

Lesson 29

Maha Mudra

Press the perineum with the left heel while stretching the right leg forward on the ground and holding the right leg firmly with both hands.

Perform jalandhara bandha at the throat, retaining the air upwards, even as a snake beaten with a stick becomes straight like a stick.

The kundalini quickly straightens and then the breath ceases its function in both the nostrils.

Exhalation should be slow and gradual. The wise call it maha mudra. This maha mudra is able to destroy all kinds of pain and even death.

One should practise the mudra on the left side and on the right side. When both become equal, then the practice should be left.

By its influence even faulty diets are easily digested and poison can be digested like nectar. Ailments like tuberculosis, leprosy, piles, indigestion, and other diseases are destroyed by those who practise maha mudra.

This maha mudra can give great siddhis to men, and should not be given to ordinary persons.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika (3:10-18)

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 6: MAHA MUDRA (GREAT PSYCHIC ATTITUDE)

The Sanskrit word *maha* means 'great' and *mudra* means 'psychic attitude'. In English this kriya can be called the 'great psychic attitude'. There are two methods, one of which should be chosen.

Rationale

Maha mudra is the first of two closely related Kriyas. These two are called mahabhedha mudra¹. Together they create and release a lot of energy in the physical, pranic and mental bodies.

The kriyas that we have already discussed, namely nos. 1-5, are specifically concerned with inducing pratyahara - withdrawing one's awareness of sensory perception of the outside world and the mind. The kriyas from no. 8 onwards are designed to induce dharana, mental one-pointedness. Maha mudra and mahabhedha mudra act as stepping stones which simultaneously supercharge the whole system and concentrate the mind. They intensify awareness.

Scriptural references

Maha mudra is mentioned in yoga-tantra scriptures, though the descriptions tend to be either different or inadequate. The *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* states: "Maha mudra is a practice which purifies the entire network of nadis (pranic passages), balances ida and pingala and absorbs rasa (nectar of bliss) so that it pervades one's whole being." (v. 65)

"The chin should be pressed against the throat (jalandhara). The left foot should be firmly pressed against the perineum (between the anus and sexual organ). The right foot should be stretched in front and kept firmly on the ground. The two hands should hold the right foot. The breath should then be drawn in to fill the lungs; then it should be

slowly exhaled. This is called maha mudra, the destroyer of disease." (v. 66)

This brief description is similar to one method utilized in kriya yoga; a notable difference is that jalandhara bandha is not practised in the maha mudra of kriya yoga. The text continues: "The practice should be done by first of all breathing through the left nostril and then through the right nostril. When the ida and pingala become balanced then the mudra should be released." (v. 67) This is the hatha yoga method of maha mudra which utilizes nadi shodhana pranayama. The kriya yoga method is different, though it brings about the same result - meditation.

The text then describes the benefits of maha mudra: "By the power of this mudra, unwholesome foods can be digested, tasteless foods become tasteful, excess consumption and even poison can be digested by the system and converted into nectar. Various ailments such as tuberculosis, leprosy, indigestion, etc. can be cured and prevented." (v. 68, 69)

"Maha mudra bestows spiritual power and should be kept secret and not divulged to anyone." (v. 70) Maha mudra, both the hatha and kriya yoga forms, have by tradition never been publicly taught. They were always passed on from guru to disciple. It is only in recent years that these techniques have been published in accordance with the needs of the era.

Similar descriptions are given in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3: 10-18) and *Gherand Samhita* (3: 6-8). Here we are only concerned with the kriya yoga form of maha mudra.

Subsidiary practices

In order to practise maha mudra you should be familiar with the following techniques:

1. Ujjayi pranayama²
2. Unmani mudra³
3. Khechari mudra²
4. Shambhavi mudra⁴
5. Moola bandha⁵

You should already be familiar with the first three techniques since they are an integral part of the previous kriya practices. Shambhavi mudra (eyebrow gazing) and moola bandha are now being used in the kriyas for the first time, so you should refer back to their previous descriptions.

Note: In maha mudra, moola bandha should be done without jalandhara bandha. That is, you should merely contract the perineum without contracting the throat.

MAHA MUDRA - .ALTERNATIVE 1

Sitting position

The sitting position is siddhasana (for men) or siddha yoni asana (for women). These asanas are practised specifically to apply pressure in the perineum at the mooladhara chakra trigger point⁶. If you cannot sit in this asana you

should practise maha mudra alternative 2 instead.

Technique

Sit in siddhasana or siddha yoni asana.

Make sure that one heel firmly presses the mooladhara chakra trigger point between the anus and the sexual organ.

Hold the spine upright.

Fold your tongue into khechari mudra; maintain it throughout the entire practice.

Open the eyes and exhale deeply.

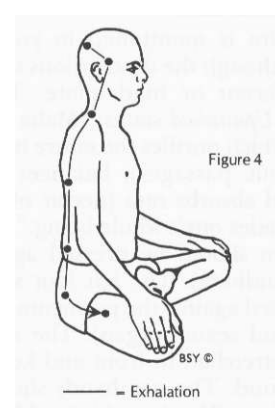
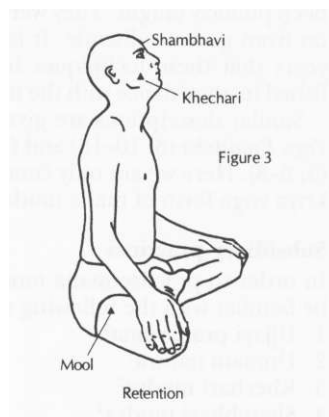
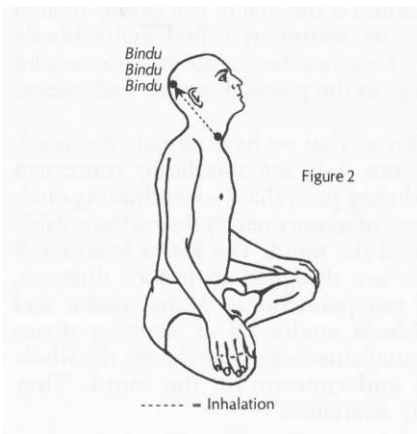
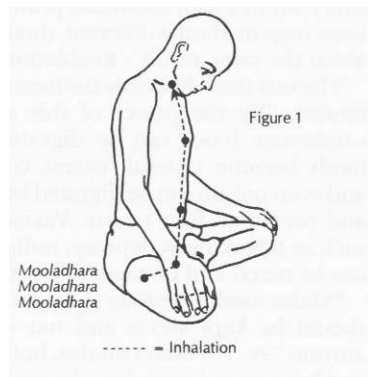
Hold your breath.

Bend your head forwards.

Be aware of the mooladhara chakra and the pressure applied by the heel.

The first round starts here.

Repeat mentally three times: 'mooladhara, mooladhara, mooladhara'.



Then inhale with ujjayi pranayama and let your awareness ascend through the chakra kshe-trams in the frontal arohan passage (see figure 1).

Swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, bindu.

There should only be awareness; no mental repetition.

As your awareness moves from vishuddhi to bindu, your head should slowly rise.

At bindu inhalation should be terminated and the head should lean slightly backwards (see figure 2).

Fix your awareness at bindu.

Hold your breath.

Repeat mentally: 'bindu - bindu - bindu' then practise moola bandha and shambhavi mudra while continuing to hold the breath.

Say mentally: 'shambhavi - khechari - mool' while moving your awareness through the centres of these practices (see figure 3).

When you say 'shambhavi' your awareness should be fixed at the eyebrow centre.

When you say 'khechari' your awareness should be fixed at the tongue and roof of the mouth.

When you say 'mool' your awareness should be fixed at the mooladhara chakra.

The rotation of awareness through shambhavi, khechari and mool should be done 3 times in the beginning; with practice this should be slowly increased to 12 times over a period of a few months or so.

Then release shambhavi mudra.

Release moola bandha.

Become aware of the bindu again.

Then exhale with ujjayi pranayama and let your awareness descend through the chakra trigger points in the spinal avarohan passage: ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana' (see figure 4).

There should only be awareness; no mental repetition.

As your awareness descends do unmani mudra.

When your awareness reaches the mooladhara chakra, exhalation should terminate and your head should gently bend forwards.

Open your eyes.

This is the end of 1 round.

The whole process is summarized in the accompanying pictures.

Now start the second round.

Hold the breath.

While fixing awareness at the mooladhara chakra mentally repeat: 'mooladhara - mooladhara - mooladhara'.

Then let your awareness ascend the frontal passage as already described.

Repeat 12 rounds.

Do not strain.

Breathing

Practise ujjayi pranayama throughout. One round is equivalent to one complete inhalation and exhalation. Hold the breath while repeating 'mooladhara' three times. Inhale while ascending the frontal passage. Hold the breath while repeating 'bindu' three times and while rotating awareness through shambhavi, khechari and mool. Exhale while descending the spinal passage.

Rotation through shambhavi, khechari and mool

Rotation of awareness through these centres must be done with retention of breath. A reasonably long retention is required in order to complete 12 rotations, therefore we suggest that beginners rotate their awareness through these centres 3 times. Gradually they can increase this by 1 rotation every week or so according to individual capacity, until they can do 12 rotations. Under no circumstances should you hold your breath for longer than is comfortable. In the practices of kriya yoga never force or strain the body in any way.

Also bear the following points in mind:

- The eyes tend to droop during rotation of awareness. Take care to focus both eyes towards the eyebrow centre in shambhavi mudra.
- Try to be aware of the three centres at the same time; this may be difficult in the beginning but it becomes easier with practice and effort.

MAHA MUDRA - ALTERNATIVE 2

Sitting position

The sitting position is called *utthanpadasana* (stretched leg pose). It has three positions:

1. Right leg straight in front of the body and the left leg folded so that the left heel presses against the mooladhara chakra (see figure 1).

2. Left leg straight and the right leg folded so that the heel presses the mooladhara chakra.
3. Both legs straight in front of the body.

Each of these positions is used in maha mudra alternative 2. In positions 1 and 2 it is important that the side of the heel firmly applies pressure on the mooladhara chakra. For men, the pressure should be applied midway between the anus and sexual organ; for women, against the inside edge of the vagina.

Technique

Sit in utthanpadasana with the left leg folded and the right leg straight.

Adjust your body so that you feel comfortable. Place both hands on the right knee.

Hold the back straight.

Do khechari mudra.

Open the eyes.

Bend your head forwards and become aware of the pressure at the mooladhara chakra (see figure 2).

Follow exactly the same instructions as given for alternative 1 as far as reaching awareness

of the bindu.

Then mentally repeat 'bindu' 3 times:

'bindu - bindu - bindu'.

Lean forward and grasp the big toe of the right foot with the fingers of both hands.

Keep the right leg straight.

Practise shambhavi mudra and moola bandha.

Repeat 'shambhavi - khechari - mool' from 3 to 12 times, passing your awareness through the seats of these practices as you repeat their names (figure 3).

Release shambhavi mudra.

Release moola bandha.

Raise the spine to the upright position and again place the two hands on the right knee.

Again fix awareness on bindu and descend through the spinal passage as described for alternative method 1 (see figure 4).

The first round is completed when your awareness reaches mooladhara chakra.

The whole process of 1 round is shown in the accompanying pictures.

Immediately start the second round.

Repeat mentally 'mooladhara' 3 times and then ascend the frontal passage.

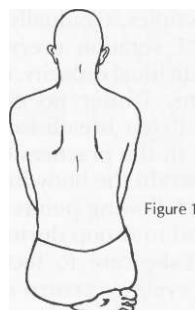


Figure 1

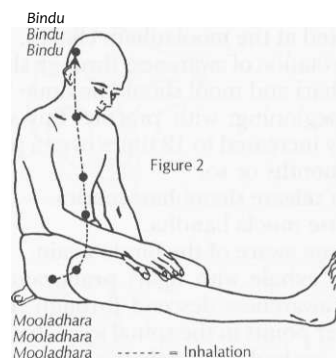


Figure 2

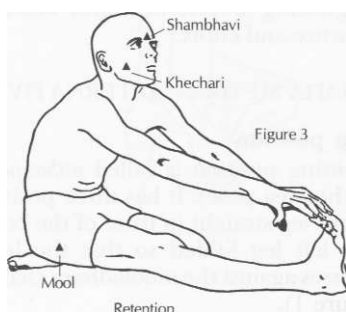


Figure 3

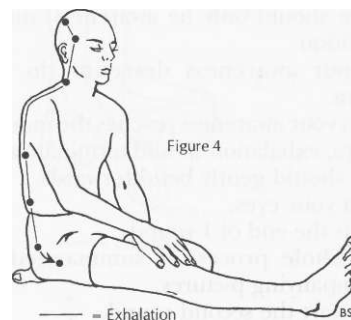


Figure 4

Do 4 complete rounds.

Then change to sitting position 2, that is, with line left leg straight and the right leg folded under the buttocks.

Make sure that the side of the right heel is firmly pressing against the mooladhara chakra.

Do 4 more complete rounds.

Then sit in position 3; that is, both legs straight in front of the body.

Do 4 more complete rounds.

This is the complete practice of maha mudra, alternative 2.

Breathing

All details are as given for alternative 1. Ensure that you do ujjayi pranayama throughout.

GENERAL DETAILS

Choice of method

Alternatives 1 and 2 are equally good. Both apply a firm and constant pressure at mooladhara. If you can sit easily in siddhasana then the best method is alternative 1. If you do not sit in siddhasana or find it too uncomfortable, then practise method 2.

If you sit in siddhasana for the previous kriyas 2 to 5, then siddhasana is the best position for maha mudra, since it ensures that there is no break in the sequence of practice. On the other hand, it is easy to become sleepy while doing kriya yoga. The practice of alternative 2 helps to remove sleepiness. You must choose the method that you like best.

Mental contraction of mooladhara

For the first few months of practice you should physically contract the muscles of the perineum surrounding the mooladhara chakra. When you can locate the exact position of mooladhara and your perception becomes more subtle, then you can merely 'touch' mooladhara with awareness; there is no need to contract the muscles. Also, if the mind is wandering here and there, you should physically contract mooladhara. When it becomes more one-pointed then mere awareness is sufficient or even a slight contraction. Choose according to the state of your mind.

Awareness

You should maintain awareness of the following:

- The flow of prana through the frontal (arohan) and spinal (awarohan) passages; this should be synchronized with the breathing.
- Mental repetition of 'mooladhara, bindu, shambhavi, khechari, mool'.
- Movement of the head.
- Movement of the eyes in unmani mudra.
- Number of rounds completed.

Duration

You have to do 12 complete rounds whether you practise alternative 1 or 2. Beginners who rotate their awareness only 3 times through shambhavi, khechari and mool will spend about 7 minutes on the complete practice. Those who do 12 complete rotations and 12 rounds will spend about 10 minutes.

We suggest that you mentally count each round as your awareness returns to mooladhara at the end of each round.

Sequence

Maha mudra should be done immediately after shabda sanchalana⁷ and before maha bheda mudra¹.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 1

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 3

⁴ Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 5

⁵ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

⁶ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁷ Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 2

Topic 1

Hatha Yoga: Nauli (Stage 2)

Nauli gives many benefits. It massages the entire abdomen and stomach in a way that is unmatched by any other practice. It also massages the heart and lungs. This induces positive repercussions at both the physical, pranic and mental levels. The following is a very brief summary of the benefits:

- Improves digestion and helps to remove various malfunctions.
- Directly helps to remove constipation.
- Harmonizes the functions of the solar plexus and adrenal glands.
- Helps to alleviate diabetes by improving the efficiency of the pancreas.
- Speeds up the blood circulation and reduces blood stagnation.
- Purifies the blood.
- Strengthens the abdominal muscles; this ensures that the abdominal organs are supported properly.
- Prevents hernia. Hernia is caused by weak and inefficient abdominal muscles. Nauli strengthens these muscles and therefore prevents the occurrence of hernia. (Note: if you actually suffer from hernia you should not do nauli.)
- Nauli massages the external organs and tones up the associated nerves. This helps to remove and prevent sexual deficiency of various types.
- Increases general vitality of the whole body.
- Directly influences the manipura chakra trigger point and kshetram. The manipura is the centre of energy distribution, both gross and subtle, in the whole body. Nauli helps to remove blockages in the energy flows of the body. This leads to better health and more energy. Indirectly, nauli helps to increase mental clarity and power by harmonizing the energy flows in the body.

NAULI - STAGE 2 ABDOMINAL ROTATION

Preparation

Only if you have mastered the preparatory stage, nauli, stage 1¹, should you begin to practise stage 2 as described here. Otherwise continue to practise stage 1. Do not attempt stage 2 prematurely.

Body position

You should stand with your hands on your thighs, legs slightly bent and feet slightly apart¹.

Technique

Stand in the correct position.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe out deeply.

Accentuate the exhalation by contracting the abdominal muscles into uddiyana bandha.

Hold the breath.

Do madhyama nauli¹.

Then do vama nauli (contraction on left side).

Then uddiyana bandha.

Do dakshina nauli (contraction on the right side).

And finally madhyama nauli again.

This is 1 complete rotation of the abdominal muscles.

The whole movement should be smooth and rhythmical.

Do more rolling movements or rotations.

Do as many rotations as you can with one breath retention. Do not strain.

Stop the churning movement.

Relax the abdominal muscles.

Breathe in. This is the end of 1 round.

Wait for a short time while allowing the heartbeat to return to normal.

Then again breathe out and do uddiyana bandha.

Hold your breath.

Rotate the abdominal muscles in the opposite direction; that is, madhyama, dakshina, uddi-

yanya, vama and finally madhyama again.
 Do more rapid rotations, while retaining the breath.
 Then release the contraction of the muscles and slowly breathe in.
 This is the end of the second round.
 Do some more rounds if you have the energy, rotating the muscles first anticlockwise and then clockwise.
Do not strain.

At first you will find rotation difficult, but with practice it will become easier; you will gain more and more conscious control over the muscles.

Breathing

Breathe out deeply before doing madhyama nauli. Hold the breath while rolling the abdominal muscles. Breathe in after releasing madhyama nauli. Breathe normally for a short period between rounds.

Speed of rotation

The speed can be very rapid or slow; it does not matter. The important thing is that the rotation should be rhythmical and combined with a strong contraction of the abdominal muscles.

Number of rounds and rotations

At first you should do no more than 10 rotations in each round. The rotations can be slowly increased up to a maximum of about 25. Beginners should only do 2 or 4 rounds, no more. As you gain more control over the muscles the number of rounds can be increased up to a maximum of 10. This is sufficient for most people.

Utility in other techniques

Nauli is an integral part of basti² and vastra dhauti¹. These are two important hatha yoga techniques (shatkarmas) which will be fully explained in the near future.

Nauli is not an easy practice to describe nor learn from a book. If you have any problems we suggest that you contact an experienced local teacher or ashram.

Notes

- 1 Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 3
- 2 Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 2
- 3 Book III, Lesson 32, Topic 2

Topic 3

Asana: Practice

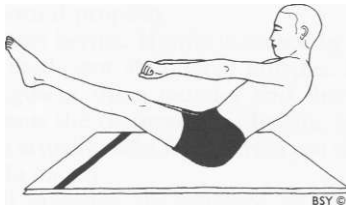
Here we will describe the following asanas:

1. Mukta hasta merudandasana
2. Merudandasana
3. Utthita hasta merudandasana
4. Niralamba paschimottanasana

These four asanas are very similar. They are forward bending asanas that require balance. You do not need to do all of them regularly. Try them, and then choose one that you like best.

MUKTA HASTA MERUDANDASANA (ROCKING HORSE POSE)

The English translation of this asana is 'the rocking horse pose' as it resembles a wooden rocking horse in the final pose. This pose is also known as ashwa sanchalanasana.



Technique

Sit on the floor with the back straight.
Fold the legs so that the knees are near the chest.
Bend your arms at the elbows.
Clench your fists and place them near or on the outside of the knees.
Breathe in deeply.
Lean backwards while simultaneously straightening and raising the arms and legs.
Keep the fists in contact on or near the knees.
The final pose is shown.
The whole body should be balanced on the buttocks.
Try to raise the legs as high as possible keeping them straight.
Hold your breath in the final position.

Stay in the final raised pose for as long as is comfortable.

Then lower and bend the legs into the starting position.

This is 1 round.

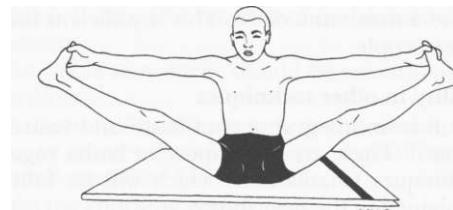
After a short rest do another round.

Other details

This is an excellent preparation for merudandasana, utthita hasta merudandasana and niralamba paschimottanasana. All other information is given in the 'General Details' at the end of this topic.

MERUDANDASANA (SPINAL COLUMN POSE)

The Sanskrit word *meru* literally means 'mountain' or 'peak' and *danda* means 'stick' or 'pole'. Here *merudanda* means the spine. The ancient rishis described the spine as a stick with a series of undulating peaks, which is not a bad description. The length of the spine from top to bottom is indeed like a long mountain range. The English name of this asana is 'the spinal column pose'.



Technique

Take a sitting position on the floor.
Bend the legs at the knees.
Place the soles of the feet flat on the floor in front of the buttocks, about half a meter apart.
Hold the big toes with the thumb and index finger of each hand.
Relax the whole body.
Breathe in deeply.

Lean back slowly and straighten the two legs. Simultaneously try to separate the legs as much as possible.

The final pose is shown.

Straighten the legs and arms while maintaining the hold of the fingers on the big toes.

Raise the legs as high as is comfortable.

Hold the breath in the final pose.

Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable.

Then return to the starting pose.

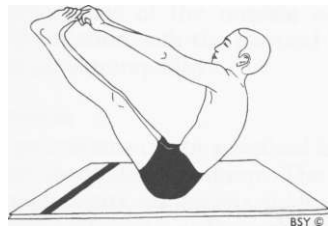
This is 1 round.

Repeat another round when the breathing has returned to normal.

For all other information refer to 'General Details' at the end of this topic.

UTTHITA HASTA MERUDANDASANA (RAISED HAND AND SPINE POSE)

The word *utthita* means 'raised'; *hasta* means 'hand'; *merudanda* means 'spine'. In English this asana can be called 'raised hand and spine pose'. This asana is very similar to merudandasana.



Technique

Take a sitting position.

Bend the legs and place the soles of the feet together on the ground in front of the buttocks.

Hold the big toes with the thumb and index finger of each hand.

Breathe in deeply.

Lean backwards and straighten the two legs, keeping them together.

The body should be supported and balanced only on the buttocks.

The arms and legs should be straight and together.

Hold the breath and final pose for as long as possible.

Then lower the legs to the starting position.

Rest for a short period of time.

Then repeat.

All details are given under the 'General Details' heading.

NIRALAMBA PASCHIMOTTANASANA (UNSUPPORTED BACK STRETCHING POSE)

The word *niralaviba* means 'unsupported'; the rough translation of *paschimattan* is 'back stretch'. The English name of this asana is the 'unsupported back stretching pose'¹.

Niralamba paschimottanasana requires a very flexible spine. Before trying it you should master paschimottanasana.



Technique

Sit on the floor with the knees bent.

Grasp the soles of your feet as shown.

This is the starting pose.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe in deeply.

Raise your feet.

Try to straighten your legs.

Maintain balance.

Firmly maintain hold of the feet with the hands.

Adjust yourself so that you are perfectly balanced.

Breathe out.

Then breathe in deeply.

By pulling your arms try to draw your head towards the knees. Don't strain.

Try to relax your back as much as possible.

In the final pose either:

1. hold the breath, or
2. breathe deeply and slowly.

After a comfortable length of time slowly lower the legs to the starting position.

Relax the whole body and breathe normally.

This is the end of 1 round.

If you wish you can try another round.

GENERAL DETAILS

The following details apply to all four asanas.

Awareness

Be aware of balance and breath. If you wish you can fix your concentration on a fixed point on the wall in front of the body.

Limitations

These four asanas should not be practised by those people who suffer from:

- high blood pressure
- heart ailments
- slipped disc
- sciatica

Number of rounds

Mukta hasta merudandasana, merudandasana and utthita hasta merudandasana can be done up to five times each. Niralamba paschimottanasana can be done up to three times.

Benefits

All of these four asanas have similar benefits. They strengthen the whole spinal column and help to realign displaced vertebrae. They tone up the entire nervous system, including the sympathetic and parasympathetic. All the abdominal organs are squeezed and activated. Intestinal peristalsis is stimulated. They develop the sense of balance and mental concentration.

The benefits of niralamba paschimottanasana are almost the same as for paschimottanasana¹.

Notes

¹ For further details on the meaning of paschimottanasana refer to Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2.

Pranayama: Moorchha Pranayama

MOORCHHA PRANAYAMA (THE FAINTING PRANAYAMA)

There are various methods of doing moorchha pranayama. In this topic we will describe two types that are specifically mentioned in the yogic scriptures and which we teach in our ashram. They are both excellent techniques that can bring many benefits at all levels. Practise them yourself and choose the method you prefer.

Definition

The word *moorchha* means 'fainting'. Moorchha pranayama can be called the 'fainting pranayama'. It is so called because it induces a state of light-headedness and swoon. It helps to cut off the distractions of the outside world, cease identification with the physical body and bring mental tranquillity.

Sitting position

Moorchha pranayama can be practised in any comfortable meditation position. The best asanas are padmasana, siddhasana, siddha yoni asana, swastikasana and ardha padmasana, though vajrasana and sukhasana can be utilized¹.

Technique 1

In the *Gherand Samhita* it says: "Do kumbhaka (breath retention) and then do shambhavi mudra (gazing at the eyebrow centre). Discard all desires and thoughts. Feel the experience of fainting. Unite your mind with atma and enjoy bliss." (v. 5:83)

This is the method that we normally teach. The technique is as follows:

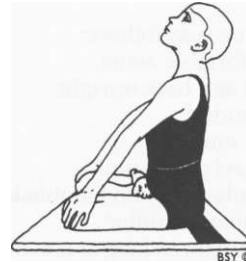
Sit in any comfortable sitting asana.

Hold the spine and head upright.

Relax the whole body.

Fold your tongue against the upper palate - khechari mudra².

Do shambhavi mudra³.



Inhale deeply and slowly with ujjayi pranayama².

Simultaneously bend the head backwards so that the movement of the head is synchronized with the inhalation.

At the end of inhalation your head should lean backwards but not completely.

Straighten the arms and lock the elbows, pressing the knees with the hands.

Continue to practise khechari mudra.

Hold kumbhaka (breath retention) for as long as possible, but without strain.

Fix your whole awareness on the eyebrow centre.

Then bend the arms.

Slowly exhale with ujjayi pranayama as you bend your head forwards.

Simultaneously practise unmani mudra⁴; that is, slowly close your eyes as you exhale and move your head.

At the end of exhalation your head should face forwards and the eyes should be completely closed.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe normally.

Keeping the eyes closed, feel the lightness and calmness pervading the whole mind.

This is the end of 1 complete round.

Repeat another round.

Do shambhavi mudra.

Maintain khechari.

Inhale with ujjayi pranayama and slowly lean the head backwards.

Continue as before.
Do as many rounds as time will allow.

Technique 2

In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it says: "After pooraka (inhalation) you should do jalandhara bandha. Then do rechaka (exhalation). This practice is called moorchha pranayama; it makes the mind swoon and brings bliss." (v. 2:69)

The technique is as follows:
Sit in any comfortable asana.
Hold the head and back upright.
Do khechari mudra².
Do shambhavi mudra³.
Inhale with ujjayi pranayama².
At the end of inhalation do kumbhaka.
Practise jalandhara bandha⁵.
Hold your breath for as long as is comfortable.
Then while maintaining jalandhara bandha slowly breathe out.
Continue to practise shambhavi mudra and khechari mudra.
The first round is completed at the end of exhalation.
Repeat more rounds.

Awareness

In both techniques you should be aware of:

- breathing and sound of breath
- head movement
- eyebrow centre

Duration

A few minutes practice will bring some benefits which you can experience for yourself. About ten minutes is sufficient to start. Do each round for as long as possible without strain. Slowly increase the duration with regular practice. Stop the practice when you feel the fainting sensation. To bring optimum benefits this pranayama should be done for a reasonably long period of time, say one hour or more every day for advanced practitioners.

Kumbhaka

The longer the kumbhaka (breath retention), the greater the benefits. The stopping of breath acts directly on the mind via the pranic body to induce voidness of thought. Kumbhaka is the essence of moorchha pranayama.

In the correct environment, with intense self-purification and a carefully selected diet, it

is possible to slowly develop the capacity to hold the breath for long periods of time. Without preparation, however, we strongly advise you against attempting long kumbhaka; you may easily harm yourself.

Limitations

People who suffer from high blood pressure, vertigo or brain haemorrhage should not do moorchha pranayama.

Warning

You should not practise until you become unconscious. The aim of the practice is to induce a state of semi-fainting, not complete unconsciousness. Stop the practice when you feel a fainting sensation.

Sequence

The best time to practise moorchha is after asanas and immediately before meditation.

Physiological reason for fainting

The fainting sensation and light-headedness arise due to the following reasons:

Pressurization of the carotid sinuses in the throat by the combined practices of ujjayi pranayama, khechari mudra and jalandhara bandha (in technique 2). The carotid sinuses are located in the neck beside the carotid artery which supplies the brain with its vital supply of oxygenated blood. These sinuses are sensitive to pressure and they regulate the heart rate and pressure and match it with respiration. They are vital in maintaining the oxygen balance of the body, among other things. During moorchha pranayama these sinuses are compressed continuously; this reduces the blood flow to the brain and directly induces fainting.

Kumbhaka further reduces the oxygen supply to the brain. This becomes especially noticeable if kumbhaka is held for a long time. The brain is hypoventilated. This leads to fainting.

These two influences, compression of the carotid sinuses and kumbhaka, supplement each other and anaesthetize the mind so that it becomes one-pointed. All mental fluctuations are stilled.

Benefits

Moorchha pranayama is a very powerful practice especially if it is done with extended

kumbhaka It relaxes the entire mind and body.
It withdraws one's awareness from the outside
world (pratyahara) so that all external sounds,
feelings, smells, etc. are cut off. Simultaneously,
it renders the mind free of thoughts. This
leads to meditation and bliss.

Notes

1 Book I. Lesson 2, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 7,

Topic 2.

2 Book I. Lesson 6, Topic 5

3 Book I. Lesson 9, Topic 5

4 Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 3

5 Book II. Lesson 14, Topic 3

Meditation: Antar Mouna (Stage 4)

A vast number of diseases such as cancer, high blood pressure and asthma etc. are caused primarily by mental disturbance, tension and suppressed feelings. Other factors are also involved, but we feel the main cause lies in the mind. Mental tensions reflect in the body. Extreme tension, dissatisfaction or frustration in the mind over a long period of time leads to manifestation of physical malfunction in some form or another, that is, disease.

Regular practice of antar mouna brings about a gradual release of pent-up mental tension and suppressed emotions. This in turn leads to more relaxation at a pranic and physical level. That is, relaxation of the mind leads to the removal of blockages in the pranic channels of the body; the flow of prana is allowed to circulate to every part of the body without impediment. There is a progressive removal of chronic muscular tensions. Organs such as the digestive organs are allowed to function more efficiently, unhindered by turmoil in the mind. The endocrinal system begins to function smoothly without being continually overloaded. In this manner, physical and pranic disorders can be gradually alleviated. The whole body finds its lost state of good health and becomes infused with a new level of vitality. There are many benefits to be gained by including the practice of antar mouna as part of your daily life.

If you have not yet practised the three previous stages, then we suggest that you start with stage 1. If you have been regularly practising these first three stages, then you can proceed to stage 4¹.

ANTAR MOUNA - STAGE 4 AWARENESS AND DISPOSAL OF SPONTANEOUS THOUGHTS

In stage 1, attention is directed to sense impressions from the outside world. In stage 2, there is awareness of the spontaneous

eruption of thoughts. In stage 3, there is wilful creation of thoughts and then the disposal of them at will. In this stage, stage 4, the process is as follows:

1. Allow spontaneous eruption of thoughts
2. Then choose a thought that seems especially strong
3. Reflect on that thought for some time
4. Then wilfully dispose of it
5. Again become aware of the spontaneous flow of thoughts
6. Repeat the process.

Purpose

The purpose of this stage is to face deeper, subtle thoughts and visions buried in the subconscious mind. At a certain stage on the yogic path these subtle thoughts will bubble up spontaneously. It is very easy to get attached to them, for they open up and indicate a new dimension of your being that you probably did not know existed. But you should try to remain detached, for they are distractions that prevent further progress. They are obstacles to deeper perception of one's being. They may be precognitive or they may be memories of events that happened long, long ago. They are nevertheless no more than subtle distractions. Try to resist the temptation to attach significance and see deeper meaning in them.

Compare this to a man who sets out to see a friend. His destination is his friend's house; your destination is the inner core of your being. If the man is distracted by everything that he meets, if he smells each flower or talks to each person that he sees, then he will take a long time to reach his destination. It is the same if you become attached to and distracted by psychic scenery; it will take you a long time to reach your destination. Go straight to the goal and do not waste time en-route. Merely witness all these subtle impressions. The confrontation of these subtle impressions

leads to progressive purging of the mind at deeper levels. Gradually the mind becomes more and more refined and lucid.

Preparation

Before practising stage 4, your mind and body should be systematically relaxed. Without this preparation, the subtle impressions will not arise and you will gain little from the practice. We suggest that you precede antar mouna stage 4 by the practise of other yogic techniques. Asanas and pranayama are preferred; therefore the best time to practise antar mouna stage 4 is at the end of your daily practice program.

Alternately, you can practise japa or ujjayi breath awareness for a few minutes². A simple and effective practice for inducing relaxation is kaya sthairyam². Choose any method that you like and practise it for a few minutes as a preliminary to stage 4.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Close your eyes.

Hold the head and spine upright and relax the whole body.

For a few minutes systematically relax your mind-body by doing any preliminary practice, such as kaya sthairyam or breath awareness. Then begin stage 4.

Let all thoughts arise spontaneously.

Do not create any thoughts as you did previously in stage 3.

Be aware of the continuous flow of thoughts. try to be an impartial witness.

If you are sufficiently relaxed then thoughts will arise and spew out of the subconscious; there will be an overflow of thoughts.

many of the thoughts will be expressed in the form of psychic visions.

The process is almost like mental diarrhoea.

Continue to be aware of the process.

Suddenly, among this confusion, you may become aware of one thought that is more prominent than the rest.

Reflect on it for a short time.

Try not to identify with it; then wilfully throw it out.

This thought is a projection of the deeper realms of the subconscious mind; it may be pleasant or unpleasant thought... it does not matter.

You may be tempted to brood over it for a long period; try to resist this temptation; merely reflect on it for a few seconds and then throw it out.

The thought should arrive spontaneously, but should be deliberately and wilfully ejected.

Continue to be aware of the spontaneous eruption of thoughts.

Another prominent thought will suddenly present itself.

Reflect on it for a few seconds.

Then dispose of it.

Resume awareness of the thought process.

Continue in this manner for the duration of the practice, alternating between awareness of spontaneous thought flow and reflection on specific chosen thoughts that emerge from the bubbling thoughts.

Try to remain a witness throughout.

This is antar mouna stage 4.

No flow of thoughts

It is possible that you will not experience this overflowing of spontaneous thoughts. Your mind may remain extroverted. In this case, you should again start to practise stage 1. It means that you have prematurely started to practise stage 4. Spend a few more months doing stages 1, 2 and 3 in turn.

It is also possible that you experience a temporary suspension of thoughts in the practice. That is, during the spontaneous flow of thoughts, there will arise a state of blankness. In this case, you should patiently wait for the inner flow to recommence. Try to remain aware: 'I am practising antar mouna' and passively watch the chidakasha - the space in front of the closed eyes.

Extension of each stage

We do not recommend that you start stage 4 until you have fully practised the previous stages. If necessary you should spend several months on stages 2 and 3. If you spend only a few days on each stage then you will gain little benefit.

Practise each stage until you are ready to begin the next stage. The signs of this readiness are clear and we have described them for each stage¹. Check these signs carefully and use them as a guide to tell you when to proceed to the next stage.

Readiness for Stage 5

Stage 5 arises automatically when the thought process almost stops or stops completely. Stage 5 starts when there is a state of thoughtlessness³.

Notes

- 1 Antarmouna: stage 1 - Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 5; stage 2 - Book III, Lesson 27, Topic 5; stage 3 - Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 5
- 2 Japa: Part 1 - Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5; Part 2 - Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 6; Ljjayi pranayama - Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5; Kaya sthairyam - Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6
- 3 Antarmouna: stage 5 - Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 4.

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson and for the remainder of the book we are mainly concerned with practice; that is describing the techniques of kriya yoga and other yogic techniques so that you can try them for yourself. Here we have discussed the following practices:

1. Maha mudra, the sixth of the kriya yoga techniques. This should be added to the kriyas that you already know and practise.
2. N'auli, stage 2. If you have perfected stage 1 then you can proceed to develop the ability to rotate the abdominal muscles (stage 2). Try to find some spare time to practise outside your daily practice program.
3. Antar mouna, stage 4. If you have practised

the previous stages of antar mouna for at least a few months then proceed to stage 4 - awareness and disposal of spontaneous thoughts.

4. Moorchha pranayama is a very powerful practice. Try it for yourself but don't retain your breath beyond your capacity.
5. Ashwa sanchalana, merudandasana, utthita hasta merudandasana and niralamba paschimottanasana have been described. Don't do all of them. Choose and practise one of them according to capacity; beginners can do ashwa sanchalana and more advanced practitioners can try niralamba paschimottanasana.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
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
Antar Mouna - Stage 4	15
	120

Program 2: duration 1 1/2 hours

Surya Namaskara	4
Shavasana	3
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
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We have added 3 extra minutes onto the program so that surya namaskara can be included to loosen up the body in preparation for kriya yoga practice. Try to find the time to do some asanas, pranayama and meditative practice.

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general yoga practice

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Merudandasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana	4
Tadasana	1
Moorchha Pranayama	10
Antar Mouna:	
Stage 2	7
Stage 3	7
Stage 4	10
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