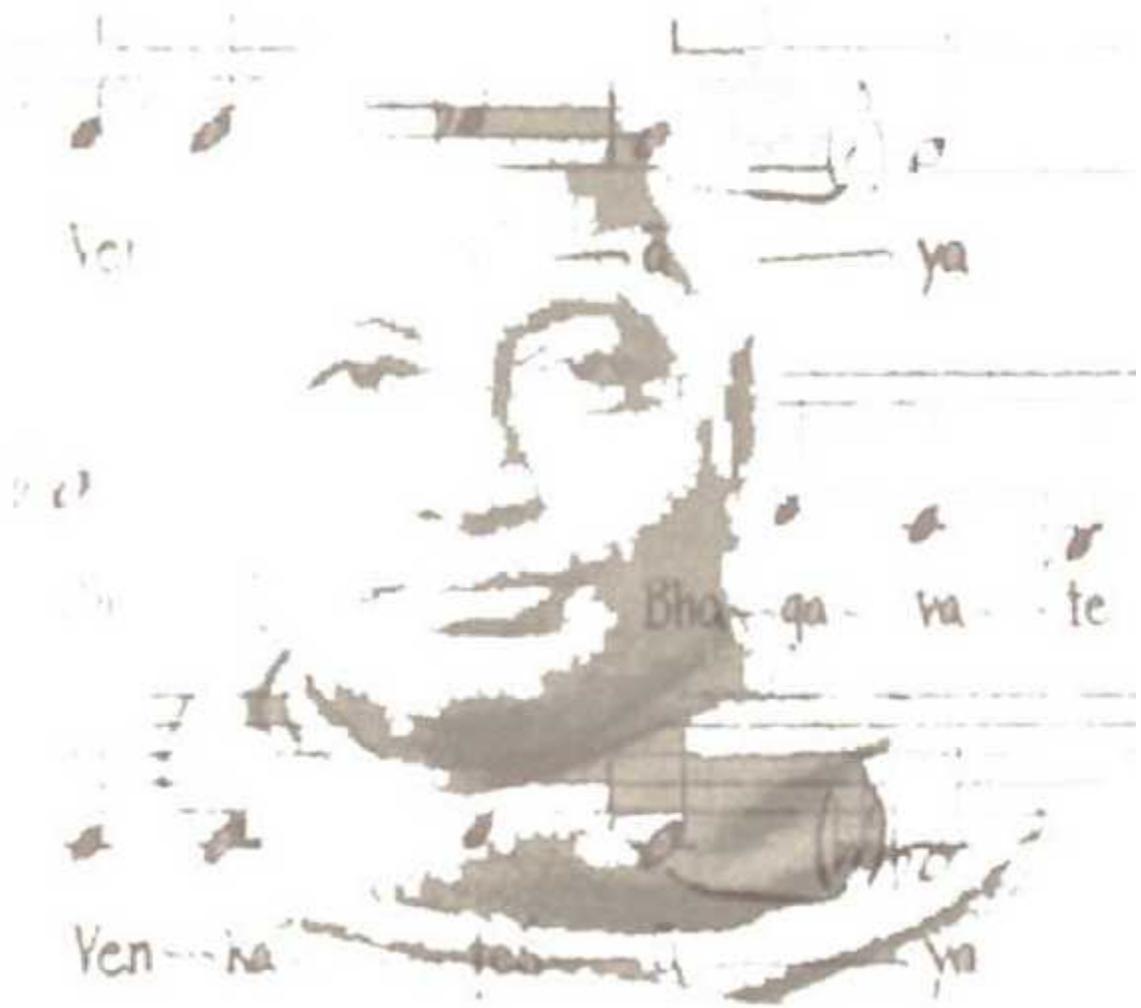




Yasodhara Yoga Talks 1975
Hatha Yoga

Swami Venkatesananda



Om Namah Venkatesaya
Om Namah Shivaya

Yasodhara Yoga Talks

HATHA YOGA

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This series of talks was given at Yasodhara Ashram in British Columbia in the Spring of 1975.

Swami Venkatesananda regarded these as Swami Sivananda's Integral Yoga.

Over the course of 10 weeks, Swami Venkatesananda spoke for roughly 20 hours on each of the five major branches of yoga - Hatha, Bhakti, Karma, Raja, and Jnana, devoting 10 hours to formal talks in the morning, and 10 hours to questions and answers during the afternoons on each of these topics.

One discovers in the course of listening to these talks that the five are not separate paths; that each branch of yoga incorporates elements of the so called 'different' paths. While many people often focus on just one branch of yoga, one cannot escape the realization that it would be far better to assimilate them all in some fashion in order to create a balanced approach to sadhana or 'spiritual practice.'

Swami Sivananda taught that the aim of this integration - Integral Yoga or the Yoga of Synthesis - is to avoid becoming lopsided. In so doing, the aspirant nurtures the whole being. As demonstrated in the lives of both Swami Sivananda and his disciple, Swami Venkatesananda, the words 'whole' and 'holy' are completely interchangeable.

Yasodhara 1975 - Hatha Yoga

April 15 - The Non-Haphazard Flow of Chit-Shakti

Consciousness and energy 'Chit-Shakti' are not two different things. The substance and its nature cannot be separated, just as God and its nature cannot be separated. Venkatesananda leads us into the mystery of the 'apparent individuality' - the notion of the 'I' and 'I' and the notion of the Jiva, the individualized soul, with a discussion of prana and the kundalini (spiral) energy and its beginning point (bindu) - the 'kama' or 'desire to know' resulting in a movement of energy in consciousness. While this movement is capable of returning to or finding its source (a circle), it commonly 'misses' its starting point (spirals out and away) creating or super-imposing in its path the notion of 'my mind' and 'the world.' Here Swami Venkatesananda explains that the entire Hatha yoga 'practice' lies in reversing this movement of energy, so that instead of haphazard erratic movement, the energy is 'gathered in' until eventually the polarization of consciousness and energy is overcome and the Source is realized for once and for all.

April 15 - Q/A Session: The Bindu, The Circle and the Spiral - The Kundalini Spiral

This Q/A (this particular disc) begins with a question the kundalini energy. This allows Swami Venkatesananda to continue His discussion of the spiraling of the kundalini energy discussed in the previous talk.

Here you find a fascinating description of both sides (the macrocosmic and microcosmic) of the spiraling of energy in consciousness.

April 16 - Prana

Just as Chitshakti and its movement back its source can be regarded as central to all of yoga, 'prana,' can be regarded as central to concept of Hatha yoga. And just as energy cannot be grasped except by how 'acts' through its many vehicles, prana cannot be known except by its functions. Swami Venkatesananda attempts to provide teachers and students with this often neglected overview of prana, and introduces us to the various functions of prana: prana, apana, sumana, udana, and vyanaya.

April 16 - Prana Q/A

How do we gain prana and lose prana? Here Swami Venkatesananda discusses the effects of the ego and non-ego centered activity. Various other aspects on this topic are discussed: the effect of the emotions on prana, the effect of self-knowledge, sex and what is known as 'tantra.'

April 17 - Purificatory Practices

Swami Venkatesananda continues his discussion of the problem of 'forgetfulness', explaining that identification with the physical world happens immediately upon losing (or forgetting) our true identity. He points out that main Hatha yoga texts, The Hatha Yoga Pradipika are meant to prepare students for meditation. It is towards that end that The Hatha Yoga Pradipika, mentions certain 'purificatory practices.' And likewise, the Gheranda Samhita, which discusses the Sat-Kriyas, asana, mudra, pratyahara, pranayama, dhyana, and samadhi. These are all meant for the purpose of regaining one's true identity, not merely as physical culture or physical betterment.

Continuing on the same track, Swami Venkatesananda continues with the six purificatory practices, dhauti, vasti, neti, tratakam, nauli and kapalabhati, for those in pursuit of the practice of pranayama.

April 25 - Contemplation of the Sound

This 'contemplation of the sound' or what has been described as the culmination of the Hatha yoga practices can only be undertaken if the nadis are pure, for then, and only then can the nada be 'heard.' Swami Venkatesananda makes it clear that pranayama is the starting point for these purificatory practices, but indulges us by reading a description from the Gheranda Samhita of the three forms of meditation that can be said to be the final 'steps' on the traditional path of Hatha Yoga.

April 25 - Concluding Discussion

Bringing us back to the discussion of the movement of energy in consciousness, Swami Venkatesananda reminds us that the life force is indivisible, and cosmic, and forever non-individualized. Many topics re-emerge in this final discussion, including a few new ones that will be explored further in the Karma, Bhakti, Raja and Jnana talks of this same series of talks given at Yasodhara in 1975.

Yoga Vasistha devotees will be interested to know that the fascinating topic of 'accidental coincidence' or Kakitalaya Nyana is also mentioned.

WHERE DOES HATHA FIT

What, basically, does 'yoga' mean? And, how does hatha yoga fit into the total scheme of yoga? For obvious reasons, we give to this word 'yoga' our own interpretation. If you look up the word 'yoga' in a large Sanskrit dictionary, you will find from two hundred to twelve hundred meanings. If you pick up a dictionary of moderate size, you will find at least ten or twelve completely different meanings. One meaning with which most of you are familiar is the word 'yoke', to bring together, to join. Two completely different and dissimilar things cannot come together. Only two things which are basically and fundamentally identical can ever become one.

This is fundamental to the whole concept of yoga, because we are not bringing together two things that are dissimilar. I am sure that you have read or heard someone say that 'Yoga is the union of the Supreme Soul, the union of the individual self with the Supreme Self, the union of the individual will with God's will, the union of the jiva with God', and so on and so forth. If these unions were between two completely and dissimilar things, they could never come together. And so, I hope you see that the basic concept of yoga is to discover the harmony, or the unity that already exists.

Yoga is the unity, or the harmony, or the oneness, that exists already. You and I are one. Can we discover that? I think that even in our own domestic or social relationships, if we proceed from there, from this understanding, life will be easier. If we avoid placing emphasis on what appears to be the dissimilarities, we will not have to battle to become one. We can look for the harmony instead of trying to reject the disharmony which does not even exist. If we start from the premise that you and I are different, the premise that you and I shall never become one, then we will not even begin to examine the disharmony, the ill will, or the conflict that appears to exist between us.

If you and I are one, why is it that there appears to be this disharmony? If God and I are fundamentally and basically one, then what is it that makes it appear that there is a fracture or division? Unless you understand this also, you cannot realize oneness. What has brought about disharmony, conflict? If God is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient, how is it that you are just a small little individual thing?

The easiest way to understand this is to use the example of a blackboard. On it, write the word 'me'. Where you have written that word is the only place where the blackness or the omnipresence does not seem to exist. You can wipe off the white chalk and the blackboard is black one again, because the blackness was there all the time. In this example of the constantly homogeneous blackboard is found the exact meaning of the word 'yoga'. In this omnipresence, in this cosmic being, a concept of 'me' has arisen.

The 'me' is not true, not real. If you accept it as true, then you do not even attempt to wipe it off. It is like accepting that the blackboard is no longer black at the spot where the 'me' is written in chalk. The blackness cannot be taken away with white chalk. You have merely done what in Yoga and Vedanta is called superimposition.

In other words, a concept has been superimposed upon this omnipresence, superimposed upon this oneness, and so, for the time being, homogeneity seems to have been disturbed. Yet the homogeneity is always there. Wipe off that word 'me', and the blackboard springs back to its real nature. Similarly, like the blackness of the blackboard which persists unchanged behind and underneath this word 'me' that is printed in white chalk, there is something which is beyond the 'me', beyond the ego ego-sense, beyond all thought, beyond all concepts. And hatha yoga must enable me to discover the self, which is beyond the 'me'.

How do I know that such a thing exists? A simple answer given by one of the great masters is 'Examine your own sleep'. During sleep, you were there; life went on. The movement of energy was still there, consciousness was still there. If someone tickled your foot, you withdrew it. You say, 'But I was not aware'. Quite right: 'I' need not be aware. Something is there, something that is beyond the 'I', beyond the 'me', beyond the ego-sense, and that some-thing is the truth for all time to come. Why is it not true for us now? What happened when sleep came to an end? You became aware that you were lying in bed. A desire arises - we do not know from where, and suddenly there is an apparent loss of oneness when the ego-sense interferes with this homogeneity. From there on, all problems start, including the problems that concern this body.

At that point, you begin to think: 'This is my body ... and ... I must begin to look after it'. Can you already see the confusion here? For instance, I pat myself on the chest and say, 'This is Swami Venkatesananda'. - which suggests that this body is Swami Venkatesananda, while at the very same time, I also say, 'I must look after this body'. There is a dichotomy here. If this body is Swami Venkatesananda, then it should know how to look after itself. But suddenly, I turn around and say, 'This is my body, and I must look after it'. It shows that the relationship between oneself and the body has not been clearly understood. You are left with this puzzle: Is the body me, or is it mine?

What is known as hatha yoga is meant to enable us to see that the body can jolly well look after itself. There is something in the body, activating it, intelligently making it function, that is looking after it.

I have a little trick that will demonstrate this. Ask your friend to stand on the edge of a chair, as close to the edge of the chair as possible. You will see that his legs, feet, and toes soon start quivering in order to keep him from falling off the chair. That movement is being done in spite of him. If he tries to stop it, it gets worse. If, while standing on the chair, your friend is able to see: 'My God, I want

to stop this', but the legs say, 'No, sorry, we know what to do', then that is already yoga. If all the yoga postures are done in that spirit of watching, then suddenly you discover that intelligence - which sustained you during sleep, and which is the same intelligence that made your friends feet tremble on the chair - is beyond the 'me', beyond the ego-sense, beyond the mind. That is all hatha yoga is.

It is this discovery which really promotes health, not all the pushing and tugging and chugging which people bring into what they call hatha yoga. Swami Sivananda's own unique teaching was that even if you are only able to practice a few yoga postures, practice them with such tremendous inner awareness that you will discover the God within which is beyond the 'me'. The awareness is only meant as a door. Do not get shut in by it. Get out through it. I must be aware, and when aware, I must be able to look beyond the 'me'. If that is done, then, of course, even a few yoga postures will do. Swami Sivananda insisted: Practice yoga asanas ... without undo exertion. When it came to pranayama, His motto was: Inhale as long as comfortable. Exhale as long as comfortable. Hold as long as comfortable.

One word is not more important than another. One can inhale and exhale quite comfortably, but do not leave out the 'for as long as' aspect, the part which has you reach out towards your potential. You can prolong the inhalation, prolong the holding, and prolong the exhalation without making it uncomfortable, neither trying to kill yourself, nor allowing yourself to be too soft. Swami Sivananda's attitude was that all the practices of hatha yoga could be done as contemplation, as meditation, in such a way that they may discover the power and the intelligence which is beyond the 'me'.

If there is some kind of manifestation of Divine Grace in this world, it is seen in what is called the 'unconscious'. I do not know if you have ever thought about this, namely that there is no such thing in this world as 'unbearable pain'. Whatever pain we experience in this world is bearable. Should it go beyond that threshold, we are knocked unconscious. That to me is proof positive of Grace, and proof positive of what we have just been discussing: the reservoir of power, of intelligence, beyond the 'me'. When intelligence knows that the conscious mind cannot take any more of the troubles of life, it makes you go unconscious. It probably can even stop the flow of life in the body.

Viewed in this light, pain, unconsciousness, and even death, can be regarded as a manifestation of the intelligence of life. If that view is taken, pain and sickness need not necessarily be symptoms of either weakness or 'sin', or anything, not even the thing called karmic retribution. Thus, pain can merely be the sign that the intelligence of the body is so alert that, like a watchdog, it starts barking. Why not?

Unfortunately, the ego will reject this with 'I do not deserve this pain'. There 'is' the feeling: 'I am so good, and so holy, and so nice, and I have never done anything wrong. I have prayed to God, and I do yoga three times a day, and ...

why me, my Lord? Why me? We are the chosen ones'. Do you know the Lord's response to 'we are the chosen ones'? The Lord looks down, and He says: 'I chose you for this, especially for this. I do not give it to anybody else. Some people react with 'Why me?', and some people take some drugs, instead of being open to it and getting the message.

However, from the point of view of hatha yoga, you are given plenty of notice that something is not quite right. There is some discomfort somewhere. Somehow, at the time, you do not pay any heed to it. You either push it away, or withdraw from it, or drug yourselves into unconsciousness, get depressed, or fight it. You do everything except listen to the message. You do not ask: What are you trying to tell me? When the message is ignored, naturally the problem gets worse, and worse, and worse. Then you develop something like terminal cancer.

I think it should be made clear that the yogis are not saying that pain in itself is a good thing. The body is not just made up out of assembled parts. It is integrated with the whole being, including the mind, the spirit, and so on. When the body becomes an integrated whole, there is health. In hatha yoga, one can realize that it is not just the physical body which makes up the whole, but that the physical body must be in harmony with the mind and the spirit. You will not see this if you are stuck on the emotional level.

hatha yoga talk #2

THE POWER OF CHIT SHAKTI

The extraordinary thing is that, having created a division between 'I' and 'the other', man has tried to recover the state of non-division while at the same time holding on to the 'me'. If you examine this 'I want to become one with you', you will notice that the 'I' must still be there: 'I do not want to lose myself. I want to go to heaven. I want to realize God'. It is all the time 'I want to ... I want to ... I want to ...'

There is a lovely little book called the Yoga Anusandharam, where the author wrongly criticizes every other approach except the yoga method. While it is wrong for him to do this, some of his arguments are beautiful. One such argument concerns the ineffectiveness of practicing goodness.

In order to attain self-realization, you try to become as good as possible, and do as much good as possible. By all these methods, you gain a certain sense of satisfaction. Then you go to bed at night, and sleep. You are very happy because there is no anxiety about having done anything bad. But the funny thing is that you have to wake up. Therefore, the author's criticism is that, even though you have done good, you are still bound somewhere, that all these good actions have been tried quite fruitlessly because you will still go around and around in circles. He says that good action in itself has no real use. On the other hand, if you are good and therefore, all actions that spring from you are good, then that is a different story. Then you are not doing anything with a calculating mind: 'If I do this, I will get that'.

If you are trying to do what is called 'right action', motivated by desire to gain something, you are all the time trying for that, and the doing good is only incidental. If you were honest about it, you would realize that you are only good so long as there is something to be gained from it. That, our author friend says, is of no use. You must attain self-realization.

There is another yoga text, the Hatha Yoga Pradipika which would be interesting to discuss at some point. In it, the author paints a lovely picture which uses the metaphor of walking in a hot desert. It implies that bliss comes to the one whom, after wandering in the desert, has been able to find shelter. Then he says: 'Whatever be the fire of the suffering that burns you, whether it be physical, psychological, emotional, or psychic, come into this Hatha yoga, for that will give you shelter'.

This practice is not only a physical affair, meant to help your liver, or to treat your phantom pain, but it is also related to emotional and psychological disturbances, right up to the ultimate problem of division between 'I' and the 'other'. If that division does not go, then all has been of no use, because the seed of mischief has been retained. So, hatha yoga is not just a set of gymnastics which can be treated

purely on the physical level. Nothing happens purely on the physical level. What the body does, the mind and emotions are also involved in, as is also the spirit. When the whole thing is harmonized, and given the right direction, there is yoga. Otherwise, hatha yoga is treated merely as gymnastics.

According to the Hatha Yoga Pradipika: Whatever be the yoga practiced, this hatha is the cornerstone, the foundation of any yoga practice. If one neglects this hatha yoga, something vital is missing. A famous quotation, quoted in many hatha yoga books makes note: it is only with the help of the body - here body means the physical body and the intelligence built into the physical body - that you are able to perform anything else at all.

Swami Sivananda used to say quite often that for enjoying the pleasures of this world, or to be successful and prosper, a healthy body is necessary.

As we begin to look at the fundamental philosophical basis of hatha yoga, we will often revert back to one fundamental truth: that the infinite alone is true, that the infinite alone is the reality. Whether you call it God, Ishvara, or Atma, whatever you call it, in the infinite there is no duality. The infinite can only be one. There cannot be two infinities. The infinite by definition is indivisible. You cannot have two or three infinities. That infinite, which alone is truth, is consciousness.

Throughout the universe we see this consciousness, this intelligence, which is omnipresent, all pervasive. You can see it in the trees, in the blossoms, in water, in air, in everything. Everything is pervaded by this consciousness, this intelligence. Consciousness is not inert dead substance, but consciousness is a living being, living entity: not living in the sense that you and I are living, but full of energy, full of energy. Energy is the very nature of consciousness.

The notion of consciousness with its inherent energy or power was expressed in Sanskrit texts long ago. Chit is the Sanskrit word for consciousness, and Shakti is the Sanskrit word power. Consciousness in which energy is inherent, not merely latent but inherent, was called Chit Shakti. Masters of yoga saw these two as non-different and indivisible. These masters said that you cannot take heat away from fire. After all, what is fire without heat? You may transfer the heat it to another substance, but that only means that you have kindled one flame from another. And so, the nature and the substance - whose nature it is - cannot be divided or separated.

We have always had some kind of compulsion to divide and separate, to analyze. We talk of man and his nature as if they were two completely different things. In the same way, Chit Shakti has been divided in two: divided into God and His nature, into Purusha and Prakriti, as though they were also two different entities. But the division is totally arbitrary. One must realize that these two are forever inseparable. The substance whose nature it is, is indivisible and inseparable.

In this cosmic consciousness, energy keeps moving all the time, everywhere. In

this movement, there is still no division but, mysteriously, there is a power - which some have called 'maya' - which can make us see a division where no division exists, very much like dipping a cup into the ocean and seeing the water in that cup as something distinct and separate from the rest of the ocean. How that mysterious power came about, nobody knows. Mysteriously, it seems as if the cosmic being, with its inherent movement of energy on a cosmic scale, becomes limited. Does it? Perhaps yes, perhaps no. It is best not to rush to any conclusions regarding this. We see the division. And, we see the division exists as long as we see the division. We are caught in this same tight vicious circle, this circular argument: 'How do I know that the division exists? Because I see that the division exists. As long as I see that the division exists, that division continues to exist'.

Through this mysterious power of maya, the Chit Shakti comes to be regarded as jiva, the living consciousness, the apparent division giving rise to the 'I'. Even so, there is still no division. It may not be on a cosmic scale, but it is the same cosmic energy, but with an apparent individuality. What is this 'apparent individuality?' It is the thought, the concept, the notion 'I am'.

When you are sleeping, and sleep comes to an end, the first principle of awareness that becomes manifest is 'I am'. Afterwards, you add to it all the rest: 'I am still in bed ... I am no longer sleeping ... I am trying to wake up ... I am here in a room ... I am going to sleep a little more'.

Without the 'I am', there is no externalized awareness. In this cosmic consciousness, somehow the 'I am' thoughts or notions spring up as if on a cosmic scale. This is what we have called the jiva, and this is also what we call the chitta, or the mind-stuff.

The mind is cosmic consciousness, apparently limited by this 'I am' notion. Visualize, if you will, a small glass bottle. Looking at the bottle, you seem to see space inside it, do not you? And you also see this space inside the glass bottle as somehow distinct, separate, and different from the space outside it. You call the space in which we are now a 'room', because you see the space as something separate from the space 'outside'. But to see the space in the bottle, or the space in the room as different from the space outside the bottle or outside the room is absurd. It is equally absurd to say that when the space outside the bottle is broken, the space in the bottle 'becomes one with all space outside'.

We think that way, do not we? Was the space ever part of the so called 'room space?' No, you cannot call it 'a part' unless it can be parted. This is a funny, but a good little axiom, is not it? You cannot call it a part unless it can be parted. The finger is a part of me, because you can take it off. However, space is not part of the 'bottle space', or the 'room space', because space cannot be taken away. You cannot open a jar, fill it with space, close it, and take the space away, thinking that 'Ah, I have taken some space from that room'. You can take the air away, but not the space.

Yet, when the glass bottle was here, you did see space within it that was apparently distinct and separate from the space outside the bottle. The notion of the jiva of an individualized soul, of individualized consciousness, is nothing more than a notion. Similarly, the notion of cosmic consciousness, the notion of consciousness, is chitta, my mind. In the same way, as there is no such thing called 'the space in that particular glass bottle', there is no such thing as 'my mind'. There is only mind. However, because this mind, this consciousness, this intelligence seems to have a notion called I - which may be likened to the jar, it thinks: 'This is my mind'. The cosmic energy is somehow able to give rise to a notion: I am a living personality.

When this happens, the cosmic energy is able to manifest power which we call the life-energy, or the life force. The yogis have a name for this. They call it 'prana'. Prana is also not divisible, but cosmic. This is the reason that we cannot avoid interacting with each other.

Although we go on spinning concepts to distinguish one from the other, these words 'jiva, chitta, prana' are all identical in their meaning. If we can see this clearly, it may be possible for us to see how, on an individual level, each one of these can, and does react upon the other. How, for instance, pranayama helps control of mind, and how a wayward mind disturbs the flow of prana; how a disturbance in one causes a disturbance in the other; how the flow of energy on the body, if disturbed or having become haphazard, will disturb your mind; and how, when the harmony gets restored, the prana also gets restored. One must see that the only difference between the chitta, the prana, and the jiva is the spelling. There is no other difference. And the same thing has also been given another name, 'kundalini'.

'Kundalini' literally means 'coil'. It is amazing to realize that the yogis of long ago actually visualized the source of energy as being coiled, because that is the current view today. Armature, engines, motors, and so on, all these modern inventions are based on some kind of coil, like coiled copper wire. If you look into the insides of an electric light bulb, you find the wire is coiled. Energy seems to be well represented by a coil. Yet, there is something more to it, and it is very interesting.

Can you visualize a coil? You begin the visualization with a point. Starting there, should you go around and back to the point, you have a circle, a closed circle. In order to draw a coil, the interesting thing which has to happen is that after beginning at the starting point, after moving down and then back up again, you come close to the starting point but ... miss it. And that fashion, missing and missing, you go round and round.

This movement is a good way of representing what we commonly call 'maya', an 'illusion', or 'delusion', or 'ignorance'. There is movement of energy in consciousness. This movement takes place on a cosmic scale, at an infinite

number of points, everywhere, all at the same time. This movement has consciousness as a basis, because energy is inherent in that conscious. Yet, as it goes on whirling, it seems to miss the starting point. Why does it do so? It does so. There begins an outgoing tendency. If the circle becomes complete, there is no outgoing tendency. The movement can only go around and around, staying completely with the circle. Once the closing point is missed, there is an out-going tendency, and the spiral is formed.

This is the basis of hatha yoga. There is movement in consciousness and, as it begins to vibrate and move, it misses forming a complete circle. Had it formed a complete circle, there would have been an end to it, there would have been liberation. All motion would remain within the center with no spiral movement, no disturbance, no disharmony. That is what happens in samadhi, or deep meditation. In meditation there is tremendous movement, but not away from the center. That is what the Buddhists call 'collectedness', or 'recollectedness'. The whole thing is collected; it is not dispersed.

In relation to the human body, the center of consciousness is the Sahasrara Brahma-randhra, which is located on top of the head where there is movement of energy, movement of prana. In normal activity, this movement of energy is not circular, but 'misses', and comes round to the eyebrow center where a notion, a thought arises. The thought becomes the seed for the mind, and the mind is formed.

Since the movement of energy has missed its starting point, becomes lost, so to speak, there is further spiraling movement of energy away from its center. The energy spirals past the center of the forehead, the ajna-chakra, down to the visuddhachakra, located in the base of the throat. The energy is still lost, but since the visuddha-chakra is the equivalent of macrocosmic space on the micro-cosmic level, there is the experience: 'I am lost in space'. The spiral continues to move the energy away from its center. From the visuddha-chakra, it spirals to the anahata-chakra in the heart region. From the anahata-chakra it spirals to the manipura-chakra in navel region. From the manipura-chakra, it spirals to the svadhithana-chakra in region of the genitals, and from the swadhithana-chakra it spirals to the muladhara-chakra below the genitals and above the anus, in the region of the perineum.

Each spiral of energy has both a top and a bottom, and sparks the micro-macro cosmic connection. This is how the individual is linked with the cosmos. There is movement, resulting in 'I think', but at the very same time, there is - the link to - cosmic mind. Thus, you are linked to cosmic space at the throat chakra, linked to cosmic air at the heart chakra, linked to cosmic fire in the manipura-chakra, linked to cosmic water in swadhishtana-chakra, and linked with cosmic earth in muladhara-chakra.

To summarize, the fundamental basis of hatha yoga is that consciousness polarizes itself into energy, and there is movement of energy in consciousness.

When this movement is unable to fulfill itself immediately, the incomplete circle becomes a spiral and there is concentric but outward motion. The entire hatha yoga practice lies in reversing the total movement of this energy, so that, instead of becoming dispersed, it is gathered inwards, back to its center. When the energy is gathered in, the consciousness is also gathered, until eventually the polarization of consciousness and energy is also overcome, and the circle 'is'. This is known as 'laya', which means 'absorption', or 'return to the source'.

There is a beautiful doctrine that says that consciousness, in which energy is inherent, wants to know itself. Awareness, which is energy, Chit Shakti, wills to know its own potency. In other words, it is much like asking yourself: 'Am I strong enough to stand on one toe?' How will you answer this question for yourself? The only way is by getting up on your one toe. It is then that you are realizing, manifesting, and in a manner of speaking, throwing out your energy.

But then, out of this comes a dichotomy, 'me' and 'my energy', because a notion arises: I am manifesting my energy. Before this happens, before I am moving, while I am still what seems to be a static state, I and my energy are one. Suddenly I ask myself to show it. When I have realized my energy, I am left with this dichotomy, this division.

However, the consciousness-energy at the sahasrara is not divided. It is where the kundalini is neither separate nor distinct from consciousness, or, in orthodox terminology, is 'where shakti is not different from siva, but are at one'. There is total at-one-ment in the sahasrara. That is the consciousness which remains conscious when the mind and the ego-sense are asleep. In this consciousness, there arises kama, 'a wish' or 'a desire' - desire not in the same way someone may desire a cup of coffee, but desire in the sense of a stress point which the yogis call a 'bindu'. The wish is a stress point, the bindu, and the wish which arises in this intelligence is: What is power? Can I experience this power?, and immediately the spiraling starts.

It has been said that in the case of 'the gods', the circle is completed immediately, there itself, and the being does not lose its being-ness. This is perfection, perfection in all respects. There is movement, but the movement is within the center itself. God in manifestation, what you and I call the 'manifest God', where there is no delusion, no conceptualization, no notion, but simply pure awareness. In which case, the wish that arises finds fulfillment there itself without having to spiral up and down: there is pure awareness, self awareness. The wish to know myself arises, and there is realization of self.

That is a circle. Even in the case of what the yogis called 'the perfected beings', it has been suggested that they can still act in the world without getting involved in it. The perfected one acts like a crystal. A crystal ball simply reflects the color of object continuous to it without actually changing color at all. In the same way, the perfected one does not leave the center. Therefore, there is no spiraling no missing of the mark.

As the spiral weaves in consciousness where there is movement of energy, it assumes a particularized notional consciousness, which is the jiva, the 'I am'. When the 'I am' begins to move, there is the awareness. 'I am moving in space'. This 'I am moving in space' wants to hear. When it wants to hear, space is created on the upper arc of the spiral, and the sense of hearing is created on the lower arc. It does not stop there, but moves, and starts to become larger with the wish: 'I want to touch'.

The sequence in which sensation happens in this spiraling is not different from the sequence of sensation that happens when you wake up. First thing, you hear some noise. When notional consciousness-energy wishes to touch, the second spiral is formed with air on macrocosmic side, and the sense of touch, arbitrarily located at the heart center, on the microcosmic side. One side of the arc representing the macrocosm, the other side representing the microcosm, parts of the same spiral, they are the same thing. The spiral expands - or deepens, whatever you wish to call it, and much like opening your eyes after sleep: I want to see what is going on here.

The spiral having gone one more round by the time this has happened, has, on its macrocosmic side, fire, the luminosity, the light, and has, on the microcosmic side, the sense of vision, whose center is the manipura. Again the spiral 'expands', and there is the wish to taste: Ah, breakfast.

Here, the macrocosmic arc or sphere becomes water, while on the microcosmic sphere it becomes the sense of taste. Lastly, there is smell. On the macrocosmic sphere, it is what you call the earth element, while on the microcosmic sphere, it is the sense of smell. Thus, simultaneously, the movement of energy-consciousness has created both the world and me, the two being non-different.

It can be said, if you will forgive the grammar, that 'I' exists because the world exists, and the world exists because 'I' exists. The two are simultaneously brought into being by the combination of energy-consciousness plus a wish. It takes place during every moment of our life. It is one of the reasons yogis insist that one who is trying to practice yoga seriously must not further one's desire syndrome. If one keeps on desiring, there is two way movement.

The energy, or kundalini, which was on the top of the head, comes to rest, after all this spiraling, not exactly in the lowest center, the muladhara, where it is supposed to be dormant, being neither awake, nor active but merely asleep. This beautiful concept of the 'sleeping kundalini' down below and the 'awakened kundalini' up on top is full of common sense. Unfortunately, some people have made a scripture out of this.

Consciousness is perpetual. Consciousness is, even in between thoughts. It is there all the time, and is totally unaffected by what you do. No matter where your attention is focused, the consciousness inside is totally unaffected. Even in sleep,

the inner consciousness is not affected, because sleep is an activity of the mind, and not of consciousness. Consciousness knows no sleep. It flows perpetually like a stream.

It is impossible to imagine what it means for the consciousness to be unbroken throughout. It is equally impossible to grasp the workings of this spiraling movement. That which you and I may call the 'lower elements' and the 'higher elements' are all modifications of the same consciousness-energy. Earth is water, water is fire, fire is earth, etc. Their molecular structure may be different, but essentially, basically, they are nothing but energy and consciousness which are inseparable, and which have combined in response to a wish that has arisen in consciousness.

This is all corroborated by the very latest discoveries in science. All matter is condensation of energy, and all energy is indwelled and prompted by consciousness. Differences in the structure of elements are superficial differences, not fundamental. All those differences arise from the wish that arises in consciousness. In Biblical language, God said: 'Let there be light'. And there was light. The wish acted on this cosmic consciousness-energy, and the necessary combination took place. Why did it do so? It is an absurd question. It did so.

In His book called Japa Yoga, Swami Sivananda mentions that the constant repetition of a mantra, like 'Om Namah Sivaya', can effect change in molecular structure. It cannot affect consciousness, but it is able to produce that re-combination of the molecular structure because of consciousness. It is the inherent potency of consciousness and energy, Chit Shakti, that makes it possible for this molecular combination to happen. What is intriguing is that merely repeating 'Om Namah Sivaya' makes nothing happen. For such a thing to become operational, that which is merely external must become internalized, operate from within outward.

In other words, there must be contact with the Chit Shakti within. If what we call 'prayer' can start from there, it can work wonders. That, again, is beyond the 'me'. 'My prayers are never heard', but if prayer touches the Chit Shakti within, then it springs to action. So, for the mantra to realize the potential within consciousness, more must happen than the verbal repetition of it. In psychological language, your subconscious mind must repeat the mantra.

Here one must distinguish between automatic or mechanical and the spontaneous. One cannot know whether an action that springs from someone else is spontaneous or automatic. One can only know this for oneself. Spontaneous action is not only non-mechanical, but is also motiveless.

To see this spontaneous action, one need only look at a baby not yet eight weeks old. This baby does not have what your mind interprets as likes and dislikes. One should be able to see this. However, if your own mind is conditioned by likes and dislikes, you will necessarily see likes and dislikes in the actions of the baby.

PRANA

In the study of hatha yoga, the fundamental and most central concept is 'prana'. You have probably heard that word mentioned many times before. But what is prana? Prana is prana. Nothing more can really be said about it, because it is not something which can be objectified or described. Its existence cannot be inferred. It can neither be proved, nor disproved. It can neither be demonstrated, nor thought about.

However, its effects can be known. Just as you cannot see the air, but know you would not be able to breathe if it were not there, in the same way you know that the branches of a tree swing because of the movement of air. You do not see the air itself, but you become aware of it by its functions. If you bring to our questioning of what exactly is prana, a description of its functions, you wind up with a generalized definition that prana is cosmic energy, and that every form of energy that we can discover and describe is prana. So, before going into the details that are usually discussed, let us try to look at the way prana operates on the cosmic level.

It is prana whose movement, or vibration in the cosmos gives rise to the world's appearance. In other words, it is because of some vibration, or movement of energy in the cosmos that elements are able to be formed in the first place. For the most rudimentary element - if one could accept the scientist's description of hydrogen as a rudimentary element - to collide and collide and collide, and become more and more complicated, forming the most complicated elements or molecules, some force is needed. The force which brings about this collision is prana.

As we have said, the entire universe is nothing but Chit Shakti - consciousness in which energy is inherent. What caused the agitation which forms the elements in the midst of consciousness-energy? In the Yoga Vasistha you find this question along with a rather interesting answer: Where are the seeds that bring about you as you, me as me, the dog as the dog, the tree as the tree? There are two causes. One is prana-spandana, movement of energy. The other is vasana, a mysterious self-limiting concept.

What is the meaning of this innocent little verse? Even to merely suggest a meaning, I suppose you will have to imagine the universe as filled with an infinite number of root elements or cells - cell, soul, notice the similarity of the words - and each one of these cells being identical with the cosmic being, each one is also pervaded with consciousness-energy. Now imagine that each one of these particles, in which there is both energy and consciousness, thinks, 'I am a particle of sand', and so becomes a particle of sand. The consciousness, as it were, thinks 'I am a man', and it becomes a man. The particle thinks 'I am a woman', and it becomes a woman. How could this cell do that? It is only able to do something

like this because the energy inherent in consciousness is able to fashion it, immediately. Since energy is there in all things, in every cell, in every atom of existence, it is immediately able to fashion the substance that is conceived.

When we come to the study of Raja yoga, we will no doubt come headlong into this subject. The vasana, or notion, together with the movement of energy, is the cause of what the yogis call 'chitta' and what you call 'my mind'. The mind, your mind, has these two causes. The notion which we refer to is fundamentally non-different from consciousness or intelligence. You cannot have a notion which is devoid of consciousness or intelligence. Nothing cannot entertain a notion of something. A non-entity cannot entertain a notion of entity. An unintelligent, inert, absolutely lifeless non-thinking substance, an insentient substance cannot produce a thought or song. So, where there is a notion, where there is thought, or concept, its own content, its own reality is consciousness. That concept produces a limitation of itself.

On a less grand scale, we do this every time we use the words 'entire universe' or 'entire cosmos'. No sooner do we use these words, but we are also stretching out our arms as if to show that the universe is so big, while we mentally entertain some kind of vague notion that the universe is some kind of circular beginningless and endless unit, like a big globe. Right there, we have limited the cosmos to that. In the same way, in this cell, there is a notion, 'I am that'. No matter what that notion is, it is, by definition, self-limiting. The movement of energy in that notion is mind.

The chitta is more or less the same as the notion called vasana. The vasana is the 'seed': the chitta is the 'sprout'. There really is not much difference between the seed and the sprout. Vasana, the seed, is built into every cell of the body, and it has been animated by prana. The vasana and the prana together give rise to chitta, the mind.

It is important to understand these distinctions clearly, because quite a lot of what goes under the name of 'positive thinking' proves ineffectual due to this misunderstanding: We think that we think what we think we think. Afterwards we wonder why all that positive thinking has not worked. It has not worked because we have not been thinking at all. We only think that we think. Thinking probably takes place at the level of the vasana, at the level of the reality of consciousness, at the cellular level. Are we able to think at this cellular level? No, our thinking is a terribly superficial affair. In order to bring about any real change, we must go down to the 'grass roots'.

Incidentally, you might find it interesting to learn that 'I' which we have been talking about, which is sometimes referred to as 'ahankara', is one of the thoughts that arise in the chitta, which makes it twice removed. Therefore, in order to bring about a total revolution, or change, we must go over the fence called the ego-sense, dive through the chitta, and come right down to this vasana, and change it there.

We have said that prana is energy, and that one can only see prana as its various functions. If we are to continue to explore what prana is, then obviously we will have to look at the functions of prana. However, before we go on to discuss prana at the individual level, let us consider one important point regarding the operation of prana at the cosmic level.

One might say, for example, that the force of gravity is a manifestation of the function of prana. But it is good to remember that it is only with our finite minds, which are so fond of division, that we see the world, planets, stars, etc., as held together by the force of gravitational pull. As far as the cosmos is concerned, there is no such force, but only pure oneness. It is not any different than the example of walking along with your arms attached to your body. You do not feel that some kind of force or pull is needed in order to keep your arm with you when you start walking somewhere. So, when we say that the force of gravitation at work in the cosmos is a manifestation of prana, we are looking at the cosmos from our own preconceived notions. As we proceed to explore prana, please remember that.

One can say that gravitation at work in the cosmos is a manifestation of prana. And on a closer level, electromagnetism is also a manifestation of prana. The energy inherent in physical substances, however you may name it, may be regarded as prana. And in sentient beings - in which we can include not only humans and animals, but also the plant kingdom - what can be called 'natural sensitivity' may be regarded as prana. In humans and animals, prana acts as natural neurological response.

What is natural neurological response? It merely means that if your hand comes down on a hot plate, before you know what has happened, you are withdrawing your hand. Of course, that is a very simple example. In some cases, the natural response is difficult to see, because neurological response is not always natural but sometimes perverted by, say, fear.

If someone hiding in the bushes suddenly jumps out and violently attacks a passer by, the victim may become afraid of all bushes, or, all human beings. That is not natural neurological response. If one of you were to jump up and grab me by the throat, the natural neurological response would be to grab your hands and pull them loose. But is it natural neurological response to later look at someone who wore the attacker's hair style, and run away? That is perverted psychological response.

Is the distinction clear? In animals, at least in the non-domesticated ones, one does not find this perversion. That is why you do not see the perpetuation of animosity in animals that you see in the case of humans. The non-domesticated animals may fight for a few minutes over a bone or piece of meat, but when the quarrel is over, all animosity is forgotten. If you and I start fighting, who knows when it will come to an end. Probably your grandson will be fighting with my

grandson.

Perhaps now you can see that when our friend was standing on the edge of the chair, and his legs, feet, and toes started 'dancing', moving around, what was happening was the result of natural neurological response. He was not afraid until his mind looked at the situation and took over with the psychological perversion you call 'fear'. If one is able to see the difference between the natural neurological response and perverted psychological response, one can keep the fear from taking over. Without fear, the feet will still 'dance' and move around on the edge of the chair, because the body is engaged in not falling off, which is natural neurological response, the function of prana. In the same way, if someone accidentally bumps the sore arm of a sage or great saint, that sore arm will make the sage or saint howl, but the howl has nothing to do with fear of pain. It is only natural neurological response, a manifestation of prana.

How do we recognize prana? This must be asked because we have so completely forgotten the real nature of prana, the life force, that we have ignorantly identified prana with our breathing. We are the victims of a simple psychological trick. We see a dead body, and because we are told that prana is the life-breath, and because we see that the breathing has stopped, we assume the prana has left. We can see that in the dead body there is no breathing, and make the simple equation that prana is breathing.

However, prana is not just breathing. Prana is what enables every cell of being to live and to function. And the yogis looked at these functions of prana rather closely. In accordance with the several functions the single prana performs, they classified it into these five: prana, apana, samana, udana, vyana

The function of breathing in and out is given to the first of these five: prana. The function 'apana' is excretion. It includes not only excretion of the feces and urine, but all manner of excretion. And so, to the extent that the exhaled breath carries some sort of excretion with it, the function of apana is involved with the exhalation of the breath.

I bring this to your attention to point out that the divisions between these classifications cannot be taken literally, in a cut and dried fashion. The whole thing is prana, but the prana has different functions. In accordance with the different functions, we give the same thing a different name, just for the sake of identifying that particular function.

The carrier of nourishment to the very cells of the body, that which enables assimilation and nourishment to take place is called 'samana'. To the force which enables you to walk they give the name 'udana'. The word means 'to lift up'. So, in the giving of that name, I hope you appreciate that, although these ancient yogis have often been called unscientific and even superstitious and silly people, they certainly must have observed that all objects fall to earth and were pulled down by some force, which we now call 'gravity' and must have questioned how

humans, in light of this downward pull, were able to walk at all. They must have realized that an upward force was needed in order to tear, as it were, one's foot away from the ground in order to advance in any manner at all. Finally, to the force needed for the circulation of the blood and all energy throughout the body, they gave the name 'vyana'.

Prana is found everywhere in the universe, not only in food, water, or air, but everywhere throughout the cosmos. Yet, it is only in the individual that there is the need to conserve and not misuse the supply of prana. It is a self-perpetuating mechanism. However, in having to assimilate the life force from food and drink, the prana has to work. There is an expenditure of energy in the activity of digestion, and in the activity of assimilation.

That is the only problem with this machine. It performs work, and in its working, it has to spend prana. Of course, in that food which is eaten, and in that air which is breathed in, etc., there is prana. But prana is needed to replenish the prana expended. If perversion and other interferences are avoided, the prana can absorb additional prana that is inhaled, or taken through food and drink, and in so doing, perpetuate itself.

And yet, somehow we are losing, and the balance always seems to be in the red. We gain a little prana here and there, but little by little, we are losing. When the energy that animates this body gets so low that it cannot replenish itself anymore, then no amount of food, tonic, what have you, is going to be able to perpetuate it. Then apana takes over. At that stage, the entire body is fit to be excreted. That is why the yogis also regard apana as the manifestation of death. When the prana budget gets so very low that it is more in the red than otherwise, they call it 'the end of life', the time when the body becomes useless, and fit to be excreted.

There is also a theory that prana is not recharged by eating and drinking. According to that theory, eating and drinking provides only flesh - the material substance, the energy itself comes from sleep. When they say that, they are talking about the average person. They are not talking about those people who are meditating. In the case of meditators, it is meditation itself that puts them in touch with the source of prana.

If you wanted to rate the sources of prana from the most abundant source to the least abundant source, meditation would be first. Next would be sleep. The third most abundant source of prana would be water, pure and simple water - not polluted by alcohol. Last on the list would be food, because so much energy must be expended in the process of digestion and assimilation that the amount derived is not much greater than the amount necessary to process it; the balance table does not change significantly.

Only in sleep or meditation is one able to derive maximum energy from the source. Why so? Maximum energy is derived from sleep and meditation because it is specifically at those times that ego interference is minimal. The ego stands as

a barrier between the source of energy and the body. The less ego interferes with our life, the greater the energy and the less the loss of it.

Physical activity, of course, is one of the ways that we lose energy, but the greatest loss, according to the yogis is supposed to occur in the activities of speech and sex. Therefore, they advised us to reduce these two, or cut them out. Any activity that is ego-centered, ego-based, motivated by the ego, is a drain on prana. And therefore, all emotions are a drain all the time, the emotions being the reaction of the ego. By definition, the externalized motion of energy is emotion: e-motion.

Any haphazard or disorderly movement of energy is also ego-based, and is, therefore, a drain on prana. Greed, aggression, anger, violence, etc., are actions that cause prana to be dissipated.

Another classic example would be the person who feels caught in the situation of being compelled to do what he does not want to do and deprived of the opportunity to do what he wants to do. This person gets depressed because his prana has been dissipated. This happens because having been forced to do what he does not want to do and wanting to do something that is denied, he is struggling between these two directions, and the struggle itself uses up much prana.

The problem of how to gain prana, and of how not to stop the drain of prana, or at least of how to minimize loss, should not be oversimplified. Perhaps it may be oversimplifying matters by saying that the source of prana is beyond the 'me'. Nevertheless, any state of consciousness which is beyond the ego-sense must provide a source of prana.

Sleep is beyond the ego-sense, and it does provide a gain in prana. Meditation is always beyond the ego-sense, and through meditation prana is gained. Pure love - pure love, not lust, or sexual activity - sexual activity causes a huge loss. Pure love you might not find between a man and a woman as such, but is sometimes found between a mother and her infant. There the mother gains prana every time she nurses, every time she attends to the baby's needs.

It is only afterwards, when the ego wakes up, and says, 'My god, I have lost all my sleep', that the drain of prana can set in on the mother. Even then, the drain comes only from the ego's activity, not from any mothering activity. So, that if the baby is truly and seriously ill, the mother can go for days without sleep, and still not feel like she has missed her rest. Such an activity goes on in the consciousness that is beyond the self, beyond the ego.

Energy is motion. It has to move, because it is energy's nature to move. This tells us that movement of energy in itself is no loss. In this light, perhaps you can appreciate the sanskrit word 'brahmacharya'. The meaning given is 'a unidirectional movement of energy'. Thus brahmacharya is the closest kind of movement to the natural condition of energy, because it signifies the whole being

moving in a single direction. In that, there is no struggle, and therefore, little if any loss of energy. In brahmacharya, the whole being is aligned in a single direction. Brahmacharya does not mean 'forced celibacy' or continence.

Of course, on another level, it is useful to understand what activities cause a greater drain of energy than others. So, some yogis have provided us with that information, considerations that we may deal with. Certain foods, for example, do need a greater expenditure of energy to digest and assimilate, and those foods are generally prohibited.

How does one know which activities drain the energy more than others? At least one indication of energy loss is easily found in one's own breathing. If you watch your own breathing, the activity in which there is greater loss of energy produces a breathing that is labored and agitated. On the other hand, that activity which puts you in touch with the source of prana is accompanied by rhythmic, graceful, and almost imperceptible movement of breath. In this activity, there is no labored breathing, only subtle breathing, gentle and smooth. I have often felt that our inhalation-exhalation has no other purpose but to indicate this.

Look at this room. It breathes by simple cross ventilation, without having to have the walls go up and down. So, perhaps the purpose of having an in an out motion was simply to indicate the state of emotional being. Perhaps it was meant to indicate your state of mind. Perhaps it was meant to indicate the state of your consciousness. Perhaps it was meant to indicate the state of the functioning of your prana, that is, whether you are gaining or losing, because if you watch your breathing you will know. If the breathing is gentle, quiet, and even, you are not losing very much. However, if it gets labored, you are beginning to lose prana. There are some other signs also. If your body begins to shake, or if the skin gets hot, it means that prana is escaping, and you are in the red.

In the unusual circumstance of the person who, in an act of selfless service lifts a heavy object which is pinning someone down to the ground, what would happen to breathing? Would it become agitated? What is important to understand in this special instance is that the prana is coming from somewhere else, and so it does not get exhausted. However, the motivation of saving that person's life must be there to such a high degree that one jumps into that task spontaneously. Otherwise, one is straining to lift and becomes terribly conscious of the body, the muscles, arms, shoulders, and so on and the effect of the strain is felt.

Can you do this simple experiment. At what precise point does inhalation stop and turn into exhalation, and, at what precise moment does exhalation turn into inhalation? You can look at a point on the wall, or on the floor, but do not close your eyes. When you do this for some minutes, you are not aware of the breathing at all, because you are looking for the moment of change. You will also find that you are neither tense, not agitated.

As long as the ego is active, there is tension, and there is lack of inner awareness,

because the ego has faced outwards. In which case, you will be more aware of body, more aware of your surroundings, and less aware of the mind, or what is behind the mind, and therefore, less aware of the source of prana. There is still a flow of prana from the source, but because it passes through the filter called 'ego', it gets distorted. This is the cause of the agitated movement of prana. You call it 'deep breathing', but it is really tense breathing, not deep breathing. The real deep breathing only takes place when you are not even conscious that you are breathing.

The eyelids are like the breath in that they are also indicators. If you are very tense and nervous, the eyelids will blink a lot. When the mind is completely relaxed, and when the mind is totally concentrated, the eyelids do not blink. This is because the vision is not focused outwards. You are looking at the breathing even though the eyes are open. People who complain about having to keep the eyes open, complain that with the eyes open, they will be forced to look at something, and will, therefore, start thinking about something. However, when the eyelids are down, there is no way to prevent yourself from looking at the inside of the eyelids. That is my argument for keeping the eyelids open.

Some of us get terribly worried about correctly learning how to take 'the full yoga breath'. If you watch beginners who come to yoga class, you will learn that most people cannot even breathe from their abdomen, which is only the first step in this 'full yoga breath'. It seems that the beginner's abdomen is always tense. That is probably from holding it in. These people must first be taught diaphragmatic breathing, and only then can they learn to take the breath into the chest, and then fill up to the very top: 'the full yoga breath'. Where does the breath in actually begin? After having to relearn how to breathe in, if someone were to ask you, 'When you breathe in, where does it start?', would you know what to say?

THE PURIFICATORY PRACTICES

If you have followed this philosophical basis of hatha yoga, it should not be difficult for you to see that what we call the physical was originally pure spirit, and is pure spirit even now. There is a Biblical parallel, saying that God created everything out of Himself - since in the beginning God alone was, and then created his first and perhaps only truly begotten son, Adam. At that point, it had moved one step away from the source: Adam had become an individual, what the Vedantans call Atma. Afterwards, God took rest, and Adam went to sleep. The 'Adam' or Atma falling asleep is analogous to falling into the state of ignorance. Out of Adam, the child of God, came Eve. In other words, identity, or self-knowledge, is lost, and the loss of self-knowledge immediately gives rise to identification.

Do you see that this is a double-edged sword that cuts both ways? It is not only that there is a loss of self-knowledge, but also the loss of self-knowledge immediately gives rise to identification.

In the same way, a little movement of energy in cosmic consciousness creates a collision and fusion within cosmic consciousness, within cosmic being, and energy colliding and fusing with the basic element creates greater and grosser combinations until, eventually, you find this body in this world. As this proceeds, self-knowledge is forgotten, which at the same time creates identification.

We see this happening all the time. When I lose my identity, I want to immediately identify myself with something or someone. Even the psychologists agree with this. In psychology, they say that when a person who has amnesia wakes up to find himself in a strange place, not knowing who or where he is, that person immediately creates some kind of identity and relationship in order to feel secure. If I do not know who I am, I must immediately call myself an Indian, or a Hindu, etc.

Likewise, in our Biblical parallel, this man who was originally God, later the Son of God, and then the husband of Eve. And then, if you believe all that story, he is thrown out of the Garden of Eden, becomes a farmer, is god-forsaken, becomes the father of two sons, etc. From there, this identification moves further and further away from the truth.

But if the truth, if God, if cosmic being, if cosmic consciousness is omnipresent and infinite, then one can never get away from it. That is probably what the Christian theology tried to prove by saying that Adam was not completely banished from the Garden of Eden, that he did not get completely lost, that he is there in all, and that the same Adam in Jesus is to have awakened to the truth when in the crucifixion of the flesh he was to throw the flesh away and recapture spirit. Somehow we have come to identify ourselves with the flesh. We cling to

some notion or other, in an effort to make an identity for ourselves. You can see that in the case of every one of us. We started as a baby. The baby is completely free, but somehow the purity gets lost. How does this happen? The little one is forced into a relationship. How? You tell them: 'I am your mommy'. or 'I am your daddy'.

The baby is simply forced into a relationship, and pulled away from its center. Although the child identifies itself as the child of Mr. & Mrs. So-and-so for some time, that relationship gets abandoned, and the identity shifts from the parents to the child's school mates. The father and mother may still be there, and identity with oneself is still there - the 'I' is still there and therefore, the child will continue to be what it is, but in his or her own heart, mind and consciousness, the notion that 'I am the son or daughter of Mr. and Mrs. So-and-so' is either gone, or greatly weakened. The parental thing is weakened, and 'I am the friend of So-and-so' starts to gain strength.

This goes on. A more intimate relationship is developed with one particular person, to whom 'I' becomes the boyfriend or girlfriend, wife or husband, so that now, the parental relationship is nearly completely submerged. The parents are almost total strangers now, the friends are no longer friends but acquaintances: We were classmates, weren't we?

If you see this, you see our identification go on changing and changing. And so it is with relative ease that notions arise and subside, arise and subside in consciousness. When you begin to wonder how it could be possible for this omnipresent cosmic being to forget itself and become this flesh, just remember it is as simple as this: How is it possible for the child, who was clinging to father and mother, to throw them out of his or her consciousness and come to identify with some other person, a total stranger by comparison? In just the same way, consciousness is able to progressively forget its identity and become involved in identification with the mind and its limitation, a conditioned notion, and with this particular body along with its own inherent notions.

Yoga recognized that this has become a part of life, seeing the entire process as a purification of the whole being. Yoga does not say: Why labor with this physical body? Why not go right back to the source? People have tried to do that. It would be a bit difficult for most of us. Since the whole process of identification seems to have already taken place, it might be better to transform or transmute every aspect of this identification, and in doing so, roll the whole thing back to the source. That is the yoga approach.

Since the identification has descended right down to the level of the physical being - the body, pay some attention to that, but without getting lost in it. Your body may need some attention, but do not overdo it. You do not practice hatha yoga merely to rectify the liver or spleen. You involve the physical body in order to go back to the source.

Hence, the author of the Hatha Yoga Pradipika makes it clear right from the beginning that he is teaching hatha yoga only to prepare you for the practice of raja yoga. That is a truth that is hardly ever remembered in the modern world. And this seldom remembered truth is stated in the very beginning, in the second verse.

Certainly then, hatha yoga is not meant as a slimming exercise, or for those on some kind of a 'health kick'. Every physical benefit is incidental to the spiritual benefit that one derives from the hatha yoga practices. And one could say the same thing for all the so called 'different' yogas. And so, in the Bhagavad Gita, when Krishna explains why one bothers to meditate at all, he says that one should practice meditation for the purification of the self - atmavisuddhaye. One meditates in order to purify oneself, in order to cleanse the mirror. If the mirror is clean, then the truth is reflected without any further effort. When the heart is clean, the truth is reflected without any further effort.

Aside from the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, there is another important hatha yoga text called the Geranda Samhita. In this lovely scripture, you will not only find the seven components of hatha yoga, but the purpose of each practice is also given. Purification is acquired by the regular performance of the Sat-kriyas. Neither slimming down, building muscles, or becoming more supple are mentioned: 'Asana - posture gives drdhata - stability'. You can see that it only mentions that postures give stability. In the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, you have a description of the posture, meaning the posture for meditation, and words given for it are sthira-sukham asanam.

From this we learn that 'the posture' must be comfortable - one in which you can sit for a considerable time, and it also must be sthiram, firm. Mudra gives sthirata - steadiness. Pratyahara - introverting mind and senses gives dhirta - calmness, perseverance. Pranayama - regulation of the life force gives lightness. Enlightenment, yes? If you are light, and therefore do not feel heavy - not only physically but psychologically, neurologically and also spiritually- you are able to go through life without a burden.

Dhyana - meditation gives pratyatsa - direct realization of the self. Samadhi - direct experience of of cosmic consciousness brings about nirliptam - freedom. Nirliptam also means non-attachment.

Have you seen the people who go guru hunting, looking for a yogi who, in samadi, has achieved this non-attachment? These hunters go around looking at all the different yogis, and get quite worked up over this non-attachment business. They say, 'That yogi does not want to look at anyone, or touch anyone. He must be unattached'. I doubt that this is the intended meaning of non-attachment. Attachment implies duality. Attachment presupposes a division. So, the non-attachment that the yogi experiences in samadi is a realization of cosmic oneness.

When you and I are forever one in cosmic being, in which there is no division,

there is neither an attraction nor aversion, neither what you call love, nor what you call hate. Swami Ramdas once explained what it is to love all. He said, 'To love all is to love none in particular'. That means the one who loves does not think: 'You are my favorite. I love you more than ...' Such attachment is a trap, and the yogi is not caught by it. Free of attachment, the yogi is free to love.

Those are the seven hatha yoga practices, and their benefits. It is good to become acquainted with them. Many of them are not universally practiced. Let us look at some of them briefly.

The first of these are the purificatory practices, known as the sat-kriyas. Both the Gerandha Samhita and the Hatha Yoga Pradipika mention them. If you would like to know why one should practice all the purificatory kriyas, the benefits are beautifully given in this selection from the Hatha Yoga Pradipika: suddhimeti yada sarvam nadicakram malakulam tadasiva jayate yogi pranasangrahanes ksamah. If the physical body is rid of toxic substances, then it is possible to hold the breath for as long as you like. The impediments to the practice of pranayama are removed. It is obvious from this passage that such purificatory kriyas are necessary only if you are going to devote yourself wholly and solely to the practice of pranayama. Otherwise, it is not necessary. Take to them only if you wish to take the practice of pranayama very seriously.

Briefly, serious pranayama practice means practicing pranayama at the rate of at least twelve to sixteen hours a day. If you are going to be devoted to pranayama to that extent, all the purificatory kriyas are desirable. The six sat-kriyas promote the vitality of the gastric fire. This means that digestion and assimilation improves. It improves, not because you can eat more pancakes than you used to, but now you can make do with half of what you used to eat, because now whatever little is eaten is fully assimilated. So, the yogi looks for better digestion and assimilation, not because he craves to eat more, but because he hopes to eat less.

If the body, including the nadis, is completely purified, and rid of all toxins, then the inner hearing becomes acute, clear. In order to hear the 'inner sounds' - we will discuss the inner sounds later on, you must be rid of various toxins. The yogi refers to toxins not only in the physical body, but also as a kind of pollution affecting the psychological and subtle body as well. In hearing the inner sounds, there is clair-audience, which simply means the yogi has clear ability to listen. The physical body is also restored to perfect health.

Now comes another important verse: medah slesmadhikah purvam satkarmani samacaret anyastu nacarettani dosanam samabhavatah. If you find that your body is phlegmatic, take to these purificatory practices. Otherwise, do not do them. If you are phlegmatic - not only in the sense of the respiratory tract being full of phlegm, but also in the sense of being fat, lazy, lethargic - then you may practice these things. But if your body is very thin, and if you do not suffer from phlegm, it is better not to try them. Otherwise, you may run into difficulties. If,

for example, you were constipated, taking a laxative would be a good idea. On the other hand, if you were already having diarrhea, it is rather unwise to take a laxative.

The following six practices are recommended to those in particular who wish to devote themselves to the study of pranayama. Therefore, these were not intended for those who only practice yoga asanas: dhauti, basti, neti, tratakam, nauli, kapalabhati.

Dhauti literally means cleansing. There are different procedures for achieving the cleansing which may be necessary, so that quite a number of different ways of doing dhauti are found. In the cleansing of the stomach and the intestinal tract, for example, several methods are found. There is something known as vastra-dhauti, in which a piece of cloth is swallowed, and then pulled back out. The idea behind it is that while in the stomach, the cloth absorbs useless waste. One valid criticism is that even though you take the waste out, you are going to put some more in very soon. Even so, people do practice this. And some others do another method called vamana-dhauti. In vamana-dhauti, you must drink a minimum of ten glasses of slightly warm salted water. You keep drinking until it eventually all comes up. If it has not all come up, and you do not feel that you can force down any more water, simply tickle the throat with your finger, and bring it up that way. It is important for each practitioner to relate his or her own body to the specific practice in order to see not only whether the body needs that practice, but also whether the practice 'agrees' with you.

A practice may be good for some, and not good for others. Be watchful and cautious. Also, although it should go without saying, try to be aware of whether your system needs that practice before you commence with it. For example, in the case of the dhauti called plavini-pranayama, where you swallow air into your stomach only to belch out toxic gases along with the air swallowed, it is especially true that it is only a good idea to do it if your system needs that kind of thing. In the same way, if you sense that you have some leftover waste in your stomach, you might do something called agni-sara-dhauti, where you pump the abdomen vigorously in order to generate heat in the body so that what little rubbish is left in there gets eliminated. Again, the point is to do it only if needed. It also goes without saying that if you are doing all these practices, you will be extraordinarily careful about what you put into the stomach in the first place.

The second type of purificatory practice is called basti, which literally means 'enema'. There are two categories: jala-basti and sthala-basti. Jala-basti is done squatting in water, and sthala-basti is done on land. It is rare to see these performed. Once, in India, I saw a young man walk into the Ganges, squat down, and do asvini-mudra - contracting and expanding the rectum while churning and drawing the rectum up, which enabled him to suck up the water through his rectum and into his large intestines. He continued churning for awhile, and then pumped the water out. The whole process is exactly like an enema. Since sthala-basti is done on land, it is accomplished by sucking in a instead of water.

The third type of practice is called neti. In neti, you feed a soft cloth through your nose, down the throat, and out the mouth. It is fairly easy to do, and can be helpful if you have nasal problems. Neti can also be done using water to rinse and clean the nasal passages. That is the most popular form of neti. It can be used to clear the sinuses or cure headache. It is also said to be good for the eyes. Some people use a small jug with a special spout. They stick the spout into the nostrils, and let the water run through. It is a good practice if you need it.

The fourth practice, nauli is churning of the abdomen. When the churning is going on, you also practice uddiyana, which involves isolating the rectus-abdomini by pulling the abdomen upwards. It is given as one of the purificatory practices, but is also used as part of the practice of awakening the kundalini.

Trataka means 'staring', gazing at something with the eyes open. Unlike a previous experiment, where we kept the eyes open but gazed inside, looking at the breathing, trataka is looking at something outside. It is not abstraction of vision. Since the vision is not abstracted in trataka, the eyes have to focus. This causes eye strain, and eventually the eyes smart and tears flow. The instructions regarding trataka say that you should keep staring until tears pour from the eyes. When that happens, the eyeballs are flushed and cleaned.

There is a wonderful message to realize when you practice trataka. You are staring and there is strain, smarting, etc., and suddenly without you having to do a thing, the eyes wash themselves. You need do nothing. That is the message. The 'I' need do nothing. If the eyes need to be flushed and cleaned, there is something deep within that knows. See that.

Some yoga teachers have some strict conditions regarding picking the object upon which to do trataka. Although some people use a candle, these orthodox teachers say that whatever light source you use, it should not emit smoke. They prefer that you use one of those wick lamps with ghee or castor oil, because in the use of these oils, there is no smoke to get in your eyes. Smoke in the eyes would be annoying. Our master, Swami Sivananda, did not use lamps. He preferred to use a picture instead of a flame. You can use a picture of Rama, or Krishna, or Buddha, etc.

The last of these six is kapalabhati. Although this is given as one of the pranayama exercises, it is good to remember that it is neither a breathing exercise, nor a pranayama exercise, but a purificatory exercise. That is the essential difference between kapalabhati and bhastrika - a topic we shall cover when we come to the subject of pranayama. Kapala means 'skull', and 'bhati' means 'to shine'. Although it may seem as if the only concern is with the lungs, kapalabhati is meant for the cleansing of the brain cells.

How often these purificatory practices are done is up to each individual, who must then see if, and how often they are necessary. Unlike hatha yoga and

pranayama, the frequency of the purificatory practice varies greatly. When there is a need, and only then do you do these practices. But it is good to know about them. It is like first aid lessons. An instructor does not leave out teaching the class how to attend to a broken arm simply because no one in the group has just fractured an arm. Likewise, when the first aid instructor teaches you the procedure for treating a broken arm, you do not jump up and down, saying: 'Come on, fracture my arm. I want to see if I learned correctly'.

One should give these kriyas the place they deserve in the total scheme of yoga, without making a fetish out of it. If you give all these practices more importance than they deserve, it is going to lead you astray. Should you think that the asanas, kriyas, and pranayama are so marvelous that they will keep you from any physical problem, and should some health problem suddenly occur, you might become totally disillusioned with yoga practice. Rather than have that happen, it is better if these practices are seen as part of the total scheme of self-knowlegde.

According to the hatha yoga texts, all these practices are not only supposed to be for the purification of the physical being but also for the purification of the most vital aspects of the personal, psychological, and spiritual being. There is toxicity present in the body. The toxicity, or pollution is present not only in the physical sense but also present psychologically and psychically. In fact, it is thought that it is the ignorance or confusion which has brought about identification with this body, and which in turn has contributed to the physical impurities found in your body. This is the philosophy and psychology behind another beautiful technique called nadi-suddhi.

Nadi-suddhi is given in both the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Gerandha Samhita as one variation of pranayama practice, but we should regard it as another method of self-purification. Nadi-suddhi is not strictly a physical exercise but rather a technique of deep psychological and psychic dimensions. It may be regarded as a mystic practice, and as such, it is the inner attitude which is vital to the technique. If it can be done with deep feeling and deep visualization, then this practice can have a tremendous effect.

In nadi-suddhi, or purification of the nadis, one visualizes a blazing fire which is capable of burning all impurities. Since, in a manner of speaking, the impurities pervade the entire body, and since those impurities must be destroyed without burning up the self, or the consciousness hidden behind those impurities, the first step in nadi-suddhi is to visualize withdrawing the jiva, or soul.

After all, you do not want to throw the baby out with the bath water. For this purpose, the jiva is visualized at the base of the spine, at the muladhara-chakra. From there, you symbolically take the jiva up, and visualize it at the very top of the skull. That is only the first step. When you have done that, you visualize whatever defects or weaknesses that you may have in you, and visualize them as being concentrated in the splenic region, on the left side of the abdomen. You visualize this as some kind of dark force or dark cloud. Then you inhale through

the right nostril while you mentally repeat the mantra Om. As the breath is retained, visualize the dark cloud. Exhale through the left nostril.

The recommended ration for inhalation-retention-exhalation is inhale for 16, hold for 64, exhale for 32 - repeating Om each time. If you can do all that, wonderful. If you are unable to do all that, also wonderful, because it is the visualization that is most important. So, just do whatever you can. You may wish to repeat this part of the exercise until it is experienced. Even so with the other stages of the exercise.

Next, breathe in through the left nostril, mentally repeating the mantra 'yam'. Since yam, the 'air' mantra, is meant to invoke air, you are to entertain the feeling deep within you that while inhaling and holding the breath this yam is letting loose a gale which dries up the dark cloud containing those impurities in your body. Hold the breath, and feel that the dark cloud has been dried up by the air mantra. Having done this, you exhale through the right nostril, repeating the air mantra.

In the next round of nadi-suddhi, as you inhale through the right nostril, the mantra repeated is 'ram', the fire mantra. While mentally repeating the mantra, you visualize that it generates a tremendous fire in the region of the gastric fire. It should not be difficult imagining a fire there. Visualize whatever impurities you may have as being consumed in this fire. It is best to visualize it as clearly and realistically as possible. If you want to get rid of anger, for example, just ask yourself: 'Have I never felt angry or irritable? Of course, I have. All that I place in the fire'.

Whatever you want to overcome is there to visualize. Visualize it, and put it in the fire to be burned. Hold the breath, feeling that all has been burned in the fire. You exhale through the left nostril, repeating the fire mantra. It is often recommended that while exhaling you feel as though the ashes from the fire are being blown out.

In the next round of the cycle, inhale through the left nostril while repeating the mantra 'tham'. This is pronounced with the same hard 't' sound as the 'tha' in 'hatha yoga'. As you mentally repeat 'tham', you are asked to meditate upon the top of the palate, visualizing a lunar orb there, a moon which showers down cool nectar. As you hold the breath and repeat the mantra, you feel that these moon rays of cool nectar shower down to revive your whole system, giving it new shape: the old personality is gone, and a new body is taking shape. After exhaling through the right nostril, repeating the mantra, you are ready for the next part.

Inhale through the right nostril, mentally repeating the mantra 'vam'. Vam is the bija mantra for water - for the invocation of water. Holding the breath as you repeat 'vam', feel that the old impure body has been destroyed, and a new body has been created. Exhale through the left nostril while repeating the mantra. Now you are ready for the final cycle.

Inhale through the left nostril, and use the mantra 'lam' which is the bija mantra for the invocation of land, earth. As you hold the breath, visualize a new pure body, solid, and ready for yoga practice. Exhale. With your hands in your lap, and with the mantra 'soham', you visualize the jiva, or soul, returning to the muladhara chakra.

That is nadi-suddhi, the mystic practice of the hatha yogis. The orthodox yogis do it before commencing any serious yoga practice. They would do nadi-suddhi before practicing puja, worship. They would do it along with meditation also. It can be done with any spiritual practice.

We have a long way to go in our discussion of hatha yoga. We will discuss the asanas next, followed by pranayama and kundalini spiral, and we will see where that takes us.

THE PRACTICE OF ASANAS

Perhaps you will be surprised to learn that not all the modern day asanas are mentioned in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and the Gerandha Samhita. These two basic texts list some of the asanas you practice, but others are not mentioned at all. We know that originally, there were supposed to be 84 asanas, but somehow that list was greatly reduced. By the time these yoga texts were written down, only 4 postures, all of which were meditation postures, were considered important. Of these 4 only 2 remain popular today, the most famous of which is, of course, padmasana, or the lotus posture. The other, siddhasana may be less widely known by non-practitioners of yoga, but it is considered by many to be the 'supreme posture'. Another name for it is 'adept's pose'. Mentioned also are a few other asanas which you may know. For example, you find a forward bending pose, paschimottanasana, salabhasana - the 'locust pose', and bhujangasana - the 'cobra pose', both backward bending poses. You will also find another popular and easy posture, dhanurasana - the 'bow pose'. And, you will also come across some slightly more complicated poses, where you tie yourself in knots, such as kokkutasana and garbha-pindasana are also mentioned.

Although you find all these postures mentioned, very few postures were considered important. No doubt this was because these yogis intended to concentrate mainly upon pranayama and meditation. Postures other than padmasana and siddhasana were probably meant to enable the yogi to sit still for some considerable length of time, and to do so without discomfort. Also, they probably needed some postures to relieve the stiffness which could result from sitting for long periods of meditation. To facilitate meditation seems to have been their basic intention.

It was Swami Sivananda's attitude that the yoga asanas not only facilitate meditation but that the practice of yoga asanas can itself be a dynamic meditation. From Swami Sivananda we learned that the yoga asanas are not merely a set of gymnastic exercises for the promotion of physical health, but can enable one to see the intelligence beyond the 'me' which exists in every cell of this body.

If you bring to this hatha yoga the proper spirit of meditation, you will discover the intelligence beyond the 'me', which is able to maintain the body, balance the body, and bring about the necessary adjustments from moment to moment in all these yoga exercises. Then you will also discover that the same intelligence is fully capable of looking after the body, even bringing on pain and what you call 'illness' if necessary. At that point, you do not complain that you 'do not have time to meditate' because you have discovered the key which transforms your whole life into a meditation.

Out of such a transformation comes a new angle of vision. No longer do you

complain, grumble, or groan about a little pain illness, sickness, or even the shadow of death, because to you this ever changing life looks much like a lovely portrait in which there are dark shades and light shades, different shades of the same color. Your mind no longer rebels against illness, the shades of the painting, nor does it rebel against 'old age' seeing clearly through the eyes of intelligence that time must keep moving on.

Seen through such eyes, there is no old age, but only time progressing. Seen through such eyes, health and illness and even life and death are not different or antagonistic features. Through such eyes, life is continuous, all these being manifestations of the same intelligence. You must see it. You must see it in the face of someone like Swami Sivananda, whose body was riddled with all kinds of clinical diseases but whose face was radiant.

As I have said before, Swami Sivananda himself practiced and advocated only a few asanas for the daily routine. If you wish to do more, very good. One also learned from Sivananda that in the initial stages of yoga what you call 'physical health' is to be valued because initially illness acts as a barrier which prevents you from seeing this life stream within yourself. Unless you have already come face to face with this intelligence beyond the 'me' you will not be able to look within, will not be able to transcend that ego barrier without physical health.

In the initial stages, the physically unhealthy body will constantly interfere with any attempts to practice pranayama or meditation, because the body will not stay quiet. Only the physically healthy body is capable of being quiet. In fact, in the physically healthy body, you are not even aware that you have a body.

For example, unless something goes wrong with your heart or your brain, you are not even aware that they are there. You are not aware of any internal organs unless something goes wrong. When something goes physically wrong, the intelligence in the body sounds an alarm, and sounds it loud and clear. That noise of that alarm will disrupt your ability to be attentive.

In performing yoga asanas, the yogi observes that asanas have an influence on the blood circulation, direction of blood flow, on nerves, and glandular activity. The yogi is able to recognize the value of asanas, because he sees that as a contributing factor to physical health, the asanas can reduce the possibility that his body will become a hindrance in the practice of meditation. Also, the yogi recognizes that the physically healthy body clears a path for one to more fully experiment with the yoga asanas themselves, leaving him free to explore the natural rhythms and responses of a healthy body, and thus allow him to more fully appreciate the wonders of which this inner intelligence is capable. The hatha yogi's aspiration is not to get involved with the physical but rather to extricate himself from it. Although the hatha yogi may not object to some amount of physicality in his practice, he would not want to get caught there.

I wonder if you can also see one very big disadvantage in regarding asana practice

as therapeutic. When someone approaches yoga because it is therapeutic, it means there is a motive or perhaps a hope in that person. In other words, there is already some expectation there in that person's mind. This expectation is really another form of tension. And so if the person brings the expectation, he is already bringing a tension before he has even started. That person is working for health, and therefore, not relaxed.

Let me give you one classic example of how having an eye on some result can make you tense. Some years ago, a lady who had a rather incredible problem came to see me at a yoga camp. She was suffering from something like insomnia, only it was more serious. She had not been able to sleep very well in a very long time. She had gone to see all the psychiatrists in New York, in an effort to find someone who could solve her problem. Doctors had failed to help her. Having spent over 15,000 dollars on doctor bills in search of a cure, and having strained her purse to the limit, she had been referred to the yoga camp by the last doctor she had been able to afford. She was a small woman, and she appeared to be shrivelled up by her illness. She also had a wild look about her, perhaps from the drugs which had failed to help her. She came to my door, and not so much asked, as demanded: 'I want your help. I have not slept in six months'.

I wanted to help her, but I had never run across such a problem. I asked her to come in and sit down. We talked, and later I gave her a mala and a mantra, and told her to repeat the mantra until I returned in about an hour or two. I thought that the repetition might put her under. I came back to find her still awake: 'I still cannot sleep'. Not realizing that it would have any effect at all, I said to her: 'What does it matter if you sleep? I have given you a very powerful mantra, the Name of God. Why should you want to sleep now? Go on doing this mantra, and if you are able to avoid sleep you will go straight to heaven', and she slept. The moment it hit her that it was not the only important thing she had to do, she slept.

If you start under the condition of hoping to get rid of something, you are starting with anxiety. Sometimes when you are asked a question about something you have studied, there is anxiety that you might produce the wrong answer. The answer should be available to you, but because of anxiety, there is progressively a greater and greater blockage of the answer. Consciousness has the answer which I do not know for every situation. Right from childhood, you have messed yourself up. Somewhere along the line, you must end this vicious circle. You must become aware of this intelligence.

As you do that, you must learn to listen to it. Perhaps it is not the best expression, but 'I must learn to obey it'. You must learn to live in tune with it - not fighting, knowing that it is 'right'. Intuition has become a rather loaded word, but depending upon your interpretation of intuition, it could mean the same thing as 'intelligence'. Reason comes in to play only afterwards, in order to justify what intuition has said earlier. Of course, reason and logic have their place, in study and that sort of thing. It is not possible that anxiety can occur because the body has not taken proper care. Anxiety always comes first. Always. The intelligence

will never make a mistake.

In doing even the simplest of yoga asanas, there is much that can be observed. For example, uddiyana, the abdominal lift, is very easy. Every one of you here can do it. All that you have to do is lift up the abdominal muscles, and hold that position. Easy, simple to do. But have you ever asked yourself how you do it? Can you tell me right now what it is you do with each of those abdominal muscles? If you try, you will probably see that it is the abdominal muscles that know exactly what to do, while the mind cannot easily explain how it is accomplished. Try, if you like. Hold the posture right now. Hold it continuously. Holding it for some length of time, do you feel some tension there? Is this tension caused in the abdomen? Is it caused in the mind? Where does it come from?

What is tension? To find out, the brain need not get involved. In fact, the trick or secret to finding the answer is to leave the brain out of this entirely, and ask the question from within. If you can do that, you will see that the intellect is producing this 'tension'. But if there is anxiety, your mind will be occupied with it, and you will not be able to watch. In fact you will have to get rid of your anxiety if you hope to watch what is happening in any of the asanas you practice.

Our anxieties over a particular yoga asana seem to bear no relation at all to their difficulty. Sirasana - the headstand, for example, has to be one of the easiest yoga postures to do. You put your head down in front of the hands, with the hands forming a triangle, and you lift with the small of the back until you are in what can only be described as a half-headstand. From there, all you do is raise the legs up, and there you are, wondering: 'How on earth did I get up here?'

Actually, it was all quite easy as long as there was no anxiety about getting it done. Before one has learned that the body can do this headstand quite easily, there is likely to be some anxious moments. If you are new to this posture you can be on the lookout for anxiety building up. Look to see if there is anxiety, because, as you shall see, the body is performing the posture, not your mind. It can do it without any help from the mind at all. When you experience the truth in this, you will probably be able to do the most complicated yoga asanas without anxiety. When you get past the anxiety, you will probably also see something which has never occurred to you before, namely that standing on your head should be easier than standing on your feet. I am not joking.

When you stand on your own two feet, look down and examine the surface area that you are using to stand on. Approximate the amount of space that you are utilizing, or better still, ask someone to draw a circle around your feet while you stand there. That done, have that same person draw a tight circle around the entire area you utilize when in the headstand. The circle will encompass not only the head, but also the arms on both sides of the triangle. At once you can see that there is a much larger area to support your weight while in the headstand than there is while on your feet.

Of course, I am not saying that by ridding yourself of anxiety you will be able to do every single asana perfectly. If your body is unable to do it, then the body will fall. But without anxiety, the body can fall out of that headstand and not be hurt. Just as a baby is able to tumble down a short flight of stairs and not get hurt, your body can tumble down out of that headstand without being hurt. Only anxiety will prevent the natural intelligence from following through with whatever is appropriate.

When you attempt a posture like trikonasana - the triangle pose, in which flexibility is tested, you can more readily see that the mind, in its anxiety, focuses itself upon the place where there is the greatest tension. The mind does not want to continue holding the posture, because the tension is building. But that tension is simply the body telling you that you are not very limber. There will be tension at that precise point where the body attempts to make the needed adjustment. If you can hold the position long enough, the body will begin to readjust.

Perhaps this is the reason why the yogis recommended that when you practice asanas, you should stay in a particular posture until all the initial commotion is over. In doing that you have given the body time to readjust and regain normalcy. As a practitioner, our problem is that when the initial tension is received by the mind, in its anxiety, the mind focuses on that point where there is quite naturally the greatest tension, and gets worried: 'Ouch. Stop that pain'. At such times, try shifting your attention away from the trouble spot to a place where there is not discomfort.

For example, when in trikonasana, the direction in which you bend will cause more stretching and discomfort in one leg while the other leg will be fairly busy trying to compensate for the unusual position of the body. The fact that there is no discomfort in one of your legs, plus the fact that it is doing quite a lot to keep the body balanced, makes it a good choice for a new focal point. When you shift the attention away from the leg that has discomfort, the pain will seem to disappear, and in turn, you will be able to hold the posture long enough for the body to make the necessary internal adjustments. Without the aid of a trick like this, you might give up, or else force yourself to hold the posture.

Forcing yourself to hold a yoga position is to be avoided because the application of force does nothing to relieve anxiety on the contrary, forcing makes the asana feel more violent and frightening, and therefore, will only intensify the anxiety. In an asana like sarvangasana - the shoulder stand, though why it is so called is rather puzzling because it is not only the shoulders that one stands on but rather that the entire body is active, with the small of the back being the fulcrum, the body should 'rest' without any commotion.

This is one reason why some teachers have suggested beginners support the pose with the use of their hands and arms. Later, when you no longer need support, you may remove your hands. The important thing is that there should be no struggle. If you need a place to concentrate, try looking at the fulcrum of this

asana the small of the back. When the attention is focused in such a way that there is no anxiety, you will see how beautifully the body adjusts itself from within, and will be able to discover the beauty which the body is.

The asana called matsyasana - the fish pose is often performed immediately following the shoulder stand. Even beginners find this posture easy to maintain. However, there is usually exaggerated movement in the chest. All activity must have the gentleness which implies inward concentration inward feeling inward attention. In this way, you will easily realize that the lungs are fully capable of breathing without your assistance. Perhaps you will be able to meditate on the wonders of this physical body, realizing: 'I would never be able to build a body like this'.

It should be possible for you to enter into a state of contemplation in any one of these yoga asanas, whether it is the fish pose, the shoulder stand, the head stand, or any posture at all. And so, try to contemplate in every one of the yoga postures that you practice. Meditate on the intelligence within, and all the incredible abilities of which this body is capable. Although the yogis mention only a few postures for meditation, realize that you need not be sitting bolt upright in padmasana or sirsasana in order to meditate. The body can be in motion, but the spirit can be in meditation. Why not?

THE PRACTICE OF PRANAYAMA - THE REGULATION OF THE LIFE FORCE

At some point in the development of hatha yoga, yogis must have realized one extremely simple phenomenon, namely that a limb becomes paralyzed when energy can no longer flow down the pathways that supply that limb with energy. Contemplating this simple observation, these yogis eventually concluded that all malfunctioning of the physical organism could be traced to some restriction in the flow of prana, and specifically, a restriction in the flow of prana along certain nadis. As time went by, yogis became aware that that the practice of asanas could curtail any restrictions in the flow of prana. With asana practice, the yogis were able to insure that no part of the body would fall victim to inertia, and that the body would be kept free of tension.

Of course, it should be pointed out that all this came much later in the development of hatha yoga. Earlier on, the primary focus was meditation. Therefore, initially, it was strictly the meditation postures that the yogis considered important. They observed that meditation would restore, and maintain the regular and unrestricted flow of prana throughout the body. Only when the unrestricted flow of prana was achieved, was a student thought ready for practice of pranayama.

Before we go on to discuss pranayama procedures, it is necessary to point out that the yogis would never have suggested that flow of prana could be corrected or kept flowing to all parts of the body merely by physical techniques alone. Although it may be common these days to use the phrase 'the flow of prana in the body', the yogis who first developed a science of pranayama never asserted that prana was confined to the physical body; not even the so-called 'personalized' or 'individualized' prana. They would not have defined prana as energy that flows through the veins, arteries, or even cells of the body. Instead, they regarded prana as the energy that filled every cell of the body and as such, not confined to the body. In fact, they saw it as extending outside the body.

If you read the Yoga Vasistha, you will come across a chapter which describes prana as extending outside the physical body. The Vasistha insists that the pole of prana, which extends beyond the body, reaches a distance of approximately twelve inches. The term given for this is 'vadasanta' or twelve finger-breadths from the body. On one level, this was regarded as the field of prana. On another level, it was understood that prana, being cosmic, was not limited to this twelve-inch shell.

However, when it came to discussing the prana which had become associated with the 'me', the so called 'individualized prana', the yogis regarded it as everything which existed within this twelve inch field, or expressed in slightly different terms, as existing outside the body. This is quite different from the notion that

prana becomes individualized when taken in through the nostrils. If you follow this, you will also see that these yogis could not possibly have regarded prana as being synonymous with the breath. And, if you remember that prana is not breath, and that individualized prana is not limited to the physical body, you might find that your practice of pranayama can be done more freely.

For a beginning practitioner of pranayama, it will be more useful to remember some sanskrit terms, and the corresponding word meanings, rather than to attempt to recall the distinctions given in the various yoga texts. First, let us look at some of these sanskrit terms. Then we can briefly examine some of the procedures.

There are three sanskrit words that are often used in connection with the practice of pranayama. They are: puraka, kumbhaka, and rechaka. Puraka is loosely translated as 'inhalation', but it literally means 'filling'. This filling process commences twelve inches away from the body. Therefore, mental visualization is involved in the procedure of puraka. Kumbhaka means 'pot'. You might understand this definition more clearly if you visualize your body to be a pot which you are filling up until it becomes completely full. When this filling is accomplished, like a pot with its cover on top, the breath is held, shut in so to speak, like a pot that holds grains. Lastly, the term 'rechaka', a word that sounds similar to the English synonym for vomiting, retching, is usually translated as exhalation, but is more correctly understood to mean 'holding the pot empty'. In other words, the breath is not only expelled, but also held outside.

Some hatha yoga teachers refer to all the pranayama practices as kumbhakas. This is because the essential part of the practice, according to the hatha yogis, is the kumbhaka. These yogis say that when the pranayama is performed, the holding of the breath outside is the very thing that activates the prana, and maintain that you only come face to face with prana and therefore only know what prana is, by doing kumbhaka. This is the reason the various yoga scriptures mention that the breath should be held 'as long as possible'.

Unfortunately, this instruction is not given due emphasis because most people are not interested in doing anything that could be unpleasant. You may recall that Swami Sivananda modified this instruction into 'Hold the breath as long as comfortable'. This instruction is nicely phrased, because it is not likely to scare you off, and yet, it still leaves enough room for great discovery within the practice. There are still some who won't even try this. They modify 'as long as comfortable' into 'do what is the most comfortable'. You must be able to reach out, making every attempt to discover what the prana is, or you defeat the whole purpose of kumbhaka practice. The words 'as long as' are important, and if you disregard them, you will not know prana.

There are 8 kambakas mentioned in the scriptures: sahita, surya bhedana, bhramari ujjayi, murccha, sitali, bhastrika, and kavali. The first of these, sahita, has, over time, taken on a much broader meaning, and is even used as a synonym

for any kumbhaka involving inhalation and exhalation. The last kumbhaka on this list, kevali, might be considered the opposite of sahita. Kevali kumbhaka implies a kumbhaka 'without' inhalation or exhalation. In other words, in kevali, there is complete suspension of breath, and thus, no inhalation or exhalation. Is such a thing possible? Yes, it happens. I am not talking about swamis and yogis. I am talking about all of you.

Whenever you are in that state which you call 'a state of shock', a suspension of the breath takes place for a couple of seconds. The amount of time that the breath is suspended is related to the intensity of the 'shock'. We all have had this in varying degrees. The mouth drops open, the eyes go glassy, and seem to stare straight ahead at nothing at all, and, there is no breathing at all - no inhalation, no exhalation. Unfortunately, as in the case of sleep, we are unable to observe it. That is why I hesitate to use the words 'we have all experienced this'. Like sleep, either we are in it totally, or else at the very moment when we begin to observe it, we are no longer in it. That is our problem. Either we are in darkness, or in light, but not able to observe what this darkness is from inside the darkness. We never stand on the threshold. Never. We are either on one side, or the other. Our life is governed by the 'either-or' pendulum. In spiritual life, however, as in the life of the Buddha, the 'either-or' is displaced by 'neither-nor'. If one is neither here, nor there, one is at the threshold. This is called 'transcendence'.

The intent of practicing the next one, surya-bhedana, is very apparent by a translation of the sanskrit. Sury' means the solar force, and bhedana to pierce, literally meaning, to break open the shell of the solar fire. The texts give the instruction to inhale through one nostril, and then hold the breath until perspiration is dropping from the body.

The Bhramari kumbhaka is easier to practice. Bhramari means bee. The kumbhaka is so called because in practicing it, one produces a humming sound in the throat that sounds like a bee. There are two different sounds involved: one with the inhalation, and one with the exhalation. The voiced inhalation is a very rough, course sound. It is referred to as the male bee sound. The exhalation is the sweeter sounding of the two. It is not surprising that this is called the female bee sound. Some yogis do not bother to do the sound on the inhalation.

For instance, when Swami Sivananda practiced bhamari, He preferred to make sound only on the exhalation. Perhaps He felt the sound made on inhalation was unpleasant. Whatever the reason, He usually only did the humming sound on the exhalation. He recommended this practice, not only because it facilitates concentration, but because the practice helps the mind gradually become introverted, and as such, it is an aid to meditation. This is also true of ujjayi kumbhaka.

Ujjayi literally means lifting up. It is so called because after doing ujjayi, you naturally feel uplifted. It is also an extremely simple pranayama practice once you are shown how to do it. It involves closing the glottis just a little while breathing

out - the mouth remains closed, making an unvoiced 'ha' sound. Ujjayi is a good thing to do before starting meditation, because there is sound, and the sound invites the attention to follow. The student should first do bhamari kumbakah. When the mind begins to become introverted, switch to ujjayi.

A very challenging kumbhaka practice is murccha, which literally means fainting. Here you are instructed to hold the breath until you faint. If you approach murccha with the courageous attitude of 'yes, I am prepared to hold the breath until I pass out', it is possible for you to discover that power in you which makes you stop and breathe. You can only discover it if you are really and truly prepared to hold the breath until you pass out. You are not attempting suicide. You are just looking to discover prana. You hold the breath, and suddenly, just before passing out, something beyond the 'me' steps in, takes your hand away from the nose, and makes you take a breath of air.

Do not cheat yourself by calling this a reflex action. What exactly is it that makes you stop? It is not fear. Fear is something which you would have to introduce. We are talking about something which comes of its own accord. If you are prepared to hold the breath until you faint, until tomorrow morning if necessary, then you will witness something which springs up and stops you. What exactly is that?

Perhaps you can see the similarity of this question and the question that is been asked about sleep. That is, in the waking state, I am aware of this world, and in the deep sleep state I am not aware of anything. In meditation, it is possible to see that there is a threshold. How do I slip from here to there? If I can see that for one split second, that is meditation, and there is samadhi. In the same way, what exactly is that which stops me from holding the breath? If that stage can be reached without passing out, you have come face to face with the power they call 'prana'.

Before we go on, let's discuss some kumbhaka practices. Sit up straight, but stay relaxed. Begin by first visualizing the surrounding shell of prana. Let the visualization continue for awhile, because, after all, you are attempting to become intensely aware of this surrounding shell of prana. When you feel aware of it, begin to experience the sensation of filling by breathing in through the nose. After a complete inhalation, hold the nostrils at the tip. At this point, you will be attempting to experience the kumbhaka. Try to experience that the breath is held out only at the tip of the fingers. Feel the experience of the kumbhaka is taking place only there.

Following the same procedure as above, inhale completely, and hold the breath in the pit of the throat, or what could also be called the top of the chest. Since you have changed the point where the kumbhaka is taking place, you can forget about your fingers during this exercise. If you experience a little tightness in the throat, or chest, exhale a little to get this tightness out. Continue to hold the breath at the top of the chest. Feel that the kumbhaka is taking place there.

Again, try changing the place where you hold the breath. This time try holding it in the middle of the chest. You should be as relaxed as possible. Therefore, let your mouth fall open a little. Do not worry about where your tongue should be. It can be anywhere, so long as it is relaxed, and comfortable. Feel that the breath is being held in the middle of the chest and nowhere else. In other words, from the middle of the chest upward, feel that it is all 'open'. This is not easy to achieve. Nevertheless, it is possible to experience holding the breath there. In fact mentally, it is possible to hold the breath and also the prana anywhere.

There is another exercise that you should try before proceeding. Here are the rules of the game. Sit up straight, but again, comfortably and relaxed. You are going to use the fingers of the right hand to close the nostrils: the thumb will close the right nostril, and the ring and little fingers will close the left nostril; the other two fingers usually are rested on the palm - some people prefer to rest them on the space between the eyebrows. Even while the nostrils are kept open during this exercise, it will be best not to entirely remove the fingers from the wings of the nostrils. In other words, as you perform this practice, breathing in and out the left and right nostrils variously in a changing pattern, you will do so without taking the hand away from the nose. So, if the right arm gets fatigued, use your left arm.

To begin, inhale through the left nostril, and as you fill up, the abdomen will expand outwards. Exhale through the right nostril, and as you exhale, pull the abdomen back as far as it will go. Inhale through the right nostril, expanding the abdomen outwards, filling up. Exhale through the left nostril, again pulling the abdomen back as far as it will go. Now, as you continue in this fashion, inhale through the left nostril, and as you hold the breath, concentrate on the solar plexus. Hold the breath as long as is comfortable. Some yoga books give a quite specific ratio for the amount of time one spends on the inhalation, retention, and exhalation. These books say to inhale for a count of four, hold for a count of sixteen, and exhale for a count of eight. However, it is best not to start out trying to emulate this model. You should begin practicing without worrying about any of that. The 4-16-8 ratio was given by the yogis, because it is a very close approximation of the rhythm which is most natural. After practicing the exercise for sometime, you will probably find that you were already doing the 4-16-8 ratio without even being aware of it.

Now add one more step to this exercise. After you have pulled in the abdomen, and have exhaled completely, let go of the abdomen, and hold the lungs empty. Try not to create any unnecessary tension. There will be some tension as you hold the lungs empty. Do not worry about that. There is no danger of harming yourself as long as you are the only person that is holding your nostrils. If you let someone else hold your nostrils, then, of course, there is some danger.

Be attentive to what happens as you proceed. It is best that I not tell you where to fix the attention, because a suggestion of that kind will make you unnecessarily tense. What is more, if I tell you something like 'fix your attention between your

eyebrows', or give you a how to visualize the prana, or where to visualize it, that will immediately occupy your attention and immediately interfere with your ability to hold the lungs empty, as well as your ability to watch what happens as you do so. Be like a child, and watch.

A translation of sitali kumbhaka, cooling, reveals the benefit is to cool the body. It will also temporarily relieve thirst. Sitali kumbhaka will be easier to learn if you stand in front of a mirror. Stick out your tongue, and roll the tongue into a tube. If you are confused as to what to do, find someone who can demonstrate what the curled tongue is supposed to look like, or find a picture in a hatha yoga book, and looking into the mirror, imitate it. Once you get the hang of curling the tongue, you will be able to form the tube with your tongue without having to think about what to do. At this point, breathe through the 'tube' which you make by curling the tongue, and as you breathe through the tongue, concentrate on the solar plexus. It should be easier to concentrate on the solar plexus doing sitali than doing other kumbhakas, because one tends to feel pressure in the neck when breathing through the nose. With sitali, the pathway feels more open, so that the sense of blockage from tension in the neck is diminished.

Now, let us discuss bhastrika kumbhaka. Bhastrika looks very similar to the purificatory practice kapalabhati. The essential difference between bhastrika and kapalabhati is suggested by the root meanings of the sanskrit. You might recall that we said that 'kapala', means 'skull', and 'bhati' means 'shining', and that when you practice kapalabhati, the brain cells are bathed in prana, and entire skull feels like it is shining. If that does not happen, there is no kapalabhati. Bhastrika means bellows. When you practice bhastrika, the abdomen must work as a bellows. If that is not accomplished, there is no bhastrika. The bellows-like movement is not intended to cleanse, but is intended to cause prana flow. So, while kapalabhati is strictly a purificatory exercise meant for the brain cells, bhastrika is a pranayama exercise intended to cause a stream of prana to flow, and specifically, to cause prana to flow through the sushumna nadi.

The kumbhaka, or retention, is the important aspect of bhastrika. As with many of these practices, you will find that there are various techniques for practicing bhastrika. One technique is to breathe through only one nostril at a time. Some yogis, recommend that both nostrils are used at the same time. Since Swami Sivananda taught bhastrika using both nostrils, that will be the procedure that we will take a look at here.

Sitting up with the back straight, yet relaxed, assume any firm posture you like. Using both nostrils, the bhastrika begins with a vigorous 'bellows' pumping motion of the abdomen. There should be no conscious movement of any part of the body other than the abdominal muscles. You may find that the shoulders move ever so slightly as sort of a reflex movement to the abdominal breathing. The inhalation may be as long as you like, but the exhalation is quite short and very forceful. By this vigorous diaphragmatic breathing, all the impure air is literally pushed out of the lungs. One continues with this pumping until there is

an experience of slight lightheadedness.

The amount of inhalation-exhalations that it takes to produce this effect will vary from person to person. So make sure to continue until you feel that there has been some effect, and that you have had enough. If you do not feel anything happening at all, it means that the bhastrika is not being done vigorously enough. On the other hand, be careful not to continue past the point where you feel some light-headedness. The aim of this practice is not passing out.

When you have reached the point where you feel you have had enough, exhale and take another inhalation. The idea here is not to fill the lungs completely. The reason being that once the breath is held, the oxygen will be exchanged for carbon dioxide, and there will be some expansion of the gases in the lungs. By not filling the lungs completely, you are providing room for the gases to expand, making it possible for you to hold the breath longer. Concentrate on the solar plexus and feel that the breath is held there, rather than at the throat or nostrils. Otherwise some tension in the throat may be felt, and some discomfort will be experienced. Having taken that last inhalation, drop the chin on the chest as you continue to hold the breath at the solar plexus. Again, hold the breath as long as is comfortable. Then exhale, take a few normal breaths, and try the bhastrika again.

Do not be disturbed if you cannot hold your breath for very long. You can always increase the kumbhaka part of bhastrika over a period of time. The important thing, as Swami Sivananda said is to reach out, and to attempt more than simply what is easiest and the most comfortable. Remember that it is the element of kumbhaka that will bring you face to face with this thing called prana. Finally, when kumbhaka is performed you will find that the mental activity becomes restricted. This is another major benefit of kumbhaka. Kumbhaka is not meant to increase your lung capacity. Such physical benefits are merely incidental to the practice .

In practicing the kumbhakas, yogis employ some additional techniques. This involves performing certain bandhas. The word 'bandha' can be translated to mean 'tying up, restricting', or 'binding'. Let us take a look at some of the most important bandhas.

There are three bandhas that are done in the sidhdhasana posture: mula-bandha, jalandhara-bandha and uddiyana-bandha. The mula-bandha, involves closing the rectum and pulling up on the alimentary canal. Mula is translated as 'root' or 'base', and so you are restricting or binding the base. In the beginning stages, if you are doing mula-bandha correctly, there will be some pressure felt in the pit of the throat. The pressure is caused internally, and shifting or moving will not cause it to stop.

Jalandhara-bandha is commonly known as the chin lock, because it is done by holding the chin firmly against the chest. Jala means 'net' or 'wire mesh'. It is

performed in order to tie up the network - jala of the nadis. Uddiyana-bandha involves pulling in of the abdomen. The motion starts from the very bottom about the pubic region, and is best described as a scooping movement which is both up and inwards. You will find a caution in some of medically orientated hatha yoga books which warns not to do 'uddiyana-bandha more than three or four times a day'. This is because it creates a pressure upon the diaphragm, and therefore, upon the heart.

In practicing kumbhaka, the mula-bhanda will be done after inhalation, and following the exhalation. The jalabhandhara, or chin lock, comes in between inhalation and exhalation. In addition jalandhara-bandha can even be done while the lungs are being held empty. The usage of uddiyana, or pulling up of the abdomen, is, of course, during the exhalation.

Putting all that together, one would inhale, do retention performing mula-bandha and jalandhara-bandha, exhale performing uddiyana-bandha, and then hold the lungs empty adding the jalandhara-bandha once again. At this point, you might note that all three bandhas come in to play at the very same time, and as such, holding the lungs empty could be viewed as the peak of this particular kumbhaka practice. It can be a most powerful experience, and is even regarded by some to be one of the most powerful exercises for arousing the kundalini. Of course, we can only speculate as to the 'why's and wherefore's' of the arousal of the kundalini energy. One thing is certain, doing this practice can fill you with new found energy. And, who knows, perhaps, after doing it, you might look up, and see a new world.

THE KUNDALINI SPIRAL

We began the exploration of the subject of prana by discussing the spiral movement of energy in cosmic consciousness. We mentioned that there is a stress point that arises in consciousness which causes a particle of energy to go out into orbit. We said that if the particle returns to the source, the circle is complete, and the movement can no longer be erratic, and you have pure consciousness, what people call 'God', or the 'Divine'. We also mentioned that the word 'Kundalini' is merely another name for the cosmic life force, which is all pervading. The cosmic life force, or, prana, passes through certain fields of consciousness. When it does so, there is movement. Why the movement misses its starting point, and spirals out and away from its center is something that I cannot know. It happens. That is all that can be said.

People may ask: 'What is my relationship to the Kundalini?' Perhaps they would do better to ask: 'What does the Kundalini have to do with the individual?' These two are different questions, because the 'individual' and 'me' are different also. If one has an accident in which there is much brain damage, there is no 'me' left, but only an 'individual'. This difference is enormous. The 'individual' is 'indivisible duality', something which cannot be divided. The 'me' is division itself.

The spiral, because of its consentience with a certain consciousness, sankalpa, functions as an individual. The Kundalini energy is not my energy. There is no such thing as 'my Kundalini'. The Kundalini has nothing to do with my being, it is purely of being. The notion of 'free will' has nothing to do with the Kundalini. You cannot take a certain yoga posture, and will the Kundalini energy to rise. The ego-sense, with all its comrades are the obstructions, or veils, that make the Kundalini apparently dormant. You have no doubt heard someone talk about the 'dormant Kundalini' or the 'sleeping Kundalini'. The Kundalini can never be asleep. Energy can be static, but never asleep. It is not even possible, not even hypothetically. To suggest, for example, that light is ever dormant would be absurd. Light can be eclipsed, or, one may not be able to see it with the naked eye for one reason or another, but is not capable of being dormant. In the same way, the Kundalini, by virtue of its definition as cosmic energy, cosmically manifest in infinite ways and in infinite places, can never become dormant.

When the Kundalini energy misses the first full circle, it becomes lost. The individual assumes: 'I am lost'. The Kundalini begins to look for its own completion, and the apparent individual consciousness assumes: 'I am looking to find completion', but, unfortunately, moves farther and farther away from completion all the time. And as it goes on spiraling, however, there is, at the same time, a constant pull towards the center.

Take the simple analogy of a lake. A lake is made up of water. The lake water

evaporates from the lake, and goes up into the air. If, for example, the weather is suitable and the vapor becomes rain, it comes back to the lake immediately, and the circle is completed without any problem. On the other hand, if the vapor gets carried to a nearby mountain, and conditions turn it into snow, the mountain might hold the water for some time. However, sooner or later, the sun will warm up that snow, and it is bound to melt. It will start to dribble down the mountain, drop by drop, slowly becoming a stream, and it will eventually find its way back to its source.

The Kundalini spiral is like the water from the lake. Despite its erratic movement, there is a constant pull towards the center that will eventually bring it back to its point of origin. It is one of the most vital messages of yoga. Namely, that there is no such thing as eternal damnation. It may take you one hundred years, it may take you one hundred lifetimes; but, having left the source, the constant pull towards the center will bring you back.

The constant gravitational pull towards the center - not the return, but the pull, is not exerted in a straight line; it is that of a spiral. As the energy spirals, it moves down pathways that form the spiral from the top of the head to the base. These 'channels' are themselves the psychic nerve-current which the yogis call the 'nadis'. The nadis are like radio waves in the sense that they are not visible to the eye. Nadi is often translated as 'nerve', but the root meaning is simply 'motion'. A nadi is simply energy in motion. The energy - prana is in motion, and the streams of energy in motion themselves are the nadis.

How many nadis are there? Some have suggested that there are 22,000 nadis. Others put the count at 350,000 thousand. The nadi being sheer energy in motion, I doubt if there is any way to determine how many there are. Yogis say that all of the nadis come together at certain points in the human body. What is meant by that? All that can be inferred is that the waves of energy keep pouring through the body, and that as they crisscross, the waves of energy meet each other at certain major junctions in what we have agreed to call the solid human body.

Is the body solid? How solid is it? X-rays pass through it. Perhaps it is not really solid, but only an apparent modification of energy. The apparently solid human body, they say, is permeated by thousands of nadis, thousands of pourings of energy of them, one hundred and one are thought to be major, but only three are thought to be principal. These are: the ida nadi the pingala nadi, and the sushumna nadi.

The prana can take a central route which yogis refer to as the sushumna. Normally, the prana is not able to flow through the central channel, but must crisscrosses it from left to right and from right to left. As the energy spirals to the left, prana is said to be flowing in the ida nadi. The ida nadi is also regarded as the 'chandra nadi' or 'moon nadi' because when flow is on the left side, the lunar force is considered to be dominant. When spiral comes around to the right, the

energy is said to flow in the pingala nadi; regarded as the 'surya nadi' or 'sun nadi' because, when on the right, the energy is considered to be dominated by the solar force.

Hatha yoga is the 'coming together' of the solar and the lunar forces. When the division between the 'ha' or 'moon' and the 'tha' or 'sun' disappears. All distracted movement ceases, all wastage of energy ceases, and the prana is able to flow through the center channel - the sushumna. When this happens, the prana has discovered the direct path back to its center, and can return directly to its source. The movement of energy then ceases to be multidirectional. Its movement is unto itself, which is really no movement at all.

When there is no movement at all, there is no sense of space. If you go back to what we said about the very first arc of the spiral, you will remember that it was mentioned that energy has the power to move, and that by a process of expansion, there is the notion of a sense of space. It is a bit tricky to understand this properly. In pure consciousness, there is no space. Space is only brought into being by movement. In deep sleep, for example, there is no space at all. Likewise, when there is total quiescence, or oneness, space does not exist at all. It is not that the first movement of energy creates space. The first movement of energy in consciousness is space. That first movement, itself, is space.

As the spiral gyrates, the elements are brought into being. It is not difficult to understand how this comes about. The first movement itself is space. The next movement, which brings it to the second arc, is movement in space. What is movement in a specific combination of hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen, but merely a field, a field of 'something' which the yogis have space? Movement in space is movement in air - not the air which is conveniently called 'air'. This is the very simple reason why the yogis say that the element 'air' has been created at the second arc, or chakra. The creation of the next element is equally easy to understand. As the expansion of the spiral, as it moves in space, faces inevitable collision, various gases, etc., and the collision itself brings about friction which creates heat and, therefore, fire. This is why the yogis say the spiral brings about the element of fire at the third chakra. Further movement of the spiral brings further collision, and a reaction very much like one in a chemical laboratory when, say, hydrogen and oxygen are mixed to explode into combination, and water is formed. The water element begins to precipitate, and in the next chakra forms ice, a solid. That solid water, in a manner of speaking, becomes the earth element.

The same spiral of energy gyrates, and brings about all these elements. And so, it is not appropriate to suggest that all these elements, earth, water, and air are separate, and only to be found in separate locations and nowhere else. Very much like switching on a transistor radio, tuning it to one station that receives Vancouver, then to another that receives Seattle, and realizing that one antenna is able to receive all stations, and further that the radio wave energy is laden with all these frequencies - the difference only being the tuning, the difference

between the earth element and the water element is not truly a spatial difference; it is one of dimension, and that both elements are, in truth, the same.

In Vedanta, you will find the word 'tanmatra'. It expresses a theory which is rather difficult and complicated to explain. In brief, the tanmatra is the word for the basic element. The tanmatra is as yet undifferentiated, and so it cannot be seen. According to this theory, water is not water; it has, in addition to its qualities as water, some solid substance in it. They would also say that water has heat or fire in it, as well as air, as well as space, that, in fact, it occupies space. In other words, there is no such thing as pure water element; pure water element is only a concept. The same would be true of earth. Earth is only a vibration, a movement of energy, a certain form of energy which is experienced on a certain dimension. The same energy looked at from another dimension 'becomes' water, and so on.

In hatha yoga, you are asked to contemplate each one of the chakras. It is therefore important to remember that each one of the chakras are not fixed physical factors, like fixed ganglia, but are also spiritual in nature. They are psychic centers, and each one represents not only one of the elements, but, in turn each element can be interpreted cosmologically, metaphysically, and even psychologically. There is a lot of symbolism connected to these chakra centers.

Before we proceed with the study of the chakras, something further need be said. As we proceed, and you find yourself confronted by a discrepancy between what you hear and what you have already heard - 'He says one thing, and she another', that kind of thing, do not get frustrated and give up. Someone may say that the second chakra is located near the sexual organs, while another may say it is near the spleen. What is the difference? It is somewhere down there, forget about that. The third chakra is called the manipura, but you will find some very respectable yoga texts claiming that the second chakra is the manipura.

Again, what is the difference? I need not lose all respect for this just because one person calls it one thing, and another person calls it something different. Instead, realize that we are talking about something which is beyond description. Only the description will vary; the truth cannot. You are attempting to discover something with the senses that is beyond the senses. Naturally it will elude you. Instead of calling your quest rubbish and dropping the whole thing, enter into this spirit: 'Ah, I see that my mind is struggling, because it cannot find an adequate expression for this. All right, I will reach out beyond expression in order to see this truth'.

There is no need to caught up with any particular ideology. It is unfortunate that many consider the chakras merely Hindu theology. Actually many Hindus do not believe in what we are discussing. And while it is true that the majority of the material on the chakras shows a Hindu influence, it is not necessary to get caught up in Hindu theology in order to contemplate the chakras.

All of this can be seen in a more neutral perspective, a perspective that is not entirely ideological, neither entirely psychological, nor entirely physiological, but a composite of the total truth. When such is your perspective, the chakras are able to act as a window. Seeing through that window does not, in itself, show you the whole truth; the view is definitely limited. Yet, the view out a window can let you see the sky, even if it is only a portion of that sky. Once you have seen what the sky looks like, it might be possible to climb out of the window, and seeing it in its entirety, be at one with the sky.

Although the chakras are considered to be in the central most pathway, the 'channel' where we located the sushumna, the chakras are, in effect, located only in certain planes. They are not necessarily associated with certain organs of the human body though they have been associated or identified with some organs. Each one of these centers may be seen as a point on a radio receiving dial which puts the whole receiving set in tune with a certain broadcasting station.

What makes this possible is that the spiral of energy touches me at one point, where the microcosmic arc is formed, and the entire universe at the point of contact, the macrocosmic arc. Since the microcosmic arc is connected to the macrocosmic arc, the spiral envelops the entire cosmos at each arc formed. When each element is encountered, it is encountered on both on the microcosmic and the macrocosmic level. By contacting this particular principle in chakra meditation, one can get in tune with the entire universe. The chakras are windows on the cosmos.

In this way, each one of these centers takes you beyond the 'me'. This does not happen in me; it is the macrocosmic arc, which at one point seems to touch the microcosmic arc. As we have said, it is not 'my Kundalini'. The very expression is absurd. Kundalini is cosmic power, which functions on seven cosmic planes. The individual is just one small speck of dust, floating in space. Since this speck of dust happens to be part of this cosmic being, the Kundalini is relevant to it also.

Let us look at the way yogis have described these centers, and examine some of the symbolism. The first chakra, the muladhara, located near the point where the body comes into contact with the earth is called the earth center. Simple enough, and yet people make such big fuss over the name 'earth center'. Drawings of this chakra show petals or radii, which represent the four directions a very good symbol for meditating upon. As with all of the chakras, there is also a geometric pattern that is meant to represent the particular element, in this case, earth. A yellow square represents the earth element. Do not ask why it is a yellow square. If there is a mystic significance, please find it out yourself.

Each chakra has a sound, a mystic syllable called a bija mantra associated with it. The bija for earth is 'lam', which sounds like 'land'. I hope you find it interesting that here we have two different languages, one ancient and one modern, both using the same sound symbol: 'lam' or land. The bija 'lam' has all sorts of meanings ascribed to it, but it is hardly necessary to go into it when your most

meaningful one is 'land'.

Each chakra has also an animal associated with it. The muladhara, is associated with a elephant. The reason is obvious. An elephant is strong, sturdy, and firm, unmoving. You are meant to sit there, and feel: 'Ah, I am firm and unmoving as the elephant'. Drawings of the chakras also have a god and goddess in them, so that you can meditate upon them, and their deeper significance, each chakra having a different god and goddess to represent it. It is interesting to note that you will find different versions of what gods and goddesses belong with the various chakras.

Arthur Avalon, for example, in his book *Serpent Power*, one of the few as well as one of the best texts on Kundalini, ascribes some different deities, and some tantric texts, give yet another version. The variance as to what god and goddess presides should denote that the truth regarding its significance is to be discovered by you.

In meditating on the chakras, the yogis considered visualization to be very important. This is why you find so much symbolism associated with the chakras. The petals in the muladhara drawings have their own color. The pericarp has its own color, and different color inside the pericarp. There is the color of the 'lam', and the color of the geometrical square. So many things are given to you in order to help hold the attention and to help make your own visualization become more acute.

Some of you may wonder how you are going to remember all the details that are mentioned, and how you are going to avoid leaving these out of your visualization and contemplation. The answer is simple. Do not start off trying to visualize everything. In the beginning, take just one aspect, and try to visualize that. You can draw upon this wealth of detail a little at a time, and add to your visualization as you continue. Visualization is a great aid to concentration. If one learns the art of concentration, which is the power to focus the attention - not the mind, but the attention, then complete attention can be focused in one of these centers.

What I find of particular interest in chakra meditation is the so-called psychological aspect, because it seems that there already is, in each one of us, a built-in conditioning resulting from an already established association of ideas. For instance look at the chakra element itself. What do you associate earth with? The earth element has both a positive and negative associations. On the positive side, earth is associated with firmness, determination, and perseverance.

On the negative side, there is coarseness, grossness. The water element is associated with that which is life giving, adaptive. It can also be associated with that which takes the path of least resistance, and therefore, that person who is not capable of standing up for anything. Fire also has its own built in psychological associations: either zealousness or impulsiveness, either warmth, as in the positive warmth of our relationships, or great heat, as a temper that is

destructive. The air element is also freely associated with that which is life giving. Air also has the ability to blow dust, dirt and any impurities away. The same wind can blow hither and thither. This is associated with aimless wandering, and being flippant and unstable. Is your life like this?

Obviously there are going to be traits that you wish to augment, and traits that you would like restrained. The attention can be focused upon each chakra, and you can work upon these psychological qualities one at a time. At the very least, you can become aware of these qualities in yourself, be they noble, or not so noble, and that in itself is significant.

We have discussed the major principles of the chakras. You have the opportunity to investigate these further. Let us recapitulate the symbols, associations, and qualities of the muladhara, attempting to include some details that we may have overlooked. Then we will move on to list the symbols and characteristics of the remaining chakras.

The muladhara is located at the mouth of the sushumna below the genitals, and above the anus, in the perineum. It has four blood-red petals with the letters yam, sam sam and sam on them. It contains the symbol of earth which is the yellow square, and the lines which constitute this square end in a trident. Within this is the red seed-syllable, the bija mantra 'lam'. The baby creator of the universe, Brahma, dwells in it; he has four arms and four faces and rides an elephant. His color is of the rising sun. In it also dwells the goddess Dakini who has red eyes; she is the bestower of the highest knowledge.

About an inch above this is the terminal of the vajara-nadi. In it there is a triangle with the svayambhu-linga, the symbol of life associated with procreative energy. It is here that the Kundalini-shakti dwells with her three and one-half coils wound around the linga, and her mouth closing on the bramha-nadi. The second chakra, the svadhisthana, is located in the region of the genitals. It has six petals of vermilion color, and on them are the six letters of the sanskrit alphabet with the character 'm' superimposed upon them, i.e., bam, bham, mam, yam, ram, and lam. The symbol for the water element is a crescent moon, white in color, and in it is depicted the crocodile carrying the bija mantra 'vam' which is also a symbol for water, and is, in this case, a symbol for immortality in that the water of the svadhisthana is also associated with the genital area and the sexual reproductive process. The presiding deity of this center is the protector Vishnu, blue-bodied and clad in yellow, with four arms. The presiding female deity is Rakini, who is also blue in color. Some have mentioned that he who meditates on this chakra can be freed from the ego-sense.

Above the svadhisthana, in the navel region is the center known as the manipura. It is of the dark color of a rain cloud. In its ten petals are found the letters dam, dham, nam tam, tham dam, dham, nam, pam, and pham. The element of fire is

represented by a radiant triangle of the color of the rising sun; within the red triangle a ram (the animal), and on it is inscribed the bija mantra 'ram'. The presiding deity is Rudra, who is vermilion color with ashes smeared over the body. He has three eyes, and his hands symbolize the boon of fearlessness that he grants to his devotee. The female deity is the four-armed, dark-complexioned, yellow-clad Lakini. Examples of the positive psychological attributes of fire are: vireo determination, ardency of affection and fiery speaking powers. The negative association is a fiery temper.

The anahata chakra is in the heart-lung region. It is red in color, and on its twelve petals are the letters kam, kham, gem, gham, nam, cam, cham, jam, jham, nam, tam, and tham, In the center of the chakra, the element of air is represented by a smokey hexagon. The smokey hexagon may also symbolize the coming together or meeting point of the divine and the human in which human aspiration meets divine Grace. Above this smokey hexagon is the sun with the radiance of 'ten million lightning flashes'. The bija mantra for air, yam, is seated on top of a black deer. The presiding deity is the three-eyed Siva who holds his two hands in a gesture of granting boons and dispelling fear. The female deity is the four-armed Kakini of a golden color.

The visuddha chakra is at the base of the throat. It has sixteen petals of smokey purple color on which are inscribed the sixteen vowels of the Sanskrit alphabet: am, am, im, im, um, us ra, rm, lm, lm, em, aim, om, aum, a, h. The bija mantra 'ham' is given for the element of space, and it sits in the middle of a pure white full moon. The moon shines even though it is surrounded by total darkness. The presiding deity is Sadasiva seated upon a bull; he has a hermaphrodite form, with half his body as white as snow, and the other half golden. He has five faces and ten arms. He is clad in tiger skin, and his body is smeared in ashes. He wears a garland of snakes. The female deity is the white Sakini, four-armed, five-faced and three-eyed, clad in yellow. This chakra also has an elephant upon which the space mantra 'ham' sits. The elephant symbolizes the fact that no one can move space. Space is firmly rooted, established, immovable.

The last chakra is the ajna chakra. It is located in the forehead. Color cannot exist here; there is only bright light, which the texts say is like lightning. There are two petals upon which the letters ham and ksam appear. The animal associated with this center is not an animal as such; it is the mind, consciousness. The mantra for this chakra is the sacred monosyllable 'Om'. There is only a female deity, Hakini, who is also white, and has six red colored faces, each with three eyes. She has six arms and is seated upon a white lotus. Above her is a triangle which gives off the light which is like lightning. Above this, in another triangle, is the self, in whose luminosity everything from the muladhara right up to the crown of the head is visible. It is not possible for the human to ascend or even aspire beyond the ajna chakra. When one reaches the ajna chakra, when the energy has been withdrawn into it, then it is offered up to the Supreme to be taken over.

This process is called 'laya' or 'return to the source', and by this, that which has

gone out into orbit has returned to its source. The yoga texts have some beautiful descriptions of this. Since we have already described each chakra, we can briefly go over the process also. Starting off, one enters meditation on the muladhara. There, one finds the mantras that are inscribed on the petals. One goes on in contemplation of these sound symbols until they become withdrawn into the bija mantra for the muladhara: 'lam'.

When that happens, the yogi shifts his attention to the svadhistana-chakra. There the yogi contemplates the entire earth, not just this silly Earth, but all earth everywhere, having been dissolved into water. The water element has six petals, and six mantras. One contemplates them in the same fashion as before until there is nothing but pure water, and all merges in water's own mantra: 'vam'. When this is complete, the radii rest in the center.

This is the process by which the energy ascends towards its source. There are ceremonies, which are meant to be followed also. One repeats at every stage, 'I worship the god in this chakra'. Why does one do that? One does it to be reminded that it is not your will that makes this happen, but the Divine alone that does all this. Thus, the ego-sense is kept in check at every step in the process. One offers oneself to the deity knowing that guidance and grace are necessary.

From the svadhistana, one ascends to the manipura. There one contemplates all the mantras, the colors, the symbols, until consciousness is completely and totally merged into the bija mantra for fire: 'ram'. When the consciousness ascends up to the next stage, it spreads out into the twelve petals of the anahata chakra. One goes on in contemplation there. When all consciousness is merged with the 'air' bija mantra 'yam', then one hands oneself to the Divine power in order to ascend to the vissudha chakra.

If you add up all the petals, including the final two in the Ajna, you get fifty radii in all. These compose the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. Fifty multiplied by twenty is one thousand. Why multiply by twenty, you ask? Why not? You can multiply by fifty if you like. There is really no rhyme or reason as to how they come up with that figure.

The seventh center, the Sahasrara becomes 'the thousand petaled lotus' which rests above the six centers. The Sahasrara is the lotus, white in color, and has its face downwards. Deep within it is a huge triangle within which is a great void. It is the bindu or the blue pearl which grants liberation. In it is the Supreme Being, the self of all. Therefore, the Sahasrara is neither considered to be a chakra nor a center of consciousness; it is beyond; it is the beyond. No one talks about it.

This is the process of laya, where all the elements are withdrawn and absorbed. Some have suggested that you can omit contemplation of the lower two chakras. Others say that this would be ineffective because that would be ignoring vital operative elements of our being: 'What is a human being, after all, if not these bottom three chakras? Are humans detached from eating, or sex, or other aspects

of earthly existence? '

And yet, if you are caught up in these, you will be expending your energies there, and not have any left with which to look towards the Divine. On the other hand, there is no sense in suddenly trying to jump into this process at the Anahata-chakra.

You can try it, but the Supreme may say: 'You are bluffing'.

THE PRACTICE OF VISUALIZATION: THE MUDRAS

The material that one reads about visualization of the chakra centers has, of course, been based upon someone's experience. Some yogis saw fit to leave records describing what they experienced, thinking such descriptions would benefit the students that came after them. These descriptions were not merely intended to be a reference guide, but rather to point out 'possibilities' that the student had not considered. Knowing about these possibilities was regarded as important, because it was thought such knowledge would bring about a certain kind of faith - faith that there were possibilities to be experienced, which would, in turn bring about two factors essential to the entire system of chakra meditation: clarity of the visualization, and the intensity necessary to keep up the practice.

For instance, imagine that you have no knowledge of anatomy. A doctor comes along and asks you to visualize your spinal column. How would you begin to do that? In order to do it, you must first have some faith that there is such a thing as a spinal column, and secondly, you must know something about how to begin your visualization. If the doctor produces some anatomical charts that show you the particular details of the spine, you feel you can proceed. And so in much the same way that some faith is necessary to attempt to visualize your own spinal column, something which you have never seen, some amount of faith in the yogi is necessary in order to begin the practice of chakra meditation. If your faith can be awakened, you will also need the descriptions as a starting point from which to proceed.

Are these chakra centers located in the physical body? There are two points of view in response to this question. Some doctors say that they have discovered some physiological correspondences between the physical body and the chakras. Others, the mystics, vehemently protest this notion, and say chakras have absolutely nothing to do with the physical being. They say that the chakras belong to the 'subtle body' or 'astral body', and go so far as to deny any correspondence to anything physical. This is because the mystic discounts the reality of the physical body, and considers the physical body to be nothing more than the crystallization of thought. His notion of the physical body is similar to the refrain in the Prajnaparamita Sutra: 'All this is empty, void', the notion being that in the void a thought arises and then assumes a physical body, and having assumed the body, sees the solid substance as the truth or reality. It is very much like building a statue of great saint, adoring it and eventually coming to feel that the living presence of that saint is embodied in that statue. Thought has produced the statue, and thought sees the living presence existing in it. According to the mystic, thought has produced the body, and thought sees it as existing as solid substance. Argue with him all you like, that is the mystic's premise, and he will not compromise it.

The chakras are regarded as the centers of psychic energy. As we have seen in our discussion of the 'Kundalini Spiral', the literature gives very detailed descriptions regarding the shapes and colors, etc., and one contemplates all this in the manner that we have described. As has been intimated, the yogis knew that the whole secret to this practice is visualization done with the utmost clarity and intensity, so that, for example, when you contemplate and, therefore, visualize the earth center, your whole being becomes that earth center. You do that with each center becoming water, fire, air, and space. You become water. You become fire. You become air. You become space. You become one with it. When you become one with space, there is oneness with infinite space also. There, in a manner of speaking, the body is said to 'disintegrate'. In infinite space, one sees what can only be described as 'lightning', the ajna chakra.

In order to facilitate concentration, contemplation, and meditation upon all this, you have to have the feeling that you have some kind of grasp of it. That is why it is not only the imagination but the visualization that is vital. In the case of imagination, you see the thing almost as if it were real. That is not quite good enough; it is much too nebulous. One must get closer to the perception of it as real. We make only this small distinction between visualization and perception: in visualization, I see it as if real, while in the case of perception, I see it as real.

There are some techniques described both in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika and the Geranda-Samhita, which aid visualization in chakra meditation. These are the special yoga practices known as the 'mudras'. Frequently, mudras are associated only with the hands, either as traditional gestures, many having been preserved in Indian dancing or as symbols, the most famous of which is the chit-mudra, which of course, denotes chit: wisdom of the highest consciousness. However, for the yogi, the word 'mudra' itself translates as 'seal', both in the sense of the seal of authority, and, like sealing an envelop, the 'seal' that closes and safeguards. The purpose of performing mudras is often said to be awakening the kundalini energy. They can be practiced either before or after other yoga practices like pranayama or asanas.

You will find that you can practice the mudras without any difficulty. The practice of maha-mudra is especially easy to do. Maha-mudra is performed to aid the visualization of the sushumna. To perform it, simply sit on the ground, and place the left heel on the perineum, being careful not to sit on it. The right leg is kept straight and at a right angle to the body. Clasp your right foot with both hands, not merely touching the foot but holding it firmly. Remember, 'mudra' means 'seal', and so any body-lock should be firm at all times. Concentrate within, turning your attention to eyebrow center. Now fix your gaze inwards, and clearly visualize the sushumna nadi as a radiant shell running vertically through the center of your body from top to bottom. Inhale. Do jalandhara-bandha - dropping the chin and pressing it firmly to the chest, and hold the breath, continuing to visualize the sushumna nadi. The visualization is only of the psychic tube itself, not of the individual chakras. Since the heel of the foot is on the perineum, and since your attention has also been focussed upon the eyebrow center, you are

immediately aware of where the sushumna begins and ends. After holding the breath to your capacity, raise the chin and exhale slowly. This constitutes only the first half of the procedure. You should repeat it again, only this time place the left leg out straight and the right foot on the perineum. This is the second-half of one complete round of the maha-mudra. If necessary, you may do several complete rounds of maha-mudra. It may be necessary to do several rounds of maha-mudra in order for the sushumna to be visualized clearly.

After finishing with maha-mudra, you should perform what is called maha-bandha. Place the left heel so that it presses up against the perineum. Place the right foot on the left thigh. Inhale, do the chin lock, and place the palms on the floor. As part of the maha-bandha, you should perform the mula-bandha, which was described in the discussion of pranayama, contracting the muscles so as to close or 'bind' the anus while also contracting the muscles in such a way so as to pull up on the alimentary canal. This mula-bandha must be firmly kept while you continue with the maha-bandha. Contemplation is of the eyebrow center. And as in maha-mudra, you visualize the sushumna. As before, you raise the chin, and exhale slowly.

Finally, still assuming the maha-bandha, you perform the maha-vedha. Take a deep breath and hold it, and, while dropping the chin again into jalandhara-bandha, you lift and raise your buttocks off the ground, your two palms pushing you off from the ground, and then gently drop the buttocks, letting it gently strike the floor.

Maha-mudra, maha-bandha, and maha-vedha can all be considered three parts of one exercise, since they are to be practiced together. You have probably noticed that all three produce some effects upon the perineum. These are performed because, as a beginning student, you have no sensitivity whatsoever about the beginning of the sushumna, and these three practices will enable you to create that sensitivity.

This is also the reason your focus is directed towards the eyebrow center. When you are asked to focus the attention upon the eyebrow center, you are not being asked to look specifically at the eyebrow center. The eyebrow center is the terminus of the sushumna. There you begin your meditation upon the whole sushumna. Your concentration should be free to move through the entire field of the sushumna, because the sushumna is not just top, middle, and bottom, but one field, one sushumna. Therefore, this meditation like all meditation, is not fixed upon a point; it is not staring at something.

In meditation, the chitta or mind is not fixed upon one thing; there is movement. The movement may be limited to the extent that the meditation is upon the sushumna only, but there is no limitation on the movement of consciousness within that field. In other words, the only thing we have limited is the field of attention, which actually is not such an easy thing to do. To fix the attention so that it is kept fixed is easy. It is much more demanding to limit the field of

attention without having it be fixed. That is what we do in these yoga practices.

Quite a number of yoga texts mention the kechari-mudra. They say that performing this mudra will promote concentration. It involves rolling the tongue back so that it touches the posterior nares. Since the tongue will not reach to such a distance, some yogis cut the frenum liguae, so that the tongue is free to reach the distance. Other yoga texts, such as the Geranda Samhita suggest performing nabho-mudra, where the student need not take such drastic measures as altering the tongue. In nabho-mudra, the tongue is turned back onto the palate towards the uvula as far as it will go. It is thought that mental agitation ceases when the tip of the tongue turned up and back. Many regard nabho-mudra as an adequate substitute for karchari-mudra.

Yoni-mudra is excellent for meditation upon the chakras because it completely blocks out, or seals off all distractions. It gets its name 'yoni', meaning 'uterus', because like the baby in the uterus, the practitioner has no external contact with the world, and therefore, no externalization of consciousness.

The physical posture that is recommended, therefore, is siddhasana, because it is thought the best for sealing off the lower apertures. If you cannot do siddhasana, sit in padmasana. The yogi then seals off all the upper apertures. First, the ear holes are closed by putting the thumbs in the ears. Keep your back straight. Next close the eyelids, and place the tips of the index fingers on them. If the eyeballs feel disturbed by the pressure of the finger on the eyelids, try drawing the eyelid down with the index fingers so that the only place where the fingers apply pressure is just below the eyes, at the cheekbone. The middle fingers push in on the nostrils. The ring fingers rest on the upper lip, while the little fingers rest under the lower lip. Each elbow should be pointed outwards: the right at a ninety degree angle to your right side, and the left elbow at a ninety degree angle to your left side. Keep them them in this position throughout, i.e., do not let them drop downwards. You are allowed to prop them up with something if necessary. In fact, serious practitioners use a 't' shaped stick called a yoga danda which keeps the elbows stationary. By putting pressure on the arm pit, the yoga-danda is also supposed to change the flow of energy in the nadis. This would be desirable if the alteration of the flow of energy, which in a healthy person has its own natural rhythm of alternation, had somehow become restricted due to some disturbance somewhere in the body-mind complex. If this were to happen, the normal regulation of energy from one side of the body to the other would be very sluggish and flow on one side would dominate for quite longer than usual. To help counter this, the yoga-danda is placed under the arm pit on the side in which the energy flow is dominant. If the energy flow is dominant on the left - the ida, the yogi places the yoga-danda under the armpit on the left side, and the flow will begin to shift, and will eventually start flowing in the pingala nadi on the right side.

Now let us look at how to breathe while doing the yoni-mudra. Some of you may be wondering how that is to be accomplished, since so far, all the apertures have been sealed. There are two variations in the technique. The first is simply to stop

pinching the nostrils with your middle fingers when you wish to breathe in and out. In the other procedure, the nostrils are held tightly shut the ring and little fingers stay put also, but the lips open as if you are pouting, or, as if you are about to whistle. Breathing through the mouth is recommended in the Gerandha Samhita, and is known as kaki-mudra. Swami Sivananda recommended breathing through the nose. Use which ever one you like. I prefer Swami Sivananda's method.

You will find that when it comes to yoni-mudra, the yogis do not suggest any ratio for the inhalation-retention-exhalation of the breath. do not be concerned with how long you prolong the inhalation-exhalation. As with most of the yoga practices, here the retention of the breath is the important thing. Hold the breath for as long as you like. And, as you hold the breath, concentrate and visualize each chakra singularly, and for some time, visualizing, for example, the four-petaled chakra with the yellow square at the place where the body touches the ground. You visualize the two deities, and everything else in the descriptions that you have been given, and repeat the mantra, etc., until you are one with that earth center, and become absorbed in it. Then, as we have discussed, the consciousness moves up to the next center.

In chakra meditation, yogis have experienced different 'sounds'. You may recall that in our discussion of the purificatory practices, we mentioned that according to the Gerandha Samhita, the seven main yoga practices were given to enable the student to hear the 'inner sounds'. Since mudra is one of seven practices that yogis employ in order to aid the hearing of these inner sounds, we will touch upon this subject now. We should, however, reserve some discussion of the inner sounds for another time, because the hearing of those sounds is really the culmination of hatha yoga.

In yoni-mudra yogis not only visualize each one of the chakras, but also listen intently in order to hear the inner sounds, or what others have called 'the mystic sounds'. The yoga texts say that if you are right-handed, you will here these sounds in your right ear, and, if you are left-handed, you will hear these sounds in your left ear. Your whole attention is funneled there in order to hear these sounds.

Another mudra practice which the yoga texts also recommend for the hearing of the inner sounds is sambhavi-mudra. Like yoni-mudra, it is also more of a spiritual practice than a physical exercise. Yoga texts mention that you should sit in siddhasana, and close your ears with the thumbs, as in the yoni-mudra. Although the eyes are kept open in samthavi-mudra the practitioner is supposed to 'look without wanting to see anything'. In other words, while the eyes remain open, your attention is looking within to see that no concept or precept is formed. It follows that you are without want of hearing anything, and without want of smelling anything. The practice is a 'seal' in that consciousness is prevented from externalizing which in turn prevents the arousal of objects from within itself. Should the inner sounds be heard that will itself shut out all external sounds and

distractions. When all externalization ceases, there is the experience of great inner joy. This is the reason that some yogis, including the Tibetans, have translated the word 'mudra' as 'fountain of joy'.

Since these mudras are intended to be used in chakra meditation, it is recommended that you do not combine them with other types of meditation. It is not that you would be in danger of harm by doing so. However, the effectiveness of mudras would most certainly be lost in toying around with them as if they were merely games to play with. One must be totally serious and totally immersed in the mudras if they are to be effective. This is why it is best to avoid making up the mudra practice yourself as you go along. As no doubt you have already glimpsed, there are so many yoga practices that there really is not any need to make up your own. There are the numerous purificatory practices, numerous pranayama practices, numerous asanas, numerous mudras all providing varied opportunities for meditation and self-discovery.

THE NADA

Earlier on in these talks, we mentioned that the reason for the performing the seven steps of hatha yoga was to enable the aspirant to hear the inner sounds: the nada. However, what takes place at this, the final stage, is more significant than just the hearing of some sounds. The final stage is laya, absorption or dissolution. In other words, your whole being is to be absorbed into the nada.

The hatha yogis viewed all seven aids to hearing the nada - and to having this laya - as one unit not as independent practices. In order for the whole being to be absorbed into the nada, it was necessary for the aspirant to first purify the nadis. For the nadis to become purified, the aspirant not only had to have the experience of intense visualization of the ida, pingala, sushumna, and all of the chakras, but also needed to know if the flow of prana had become obstructed and if so, be able to correct the situation. That is why, in addition to yoni-mudra, chakra meditation and nadishuddi, pranayama was added to the yogis list of important practices. Of course, in order for the pranayama to be effective some asanas and mudras, not excluding the various bandhas, would have to be utilized. Pratyahara - turning the senses, and therefore, the mind, inward - is also understood to be essential for all these practices, as is meditation. Samadhi or direct experience of transcendence is possible through meditation.

All these seven, viewed as one, bring about the laya, or dissolution. The dissolution must encompass the entire personality, so that the entire being is dissolved in the nada, and the spiral of consciousness-energy is returned to its source. Until this happens, there can only be said to be progressive absorption, dissolution. The spiraling motion will continue in some form until the personality merges with the nada. Where does that take place? You have, no doubt, heard this famous expression quoted at one time or another: 'I am the Alpha. I am also the Omega. I am the beginning. I am also the end.' This is an apt description of what we have called the 'bindu'. The bindu is not only the point from which the whole process began, but it is also the point of absorption, where everything gets dissolved.

In our previous discussion of this process, we have mentioned that the attention is focused rather than fixed upon various chakras. The yogis say that if one engages in contemplation of the element of a particular chakra, one becomes attuned to that element, and merges with it. Pondering all of this seems to imply some kind of mastery over the natural elements. Mastery implies the retention of the ego-sense. After all, it is the ego that says 'I can walk on water', not cosmic consciousness. Cosmic consciousness is under water, inside water, above water. It is water. It is everywhere. Only the ego-sense says: 'I can walk on water. I can lift a mountain'. So, although various powers may be mentioned as the fruits of contemplation of the various psychic centers, the contemplation is itself meant to dissolve that which attempts to manipulate these powers, the ego-sense.

Dissolving the ego-sense is also what will take place in the hearing of the nada. There is no manipulation of the sound at all. It is given the name 'nada-nusandana', which not only means contemplation of the nada sound, but also its 'adoration'.

Sound is represented by color, the whole universe being composed both of name and of form. Name is form, and form is name. These two are indistinguishably one, identical. Science corroborates this in its study of vibration - sound - as matter. The yogis go one step further, and insist that each sound has got its own corresponding light. You can put it another way: each vibration has both a sound value and a color value. When the vibration is apprehended by the ear, it is heard as sound. When the same vibration is 'seen', it is apprehended as color. If you can digest this truth, a whole new dimension of understanding will open up for you. You will understand, for example, why the yogis give a mantra with its own corresponding deity, or give the mantra - sound vibration - for a specific chakra its own corresponding light.

Although samadhi is the last of the seven aids to hearing of the nada, no individual practice can be given for it. Samadhi must be thought of as a final stage rather than as a final practice. And so, the last practicable aid to the hearing of the nada are the dhayana practices, or meditation practices. With few exceptions, most yoga texts do not attempt to define classifications for the various meditation practices. One exception is Patanjali's Astanga Yoga, which we will discuss when we come to the subject of Raja Yoga. Another exception is the Gerandha Samhita.

In the eleventh chapter of the Gerandha Samhita, three types of meditation are mentioned. The three types are sthula-dhyana, jyotih-dbyana, and sukshma-dhyana. Sthula means 'gross', jyotih means 'light', and sukshma means 'subtle'. This last one, sukshma meditation, is the very opposite of sthula meditation, and is an extremely subtle form of meditation.

We do not know who the author of the Gerandha Samhita was, or what type of background he had. Although his classifications for meditation nearly follow the same pattern as those of Patanjali, some variance can be found in the first of the three groups, the sthula-dhyana, which seems very much in tune with bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion. He describes a type of contemplation that is common amongst certain classes of devotees in India. In this type of contemplation, one is to visualize a very specific scene. Superlatives abound in the scenes described and the images given are meant to be attractive so that the mind is attracted to them.

Visualize your heart as temple. The temple itself shines, and has a golden dome. In the center of this temple, visualize a full-blown lotus. In the center of the lotus is a radiant throne covered in jewels. On that jewel-encrusted throne, visualize your deity. Actually, the descriptions which you come across do not let you choose the deity that resides in the place which is described. Instead, they prescribe a deity for you. If you investigate this matter, you find that the deity prescribed just happens to be the deity of the author giving the description. The deity given is the

deity with which he himself is familiar; the dubiety that has been a part of his experience, his reality. Should a Buddhist give the description, he would no doubt prescribe the Buddha and a Christian would no doubt prescribe the Christ.

Another common feature is that the deity must provide some kind of guarantee. Visualize the deity seated on the throne ready to grant your boons, and ready to dispel all your fears. These are the most common guarantees. The deity must grant all one's boons, and must necessarily dispel all one's fears. Such guarantees seem unfortunate. After all, why not face these fears? In facing your fears, you can get rid of them. Why should you pray to God to be rid of fear?

Even so, sthula-dhyana has its place in the scheme of yoga. If the mind is not subtle, being gross and body-conscious, it will not be capable of entering into the subtle regions of contemplation that has often compared to jumping on one's own shoulders. However great an acrobat you may be, a body-conscious, unsubtle mind will not be capable of jumping on its own shoulders. The yogis, realizing this, suggest that it is most advantageous to realize what stage of development one is at, so that one can adapt one's meditation to that stage of development. If all one knows of oneself is 'I am the body, gross, physical, material', then it is suggested that this special materialistic approach towards truth called sthula-dhyana be used.

Even should one realize that the earth is extremely subtle, and not what it appears to be through the gross instrument of the human eye, that it is also a mass dancing electrons, subtle, as energy is subtle, if in one's present state of development the earth is seen as solid, let the contemplation of the divine, of the supreme spirit, also be of something solid. There is no harm in proceeding with this, unless, of course, you start insisting that everyone else must do the same, or worse, use it as a stick to beat everyone else into submission.

It is totally inappropriate to force one's own visualization upon someone else. Each must find their own type of visualization. It is not even a question of remaining within the boundaries of one culture verses another. Even within what you think of as your own culture, there are thousands of variations. Some devotees may visualize a crucifix, while others do not even like the symbol of the cross. Some devotees may prefer to visualize a human form. Others would never dream of using a human figure in a visualization of the Divine. Each will have to find his or her own inner predisposition. The only principal that applies to all is the underlying reason for performing this type of meditation: I am body-conscious at present, and therefore, I need a physical symbol upon which the mind can rest, and focus.

Sthula-dhyana may also use the descriptions of the chakras, each one of which is an elaborate mandala. Like the Tibetan Buddhist mandalas, the mandala designs of the chakras have been deliberately planned to be elaborate. The meditation upon the mandala becomes a great psychological adventure. It may even function as the archetype of union. When you practice sthuladyhana on the various

elaborate chakra patterns, it should be with the feeling that there no great hurry. Each chakra meditation may take about an hour or so. There are many petals, and adding and integrating them with the whole being should not be rushed. Moving to the next chakra brings you to a wholly new mandala. Each can be an entire meditation unto itself. Eventually, when the meditation reaches the ajna, there will be the flame, and that light will be the source of your meditation.

When it comes to the most common type of Sthula-dhyana, such as those found in the Gerandha Samhita in which one visualizes beautiful scenes with thrones and deities, some people will no doubt ask if it is not just bluffing oneself to spend time visualizing temples, shrines, thrones, and deities. The frequent accusation is that such practices merely sanction hallucinations. The only response to this charge is: What are you seeing in front of you? Is that not also an hallucination? It is merely the other side of the spiral, the world of matter. Is it not possible that it is made up of its own hallucinations? How do you know that what you are seeing in the physical world is true? At least by raising this inner 'hallucination', or vision, our confirmed conviction in the reality of the physical world has been shaken. You sit in your own meditation room, contemplating the ocean, or the orb of the sun, the mountains, etc. Maybe there is a throne with someone sitting there illuminated by seven lights or candles. For the time being, it appears to absolutely real. You feel that you touch that person. You feel that you could even talk to that person. Then you open your eyes, and ask: 'Was all this hallucination? It was hallucination, yes? In my meditation room, I saw Siva, Buddha, Krishna, Jesus. Now, having come out of it, I and see only myself, and this room. Maybe I am a hallucination too? What is the difference?' Something shakes deep within. At that point, one cannot take anything for granted, because from that moment on, one is inquiring. An inquiring mind never gets caught.

The basis of what the yogis call 'non-attachment', or psychological freedom, is the spirit of inquiry. If this spirit of non-attachment is constant, without letup even for a second, one never forms attachment. In this spirit of inquiry, there is merely questioning, not doubting but merely questioning: 'If that is hallucination, maybe this is also hallucination'.

They are only images. If one image, or imaginary being, turns around and calls another image, which is also an imaginary being a 'fool', must one begin to fight with that hallucination? Must one fight with a phantom? What for? Therefore, this spirit of itself is the answer to attachment, non-attachment, and the whole lot. It gives freedom, total freedom, not only from external forces, but also from internal forces.

One person may say: 'I am all admiration for you. You are such a good man'. The other person might say: 'And to think that I really thought that I saw God in you'. One may be as much of an illusion as the other. In this inquiry, one questions what is seen outside. One questions the seer also.

There is questioning of the seer, not doubting. The seer obviously exists. The yogi merely questions: 'There is a subject, but is it as a subject? The word subject, and the concept of a subject relates directly to the object. It seems obvious that there is an object, otherwise there is no subject, no vision. What is it, and what is the subject?'

One continues to question, but there is no doubting of the existence of existence. There is inquiry, and out the spirit of inquiry, freedom is born.

The orthodox yogis who read this will be cross to hear that all this tremendous meditation is only to rouse this spirit of inquiry. However, the aspirant will not be ready for any type of meditation as long as the mind's gaze is restless and unsteady, and unable to focus. Such a aspirant will only overcome the need for diversions, and paraphernalia, when the mind has reached a more subtle dimension.

Next, from this sthula-dhyana on, an elaborate physical form one can practice the jythih-dhyana. As we said earlier, jyotih means 'light'. In this meditation, the yogi visualizes a single brilliant flame. It can be contemplated in the muladhara chakra, or in any of the other chakras. This flame may also be visualized between the eyebrows, where, according to the Gerandha Samhita, the flame is the light of 'Om'. The flame is steady and un-agitated. In this meditation, the mind merges with the flame.

The sukshma-dhyana is complicated to explain; complicated in the sense that one has to digest many of the doctrines of hatha yoga before one can really grasp its significance. It involves the awakening of the kundalini in the sahasrara, where resides the bindu, the point of beginning and ending. As we have said, it is the point where the spiral returns, and turning upon itself, finds the center. That bindu, it is said, refuses to be confined to the physical body. The hatha yogi practices shambhavi-mudra, and there is what is called the 'wakened gaze' where the eyes are unseeingly open. Some describe this as having the eyes 'vacantly focused', but, of course, when the eyes become 'vacant' they are not focused. Of course, it will be impossible to find any appropriate terminology.

When the eyes are 'vacantly focused', and the kundalini reaches the bindu, and the bindu shines like a blue diamond, or with the radiance of a 'blue pearl'. The light emerges through the eyes, and stands, as it were, in front of the yogi in that twelve-inch space, the magnetic field that we have talked about in our discussion of prana. It stands within that twelve-space, guiding the yogi in all that has to be done from that point on. It is seen outside, but at the same time, the yogi does not know whether it is inside or outside, because inside and outside are all within this magnetic field. It is both inside, outside, and no side. With the vision of this blue light, or 'blue pearl', one's own personal deity is seen. It can be regarded as a vision of 'God'.

We could easily end our discussion upon this high note were it not for the fact

that we have yet to discuss the hearing of the nada. Before experiencing the subtlest nada, various other inner sounds are heard. These are often referred to as the anahata sounds. As with visualization, the yogis have written down descriptions of the sounds they had experienced, so that yoga students who were to come after them would know that such sounds existed. One can find such descriptions in yoga texts such as the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, The Gerandha Samhita, or Swami Sivananda's Kundalini Yoga. You will find that different descriptions of them, the descriptions being only approximations of the sounds that are heard.

The list found in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika says that the sounds resemble: 'The ocean, the cloud, the kettle drum, the jarajara drum, the conch, the bell, the horn, tinkling bells, the vine, and bees'. Swami Sivananda also lists ten kinds of sounds: 'chini' - like the pronunciation of the word, the 'chini-chini' sound, the bell, the conch, the lute, the sound of cymbals, the tune of a flute, the voice of a drum, the sound of the double drum - mridanga, and the sound of thunder.

Besides giving descriptions, these three texts also list some procedures for hearing the sounds. We have already covered these in our discussion of the mudras. You may recall that after assuming the yoni or shambhavi mudra, the yoga aspirant listens for these sounds by first directing the attention to the right or left ear. Why do the yogis require this? The reason is that by providing a specific point for the aspirant to listen, the entire attention will be able to be funneled to that one point.

For instance, there is a custom that concerns the giving of a mantra that was practiced in my younger days and which is still practiced today. According to this custom, when someone gives a student a mantra, even if the mantra is well known and has millions of people who know and repeat it, it is given by whispering the mantra in the ear of the recipient. Why whisper the mantra if everyone knows it? One whispers it so that the recipient will be more intently focused to listen to it when it is whispered. This enhances the attention of the recipient. In the same way, one listens through the right or left ear when attempting to hear the inner sounds so that all the attention is focused at one point, which, in turn, brings more depth to the awareness. It is an explanation that is full of common sense. Of course, you will probably find many different explanations for it.

There is also a simpler way of looking at the entire practice of hearing the anahata sounds. It is such a departure from the traditional viewpoint that when some people hear it, they may feel inclined to throw stones; it is so terribly unorthodox. How does this unorthodox view take shape?

To begin with, the word 'anahata', what does it mean? The word 'anahata' simply means 'unstruck'. 'Ahata' means 'striking'. The sound produced by one object striking another is the normal way of producing any sound. Anahata is the opposite of that sound, produced by non-striking. What you call the mental

repetition of a mantra is a non-striking sound. You hear the sound of the mantra within you, and yet, you are not producing the sound in the throat by vibrating the vocal cords. In this way, I am constantly hearing anahata sound. When I am thinking and the thinking comes in the shape of words, that is anahata sound also. Do you begin to see the simplicity in this?

One person proudly exclaims: 'I hear it'. Well, I hear my mantra also. I was going to ask you another question just now, and I heard that also. The formulation of the question was heard within. That is anahata.

In fact, and this is perhaps the most terribly unorthodox of all, any mental verbiage is anahata. And so, by directing the attention to my mental verbiage, I am already engaged in the practice of listening to anahata sounds. Somehow it seems less blasphemous to use the example of the mentally hearing a mantra than it does to use the one of mentally asking a question, so we will use the former example of hearing the mantra instead. Without striking anything, a mantra is heard. Where is that sound produced? Where does that sound originate? And, who hears the sound?

In view of all this, ask yourselves this important question: 'Why must I look for extraordinary phenomenon when the ordinary phenomenon itself is puzzling?' If I close my eyes, I can see an orb of light there. And even though I may not be interested in the color of that orb, the color keeps on changing. That is already a puzzling but simple ordinary phenomenon. So, also is the question of where the sound of the mantra originates. By directing the attention to it, and by inquiring into it, I get out of it some truth. I can arrive at an understanding of the self, which is self-knowledge.