

Lesson 32

He who is able to retain the climax becomes master over death and the knower of yoga, because the discharge of bindu brings depression and its consequences, and retention brings vitality, vigour, power, strength and concentration.

The body of the practitioner of vajroli has a nice odour. If the bindu is steady, then where is the fear of death?

The bindu which is controlled by the power of the mind bestows life, therefore, the bindu should be carefully controlled.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika (3:88-91)

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 10: NAUMUKHI MUDRA (CLOSING THE NINE GATES)

The Sanskrit word *nau* means 'nine' and *mukhi* means 'gates'. This kriya can be called 'the mudra of the nine gates'. A more widely used name, however, is 'the closing of the nine gates'.

The first nine kriyas can be classified as techniques of pratyahara (sense withdrawal). Naumukhi is the first in the group of dharana (concentration) techniques. From this stage onwards the mind becomes more and more one-pointed.

Rationale

In the human body there are nine openings or gates through which one perceives all the sense experiences of the outside world. These are: the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, the mouth, the anus and the sexual organ.

There is also a tenth gate, called the *Brahma Dwara* (the Door of Brahma), which leads to mystical or transcendental experience and realization. During mundane, everyday experience this gate is closed - all perception comes through the other nine gates. In naumukhi these nine gates are temporarily closed. This prevents external perception and helps to open up the tenth door.

Subsidiary practices

Naumukhi is made up of the following subsidiary techniques:

1. Ujjayi pranayama²
2. Khechari mudra²
3. Moola bandha³
4. Vajroli mudra
5. Shanmukhi mudra⁴

Vajroli Mudra

The word *vajroli* is derived from the word *vajra* which has various meanings and implications. In the context of vajroli mudra, vajra can be regarded as the name of a nerve which

connects the sexual organs with the brain. It is also a psychic pathway that is associated with the sushumna pathway⁵. This pathway is directly connected with the unleashing of powerful psychic forces.

There are two types of vajroli mudra - one is concerned with maithuna (sexual intercourse under prescribed conditions) and the other is a simple raja yoga form. It is the latter that is utilized in kriya yoga.

The technique is as follows:

Sit in any comfortable position.

Place the hands on the knees and relax the whole body.

Try to draw the sexual organs upwards by pulling and tensing the sexual organ and lower abdomen.

This contraction is similar to that which is made when one has the urge to urinate, but has to retain the urine for some time.

The testes in men and the vagina in women, should move slightly due to the contraction. This is the simple form of vajroli mudra.

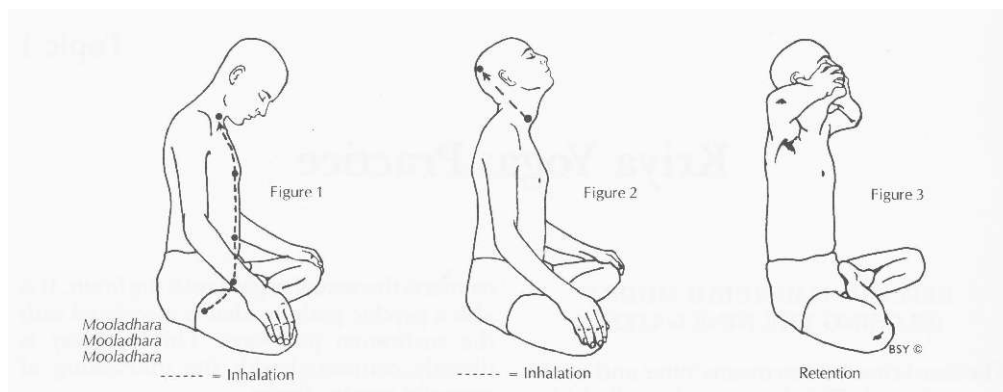
Its purpose is to convert *retas* (sexual energy) into *ojas* (highly refined pranic or psychic energy). This process is called *urdhva retas* - the sublimation of sexual energy. Prana is the essence of both ojas and retas; vajroli helps to bring about sublimation of the grosser retas into the more refined ojas.

Shanmukhi Mudra

Shanmukhi mudra⁴ can be translated as 'the attitude of the seven gates'. Before attempting naumukhi we suggest that you practise shanmukhi mudra for a few days.

Sitting position

The sitting position for naumukhi mudra is siddhasana for men, and siddha yoni asana for women⁶. These two asanas are most suitable since they apply a constant pressure at the mooladhara chakra trigger point in the area of the perineum.



If you cannot sit in one of the above asanas you can choose any other comfortable sitting pose as an alternative. If necessary you can use a cushion.

Technique

Sit in siddhasana or siddha yoni asana.

Keep the back straight but relaxed.

Close the eyes and keep them closed throughout the practice.

Do khechari mudra.

Place the hands on the knees and let the arms relax.

Exhale deeply and bend the head forwards slightly as shown in the accompanying figure 1. The first round starts here.

Fix your attention on the mooladhara chakra. Repeat 'mooladhara' mentally 3 times: 'mooladhara - mooladhara - mooladhara' while holding the breath.

Inhale with ujjayi pranayama and simultaneously move your awareness up the arohan (frontal passage) as illustrated in figure 1.

Be aware of each kshetram as you raise your awareness: swadhisthana, manipura, anahata vishuddhi.

Do not say the name mentally - only awareness of each centre.

Raise your head as your awareness passes from vishuddhi to bindu (figure 2).

Inhalation should be completed when your awareness reaches bindu.

Hold the breath.

Raise your head as your awareness passes from the face.

Practise shanmukhi mudra by closing the ears with the thumbs, the eyes with both forefingers, your nostrils with the two middle fingers and the lips with the fourth and fifth fingers (figure

3). Do not apply too much pressure with the fingers - just enough to firmly close each 'gate'. Practise moola bandha, without jalandhara bandha.

Practise vajroli mudra.

At this stage all the gates are closed.

Be aware of the awarohan (spinal passage).

Try to visualize a shining copper *trishul* (trident) in the spine with the root in mooladhara chakra and the 3 prongs extending upwards from vishuddhi chakra (figure 4).

Continue to retain the breath.

The trident will move upwards slightly of its own accord so that the central prong pierces bindu.

As it pierces bindu, mentally pronounce the mantra 'bindu bhedan' (literally: 'bindu piercing') once.

Feel that there is an explosion of the mantra in all directions from bindu (figure 5).

Then the trident will drop downwards again to the starting position shown in figure 4.

Again it will rise; once more pronounce the mantra 'bindu bhedan' as the bindu is pierced. Then it will drop again.

Feel this alternate rising and falling of the trident for as long as you can comfortably hold your breath.

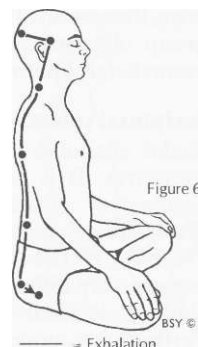
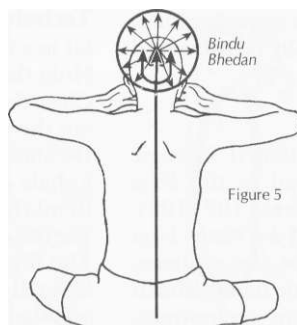
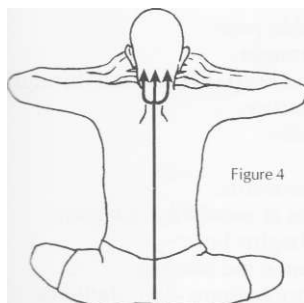
Then release vajroli mudra.

Release moola bandha.

Release the pressure of the fingers and thumbs and lower the hands to the knees.

Exhale with ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra while simultaneously moving your attention through the centres in the awarohan as follows: bindu, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara.

Be aware of each centre in turn (figure 6) - no mental repetition.



Exhalation should end at mooladhara.

Hold the breath.

Bend the head slightly forwards.

This is the end of the first round.

Start the second round immediately.

Inhale and let your awareness pass through the centres of the frontal passage and so on.

Practise 5 complete rounds.

Breathing

Ujjayi breathing throughout the practice. Hold the breath while repeating the 'mooladhara' mantra. Inhale while ascending the frontal passage. Hold the breath while visualizing the trident and repeating the 'bindu bhedan' mantra. Exhale while descending the spinal passage.

Awareness

Fix awareness on breathing, chakras and the sensations experienced during this practice. Hold the breath while repeating the 'mooladhara' mantra. Inhale while ascending the frontal passage. Hold the breath while visualizing the trident and repeating the 'bindu bhedan' mantra. Exhale while descending the spinal passage.

Number of rounds

Do 3 rounds. This should take about 5 minutes - a little more, a little less - depending on your control of breath.

Hints

- Most people will find it difficult to complete a round with one respiration. You may feel slight suffocation. In the beginning, it is best that you prematurely break the practice in the middle of the round and breathe in and out. Do not strain.
- Perhaps you can do one complete round may still feel discomfort. Under these

circumstances, we suggest that you breathe in once at the end of each round when your awareness reaches mooladhara. As you gain more control over the duration of inhalation, retention and exhalation, then this extra facility can be discarded.

After breath retention and visualization of the trident you may feel a little discomfort or difficulty in exhalation. The lungs seem to 'lock'. We have found that this problem can be overcome by inhaling slightly before exhalation.

- It is extremely important that the back be held perfectly straight all throughout this kriya. If the spine is not straight, the sensation that follows the piercing of bindu will not be perceived.
- It is also important that vajroli mudra be correctly performed, for this too heightens the sensations experienced during this practice. When vajroli mudra is perfected, the contraction of vajra nadi can be achieved without contracting the anal sphincter muscle. The sensation is like an electric current running the full length of vajra nadi to the brain.
- Try to sensitize your awareness to the point where you actually feel the piercing of bindu. The sensation is similar to an electric shock.

KRIYA 11: SHAKTI CHALINI (CONDUCTION OF PRANA)

The word *shakti* means 'energy', 'prana' or 'kundalini'; the word *chalini* means 'to move' or 'to conduct'. This kriya can therefore be called 'the conduction of prana and energy'. It is the eleventh

kriya, the second of the dharana (concentration) group of practices and should be practised immediately after naumukhi.

Scriptural references

Shakti chalini is widely mentioned in yogic scriptures. It is well described in the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* (verses 107-108), *Gherand Samhita* (3:44-50) and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:104-120). All the descriptions, however, are different; the same name, 'shakti chalini', is used for different techniques. Furthermore, none of these techniques resemble the practice of shakti chalini that is used in kriya yoga. If you are interested, we suggest that you look up these references for yourself. However, we will give a few quotations from the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*: "The kundalini is coiled and shaped like a snake. When the shakti moves then there is realization. Of this there is no doubt." (3:108) This verse indicates the importance of awakening the kundalini (shakti) using such methods as shakti chalini. However, there must be mental balance in one's being:

"The *balaranda* (kundalini) lies midway between the Ganges (ida) and Yamuna (pingala). When it moves one attains the abode of Lord Vishnu (illumination)." (3:109) This verse emphasizes that the kundalini will not awaken unless the ida and pingala are balanced. We suggest that you refer back to our previous discussion 'The Balance of Life'⁵. Without this balance the kundalini will never awaken even if you practise shakti chalini or any other yogic technique for the next twenty years.

Subsidiary practices

To practise shakti chalini you should know the following techniques:

1. Khechhari mudra²
2. Ujjayi pranayama²
3. Shanmukhi mudra⁴

The position of the fingers and hands for shanmukhi mudra is illustrated in figure 3.

Sitting position

Sit in siddhasana or siddha yoni asana¹. If you cannot sit in one of these two asanas sit in any other comfortable asana.

You should remain in the same sitting position that you utilized for naumukhi; there is no need to move one's physical position or to open the eyes.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Hold the back straight.

Close the eyes and keep them closed throughout the entire practice.

Do khechhari mudra.

Exhale deeply.

Bend the head forwards.

Fix the awareness at mooladhara chakra.

The first round begins here.

Mentally pronounce the mantra

'mooladhara - mooladhara - mooladhara'.

Then inhale with ujjayi pranayama letting your awareness ascend the frontal (arohan) passage.

You should be aware of each centre in turn as follows: swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi.

There should be a smooth flow of awareness (figure 1) - no mental pronunciation.

Raise your head as the awareness moves from vishuddhi to bindu (figure 2).

Inhalation should cease on reaching bindu.

Hold the breath.

Practise shanmukhi mudra, closing the eyes, ears, nose and lips with the fingers and thumbs (figure 3).

Allow your awareness to rotate in a continuous circle through the avarohan (spinal passage) and the arohan (frontal passage).

Simultaneously try to visualize a thin green snake moving in the same closed loop.

Continue to hold your breath.

The snake should move downwards from bindu to mooladhara in the spinal passage and then upwards from mooladhara to bindu in the frontal passage.

The movement of the snake should be integrated with the movement of your awareness. The snake should make a complete loop (figure 3).

Visualize the snake as biting its own tail.

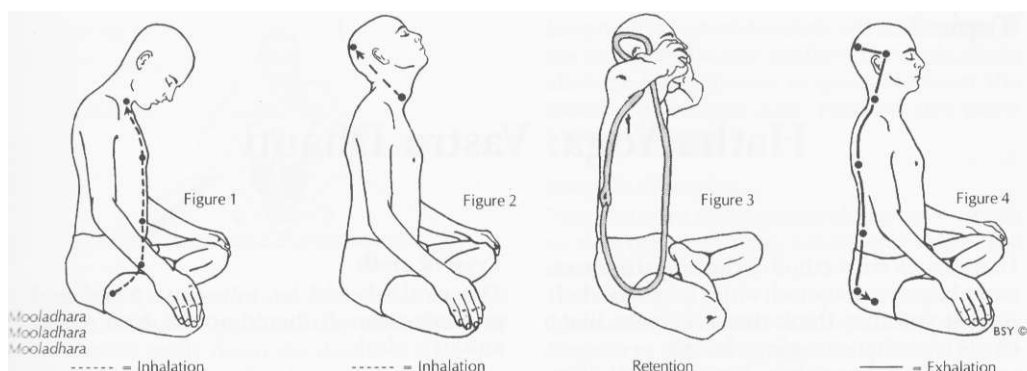
Let the snake move in a continuous circle; if it starts to move on a different track, let it - only watch.

It may appear to spin off away from the avarohan - arohan circuit, let it. Only remain aware.

Continue this visualization for as long as you can comfortably hold your breath, but don't strain.

Then release shanmukhi mudra and place the hands on the knees.

Fix your awareness on bindu.



Exhale with ujjayi while being aware of each centre in the avarohan as follows: ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara.

Only be aware of each centre - no mental repetition (figure 4). Exhalation should be terminated when your awareness reaches mooladhara.

Lower your head forwards. This is the end of the first round.

Immediately start the second round.

Mentally repeat the 'mooladhara' mantra 3 times.

Then, with ujjayi inhalation, raise your awareness through the centres of the arohan passage. Do 5 complete rounds.

Breathing

Ujjayi breathing throughout the practice. Hold the breath while repeating the 'mooladhara' mantra. Inhale while ascending the arohan passage. Hold the breath while visualizing the movement of the internal snake. Exhale while descending the avarohan passage.

Hints

When this kriya is mastered then 5 rounds should be the equivalent of 5 complete respirations. In the beginning, however, this is not easy. We suggest that you follow the instructions that we have listed under this heading in the description of the previous kriya, naumukhi mudra.

Awareness

Be aware of the breathing, the centres in the arohan and avarohan, the 'mooladhara' mantra, the physical movement of the head,

the raising and lowering of the hands and the visualization of the psychic snake.

Visualization

If you practise shakti chalini alone, then you may find it difficult to visualize the snake. If, however, you first of all practise the preceding ten kriyas you will find that visualization is much easier. The snake seems to appear naturally. If you cannot visualize the snake, don't worry - with time and practice you will.

Number of rounds

Do 5 rounds. This takes approximately 5 minutes according to your capacity to retain the breath and control exhalation and inhalation.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 31, Topic 3

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

⁴ Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 5

⁵ For further details of the sushumna pathway refer to Balance of Life: Part 1 - Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1; Part 2 - Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

⁶ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Hatha Yoga: Vastra Dhauti

Vastra dhauti is a method of cleaning the throat, oesophagus and stomach with a length of cloth. At first you may think that it is more like a circus trick than a yogic technique as it seems unnatural and unsightly. You may feel disinclined to practice it. But it gives many benefits. For this reason we strongly suggest that you try to master it. We specifically recommend *vastra dhauti* for those who suffer from asthma.

Definition

The word *vastra* means 'cloth' and *dhauti* means 'cleansing' or 'washing'. Therefore, *vastra dhauti* is a technique for cleaning the digestive system with cloth.

It is also known by various other names. These include: *vas dhauti* (washing with a cloth), *dhauti kriya* (cleansing technique) and *dhauti karma* (cleaning technique).

Scriptural references

Most traditional texts on hatha yoga mention *vastra dhauti*. The *Gherand Samhita* says: "Take a long fine cloth which is two inches in length. Swallow it gradually and then take it out again. This is known as *dhauti kriya*." (1:41) "*Vastra dhauti* cures tumour, fever, kidney trouble, leprosy, cough, catarrh and bile trouble. It keeps the body free of disease and strong. It helps to develop the body." (1:42)

It seems that the great yogi Gherand had a very high regard for *vastra dhauti*.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* says: "According to the guru's instructions take a wet cloth four fingers in width and fifteen feet in length. Swallow it and then remove it again. This is known as *dhauti karma*." (2:24) The text continues: "The afflictions of twenty types of diseases such as cough, asthma, leprosy, etc. can be completely removed. Of this there is no doubt." (2:25)

We don't know the specific names of all twenty diseases, but we can vouch for its efficacy in treating asthma.

Type of cloth

The cloth should be soft, unstarched and perfectly clean. It should not be dyed. White muslin is ideal.

Length of cloth

Beginners should cut a length of cloth that is about 2 1/2 cms wide and 3 metres long. When you can do the practise then the width and length can be gradually increased. After a few months the width can be about 5 or 6 cms, and the length about 6 1/2 metres. However, such a long cloth should only be used under expert guidance, and after regular practice with a shorter cloth.

Make sure that all frayed edges and loose thread are removed before starting.

Preparation

The cloth should be placed in a mug or bowl of lukewarm water. If you wish you can use salt water, but it is not essential. This will keep the cloth wet so that it slips smoothly down the oesophagus into the stomach.

Some people soak the cloth in milk, or even sweetened milk. If you find that this makes the cloth more palatable, and the practice easier, then try it.

Sitting pose

If your legs are reasonably flexible, then sit in a squatting position. Otherwise sit on a low stool or chair. The position is clearly illustrated in the following figure.

VASTRA DHAUTI

Sit in a comfortable position. Place the cup containing the cloth and water on the floor between the two feet. Then start stage 1.

Stage 1: ingestion

Take one end of the cloth, leaving the other end immersed in the water.



Fold the 2 corners of the end of the cloth so that it is slightly pointed; this will allow it to pass more easily down the throat. Place the pointed end of the cloth in the mouth. With one finger push it towards the back of the tongue.

Hold the cloth with the index (second) finger and the thumb of each hand as shown below. Imagine that the cloth is food, perhaps a long, thick strand of spaghetti.

Chew the cloth thoroughly as though it is food; this will induce copious secretions of saliva so that the cloth can slide into the stomach.

But do not chew the cloth too roughly with the teeth or it will shred and become frayed.

Try to swallow the end of the cloth.

If necessary sip some water from the cup.

Feed more of the cloth into the mouth as the end gradually goes down the oesophagus; but do not feed it too quickly or it will bunch up in the mouth and make the practice difficult if not impossible.

Gradually the cloth should slip down the throat.

The first part of the practice is the most difficult; that is, swallowing the cloth from the mouth to the point where the windpipe joins the oesophagus in the throat.

You may start to retch a little; if so, stop for a short period until the spasms cease and then continue to swallow the cloth again.

Remember: you must chew the cloth in order to produce saliva to act as a lubricant; without chewing you will find the practice impossible. Simultaneously you must swallow the cloth. Drink some more water from the cup if it is necessary.

You will find that the practice becomes easy when the end of the cloth has passed the junction of the windpipe and oesophagus; it will slide smoothly into the stomach almost as fast as you can swallow.

Eventually most of the cloth will accumulate in the stomach. Do not swallow the whole cloth; allow at least 30 cms to protrude from the mouth. When you have reached this point proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: churning

Now you must massage and churn the stomach so that the cloth rubs, scrubs and cleans the stomach walls.

Do nauli¹.

Alternatively you can practise agnisar kriya².

Beginners should agitate the stomach for no more than 1 minute. Adept can practise for up to 3 minutes. Then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: withdrawal

Now the cloth must be removed from the stomach.

Hold the free end of the cloth.

Pull the cloth, but do not pull too hard or you may damage the delicate walls of the stomach and the oesophagus.

You should pull gently but firmly.

At first you may feel some resistance to the withdrawal of the cloth; after a few seconds this resistance will disappear and the cloth can be easily extracted.

Let the cloth fall into the cup.

Remove the whole cloth to complete the practice.

Advice for beginners

You are not likely to master vastra dhauti on the first day. It may take a few days or even a few weeks before you are able to swallow the cloth. It is strange but true that the less you try the easier it becomes; the more you relax the more easily the cloth will go down the throat. If you forget that the cloth is a piece of cloth and merely swallow, then the cloth will automatically drop into the stomach. Do not hurry, take your time.

Practise for about ten minutes whether you can swallow the cloth or not. Practise every day. After a few days you will become accustomed to the cloth entering the throat. When your mind accepts the idea then it is a short step to mastering the technique.

Warning

- Do not leave the cloth in the stomach for more than fifteen to twenty minutes,

otherwise it may start to enter the intestinal tract.

- Do not swallow the entire cloth. Leave about thirty centimetres hanging from the mouth.

Reuse of cloth

The same cloth can be used again and again. After the practice, thoroughly wash the cloth, dry it and then store it in a safe, clean place.

Time of practice

Practise when the stomach is empty. The best time is before breakfast.

After completing the practice wait for at least half an hour before eating breakfast. This period will ensure that sufficient mucus has been secreted to protect the linings of the stomach and esophagus.

Regularity

Practise once a week for general health and cleaning of the digestive tract. Practise every day until you master the technique.

Supplementary practices

For the fullest benefits we suggest that you also do kunjal kriya³ and jala neti⁴. These should be done after completing vastra dhauti. Vastra dhauti scrapes the impurities from the walls, while kunjal expels the impurities. Jala neti tones up the nasal system.

Benefits

The cloth thoroughly scrubs the stomach walls. It stimulates the digestive juices and the peristalsis. It invigorates the entire body. If you refer to quotations that we have given under the heading 'Scriptural References' you will see that it is recommended for a wide number of ailments. From our experience we have found the practice useful in treating acidity, indigestion, bronchitis and asthma.

Alleviation of asthma

If you suffer from asthma you should do vastra dhauti every day as a preventive and curative measure. It is simple but effective. Many sufferers of asthma have gained much relief using this method.

Asthma is an ailment of the respiratory system - vastra dhauti acts directly on the digestive system. Possibly the swallowing of the cloth activates nerve reflexes in the

digestive tract and brain. These in turn cause a chain reaction, which somehow brings about a relaxation of the congestion in the lungs. One thing we are certain about is that it works

Notes

¹ Nauli: Part 1 - Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 3; Part 2 - Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 1

⁴ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Asanas: Practice

The following two forward bending asanas are advanced asanas that require a reasonable degree of flexibility in the legs and spine.

1. Koormasana
2. Eka pada sirasana

Before attempting them you should master other forward bending asanas such as paschimottanasana¹, janu sirshasana² and ardha padma paschimottanasana². They should not be attempted by beginners.

KOORMASANA (TORTOISE POSE)

The word *koorma* means 'tortoise'. This asana can thus be translated as 'the tortoise pose'. It is so called because it resembles a tortoise in the final position; the back of the body representing the shell, and the arms and legs the four limbs. If you look at the accompanying picture you will see that this is a fair description.

The tortoise symbolizes pratyahara (sense withdrawal). The *Bhagavad Gita* states: "When he (the yogic aspirant) can withdraw his senses from association with the other objects like a tortoise withdraws its limbs from outside danger, then he is firmly fixed on the path towards wisdom". (2:58) Koormasana symbolizes this state of pratyahara; moreover, it can also help to induce this state. That is, the asana can be practised to stabilize the mind and direct awareness inwards away from the external world.

Technique

Proceed slowly through each stage, especially stage 3.

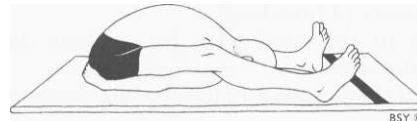
Stage 1: starting position

Sit on the ground with the two legs pointing forwards.

Separate the feet by about half a metre, more if possible.

Bend the legs upwards at the knees.

The two heels should remain in contact with



the floor throughout the whole practice. Keep the eyes open.

Stage 2: leaning forwards

Breathe out deeply.

Lean forward and place the hands under the knees, palms facing either upwards or downwards.

Lean further forwards and slowly slide the arms under the two legs.

You can bend the knees further upwards if necessary.

The arms should slide sideways and backwards until the elbows lie near the back of the knees. Breathe normally for a short time allowing the spine to relax.

Then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: attaining the final pose

During this stage it is important that the spine remains passive; do not tense the back muscles.

Breathe out deeply.

Slowly push the heels forward and straighten the legs; simultaneously the body should bend further forwards as you apply leverage on the arms with the legs. Do not strain.

This process should be progressive.

After leaning forwards slightly, breathe in and relax the body.

Then breathe in again and bend a little further forwards, hold your body position and then inhale and relax the whole body.

Repeat this process until your forehead touches or nearly touches the floor between the two legs.

Only bend forward as far as you feel comfortable; don't force or you will injure the spine.

If you are able you can rest your chin on the floor.

Then fold the arms around the back and interlock the fingers of both hands under the buttocks.

This is the final position.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Close the eyes.

Be aware of breathing.

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

Then slowly return to the starting position.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Breathe in as you lean forward. Breathe out as you relax the body. Breathe deeply and slowly in the final pose.

Be aware of relaxing the spine and synchronizing the breath with the forward bend. In the final pose be aware of breathing.

You can practise koormasana for as long as you wish providing there is no strain.

Time of practice

Do not practise after taking food; wait for at least three hours. The best time is early in the morning, before breakfast, and late in the afternoon, before the evening meal.

Restrictions

People who suffer from the following ailments should not attempt to do koormasana:

- slipped disc
- sciatica
- hernia

You must use your discretion; only practise the asana if you are certain that your spine is sufficiently flexible.

Counterpose

Any backward bending asana can be done immediately before or after koormasana. We suggest bhujangasana³, matsyasana or supta vajrasana⁴.

Benefits

This asana gives the general benefits of other forward bending asanas. It loosens up the vertebrae of the spine and tones the spinal nerves. It massages and improves the functional efficiency of the abdominal organs. It is specifically recommended for relieving consti-

pation and backache, and for inducing mental relaxation.

ERA PADA SIRASANA (ONE FOOT TO HEAD POSE)

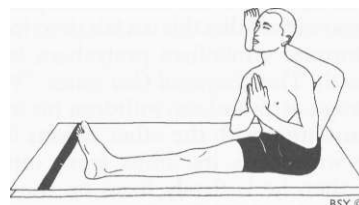
In Sanskrit the word *eka* means 'one', 'single'; *pada* means 'foot' and *sira* means 'head'. The name of this asana can be translated as 'the single foot head pose'. It is so called because one foot is placed behind the head in the final position.

This asana is also called *eka pada sirshasana* where the word *sirsha* means the same as *sira*, that is head.

It may not seem like a forward bending asana from the point of view of the final body position. However, instead of bending the trunk forward onto one leg, the one leg is pulled backwards behind the trunk; this really amounts to the same thing. Because the benefits of this asana are essentially the same as many other forward bending asanas, we have classified it accordingly.

Technique

Do not force any stage, particularly the last.



Stage 1: starting position

Sit on the floor with the two legs straight in front of the body.

Bend the left leg slightly.

Hold the left foot with the right hand, the fingers placed in the region of the ankle, the palm in contact with the outside of the foot. Wrap the fingers of the left hand around the left leg slightly above the ankle; the left arm should be positioned so that the elbow lies between the thigh and the lower leg.

This is the starting position.

Stage 2: raising the leg

Raise the left leg using the two arms and hands. As you raise the leg bend the trunk forwards and twist slightly to the right.

Try to place the left leg on top of the left shoulder. Do not strain.
Proceed to stage 3 if you can place your leg on your shoulder.

Stage 3: attaining the final pose

Release the grip of the left hand.
Place the left arm under the left thigh so that the hand points towards the buttocks.
Raise the left leg higher by using the right arm and by pushing the left thigh to the back with the left arm. Do not strain.
Try to place the left foot behind the head at the nape of the neck.
This should be achieved by bending the head forwards under the calf muscle which then rests on the shoulder.
If you are feeling comfortable, place your hands together in front of the chest.
TIT to straighten the spine and hold the head upright.
This is the final pose.
Breathe slowly and deeply. Close the eyes.
Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable.
Then slowly release the left leg and return to the starting position.
Repeat the same procedure with the right leg.

Breathing and awareness

Normal breathing while moving the body into the final pose. Breathe deeply and slowly in the final pose. Be aware of breathing in the final pose.

Restrictions, duration, time of practice and counterpose

These details are as for koormasana.

Benefits

Eka pada sirasana compresses each side of the abdomen in turn. This gives the internal organs a thorough massage and is very useful for removing constipation and stimulating peristalsis. For fullest benefits you should raise the right leg first so that the massage is applied in the same order as the movement of faeces.

Practice of this asana applies a powerful massage to the sexual organs, helping to improve their efficiency and remove malfunctions.

When done regularly, eka pada sirasana has been found useful in improving the blood

circulation in the legs and relieving varicose veins.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

² Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 3

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

⁴ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 4

Topic 5

Pranayama: Surya Bheda Pranayama

Surya bheda pranayama is concerned with stimulating and awakening energy within the physical and pranic bodies. The practice can be described as a psychic supercharger. The word *surya* means 'sun' and *bheda* means 'to pierce', 'to awaken'. The sun represents pingala nadi (the pranic pathway associated with energy in the human framework) and the flow of the breath through the right nostril.

There are various alternative methods; we will describe three. You can choose one of these practices according to your preference.

Scriptural references

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* states: "The aspirant should sit in a comfortable pose and breathe in through the right nostril until he feels pressure build up to the hairs and fingertips. Then he should exhale through the left nostril." (2:48, 49)

This is one method. We do not suggest that you hold your breath until you feel 'pressure build up to the hairs and fingertips'; hold it only for as long as you feel comfortable. Long retentions should only be done under very strict conditions of practice, perfect health and cleanliness of the body-mind, and under the guidance of a teacher. The scripture gives clear instructions about this in previous verses. The text continues: "Surya bheda pranayama should be practised again and again. It will purify the frontal part of the brain, remove all kinds of wind problems and eradicate bacteria within the body." (2:50)

Surya bheda pranayama is also described in the *Gherand Samhita*, although the technique is slightly different: "I am going to discuss surya bheda pranayama with kumbhaka (breath retention). Please listen carefully. Inhale air through the surya (right) nostril as deeply as possible. Retain the breath inside. Do jalandhara bandha. Continue to do kumbhaka for as long as you can until sweat starts to come from the tips of the hair and fingers." (5:57, 58)

Again we do not advise you to hold your breath for prolonged periods of time without the personal guidance of a teacher.

The description continues in later verses: "During surya bheda you should feel as if the inhaled breath is ascending from the navel region. You should slowly breathe out through the left nostril. Again inhale through the right nostril, hold the breath, then breathe out through the left nostril. Repeat the process over and over again." (5:65, 66)

This practice is slightly different to that given in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* in that it includes jalandhara bandha and awareness of the upward flow of breath from the navel. The practice that we generally teach in the ashram is also slightly different as you will see when we describe the techniques. All these techniques, however, bring about essentially the same benefits.

Technique 1

This is the method described in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Hold the spine and head erect but without tension.

Place the hands on the knees.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Let the breathing become deeper.

Now start the practice of surya bheda.

Raise your right hand in front of the face in nasagra mudra¹.

Place the index (second) and middle (third) fingers on the forehead with the ring (fourth) finger and thumb on either side of the nose.

Close the left nostril with the ring finger. Inhale slowly and deeply through the right nostril.

At the end of inhalation, close both nostrils with the ring finger and thumb.

Hold your breath for a comfortable length of time.

Do not strain.

Then release the pressure of the ring finger.

Breathe out slowly through the left nostril.
This is 1 round.

Do as many rounds as available time permits.

Technique 2

This is the method described in the *Gherand Samhita*.

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Make the preparations described in technique 1.

Then inhale deeply through the right nostril, trying to imagine that the breath is being drawn up from the reservoir of energy in the navel region.

You should feel the inhaled breath recharging the whole body.

Feel that the whole body is expanding.

At the end of inhalation close both nostrils.

Hold the breath and do jalandhara bandha².

After a comfortable period of retention, release lalandhara bandha and raise your head.

Release the pressure of the ring finger and breathe out through the left nostril.

One round is completed at the end of exhalation. Do more rounds.

Technique 3

This is the method that we teach in the ashram. Repeat technique 1 as far as retention of the breath.

Then do both jalandhara bandha² and moola bandha³.

Hold the breath while doing the two bandhas for as long as you feel comfortable.

Then release the two bandhas and raise the head. Breathe out slowly through the right nostril (not the left as given in the previous practices).

At the end of exhalation start the second round.

Breathe in through the right nostril, hold the breath, do the bandhas; then release the bandhas and breathe out through the right nostril. Do more rounds.

Awareness

Maintain awareness of breath and the mechanics of the practice.

Duration and time of practice

Sun a bheda gives many benefits if done for a prolonged period of time. However, it can cause more harm than good if your body-mind is not sufficiently purified. We therefore

suggest that you practise for no more than twenty minutes at one stretch.

The best time to practise is early in the morning before breakfast. Do not practise after food because you will interfere with the natural energy flow associated with digestion.

Benefits

The three variations seem to be quite different, especially the third technique. But actually they give very similar benefits. They awaken energy in the body and increase vitality; they are especially recommended for those people who are habitually lethargic. The practice should not be done, however, if the lethargy is due to illness. Surya bheda pranayama will help transform *tamas* (lethargy) into *rajas* (dynamism). This will help to make the mind more alert and perceptive, and will be a great help in meditative practice.

Notes

¹ Book I Lesson 3, Topic 4

² Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

³ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

Daily Practice Program

We suggest four programs: two for kriya yoga practice and two for general yoga practice.

Program 1 is for people who have sufficient time to practise all the kriyas every day; that is, kriyas 1 to 11 that we have so far introduced.

Program 2 is for those who want to do kriya yoga practice but who have limited time. This group should practise as many kriyas as they can, starting from vipareeta karani mudra (kriya 1) and proceeding through the other kriyas in turn. No kriyas should be cut, either partly or wholly. As many should be done as time allows.

Programs 3 and 4 are general yoga practice programs for durations of 1 hour and 1/2 hour

respectively. They do not contain kriya yoga practices and are for those people who honestly feel that they are not ready for serious practise of kriya yoga. If you are not sure of your readiness then we advise you to read our two previous discussions on kriya yoga practice¹.

In this lesson we have described two new kriyas: naumukhi and shakti chalini. Integrate them into your daily practice if you have time for program 1; otherwise omit them.

Try vastra dhauti, especially if you suffer from asthma, surya bheda pranayama especially if you lack vitality, and koormasana and eka pada sirasana if you are sufficiently flexible in body.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 hour 58 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
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Program 2: shortened kriya practice according to available time. Do as many of the above kriyas given in program 1 as you can starting from no. 1. Do not omit any kriya wholly or partly.

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general health	
Surva Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Surya Bheda Pranayama	
(or any pranayama of your choice)	10
Antar Mouna (or any other meditative practice)	20
	<hr/> 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
Surya Bheda Pranayama	
(or any pranayama of your choice)	6
	<hr/> 30

Notes

Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 2
and Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 2

