

Lesson 24

There is the Moon and the Sun
And between them is the Seed.
This last is that being
Whose nature is Joy Supreme.

Hevajra Tantra

Health

The most basic and important thing in life is good health. Without abundant health, it is impossible to aspire towards anything. Illness dulls the whole mind and body. Perceptions, enthusiasm, positivity and so forth are all diminished. It is only with loss of health that a person understands the incapacitating effect of bad health, and profoundly appreciates the meaning of good health. Health only becomes a problem when one does not have it. So if you are ill, then your first concern should be to attain perfect health. If you already have good health, then take care to maintain this exalted state of being, which all the wealth in the world cannot buy. To meet the challenges of your life good health is essential.

Health survey

In a very revealing article entitled: 'International Comparison of Medical Care' in the Scientific American Vol. 233, No. 2, dated August 1975, written by Professor Kerr L. White, there are details of a health survey carried out in the U.S.A., Canada, U.K., Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Finland, Poland and Argentina. Approximately 48,000 people were questioned, representing a cross-section of 15,000,000 people in specific areas of the named countries.

For the purposes of the survey, signs of bad health were as follows:

- Inability to fully carry out one's social duties.
- Detectable known illness.
- Physiological symptoms of illness such as phlegm, cough, chest pain, shortness of breath, stiffness, anxiety and swelling of joints.
- Dental morbidity.
- Perceptible visual morbidity.

A healthy person was defined as one who did not show any of these signs. A functionally healthy person was defined as a person who, though able to work and not confined to bed, reported some slight chronic but not disabling

ailment, and who manifested one or more of the above signs to a slight degree.

In the survey, people were questioned about their state of health. Those questioned did not include people in hospitals or any form of health institution.

A summary of some of the results is as follows:

- *Healthy* - 14.3% (average)
- *Functionally healthy* - 24.4% (average)
- *Unhealthy* - 61.3% (our figure)

It was also found that between 7.7% and 30.4% of people were chronically disabled (physically impaired, handicapped, or with long-standing bad health resulting in some disability).

We have summarized only a small part of the article. If you want to see more relevant statistics, then we suggest that you read the report for yourself.

This survey is very revealing. It shows that the standard of health of people in the countries involved is generally not very good. In the areas surveyed, a mere 14.3% are healthy, while 7.7 to 30.4% (an enormous figure!) are permanently disabled to a greater or lesser extent. Note these figures. Among those people regarded as disabled are those injured in the last war. This makes the figure rather high; but at the same time there are many people included in this figure (7.7-30.4%) who could attain better health if the correct steps were taken.

Similar figures would probably be obtained in surveys in other parts of the world. The health of the average person is not as it should be. We suggest that if you are one of the 85.7% who are unhealthy or functionally healthy, you should take immediate and sensible steps to become one of the 14.3% who boast of good health. Don't be satisfied until you feel energy and vitality pulsating throughout the entire body and mind. Use all means that are readily available and which are suitable for your specific ailment. The natural

state of your body and mind is vibrant good health; bad health is unnatural. You should utilize any healing system that will bring about positive results, namely good health.

Mental and physical diseases

It is often said that: 'all diseases are in the mind'. This is a very trite statement that too many people use without the slightest thought. If by mind one means cosmic mind, then indeed all diseases are in the mind, but very few people identify their mind with the cosmic mind. If by mind one means individualized mind, which is almost certainly the case, then all diseases are not necessarily in the mind. It is a matter of identity and definition.

Most of you will have heard of bilharzia. If you have not then we will explain it. It is a disease that plagues millions of people in the world, especially in places such as the Nile delta in Egypt. It occurs in places where people excrete and urinate in the same water that they drink. It is caused by a flat-worm parasite that invades the blood and bladder of the unfortunate victim. It debilitates the whole body so that there is no energy. This is why it is possible to see countless people in the affected areas walking around looking half-dead. There is nothing mental about this disease; it is entirely physical.

We could give many other examples of diseases that are physical in cause. These could include contagious diseases such as cholera, smallpox and any ailment that arises through insufficient food or food that is harmful. All these diseases require a direct approach through any healing system that is available and that brings results.

Many diseases, especially modern diseases, do have their main root in the mind. Besides all mental illnesses, these include such diseases as cancer, diabetes, indigestion and so forth. It is these types of diseases that are particularly amenable to cure through yoga practices. In these cases also, any healing system should be adopted that will bring results.

The mind and body are really part of one unit but for the sake of definition and explanation, we can say that certain diseases are mainly mental in cause while others are mainly physical. Mental diseases cause derangement in the body and physical diseases cause derangement or loss of efficiency of the mind.

They are directly related. The treatment of some diseases will need a more direct physical approach whether from medicine, yogasanas, pranayama or whatever is suitable. The healing system adopted should be one that brings mental relaxation, removal of phobias and any other mental imbalance. In this field, yoga is particularly powerful. It brings wonderful results.

The important thing to remember is that one should adopt a suitable healing system whether the disease is predominantly physical or mental.

Different healing systems

There is a vast spectrum of healing systems that can be adopted to bring about removal of an ailment. Some are well known and widely practised; others are almost unknown and rarely practised. The following is a list of healing systems that may be found useful in treating disease:

- yoga
- allopathic medicine
- homeopathic medicine
- ayurveda
- acupuncture
- herbal medicine (such as unani in India)
- naturopathy
- chromotherapy (use of colours)
- gem therapy
- massage
- chiropractic or osteopathy (manipulation of joints and bones)
- music or sound therapy (including use of mantras)
- perfume therapy
- zone therapy (foot zone massage)
- urine therapy

And so on. If you have a disease, then you should consider any of these systems as a possible means of treatment. Don't restrict yourself to one system, especially if it does not bring results. Be sure to utilize any one of these healing systems only under expert guidance.

Application of the right system

Each healing system has its place. For specific ailments some systems are better than others. It is important to choose the correct healing system for the treatment of a given disease. Some systems act more directly; others act

more subtly. Gem therapy, perfume therapy and colour therapy, for example, have a very subtle influence on the mind and body. These are not very useful in the treatment of diseases

such as dysentery. Allopathic medicine, on the other hand, will act directly to help bring about a cure of dysentery.

It is important that the practitioner of any of these healing systems, whether doctor, masseur, chiropractor, naturopath or whatever, knows the limitations of the system that he follows. People who prescribe a method of treatment must know its limitations and its remedial powers. They must know the field in which that particular system is useful and stick to that field. Ailments that cannot be treated should be left to other healing systems that can provide a remedy. There is surely a system available to help treat every disease. Practitioners of every healing system make the mistake of overstepping themselves. They recommend their method for an ailment which it cannot cure. This causes unnecessary suffering to patients through adopting an inadequate or unsuitable healing system for that particular disease.

The same criticism can be applied to yoga enthusiasts. Too often one asana is recommended as the certain treatment for an ailment such as hernia. This misinformed approach is not only wasting the time of the patient, it is also 'cheating' him, as well as giving yoga a bad name. The patient will tend to criticize yoga as a healing system when he gets no relief. It is therefore important in all systems, including yoga, that the expert knows all the limitations.

All systems have their place and help in maintaining good health. All systems should be seen as being part of the spectrum of healing systems. The different systems should be unified so that barriers are broken down between them. In this way the best treatment for a given ailment is more likely to be prescribed. Let all systems be unified so that they can form one comprehensive system.

If you have an ailment you have to use some discretion in adopting a certain healing system. Don't become tied to one system or one person. The test is in the cure. Therefore, look carefully until you find a system that brings relief. Give the healing system that you adopt a chance to work. Many diseases take time to treat, some

healing methods act slowly. The important thing is the final result . . . abundant good health.

The place of yoga as a healing system

Yoga may not cure a broken leg, but can help to prevent hernia. Yoga alone may not cure bilharzia, but it can help to treat countless other ailments. It can treat all types of mental disorders, from which stem a large array of ailments. It can be used to treat cancer, polio, diabetes, constipation, asthma, high blood pressure, sexual malfunctions, anxiety, arthritis, backache, rheumatism, colds, coughs, epilepsy, varicose veins, piles, flatulence, migraine, pyorrhoea, sciatica, sinusitis, slipped disc, gastric ulcers, indigestion, insomnia, eczema and a multitude of other diseases. There are many authenticated cases of people who now have perfect health, having once suffered from some disease and removed it through regular yoga practices.

Yoga tackles diseases in the following manner:

- Massages and improves the efficiency of the internal organs through asanas.
- Tones up the nerve connections by asanas.
- Improves the blood circulation through asanas.
- Improves respiration and general vitality of the body through pranayama.
- Cleans the body of impurities through asanas, pranayama and the shatkarmas such as jala neti¹, shankhaprakshalana², kunjali kriya³ and so on.
- Relaxes the mind and body through scientific relaxation techniques such as shavasana⁴ and yoga nidra⁵.
- Removes mental suppressions, phobias, neuroses, and all other negative aspects of the mind. This brings about greater happiness in life and removes many diseases.

Yoga methods simultaneously influence both the body and the mind. It is for this reason that yoga methods are so effective in treating a wide range of diseases.

Yoga techniques are also a great help in maintaining the body in good physical shape. In other words, yoga is good preventative medicine.

It is your duty to gain first class health, not only for yourself, but so that you can participate positively in the world. If you are ill then you

will tend to be self-centred; this must be the case. It is difficult to practise bhakti yoga, karma yoga and so forth with enthusiasm and effort if you are stricken with some chronic ailment. It is also almost impossible to practise kriya yoga if you are ill. The first thing you need in life is health, so if you have a disease, any disease, take immediate steps to remove it. Adopt any means, any healing system that is suitable, available and which brings results, without causing other problems in its wake. Yoga is one of these systems.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 1

⁴ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5

⁵ Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 5

Ajna Chakra

The ajna chakra is the sixth and last of the chakras that we will discuss. It represents the highest of the psychic centres in man. Above this level are bindu and sahasrara, which are not chakras or psychic centres - they really come into the realm of the ineffable¹.

In the human framework there are said to be ten doors of perception. The first nine are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, mouth, anus and sexual organ. These are the gateways through which a person communicates with the outside world. The tenth door is ajna chakra, which leads 'upwards'. It is the tenth sense that leads directly to sahasrara, the source of all things. The first nine doors lead out to the material realms of being; the tenth door, *ajna chakra*, leads into the more subtle realms. It is the gateway to the fountainhead of life.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *ajna* means 'command'. This chakra is so called because it represents the level of awareness and harmony where it is possible for direct mind to mind communication between two people. It is the stage of sensitivity where individual minds can meet. It is the centre through which the guru communicates with his disciples and gives them commands. It is the link or bridge between the guru and disciple; therefore, this chakra is often called the *guru chakra*. It is the gateway to the inner temple of subtle initiation.

Ajna chakra has many other names. It is called the *eye of intuition* where an awakened aspirant can perceive events in both the outer and psychic realms. The most common name is the *third eye* - the psychic eye that is located midway between the two physical eyes. This is the eye that looks inwards instead of outwards. It is an eye that everyone has, yet which few people know about and fewer actually open and use. In a sense most people are blind, since this third eye is never utilized to view the

deeper levels of being. It lies dormant. In Sikhism it is also called the *tisra til* (third eye).

In India, the ajna chakra is called the *divya chakshu* (divine eye); the *jnana chakshu* or *jnana netra* (eye of knowledge) for it is the channel through which the spiritual aspirant receives revelation and insight into the underlying nature of existence. It is also called the *eye of Shiva*. There are various reasons for this name; one is that the ajna chakra is the means through which consciousness (Shiva) filters down to individuality. Also Shiva is the epitome of meditation and this is directly associated with awakening of the ajna chakra.

Various poets of India, such as Kabir, allude to the ajna chakra. They call it such names as the *bankunal* (the curving, zigzagging path) indicating the precarious path to wisdom; and the *bhramariguha* (cave of bees) indicating that subtle sound (nada) is the home-line between the ajna chakra of individual being and the sahasrara.

The ajna chakra trigger point is located in the centre of the brain at the top of the spine. However, this is a difficult area to sense for the purpose of yogic practices. Therefore, an associated trigger point called the *bhrumadhya* is utilized to awaken ajna chakra.

Bhrumadhya

The Sanskrit word *bhru* means 'eyebrow' and *madhya* means 'centre'. Therefore, the meaning of *bhrumadhya* is 'eyebrow centre'. This exactly describes the location, of this point. It is also called *trikuti* - 'the dwelling place at the eyebrows'.

The ajna chakra and bhrumadhya are really part of the same centre. Ajna chakra at the top of the spine is connected directly to the bhrumadhya between the two eyebrows by a psychic passage called *maha nadi*. Therefore, stimulation of bhrumadhya will also stimulate ajna chakra. Since the bhrumadhya is much easier to locate, it is widely used in yogic

practices to awaken ajna chakra. These two centres are so closely interrelated they are often regarded as one psychic centre, and for practical purposes there is nothing wrong with this. Together, they can be regarded as the third eye.

Bhramadhyā (and ajna) is the centre where ida and pingala end - where they merge with sushumna². These three nadis (psychic passages) merge together to become sushumna alone. For this reason, the bhramadhyā is also called *triveni* (the three strands), *mukta triveni* (the place of three strands from which one gains liberation) and the *trikuti* (the dwelling or meeting place of the three nadis). Bhramadhyā is also called *prayaga* after a town in India which lies at the junction of the rivers Ganges and Jamuna, and the mythical underground river Saraswati, which connects them. These three rivers represent ida, pingala and sushumna respectively.

Bhramadhyā lies directly in front of ajna chakra. In many yogic practices, bhramadhyā is utilized to awaken ajna. In kriya yoga, however, one must try to locate ajna directly. We will shortly describe techniques to develop sensitivity.

All the other chakras that we have described, except mooladhara, were associated with a corresponding chakra kshetram on the front of the body. In a sense, bhramadhyā can be regarded as the kshetram of ajna chakra, although actually the relationship is much more direct.

Ajna chakra in different traditions

The awakening of ajna chakra is the heart of all mind expanding, religious and mystical traditions. Sometimes it is widely described and symbolized, as in India; often it is hardly mentioned at all. But always, in mystical circles, its existence and significance has been known; without awakening ajna it is impossible to gain wisdom and open up the deeper layers of one's being.

Because of its importance, ajna chakra is widely mentioned in texts and teachings throughout the world. The following are a few obvious examples.

Many people, such as the ancient Egyptians and the American Indians, wore special head raiments that symbolized the third eye at the eyebrow centre. Often a snake is shown

emerging from the forehead, indicating that the kundalini rises through ajna via sushumna.

Ajna chakra is clearly mentioned in the **Bible**: "The light of the body is the eye (ajna); therefore, if thine eye be single, the whole body shall be full of light." (Matthew 6:22) There is a lot of information within this short verse. First of all it explains that ajna chakra is the psychic centre which connects man to the source, sahasrara. If one's mind is concentrated (thine eye be single) then one can perceive the more subtle aspects of being through ajna chakra. The result will be illumination and wisdom.

The medieval mystic Eckhart similarly stated: "The eye with which I see the supreme is the same as that with which it sees me." This statement also has many implications. Ajna chakra is the bridge between the microcosm and the macrocosm, between the finite and the infinite, and between man and pure consciousness. Like a bridge over a river, it can be traversed from either side. Thus ajna chakra is the means by which consciousness manifests into individual man and activates man's actions and thoughts (pravritti path). Conversely, ajna is man's means of making the return journey (nivritti path) and communing with the source. Ajna is the door of subtle perception, and is what William Blake referred to when he said: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is ... infinite." This verse implies that when the mind becomes harmonized, one-pointed and a perfect instalment, then one can gaze through the window of ajna into the infinite.

The mystics of ancient Greece knew of the ajna chakra. Plato wrote: "In all men there is the eye of the soul, which can be re-awakened by the correct means. It is far more precious than ten thousand physical eyes." There are many methods of helping to open up the ajna. Plato was initiated by a mystical sect and was the disciple of Socrates; he therefore utilized the appropriate methods that he was taught.

Many sects and traditions symbolize the ajna chakra by an open eye, whether alone or shown on the forehead of a deity, yogi and so forth. Bear this in mind when you study old texts, fables and when you see pictures of one-eyed people. It is the ajna that is being indicated. Incidentally, in the Kabbala, the Ain Soph

sahasrara) is often symbolized by a closed eye. This means that one will tune in with the sahasrara when one's perception is directed along the sushumna through ajna chakra. Illumination will arise when the eye of subtle perception, the ajna chakra, is directed away from both external and psychic phenomenon, hence the closed eye.

Many statues of Buddha indicate the ajna chakra by a jewel placed at the eyebrow centre. This is the divine eye of perception that Buddha awakened when he sat under the bodhi tree and was enlightened. This leads to the sahasrara, indicated by a large number of petals around the head.

The ajna chakra is widely symbolized in Hinduism and Tantra. Many of the deities, such as Shiva and Dakshina Kali, often have a dear marking on the forehead. Also, one of the most widespread rituals of India involves placing a *tilaka* (spot of coloured powder) on the forehead of all people during a religious or festive occasion. Furthermore, all married Hindu women wear a tilaka on their forehead at all times. This tilaka symbolizes the bhrumadhva and ajna chakra.

There are many mystical stories that describe the awakening of the ajna chakra. For example, a well known one concerns Shiva. The devas (celestial and divine beings) were being molested by asuras (demons). The devas represent the positive, harmonious aspects of the mind; the asuras represent the negative forces. The devas help one along the path to wisdom, whereas the asuras retard one's progress. Therefore, the confrontation between the devas and the asuras means a person's spiritual progress is being hampered. When the asuras gain the upper hand then there is a retardation. When the devas become dominant, then one makes spiritual progress.

Let us return to the story. The devas discovered that the asuras could only be destroyed by a child born of Shiva, but Shiva lived in the Himalayas and sat continuously in meditation. How could he possibly produce a child? A plot was hatched. The devas sent Kama Deva, or Kandarpa (the equivalent of Cupid in European mythology) to disturb Shiva's meditative bliss and incite passion so that Shiva would produce a child with his wife Parvati. Kama Deva shot his arrow of passion at Shiva, but Shiva was unmoved. He merely sat on his

tiger skin with his eyes firmly closed. However, he opened his third eye, keeping his fleshy eyes closed. He saw Kama Deva and perceived his motives. He immediately emitted a thunderbolt of psychic power which instantly killed Kama Deva. The story continues and involves various other plots and ploys. Eventually, Shiva is persuaded to mate with Parvati and their son Subramaniyan was born. He is known as the lord of the celestial realms and he destroys the demons.

This story can be interpreted in many different ways. For example, the ajna chakra destroys attachment to passion and other worldly interests (indicated by Kama Deva). One can still act in the world, passionately or otherwise (as in the case of Shiva), but there will be an attitude of inner detachment. However, we have narrated this story more because it makes interesting reading, rather than for any other reason. We leave the reader to interpret the meaning of the story for himself.

The ajna chakra has been symbolized in a large number of traditions and will continue to be so in future. In fact the Bihar School of Yoga will continue this tradition, since we have adopted the symbol of ajna chakra for our emblem.

Ajna chakra and the pineal gland

Ajna chakra is often directly related to the physical pineal gland, the pea-sized endocrinal gland located in the centre of the head. In fact, they are often regarded as one and the same thing. This is rather an over-simplification. The difference should be clearly understood. The pineal gland refers to the physical body; the ajna chakra spans the chasm between the physical and the most subtle psychic realms. In fact, ajna chakra leads beyond the psychic realms via sushumna. It seems likely that the pineal gland is part of ajna chakra; it is that part of ajna chakra that acts in the physical body. But ajna chakra as a whole goes much deeper. Ajna can be compared to a mountain in the sea; the peak, the island that can be seen above the surface of the sea, is the pineal gland. The rest of ajna chakra, the base of the mountain, goes much, much deeper than can be seen with normal perception.

The physiological functions of the pineal gland have baffled medical scientists for

centuries. Even today it is not very well understood, though gradually it is divulging its secrets. It seems that the pineal gland acts as a biological clock which regulates man's activities according to outside circumstances. It has been found that the eyes and the pineal gland are connected via the sympathetic nervous system; and that light entering the eyes directly influences some of the functions of the pineal. The pineal gland in turn regulates the whole sympathetic nervous system which greatly controls human behaviour. Thus cosmic rhythms, such as night and day, the moon and sun cycle and so forth, influence man's behaviour via the pineal gland. Melatonin and other hormones are produced in response to outside stimuli; these in turn produce changes in sexual behaviour, menstrual cycles, nervous energy and other biological rhythms of man. Thus it seems that the pineal gland acts like a radio antenna, which picks up outside signals and regulates man's behaviour accordingly.

It is interesting to note that the pineal gland is not directly connected to the brain, at least as far as we can tell by current scientific research. It therefore seems that man's behaviour is influenced by two systems - the pineal gland and the mind acting through the brain.

Besides being a link between the outer material environment and man, it seems that the pineal gland also acts as a gateway to the more subtle realms of the psyche. The pineal gland is a physical transducer between the physical and psychic planes. Thus psychic changes can induce corresponding physical changes via the pineal gland. Conversely, physical, chemical or any other stimulation of the pineal gland can bring about repercussions in the psyche. This is indicated by practices of *trataka* (blinkless gazing) where the ajna chakra can be awakened via the eyes and pineal gland; the practice of *sirshasana* can also induce psychic changes, though to a lesser degree, by increasing the blood supply to the pineal gland. Various drugs also bring about psychic changes; it is possible that they directly influence the chemistry of the pineal gland. Thus it appears that the pineal gland is a switch or a sluice gate which restricts or opens up psychic awareness. Direct stimulation of the pineal gland by various yogic practices can help to awaken the ajna chakra.

To summarize: the pineal gland is a material body that seems to be a physical manifestation of the ajna chakra. They are not the same, for the ajna chakra, while including the pineal gland, dives much deeper into the more subtle levels of being. The ajna is the link between the physical level of being and the sahasrara.

Attributes of the ajna chakra

The ajna is the seat of the mind, the purified *buddhi* (subtle intelligence). When this chakra is awakened, fickleness of the individual mind is dispersed. Attachment, the cause of lack of discrimination and ignorance, fades away. The mind becomes a perfect instrument.

Ajna chakra is the centre of wisdom. It represents the level of awareness where one begins to see and realize the hidden essence behind all visible things. It is the centre of intuition where one tunes in with the underlying essence, rather than manifested forms. When ajna is awakened, the meaning and significance of symbols flashes into one's conscious perception. Ajna chakra represents the level of revelatory knowledge.

Ajna is the centre of extrasensory perception. *Siddhis* (psychic powers) arise according to one's *samskaras* (mental tendencies). One can experience clairvoyance - vision of far away events. One can detect the real meaning and ideas of a person who is speaking, independent of what is being spoken. Ajna chakra is the centre whereby one can communicate without speaking; it is the centre of direct mind to mind thought transference. Various *siddhis* can arise according to the propensities of the individual, but one should not become attached to these *siddhis*, one should treat them as one would treat a plague - very warily. Attachment to *siddhis* is a great obstacle on the path to wisdom; this block is called *rudra granthi* (knot of Shiva) and applies especially at the level of ajna chakra. This hurdle of attachment must be transcended; one must pierce this psychic block with the axe of inner detachment.

When ajna chakra is awakened, *sankalpa shakti* (willpower) becomes very strong. Mental resolves are almost automatically translated into fruition, providing they are in accordance with individual dharma. This chakra is also the centre where one begins to gain more control of prana. In fact, this chakra is important in the yoga technique of *prana vidya* (psychic

control and healing). Ajna is the distributive centre where one transmits prana to specific areas of the body.

Ajna chakra is the centre where ida and pingala meet and merge together to become one. That is, the outside and the inside environments become one reality. Opposites are harmonized into a unified whole. One functions in the sushumna tube.

Ajna is the witnessing centre. One becomes the unmoving witness of all events, including those of one's own mind and body. Though involved, passively or intensely, in the play of life (lila), one merely observes. One functions at the balance point, where there is both inner communion with the depths of one's being, and interaction with the outer world. When ajna awakens one begins to perform real karma yoga, without expectation, selflessly and with perfection. Intuition begins to predominate in one's actions. Actions of the mind and body become perfect responses to given situations. The ups and downs of the mind-body will less and less affect one's being. They will gradually be seen as something external to the inner core of one's nature. Life will carry on as usual, but more harmoniously and with greater wisdom. The body and mind will be seen to follow its own inclinations in the way that they were designed.

Ajna chakra represents an elevated level of awareness. In Sanskrit it is called *tapah loka*, the level where the vestiges of one's imperfections are burned away.

Symbology

In the front of the topic you will find a symbolic representation of ajna chakra. In the centre is the symbol of AUM, the *bija* (seed) mantra of this chakra.

In the centre of the diagram there is the black itara lingam. The Sanskrit word *itara* means 'another', or 'the other, different from'. And this is a perfect description, for it indicates that this lingam is the entrance to the *para* lingam of the sahasrara. The itara lingam of the ajna chakra is different from but leads directly to the ultimate lingam.

The ajna has two lotus petals, one inscribed with the sun and the other with the moon. These two petals and the sun and moon represent the pingala and ida nadis respectively. Two mantras are also inscribed on each

petal: (ham) and (ksham). These are the two mantras for Shiva and Shakti, which merge at the ajna.

Ajna has the same implications as the cross: effacement of ego and union of opposites. It was at the centre of the cross that Christ was crucified, transcending his ego and the level of ajna chakra.

Ajna is widely associated with the planet Jupiter, for this planet represents the guru. In the Vedas, ajna is symbolized by Brihaspati, the guru of the devas. It is also interesting that in alchemy the metal tin represents Jupiter, the guru and wisdom. The metal copper symbolizes the planet Venus and devotion; this devotion is that of the disciple. The combination of these two metals, tin (guru and wisdom) plus copper (the disciple's devotion), produces the well known alloy bronze. This bronze is the metal of initiation and the link between the guru and disciple. This link arises most directly at ajna chakra.

Location

The trigger point of ajna chakra is located at the top of the spine in the centre of the head. It lies in the region of the medulla oblongata and the pineal gland. If you look in a physiology textbook you will get a clear idea of the physical location.

The *bhrumadhya*, the direct trigger or switch of ajna, lies in the centre of the two eyebrows on the forehead. Ajna lies directly and horizontally behind the bhrumadhya. A drop of tiger balm, camphor, etc. can be placed at the eyebrow centre to intensify perception of the exact location of the bhrumadhya.

PRACTICES

Almost all yogic practices are concerned with awakening ajna chakra, whether directly or indirectly. The following are a few which simultaneously develop sensitivity to the location of ajna and the bhrumadhya in preparation for kriya yoga. We don't expect you to do all of them - choose one or two and practise them regularly.

Trataka

This is a very powerful technique³. With regard to developing sensitivity to the location of ajna chakra and bhrumadhya, a candle is

certainly the best object. Feel as though you are gazing at the candle, or whatever object you choose, with your eyebrow centre instead of the two eyes.

A particularly powerful method for developing simultaneously sensitivity to both ajna and bhrumadhya involves the integration of trataka with the flow of breath as described in stage 3. You should try to feel that the breath is piercing both ajna and bhrumadhya while it flows to and fro along the maha nadi. That is, as you breathe in feel that the breath is being drawn in through the eyebrow centre to eventually pierce ajna; as you breathe out feel that the breath is being pushed forwards from ajna to eventually pierce the eyebrow centre. Continue in this manner while maintaining a concentrated gaze on the candle flame.

Trikuti Sandhanam

The word *sandhanam* means 'search'. Therefore, this practice can be called 'the search of the location of the bhrumadhya'. The practice is as follows:

Sit in a comfortable asana (you can also practise while lying flat on the floor, but be careful not to sleep). Try to feel the location of the eyebrow centre. Feel the rhythmic blood pulse at that point; at first the pulsation may be indistinct, but with time and practice you will clearly discern it.

For at least 5 minutes fix your attention on the pulse.

Then mentally integrate the sound of Aum with each pulsation at the eyebrow centre . . .
Aum Aum Aum Aum Aum . . .

Be totally aware of this continuous vibration of Aum . Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available.

Note: this practice can be done at any time during the day, whether working or resting, eating or walking. Using this technique one will become very sensitive to the bhrumadhya.

Shambhavi Mudra

Shambhavi mudra is also called bhrumadhya drishti (eyebrow gazing) and is an excellent method of developing sensitivity to the bhrumadhya and should be mastered in this sadhana course⁴. It is an integral part of kriya yoga.

Kriya yoga - ajna location

Kriya yoga is one of the most powerful methods of awakening ajna chakra if it is practised sincerely and regularly. In various specific techniques attention is directed to ajna chakra in the centre of the head. Location is not easy at first, though it becomes easier with practice and time. As preparation for kriya yoga, we suggest that you spend a few minutes every day trying to locate ajna chakra. Sit quietly and focus your attention at the centre of the head. Eventually you will become sensitive to the exact location. The best time to practise is immediately after trataka, trikuti sandhanam, shambhavi mudra or, in fact, any other meditative technique. This will prepare you for the forthcoming kriya yoga techniques.

Notes

¹ Bindu - Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 5; Sahasrara - Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 1

² For details refer to the following references: Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 1; Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2; Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 2; Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1; Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

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

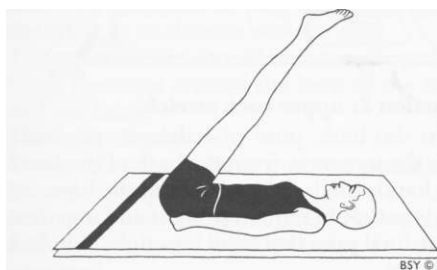
⁴ Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 5

Asanas: Practice

Halasana is both a forward bending and a semi-inverted pose. It gives many benefits, especially when combined with sarvangasana¹. The main reason for introducing it at this time is that it is an excellent preparation for the first kriya yoga technique, vipareeta karani mudra². Perfection of halasana will make vipareeta karani mudra easy to perform. We therefore suggest that you practise halasana and sarvangasana as a preparation for the more advanced practices.

HALASANA (PLOUGH POSE)

The Sanskrit word *hala* means 'plough'. Halasana is so called because in its final pose it resembles a plough; not the modern mechanized plough but the wooden plough pulled by oxen or bulls that has been used in India since time immemorial and still is. The resemblance is very close. The English name for this asana is, not surprisingly, 'the plough pose'.



Technique - basic form

The traditional method of doing halasana is as follows:

Lie flat on the floor, facing upward.
The legs should be straight and together and should remain so throughout the practice.
The palms can face upward or downward; beginners may place their fists under the buttocks with the knuckles facing upwards.
Relax the whole body and prepare for the practice. Breathe in deeply.

Then slowly raise the two legs to the vertical position; use the abdominal muscles as much as possible and the arms as little as possible. The aim, eventually, is to use only the abdominal muscles to raise the legs without the slightest help of the arms; this may require a little time and practice.

Then fold the legs over the top of the head, keeping them straight as illustrated.

As the legs are raised over the head, the buttocks and hips should also be simultaneously raised.

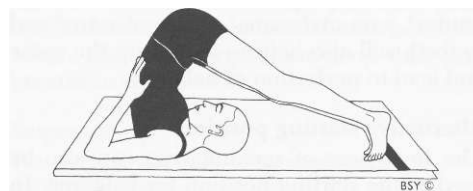
Gently lower the feet toward the ground behind the head, but without the slightest strain.

If possible touch the toes to the ground behind the head; those who are unable to do this should allow their feet to suspend above the floor.

This is the final pose.

The hands and arms can be positioned as follows:

1. Keep in the same position with arms flat on the floor behind and to the side of the back.
2. The arms folded behind the back of the head with the hands clasped together.
3. The hands placed behind the hips as shown in the following picture.



You can choose any one of these three alternatives.

In the final pose relax the whole body as much as possible, keeping the legs straight.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Maintain awareness of the breathing process. Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time.

Then either perform some or all of the variations (see later text) or return immediately to the starting position.

Before returning to the starting position, the arms should be placed behind and to the side of the back, flat on the ground.

The sequence of return is the reverse of that already described to take the final pose.

The movement should be slow and controlled, using the abdominal muscles as much as possible.

The legs should be lowered gently to the ground without any thud as they reach the floor; the back of the head should remain in contact with the floor throughout.

Breathing

Inner retention while raising the body from the ground to the final pose. Slow, deep and rhythmical in the final pose. Inner retention while returning to the starting position.

Advice to beginners

Beginners will probably have difficulty touching the toes to the floor behind the head in the final pose. Under no circumstances should one use force or sudden jerks in order to touch the floor, for this is the quickest way to strain the spine and be out of action for a week or so.

Let the feet suspend above the floor, keeping the legs straight. Regular practice over a period of weeks will make the back more supple, and the toes will gradually move nearer to the ground. The aim is to stretch the muscles progressively, not permanently by force. Regular practice of other forward bending asanas such as paschimottanasana³, yoga mudra⁴, janu sirshasana⁵, shashankasana⁶ and so forth will also help to loosen up the spine and lead to perfection of halasana.

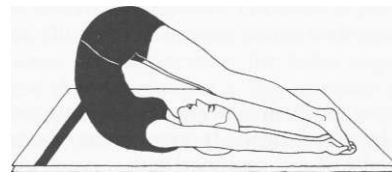
Alternative starting position

The final pose of sarvangasana can also be used as the starting position for halasana. In this case, the legs are slowly lowered over the head from the vertical position in the manner already described.

Variations

There are many variations of halasana, all of which have distinctive benefits. We will shortly describe six. They are all performed from the

final pose of basic halasana. They should not be attempted until one can easily do this basic form. These variations can be practised individually or one after the other as follows:



Variation 1: lower back stretch

From the final pose of halasana, the toes should be gradually moved nearer towards the back of the head.

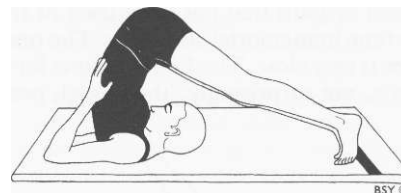
The legs should be kept straight and together. Grasp the toes with the hands to accentuate the process.

The final pose is as shown in variation 1.

Relax the body as much as possible, especially the spine.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

This variation notably stretches the lower back (lumbo-sacral) and makes it more supple.



Variation 2: upper back stretch

From the basic pose of halasana, gradually push the toes away from the back of the head. The hands can be placed behind the hips.

The legs should remain straight and together. In the final pose there will be a tight chin lock as shown.

The toes should be as far away from the head as is comfortably possible.

Breathe slowly and deeply in the final pose.

This variation produces an accentuated stretch of the back and neck.

Variation 3: anchored back stretch

Take the final pose of the basic halasana.

Place the arms on the floor behind the head.

Grasp the big toes with the fingers.

Then variation 2 should be repeated; the toes

should be gradually pushed away from the back of the head.

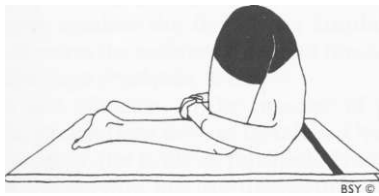
The toes, however, are anchored by the arms; this limits the movement of the toes away from the head and induces an accentuated muscular tension in the back muscles.

Hold the final pose, breathing deeply and slowly.

Then release the tension and relax.

This variation tenses all the back muscles and tones the associated nerves.

It also massages the kidneys and adrenal glands.



Variation 4: the neck stretch

This variation is widely known as *pashinee mudra* (the folded mudra).

Take the final pose of the basic form of halasana.

Separate the legs by about half a meter.

Bend the legs and bring the knees - as close as possible towards the shoulders and ears; if possible, place the knees on the ground.

The thighs should be folded closely against the chest or as close as you are able.

The top of the feet should lie flat on the ground.

Wrap the arms around the back of the knees and the head.

This is the final pose.

try to relax the body as much as possible.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

many people will find this variation more difficult, though with practice it can be mastered.

The neck muscles are given a powerful stretch, the cervical (neck) vertebrae loosened and the associated nerves toned.

This variation also squeezes and massages the thyroid and parathyroid glands in the throat.

Variation 5: neck tensing pose

Take the final pose of the basic form of halasana.

Place the arms behind the back on the floor.

Interlock the fingers.

Push the feet away from the back of the head as far as is comfortable.

Then press the arms and hands against the floor so that the neck vertebrae are slightly raised off the ground.

In the final position, the weight of the body is supported on the back of the head, the shoulders, the hands and the arms.

Breathe slowly and deeply while maintaining the final pose.

Then release the muscular tension and relax the whole body.

This variation stimulates the large number of nerves passing through the neck. It improves their efficiency and in turn improves the health of the whole body.

Variation 6: pelvic stretch

Resume basic halasana.

Hold the big toes with the fingers of each hand.

Keeping the legs straight, slowly spread the legs on either side of the head; the toes should remain in contact with the ground.

Separate the legs as much as possible without straining.

This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

This pose stretches and tones pelvic muscles, nerves and organs.

Duration

The basic form can be practised for up to five minutes. Beginners should start with about thirty seconds in the final pose and increase by a few seconds every day.

Any of the variations can be practised for similar durations for specific purposes. If all the variations are performed one after the other, then we suggest ten deep and slow breaths in each pose.

Sequence

We suggest the following sequence:

1. Sarvangasana
2. Lower the feet into halasana
3. Some or all of the variations
4. Return to lying position on the floor
5. Counterpose

Counterpose

Any backward bending asanas can be used as a counterpose. The best ones are matsyasana⁷,

ushtrasana⁸, supta vajrasana⁷ and chakrasana⁹, because these release the compression of the throat by stretching the neck in the opposite direction.

Time of practice

The best time to practise is early in the morning before breakfast and late in the afternoon before the evening meal. Halasana should not be practised after meals or after vigorous exercises.

Limitations

People who suffer from hernia, slipped disc, sciatica, high blood pressure or any serious back ailments should not do halasana. If you are not sure then seek expert guidance.

Benefits

Halasana gives many of the same benefits as sarvangasana. However, the direct influence on the brain is much less, with more emphasis on the back, abdomen and pelvis. It combines the benefits of inverted asanas with forward bending asanas. Halasana is almost an upside down form of paschimottanasana, though there is a distinctive difference between the benefits that they give. Paschimottanasana acts mainly on the lower back and stretches the back; halasana, on the other hand, acts mainly on the upper back and neck region. These two asanas supplement each other.

Halasana makes the entire spine supple, stretches the muscles, loosens the vertebrae and tones the nerves both inside and outside the spinal column. This leads to better efficiency of all the organs in the body.

The thyroid and parathyroid glands are rendered more efficient. The abdominal muscles are strengthened. The abdominal organs are massaged. This helps to alleviate constipation, dyspepsia, diabetes and various other abdominal ailments. It generally decongests and revitalizes the liver, spleen, kidneys, pancreas, adrenal glands and so on. It helps to remove backache, neck ache and headache.

Besides these physical benefits, halasana done with attention can induce states of pratyahara (sense withdrawal) as a preparation for meditational techniques.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 2

² Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 4

³ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

⁴ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 2

⁵ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 3

⁶ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 2

⁷ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 4

⁸ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 3

⁹ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 4

Pranayama: Practice

It pranayama is practised regularly and for a reasonable duration everyday, then it can awaken the kundalini power. This is clearly indicated in the traditional hatha yoga texts: "Those who have mastery over their breathing process, awaken the fire of the kundalini so that it enters the sushumna without hindrance."

Hatha Yoga Pradipika 4:19)

As one advances in the practice of pranayama, precautions have to be taken. One must ensure that the body is purified. Pranayama itself will do this, but the shatkarmas, such as shankhaprakshalana, neti, etc. are perfectly suited for removing gross impurities. The importance of physical purity is indicated in the scriptures: "When the entire nervous system is purified of all impurities, then the yogi is able to hold his breath for long periods of time." (*Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* v. 94) One should also make the body strong by regular practice of asanas.

Another important point, essential in fact, is that one must eat pure and vegetarian food. Failure to do this could easily lead to harm and disease. So if you are practising a lot of pranayama, then it is vital that you adopt a simple, balanced and pure diet.

Another point to remember is that serious pranayama should not be practised when you are ill. By serious we mean for durations of longer than twenty minutes and with extended breath retentions of more than thirty seconds. Therefore, take steps to find good health before undertaking serious pranayama sadhana.

We suggest that all those who are practising a lot of pranayama should do so under the guidance of a competent teacher. Pranayama is a very powerful technique if it is done correctly; if done incorrectly, then it will cause you harm. If you master pranayama then you will become master of your mind. "Mind is the master of the senses and the breath is the master of the mind". (*Hatha Yoga Pradipika*

4:29) Pranayama itself can lead you to awareness of the depths of the mind and beyond, but please don't overdo the practice. You must practise for a few years in order to slowly accustom the physical and pranic body to new functional conditions. This point should be clearly understood and remembered.

NADI SHODHANA - STAGE 4 WITH MAHA BANDHA

Since Lesson 22 we have suggested that you combine nadi shodhana pranayama with maha bandha¹. This is an advanced technique, therefore you should continue to practise it, steadily increasing the duration of breath retention, but don't strain.

Those people who have not practised pranayama before should proceed through the practices that we have described since Lesson 3, taking as much time as they wish to do for each stage². Those who have already reached an intermediate stage should also proceed at their own pace.

Nadi shodhana pranayama combined with maha bandha is as far as we intend to go in this sadhana course. In Book III we will introduce other types of pranayama.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4

Meditation: Ajapa Japa (Stage 5)

In this lesson we will teach the fifth stage of ajapa. With regard to preparation for kriya yoga, this stage can be regarded as the last stage. There are further stages, but these are really an integral part of kriya yoga and will be discussed in Book III.

Spinal psychic passage

Between the trigger points of the ajna and mooladhara chakras lies the spinal psychic passage. It is called sushumna. It connects all the chakras together and is located within the centre of the spine. In stage 5 of ajapa you must feel the breath moving up and down within this psychic passage, piercing all the chakras in turn. You will have to use a little imagination. At first you may find this difficult, but with regular practice you will find it becomes natural. You will feel the breath moving within the spinal passage without the slightest effort.

AJAPAJAPA - STAGE 5

This fifth stage of ajapa brings in all the chakras that we have so far introduced. It is different to the previous stages in that one must now imagine the breath ascending and descending through the spine; in the previous four stages the breath was imagined to move in the frontal passage between the navel (manipura kshetram) and the front of the throat (vishuddhi kshetram)¹.

Technique

Take a comfortable sitting position.
Close the eyes and relax your whole body.
Spend a few minutes preparing your body and mind for the practice in the ways described for the previous stages (that is, Aum chanting, kaya sthairyam, etc.)¹.
Become aware of the breathing process.
Make it slower and deeper.
Fold your tongue into khechari mudra².

Slightly contract your throat and do ujjayi pranayama².

For a few minutes only be aware of the breath. When your breathing has become long and rhythmical, try to imagine that it is ascending with inhalation . . .

And descending with exhalation.

Try to feel the breath passing through each chakra in turn.

As you inhale, feel the breath moving from mooladhara to swadhisthana, then manipura, to anahata, vishuddhi and finally ajna.

Repeat the same process as you breathe out and descend from ajna to mooladhara. -

After a few minutes synchronize the mantra *Soham* with the breath - *So* with inhalation upwards and *Ham* with exhalation downwards. Feel the mantra vibrating throughout your spine.

Feel it piercing each of the chakras in turn.

There must be total attentiveness.

Continue in this manner for 5 minutes or more.

Then watch the blank space in front of your closed eyes.

Be a witness to any psychic occurrences that arise.

If any visions arise, let them; don't interfere.

This is a method of cleaning out the mind.

After a few minutes return to ajapa, the awareness of the mantra and breath in the spinal passage.

Do this with total attentiveness for at least 5 minutes.

Then repeat the awareness of the chidakasha - the space in front of the closed eyes.

After some time return to ajapa.

Continue in this manner for as long as you can.

Duration of practice

You should aim to practise this technique for at least half an hour every day without fail, until you can practise it easily without effort.

Awareness

Mindfulness during ajapa is essential. You must be mindful of every activity, whether breathing, mantra or thoughts. Without this mindfulness you will slip into the state of drowsiness. This is called *tandra* or *laya* in Sanskrit. It is a great obstacle that has to be overcome. It is the stumbling block, the greatest impediment, the greatest hazard that faces every person who tries to practise meditational techniques. How many times have you practised a meditative technique and found that your mind has been brooding over some problem for many minutes without your awareness? During this period you were completely lost in your thoughts. It is only after the period of brooding that you realize you were brooding. This is in total opposition to the path of meditation.

You must be aware of what you are doing. You must be awake. If you feel sleepy, go and take a cold bath or wash your face. Or practise a few rounds of surya namaskara. Without developing mindfulness you will never be successful in meditative practices.

The mind can wander from the practice in hand . . . there is nothing wrong with this. In fact, initially this is positive, for it helps to release pent-up mental problems. But you must be aware of the thoughts as they arise. You must know that you are thinking about a certain subject. The mind will always wander here and there; it is its very nature. Let it but maintain mindfulness.

In ajapa you must be alert to all things that occur in the mind and the processes which are part of the practice. Don't suppress thoughts; this is not the way to harmonize the mind. Let them arise, but while simultaneously being attentive to the breath and mantra movement of ajapa.

General note

We have described the five stages of ajapa in order to prepare you for kriya yoga¹.

Ajapa is a powerful technique, especially if it is done continuously throughout the day and night. Many great yogis have attained highest stages of consciousness through this method alone. We realize that continuous practice is difficult for most people, especially those who have many responsibilities and this is nearly Jill of us. But at least try to do ajapa as much as possible, whenever you find the time. Instead

of brooding over past regrets and future problems, do ajapa. You can practise at any time . . . before sleep, before lunch, while on the bus or train to work or wherever. This will help to harmonize the mind and allow the deeper mental impressions (samskaras) to arise to conscious perception. This is the way to equanimity in life.

Notes

¹ Ajapa Japa: Stage 1 - Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 5; Stage 2 - Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 5; Stage 3 - Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 5; Stage 4 - Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have fully described the implications of the ajna chakra, together with relevant techniques. Ajna is the most difficult of the chakras to locate; we therefore suggest that you practise trataka and trikuti sandhanam as a preparation. Also try to spend a few minutes every day directing your attention to the centre of the head; this will help to develop further sensitivity to the position of ajna. You should continue to practise chakra shuddhi in

order to develop more sensitivity to the other chakras and ksbetrams. This will prepare you for kriya yoga techniques.

Continue to practise nadi shodhana combined with maha bandha¹. Don't strain.

Halasana should be integrated into your asana program. If you have time try to do some or all of the variations.

If you have mastered ajapa stage 4, then proceed to stage 5.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	15
Chakra Shuddhi	20
Trataka	15
Trikuti Sandhanam	5
Ajapajapa - Stage 5	20
	120

Program 2: duration 1 1/2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	7
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	10
Chakra Shuddhi	15
Trataka	11
Trikuti Sandhanam	5
Ajapa japa - Stage 5	10
	90

Program 3: duration 1 hour	
Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Halasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Sirshasana	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	10
Trikuti Sandhanam	8
Ajapajapa - Stage 5	14
	<hr/> 60

Program 4: duration 1/2 hour for general health	
Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Halasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Nadi Shodhana	10
<hr/>	
	30

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 4