this respect science, yoga and other ancient systems have agreed with each other. It is the nature of prana in the body that has caused disagreement between traditional thought and science; though in very recent research, science is again confirming experimentally what the yogis and ancient sages knew intuitively, namely that the physical body is enveloped and controlled by an energy or pranic body.

### **The pranic body**

Let us first of all discuss what yoga says about prana in relation to the human body. The sciences of yoga and physiology agree that there are various energies within the body: nervous energy, heat, biochemical energy, etc., which function in the different parts of the body. These energies allow all the different organs, nerves and muscles to operate and communicate with the brain. Without them the physical body and brain would not function. These energies can be classified as various forms of prana. Physiology confines itself to the study of these energies and their interrelationship with each other. Yoga, on the other hand, says that there are other forms of prana within and around the body, as well as the energies known and accepted by physiology. These other forms of prana have a great influence on our lives.

Yoga says that permeating and surrounding the physical body is an energy body which is known as the *pranamaya kosha*, literally the sheath of prana. This corresponds to the etheric body described by people who awaken their psychic abilities. Within this pranic body, the prana flows in fixed pathways. These are called *nadis* in yogic terminology. Many people regard these nadis as nothing more than nerves (and often blood vessels) of the physical body. This is certainly not what is meant by nadis. Though of course the nerves and blood vessels are passages for energy flow, the nadis refer to pathways or flow of a particular form of prana, more subtle than the energies normally considered by physiologists. This is not just an interesting hypothesis, for Russian scientists have recently photographed these nadis as well as the flow of prana.

Let us take the analogy of a radio. A radio is made up of different parts which perform

specific functions. The human body is comprised of different organs which also carry out certain duties. In both cases, of the human body and the radio, the totality or grouping of these different parts constitutes the whole. Now consider a person who has never seen a radio before. If he was told before turning it on that the radio picks up programs from a transmitting station one hundred miles away and emits exactly the same sound he would probably laugh with disbelief. "How is this possible?" he would think. "If there is no visible connection such as a wire between the transmitting station and the radio, how is it possible for the radio to reproduce programs?" But we all know through science and by actually turning on a radio that in fact no visible connection is necessary, the connection is made in a non-visible form through the agency of electromagnetic waves. The body is like a radio, it receives energy or prana from the surroundings. When the body is healthy and the nadis allow free flow of prana it is like a well-tuned radio; it picks up with perfect clarity the energies around us. An unhealthy body is like an old, dilapidated radio; it does not tune in as well as it should to the surrounding energies. This is the aim of pranayama: to tune the body and mind to a high state of sensitivity, so that one picks up these cosmic energies and so that consciousness can shine through our mind and body in its pristine glory.

### **Modern science and prana**

Knowledge of prana is not a new thing to scientific circles. It has been known and recorded by scientifically inclined persons throughout the ages. Unfortunately their discoveries have generally been shunned and ridiculed and their ideas not taken seriously. For example, Mesmer, who was one of the people who introduced modern man to hypnotism, called the psychic field enveloping the physical body animal magnetism. Reichenbach, an eminent industrialist and inventor of creosote did a lot of research on this subject and named the energy odic force after the Norse god Odin. Paracelsus, Keely, Eeman, Van Helmont, etc. are all down to earth non-mystical people, who have reported the existence of this pranic body. Yet no one took much notice of them, so busy were they in pursuing more concrete studies of science and technology.

Even when a renowned professor of neuro-anatomy at Yale University in America, called Dr. Harold Burr, announced the existence of this energy sheath in 1935 little notice was taken. He established that all humans, all animals, all plants, in fact all organic matter, all life, is enveloped by an energy or pranic body. He clearly stated that this pranic body, though he called it an electrodynamic field, regulates the functions of the physical form, controls growth, shape and decay of the cells, tissues and organs. Further studies in the same university showed that there was an intimate link between the mind and this pranic body. Disturbances of the mind interfered with the pranic body. Yet still no serious attention was given to this phenomenon. People preferred to bury their heads in the sand.

It is only fairly recently in Russia, Czechoslovakia and a few other countries that serious investigations on this subject have been started. And their findings sound more mystical than scientific. It is almost as though the scientists involved had been transformed into mystics, and in a way they have.

The most astounding and revealing investigation into the phenomenon of the energy body was initiated over thirty years ago. This paved the way for the research that is now being conducted in various quarters. It opened the normally closed eyes and minds of some scientists to new possibilities. Without this initial path-finding research there would still be an atmosphere of disbelief surrounding the subject of the energy body. The research was not carried out in universities or by scientists, but by an ingenious technician in his own house, aided by his wife. His name was Kirlian and he lived in the city of Krasnodar near the Black Sea.

In his research, Kirlian gave conclusive proof of the energy or pranic body. Many people will not believe anything unless they can see it. And this is exactly what the Kirlians did; they provided photographs of the pranic body. Moreover, they were able to produce photographs of the pranic body for anyone who cared to visit them. This photograph was not the result of some fluke of nature. The pranic body of all organic objects could be photographed at any time as required.

They used equipment in which organic objects were placed in a high frequency electric

field. For this reason the technique is known as 'Kirlian high frequency photography'. The system utilizes an oscillator which can emit up to 200,000 electrical impulses every second. This electrical oscillator is connected to an assortment of instruments including photographic and optical equipment, together with two plates which create a high frequency electric field in the space between them. An object to be photographed is placed between the two plates. The object can be anything animate, such as a leaf, a flower, or any part of an animal or human organism. What happens when an object is photographed under these circumstances? Strange and complex patterns of light are seen to pervade and are emitted from the object. The object is seen to vibrate with life. Processes, movements, signals, flares and beautiful iridescent colours throb throughout the whole object. Untold beauty is seen to exist within organic objects about which we were previously totally ignorant. We are normally incapable of comprehending this pulsating, living phenomenon occurring within and around us.

The human hand was seen to appear like a firework display, with lights of all colours bursting into activity, some fading quickly away and others remaining in their glory for longer periods of time. In some areas of the hand there was intense activity, while in other areas there was almost lethargy in comparison. The lights, the movements and the different areas of activity seem to bear no relationship whatsoever with the different physical aspects of the hand. There was some kind of order in the multifarious show, but it was not linked to any known physiological process.

What did the scientists conclude? They decided that they were seeing a new form of energy. It is not electrical in nature; it is not magnetic nor is it heat energy. It defied classification into the normal, known forms of energy. Eventually, the scientists came to the conclusion that this phenomenon was related to the biological aspect of nature. They called it bioplasmic energy. The bioluminescence which was given off by this energy was the manifestations of ionized atomic particles. But the phenomenon was not a haphazard inner process that one would normally associate with the emission of atomic particles. The photographs showed that there were definite

patterns and structures which suggested order and unity in the organism.

There were further surprising facts to be discovered. The bioluminescence is a sure indication of the state of health of the organism. In fact the energy body indicates that a disease will occur before it actually happens. Each organism, whether plant, animal or human has a characteristic pattern when it is in a healthy condition. When the organism is unhealthy the pattern changes. This was discovered one day when the Kirlians were presented with two physically identical leaves and asked to photograph them. This they did and were surprised to discover that the patterns were different. This contradicted previous extensive experiments. Then the person who presented them with the leaves told them that one of the leaves was infected. They tried this experiment with various other diseased objects, including the human body, and found the same thing: the energy body differed to that of the same organism when in a healthy state.

The pattern of the energy body is a definite indicator of illnesses that are to come in the physical realm. It was concluded from their discoveries that a disease is manifested in the bioplasmic body long before it is in the physical body. What happens in the physical body seems to be determined by the energy body. The energy body is intimately tied up with the material body and directs its activities on a physiological level. Though this contradicts modern physiology and thereby modern medical practice, it offers vast prospects for correct diagnosis of diseases. It offers the possibility of foretelling that a disease will occur before it does and therefore will allow preventative measures to be taken.

Actually, in the future, it seems probable that we will revert to the old system of curing disease which was practised in ancient China. The system was such that a doctor received payment from his patients as long as they contracted no illness. As soon as they were stricken with a disease the doctor was obliged to start paying his ailing patient. The doctor's duty was to prevent illnesses, not specifically to cure them or patch them up as is modern medical practice. A good doctor was a person who prevented the onset of diseases. The doctors were able to give this guarantee to

patients because of their intimate knowledge and understanding of these psychic or pranic energies. This discovery of something that was widely known thousands of years ago opens up new possibilities for the relationship between the doctor and his patients.

It was also discovered that the bioplasmic body of animals and humans is very much influenced by the state of mind. This is something that is well known in yoga, and of course the converse is also true, that change in the bioplasmic or pranic body brings about corresponding changes in the mind. This is the main reason why the pranic flow is manipulated in the yogic practices of pranayama to bring about positive changes in the mind.

Kirlian photography showed that mental or emotional stress tends to blur the bioluminescence surrounding the human and animal body or any part of it that was photographed. The inner movements and flashing luminescence seemed chaotic; it certainly lacked the order that could normally be detected. This tension, of course, has negative repercussions on the physical body. This is scientific confirmation of one of the basic tenets of yoga - that the way we think has vast influence on our physical body. Our emotions and thoughts, mental problems and fatigue are reflected in the physical body via the pranic body as well as the nervous system. A relaxed emotional and mental approach to life allows the pranic body to remain in balance and consequently the physical body to remain in the best possible health. As a slight digression, it is worthwhile pointing out that this close relationship between the physical and pranic bodies and the mind is the reason why pranayama practices are so effective in bringing about vibrant health of one's whole being. Pranayama brings the physical and pranic bodies into harmony. Pranayama gives many benefits that are not easily explainable in physiological terms. This is because the influence is applied through the pranic body which is not even included in physiological terminology.

The research of the Kirlians brought many other curious results. Scientists were shocked to find that if a part of the physical organ under test was removed it still retained its bioplasmic body. In other words, if a small part of a leaf was torn the energy body was not

affected. The same applied to humans who lost a leg or an arm or any limb; though the physical form had gone, the bioplasmic body still retained its shape. We will not dwell on the implications of this revelation.

Researchers have found that the bioplasmic body gives off its own electromagnetic field which can be detected and measured by sensitive instruments. It has been found that this field changes according to the mood of the individual. We are all highly sensitive to fear, friendliness, aggression, etc. in other people. We generally feel this on a subconscious rather than on a conscious level. If a group of people are relaxed and harmonious it gives off a different electromagnetic pattern to that which can be detected if there is tension within the group. If another person enters the group then again the electromagnetic field changes. The good or bad health of individuals also influences the pattern, which indicates just how sensitive we are to bad health in others.

This electromagnetic field is also influenced by other fields such as those emitted from machinery and vibrations that we receive from the sun, moon and other cosmic bodies. The last factor ties in with the age old contention of astrologers that our lives are influenced by the heavenly bodies. Occurrences such as solar magnetic storms and eruptions of distant stars cause disturbances throughout the whole universe. They also interact with our bioplasmic body and in turn our mind and physical body.

While on the subject it is interesting to note that researchers in Canada have artificially created energy waves which cause different responses in individuals or groups of people. These waves or vibrations interfere and interact with the electromagnetic field of the bioplasmic body. They have managed artificially to produce waves that an extremely anxious person would emit. These have drastically and quickly changed the mood of groups of people when subjected to them. The whole group tended to become depressed. Waves that induce calmness have also been artificially created.

The Soviet scientists made a most important discovery that has vast implications with regard to the practice of pranayama and its influence on the pranic or bioplasmic body. As we will shortly explain, pranayama practices seek to affect pranic flow by controlling the

flow of breath. How can there be any connection? How can manipulation of the breathing have repercussions on the pranic body? According to various eminent scientists in Russia, the energy body requires continual replenishment. This is obtained from the air that we breathe. The oxygen in the air breathed gives up some of its surplus supply of free electrons and quantum energy to the bioplasmic body. This is not merely a hypothesis - scientists have actually seen this process in action. This is why correct breathing is so vital for our health. Not only does the breath maintain the health of the physical body as is known in traditional scientific circles; it also revitalizes and is the source of sustenance to our subtle bioplasmic or pranic body. This further confirms the knowledge of ancient yogis who regarded pranayama as an important part of life. The yogis knew intuitively of the existence of the pranic body. This further shows prana, and its control by pranayama, is more than a convenient and fanciful idea.

This bioplasmic body is definitely linked with life. Both animate and inanimate objects have been photographed by the Kirlian process and they have clearly shown distinctive differences. Inanimate objects are also permeated with energy or prana, but the luminescence is of a constant intensity. It lacks the iridescence, movement and life that can be clearly seen in animate objects. What happens when something dies? This was also investigated. It was found that as life slowly oozed out of the organism the intensity and orderliness of the bioplasmic body slowly reduced. Blobs of energy were seen to be ejected out of the bioplasmic body and away into the surroundings. Eventually the bioluminescence disappeared completely. This seemed to be the stage when the organism was truly lifeless. This is the reason why this energy has been widely known as vital energy or life force.

### **Uses of pranic control**

Pranic healing is a power that one can develop through higher yoga practices and it has been used by many great saints and mediums throughout the ages. Most people tend to regard the phenomenon with a hint of scepticism, but scientists doing research on the bioplasmic body are starting to give scientific validity to the system of healing. They

have photographed the hands of a psychic or pranic healer while actually 'laying on hands'. It was clearly seen that an intense beam of bioluminescence poured from the hands of the healer to the patient. It seems that the healer recharges the bioplasmic body of a sick person and in this way brings about a cure. This is a further verification of something that has been surrounded by an aura of superstition.

Acupuncture has also been scientifically investigated with very conclusive results. Medical scientists were always completely mystified when they saw the wonderful results that the ancient system of acupuncture could give. It did not fit the patterns of thought associated with physiology and the highly developed scientific theories of the modern world. Yet the results were there to be seen.

The ancient Chinese, unlike modern medical practitioners, did not treat the human body as a collection of separate physical organs. They saw the whole body as a unit and that each part of the body was intimately related to the whole. We have already mentioned that the Chinese of antiquity knew of the pranic body. Not only this, they actually mapped out specific pathways of pranic flow within the physical body. Further, they were aware of seven hundred or so particular points on the skin which corresponded to the position of this flow which cannot normally be detected. It is within but not of the physical body. Needles could be inserted at these specific acupuncture points to somehow manipulate the pranic flow. If there is imbalance in the flow of prana then disease will result. These needles were able to correct the balance of prana in the pranic body and thereby cure or prevent the occurrence of illnesses.

Modern researchers have started to solve this enigma. Using Kirlian photography they have clearly seen that the flow of bioluminescence corresponds exactly to the flow patterns mapped out by the Chinese thousands of years ago. Though modern scientists use complex instruments and the Chinese used intuition, the findings are the same. The points on the skin that are utilized by acupuncturists to insert their needles were found to correspond precisely with notably brilliant and localized flashes of bioluminescence. In the future, collaboration between science and acupun-

ture should be able to elevate the diagnosis and removal of illness to a high level of perfection.

Swara yoga is an ancient and little known science. It relates the phases of the moon, the sun, the prevailing conditions of nature, one's breathing pattern, etc. with events that are likely to occur to an individual. For instance, it can foretell if a person will meet success in any future undertaking. The modern discoveries of science have given some indication of how this system of swara yoga works. Man is not isolated from the universe as is commonly felt. Man is linked to the whole universe via the pranic body. As such, external events such as the movement of the stars, weather, interaction with other people, vibrations from other persons as well as one's own internal makeup, mood and health intimately relate to each other. Man is an integral part of the cosmos. Yoga has always said this and now modern science is slowly but surely confirming this fact. Swara yoga, though a complex subject, has much to offer to modern man.

Telepathy and other psychic phenomena are now being investigated scientifically. It has been found that the receiving medium of telepathic messages is the bioplasmic or pranic body. This acts as a relay station which transmits the message to conscious perception. Scientists have actually detected changes in the pranic body as it receives telepathic messages. It is something that we all have the potential to do, but are not able to because of insensitivity in our mind and body. As one becomes more aware so the ability to consciously perceive telepathic messages and to utilize other psychic powers is increased.

Another interesting discovery made in Russia is that artificial stimulation of specific points that influence the pranic body can induce greater sensitivity to telepathic and other psychic phenomena. These points or specific areas of the body which can artificially stimulate the pranic body are known as chakras in yoga. In yoga we normally consider half a dozen or so important chakras, but there are others throughout the body. In various practices such as kundalini yoga and kriya yoga these chakras are physically and mentally stimulated. This brings about higher awareness as does artificial stimulation of the chakras with electricity and massage as practised by the scientists.

### Summary

We have spent a long time discussing scientific discoveries and investigations into the pranic body. We have done this so that the reader can realize that prana is not just an imaginary concept. It is verifiable and has been confirmed by modern science. Yoga utilizes this pranic body and the flow of prana to bring about changes in the sensitivity of the practitioner and to influence the mind. This is done through the various practices of pranayama. Beginners often seem to be sceptical, and if they do pranayama it is because they see tangible results through knowing that they are alternating the breathing, and thereby inducing more oxygen into the physical body and eliminating more carbon dioxide. Of course this is true and this alone brings wonderful results. Yet we want you to appreciate that pranayama has a far greater implication than one normally considers.

People of today tend to listen to the words of science. As such we have given a lengthy discussion to show that modern science has shown conclusive evidence of the pranic or bioplasmic body as it is known in scientific circles.



## Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana (Stage 1)

The Sanskrit word *nadi* means 'psychic passage' or 'specific pathway' through which prana flows throughout the body'. The word *shodhana* means 'purification'. Thus this is a practice whereby the pranic pathways are purified and decongested. This allows the prana to flow freely throughout the body, bringing the physical body into the best possible health and calming the mind. It is an excellent preparation for meditational techniques.

There are four basic stages of nadi shodhana. Each stage should be mastered before proceeding to the next. This is important, for control over the respiratory system has to be gradually developed over a period of time. Premature attempts at doing more advanced stages could lead to strain and injury of the respiratory system, and particularly to the very sensitive associated nervous system. It is for this reason that the four stages will be introduced in this book over a number of lessons. This will allow the reader to practise each stage for a reasonable period of time and to be fully ready for the more advanced stages as they are introduced.

In this topic we will discuss nadi shodhana stage 1, which is divided into two parts.

### NASAGRA MUDRA (NOSE TIP POSITION)

The breath through the nostrils is controlled by the fingers of one hand held in front of the face. This position of the hand is actually called *nasagra* or *nasikagra mudra* (nose mudra). This is the first mudra that we have so far mentioned and is one of the numerous hand mudras. We don't want to discuss mudras at this stage for we will do this in the near future, but we have prematurely introduced you to nasagra mudra because it is so important for pranayama practices.



### Technique

The position of the fingers and hand is as follows:

Hold the right hand in front of the face (the left hand can also be used in which case the following instructions are reversed).

Place the tips of the second (index) and third fingers so that they rest on the forehead at the eyebrow centre.

These fingers should be straight. In this position the thumb should be beside the right nostril and the fourth (ring) finger beside the left nostril. The little finger is not utilized.

The right nostril can now be left open or closed by pressing the side of the nose with the thumb as required. This allows air to flow, or prevents the flow.

The air flow through the left nostril can be similarly controlled with the ring finger.

The elbow of the right arm should preferably be in front of and as near the chest as possible.

The forearm should be as vertical as possible. This will reduce the tendency of the raised arm to become tired after some time.

The head and back should be held upright but without strain.

### NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA (PSYCHIC NETWORK PURIFICATION)

#### Stage 1

Sit in a comfortable position. The two simple meditative asanas, *sukhasana* and *vajrasana* are particularly suitable<sup>2</sup>. If you cannot manage

these positions you can sit in a chair with a straight back or you can sit on the floor with legs outstretched and back supported against a wall.

If necessary wrap a blanket around you for warmth and to keep any insects away. Adjust yourself so that there will be no need to move for at least 10 minutes or even longer for those who have the time.

Relax your whole body.

Hold the spine upright but without arching backwards and thereby tensing the back muscles.

Place the left hand on the left knee or in the lap.

Raise the right hand and perform nasagra mudra.

Close the eyes.

For a minute or two be aware of the breath and the body.

This will help you to relax and to make the forthcoming practice easier to perform.

If you are tense or excited any form of pranayama is more difficult.

### **Part 1**

Close the right nostril with the thumb. Slowly inhale and exhale through the left nostril.

Be aware of the breath. Do this for half the time allocated for the practice.

Then close the left nostril and open the right. Repeat the same procedure with awareness.

Do this for about 1 week.

Then proceed to part 2.

### **Part 2**

This is the same as part 1 except that one now starts to control the relative duration of inhalation and exhalation. Close the right nostril and breathe through the left nostril.

Simultaneously mentally count: 1, 2, 3, each interval being about 1 second. Don't strain but breathe deeply in the manner previously described - yogic breathing<sup>3</sup>.

During exhalation again keep the count mentally.

Try to make the length of exhalation twice as long as inhalation. For example, if you breathe in for a count of 4 then try to breathe out for a count of 8. If you breathe in for 3 then breathe out for 6, etc. But we emphasize: don't strain or make the duration longer than is comfortable.

1 inhalation and 1 exhalation represents 1 round.

Do 10 rounds through the left nostril. Then close the left nostril using the fourth finger, open the right by releasing the pressure of the thumb, and do 10 rounds through the right nostril.

Be aware of the breath and the mental counting throughout the entire practice. Then if you have time do 10 more rounds first through the left nostril and then 10 rounds through the right nostril.

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

Practise part 2 for about 2 weeks or however long it takes to master the technique, and then begin to practise stage 2, which will be explained in the next lesson<sup>4</sup>.

Make sure the nose is unblocked before starting the practice. If necessary do jalāneti<sup>5</sup>.

### **Awareness and duration**

It is easy to think of other things during the practice. The mind starts to dwell on business or breakfast and so many other diversions that have not the slightest relevance to the practice in hand. Don't become frustrated for this will cause mental stress. Only try to be aware of any wandering tendency of the mind. If it wanders let it wander, but ask yourself the question: "Why am I thinking of other things?" This will automatically encourage the awareness to return to the practice of nadi shodhana. Try to be as aware as possible of the breath and the mental counting.

One can practise this technique for any length of time. We recommend at least ten minutes daily.

### **Sequence and time of practice**

Nadi shodhana should be done after asanas and before meditational or relaxational practices. It is best done in the morning before breakfast, though it can also be performed at other times during the day. However, it should not be done after meals.

Under no circumstances should one force the breathing. Avoid breathing through the mouth.

### **Benefits**

Stage 1 of nadi shodhana is an excellent preparatory technique for more advanced

forms of pranayama and an excellent prelude to meditational or relaxation techniques.

It induces calmness of mind by regulating the flow of prana in the body. It helps to remove congestion or blockage of the nadis and thereby allows the free flow of prana.

The whole body is nourished with an extra supply of oxygen and the carbon dioxide is more efficiently eliminated. This purifies the whole blood system and increases the overall health of the body, including its power to resist disease. The deep, slow breathing encourages the removal of stagnant air from the lungs.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Topic 3 of this lesson

<sup>2</sup> Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

<sup>3</sup> Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 4

<sup>4</sup> Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5

<sup>5</sup> Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

## Topic 1

# Awareness: An Introduction

We have already mentioned the word awareness in the practices previously described. In this topic we will discuss its meaning and implications a little more fully, for it lies at the very basis of yoga and yogic techniques. It is essential to understand what we mean by awareness in order to gain the maximum benefits from the contents of this book. This is the biggest problem for beginners; they are told to be aware but they are not really sure what it means or what the point of it is. As such they miss the essence of their yoga practices. For this reason we will attempt to explain what is meant by awareness so that you can realize what we are aiming at, even if it is only at an intellectual level. Intellectual understanding of awareness is at least better than no understanding. Eventually, as you progress in your practices, you will come to know the meaning of awareness, not through words but by personal experience.

For most people, awareness means mere knowledge. We often say, "I am aware of that," meaning that we know something. In yoga it also means knowledge but it simultaneously means far more. Awareness in a general sense means to comprehend, to know, to feel what is happening around us. It also means to know what is happening within us. Most people comprehend very little of what is occurring around and within them. This is a low state of awareness. As we realize and relate to more things internally as well as externally, and see the underlying unity in everything, we naturally develop more awareness. As this happens we break down the barriers and limitations of the mind. We understand more aspects and gain insight into the many realms of existence.

Before we further expound on the meaning of the word awareness let us first briefly mention consciousness. Every life form is a vehicle of consciousness. Whether it is a cell, a plant, an animal or a human, the underlying nature of all living organisms is consciousness.

However, each of these forms express the potential of consciousness at different levels. The cells and plants express consciousness at a very rudimentary level, while man expresses it at a far more complex level. The consciousness is the same - the potential for manifestation is different. Plants have feelings (as has been scientifically proved by various people) but no mobility. Animals have both feelings and mobility. Man also has these, but at the same time he has an extra attribute - awareness. Man has the extra and all important ability to be able to know his consciousness and to allow it to manifest and blossom to its fullest potential. The consciousness does not change. It is the expression that becomes expanded. Man can increase his awareness and transcend limitations (or rather limitations that most of us see and think to be fixed) and realize higher potentialities of consciousness. An animal, as far as we know, is unable to be aware because of its very nature. It contains the potential but it is totally unable to see the potential because of the very way it is made. It lacks the necessary equipment. Let us make an analogy. The atmosphere around us is pervaded by electromagnetic waves carrying programs transmitted from a large number of radio stations. Yet, can we pick them up directly? Can a stone or a tree listen directly to the symphony being broadcasted? No, this is impossible. Our body, the stone and the tree lack the necessary equipment. The waves are there but we cannot tune into them. The potential is there but we cannot use it. We are limited by our structure. Yet a radio can pick up the waves and enable us to listen to the symphony. The radio has the necessary equipment to manifest this potential contained within the atmosphere around us. It is the same with consciousness but in a much deeper and ineffable sense. It is within all life forms. Yet it is only humans (let us forget for the moment extra-terrestrial life) that have the

ability to know this consciousness. It is said that consciousness sleeps in stones, dreams in plants, begins to awaken in animals and can be fully realized in man; man can know that he is awake.

Let us be more specific and define what we mean by awareness in yoga. Awareness is the ability to stand back and to observe one's mental and physical activities. If a man is aware then he becomes a spectator of his activities both internally and externally. Those who have never experienced this will not really understand, but those who have experienced it, even for a few seconds, will know what we are trying to say. Its implications are profound. If you are able to watch what your body and mind do, then this means that your nature transcends the body and mind. It means that there is something that is able to watch what is occurring; there is something in the background that witnesses the actions of the mind and body. This experience alone is enough to alter your conception of yourself. It wakes us up to the fact that there is something in the background - a witnessing principle. Few of us, however, have this experience naturally for we tend to lose ourselves in the actions of the body and mind. This witnessing principle man is called awareness in yoga.

It seems that awareness is a special privilege of man. Animals perform actions without ever knowing that they are doing them. Man has this ability, though it is rarely utilized. Most of us are totally absorbed in our thoughts and physical bodies. So much so that we regard our actions as our nature. By becoming aware we are able to watch ourselves and see how superficial our personality, composed of our mind and body, really is. Awareness leads us to the understanding that our nature is something else other than mind and body. The mind and body are only our grosser vehicles.

Yoga tries to increase awareness so that a person can actually watch himself, his bodily activities and mental processes. One can watch the thought processes as though he is watching television. The thoughts appear like a television program. Let us take this analogy. If we watch television then most of us know that we are not a part of the program, we are only members of the audience. We are not really involved. However, if the program is interesting we can

completely lose ourselves in the drama being enacted so that we forget we are watching. We become part of the story. Our thinking process is like a good film, sometimes emotional, sometimes exciting, other times depressing. Whatever its contents may be, it is so appealing that most of us spend twenty-four hours every day totally lost in the absorbing mental processes. We are totally engrossed in the mind show. In fact even those who are now reading these words are most likely caught up in the thought processes. At present are you completely identified with your thoughts? The answer is probably yes. And it is not so easy to break down the magnetic appeal of the mind and to merely watch the thoughts, to be aware. When a television program or a movie finishes we automatically remember that we are only watching and that we are not involved. But from birth all of us have been lost in the mental show so that we never realize its superficial nature. We see the mind, its activities and the body as the totality of our being. Yet we have this ability to stand back from the mental show and watch it as an impartial witness. Each of us has this potential, this ability, yet few of us know it or utilize it. Yoga specifically tries to flower this witnessing principle.

For many people this awareness doesn't sound very inspiring, even if they believe that it is possible. Why make such a fuss over the trivial ability to be able to watch one's own thoughts, they may ask. Yet if one becomes more aware and starts to witness his activities then incredible experiences occur. He starts to realize things that are completely beyond present comprehension. It can take him into a new dimension of existence. At the moment most people are trapped by their minds in the same way an actor in a film is limited by his role and the cellulose film. If he could materialize and become a three-dimensional person then he would be able to jump beyond his previous two-dimensional limitations. His whole concept of existence would alter. His role would expand beyond that of the film, beyond that which would even be understandable in his film language and concepts. It is the same with nearly all people. Our identification with the mind and body keeps us trapped in a limited realm of existence. We imprison ourselves, yet we have the keys to become free again. By jumping outside the fetters of personality,

mind and body, we can tune in with higher and freer dimensions of existence. The key is awareness.

Consciousness is within each and every one of us. There are no exceptions. We can never create it or develop it. It is already there; all we have to do is to tune in with it. We have to become aware. We have to act from our basic nature, consciousness, which lies in the background of all our physical and mental actions. We actually cannot expand consciousness, for consciousness is infinite and all pervasive. How can we expand something which is infinite and everywhere? What we actually do is to expand awareness. Awareness is the variable that can be developed in all of us. It is the ability that can be developed to tune in with consciousness, the ability to identify with consciousness. This is only semantics, but it defines what we mean by these terms. Other people may use the words in a different context, possibly as interchangeable words, but our meaning is as we have just explained.

It is a common misconception that consciousness is a function of the brain and is dependent on it. Many people think that the brain is the master and that if there is no brain then there will be no consciousness. Nothing could be more incorrect. However, verbally or rationally we cannot demonstrate this, nor do we really want to. If you develop your awareness you will definitely conclude this for yourself, for how can consciousness watch the activities of the mind or brain if the brain is the master or basic instrument. The consciousness must be beyond the brain in order to be able to watch the activities of the brain and mind. Usually consciousness is associated with and tied to the activities of the brain and sensory organs through our ignorance of its nature. We are never faced with its existence for it is disguised by our everyday activities. If we see a book we naturally assume that it is the eyes that have seen it. This is so obvious we never question the truth of this assumption. But actually this is incorrect. The eyes are only the intermediary instruments between the outside world and consciousness. It is consciousness that actually sees. If we hear we tend to assume that it is the ears that hear, but actually they too are really only intermediaries. It is not even the brain that sees and hears, for this is only an instrument. In themselves, the sensory

organs and the brain are no more than receivers, transformers and transmitters. Let us take the analogy of the radio again. The radio picks up electromagnetic waves and converts them to sound vibrations which we can hear. The radio itself cannot hear, it acts as a mediator that picks up the waves and converts them to a suitable form that we can hear. The sensory organs and the brain are exactly the same; they cannot hear, see, taste, smell or feel. They can only pick up sensations, convert them to suitable signals for utilization by the brain from where they are perceived by consciousness. Without consciousness each one of us would be incapable of doing anything; we would be lifeless and would know nothing.

For western philosophy the mind is the hub of man; for yoga it is consciousness that is the central and most basic aspect. And this consciousness is not fettered and bound by finitude. It is infinite and unbound. Our deepest nature is infinite, for it is consciousness. It is not mind. The mind is merely the instrument of consciousness and the storehouse of our finite personality.

Man has the ability to tune in with and know this consciousness; he can become more aware. Animals have the same consciousness yet they are unable to know it. Man has the potential to function from consciousness by liberating himself from the shackles of mind and body. Of course, the mind and body perform the same functions; nothing changes in this respect. But a person who becomes more aware knows himself to be consciousness and nothing else. He identifies himself with consciousness and not mind and body.

#### **Development of awareness**

The first thing to remember is that no indoctrination or autosuggestion is required. If you practise yoga then it will automatically show itself or to be more exact, if you do your practices correctly then awareness will gradually develop. There are many different methods to increase awareness. In fact all the different methods of yoga - karma yoga, bhakti yoga, mantra yoga and kriya yoga - are designed for this purpose. They all use different methods to achieve the same end.

When you do asanas and pranayama, as well as meditational techniques, that we will shortly introduce, the emphasis should be on

awareness. This awareness implies that your attention is directed to a specific function or activity. It means that your attention is on something specific, perhaps breath, and that you simultaneously know that your attention is on that particular activity. In other words, if you are aware of your breath it means that you know that you are breathing and you are witnessing the breathing process. You are standing back and watching something that is occurring within you. It is the first step up the ladder to higher awareness. You are becoming a witness to all the activities of the body. This will lead eventually to the ability to witness the actions of the mind and then gradually the deeper aspects of mind which you may now think impossible.

This is the essence of awareness - the fact that you know that you are doing something and that you are observing the action. If you move the body and at the same time don't realize that your body is moving and simultaneously observe the movement, then you are not aware. To be a witness is to be aware. To be totally lost, involved and identified with an action is to be unaware.

When one practises asanas, pranayama and meditational practices awareness is essential. Without it these yogic practices lose their significance and ninety percent of their benefits. If you are angry, worried or unhappy and your mind is playing havoc, don't worry. If you are doing your asanas and you are overwhelmed by streams of thoughts when we have advised you to be aware of breath, don't by any means become frustrated. Merely watch the stream of thoughts and the breath, witness them, be aware of them.

The practice of asanas, pranayama and meditational practices develops awareness on a temporary basis. They give one a taste of what awareness means at a rudimentary level. From them, it is possible with effort to be a witness to your thoughts and physical actions throughout the day. One can watch, observe the body and mind performing the duties in the way they have been designed. One watches the antics of the body and mind as one would watch a puppet.

So when doing yoga practices be aware of what you are doing. The whole point of yoga is to unfold and make you aware of your deeper aspects.

## Topic 1

# Meditation: Body Awareness (Part 1)

In the preceding topic we explained the necessity of developing awareness. Everything done in yoga should be done with as much awareness as possible so that we can develop the potential of awareness to the maximum. All yogic practices, whether they are asanas or pranayama etc., help to progressively increase one's awareness if done in the right way with regular practice and over a period of time. The following technique is very simple and will make you more able to observe and feel the different parts of the body. In a way it is similar to shavasana and can be used to induce relaxation in the same way, just as shavasana is an excellent technique for developing awareness<sup>1</sup>. The practice we will now describe and shavasana can also really be regarded as meditational techniques. There is no hard and fast division between relaxation techniques, techniques to develop awareness and meditational techniques. They all basically aim at the same thing and are interchangeable.

This practice is intended to make you aware of your body. Your awareness will be directed to different parts. You have to feel the accompanying sensations and try to create a mental picture of that part of the body. If you can't do this don't worry, only try. Remember, the aim is to be an observer, a spectator of the different parts of the body. Try not to lose yourself in the thinking process. Try to be aware.

In many practices that we will introduce you to in the future one has to be aware of different parts of the body. Without the ability to be aware of these different parts the techniques lose much of their effectiveness. As such the following method can be considered as a preliminary to higher yogic practices. Also this technique will help one to be more aware during asana practice.

## BODY AWARENESS

Place a blanket on the floor. Lie flat on your back in the same way as described for shavasana<sup>1</sup>. Fully adjust yourself so that there is no discomfort.

If you feel any need to move your body or think you might want to during the practice, move it now instead of disturbing yourself later.

In fact it is better to move your body now even if you don't think you need to; this will preclude any tendency to move the body during the practice.

Your palms should be open and facing upwards or in any position that you find comfortable. Relax the whole body as much as possible (if necessary do shavasana immediately before this practice).

Close your eyes. Be aware of your body. Try to mentally create a picture of your body and feel your body.

Be a witness. Be aware. Try to become aware of the sense perceptions.

For a short time try to observe as many sensations as you can throughout the entire body.

Then after about a minute be aware of the skin sensations of the right foot. Be aware, though this will be difficult at first. Is your foot cold, warm, tight or whatever? Feel it.

Then slowly move your awareness to the calves and thighs, all the time being aware of skin sensations. Feel that they are affecting your body, not your perception.

Try to feel these sensations in the body: nowhere else.

Repeat the same thing with the left leg, starting with the foot.

Then be aware of the fingertips of the right hand. Create a mental picture and at the same time feel the sensations. Again feel whether they are hot, cold or whatever. Slowly move your awareness along the palm, the wrist, the



forearm and the upper arm to the shoulders, all the time being aware of the mental picture and feelings. Repeat the same thing with the left arm. Be aware.

Now feel the sensations of your cheeks; this is a very sensitive part of the body and should be easy for most people to feel its sensations. Try to create a mental picture. Do your cheeks feel warm, sensitive, cold or what? Be aware for a minute or so.

Then repeat the same thing with the lips. Are they dry or moist? Then be aware of the tongue. Feel the saliva in which it bathes, or does it feel dry?

Be aware of your ears. What sounds do you hear? Be aware of the sounds entering the ears and feel that they are not affecting your being; you are only watching them.

Be aware of the eyes. Roll the eyes keeping the eyelids closed and feel any sensations that occur. See the different patterns that occur in front of your closed eyes. Be a witness; this should be much easier.

Now be aware of the framework of the body. Create a mental picture of your skeletal structure. Feel that your whole body is supported and held in shape by your bones. Be aware.

Feel the rigidity of the bone connecting the knee to the foot of the right leg. Create a mental image and feel it; be aware. Then be aware of the thigh bone. Do this for one minute. Then repeat the same thing with the left leg.

Then be aware of the bone that gives structure to the right arm. See it as something separate from yourself. Be aware of the bone that holds the right biceps firmly in place. Repeat the same thing with the left arm.

Then feel and see a mental picture of the box-like structure of the chest closed off at the top by the shoulders.

Be aware of the whole spinal column from top to bottom. Start from the base and slowly try to be aware of the different parts as you progressively move your awareness towards the top of the spine. This is a little difficult but with practice you will clearly feel and mentally see the spine. Do this for a minute or so, if necessary moving your awareness up and down a number of times.

try to feel the whole body again. If possible see a mental image of your body. Be aware of

as many body processes as you can. Feel the contact points of the body with the floor.

Do this for a minute or so. Slowly move your body. Open your eyes. This is the end of the practice.

### **Awareness**

This practice is intended to develop your ability to visualize the different parts of the body as well as the processes of awareness. Try to be a witness as far as you are able throughout the practice. If your attention wanders from the practice don't worry but try to be aware of the mental processes that occur. This is the most difficult part for we tend to lose ourselves in our thoughts. Don't become tense if you suddenly realize that your attention was located elsewhere. Accept this as a natural tendency of the mind. Once you are aware that your attention was elsewhere, continue the practice from the point at which you were sidetracked.

### **Place and time**

This technique can be practised anywhere at any time. Before and after asanas or before sleep are excellent times.

### **Anatomy**

Those who wish can refer to an elementary text book on anatomy to see the exact nature of the skeleton. This is not essential but it will help in gaining the full benefits from the practice we have described as well as forthcoming techniques.

### **Verbal instruction**

This practice is quite long and one can forget the order of the instructions or more likely fall asleep. If you have a friend who is also interested in yoga practices you can easily overcome this problem. One of you should assume the role of teacher and the other the role of student. The teacher can read out the instructions that we have given adding personal touches and advice where suitable, while the student carries out the practice. After this, of course, the roles are reversed.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Shavasana (Part 1) - Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5;  
(Part 2) - Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

## Daily Practice Program

Use whichever of the following programs you find suitable, modifying it as you see fit. We have omitted various practices from previous lessons. Apply them as required. If at any

stage you feel the need of rest, practice shavasana for a couple of minutes before commencing the next practice or whenever you have the time during the day.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
<b>Program 1:</b> duration 1 hour		
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Kawa Chalasana	—	3
Supta Pawanmuktasana	3 each stage	5
Simha Kriya	—	3
Gatyatmak Meru Vakrasana	20 rounds	2
Saithalyasana	—	4
Sphinx Asana	3	3
Shashankasana	—	4
Marjari-asana	15	3
Naukasana	3 rounds	4
Samaveta Pranayama	—	5
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 1	—	8
Body awareness	—	10
		60
<b>Program 2:</b> duration 1/2 hour		
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Supta Pawanmuktasana	2 each stage	4
Simha Kriya	—	2
Shashankasana	—	3
Sphinx Asana	2	2
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 1	—	4
Body awareness	—	10
		30

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**Program 3:** duration 1/4 hour

Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Supta Pawanmuktasana	2 each stage	3
Simha Kriya	—	1
Sphinx Asana	2	2
Shashankasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 1	—	4
		<hr/> 15

When you have time practise Shavasana, Naukasana,  
or the practice of body awareness.

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