



SECRET POWER OF TANTRIK BREATHING

SWAMI SIVAPRIYANANDA



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Swami Sivapriyananda



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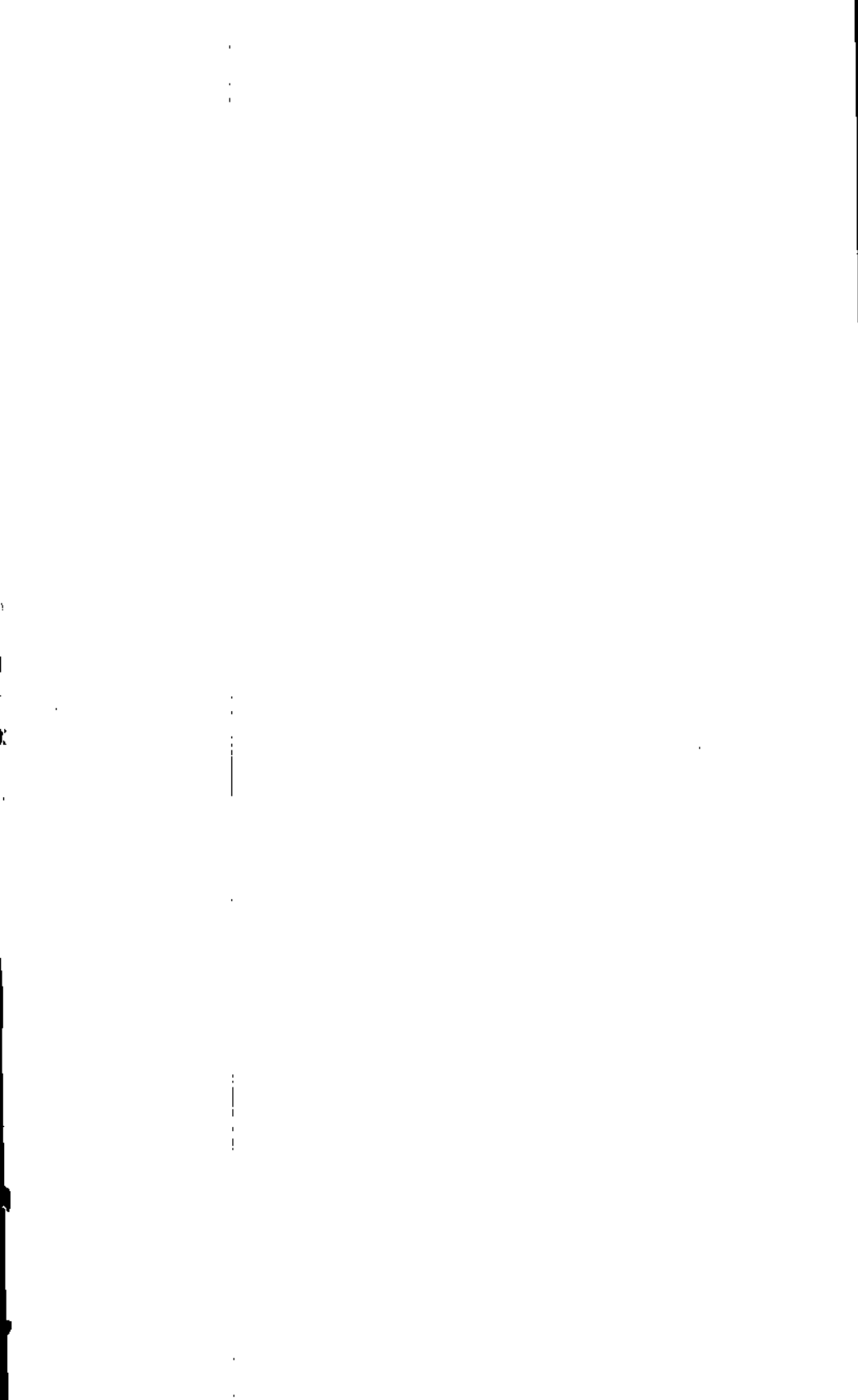
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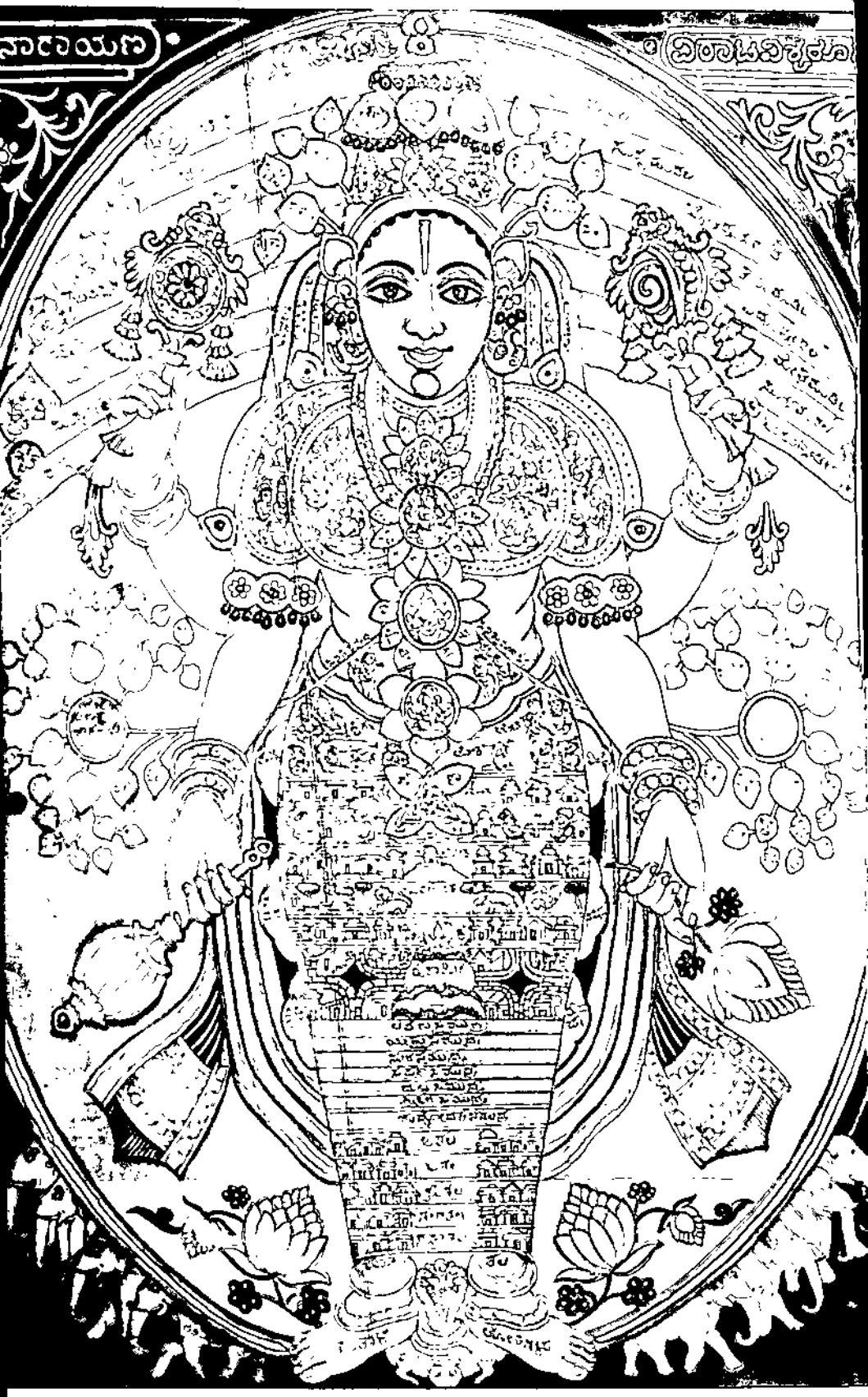
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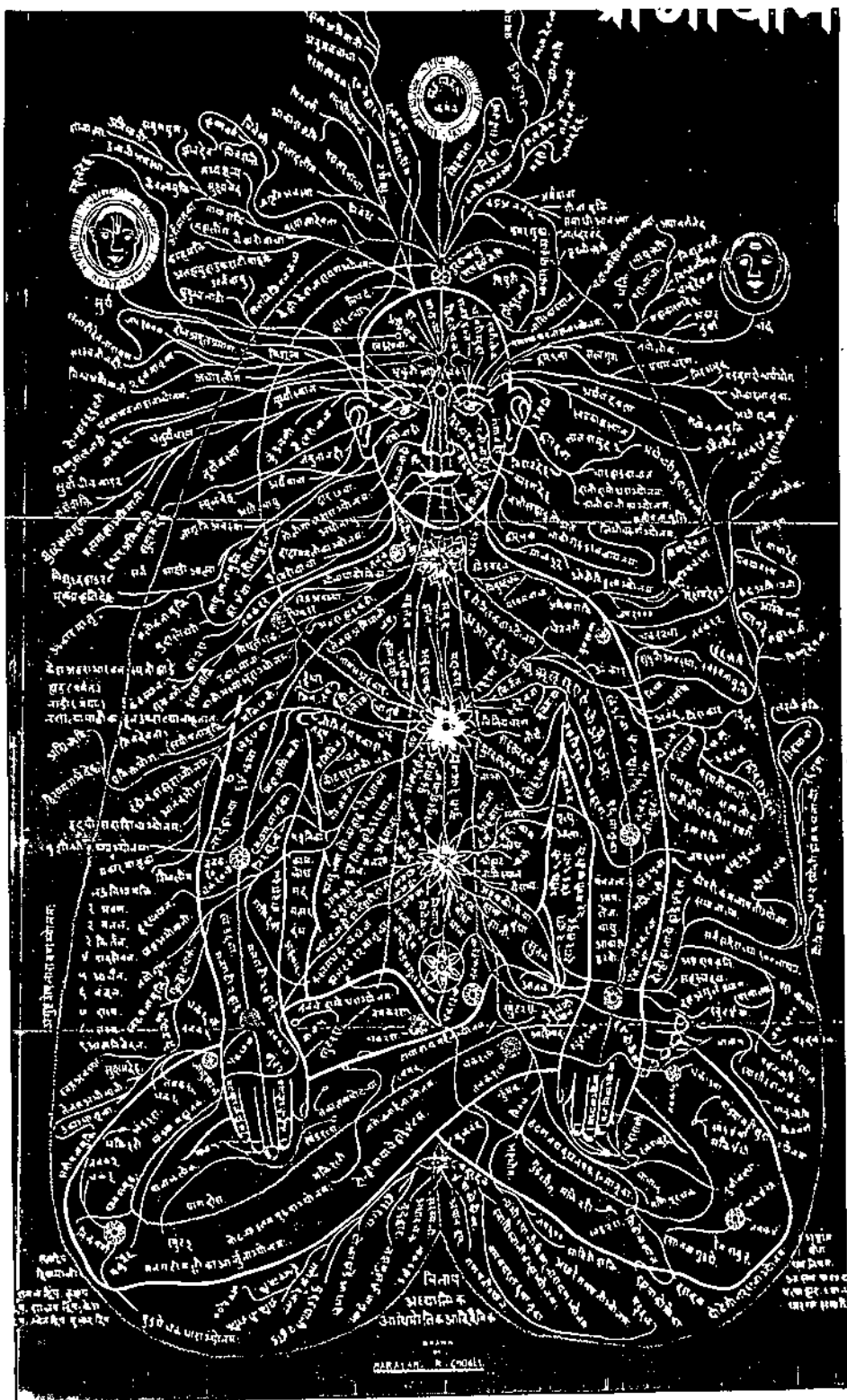
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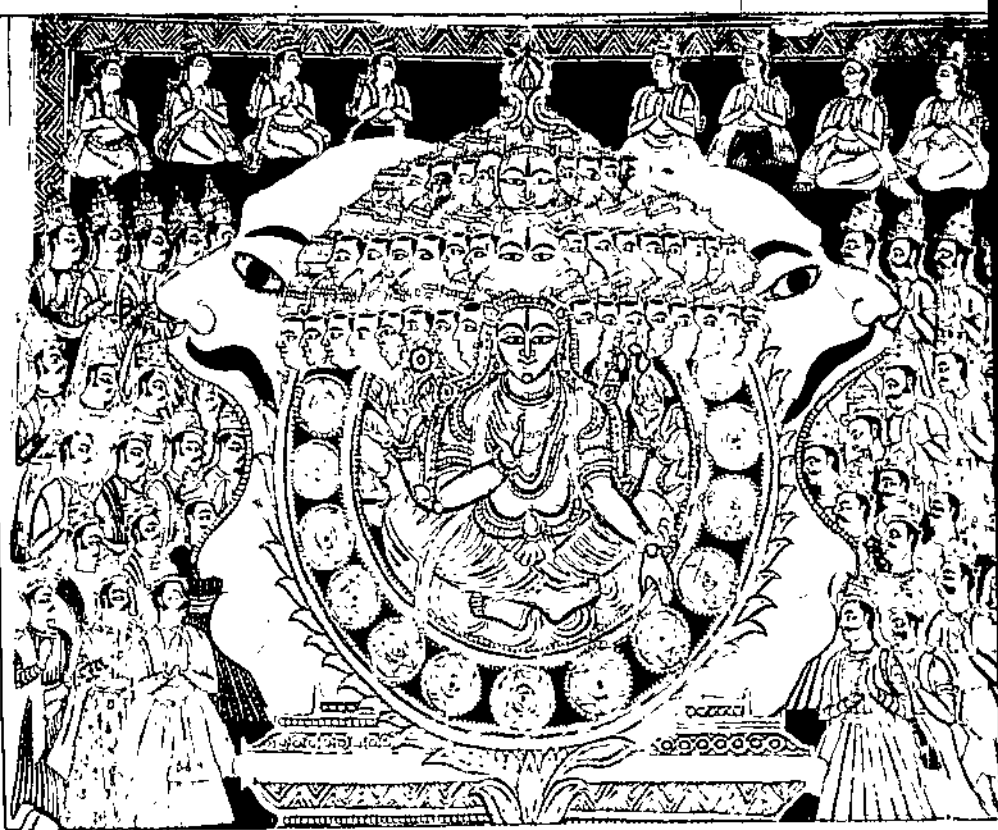




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I

INTRODUCTION

The act of normal breathing or respiration involves the taking in or inhaling of oxygen-rich air from the environment into the lungs and breathing out or exhaling air laden with carbon dioxide. Air is inhaled when the muscular wall called the diaphragm and the intercostal muscles between the ribs enlarge the chest cavity by expanding outwards. This expansion creates a slight vacuum in the lungs and air is sucked in to fill it. The air that enters the body through the two nostrils passes through the pharyngeal tube into the trachea, the main airway. The trachea divides into two bronchi, which in turn divide and branch into bronchioles leading to the alveolar ducts and sacs where the blood-gas exchange takes place.

Exhalation is, on the other hand, a passive act and requires no effort. The elastic diaphragm recoils back to its original position and deflates the lungs pushing the inhaled air out. Under normal conditions of quiet breathing, all this takes between 4 to 6 seconds. Generally, breathing is an automatic process that goes on at the rate of 10 to 15 breaths every minute, without our having to pay conscious attention to it. This automatic nature of breathing is very essential to our survival as each and every cell in our body needs to be constantly supplied with oxygen. The brain cells are specially sensitive and if starved of oxygen even for a few minutes they die never to be replaced again.

Breathing, however, is not always automatic, and unlike the processes of digestion and heart beats, we can override the respiratory centre in the brain and hold our breath. The group of cells that govern respiration are collectively called the 'respiratory' centre and are situated at the back of the brain in the region known as the medulla oblongata. This centre has nerve connections to higher centres of the brain and spinal cord, and therefore the emotional states of our mind profoundly influence breathing. Emotional stress can increase the

rate of respiration, while emotional calm makes the breathing deep and slow.

The intimate relationship between respiration and the changing emotional states of the mind was known to man long before the birth of modern science. Most early civilisations, and particularly those of India and China, evolved methods of controlling respiration and consequently changing the emotions and the state of consciousness.

Very fast and deep breathing over long periods results in too quick a loss of carbon dioxide. This leads to muscle rigidity, stupor and cataleptic coma. Many religions use prolonged chanting, shouting, singing and dancing to induce trance-like states. A method of increasing the carbon dioxide content of blood is slow breathing. Rise in the level of carbon dioxide decreases the oxygen content which results in anoxia, a feeling of lightheadedness and a trance-like state in which subjects occasionally have mystical experiences. Meditation and the yogic method of pranayama both attempt to regulate the carbon dioxide and oxygen ratio of the blood in order to induce mystical states.

Pranayama and the Knowledge of the Rise of the Vital Breath (Svarodaya Shastra)

Besides the change in oxygen-carbon dioxide ratio of the blood, the yogic method of breath control (*pranayama*) influences the thought process in another way. It is well known that the normal rate of respiration is related to bodily activity and emotional state of the individual. Physical exercises and violent emotions such as anger, anxiety, fear and sexual arousal increase the rate of breathing. A peaceful mind and emotional calm slows down the respiratory rate, sometimes even below the normal level. Scientists have observed that even among animals, those that are excitable breathe more quickly than those that are placid by nature. A hare breathes 55 times per minute, an ape 30 times, a cat 24 times, a dog 15-18 times, a horse 8-12 times and a tortoise only 3 times a minute. On the basis of this, Yogis argue that if emotional states can affect the rate of breathing, then conversely, an alteration in the rate of respiration should alter the individual's emotional state. All methods of *pranayama* are based on this basic idea. And the final aim of Yoga is to reduce

breathing to the absolute minimum, thereby arresting totally the discursive and emotional functions of the mind (*Yogaḥ citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*, Patanjala *Yogasutra*, I, 2).

Beyond the yogic method of *pranayama* is another method called the Siddha system of 'svara' (breath and sound) 'udaya' (rise). This is not a method of breath control but a way of using normal respiration to harmonise the forces of life with the pattern of breathing. The *svara-udaya* technique is based on one basic observable fact which is frequently overlooked. That is, we normally breathe freely through only one nostril at a time. This alternate breathing changes roughly every one and a half hours from one nostril to the other.

There is a qualitative difference between the breath from the left and right nostrils. Breath from the left nostril is cool, soothing, passive and feminine in nature, while the breath that flows from the right nostril is warm, energizing, active and masculine. The basic purpose of 'svara-udaya' method is to teach mankind the way of harmonising the breath from each nostril with the nature of the life task to be accomplished.

According to the Tantras, the distinction between the breath from the left and right nostrils is due to the movements of the celestial bodies. 'As the moon moves through the signs of the Zodiac, so the breath moves from the moon (left) nostril to the sun (right) nostril,' says the *Siva-svarodaya-shastra*. An individual's Zodiac sign determines which breath is beneficial on which day.

Some modern scientific research has been done on the mechanism of alternate nostril dominance while breathing, but no attempt has been made to correlate these nostril changes with certain psychological and behavioural tendencies. Dr. Vijayendra Pratap (1971-72) had 99 people observe nostril activity and record the results for two months. They noted the condition of nostril activity each day at 3 hour intervals, from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. Most of the 99 observers were hospital patients. Statistical analysis of the data collected confirmed variable nostril dominance but could not be used to confirm the rhythmicity of change. Regarding the cause of alternate breathing, Dr. Pratap says:

'It is believed that it has something to do with sympathetic innervation. The author of this research paper feels that air currents which pass through the nose stimulate certain parts of the olfactory nerve filaments, and consequently the olfactory bulb, which is an extension of the brain, allowing impulses to continue after a stimulus has ceased.... It is possible that central mechanisms govern nostril breathing in order to maintain homeostasis of the organism....It may be surmised that the air currents passing through the right nostril influence *excitatory* effects, while those passing through the other nostril produce *inhibitory* effects.'¹

The significance of nostrils in breathing and the force of breath from each nostril has been scientifically studied by Bhole and Karambelkar (1968). In this study, 77 men and 21 women, all in good health, were observed to determine 'resting state' breathing patterns. The method of study involved the use of a tube from each nostril which was attached to a device to record the force of breathing. In 47.8% cases, breathing force was greater from the right nostril than the left. In 37.7% the left nostril breathing force was greater. Only in 14.5% cases breathing force was of equal magnitude in the right and left nostrils.

According to '*svara-udaya*' tradition particular mode of nostril dominance is preferable for certain activities, and to some extent it is possible to change the breath from one nostril to the other. Yogic methods of doing this are given in the next chapter. Modern studies to investigate the efficacy of traditional Yoga techniques were conducted by Bhole (1968). He paid special attention to the use of a '*yoga-danda*' to change nostril breathing. Subjects were asked to place the Y-shaped crutch-like instrument, called the '*yoga-danda*', under an armpit and then lean over and press it between the chest and the arm. This position was maintained for approximately 15 minutes while the breathing force from each nostril was carefully recorded. Results suggested that the breathing force is increased in the nostril on the side opposite to the '*yoga-danda*' and decreased in the nostril on the same side.²

Rao and Potdar (1970) investigated relative nostril minute ventilation in 3 horizontal postures. They found that in the supine posture, average minute ventilation was about the same in each nostril. However, for the right lateral posture, with the subjects lying comfortably on a bed with the weight of the body borne on the lateral aspect of the thigh, temporal region, shoulder and arm, average minute ventilation was greater through the left nostril. It was exactly the opposite of this in the left lateral posture. In short, the 'up' nostril was always more active. Rao and Potdar concluded that though the nature of this mechanism was not yet very clear, the variation in blood flow through the nasal mucosa may account for the variations in relative nostril ventilation.³

Yoga texts say that if one is successful in gaining control over the change of breath from one nostril to the other and can bring about the change at will without resorting to any physical method, then one is said to be freed from destiny. Some also say that the tossing and turning that we do at night in sleep is nature's way of maintaining balance of the two forces in the human body.

Siva-svarodaya

Traditionally the '*svara-udaya*' method was first taught by Lord Shiva — the storehouse of all occult knowledge — to his wife Parvati — a personification of his occult power (*shakti*). The legend says that Parvati fell asleep while listening to Shiva's hypnotic voice explaining the secrets of the '*svara-udaya*' technique. But a fisherman, or a Shaman who had turned himself into a fish, heard the entire exposition. This Shaman was the great occultist Matsyendranatha. He remembered every word Shiva had spoken and he passed the knowledge to mankind through a long line of disciples known throughout Indian literature and religion as the Nathas (masters). The word 'Natha' is very interesting and its mystical etymology is subtly related to the cosmic philosophy of the Natha sect. There are two syllables: *Na* and *tha* in the word. The *Na* is said to represent the Unmanifest cosmic spirit, and *tha* symbolises the Manifest universe. Therefore, a Natha is a person who understands and harmonises the two polarities of the 'Unmanifest' and the 'Manifest'.

In order to understand the ancient system of the harmony of breath one must first comprehend the basic concepts on which this system is based.

The first basic concept is the evolution of the universe. But it should be clearly understood that this occult theory of evolution does not refer to the physical universe. It represents the gradual awakening of the individual's consciousness. Therefore, it refers to the psychological and psychic universe.

The evolution of this microcosm/macrocosm is the result of an interaction between the principle of 'Consciousness' (Purusha) or the positive/male element and the 'Energy of nature' (Prakriti) or the negative/female element.

In the beginning, the three potentials/qualities of the universe (gunas) — luminosity, existence, goodness (sattva); activity, movement, motor energy (rajas); and sloth, static inertia, darkness (tamas) — lay in perfect and homogeneous balance within Prakriti. Then, in time (kala), the proximity of the Purusha to the Prakriti upset the perfect primordial equilibrium and the process of evolution was set in motion. From the transformations that took place within the Prakriti principle, Buddhi or Mahat — the essence of intellect and the foundation of all mental functions — was born. Drawn by the force of evolution, Prakriti was transformed from the state of Buddhi to that of Ahamkara — the sense of I-ness and the basic notion of individual existence (ego).

From Ahamkara, evolution proceeded in two directions: the objective or external world and the subjective or psychomental world. The evolutionary direction that Ahamkara took depended upon which of the three gunas predominated. When sattva or luminosity predominated, Manas — the mind, five sense organs (*jnana indriyas*) — ears, skin, eyes, tongue and nose, and the five sense perceptions — hearing, feeling, seeing, tasting and smelling, were evolved. When rajas or movement was dominant, the five organs of action (*karma indriyas*) — mouth, hands, legs, bowels and genitals and the five basic actions — speaking, grasping, walking, excreting and copulating came into being. With the predominance of tamas or inertia there appeared the five potential elements (*tanmatras*), their subtle qualities of sound, touch, form, flavour and odour, and

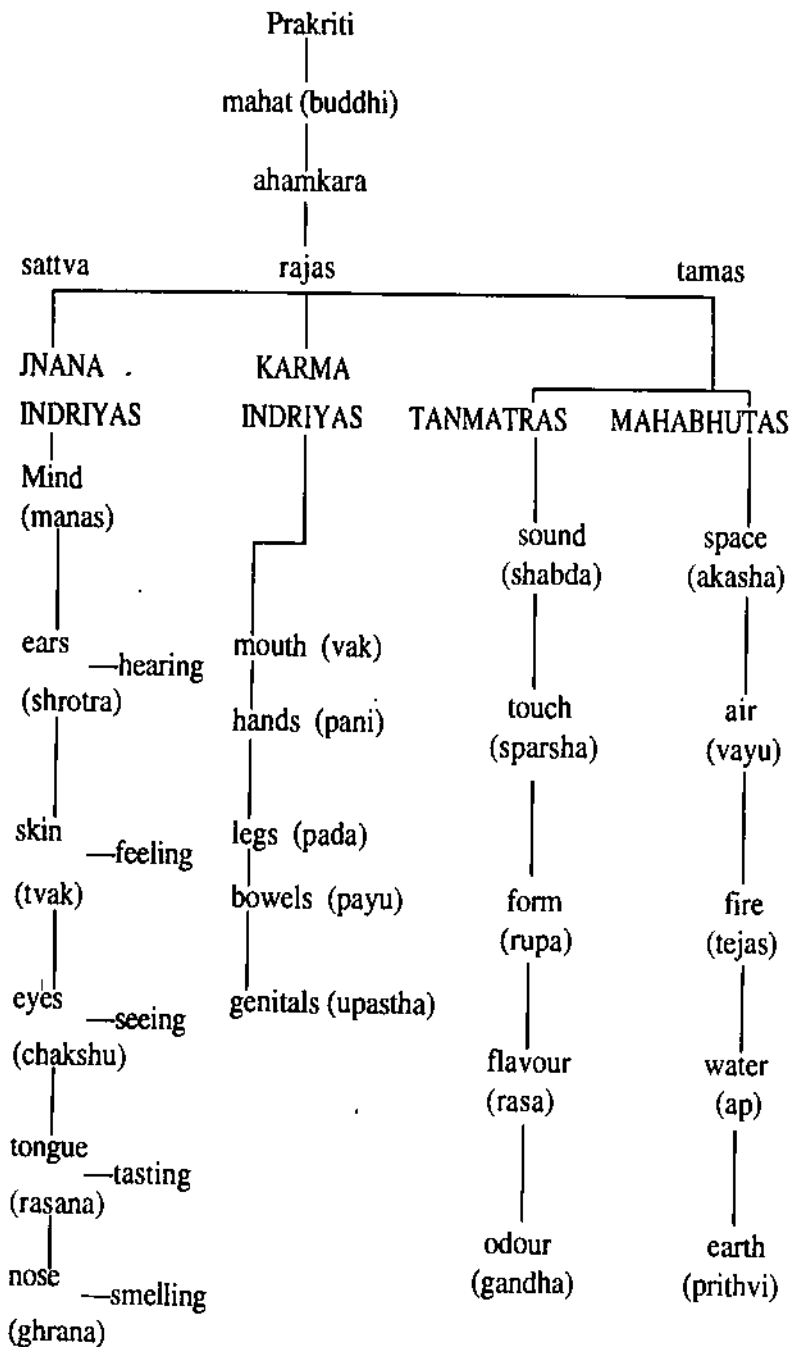


Chart 1: Evolution according to Yoga

the five gross elements (*mahabhutas*) — space, air, fire, water and earth (see Chart I).

The five gross elements make up the physical world we see around us. But they never exist in their pure state. The actual earth, for instance, is only fifty per cent earth and about twelve per cent of each of the other four — water, fire, air and space. All material and visible forms of the five gross elements have a similar composition.

After a set period of time, the microcosm/macrocosm dissolves in a reverse order until the primordial state of equilibrium of the three gunas, in Prakriti, is reached. This is said to be the end of one 'Cosmic cycle'. This process is repeated again and again for infinite number of times.

The second basic concept is that of the vital energy of *vayu* (air). The life of all living bodies depends upon the air that is breathed in and out. Without breathing life would not be possible. Similarly, the subtle body depends on the vital energy of *prana* which circulates throughout the body and flows in and out along with the physical breath. And like the physical breath, *prana* energy also needs to be constantly replenished from the 'universal' energy that pervades the cosmos.

Soham Sadhana

As already mentioned earlier in the Introduction, breathing, both physical and subtle, is made up of two acts: inspiration where the air is taken into the lungs, and expiration where the inspired air is driven out of the lungs. The air that is driven out of the lungs makes the sound 'ham'; and the inhaled air produces the sound 'sah'. The two sounds together make the Sanskrit word 'hamsah' (literally goose) which is a synonym for the 'Supreme Spirit'.

In Indian mythology, the goose is a bird that can separate milk from water, a normally impossible task. This special ability of the mythical goose has made it a symbol of discrimination (*viveka*) between what is real (the spirit) and what is merely transient (the world of names and forms). Moreover, the goose is pure white and spotless and therefore said to represent the 'soul'.

The 'ham' sound symbolises the male creative principle of consciousness and is known as the seed-mantra (bija-mantra) of Shiva. The 'sah' sound represents the female creative principle of energy and is the seed-mantra of Shakti. When the word 'hamsa' is reversed it spells 'soham' in Sanskrit. The word 'soham' is the famous Upanishadic statement (mahavakya) stressing the identity of the individual souls (*aham*—I) and the 'Supreme Spirit' (*sah*—That) (see *Isha-Upanishad*, 16).

'Soham' is made up of the following vowels and consonants: *s + o + h + a + m*. When the consonants *s* and *h* are taken away from 'soham' we are left with 'Om', the greatest of all mantras (thought forms). This sacred mantra covers the entire range of articulate sound, and is therefore the symbol of the cosmic order as understood by man's mind.

At a practical level, the 'soham' sound that the inhaled and exhaled breaths make can be used as a means of developing awareness. This is traditionally called the practice of spontaneous repetition (*ajapa japa*) and is very effective in cultivating awareness and controlling the mind. This technique is also known in Buddhism as the mindfulness of breathing (*anapanassati vipassana*). The 'soham' *japa* is a natural method (*sahaja*) because no mantras, no malas (rosary) and no initiation are needed. All that is required is to be constantly aware of the two sounds made by the 'in' and 'out' acts of respiration. The sound is always with us, and remains constant during all states of consciousness: waking, dreaming and deep sleep. If an awareness of the 'soham' sound can be kept going through the three states of consciousness, then the individual reaches the fourth state called the 'turiya' or the final state of enlightenment.

At first, however, it is difficult to be continuously aware of the 'soham' sound. For this, a little formal and preliminary practice (*sadhana*) is necessary:

Choose a clean place, free from noise and other disturbances. The place should be without any unpleasant associations. A naturally beautiful place near a flowing stream or in a grove of flowering trees would be ideal. It can be any time of the day or night. What is important is that the mind should be calm and relaxed.

To begin with, sit in any comfortable posture, with the eyes either closed or open, as convenient. Then breathe in slowly and try to hear the 'so' sound. If at first you do not hear the sound try to either imagine it or mentally repeat it. While breathing out, the 'ham' sound can also be heard, imagined or mentally repeated. Care should be taken to see that the breathing is continuous and the 'soham' is not broken up like a verbal mantra.

Generally, when one becomes conscious of the process of breathing its rate alters a little. This can become uncomfortable. So rest a little when this happens and then resume the practice. Ten to fifteen minutes at the beginning should become longer and longer until the awareness of the sound becomes natural and spontaneous. When this happens one might feel that the breath has stopped. But there is no need to worry as this is a sign to show that the practice has now become natural. This is the sahaja state.

The sahaja state leads to total awareness of breathing; and with the awareness of breathing comes an awareness of the nature of emotional, psychological and physical conditioning. When one is aware of the nature of conditioning of the mind one is free from the bonds of attachment. In freedom is the final meeting of Consciousness (Purusha) and energy (Prakriti).

As the normal rate of respiration in human beings is about 15 breaths per minute, this adds up to a total of about 21,600 respirations every twenty-four hours. The 'vital energy' that sustains the subtle body also flows in and out with the gross breath. As life depends on the process of breathing, and as some 'vital energy' is lost during respiration, it is quite natural that if the rate of inhalation and exhalation is controlled and reduced, the 'vital energy' can be preserved and life prolonged. Some yogis are said to have lived for many centuries or become immortal by carefully halting the flow of their 'vital energy'.

The in and out flow of the 'vital energy', along with the breath has observable effects on the human body. The claims made by yogis that they can stop their heart-beats and reduce the rate of respiration have been scientifically studied. Well-known experiments were conducted with Yogi Ramananda who was sealed in an airtight metal box for upto 10 hours. As he went into a trance, air samples

measuring his body's oxygen uptake and heart-beat were monitored every half hour. These experiments showed dramatically that yogis were indeed capable of slowing normal body processes.⁴ Also, if the flow of 'vital energy' can be brought under conscious control, yogis claim that diseases can be prevented or cured, the course of human destiny altered, and a deep insight into the past and the future can be gained.

The Subtle Body

Within the subtle body are numerous channels or subtle pathways (nadis) through which the 'vital energy' of *prana* circulates all over the body. These are subtle and invisible vessels, and they have a psychic, not a physical, reality.

From the base of the spinal cord at the pelvic plexus (adhara-chakra) rise 72,000 subtle channels which spread throughout the body like veins through a leaf of the pipal (*Ficus religiosa*) tree. Of these, twenty-four are principal nadis: ten supply parts of the body above the navel, ten feed parts below the navel, and one pair of nadis branch to each side of the body. Ten out of the twenty-four principal channels are given special importance. Their names are: ida, pingala, sushumna, gandhari, hastijihva, pusha, yashasvini, alambusha, kuhu and shankhini. These ten nadis that rise from the pelvic plexus terminate in special parts of the body. The ida terminates in the left nostril, the pingala in the right nostril, and the sushumna at the highest point of the cranium traditionally known as the brahmandhra (aperture of immensity) and situated at the centre of the dome of the skull. The gandhari ends in the left eye, the hastijihva in the right eye, the pusha in the right ear, the yashasvini in the left ear, the alambusha in the mouth, the kuhu in the genitals and the shankhini in the anus.

Like the subtle nadis, there are ten currents of the 'vital energy' of *prana* that circulate through the body. Five of these belong to the inner body and are called: prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana. They are collectively described as the '*pancha-pranas*'. Prana circulates in the region of the heart, apana in the sphere of the anus, samana in the navel region, udana in the throat and vyana pervades

the whole body. In the evolutionary order, prana is related to the element fire and the sense of sight, apana to the element earth and the sense of smell, samana to the element water and the sense of taste, udana to the element air and the sense of touch and vyana to the element space and the sense of hearing. According to the ancient tradition of the *Prashnopanishad* (III, 7) the 'vital' energy of udana is the vehicle of the soul and is said to guide it from one body to another after death.

The 'vital energies' of the outer body are: naga for belching, vomiting, and giving rise to awareness; kurma for vision and opening and closing of the eyelids; krikala as the source of hunger and thirst, the flow of gastric juices and for sneezing; devadatta for yawning; and dhananjaya for the distribution of nourishment to the subtle body. The last named 'vital energy' is also said to pervade the entire body for a long time after death.

The three most important nadis of the subtle body are: ida, pingala and sushumna. Ida — frequently called the moon or shakti channel — is situated on the left and so rules all the nadis of the left half of the body. Pingala — called the sun channel and the symbol of the Purusha principle — rules the nadis on the right side of the body.

This left and right division of the subtle body and the nature of the psychic nadis has its parallels in modern scientific physiology of the brain. According to the most recent studies⁵ the large and specialised cerebral cortex of the human brain is divided into two hemispheres, joined by a large bundle of fibres known as the *Corpus callosum*. The left side of the body is controlled mainly by the right side of the cortex, and the right side of the body by the left cortex.

The structure and function of these two halves of the brain underlie the two modes of consciousness that coexist within each one of us. Although each hemisphere has the potential for many functions and both sides share and participate in many activities, in most normal persons, the two hemispheres tend to specialise. The left hemisphere is predominantly involved in analytical and logical thinking, verbal skills, writing and speech and complex mathematical calculations; the right hemisphere is concerned with synthesis, artistic and musical abilities, body image, recognition of faces, non-verbal (symbolic) ideas, creativity and holistic thinking. Generally,

right-left specialisation is most prevalent in right-handed men, but is slightly different in women and left-handers.

The third important nadi of the subtle body is the sushumna which joins the centre of the skull to the pelvic plexus and is known as the *meru-danda* — the axis of the human body. Sushumna represents the perfect balance between the two polarities of right and left, sun and moon, Purusha and Prakriti, consciousness and energy.

Hidden inside the core of the sushumna nadi is an extra subtle channel called the 'vajrani' which runs the entire length of the sushumna. Within the vajrani is another subtle pathway known as the 'chitrani' through which runs the shining 'brahma-nadi', the cause of yogic samadhi and enlightenment. This is how the famous '*Shat-chakra-nirupana*' describes these extra subtle pathways:

'She (Chitrani and the Brahma-nadi) is beautiful like a chain of lightning and fine like a lotus fibre, and shines in the minds of sages. She is subtle; the awakener of pure knowledge; the embodiment of bliss and pure consciousness. The Brahma-dvara, entrance to the region of ambrosia shines in her mouth' (verse 3).⁶

Just as the physical body needs to be cleaned and exercised to keep it in good health, the subtle body, and specially the channels, need to be cleaned frequently. The cleaning of the channels is called 'nadi shodhana' and can be done both physically (*nirmanu*) and mentally (*samanu*). The physical methods include six yogic kriyas that are to be learnt from a yogi guru. These kriyas are: *kapalabhati* — stimulating the brain with abdominal and diaphragmatic breathing, *neti* — cleaning the air passage with water, cotton strip, milk, *dhauti* — cleaning the intestinal tract, *nauli* — isolation and rolling manipulation of the abdominal recti muscles, *trataka* — gazing at a fixed, generally bright, object to clear the eye channels, and *bhastrika* — rapid breathing or hyperventilation.

The mental methods of cleaning the nadis are many. The most important and common method includes mantra, meditation and *pranayama* (breath control). To do this, sit in the lotus posture (*padmasana*) or in the siddha posture and meditate on the mantra of air — *yani*. The mantra is to be visualised as smoky in colour and set in a crescent. Inhale through the left nostril repeating the mantra *yam* six times. Retain the breath repeating *yam* twenty-four times and then

exhale slowly repeating the same mantra twelve times. After this inhale through the right nostril repeating the fire mantra *ram*, which is red and set in a flaming triangle, six times. Retain the breath repeating the mantra twenty-four times and then exhale with the mantra repeated twelve times. Keep the gaze fixed on the tip of the nose all the time. This entire exercise can be done for about ten rounds at first, increasing it gradually to what is suggested by the guru.

Strung along the central nadi sushumna are six basic 'chakras' to be discovered and seen only by certain acts of introspection (dhyana). The lowest chakra is at the base of the spine, roughly between the anus and the genitals. This is called the mula-adhara (basic support) chakra and is identified with the pelvic plexus. Its form is that of a four-petalled red lotus with a yellow square in the centre. On the four petals are inscribed, in gold, the letters (matrikas) *va*, *sha* (palatal), *sha* (lingual) and *sa* (dental) of the Sanskrit alphabet. Within the central yellow square is an inverted triangle, the symbol of the yoni (female genitalia), inside which is set a linga (phallus). Coiled around the opening of the linga lies the dormant spiritual power called 'kundalini' (coiled) energy, represented visually as a serpent.

The power called kundalini is another form of the cosmic energy of Prakriti that animates all life. Kundalini is also the power of all psychological drives and motivations and the foundation of all emotions. According to the Tantra texts, kundalini is composed of the three potential qualities (gunas) of nature and the energy behind will (iccha), knowledge (jnana) and actions (kriya). The famous *Tara-rahasya-tantra* describes the form of kundalini as 'shining like ten million suns, cool like ten million moons, flashing like lightning in the sky, but also without form like the Immensity Brahman' (IV, 24).

Man's basic concern as an animal is with food and the elimination of waste products. The muladhara being near the end of the alimentary canal represents man's fundamental concern with digestion and excretion.

Near the genitals lies the second subtle chakra known as the svadhishthana (seat of the self). This chakra is depicted as a vermilion lotus with six petals, each inscribed with one of the following Sanskrit letters: *ba*, *bha*, *ma*, *ya*, *ra* and *la*. The central area of this lotus is silver white inset with a small crescent.

The svadhishthana is identified with the aortic plexus and symbolises man's most important drive after food, that of sexual gratification and reproduction.

At the level of the navel is the manipura (jewel-city) chakra, delineated as a lotus with ten blue petals. Each petal is marked with one of these Sanskrit letters: *da, dha, na* (lingual), *ta, tha, da, dha, na* (dental), *pa* and *pha*. At the centre is a red triangle with its apex pointing upwards. This chakra is the seat of the 'vital energy' called *samana* and represents the solar plexus.

Besides being the seat of *samana*, the manipura is also the centre for the energy of ego (*ahamkara*). People who rise above the two basic animal concerns of food and sex usually stop at the ego centre. Politicians, actors, business tycoons and even some popular gurus who acquire important places in public life and attract followers usually have their entire energy concentrated in this centre.

The anahata (vibrationless) chakra or the cardiac plexus is in the region of the heart, and is the home of the 'vital energy' *prana*. This chakra has twelve red — sometimes green — petals on which is inscribed in gold one of the following letters of the Sanskrit alphabet: *ka, kha, ga, gha, n, cha, chha, ja, jha, na, ta* and *tha* (lingual). The centre of the anahata chakra is adorned by a double triangle making up a six-pointed star. The upward facing triangle symbolises the *linga*, and the downward pointing triangle stands for the *yoni*. Just above the anahata is a minor chakra called the *manas* chakra where the mind resides.

The anahata is the first centre where the basic physical energy of man changes into spiritual energy. This is the centre of compassion (*karuna*) and love (*prema*) and blooms only after man is mature enough to rise above the usual physical and ego drives. The anahata is often called the home of the soul (*atman*). According to some yogic traditions, the higher mind, i.e. the mind that is not entirely engrossed in physical matters, resides near and above this centre of compassion. This chakra is called anahata because only when the energy becomes concentrated here does one hear the inner, non-vibratory (anahata) sound. This anahata sound is the aim of the '*soham*' *sadhana* already described.

The *vishuddha* (pure) is at the throat and is identified as the cervical plexus. This chakra can be visualised as a smoky purple

lotus with sixteen petals, each marked with one of the vowels of the Sanskrit alphabet: *a, aa, i, ii, u, uu, ri, rii, lri, lrii, e, ai, o, au, am*, and *h*. In the centre is a large blue arc of the moon. The vishuddha chakra is the seat of the 'vital energy' called udana.

The vishuddha centre is where the disciple gets the first glimpse of true samadhi (spiritual trance). Here all the basic psychological concerns are abandoned and the energy becomes purified. This is why the centre is called vishuddha (pure).

Between the vishuddha and the higher ajna is a secret chakra called the lalana (female energy or the tongue). It is also known as the talu chakra because it is said to be situated at the base of the palate (talu) region just behind the uvula. Meditation and visualisation of this chakra is a secret to be learnt from a guru. Some ancient Tantrik texts say that the rising kundalini energy should be made to pass through the lalana centre on its way to the ajna chakra. This can be accomplished with the help of the 'hamsa' mantra.

Being a secret chakra, the description of the lalana differs from one text to another. According to the *Saubhagya-lakshmi-upanishad* (III, 6) the lalana chakra has twelve bright red petals. Other texts however say that the lalana has sixty-four silvery white petals and a bright red pericarp called the 'ghantika' within which is the area (bhumi) of the moon's energy (chandra-kala) from which oozes sweet nectar. It is said that when the disciple reaches the lalana chakra a sweet nectar starts dripping on the tongue. The lalana centre is spiritually very important because it lies at the threshold of enlightenment and gives the sadhaka a glimpse of the great void (maha-shunya).

The sixty-four petals of the lalana chakra are the homes of the powerful sixty-four (chatuh-shashti) yoginis whose worship is said to grant the eight superhuman powers (siddhis). Many gurus who exhibit magical abilities are usually stuck at this centre and cannot rise above it.

Between the eyebrows, at the site of the third eye of Shiva, is the ajna (knowledge) chakra in the form of a white lotus with only two petals. On one petal is inscribed the letter *ha* and on the other the letter *ksha*. In the centre of the lotus is a white, inverted triangle (yoni) within which is the linga called the 'other' (itara).

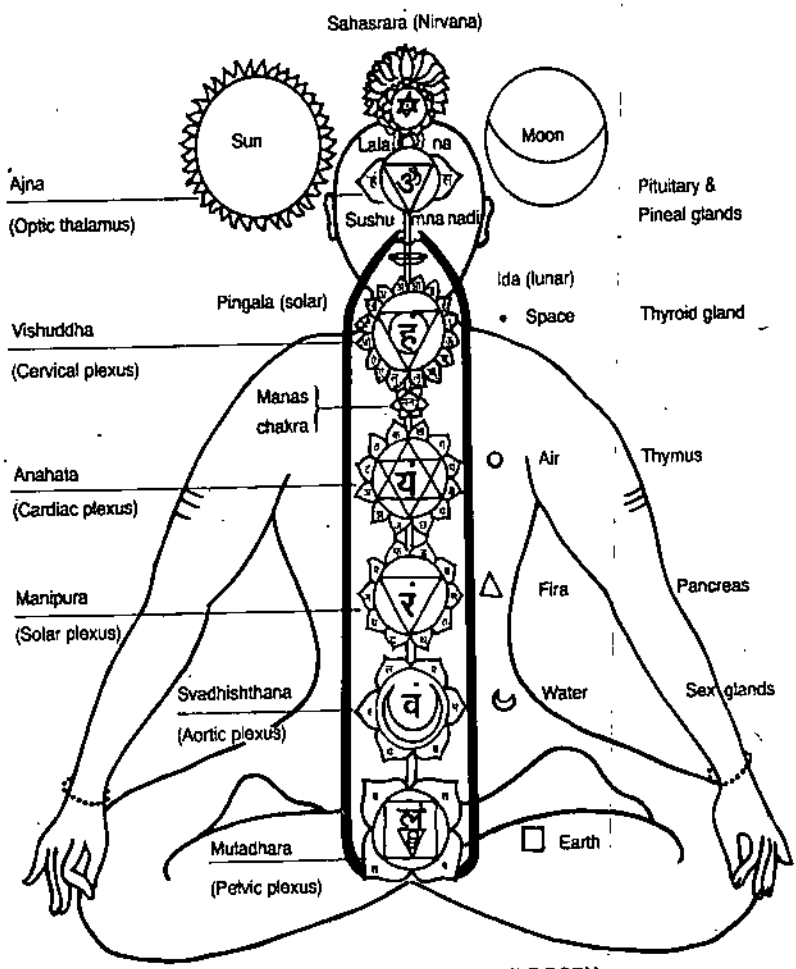
The linga in the ajna chakra is called itara in order to distinguish it from the linga in the lowest muladhara chakra. The linga in the muladhara represents animal drives, while in the ajna, the itara linga stands for animal energy transformed into spiritual power.

The itara linga and the downward pointing white triangle symbolise the union of polarities, of Shiva (male) and Parvati (female), or of consciousness (Purusha) and energy (Prakriti), in the form of the divine hermaphrodite 'Ardha-narishvara'.

A little beyond the ajna chakra is the manas (mind) centre which lies within chitrani nadi that runs through the sushumna channel. According to some traditions, the manas chakra is said to occupy the dot (bindu) that is part of the 'Om-kara' at the centre of the ajna. The visual form of the manas chakra has six petals one each for the five senses — smell (earth), taste (water), form (fire), touch (air) and sound (space) — and the sixth one for sleep. The colours of the petals are related to the colours of the five elements — yellow (earth), white (water), red (fire), grey (air) and white (space), and black for sleep. Manas chakra is the seat of consciousness where all modifications of the mind are absorbed.

Beyond the manas chakra is the sahasrara padma whose thousand petals encircle the dome of the skull and go beyond it into the cosmos. This is the centre of bliss, the experience of utter joy. On the petals of this cosmic lotus are written all the possible sounds (50 × 20) of the Sanskrit language. In the centre of this thousand-petal lotus sit Shiva and Parvati in union. This is the end of the kundalini path.

The symbol of Shiva and Parvati in union is a significant one. In the ajna centre the polarities appeared as a hermaphrodite, neither a complete male nor a complete female. This means that at the time of the opening of the eye of wisdom in the ajna centre, sexuality was entirely transformed into spiritual energy. But beyond the ajna chakra, when the final bliss comes with the opening of the thousand-petalled lotus, sexuality may re-establish itself. To represent this concept, Shiva and Parvati in the ajna chakra had lost their definite sexual nature. They became a hermaphrodite. But after bliss, the sahasrara, Shiva and Parvati regain their individual sexuality and are shown in sexual union (Fig. 1).



THE CHAKRAS OF THE SUBTLE BODY

FIGURE 1

If the human body is compared to the cosmic body of Lord Shiva who pervades the entire universe of planets, stars, space and galaxies, the chakras just described can be called levels of existence or worlds (*lokas*).

The first is the world of material bodies and physical forces governed by natural laws. This is called the 'jada-loka' and represents the muladhara chakra. The second is the realm of life and vital energies, which are under the rule of biological laws. This is the 'prana-loka', comparable to the svadhishthana centre. The third world is called the 'manas-loka', the world of mental forces that transcends matter and life, governed by subtle mental laws. This is the manipura chakra. The fourth world is the realm of the intellect, the 'buddhi-loka'. This realm rules the mind and corresponds to the anahata centre. The fifth world is even higher and more subtle than the intellect. This is known as the realm of consciousness and is called the 'dharma-loka'. This world is comparable to the fifth centre, vishuddha. In the cosmic body, the 'dharma-loka' governs the process of subtle evolution. Beyond the 'dharma-loka' is the world of pure divine beauty. This is known as the 'rasa-loka' where Shiva becomes his own beloved Parvati. To this world corresponds the ajna chakra of wisdom. The highest world is the 'ananda-loka' of pure bliss. The thousand-petalled lotus also represents this state of pure bliss in the human body.

The kundalini power that lies dormant at the base of the spine can be awakened by yogic techniques of neuro-muscular locks (*bandhas*). Once awakened, the kundalini rises through the six chakras of the subtle body and ends in the sahasrara to give absolute bliss to the spiritual aspirant.

The first neuro-muscular lock is called the uddiyana (flying) bandha and is performed by first exhaling all the air from the lungs through the mouth. Then, the chest is expanded and the abdominal muscles are sucked in so that they almost touch the back bone. The second lock is the jalandhara (glottis) bandha. To perform this, inhale first through the nose and then contract the throat so as to stop the air from going further. Press the chin firmly on the chest at the jugular notch. The third lock is called the mula (anus) bandha. To do this, sit in the *padmasana* (lotus posture), press the left heel against the

perineum. Hold the right heel above the genital region and contract the anus.

There are many postures (mudras) which produce somatic electrochemical forces that can be used to awaken the kundalini force. These are difficult to learn from a book and therefore not described here. Only one mudra is described here to give an idea as to what they are like.

This is called the ashvini (horse-like) mudra. To perform this, the breath is retained and the anal sphincter muscles are contracted rhythmically about ten to thirteen times, each rhythm lasting about ten seconds. This mudra is said to quickly awaken the kundalini.

A word of warning: the bandhas and mudras are to be performed only under the practical instructions of an accomplished yogi-guru. If done without proper guidance, they can be very dangerous.

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II

SVARODAYA SHASTRA

While describing the physiology of the subtle body two important channels were mentioned: the ida and the pingala. The ida ends in the left nostril and pingala in the right nostril. The 'vital energy' that flows through these two nadis flows in and out through the respective nostrils along with the physical breath.

Most readers may have noticed that human beings do not generally breathe through both the nostrils simultaneously. Only one of the two nostrils—and of course only one of the two nadis—is fully open at any given time. Yogis have observed that the 'vital' breath flows through each nostril for approximately two and a half ghatikas — one ghatika is equal to about twenty-four minutes. So roughly every hour the 'vital' breath changes from one nostril to the other.

The 'vital' breath — which is 'vital energy' (*prana*) plus physical breath — is called '*svara*', and the movement of this *svara* from nostril to nostril is called '*udaya*' (rise). Consequently, the ancient and occult system of knowledge (*shastra*) which deals with the significance of the changes in 'vital' breath is called the '*Svara-udaya-shastra*'.

The 'vital' breath flowing through the right nostril is known as the 'sun' (*surya*) *svara* which is warm and excitable. The 'vital' breath in the left nostril is called the 'moon' (*chandra*) *svara* and is always cool and peaceful. When the 'vital' breath changes from one nostril to the other, the action is known as the '*svara samkranti*'. Occasionally, when both the nostrils open up, this rare phenomenon is the '*vishuvat-kala*' or equal time. Texts refer to the open nostril as '*purna*' (full) and the outgoing breath as '*nirguna*' (without attributes); and the closed nostril as '*rikta*' (empty) and the incoming breath as '*saguna*' (with attributes).

Many great yogis of the past have carefully observed the relationship between the various events which happen in nature, the

human physical and psychological states and the changes of the 'vital' breath from one nostril to the other. They have recorded this knowledge in several texts which are diligently hidden, and revealed only rarely to serious students of Yoga and Astrology. Yogis claim that a master of the '*Svarodaya shastra*' can predict the future course of events on earth, can prevent and cure diseases — both physical and mental, and can influence the work of nature in matters such as the determination of sex of an unborn child. Not all these methods are known and the available texts mention only a few. Many are said to have been lost because of the break in the ancient 'guru-shishya' tradition. The rest have to be learnt from the master Guru.

The Basic Rules for the Movement of the 'Vital' Breath

During the bright half (shukla paksha) of the lunar month, on the first, second, third, seventh, eighth, ninth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth (full moon), the day should begin with the 'vital' breath in the moon — left — nostril. The theory behind this is that as the moon is the lord of the left nadi and the bright half of the month its power and influence is greatest during this period. Therefore the left breath is most auspicious at the beginning (1, 2, 3), middle (7, 8, 9) and end (13, 14, 15) of the bright lunar half. During the remaining six days (4, 5, 6 and 10, 11, 12) the power of the moon is low and so the days should start with the 'vital' breath flowing through the right, solar nostril. This process is reversed in the dark half (krishna paksha) of the lunar month when the sun is powerful and influential at the beginning, middle and end of the period. Any long term change from this basic pattern, if not accompanied by other compensating good and auspicious factors, may signify a period of trouble and many setbacks. It is advisable not to start any new and important venture during such a period.

According to another text of the '*Svarodaya*' the breath should be in the left nostril at sunrise on odd days of the bright half of the lunar month, and in the right nostril on even days. This is reversed during the dark half of the month. An oral tradition states that the breath should change from one nostril to the other every three days starting with the left nostril on the first day of the bright half of the lunar month.

Today, lunar months are not generally used and to determine the correct day, lunar 'panchangas' are essential. So a more simple and direct method is also known. In this, the day of the week is given more importance than the lunar day.

As the breath flowing through the left nostril is considered cooler than the 'vital' breath of the right nostril, days associated with the moon (chandra or soma) should begin with the left nostril open: Monday (Somavara = day of the moon), Wednesday (Budhavara = day of Mercury), Thursday (Guruvara = day of Jupiter) and Friday (Shukravara = day of Venus). The astrological reason for this association is that the moon and Mercury are friends, while the moon, Jupiter and Venus are neutrals.

The right nostril represents the sun and so the 'vital' breath from this channel is warm. Therefore, it should flow from the right nostril on Sunday (Ravivara = day of the sun), Tuesday (Mangalavara = day of Mars) and Saturday (Shanivara = day of Saturn). Astrologically Sun and Mars are friends, and even though Sun and Saturn are enemies, according to Indian mythology Saturn (Shani) is the son of the sun (Ravi-putra).

Table

Left (moon nadi)		Right (sun nadi)
<i>First theory</i>	bright half	
1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15		4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12
	dark half	
4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12		1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15 (new moon)
<i>Second theory</i>	bright half	
odd days—1, 3, 5, etc.		even days—2, 4, 6, etc.
	dark half	
even days		odd days
<i>Third theory</i> — change every day		
<i>Fourth (day) theory</i>		
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday		Sunday, Tuesday, Saturday

It is very easy to find out which channel is open at any given time. Alternately block each nostril for a few seconds. The nostril through which breathing is easy and without strain is the side of the open channel.

In order to avoid some misfortune, it may be necessary to block the flow of 'vital' breath through any one of the two nostrils. This can be done in four very simple ways:

1) Breathe in deeply through the open nostril, and then breathe out through the closed nostril. Do this about ten or twenty times and the flow of 'vital' breath will change from one nostril to the other.

2) Lie on a flat, hard bed on your side. You should lie on the side corresponding to the closed nostril, and within a few minutes it will open up.

3) The third method will be described more fully later, but in short, it involves the blocking of the open nostril with a small wad of cotton wool.

4) The fourth method involves the use of the Y-shaped crutch-like instrument called the *yoga-danda*. Place the *yoga-danda* under the armpit on the side of the open nostril and lean over and press it between the chest and the arm. Maintain this position for about 15 minutes and the breath will change to the nostril on the opposite side to the *yoga-danda*.

The first two methods of changing the flow of the 'vital' breath can be used when only one or two changes in a day are required. But if the 'vital' breath has to be kept confined to only one nostril for a long time, the third and fourth methods are more practical. There is a subtle fifth method of changing the 'vital' breath but this is based on deep meditation and is difficult to understand without a guru.

The Five Elements (tattvas) of the 'Vital' Breath

As already mentioned, the 'vital' breath flows through each nostril for about an hour. But within this hour, the quality, intensity and power of the 'vital' breath does not remain the same throughout. There are at least five subtle, important and noticeable changes that the 'vital' breath undergoes. These changes are traditionally correlated to the five elements: earth (prithvi), water (ap), fire (tejas), air

(vayu) and space (akasha). These are of course not the material elements of everyday life, but states of subtle matter that effect the physical, emotional and psychic processes of the human body.

There are many outer (physical) and inner (meditational) ways of identifying the five elements of the 'vital' breath. Each element has many and varied characteristics which help in their identification. Some of these are: nature of breath, time of flow, type of breath, manner of flow, length of flow, geometrical shape; colour, taste, experience of seed (*bija*) mantra, and physical manifestation. Some of these are described here:

a) The nature and time of flow of the breath elements: The breath of the earth element is slow, slightly warm, makes a deep sound and has a central flow which seems to stem from the chin. The breath lasts for about 20 minutes.

Breath of the water element flows very fast, makes a very loud sound, is cold to the touch and lasts for about 16 minutes.

The fire element breath is very hot and lasts for 12 minutes.

The air element breath can be either hot or cold and lasts for 8 minutes.

The breath of the space element has the combined characteristics of the other elements altogether and lasts for only 4 minutes. After every 60 minutes the flow of 'vital' breath moves over to the next nostril where the above process is repeated.

A tradition based on another text gives this short guide to the identification of the breath element: In the 60-minute period of the 'vital' breath flowing from any one nostril, the first 10 minutes are of the space element, then 14 minutes of the earth element, 12 minutes of the water element, 12 minutes of the air element and the last 12 minutes of the fire element.

b) The length of flow: Earth element is 12 finger-breadths (angulas), water is 16 angulas, fire is 4 angulas, air is 8 angulas and the space element is 20 angulas.

The method of determining the length of the breath element is as follows: Lay very well separated cotton wool or very fine sand on a flat surface and hold it near the open nostril. Exhale through that nostril at normal rate and carefully note where the maximum movement of the cotton wool or sand takes place. The distance of the site of maximum movement from the nostril is the length of the breath element.

c) The geometric shapes of the breath elements: Earth is a square, water is a crescent, fire is a triangle, air is a circle and space is only a point (bindu).

The outer method of determining the geometrical shape of the breath elements is to hold a small, clean mirror, or a piece of clean glass near the open nostril and then breathe out at a normal rate. The shape that the condensation takes indicates the shape of the breath element.

The inner method of finding the geometrical shape, the colour, and the taste of the breath elements is as follows: Find a quiet, clean place, far away from human habitation and worldly distractions. Sit either in the *siddhasana* (adept's posture) or the *padmasana* (lotus posture) (Fig. 2).

According to the *Hatha-yoga-pradipika* (I, 35, 44-45) the two postures mentioned above are formed in the following manner:

Siddhasana: Press the left heel against the perineum, and place the right heel above the penis. Fix the chin on the chest, straighten the spine and concentrate on the area between the eyebrows. This is called the *siddhasana*, giver of freedom from diseases and the cycle of rebirths.

Padmasana: Place the right foot at the root of the left thigh and the left foot at the root of the right thigh. Cross the arms behind the back and hold the right toe with the left hand and the left toe with the right hand. Rest the chin firmly on the chest and fix the sight on the tip of the nose. This is the *padmasana*, destroyer of all bodily afflictions. For meditating in the *padmasana* it is not necessary to hold the toes as described above and the hands can be kept on the knees.

Having taken up either of the two asanas, perform the *sanmukhi* (six-faced) mudra. This mudra is done by gently pressing and shutting the ears with the thumbs, the eyes with the index fingers, the nose with the middle fingers, the lips with the ring fingers and letting the small fingers rest on the chin. At first concentrate on your chosen deity and then slowly try and clear your mind of all disturbing thoughts. If after the mind has become concentrated, you see a yellow or golden square and your mouth becomes filled with a sweet taste, this is the flow of the earth element. If a white crescent appears along



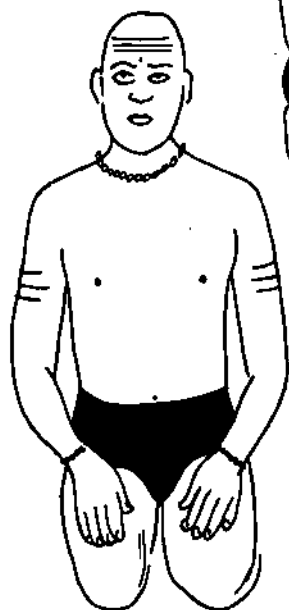
1) Siddhasana



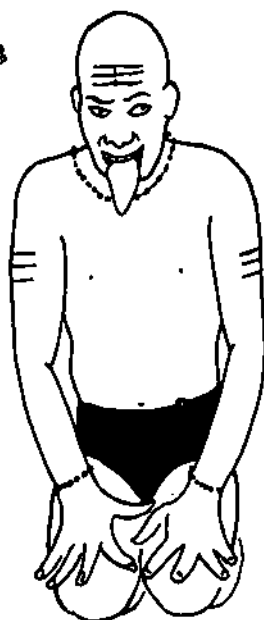
2) Padmasana



5) Virasana



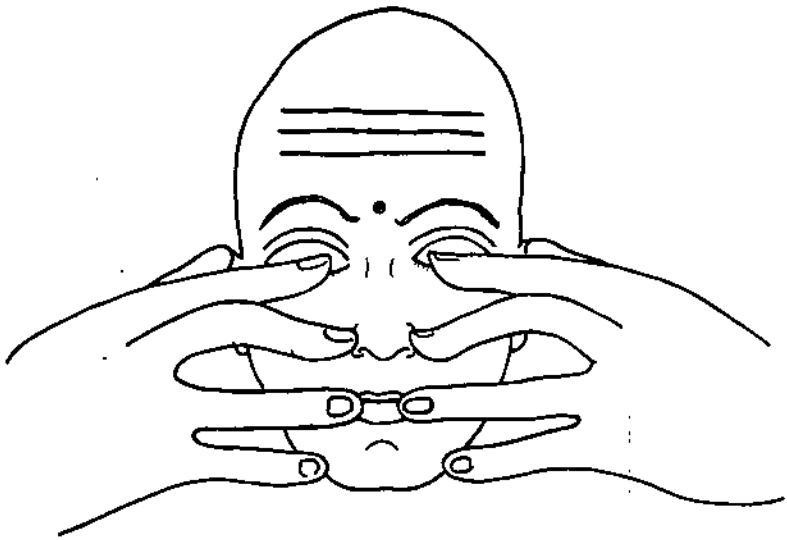
3) Vajrasana



4) Simhasana

ASANAS

FIGURE 2

**SHANMUKHI MUDRA****FIGURE 3**

with an astringent taste in the mouth, this is the water element. The appearance of a red triangle and a pungent taste on the tongue symbolises the flow of the fire element. The air element will materialise as a green circle and a sour taste in the mouth. The space element will become visible as multi-coloured dots. At the same time the mouth will fill up with a bitter taste (Fig. 3).

d) Experiencing the reality of the breath elements: To experience the reality of the various elements of the 'vital' breath through their *bija* mantras, a special form of meditation is recommended.

After the first quarter of the night has passed, find a pure, clean secluded place. Sit on a grass mat in the *Vajrasana* (thunderbolt) posture. This posture is formed by kneeling on the ground with the heels pressed against the outsides of the buttocks. Then meditate. Let the 'vital' breaths, the mental functions, and the kundalini power get absorbed by the process of 'laya-yoga'.

As meditation and absorption deepens, at first you will experience 'reality' as solid matter (earth) through the visualisation of the seed mantra 'lam' in the muladhara centre. Then, with the appearance of 'vam', the *bija* mantra of the svadhishtana chakra, you will move upwards, and know 'reality' in the fluid state (water). In the seed mantra 'ram' lies the manipura chakra where 'reality' is consumed by fire and all sense of time is transcended. When the *bija* 'yam' appears before the mind's eye, you will penetrate the cosmic air and hear the sound produced without vibrations (anahata). Beyond this is the realm of the vishuddha chakra and the seed mantra 'ham'. This level of realisation is beyond all earthly wisdom and cannot be described by words. It is as vast as space. When your consciousness reaches the level of the ajna chakra between the eyebrows, you have reached the state of formless contemplation (asamprajnata samadhi). Here the *bija* mantra is the cosmic word of power 'OM'. Beyond the ajna chakra is the awareness of 'infinity' in the sahasrara chakra.

According to some 'Svarodaya' texts, the natural order of the breath elements can be correlated to the days of the week, so that at sunrise on Sunday, the day should begin with the breath in the earth element, Monday in the water element, Tuesday in the fire element,

Wednesday in the earth element again, Thursday in the air element, Friday in the fire element and Saturday in the space element.

e) The direction of flow of the breath elements: When the 'vital' breath flows out of the open nostril, its direction is determined by the element that is active at the time. Breath of the earth element flows from the centre of the nostril, water element flows downward while the flow of the fire element is upward. Air element breath flows from the side of the nostril and the space element flows with equal force all over.

Magical Powers

With practice, control over each chakra of the subtle body can be achieved. As the yogi attains power over one chakra after another, he will find that, along with psychic experiences, he also acquires magical powers.

Control over the first chakra and its element earth gives the ability to make the body as light as air for astral travel, and levitation and to shine with a golden aura. The second chakra and its element water gives the power to live for long periods without food or water, to survive under water and to make the body shine with a silver aura. The control over fire, the element of the third chakra, confers the ability to eat enormous amounts of food without bad effects, to endure strong heat, and to make the body shine with a red aura. Command over air and its chakra in the subtle body gives the capacity to fly like birds and to understand their language. The space element invests the yogi with the fantastic capacity to look into, beyond, and before time as well as the eight famed magical powers (*siddhis*) of: *anima* — the ability to shrink to the size of an atom; *mahima* — to be able to increase in size according to desire; *garima* — to become extremely heavy; *laghima* — to become light and to levitate; *prati* — to bring anything within reach; *prakamya*—ability to immediately realise all desires; *vashitva*—the power to control all objects, animate and inanimate; and *ishitva*—ability to create matter through the power of thought.

There is another list and interpretation of the eight magical or occult powers (*siddhis*) given in some Hatha-yoga texts. According

to them, *anima* (atomisation) enables the yogi to become infinitely small in order to understand the inner nature of atoms and molecules that form the building blocks of this universe. This power can be gained by deep meditation on the heart centre. *Mahima* is just the opposite, and allows the *siddha* to become vast so as to be able to see the cosmic structure of stars and galaxies, and penetrate beyond space and time to experience the ultimate 'Reality'. This power can be gained by meditating on the essence of the intellect (*mahat*), the first transformation of the primeval state of nature (*prakriti*). *Garima* is the capacity to acquire enormous weight which leads to permanence and stability. Constant meditation on the earth element is said to confer this power. *Laghima* is the power to become light, leave the body at will and do astral projection. Deep meditation on, and identification with, the element air is the origin of this *siddhi*. *Prakamyā* is to develop an irresistible will that can compel others to obey one's wishes. Meditation on the space element leads to this *siddhi*, and the ability to hypnotise is a form of this power. *Ishitva* is the power to control nature, to stop the wind, rain, storms, fire and earthquakes. One may look upon the marvels of modern science and technology as mild examples of this *siddhi*. *Vashitva* is the ability to control animate nature and to influence the behaviour of men and animals. Both these *siddhis* are gained by meditation on the creative power of the universe. *Kamavashayitvam* allows the yogi to take any form at will and to fulfil all desires. This power is attained by meditating on the principle of primeval ego (*ahamkara*) and is quite common. One frequently hears of saints and religious leaders who can feed thousands of devotees on just a pot of rice.

The eight magical powers are by-products of yogic discipline. When the various stages of yoga are perfected and one goes deeper into meditation, the eight occult powers come naturally. Though they are called 'magical' and 'occult', they are in fact only highly developed and perfected aspects of the energies of the human mind: the energy of vision (*jnana shakti*), of will (*iccha shakti*) and of action (*kriya shakti*).¹

There are many other sub-*siddhis* which come along with the eight major powers. All these are symbols of spiritual progress. The true achievement is not to get carried away with these powers but to go beyond them to ultimate enlightenment. However, some yogis,

who are not interested in the 'ultimate' but value material benefits more than spiritual ones, use these powers for selfish reasons. For such people they can become impediments on the spiritual path. This is because if one uses siddhis, one is bound to attract a lot of attention and become famous. Fame generally leads to pride, and pride is the greatest obstacle to inner growth.

A true siddha-yogi who has established complete control over his nervous system, his subtle body and the various states of consciousness has neither the will nor the need to use any of his magical powers. And if he uses them at all, he does so only for compassionate reasons. All such a person really desires is to be united forever with the 'Supreme Reality'.

The physical manifestations of the five elements in the human body are:

earth: bones, flesh, skin, veins and hair;

water: semen, blood, marrow, urine and saliva;

fire: hunger, thirst, sleep, lustre and sloth;

air: running, walking, bending, contracting and expanding;

space: anger, energy, shame, fear and lust.

It goes without saying that control over the 'vital' breaths of the five elements gives full control over their corresponding physical manifestations.

The breath of the five elements should flow in the regular manner already explained. Any long term irregularity can cause diseases such as jaundice and asthma. The table below gives the diseases that can be caused by the uneven flow of the elements of the 'vital' breath:

Element	Quality	Organ of perception	Organ of action	Disease
earth	smell	nose	anus	jaundice
water	taste	tongue	penis	hallucination
fire	form	eyes	feet	swellings
air	touch	skin	hands	asthma
space	sound	ears	mouth	—

In the human body the water element rules the feet, earth element the knees, air the groins, fire the chest and shoulders, and space element the head.

The breath elements also have a very profound effect upon the mind. When the earth element is rising, there is calmness and peace that cannot be disturbed by the most serious problems. With the rising of the water element breath the mind becomes filled with joy and compassion and there is a tremendous inner need to help others. Breath of the fire element brings with it anger, mental turmoil, violence, pride and terror. When the breath of the air element is rising the mind becomes disturbed and restless like the wind. Space element breath has a calming effect on the mind. There arises an inner need to meditate and this is the best time for spiritual discipline.

A summary of all the qualities associated with the five elements of the 'vital' breath is given below:

Earth: place in the human body — anus (muladhara chakra), shape — square, special quality — smell, colour — yellow, taste — sweet, mantra — *lam*, length — 12 angulas, time 20 minutes, nature — equitable, direction — east, effect — beneficial after a long time.

Water: (same order as above) — genitals (svadhishtana chakra), crescent, taste, white, astringent, *vam*, 16 angulas, 16 minutes, peaceful, west, quick benefit.

Fire: navel (manipura chakra), triangle, form, red, pungent, *ram*, 4 angulas, 12 minutes, pain and friction, south, no effect.

Air: heart (anahata chakra), circle, touch, smoky, sour, *yam*, 8 angulas, 8 minutes, excitable, north, small benefit.

Space: throat (vishuddha chakra), bindu, sound, many-coloured, bitter, *ham*, 20 angulas, 4 minutes, confusion, centre, none.

Astrology and Svara

Astrologers say that just as the breath elements influence human behaviour and destiny, so do the asterisms (lunar mansions—nakshatras). Therefore, a correlation is established between the asterisms and the five elements of the 'vital' breath. This correlation is:

Earth: (1) Dhanishtha (Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta Delphinis), (2) Rohini (Aldebran), (3) Jyeshtha (Alpha, Sigma and Tau Scorpionis), (4) Anuradha (Beta, Delta and Pi Scorpionis), (5) Shravana (Alpha, Beta and Gamma Aquilae), (6) Abhijit (Alpha, Epsilon and Zeta Lyrae) and (7) Uttarashadha (Zeta and Sigma Sagittarii).

Water: (8) Purvashadha (Delta and Epsilon Sagittarii), (9) Ashlesha (Delta, Epsilon, Eta, Rho and Sigma Hydrae), (10) Mula (Epsilon, Zeta, Eta, Theta, Iota, Kappa, Lambda, Mu and Upsilon Scorpionis), (11) Ardra (Alpha Orionis), (12) Revati (Zeta Piscium etc.), (13) Uttarabhadrapada (Gamma Pegasi and Alpha Andromedae) and (14) Shatabhisha (Gamma Aquarii).

Fire: (15) Bharani (35, 39 and 41 Arietis), (16) Krittika (Pleiades), (17) Pushya (Gamma, Delta and Theta Cancri), (18) Magha (Alpha, Gamma, Epsilon, Zeta, Eta and Mu Leonis), (19) Purvaphalguni (Delta and Theta Leonis), (20) Purvabhadrapada (Alpha and Beta Pegasi) and (21) Svati (Arcturus).

Air: (22) Vishakha (Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Iota Librae), (23) Uttaraphalguni (Beta and 93 Leonis), (24) Hasta (Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and Epsilon Corvi), (25) Chitra (Spica and Alpha Virginis), (26) Punarvasu (Alpha and Beta Geminorum), (27) Ashvini (Beta and Gamma Arietis) and (28) Mrigashira (Lambda, Phi 1 and Phi 2 Orionis).

Space has no corresponding asterism.

According to astrologers there is also a relationship between the planets, the signs of the zodiac and the breath elements. On the left (ida) channel, earth is influenced by Mercury, water by the moon, fire by Venus and air by Jupiter. On the right (pingala) nadi, earth is under the rule of the sun, water under Saturn, fire under Mars, and air under the ascending node of the moon (rahu). On the central channel (sushumna), earth relates to Mercury, water to the moon and Venus, fire to the sun and Mars, air to the ascending node of the moon and Saturn, and space to Jupiter.

The twelve signs of the zodiac and the breath elements also influence each other and their relationship is as follows: earth — Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn; water — Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces; air — Gemini, Libra and Aquarius; and fire — Aries, Leo and Sagittarius. Space has no influence on the signs of the zodiac.

At this point, it would be useful to summarise all the relationships and associations of the three main nadis of the subtle body.

Summary Table

	Right	Left	Central
<i>nadi</i>	pingala	ida	sushumna
<i>planet</i>	sun	moon	Rahu (Ascending

			node of the moon)
<i>nature</i>	excitable	calm	mixed
<i>dhatu</i>	bile (pitta)	phlegm (kapha)	wind (vata)
<i>gender</i>	male	female	neutral
<i>deity</i>	Shiva	Shakti	Ardha-narishvara
<i>colour</i>	black	white	grey
<i>time</i>	day	night	twilight
<i>element</i>	fire and air	water and earth	space
<i>sign</i>	unstable	stable	both
<i>day</i>	Sunday, Tuesday, Saturday	Monday, Wed- nesday, Thurs- day and Friday	Wednesday and Thursday
<i>lunar half</i>	dark	bright	—
<i>lunar day</i> <i>(tithi)</i>	dark: 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15 (new moon); bright: 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12	bright: 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15 (full moon); dark: 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12	—
<i>lunar</i> <i>month</i>	Vaishakha, Shra- vana, Karttika & Magha	Jyeshtha, Bhadra- pada, Margashirsha & Phalguna	Ashadha, Ash- wina, Pausha & Chaitra
<i>passage</i> <i>(samkranti)</i>	Aries, Gemini, Leo, Libra, Aqua- rius & Sagittarius	Taurus, Cancer, Virgo, Scorpio, Capricorn & Pisces	—
<i>Sign of the</i> <i>Zodiac</i>	Aries, Cancer, Libra & Capricorn	Taurus, Leo, Scorpio & Aquarius	Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius & Pisces
<i>Lunar</i> <i>Asterisms</i>	Ashvini, Bharani, Krittika, Utt. Sha- dha, Abhijit, Shra- vana, Dhanishtha, Shatabhisha, Reva- ti, Pur. Bhadrpada & Rohini	Ashlesha, Magha, Pur. Phalguni, Utt. Phalguni, Hasta, Chitra, Svati, Vishakha, Anuradha, Mula, Pur. Shadha & Jyeshtha	Mrigashira, Ardra, Punarvasu & Pushya
<i>Direction</i>	East & North	West & South	angle
<i>Number</i>	odd	even	zero

'Vital' Breaths and their Effect on Human Destiny

The subtle channels, chakras, 'vital' breaths and their functions in the subtle human body have all been explained. Now let us consider some of the effects of these subtle forces on human destiny, and the laws that give us the knowledge of these forces.

When we undertake any activity, we find that no matter how hard we try we are not always rewarded with success. This is because, besides the many physical forces that work on our environment, there are hidden forces which influence our behaviour. These forces generally remain unknown, though their effects are just as potent as those of the physical forces. But the subtle, hidden forces are not always beyond discovery. Many people in the past have been able to acquire the occult knowledge of breath, and use their understanding of nadis, 'vital' breaths and subtle chakras for their benefit. And most of these people are not great yogis, but ordinary people like you and me. With devotion, faith and serious study, the wisdom of '*Svarodaya Shastra*' can be learnt and mastered by any sincere and virtuous person.

No intelligent person can fail to notice that the moods of human beings change very frequently. Sometimes we are happy and cheerful, while at other times we feel angry and depressed. Most people feel that these changing moods depend on outside stimuli only. This is not true. The flow of 'vital' breath and its five elements have a strong influence on our temperament. Otherwise how could sudden periods of depression followed by equally sudden periods of cheerfulness without any apparent reason be explained? So it stands to reason that if we can understand and control the movements of the 'vital' breath we can command and modify our moods, and indirectly influence our environment. The occult wisdom of '*Svarodaya*' helps in doing just that.

The first general rule concerning '*Svarodaya*' is that all auspicious activities aimed at obtaining permanent and stable effects should be undertaken when the 'vital' breath is flowing through the left (moon) channel. Care should be taken to start the propitious acts within the first 90 palas (36 minutes) of the flow of the 'vital' breath. This is because the breath elements of earth and water are considered

to be very beneficial, while fire, air and space elements are said to be harmful. Below is a short list of activities which can be done during the breath flow of earth and water elements in the left channel: making new jewellery, clothes and icons; leaving home to go on a long journey either towards the south or the west; entering a hermitage or a monastery; visiting a king, minister or other state dignitaries; beginning the construction of artificial lakes, dams, reservoirs and ornamental gardens; erecting large public monuments, commemorative pillars, statues of kings and important public figures; making and entering new houses; going on a pilgrimage; giving donations and performing other charitable acts; weddings, domestic rites meant to secure peace and good health; administering special tonics and herbal preparations to promote quick recovery from an illness; meeting friends, business partners and employers; buying reserve stores of foodgrains; commencing first agricultural operations of the season; purchasing domestic animals; studying yoga; casting spells and performing magical rituals to cure diseases and to secure good harvests—all the activities listed above bring especially favourable results if done on Wednesdays, Thursdays or Fridays.

The right (sun) channel dominates evil, cruel and difficult-to-accomplish acts. So, for best results undertake these activities at a time when the 'vital' breath is flowing through the right nostril in either the earth or water element. A short list of acts one should engage in during the flow of the sun channel is given below: learning and teaching magical arts; sexual intercourse with prostitutes; sailing in a new ship; making and drinking strong, fermented drinks; acquiring physical and psychic powers through the performance of magical charms and unorthodox rites which involve animal sacrifices; casting spells to confuse the enemy's mind; making yantras and magically gaining control over vampires and zombis (vetalas), eaters of raw flesh (pishachas), ghosts (pretas), and wandering souls (bhutas); climbing mountains and entering fortified cities; making and cutting bricks and fashioning building stones; cutting precious stones; plastering and decorating a new house; engaging in sword fights and duels; starting the study of difficult arts and sciences; establishing mental control over prostitutes and young virgins; eating very rich and difficult-to-digest food. Tuesdays, Saturdays and Sundays are especially favourable for all the above tasks.

When the flow of the 'vital' breath rapidly fluctuates from one nostril to the other, this denotes the flow of the central (sushumna) channel. This channel is like fire, and is said to burn all worldly pursuits. Therefore, when the 'vital' breath flows through this nadi, suspend all secular occupations. Do not even curse or bless anyone. Just sit in a quiet, clean place and meditate on your chosen deity, or on the formless, transcendental 'Reality'. It is said in the ancient '*Svarodaya*' texts that even rituals and pilgrimages are useless during the flow of the sushumna. This channel brings either death or spiritual bliss.

Here there is no need to take the word death too literally. It is likely that the death referred to in the '*Svarodaya*' texts is the end of the 'ego' and not the death of the physical body.

According to the Tantras, death of the 'ego' is always considered to be the real death. Once the sense of 'I-ness' — that I am different from the cosmos — has gone, physical life or death loses its meaning. Death is no longer looked upon as annihilation, but as change from one level of consciousness to another.

Gaining Power over Another Person

If it is found necessary to influence a man or a woman so that he or she will do as you desire, here is a practical method. First determine the open nostril and the element of your breath. Then take your first step towards the person you desire, starting with the foot that coincides with the side of the open nostril. You will find that, if the above instructions are observed, the man or the woman of your desire and fancy will be within your power in a very short time.

To bring about a favourable response from a person who is difficult to deal with, keep that person on the side of your open channel while you negotiate. This will make the person agreeable and responsive. This method works particularly well during business bargaining, court cases and job interviews.

To influence a person at a great distance hold a shallow vessel full of clean water and face the direction in which the person to be influenced resides. Think of that person and try and suck some water through the open channel. If you are even slightly psychic this method will surely work.

To influence the course of the day and make it good and auspicious, when you wake up in the morning, check which nostril is open. Then rub your face with the hand on the side of the flowing channel. As you step out of bed, touch the ground first with the foot on the side of the open nostril. You will have good luck throughout the day.

To Predetermine the Sex and Character of an Unborn Child

Most women would like to predetermine the sex of their children. Failing this, they would be very happy if it were possible at least to have pre-knowledge of the sex of the unborn child. Some of the occult methods based on the 'Svarodaya' system of predicting and in some cases predetermining the sex of an embryo are given below.

A woman is said to be fertile from the fourth to the sixteenth day after menstruation. She can become pregnant any time within this period. If the day she becomes pregnant happens to be the eighth, eleventh, thirteenth, fourteenth or the fifteenth (either the full moon day or the day before the new moon) day of the lunar month, she will be blessed with a good looking and healthy male child.

Below are enumerated some further details regarding the day on which a woman becomes pregnant, and its effect on the unborn child's character:

Male child

The day after menstruation	Qualities of the child
fourth	thin and delicate boned
sixth	average health and life
eighth	lazy and pleasure-loving
tenth	clever
twelfth	clever and handsome
fourteenth	clever, handsome and virtuous
sixteenth	all imaginable good qualities

Female child

fifth	deformed and ugly
seventh	might be unhappy in old age
ninth	lazy and pleasure-loving
eleventh	easy morals
thirteenth	will marry a man of low caste
fifteenth	will become a queen

The general rule for a woman who wants a male child is: have sexual intercourse within the fertile period and on one of the above-mentioned propitious days, whenever your left nostril and your husband's right nostril is open. The 'vital' breath should be in the earth element.

The rule for a woman who desires a female child is: copulate with your husband within the fertile period and on the correct auspicious day when his left nostril and your right nostril are flowing. The 'vital' breath should be in the water element.

In an oral '*Svarodaya*' tradition the effects of the breath elements on the unborn child are: (1) if impregnation happens when the woman's breath is in the earth element the child will become brave, adventurous, deep and thoughtful, charitable, religious, long living and lucky. The child will have a very fair skin and a well-built and proportionate body; (2) when the woman's breath is in the water element, the child is good looking, fair, calm, friendly, very imaginative, pleasure-loving and healthy; (3) during impregnation, if the mother's breath happens to be in the fire element, the child, when it is born, will be dark, excitable, proud, cruel and coarse, but at the same time brave, muscular, a good fighter who will make an excellent soldier. A child of the fire element can cause a difficult delivery; (4) if the mother becomes pregnant in the air element, she will deliver a child that is thin, pale, weak, lazy and very unstable; Such a child will grow up to be talkative, untruthful, sly, a coward and a mischief maker; (5) pregnancies in the space element generally result in abortions, but if such a child does live it will become a saint.

The basic principles of 'vital' breath that are described in the '*Svarodaya*' tantras apply equally to men and women. But it is necessary to remember that the solar channel symbolises the male,

and the lunar channel the female. Consequently, the power of the breath for a man is highest in the sun channel and for the woman in the moon channel. So naturally the moon channel of the female is attracted by the sun channel of the male, and *vice versa*. So if a man desires to completely enjoy a woman, he should approach her while his breath is in the right nostril and the woman's breath is in the left nostril. This is the best time for both of them to unite in sexual intercourse. In such a union they will get blissful satisfaction. In fact, if a married couple or two lovers observe this rule whenever they unite in sexual intercourse, their love will prosper like that of Rati (Psyche) and Kamadeva (Eros).

There is a potent method of gaining control over a woman who rejects all your advances. Approach her when she is fast asleep. If her breath is in the moon nostril, and your breath happens to be in the sun nostril, then slowly uncover her 'great lotus' (vulva) and blow your sun breath into it. Then leave her. When she awakens she will develop such a strong itch in her vagina which can be relieved only by sexual intercourse with the man who filled her great lotus with his sun breath. This is a secret law, which the Tantras say, should not be disclosed to a lecherous man. It is for the use of a good man whose love is deep and genuine.

To Overcome Infertility

An infertile woman can bear a child if her husband copulates with her at a time when either her central channel has just opened, or her 'vital' breath is flowing in the fire element of the sun nadi.

The rules mentioned above are very general. The subtle effects of the 'vital' breaths and their elements on the unborn child can only be learnt from a yogi. No number of books can teach the inner, hidden mysteries.

Changes in the Natural Rhythm of the 'Vital' Breath and their Effects upon Health and Fortune

We now know what the normal pattern of breathing is, and how it changes from hour to hour and from day to day. If this pattern is

disturbed either naturally or artificially, and remains altered for a long period, it usually denotes a change in health and fortune.

There are two ways in which the normal rhythm of breathing can be altered. If the day begins with the 'vital' breath in the wrong nostril it is called the 'day change'. If the duration of flow through any one nostril either increases or decreases significantly, this is known as the 'time change'. The effects of these changes are:

Day Change

1) If the day of the new moon commences with the 'vital' breath in the right nostril instead of the left one, there are chances that the person concerned will within a fortnight suffer either from a mild fever or domestic quarrels or both.

2) On the first day of the dark half of the lunar month, if the 'vital' breath begins to flow in the left nostril at dawn, understand that there will be an attack of influenza or severe cold, as well as some financial loss.

3) If any changed pattern of the flow of 'vital' breath remains so for a whole lunar month there are strong chances of very serious misfortunes.

4) If the disturbance in the flow of 'vital' breath lasts for a fortnight, consider this as a forewarning of serious illness.

5) If the changed pattern of breath passes away within three days, there is every reason to be grateful to God for having saved you from the coming of a serious disease. There might, however, be a slight headache and fever for a day or so as the result of the short change.

Time Changes (pleasant effects)

1) If the moon channel flows for one hour and 20 minutes you may get a pleasant surprise.

2) If the moon channel flows for 3 hours 10 minutes there will be domestic peace.

3) If the left nostril remains open continuously for 5 hours 36 minutes you will meet a long lost relative or friend.

4) If the left nostril stays open for 24 hours you will get a small fortune.

5) If the flow of the 'vital' breath through each nostril is prolonged by 30 minutes, and if the pattern remains unchanged for 48 hours, you will soon become very popular and famous.

6) If anyone breathes through the moon nostril all day and the sun nostril all night, he will live to be 108.

7) The flow of the moon channel, without change for four, eight, twelve or twenty days and nights means a long and happy life.

Time Changes (unpleasant effects)

1) If the left channel flows non-stop for (i) 4 hours, there will be frequent attacks of rheumatism or related disorders; (ii) 4 hours 48 minutes there will be trouble from enemies; (iii) one, two or three days, there will be physical suffering; (iv) one month, there will be heavy financial loss.

2) If the right channel remains open without a break for (i) 1 hour 36 minutes there is a possibility of stomach disorders such as ulcers and indigestion; (ii) 8 hours 24 minutes, your friends are likely to turn against you; (iii) 24 hours, serious illness is likely.

There is no need to panic or be depressed if the 'vital' breath happens to flow in the manner described above. Diseases and unpleasant events can be either prevented, or their intensity reduced by simply readjusting the disturbed breath pattern. To do this it is essential to block one nostril. This can be done by inserting a small wad of clean cotton wool wrapped in a little gauze into the nostril. It is however very important to remember not to smoke tobacco, shout, sing or talk loudly, or to do strenuous physical work while the nostril is blocked.

Fever

If your body feels warm and feverish, block the open nostril. Keep it closed until you feel better again. You will find that the fever will go down very quickly, usually within a few hours.

Headache

For ordinary headaches lie flat and breathe deeply. Then get someone to tie a bandage around both elbows. The bandages should be tight enough to cause only a slight restriction in the circulation of blood. Untie the bandages after four minutes. If the headache still persists repeat this process as many times as essential, giving a short interval every 4 or 5 minutes to allow the blood to resume normal circulation.

Those who suffer from persistent headaches should try the nose drinking method. Every morning, at sunrise, take a bowl full of cold water and try to suck some of it (at least about 2 spoonfuls) in through the open nostril. If this is done every morning, without a gap, for one month, your chronic headache will be cured forever.

Migraine (or Hemicrania)

Tie a bandage around the left elbow if the pain is in the left side of the head; and around the right elbow if the pain is in the right side of the head. If the pain happens to be on the same side as the open nostril, block the nostril until the pain goes away.

Indigestion

Those who suffer from chronic indigestion should make it a point to eat only during the first 36 minutes of the flow of the sun channel. To cure indigestion quickly and permanently, sit in the *padmasana* posture for 10 minutes every morning.

Weak Gums

If you have weak gums which make your teeth loose and painful, this is what you should do. While passing urine or excrement, clamp your jaws tightly together as if biting something very hard. Repeat this every day for two months and you will find a marked improvement in the health of your gums.

Asthma

When you feel an attack of asthma coming on, block your open nostril for 15 minutes. This will prevent the attack from getting serious. For long lasting relief keep this nostril blocked for at least a month.

Spleen and Liver Troubles

If the spleen gets enlarged due to jaundice or anaemia, and if the liver is not functioning as well as it should, then, before you get out of bed every morning, alternately contract and stretch your limbs for 5 minutes. Then shake your body from side to side for 10 minutes. This will help the spleen and liver to recover quickly and work much better.

Flatulence

For those who suffer from excess of gas in the intestine there is a very simple cure. About 15 minutes after every meal sit in the *virasana* (hero's posture) for 20 minutes. According to the '*Hatha-yoga-pradipika*' (1, 21), the *virasana* is formed by placing the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot under the right buttock.

Those who suffer from biliousness, skin rashes and sores should perform the *shitali kumbhaka* (cold retention). This is done in the following manner: sit in the *siddhasana* or *padmasana* posture. Protrude the tongue slightly out of the lips and breathe in through the mouth. Keep this air confined within the lungs for about 25 seconds, and then breathe out through the open nostril.

Pain

For minor body pains, suddenly close and equally suddenly open the flowing nostril until the pain disappears. This opening and closing should be done rhythmically.

Prolonging Good Health

There are three basic ways of breathing: (1) Breathing in and out through the nostrils; (2) Inhaling through the mouth and exhaling

through the open nostril; and (3) Breathing in through the open nostril and out through the mouth. If each of these three ways of breathing is done for about 4 minutes every morning there will be few illnesses and a healthy, long and trouble-free life.

Prolonging Youth

Those who have a desire to prolong their youth should frequently change the flow of the 'vital' breath from one channel to the other. Besides this, they may attempt, under a yogi's guidance, the *viparita karni mudra* (inverted gesture) every morning and evening.

To perform the *viparita karni mudra*, first lie supine on a flat, hard surface and a woollen cloth. Stretch the arms right above your head. Now gently raise the legs together making an angle of 45° to the ground. The knees must be kept straight. After achieving this, raise the legs further to make a 90° angle to the ground. Now raise the buttocks and trunk by supporting the body with the palms held at the waist. In the final position, the body should be at an angle of 45° to the ground, with the legs held vertical. Accompany this gesture with quick, forceful exhalations from the lungs. This *mudra* can be performed for about 10 to 20 seconds at a time. Many yogis can do this *mudra* for as long as 3 hours, but this is achieved only after long practice under a yogi-Guru's instructions.

The 'vital' energy that lives in the region of the heart is called *prana*. *Prana* flows in and out with the physical breath. During normal breathing, the inhaled 'vital' breath is 10 angulas long, while the exhaled breath is 12 angulas long. Thus we lose a lot of 'vital' energy during daily respiration. This can shorten our life considerably. Now, each exhalation/inhalation takes about 4 seconds to complete. The rate of respiration and the length of the 'vital' breath is increased by physical action. For instance, eating increases the length of the 'vital' breath to 18 angulas, walking to 20 angulas, running to 24 angulas, sexual intercourse to 60 angulas, and so on. If the rate of exhalation/inhalation is reduced, and the flow of 'vital' energy checked, we can easily increase our life span and gain control over our environment.

The benefits that can be derived from reducing the in and out flow of the 'vital' breath are many:

1) If the outgoing breath is reduced to 11 angulas it is possible to gain control over the physical process of respiration.

2) If reduced to 10 angulas, one can achieve long lasting peace of mind.

3) When diminished to 9 angulas, the individual is able to write spontaneous poetry and compose music.

4) Reduced to 8 angulas, one can attain clear diction and the ability to speak without hesitation or making mistakes.

5) If the 'vital' breath is pared down to 7 angulas, the eyesight improves and one is able to see into the future.

6) When the outgoing 'vital' breath is shortened down to 6 angulas, one becomes light and is able to fly like a hawk.

7) If further reduced to 5 angulas, one attains tremendous speed.

8) If decreased to 4 angulas, one attains the eight magical powers (siddhis) as well as the many minor siddhis. The eight major siddhis have been already described. The minor siddhis are also potent powers that can help in enjoying the world (bhoga) and experiencing spiritual bliss (moksha). The minor siddhis are: (i) the power of subjugation (*vashikarana*), (ii) magical eye-salve or collyrium with which one can locate buried treasures (*gutikanjana*), (iii) mastery in alchemy (*dhatuvada*), (iv) power of destruction (*vidagdha*), (v) ability to stop fire (*agnistambhana*), (vi) floods (*jalastambhana*), and (vii) speech (*vakstambhana*), (viii) to fly in the air (*khecharitvam*), (ix) to become invisible (*adrishyatvam*), (x) to attract another (*akarshanam*), (xi) to influence young people (*yuva-chitta-vimohanam*) and (xii) to make the body beautiful and attractive (*nijanga-saundaryam*).

9) When the outgoing 'vital' breath is only 3 angulas, one becomes capable of finding the nine hidden treasures. According to ancient Indian occult tradition, the nine hidden treasures (nava-nidhi) are guarded by Lord Kubera. The names of the treasures are: (i) tortoise (*kacchapa*), (ii) jasmine (*kunda*), (iii) delight (*nanda*), (iv) innumerable (*kharva*), (v) crocodile (*makara*), (vi) sapphire (*nila*), (vii) conch (*shankha*), (viii) ruby (*padmaraga*) and (ix) the great lotus (*mahapadma*). Each of the nine treasures is under the care of a yaksha (mysterious one) appointed by their lord and master

Kubera. The theory is that the treasures lie buried deep inside the heart of the earth. They are, however, not inanimate things, but living treasures that can move from one place to another. They rarely come up to the surface of the earth. Only during the rule of a noble king do the nine treasures rise automatically to the earth's surface. It is said that a great yogi who has understood the secret science of the nine treasures (*nava-nidhi-vidya*) can attain them and make them rise. According to an oral tradition told to me by Swami Prakashananda, the nine treasures are really states of consciousness which are attained by those who can stop the normal process of breathing and steady the mind.

10) If the exhaled 'vital' breath is cut down to only 2 angulas, then the individual is able to change his physical shape at will. Tradition says that the Natha yogis were able to do this.

11) When the 'vital' breath is diminished to 1 angula, one can easily become invisible and live in the subtle body for thousands of years.

12) Eventually, when the outgoing energy is so diminished that only a faint trace of the in/out flow remains, one will have reached immortality (*amaratvam*).

Death

The system of '*Svarodaya shastra*' is frequently used to predict death. Describing this method may cause unnecessary anxiety to readers. Also, death does not always mean death of the physical body. The word is frequently used to symbolise spiritual illumination. Therefore, most of the methods of predicting death have been left out. Only the way of visualising the shadow man (*chaya purusha*) is given here, as this has a wider meaning.

To visualise the shadow man, find a deserted temple, or a burning ghat, or the bank of a river, or any other holy place unfrequented by people. Bathe in the river and sit on a kusha grass mat with your back to the rising sun. Steady your gaze on the neck of your own shadow. Do this for about two hours every day, for seven days. On the eighth day, while gazing at the shadow, recite the following mantra a hundred and eight times:

HĪM PARABRAHMAṆE NAMAḤ

(Hrim, I bow to the Transcendental Reality)

Then look up into the sky, and there you will see the '*chaya purusha*' — the form of your cosmic personality projected on to the sky.

If you see the shadow man as a complete, bright and grey figure, it is auspicious and your yogic practices will be rewarded. You will eventually gain spiritual immortality. If the form of the shadow man is vericoloured you will attain all the eight occult powers. If the projected shadow man appears yellow you will have to guard against illness. If a red shadow man is seen, your heart will be filled with fear in anticipation of future violence and aggression. But always remember that ill effects can be overcome with the inner Guru's grace, with proper mantras and meditation. If the shadow man is dark black and its body appears mutilated, then either death or emancipation is near.

Divination

Many astrologers and yogis use the changing pattern of the 'vital' breath for divination. They base their system on the correlation between their own flow of breath and the breath of the questioner. Some of the basic formulae on which they base their predictions are:

- 1) Left channel is generally more auspicious than the right.
- 2) The breath of the earth and water elements is good; fire, air and space elements are inauspicious.
- 3) If the questioner stands or sits on the side of the diviner's open nostril the answer should be favourable. The reverse of this is unlucky and the answer will be unfavourable.
- 4) The flow of the central channel for long periods is generally considered to be inauspicious, with two exceptions: if the breath flowing from the central channel happens to be in the earth element on a Thursday, or if the breath is in the space element on a Saturday.

Some Questions and their Answers

- 1) If asked whether a woman will become pregnant or not: if the inquirer is on the side of the diviner's closed nostril the answer should be 'yes', otherwise 'no'.

2) If asked about the sex of an unborn child: (a) questioner's left channel and the diviner's right channel flowing, answer is short lived male child; (b) left channel of both flowing, answer is long lived male child; (c) questioner's right channel and diviner's left channel flowing, the answer is short lived female child; (d) breath of both in the right channel, the answer is a beautiful girl who will live long.

Questions about Travel

If the diviner's breath is in the moon nadi, and in one of the following elements, the results will be:

earth element = happy and successful trip;

water element = delay in reaching destination on account of floods;

fire element = troublesome trip, beset with dangers;

air element = unexpected delays and change of plan;

space element = delay due to ill health.

If the diviner's breath is in the sun nadi, then the fruits of the breath elements will be:

earth element = the trip will be successful and the traveller will return home happy;

water element = traveller will find a happy and comfortable life in a foreign country and will not come home;

fire element = the traveller will be in good health throughout the trip;

air element = the traveller is likely to be delayed and may even get lost;

space element = the traveller might have unexpected illness in the foreign country.

Some astrologers have even worked out a relationship between the breath elements and parts of the body likely to get hurt in a battle. Of course this applies to battles in the early days when man had only swords and spears to fight with. The correlation worked out by astrologers is:

earth = abdomen, water = feet, fire = chest, air = thighs and space = head.

Yearly predictions based on the flow of 'vital' breath should be made on the first day of the bright half of the month of Chaitra (March-April), or when the sun is moving southwards (dakshinayana) from the summer to the winter solstice, or when the sun is moving northwards (uttarayana) from the winter solstice.

If the moon appears at a time when the 'vital' breath is flowing in the moon channel and is in the earth, water or air element, the year will be prosperous, with plenty of rain and food. But if the breath is either in the fire or space element, there will be drought and famine. The central channel is always evil as far as mundane matters are concerned. If the sushumna is flowing at the time of the new moon, it foretells the coming of epidemics, wars, revolutions and other such national calamities.

Predictions regarding the course of the coming year can also be made when the sun enters the sign of Aries (Mesha samkramana = vernal equinox). If on this day the breath is in the earth element, there will be adequate rainfall, fertile fields, plenty of food, and national expansion. The flow of the water element also stands for good rain and harvests. The fire element is generally unlucky, and its flow at the time of the vernal equinox denotes little or no rainfall throughout the year, internal strife and setbacks in the country's economic development. The air element is also evil, and brings the well known 'six' misfortunes (iti): excessive rain in one part of the country, drought in another, locusts, rats, parrots which destroy fruits, and constant enemy invasions. The space element is the most inauspicious among all the five elements. It indicates the coming of a very miserable year.

If the breath that is flowing through the left nostril suddenly changes to the right nostril at the time of the vernal equinox, there will be wars throughout the country and the land will become like the lowest of all hells. The general rules used in predicting the course of the coming year apply equally when foretelling the course of a day or a month.

Some General Rules Regarding 'Svarodaya'

The first basic rule regarding 'Svarodaya' is that a harmony should always be kept between the warm, sun breath flowing through

the right nadi and the cool breath of the left lunar nadi. To give a few other guidelines:

1) During the bright half of the lunar month, the moon rules the night. Therefore, the effects of the sun are at its minimum. To harmonise this imbalance, it is necessary and advantageous to block the left nostril, and allow only the right channel to flow all night.

2) Throughout the dark half of the month, the moon's influence is absent. So during this period, it is auspicious to block the sun channel and let the moon nadi flow all night.

3) If at any time, and specially when out walking or exercising, one feels that the body temperature is suddenly increasing or one feels very tired, block the sun channel and let the 'vital' breath flow through the moon nostril until the tiredness or the heat has gone.

4) 'Vital' energy can sometimes be lost through the ears as the two minor channels pusha and yashasvini connect the basic chakra with the ears. So when outdoors on a very hot or cold day, keep the ears covered.

5) Meditation and visualisation of the full moon resting on the area between the eyebrows is said to cure all psycho-somatic illnesses and keep the mind calm and fresh. These benefits come only when one is capable of clear, complete visualisation.

6) When very thirsty and unable to get a drink, close the sun nadi and meditate on the tongue and the saliva dripping on to it. This will make it easy to endure the thirst.

7) After having sexual intercourse in the manner suggested in the '*Svarodaya*' texts, the couple should sip a lot of cool water.

8) Some ancient texts on '*Svarodaya*' suggest brisk, alternate breathing for about 2 minutes after each meal. This is said to help the subtle channels of the body to flow freely and the digestive organs to digest food.

These are some of the general rules of '*Svarodaya*' to keep the physical and the subtle body in good health.

How to Attain Liberation from the Cycle of Rebirth

The ida (left) is like the sacred river Ganga, the pingala (right) is like the Yamuna, and the central sushumna is the subterranean

Sarasvati. The body through which these channels flow is like Prayaga (modern Allahabad), the king of holy cities. Just as the pilgrim who bathes at the confluence of the three sacred rivers is freed from all sins, similarly, the yogi who controls the flow of the three nadis gains freedom from the cycle of births and deaths and attains liberation (*mukti*).

Sit in the *padmasana* and perform the breath control exercise known as *pranayama*, to clean the impurities of the physical as well as the subtle body. The three steps of *pranayama* are: (i) Close the right nostril and inhale deeply through the left nostril. This is the '*puraka*' (filling). (ii) Retain the inhaled air for as long as possible without discomfort. This is called the '*kumbhaka*' (retention). (iii) Slowly exhale through the right nostril. This is known as the '*rechaka*' (expulsion). Repeat this process, using alternate nostrils for as many times as you can without strain. Generally, the ratio of times between filling, retention and expulsion is 1 : 4 : 2, but this can be changed a little for those who cannot retain the breath for too long on account of physical reasons.

The *puraka* is said to stabilise the body fluids and make the blood, the saliva and the gastric juices flow freely. The *kumbhaka* prolongs life. *Rechaka* expels all impurities of the gross, as well as the subtle body.

After having mastered *pranayama*, attempt the *uddiyana bandha* (flying-up hold) to force the 'vital' breath to fly up through the central nadi.

To perform the *uddiyana bandha*: Empty the lungs by a forceful expiration. When the lungs are empty, the diaphragm rises naturally to the thoracic cavity. While the diaphragm is up, draw the intestines and the navel toward the back so that the abdomen rests against the back of the body, high up in the thorax. This can be done either sitting or standing. If done standing, place your hands firmly on the thighs, keep the legs apart and bend your trunk slightly forward. Maintain this posture for as long as you can hold the breath in without discomfort. The *bandha* can be done five to eight times with short intervals.²

Once the 'vital' breath starts flowing through the central sushumna nadi, it will result in *samadhi*, the final goal of all yoga and

meditation. In *samadhi*, the aspirant for liberation will experience the Reality. The thousand-petal lotus will open and the individual consciousness will unite with the Cosmic Consciousness in 'final bliss'.

Most traditional works on the '*Svarodaya shastra*' stress the need for secrecy. The reason for this, according to the '*Siva-svarodaya shastra*', is that many charlatans and so-called gurus may try to use the knowledge to gain wealth and to harm others. A true yogi, on the other hand, will not be tempted by selfish ends and will have no need to impress the crowds. He knows that the way to spiritual freedom is not cleared by performing miracles.

NOTES

1. DANIELOU, Alain (1987), *While the Gods Play*, Inner Traditions International, Rochester, Vermont, pp. 94-96.
2. VISHNUDEVANANDA, Swami (1972), *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga*, Pocket Books, New York, p. 42, and also '*Hatha-yoga-pradipika*', Chapter III, verses 57-58.

III

TANTRIK AND YOGIC BACKGROUND

In the last chapter the good and bad effects of the 'vital' breath flowing through each nostril were described. Now it is essential to outline a few traditional theories, Tantrik and yogic ideas and practices which form the background of the 'Svarodaya' method.

Some of these background ideas may seem a little strange to the modern mind. This is understandable. The demands of daily living today are so great on the outer and practical side of our personality that we have no time to consider even the possibility that there might be an inner, subtle side to our nature. As we have lost contact with the subtle mind, we do not understand the rules governing the hidden and subtle aspect of ourselves. The principles of Tantra, yoga, svarodaya shastra and other traditional spiritual disciplines operate entirely on the subtle level. Recent scientific experiments and tests of yogis and mystics have proved what theories of brain function once held to be impossible: they were able to bring automatic body mechanisms under voluntary mind control. As a result of such studies, many doctors and scientists now agree that the secret of these yogic skills lies in the subtle trance-like states brought about by practising techniques of meditation.¹

Colour Meditation (Varna-dhyana)

Colour meditation is generally considered helpful in maintaining inner calm and in understanding the subtle working of the 'vital' energies of the human body.

The method of colour meditation is simple. Sit in a comfortable posture. Generally the *padmasana* or *sukhasana* (easy posture) is recommended, but any posture will do. Then take a large piece of cloth or paper of the required colour. Stare at the coloured cloth or paper and allow the colour to become part of you. Let your entire

body take on the colour you are meditating upon. When you feel that the colour has covered you completely with its nature, close your eyes and visualise the colour inside you. When you can successfully visualise the colour with your eyes closed, you have perfected colour meditation. The various physical and psychic benefits will come automatically to you.

It is essential to remember that the colour meditation is directed towards emotions, and so it is necessary to understand the significance of the colours.

The first colour for meditation is red. This colour represents all the fiery emotions like anger, passion, lust, hate, violence and constant activity. The purpose of meditating on this colour is to become one with the emotions it symbolises, and to understand these emotions in our psychological makeup. In Indian mythology, red is associated with Brahma, the principle of creation, and the mother goddess, the basic energy of the cosmos.

The second colour for meditation is black. This symbolises all the negative feelings of the human mind. Depression, sorrow, grief, and so on, are all referred to as 'dark' emotions. Negative attitudes and emotions are harmful to man's physical and mental health. But to overcome them, one must understand them. And to understand them one must accept them. We generally try to push the negative part of ourselves into the subconscious and project only the good. But merely repressing the negative aspects does not make us free from them. They have to be brought into the open and understood. Any power that is understood loses its dangerous quality. Meditation on the colour black helps us in bringing the dark part of our mind to the surface. Black is a symbol of night, sleep and death, and hence represents Lord Shiva, the universal power of death.

Having understood and gone beyond the disturbing emotions of passion (*rajas* = red) and negativity (*tamas* = black), meditate upon white, the colour of inner peace and harmony. This is the symbol of Lord Vishnu, the cosmic principle of order and balance. White also represents light and wisdom, and stands for purity (*sattva*).

Element Meditation

Meditation on the five elements (*pancha-mahabhutas*) is commended in the Tantras. It is said that this form of meditation frees the

mind from the usual narrow concerns and gives it a sense of its vast potential powers. The human mind is capable of enormous creativity, but unfortunately most of us are so engrossed in petty, everyday concerns that we have no time to comprehend our hidden potential. Meditation on the natural elements also shows us how we are a part of this universe and how we share all the powers of the cosmos.

The first element is earth (*prithvi*). This is the basic material from which our bodies are made, and we live on its most gross and solid form. Symbolically the earth represents stability and volume and is therefore shown as a yellow square and is ruled by the Lord of cosmic evolution, Brahma. In our bodies, the influence of earth extends from the feet to the knees.

To meditate on the earth element, sit absolutely motionless and try to visualise the entire planet earth as being a part of your body. Gradually identify the different parts of the body with the various features of the earth. The streams and rivers are the blood vessels, the forest trees are the hairs on the body, and so on. When you feel that your body has lost its individuality and has become this entire planet earth, then move on to the next element.

The second element for meditation is water (*ap*). Not just the water we see in lakes, rivers and the sea, but all 'flowing' things. All that is capable of change and can flow has the spirit of water in it. Water is symbolised as a white circle. White because all colours are contained in it; and circular because it represents flow, a return to the source, and rhythm. The human body from the knees to the navel is ruled by water, and its ruling deity is Lord Narayana, the power of perpetual life. The word Narayana also means 'moving on water', and this may be a symbolic reference to the fact that life originated in water, and it still begins in the amniotic fluid that surrounds the embryo. Let your mind and body dwell upon the flow of water, and gradually they will lose their definite shapes and melt away into the rhythms of the universe.

When the mind and body become liquid, change to the next element, fire (*agni*). The rule of fire extends from the navel to the heart, and is represented by a red triangle pointing upwards to signify its vertical movement. Meditation on fire just after meditating on water brings about a balance. The cool and liquid nature of the mind

is now transformed into heat and activity. The lord of tears and death, Rudra, rules this element.

To meditate on fire allow your mind and body to feel the heat rising from the navel to the heart centre. As you progress in the identification of your body and mind with fire, the body temperature will rise. When the body becomes too hot for comfort, change your meditation to the next element, air (*vayu*).

Air governs the body from the heart to the area between the eyebrows. It is symbolised as a black or blue crescent and is ruled by Ishvara, lord of the cosmos. The first three elements have form, but air is formless and therefore more subtle. Meditation on air brings the mind closer to the formless reality, which is the goal of all spiritual life.

At first let your body be fanned by the refreshing air. Then imagine that your mind has become very very subtle. Allow your body to lose its gross form and become as light as air. You will feel that you are actually levitating. Air is also the vehicle of the 'vital' energies and so its meditation will quickly lead you to the final stage of meditation on the elements: the stage of the most subtle, space (*akasha*).

The element space rules the area above the eyebrows and extends beyond the limits of the human body into space. As space is beyond all human senses, it has no symbolic shape or colour. Sometimes, however, it is represented as a point (*bindu*) to stress the idea that space stands on the threshold of the manifest and the unmanifest, the seen and the unseen, the gross and the subtle, and all other such dualities.

When in meditation, the mind is completely identified with the space element, it is 'no more'. This is enlightenment, the final goal of spiritual *sadhana*. The space element is traditionally ruled by Sadashiva (always auspicious), an aspect of Shiva.²

The general method of meditation on the elements is to first sit in a comfortable posture and imagine that the body and mind are becoming one with the elements. Usually the most gross element is taken first, and the mind is gradually allowed to move to the more subtle elements until finally it is absorbed into the most subtle

element of all: space. This form of meditation is known as *laya yoga*.

Laya Yoga and other Meditations

Meditation on the area between the eyebrows (site of the *ajna chakra* and the optic thalamus) and the tip of the nose helps in the purification of the subtle channels.

The method of this meditation is simple. Find a quiet, clean spot and sit in either the *padmasana* or any other comfortable posture. Make sure that the 'vital' breath is flowing in the auspicious channel for that particular day and time. If the breath is not in the auspicious nadi change it, using one of the methods described in the previous chapter. As soon as the 'vital' breath starts flowing through the required channel try and concentrate the sight on to the tip of the nose. With both the eyes open, and the gaze pointed slightly downwards, look at the tip of the nose. You will generally see only one side of the nose. Take the visible side as the tip of the nose and meditate on it. This can be very tiring for the eyes, and so practise this method for only 2 minutes at a time. It will take roughly two days before the eyes adjust to looking at such a near object. As soon as the eyes have adjusted, close them and concentrate on the mental image of the 'tip of the nose'. After a month or so, or as soon as you are able to meditate on the tip of the nose, lift the centre of concentration upwards until you reach the site of the *ajna chakra*. Even this has to be done with eyes closed, and by forming a mental image of the two-petalled lotus symbol of the *ajna chakra*.

These two methods of meditation are called *Bhuchari* (earth-pointing) and *Khechari* (sky-pointing). Once the *Bhuchari* and *Khechari* have been perfected, the inner sight will become restless and unsteady. This is called *Chachari* (moving) and heralds the coming of the final stage of *Agochari* when the object of concentration vanishes and the mind is completely absorbed into the 'Infinite'. When this stage is reached, the 'vital' breath begins to flow through the central channel and the meditator becomes enlightened.

All the meditations so far described can be accompanied with the repetition of a mantra. This helps concentration, because con-

stant repetition of a set of sounds induces a mild state of autohypnosis and calms the restless mind.

A mantra is a sound pattern that can either be a name of a deity or a monosyllable like 'OM', or a Sanskrit phoneme imitating a natural sound, or a short prayer.

The most gross stage in the formation of a mantra sound pattern is the sound uttered aloud with the help of the vocal chords, the lips, the tongue and the teeth. This is called the *vaikhari* or audible mantra. Before audible sound can be produced, there is a stage when the speech centres in the brain activate the vocal apparatus. No audible sound has yet been produced, but the form that the pronounced sound will take is already formulated clearly in the mind. There is no sound but only mentation. This stage is called the intermediate or *madhyama*. The basic human potential to be able to arrange sounds into meaningful speech is called *pashyanti* or foreseen in the Tantras. The centre of the *pashyanti* stage of sound is said to be in the anahata chakra (cardiac plexus). Pure sound, as a form of kinetic energy that can become manifest as soon as there is vibration, is called the beyond or *para* stage of sound.

A mantra can be at any of the four stages of sound. When it is repeated aloud it is said to be at the gross, audible stage of *vaikhari*. Most mantras are at this stage. But when a serious disciple repeats a mantra silently; when the lips and the tongue move but no audible sound is produced, the mantra is said to be in the *madhyama* stage. When the mind has become silent and the mantra becomes automatic and goes on like the movement of the breath, it has reached the stage of *pashyanti*. Beyond the *pashyanti*, the mantra, along with the disciple's mind, merges with the 'Infinite'. This is the *para* stage of the mantra. It is said in the *Taittiriya upanishad* (II, 9):

He who knows the bliss of Brahman, whence words and the mind turn away and are unable to reach it, he is not afraid of anything.

Consciousness

According to yogic tradition, there are four states of human consciousness. The most basic and exoteric is the waking state or

jagriti. Then comes the state of dreams or *svapna*, when there is no awareness of the outside world, but the mind is not at rest. The worlds of the subconscious and the superconscious are active. The third state is that of deep sleep, dreamless sleep or *sushupti*, when the mind is apparently at rest, but the seed of all mental activities lies dormant. As soon as the individual awakens, and the mind goes into the waking state, the dormant seed sprouts again into the many manifestations of the mind. The fourth state of *turiya* is not an ordinary one. It is the state when the mind has gone and there is no longer a sense of 'I-ness'. The four states of human consciousness are compared to the four stages of sound in the Tantras: *jagriti* = *vaikhari*, *svapna* = *madhyama*, *sushupti* = *pashyanti* and *turiya* = *para*. The practice of meditation and mantra japa (repetition) based on the four states/stages tries to lead the mind from the gross to the subtle and beyond. This is also called *laya yoga* — the technique by which the human mind is absorbed into the universal mind.

Pranayama

Pranayama has been mentioned very briefly in the last chapter, but a more detailed treatment is essential in order to understand the yogic background of the 'Svarodaya' method.

The word *pranayama* is composed of two words: *prana* = breath as well as the 'vital' energies of the human body and *ayama* = conscious control. So together the words refer to the method of breath control which forms one of the eight basic steps of the classical science of eight-fold yoga (*ashtanga-yoga*).

All yogic practices start with *yama*, which is concerned with moral discipline and is achieved by taking vows of non-injury, truthfulness, honesty, continence, non-covetousness, forgiveness, pure diet and cleanliness. Then comes *niyama*, which is moral discipline at a more subtle level and involves internal purity, contentment, austerity, spiritual study and self-surrender. *Asana* is the third stage of physical postures that help in keeping the body healthy, so that it is possible to sit in meditation for long hours without discomfort. *Pranayama* is the fourth stage and stands on the border between the physical and psychic aspects of yoga. After *pranayama*

comes *pratyahara*, the withdrawal of consciousness from the senses and turning it inward for the next stage of *dharana* or mental concentration. The seventh stage is reached when *dharana* becomes absolutely steady and one-pointed with no disturbing thoughts entering the mind. This is called *dhyana* or true meditation. The final stage is *samadhi* or trance, in which the individual mind is freed from all material limits and is dissolved into the ultimate 'Reality'.

The three steps of *pranayama* are the same as the three acts of natural respiration and consist of inhalation (*puraka*), retention (*kumbhaka*) and exhalation (*rechaka*) of air from the lungs. The only difference between the two is that in natural respiration the rhythm is constant while in *pranayama* it is consciously changed to suit the different types of *pranayama*, of which there are many:

1) Quick inhalation and exhalation through both the nostrils is called *Bhastrika* and is said to clear the nasal passage and the subtle channels.

2) Quick inhalation through the right nostril, then retention and exhalation through the left nostril is called *Surya-bhedana* (conquest of the sun) and is used to calm the mind.

3) Inhalation through both the nostrils and exhalation through the left nostril is called *Ujjayi* (upward restraint) and helps to clear all diseases caused by too much phlegm and strengthens the heart muscles.

4) Inhalation through the mouth by cupping the tongue and exhalation through both the nostrils is called *Shitali* (cooling) which is said to prolong youth and help digestion.

5) Long retention after slow inhalation is called *Plavini* (swimming).

6) Just retention of breath without any special inhalation or exhalation is known as *Kevala-kumbhaka* (simple retention).

7) Humming during any inhalation is called *Bhramari* (bee-like) and this is said to clear the throat and the vocal chords.

The actual practice of *pranayama* starts with finding a clean, quiet and pleasant spot and sitting on a washed cotton cloth or a woollen mat. The yogic texts usually recommend *padmasana* or *sukhasana* (also called *ardha-padmasana* or half lotus posture) postures, but any comfortable posture will do provided the spine is

kept erect and the head is held up in line with the spine. When it becomes necessary to block either of the two nostrils during *pranayama*, the ring and little fingers should be used to block the left nostril and the thumb to close the right nostril. The index and middle fingers should never be used.

The usual ratio between the three acts of inhalation, retention and exhalation is 1 : 4 : 2, but this can be changed to suit the particular *pranayama*.

During inhalation, meditation on the manipura chakra (solar plexus) is known to lead the mind quickly into *samadhi*. Meditation on the anahata chakra (cardiac plexus) is recommended during retention and on the ajna chakra (optic thalamus) during exhalation.

Pranayama can be either silent (*agarbha*) or accompanied by mantra (*sagarbha*). Generally, the basic mantra 'OM' is used. This is made up of three syllables: A, U, and the nasal sound M. According to the *Dhyana-bindu-upanishad*, inhalation is accompanied by the syllable U, retention by M and exhalation by A.

Pranayama can be done at any time of the day or night. What is most essential is that the mind should be at peace. Never perform *pranayama* at a time of emotional or psychological imbalance. Another important factor is to remember that no book can teach the practical art of breath control. This can be learnt from only a yogi guru. As the *Hatha-yoga-pradipika* warns:

Pranayama performed correctly destroys all diseases, while incorrectly done *pranayama* can be the cause of all ill.

Finally, when *pranayama* is done correctly, the mind becomes calm and its processes become subtle. This leads to one-pointedness and concentration. Sensual concerns automatically fall away from a concentrated mind. The mind that is free from outer attractions goes deeper and deeper into meditation until it is totally absorbed into *samadhi*, the final goal of yoga.

Om tat sat

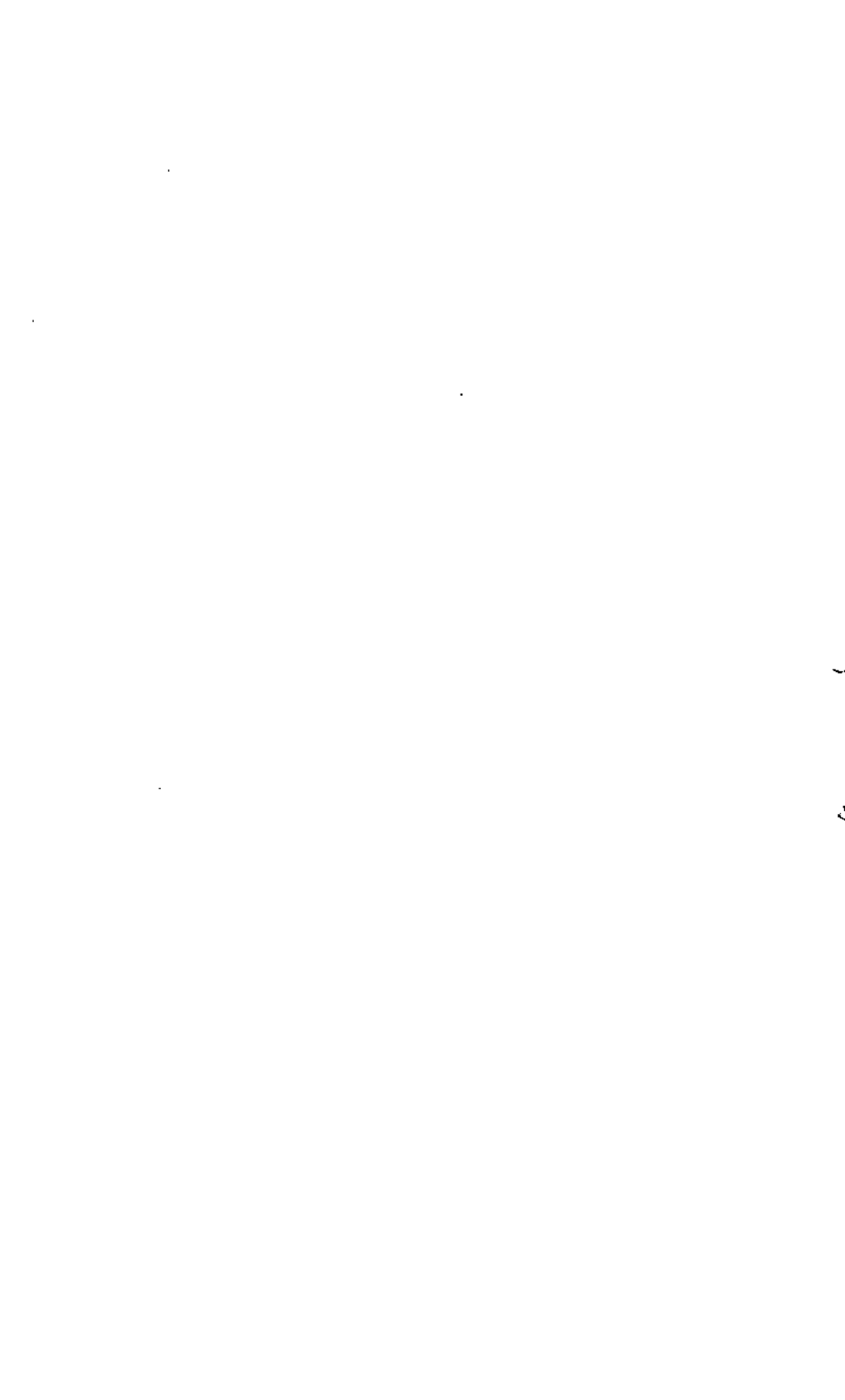
NOTES

1. DIAGRAM GROUP, THE (1982), *The Brain: A User's Manual*, New English Library, London, pp. 460-477.

2. Sadashiva: The presiding deity of the Vishuddha chakra and also the third *tattva* counting from Shiva (as the ultimate Reality) in the evolutionary scheme. Sadashiva is also a philosophical concept in the texts of Kashmir Shaivism of the Trika school. God in the form of pure knowledge is called Shiva, and in the form of energy and action is known as Shakti. When these two are in balance, this state is called Sadashiva. When the power of Shakti predominates, this state of being is known as Maheshvara. According to monistic theory of Shaivism, as given in the *Shiva-mahapurana (Rudra samhita)*, after the time of the great dissolution (*pralaya*), when all things were destroyed, there arose creative energy called Sadashiva. For more details, see: DASGUPTA, Surendranath (1922), *A History of Indian Philosophy*, Volume V, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, Indian Reprint, 1975.

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