

Lesson 33

Intellectual understanding is useful up to a point, but then it can be a hindrance, a barrier to further progress in spiritual life. Faith, love and devotion to God and Guru are the stepping stones, so too are the practice of yoga and service in the cause of yoga.

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Satsang

Satsang is the essence of yogic and spiritual life. The word *sat* means 'truth' and *sang* means 'association'. *Satsang*, therefore, means 'association with truth', 'an encounter with truth' or 'association with those who are following the path of truth'. In the highest sense it means direct perception and communion with truth, and even more, living with awareness of truth in every action and incident of life. It means that one's being is submerged in awareness of truth. But this is a very elevated definition; at a more practical level, satsang means sitting in the company of wise men and women and listening to what they have to say. Satsang also means a place where seekers of truth meet in the presence of their guru.

Satsang will bring about conscious and unconscious changes in your being. It will inspire you and bring about changes in your attitudes. It will open up new horizons and vistas; you will start to see new meaning and potential in life. Slowly it can transform your understanding and perception of your own being. Life will start to show new, undreamt of promise.

How can satsang bring about these changes? This is not easy to answer, but we can say that the energy vibrations of a sage function at a more subtle level. These vibrations can change and charge your mind and energy field. His aura will transform your aura. His psychic battery will charge your psychic battery. A sage is a transformer of energy flows. But you must be receptive. Whether you are aware of these changes or not, they will nevertheless occur.

The mind has a tendency to remain in a rut of false beliefs and conditioning; it is also full of knots. You can never remove these by yourself. You have to receive treatment from another person - a spiritual doctor, a sage, yogi or saint. The sage can say almost anything - perhaps significant or insignificant, either obviously or not obviously directed at you, perhaps seemingly superficial statements of

fact, gossip or philosophical ideas, whatever - but these words can help to shake and upset the 'boat' of mental lethargy and fixity existing in your mind. The mind is changed and sent in new directions. You may or may not be aware of the process, but it will happen.

Satsang is not a new thing. It has existed throughout the world since time immemorial. At the dawn of history, primitive tribes and village communities always had a wise man, shaman, medicine man, call him what you will. They were respected people whose views were sought by others. They gave satsang.

Satsang was practised in ancient Greece. Many of the books by Plato and other great sages are based on speeches given during satsang. The Greek sages were called philosophers, which means 'lovers of the truth'.

The difference between rhetoric and sophism is clearly described in the Greek classic called *The Phaedrus* which is based on satsang given by Socrates and written down by Plato. Socrates is one example of a great sage who used to give talks based on knowledge of the truth. He used to give satsang to his many disciples and to many others who cared to listen. Plato was the chronicler of his master's enlightened satsang.

Christ gave satsang to multitudes of people the length and breadth of Galilee. He transformed the lives of many people, converting them. Many examples are given in the *Bible*. The greatest recorded satsang of Christ is The Sermon on the Mount (John, verse 5 onwards). Buddha gave satsang for almost fifty years in every place that he went. The Buddhist scriptures are full of the recorded words of Buddha. All religions of the world are based on satsang - words of the wise. Every mystical system is based on satsang and every scripture is nothing but recorded satsang.

Satsang has been praised in many scriptures. The following quotations are from the *Rarna-*

yana, one of the most popular scriptures in India: "Without satsang there is no discrimination. Satsang only comes with the grace of Rama." (*Balakand*) The faculty of discrimination can only be sharpened by satsang; this is absolutely necessary for progress in yoga. Normally one's thoughts revolve and revolve in the 'wheels of the mind' without being able to escape from built-in misconceptions. Only satsang can break up the grooves of the mind. Yet the chance to attend satsang only comes with the grace of Rama; that is when you are ready to listen.

Here is another quotation from the same chapter: "Wise people take bath in the holy water of satsang. In this way they clean and purify their inner being." Liquid water cleans the body; the 'water' of satsang cleans the mind.

"Satsang is like the philosopher's stone. Even the most wicked people have been transformed by the power of satsang, in the same way that the philosopher's stone changes iron into gold."

The writer of the *Ramayana*, Valmiki, is a good example of this transformation. He was a robber for many years. Then he met his guru Narada Muni and attended satsang. He was a pessimist and he did not believe in saints and yogis. Yet in time his whole life was transformed. He became a great yogi and was eventually inspired to write the *Ramayana* to help others. If you attend satsang, this same change may occur in you, perhaps even against your will.

How does one know if another person is wise or not, whether he is a saint or a charlatan? You must find out for yourself. Don't listen to what others tell you. They can only tell you their own personal preferences and prejudices, likes and dislikes. Feel from your own experience. If you feel really good in contact with a certain sage then this is a good indication that you are on the right path. If you feel some peace then this is also a good sign. If there is a feeling of negativity this does not mean that you are not with a great sage, but that he or she is probably not destined to be part of your path towards self-knowledge. You must go to satsang and test for yourself. There is no other method.

What should one do during satsang? Do whatever comes naturally. If you want to ask questions, and the opportunity arises, then

ask. But do not feel obliged. The most meaningful answers are communicated at deeper, more subtle levels. If you want only to sit, then sit; there is no need to do anything else.

Satsang is the essence of yogic life. We suggest that you contact sages, though they are rare and not always easy to find. Some are world famous, others are unknown. But if you start to seek, then you will find. And contact, whether regular or occasional, will help to bring order and sense into your life. You will start to commune with the deeper layers of being, to tune in with that which underlies all things. With good reason it is said that spiritual life or rebirth begins with satsang.

At first, satsang means being in the actual company of sages, yogis, saints, your guru. But eventually there is no need for this face to face confrontation. The satsang will occur even during physical separation. It will be with the particular sage you have tuned in with; it will be a continuous satsang with consciousness. You will commune with the deepest and central core of your being. Everything becomes satsang . . . communion.

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 12: SHAMBHAVI (PARVATI'S LOTUS)

Shambhavi is the name of the wife of Shiva. She is known by many other names including Parvati, Shakti, Uma and so forth. She symbolizes energy and the manifested world, while Shiva represents consciousness. They represent the two sides of the same coin of existence.

Kriya 12 is dedicated to Shambhavi, since without her power all the kriyas, and in fact all yogic practices, would be impossible. Without energy, gross or subtle, it is not possible to practise any sadhana.

In English this kriya can be called 'Parvati's lotus' or 'Shambhavi's lotus'.

Subsidiary practices

In order to practise shambhavi you need to know the following subsidiary techniques:

1. Ujjayi pranayama¹
2. Khechari mudra¹

These are an integral part of the previous kriyas and you should be familiar with them.

Visualization

In this practice you have to visualize a lotus growing in the spine, with the roots in mooladhara and the flower in sahasrara. At first this may be difficult, but with practice it will become easier and easier. You have to gaze into the chidakasha (space of consciousness) in front of the closed eyes and feel that the space pervades everywhere, both inside and outside your body. You must feel that the lotus is in the chidakasha, but that its specific location is the spine.

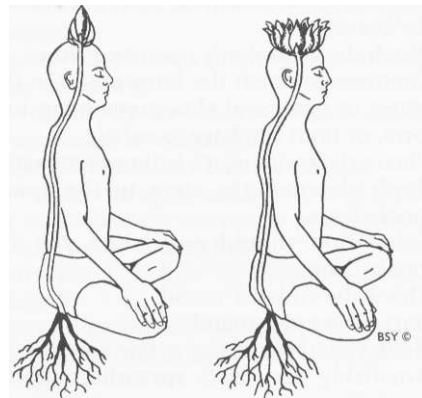
If you have never seen a lotus, then you can visualize any other type of flower, for example, a rose.

Sitting position

You should sit in padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana, if possible. Otherwise you

can sit in any other comfortable meditative asana².

To gain the most from the practice and to maintain one-pointedness of the mind, it is best to remain in the same position that is used for the previous kriyas. That is, it is best to do naumukhi, shakti chalini, shambhavi and the next kriya (amrit pan), without changing the physical position of the body. Keep the back straight throughout the practice.



Technique

Sit in a comfortable pose. Keep the eyes closed. Hold the back straight.

Do khechari mudra.

Try to visualize the lotus growing in the spine. The roots are white or transparent green and they spread out from the region of the mooladhara chakra.

The long, thin, green stem rises upwards in the center of the spine.

The lotus flower is closed like a bud; below the bud are a few light green, immature petals.

The petals are light pink with red veins.

Visualize the flower at the region of sahasrara.

Try to visualize the whole lotus, from roots to the flower, in the chidakasha; but feel as though it is growing in the spine.

Exhale deeply.

Fix your awareness at mooladhara.
 Visualize the roots of the lotus.
 Inhale slowly with ujjayi and let your awareness gradually ascend the stem of the lotus in the spine. If possible try to imagine that you are moving up the inside cavity of the stem.
 Slowly your awareness climbs the stem as you inhale. At the end of inhalation, your awareness should have reached the top of the stem immediately below the bud.
 Hold your breath.
 Fix your awareness at sahasrara.
 The flower is closed, but slowly it opens and the petals spread out to show the full blossom of the beautiful lotus.
 As it opens you will see the yellow tipped stamen in the centre.
 The flower closes again, and then begins to open. You must try to feel as though you are perceiving the lotus from both the inside and the outside.
 Watch the lotus slowly open and close.
 Continue to watch the lotus until the flower ceases to open and close, remaining in bud form, or until you have to exhale.
 Then exhale with ujjayi, letting your awareness slowly descend the stem in the spine to mooladhara.
 Exhalation should end when you reach mooladhara.
 This is the end of 1 round.
 Start the second round.
 Hold your breath for a few seconds while visualizing the roots spreading out from mooladhara.
 Then inhale and ascend the lotus stem again.
 Do 11 complete rounds.

Breathing

Practise ujjayi pranayama throughout. Hold the breath while visualizing the roots of the lotus. Inhale as you ascend the stem. Hold the breath while visualizing the opening and closing of the flower. Exhale as you descend the stem.

Awareness

Be aware of the entire lotus: roots, stem and flower; simultaneously be aware of the breathing process.

Number of rounds

Do 11 rounds. This will take about 11 minutes.

KRIYA 13: AMRIT PAN (QUAFFING THE NECTAR)

The Sanskrit word *amrit* means 'nectar' and *pan* means 'quaffing', 'drinking' or 'sipping'. Amrit pan can therefore be translated as 'quaffing the nectar'. It is the thirteenth kriya and comes immediately after shambhavi.

Amrit

Amrit is the divine fluid which brings immortality. It is called 'the elixir of life', 'the nectar of the gods', 'the nectar of immortality' and 'ambrosia'. Amrit is symbolized in different ways in all world religions. In the Vedas it is called *soma* - the intoxicating fluid of bliss. In Christianity and Tantra it is symbolized by wine. Many poets have endlessly praised the 'sweet wine' that brings unspeakable happiness; they are referring to amrit which comes not from grapes, but from spiritual evolution. Christ said: "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14)

Lalana chakra

The amrit cascades down from the bindu to the vishuddhi chakra. It is stored in a small chakra called the lalana chakra located in the throat. In the *Bible* it says: "But God clave a hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived . . ." (Judges 15:19) The verse is describing not water, but amrit emerging from the lalana chakra. This leads to spiritual awakening and bliss as described, "... and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived . . ."

The lalana is located at the palate at the top and back of the mouth. It is the area which is pressed by the tongue during khechhari mudra. This storehouse of amrit can be awakened through yogic practices, including kriya yoga; amrit pan is directly concerned with stimulating it and producing a copious flow of amrit.

The nectar passage

The lalana chakra is connected to vishuddhi chakra by a psychic pathway (nadi) called the nectar passage. It starts at the vishuddhi chakra in the spine at the back of the neck, and goes

directly to the lalana chakra in the palate, where it ends. This pathway is clearly shown in the accompanying figure.

Rationale of Amrit Pan

Amrit pan can be described as an upright form of vipareeta karani mudra'. Concerning vipareeta karani mudra, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* says: "The secretion of the moon (bindu) is called amrit. It is normally consumed by the fire of the sun (manipura chakra). It flows downwards and leads to ageing of the body. There is a wonderful technique which can reverse this process (called vipareeta karani mudra)." (3:77-78) Both vipareeta karani mudra and amrit pan are concerned with reversing this process by redirecting the nectar upwards from manipura towards bindu via the lalana chakra. The same psychic pathway is utilized in both kriyas: In vipareeta karani mudra, however, the body is inverted, while in amrit pan it remains upright.

Subsidiary practices

To do amrit pan you should know the following subsidiary techniques:

1. Ujjayi pranayama¹
2. Khechari mudra¹

Sitting position

You should sit in padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana. If these are impossible or uncomfortable, sit in any other suitable meditative asana².

Preferably you should sit in the same pose that was used for the previous kriya - sham-bhavi. That is, you should proceed from one kriya to the next without changing your physical position and without stopping the sequence of practice.

Technique

Remain in a comfortable sitting asana.

Keep the eyes closed.

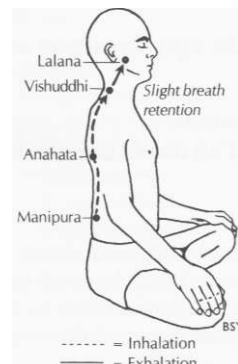
Hold the back straight and the head upright as shown above.

Do khechari mudra, pressing the tongue firmly but not forcefully against the back of the palate. Fix your awareness at manipura chakra in the spine.

Exhale deeply.

Round 1 starts here.

Try to feel the manipura chakra.



Then inhale with ujjayi and imagine that you are drawing fluid upwards from the manipura, through anahata to vishuddhi.

You should feel as though the fluid is being injected upwards by the force of ujjayi inhalation.

Inhalation should end when your awareness reaches vishuddhi.

Hold your breath for a short duration and fix your awareness at vishuddhi.

Feel the fluid or nectar become ice cold.

Then exhale with ujjayi and feel the cool nectar being injected along the nectar passage from vishuddhi to the lalana chakra.

Synchronize the flow of nectar with the exhalation.

When your awareness reaches the lalana you should feel the breath and nectar disperse and evaporate.

Remember: the lalana is located where the tip of the tongue presses the palate.

Immediately your awareness should return directly to the manipura chakra.

This is the end of the first round.

Start the second round.

After fixing the awareness at manipura for a short period with breath retention, breathe in and ascend to vishuddhi.

Do 9 complete rounds.

Breathing

You should practise ujjayi pranayama throughout. Hold the breath while fixing awareness at the manipura chakra. Inhale from manipura to vishuddhi. Hold the breath while fixing awareness at the vishuddhi chakra. Breathe out from vishuddhi to the lalana chakra through the nectar passage.

Awareness

Be aware of the ujjayi breathing and the flow of nectar.

Number of rounds

Do 9 rounds. This should take about 5 minutes.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 4

Asanas: Practice

The following two asanas need both a good sense of balance and strength in the legs. They are called:

1. Ardhabaddhapadmottanasana
2. Vatayanasana

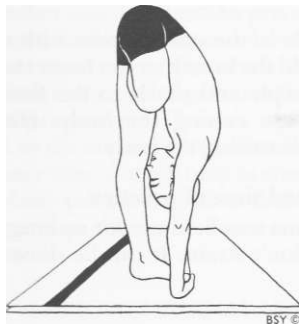
If you have time you should try them.

ARDHA BADDHA PADMOTTANASANA
(HALF LOTUS FORWARD BENDING POSE)

padma means 'lotus' and *utthan* means 'raised'. This asana can be translated as 'the raised and bound half lotus pose'. Generally it is called 'the half lotus leg stretch pose'.

Support

If you wish you can practise beside or in front of a wall.



Technique

Stand upright.

Open the eyes and keep them open throughout the practice.

Balance on the left leg.

Fold the right leg and place the foot on the left thigh: adjust the foot with your hands so that it forms the half lotus.

Use your fingers and balance on the left leg.

This is the starting pose.

Relax and steady the whole body.

Slowly bend forward as you breathe out.

At the end of exhalation you should be fully bent forward with the two hands placed on the left foot.

Try to keep the left leg straight.

If possible, try to touch the left knee with your nose or forehead, and place the hands flat on the floor.

This is the final pose as shown.

Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable, either holding the breath or breathing slowly and deeply.

Then breathe in and slowly return to the upright starting pose.

Unfold the right leg.

Then balance on the right leg and fold the left leg into half lotus position.

Repeat the same process.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Exhale while bending forwards. Hold the breath or breathe deeply and slowly in the final pose. Inhale while raising the body to the starting position.

Be aware of maintaining balance and synchronizing the movement with the breath.

You can practise for as long as you wish, but don't strain. Practise at any time of the day, but not after food.

Restrictions

This asana should not be done by people who suffer from:

- slipped disc
- sciatica
- hernia
- weak legs

Benefits

Ardha baddha padmottanasana strengthens the leg muscles, improves blood circulation, stimulates the digestive processes and develops a good sense of balance.

Ardha means

Raise the two

VATAYANASANA (FLYING HORSE POSE)

The word *vata* means 'air' and *yana* means 'a vehicle'. Literally, the asana can be translated as 'the airborne vehicle pose'. However, the composite word *vatayana* has another meaning: 'a flying horse' or 'a horse that moves like the wind'. Specifically it is the name of a flying horse that is a part of Indian mythology. The equivalent in Western and Greek myths is Pegasus, the winged horse. Therefore, vatayanasana can be translated as 'the flying horse pose', 'winged horse pose' or 'the galloping horse pose'. You may ask: "Why this name? The pose does not look like a horse nor does it help one to fly." The answer will come when you try the asana for yourself. It is very difficult to raise the body utilizing the muscles of only one leg. The arms have to be used both to provide balance and to give an extra upward momentum. The arms are held sideways like wings and used to help raise the body to the standing position in the same way that Pegasus raises itself with its large wings.

If you watch someone else, with imagination you will also see that the two legs in the final pose do slightly resemble the legs of a horse in profile. The name vatayanasana is actually a very fitting description of the asana.

Support

If you wish you can stand beside or in front of a wall for support.

Technique

Stand upright.

Bend the left leg and place the foot on the right thigh (half lotus).

Balance on the right leg.

Place the two hands together in front of the chest.

Gaze at a fixed point on the wall in front of your eyes.

This is the starting position.

Spread the arms sideways like wings.

Inhale deeply.

Hold your breath.

Slowly bend the right leg and lower the body. Be careful not to lose balance and not to lower the body too quickly and thump the left knee against the floor.

Eventually your left knee should rest on the floor.



Again place the hands together in front of the chest.

This is the final pose as shown.

Stay in the final pose for a short period breathing deeply and slowly.

Then breathe in deeply.

Hold the breath.

Spread the arms sideways.

Slowly raise the body using the right leg assisted by the two arms.

When you reach the standing position, breathe out and unfold the left leg.

Repeat the same procedure with the right leg folded in the half lotus position.

Breathing

Inhale while in the starting pose with one leg folded. Hold the breath as you lower the body. Breathe deeply and slowly in the final pose. Inhale before raising the body. Hold the breath while raising the body.

Duration and time of practice

Vatayanasana can be done for as long as you wish, but don't strain. It can be done at any time.

Benefits

Vatayanasana strengthens the leg muscles and improves the blood circulation. It tones up the sexual organs and generally stimulates the whole body.

Pranayama: Cooling Practices

There are a few simple yogic practices that cool down the body. Three important ones are:

- 1 Sheetkari pranayama
- 2 Sheetali pranayama
- 3 kaki mudra

These techniques will be discussed in the following pages.

Strange changes are occurring in the climates of the world: temperate countries are undergoing scorching summers, droughts, etc., while tropical and dry countries are having harsh winters and wet summers. The cause is variously attributed to atomic bomb blasts, sunspot activity, change in the tilt of the earth, the arrival of the Satya Yuga (the Age of Truth), the end of the world and so forth. The only thing that most people are really certain of is their own discomfort at these climatic changes.

Those people who are now experiencing cold weather can do bhasrika pranayama etc. to heat up the body. Those who are experiencing excessive heat, however, are strictly prohibited from prolonged practice of most forms of pranayama. The only types they are advised to do are the three described in this topic, since they directly help to cool down the body. Many people may find these practices useful, perhaps those who live in tropical, arid climates.

SHEETALI PRANAYAMA (COOLING BREATH)

The Sanskrit word *sheetali* means 'cooling' or 'relaxing'. This type of pranayama is so called because it cools down the body and relaxes the mind. In English it is usually called 'the cooling pranayama' or 'cooling breath'.

Scriptural references

The practice is briefly described in various hatha yoga scriptures. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* states: "Those who are wise should inbale

through the mouth and then exhale slowly, through the nose." (3:57)

No other practical details are given. Benefits are briefly mentioned in the following verse: "Sheetali pranayama alleviates diseases of the spleen and other large organs of the body, and helps to remove fever, hunger, thirst and bilious problems. Furthermore, it helps to eradicate all poisons from the body." (3:58)

A slightly fuller description of the method is given in the *Gherand Samhita*: "Inhale through the tongue and fill the lungs. Do kumbhaka (breath retention) for a few seconds and then exhale through the nostrils." (5:72)

Here it clearly indicates that one should breathe in through the tongue. The benefits are described in the next verse: "A sadhaka should do sheetali pranayama since it eliminates indigestion, coughs and bilious problems". (3:73)

A similar description is given in chapter three of the *Shiva Samhita*.

Rolling of tongue

During inhalation the tongue has to be rolled as shown below.

Roll the tongue so that both sides curl upwards and inwards, with the edges almost meeting each other. Needless to say, the teeth should be separated. The end of the tongue should protrude outside the mouth, but without strain. The rolled tongue forms a tube through which one inhales.

Technique

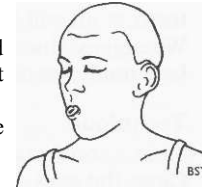
Sit in a comfortable meditative asana.

Hold the back straight and head upright, but without strain.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Be aware of breathing.

Roll the tongue.



Slowly inhale through the tube-like tongue.
Breathe in deeply, but without strain.
Then hold the breath.
Withdraw the tongue and close the mouth.
Do jalandhara bandha¹.
After a few seconds release jalandhara bandha.
Exhale slowly through the nose.
Be aware of the breath flow.
The first round is completed at the end of exhalation.

Further details

For details of awareness, benefits, duration and other aspects of the practice, see 'General Details' at the end of this topic.

SHEETKARI PRANAYAMA (HISSING BREATH)

The sound *shee* or *sheet* is made during inhalation in this practice. The Sanskrit word *kari* means 'that which produces'. Therefore, *sheetkari* can be translated as the pranayama that produces the sound 'shee'. In English the practice is usually called 'the hissing breath'.

Scriptural references

This practice is mentioned in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, which states: "Make the sound 'shee' while breathing through the mouth. By doing this practice one will become like Kamadeva (Cupid - the god of love)." (3:54)

Many worthwhile benefits can be gained from regular practice of this asana.

Shape of mouth

During inhalation the mouth should be shaped as shown in the following picture.

Press the lower and upper teeth together.
Separate the lips as much as is comfortable.
Fold the tongue backwards into khechari mudra so that the lower surface gently presses the upper palate².

Inhale through the gaps in the teeth.

Those who have many teeth missing or no teeth at all will find this practice impossible. We suggest that you do sheetali pranayama or kaki mudra as alternatives.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable asana.
Close the eyes.
Shape the mouth as described.

Breathe in slowly and deeply.

At the end of inhalation close the mouth, keeping the tongue in khechari mudra.

Hold the breath and do jalandhara bandha for a few seconds.

Then release the bandha, and raise the head.

Slowly breathe out through the nose.

This is the end of 1 round.

Do more rounds.



Further details

For full details of awareness, benefits, duration and other aspects of this practice, refer to 'General Details' given later.

KAKI MUDRA (CROW'S BEAK)

This practice is really a mudra, but we regard it as a pranayama practice because of its close similarity to sheetali and sheetkari pranayama.

The word *kaki* means 'crow'. This practice is so called because, during inhalation, the mouth is shaped like a crow's beak. In English it is usually called 'the crow's beak'. It is also said that regular practice of this mudra leads to a disease-free, long life that is often associated with the crow.

Shape of the lips

During inhalation the lips should be shaped as shown in the following picture. The two lips should be pursed together leaving a small tube through which the air may be inhaled. The tongue should be relaxed.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable asana.

Place the hands on the lap or on the knees.

Keep the eyes open throughout the practice.

Do nasikagra drishti by fixing both eyes on the nose tip³.

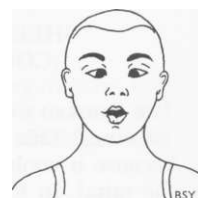
Try not to blink the eyes.

The first round starts here.

Purse the lips.

Breathe in slowly and deeply through the mouth.

At the end of inhalation close the lips.



Exhale through the nose.
The first round is completed at the end of exhalation. Do more rounds.
Remember, the eyes must be kept open throughout the practice and there should be continuous practise of nasikagra drishti.

Further details

For full details on awareness, benefits, duration and other aspects of the practice see below.

GENERAL DETAILS

The following details apply to all the three practices: sheetali, sheetkari and kaki mudra.

Awareness

Be aware of the flow and the sound of the breath, as well as the mechanics of the practice. In kaki mudra your awareness must simultaneously be fixed on the nose tip.

Duration and time of practice

You can do the practices for as long as you wish and at any time during the day.

Benefits and utility

Most yogic practices tend to overheat the body. Sheetali and sheetkari pranayama, as well as kaki mudra, on the other hand, cool down the body. They can therefore be done after other yogic practices to restore heat balance in the body. Prolonged practice of pranayama is not generally advisable during hot weather. Sheetali, sheetkari and kaki mudra, however, can be done without fear.

Besides cooling the physical body, these three practices also cool the mind and soothe away mental tension. They are therefore useful for alleviating psychosomatic diseases such as high blood pressure. The practices also purify the blood and improve digestion.

Warning

One of the fundamental laws of yogic practice, and breathing in general, is that one should inhale through the nose if possible. Sheetali, sheetkari and kaki mudra are unique in that they break this law; inhalation is through the mouth instead of the nose. This infringement is acceptable providing you:

- Do not practise in a dirty, polluted atmosphere

Do not practise in excessively cold weather. The nose heats up and cleans inhaled air before entering the delicate lungs. If you breathe through the mouth then this air conditioning is bypassed. The induction of freezing and/or dirty air directly into the lungs for prolonged periods may cause harm. Therefore, do not practise sheetali, sheetkari or kaki mudra unless you live in reasonably clean, mild surroundings.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 5

Yoga Nidra (Part 1)

Yoga nidra is a practice which can be widely applied in the modern world to improve the quality and happiness of human life. It is a simple yet profound technique and has been used in the following fields:

- *Relaxation*: yoga nidra is the best, cheapest and most permanent method of inducing deep relaxation of the entire human structure and personality.
- *Meditation*: it is a meditative technique.
- *Psychological problems*: yoga nidra acts directly in eradicating deep-rooted psychological complexes, neuroses, inhibitions, etc. It is an advanced psychiatric tool.
- *Psychosomatic ailments*: yoga nidra helps to remove a vast number of ailments that are predominantly mental in cause, such as high blood pressure.
- *Sleep*: yoga nidra induces and improves deep sleep. It is a non-chemical tranquillizer that quickly removes insomnia.
- *Physio-psychological rejuvenation* of the entire human organism can be brought about by yoga nidra. The physical, pranic and mental levels of man are directly recharged.
- *Mind exploration and awakening*: yoga nidra opens up the potential of the mind and also awakens the faculty of intuition.
- *Learning, education and intelligence*: yoga nidra is a profound educational tool. Through investigations and tests, it has been found to bring extraordinary improvements in both the absorption and retention of information from external sources as well as the tapping of knowledge within one's own mind. It heightens intelligence in all meanings of the word.

Yoga nidra has a vast number of other applications. It is a panacea for the tension-ridden world of today. It can be practised by everyone, young and old, male or female. It is thoroughly scientific and tested. It requires no belief or blind acceptance of a dogma. It only requires practice.

In this and the following lessons we will describe the various aspects and applications of yoga nidra, together with comprehensive, yet easy to understand instructions on practice¹.

Definition

The word *yoga* means inner communion; the process that leads to this state. *Nidra* means sleep. Thus yoga nidra can be defined as 'yogic sleep'. It is both the name of a specific yogic practice and a state of being. The mechanics of the practice are easy to understand and define, but the state of yoga nidra will be understood differently by different people as follows:

Sleep: to a person who is tired, exhausted and constantly worried, the state of yoga nidra will mean only one thing ... a deep, refreshing sleep. Nothing more, nothing less. Many are the people who practise yoga nidra alone or attend yoga nidra classes only for one purpose: to sink into the oblivion of sleep. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with this, since your deep sleep will bring many benefits. In yoga nidra lessons one is generally asked to remain wakeful, but if you cannot do this, do not worry ... enjoy your sleep. Sometime in the future you can try to remain awake.

Psychic sleep: to other people, possibly those who have been practising yoga for a few years, yoga nidra will mean a state of conscious dreaming, where one will see visions of the subconscious mind. One will seem to hover in a state midway between sleep and wakefulness. In this state one will confront subconscious problems, suppressions, fears, etc. Regular practice will slowly clean and polish the mind.

Sleepless sleep: this is the highest state of yoga nidra where one balances on the razor's edge between introversion and extroversion. This is the path of sushumna and corresponds to the awakening of the kundalini². This is the blissful and mystical state of 'yoga' that corresponds to superconsciousness. It has

been described by innumerable yogis, saints, bhaktas and sages throughout history. In the great yogic scripture called *Yogataravali*, Shankaracharya has written: "When sankalpa (desires) and vikalpa (fancies and imaginations) are rooted out then one is influenced no more by karma. When sankalpa and vikalpa are removed by constant yogic practice the ever-blissful state of yoga nidra dawns."

We have defined three specific states of yoga nidra. As a practice we can describe it as a method of inducing physical and nervous tranquillity, as a method of ridding the mind of chronic tension, and of inducing inner knowledge and meditation. It nulls the rational thought processes and brings inner peace.

The layers of the mind

Yoga nidra is a method of exploring the different layers of the mind. According to certain schools of modern psychology there are three dimensions of mind: the conscious, subconscious and unconscious. The *Mandukya Upanishad* also classifies the mind into three layers: *jagrat*, *swapna* and *sushupti*. The yogic and psychological terminology can be directly related as follows:

<i>Jagrat:</i>	conscious mind waking state surface thoughts and perception of the outside world <i>sthula</i> (gross dimension)
<i>Swapna:</i>	subconscious mind dream state individual memory and mind <i>sukshma</i> (subtle dimension)
<i>Sushupti:</i>	unconscious mind deep conscious sleep state collective memory <i>karana</i> (causal dimension)

Yoga nidra starts from the swapna state - that is, exploration of the subconscious mind. If one masters yoga nidra then the depth of perception may become deeper so that one contacts and explores the sushupti or cosmic mind. Great yogis go even further: they transcend the mind. They enter the state of superconsciousness. In the *Mandukya Upanishad* this state is called *turiya* (the fourth dimension of being). This is the highest state of yoga nidra, which few attain. The *Yogataravali* says: "Beyond these three states (*jagrat*,

swapna and *sushupti*) there is *turiya*. It is a state that is spontaneously experienced by yogis. It is real yoga nidra in the form of pure, illumined consciousness. This yoga nidra is not part of *prakriti* (nature) but it is the manifested form of *purusha* (consciousness)." (v. 26)

The aim of yoga nidra is to progressively explore and transcend the different states of mind.

Nyasa - traditional yoga nidra

The word *nyasa* means 'to place'. It is a practice in which specific mantras are 'placed' and felt at different parts of the body. It is the traditional form of yoga nidra used by yogis throughout the ages and still practised by almost all Hindus.

Nyasa is described in various scriptures such as the *Brihad Yoga Yajnavalkya Smriti* and the *Yogataravali*, as well as many upanishadic and tantric texts. The *Aruneyi Upanishad* (verse 5) advises all wandering sannyasins to practise nyasa at all times - to chant Aum and to place it mentally at different parts of the body. More specific and ritualistic forms of nyasa are described in the *Mahanirvana Tantra*. They include the following:

Matrika nyasa in which the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet (*matrikas*) are placed on different parts of the physical body of the sadhaka while chanting the corresponding sound.

Hridayadi sadanga nyasa literally means the placing of the hands on six different parts (*sadanga*) of the body beginning with the heart (*hridaya*). Specific mantras are chanted as follows: when touching the heart chant *namah*; when touching the head *swaha* at the crown; when touching the feet *vasat* and so forth.

Kara nyasa in which mantras are placed and chanted on the fingers, thumbs and palms of the hands. (Note: most forms of yoga nidra that we teach include this type of nyasa, but without the mantras).

Vyapaka nyasa, all pervasive (*vyapaka*) nyasa. This form is so called because the energy of the mantras is distributed throughout all the parts of the body, together with awareness. Specific mantras are placed and felt on the head, mouth, heart, etc.

Nyasa is widely practised by Hindus throughout the world. A well-known practice

is called *angvinyasa* (nyasa of the different limbs of the body). It is described in various scriptures, including the *Durga Saptashati*. Almost all Hindu puja (worship), whether for Kali, Durga, Shiva or Saraswati, start with this type of nyasa. Specific mantras are chanted and associated with different parts of the body. The practice starts as follows and continues with specific mantras for each part:

Small finger: *Aum Kannestha Abliyam Namahe*
 Second finger: *Aum Anamikastha Abhyam Namahe*

Third finger: *Aum Madhyama Abhyam Namahe*

Fourth finger: *Aum Tarjaneem Abhyam Namahe*

Thumb: *Aum Angushtha Abhyam Namahe*

It is a ritual which has far reaching benefits. It is intended to induce pratyahara in preparation for dharana.

All these methods of nyasa are very powerful. They can be either external (bahir) where the parts of the body are physically touched, or they can be internal (antar) where the mantras and awareness are mentally placed. A vast selection of mantras is utilized, including *Tam, Phut, Hrim, Krim*, the Gayatri mantra and so forth. The bija (seed) mantras of the chakras can also be utilized - *Lam, Vam, Ram*, etc. - and rotated throughout the six chakras. The mantra chanting and rotation of awareness harmonizes the nervous system, balances pranic flows and renders the mind one-pointed. Each part of the body is systematically charged with the energy of the mantras. The whole body and mind are purified and prepared for meditation.

Yoga nidra has been adapted from the traditional practices of nyasa by Swami Satyananda to meet the needs of modern man. The mantras have been omitted so that yoga nidra can be practised by all people regardless of religion, language and tradition. Though devoid of mantras, yoga nidra has been carefully designed so that it retains its power to transform the personality and receptivity of the practitioner. The emphasis has been transferred from mantra chanting (nyasa) to rotation of awareness (yoga nidra). Mantras such as Aum or the guru mantra can, however, be chanted at each centre of the body during yoga nidra if required. Both methods, nyasa and yoga nidra, have their advantages. Possibly in the near future we can reintroduce the practice of nyasa, with mantras, and

propagate them on a large scale. This will supplement the present widespread practise of yoga nidra.

Structure of the practice

Yoga nidra can be roughly divided into the following sections:

1. Preliminary adjustment of the body
2. Preliminary relaxation of the physical body
3. Preliminary relaxation of the mind
4. Sankalpa (resolve)
5. Rotation of awareness throughout the different parts of the body
6. Visualization
7. Reflection and symbol awareness
8. Sankalpa
9. Return to external awareness

These nine stages are sequential; that is, they should be practised one after the other in the order given. Variations can be adopted within this basic framework.

Full details of these stages of yoga nidra will be described progressively in this and forthcoming lessons¹.

Instructions

The instructions for yoga nidra can be given in three ways: by the direct words of a teacher; from a tape recording; by one's own mental commands. It is best to learn yoga nidra directly from a teacher so that the instructions can be modified to suit your individual needs, and so that the correct method is firmly imprinted on your mind. Eventually, however, you should practise alone, either by self-instructions or listening to a tape recording of your teacher's lesson.

In this book we are forced to give written instructions. These are not very suitable for the practice of yoga nidra. We suggest that you either transfer the instructions to tape, or that you ask a friend to read them to you while you practise yoga nidra.

The instructor

Choose a teacher carefully. He or she should have some understanding of the potential of the mind through personal experience. Specifically, the teacher should have awakened a degree of intuitive perception. There should be a feeling of empathy between you.

It is best to learn yoga nidra from one teacher, so that the sound of his or her voice

makes a deep impression on your subconscious mind. You should slowly become receptive to the sound of one voice so that your mind flows spontaneously with the given instructions without resistance. Of course no harm will occur if you change your teacher, or take lessons from different people, but one teacher is certainly best for serious practise of yoga nidra.

The sound link

During yoga nidra there is no need for physical contact between the teacher and the practitioner. The only contact should be psychic and through the sound of the voice.

The teacher's voice should be calm and clear. The speed of instructions should be varied according to the needs of the situation. The teacher must feel the needs of the student(s). Intuition is required. The instructions should be sufficiently fast that they capture the attention of the practitioner and prevent the mind wandering here and there or brooding on problems; but not so fast that the instructions cannot be understood or carried out. If necessary, there can be frequent repetition of the instructions. When the practitioner reaches deeper states of relaxation then the instructions can be slowed down.

Suggestions and dogmas should be avoided. The instructions should be concerned only with the explanation of the mechanics of yoga nidra and the sequence of practice. The tone of voice should be modulated to suit the circumstances.

For the practitioner, the voice is very important. It is the link that enables you to maintain awareness while exploring the deeper layers of the mind. Without a guiding voice you will surely lapse into sleep (which is, however, perfectly acceptable in cases where the practitioner is very tired and perhaps suffers from insomnia). Do not intellectualize about the instructor's words. Do not try to remember them. Just follow them spontaneously without too much effort. Flow with the sound of the voice.

YOGA NIDRA - PART 1

To gain the most from the practice of yoga nidra you should carry out the following rules and preparations:

Clothing: remove all tight-fitting and uncomfortable clothing. It is best to practise in loose, light clothes, the less the better, especially in hot climates. In cold climates you should wear sufficient clothing to remain warm throughout the practice, or cover yourself with a warm blanket.

Insects: if there are any insects such as mosquitoes and flies, then you should either practise under a mosquito net or cover yourself with a light sheet.

Heat: if it is very hot then you can practise under a fan providing it works silently. Do not practise under direct blasts of air. Only use a fan if it is absolutely necessary.

Environment: practise in a quiet, dark, freshly ventilated room. Do not practise under glaring lights, with foul smells, in a room that contains dust-ridden stale air, or where there are many disturbances. No matter how pleasant, it is best not to practise yoga nidra in the open air.

Ornaments: remove your wristwatch, spectacles, jewellery and all other body ornaments before beginning yoga nidra.

Loosening up exercises: during yoga nidra you will be required to remain in one position without moving for a period of time. This is difficult if your body is stiff. If necessary you can practise a few asanas before starting yoga nidra. We suggest naukasana¹ and surya namaskara⁴.

Adjustment of body: before commencing yoga nidra you should exhaust all need to move your body. It is better to move the body before the practice than during the practice. If you feel skin irritation, then scratch yourself. If your clothing feels uncomfortable, then make some adjustments. Make yourself perfectly comfortable before thinking about starting yoga nidra. Any time that you spend making these preparations will be more than justified since you will gain more from the subsequent practice of yoga nidra.

Time of practice: you can practise at any time during the day and night, though not immediately after meals; wait for an hour or so. Practise when you feel physically and/or mentally tired. If you suffer from insomnia or disturbed sleep, practise yoga nidra in bed at night.

Posture

The physical posture in yoga nidra should be so comfortable that you forget the existence

of the body so that it can be almost regarded as merely a 'shell' or 'husk' of the mind. A position should be chosen that can be maintained without movement for between 10 and 60 minutes. A wide selection of poses can be used for this purpose, but from our experience there is one that is easily the best - shavasana (the corpse pose)³.

Place a blanket on flat level ground.

Lie flat on your back.

A thin pillow can be placed under the back of the head if you wish, but it should not be too thick.

The head, arms and legs should lie in one line.

The palms should face upwards.

The eyes should be closed.

Relax the whole body when you have made all preparatory physical adjustments and when you have exhausted all need to move the body. Yoga nidra can then start at this point.

Technique 1: preliminary practice

This practice includes preliminary relaxation of the body and mind, which has already been fully described in our previous discussion called 'The Art and Science of Relaxation'⁵.

Notes

¹ Yoga nidra: Stage 2 - Book III, Lesson 34, Topic 4; Stage 3 - Book III, Lesson 35, Topic 4; Stage 4 - Book III, Lesson 36, Topic 5

² Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1 and Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5

⁴ Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 2

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

Daily Practice Program

We have introduced two new kriyas - sham-bhavi and amrit pan. If you have sufficient time integrate them into practice program 1; if you lack time, then omit them and do programs 2, 3 or 4 instead.

If you are in a hot climate try one of the following techniques that we have described - sheetkari and sheetali pranayama and mudra.

Try to master the two new asanas - ardha baddha padmottanasana and vatayanasana. They can be done at any time and in any place.

We consider yoga nidra one of the most useful practices of yoga. It can be practised by everyone, old and young, healthy and ill. It requires no difficult sitting position. If you do not already know the practice we suggest that you start to practise it.

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

Do as many of the above kriyas as you can, doing each in turn starting from kriya 1.

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Sheetali, Sheetkari or Kaki Mudra	10
Antar Mouna (or any other meditative practice)	20
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	60

Program 4: duration 1/2 hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	4
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	3
Matsyasana	3
Sheetali, Sheetkari or Kaki Mudra	6
<hr/>	
	30

Try to find the time, perhaps in the evening after work, to practise yoga nidra. Its benefits are profound.