

Satyam Speaks Bandha



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SWAMI SATYANANDA SARASWATI

1923~2023

CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

Satyam Speaks

Bandha



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Satyam Speaks Bandha

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

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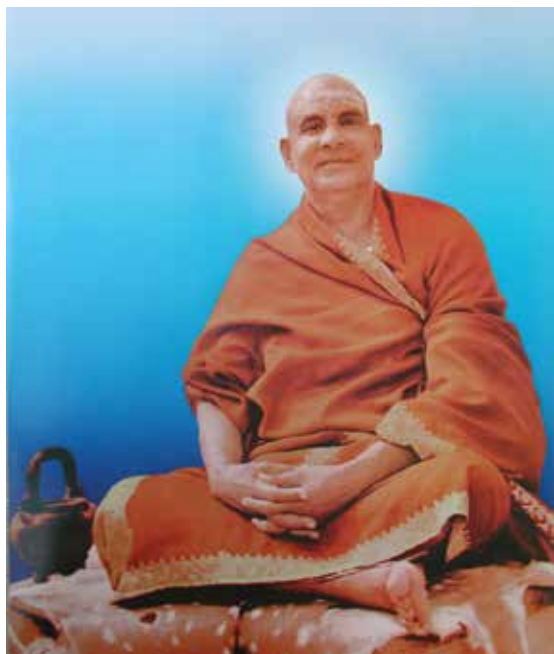
Published by Yoga Publications Trust
First edition 2022

ISBN: 978-93-94604-01-8

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

Website: www.biharyoga.net
www.sannyasapeeth.net
www.satyamyogaprasad.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



Dedication

*To our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our yogic and spiritual journey.*

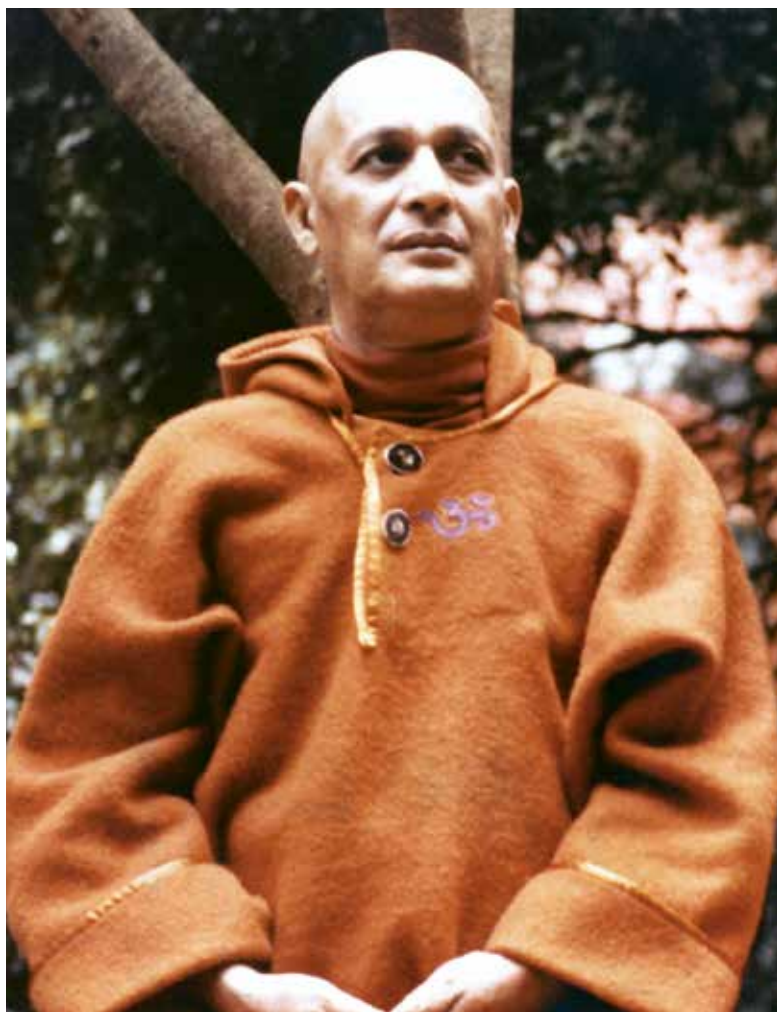
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Preface

Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati dedicated twenty years of his life to the propagation of yoga, and thus fulfilled the mandate given by his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, 'to spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore'. He travelled around the globe many times bringing the message of yoga to people of all walks of life, regardless of caste or creed. Master of yoga vidya and creator of the Yoga Chakra, he adapted his knowledge and understanding of yoga to the needs and abilities of people. Swami Satyananda simplified valuable techniques and complex processes by giving systematic and clearly defined sequences. Everyone could understand and progress following the theoretical explanation and practical instructions. Everyone was able to benefit from yoga.

Satyam Speaks Series presents compilations of Sri Swami Satyananda's teachings on yoga. Each book explores a specific topic, concept or practice. The aim is to provide an easy way to understand and incorporate various components of the immense science of yoga vidya into one's daily life. For some titles, more information is provided of specific conditions or applications, which are for the information of the aspirant only and not for practice. These have been included to show the depth of understanding and experience Sri Swami Satyananda had of yoga vidya.



Satyam Speaks Series is a tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda, his teaching and to yoga vidya. *Satyam Speaks Series* is an invitation to all sincere aspirants to live yoga and thereby make the world a better place.

Learn from an accomplished yoga master, not from a book. This series is a knowledge guide and a yoga master is a practical guide.

1

Introducing Bandha



The system of bandhas is a group of inner locks designed to hold *prana*, or psychic energy, within certain areas of the body so that its pressurized force can be directed and utilized. Bandhas are extensively incorporated in mudra as

well as pranayama techniques. Their locking action, however, reveals them as a fundamentally important group of practices in their own right. They are a small but important group of yogic practices.

Bandhas are internal flexions and are the yogic technique of controlling and exercising the involuntary organs which are connected with nerves in the body. Their effects on the nervous plexes (groups of nerves) are salutary. They possess a remarkable curative value in many physical ailments concerning organic and functional disorders. Their psychological and physiological utility is remarkable. Bandhas should first be practised and mastered individually. Only then can they be beneficially incorporated with mudra and pranayama practices. When combined in this way, they awaken the psychic faculties and form an adjunct to higher yogic practices.

Modern muscle relaxation therapies advocate that by the systematic contraction and relaxation of muscles, one gains complete physical and mental relaxation. The underlying rationale is that in order to remove physical and mental tension it is more effective to first exaggerate the tension already existing in the body by wilfully contracting the tense muscle group. Bandhas work in a similar way, but simultaneously affect the physical, pranic, mental, psychic and causal bodies. They have far-reaching effects as they are associated with powerful energy centres in the spine and brain. Therefore, bandhas are dynamic, explosive and immediate in their effect.

Bandha is a technique through which the opposite poles of energy or *shakti* are bound together. Through contraction of muscles and organs in the physical body, the shakti is accumulated in a particular centre. The true meaning of bandha, therefore, is essentially paradoxical, for it is said that by locking or contracting certain muscles on the physical level a subtle process of 'unlocking' goes on simultaneously on mental and pranic levels.

Definition

Bandha means lock. The Sanskrit word literally means ‘to bind’, ‘to hold captive’ or ‘to tighten and contract’. These definitions precisely describe the physical action involved in the bandha practices and their effect on the pranic body.

Bandha may also be defined analogously, being likened to the ‘damming of a river’, ‘building a bridge’ or ‘building over the sea’. This can be interpreted as meaning that a bandha is a vehicle to traverse the ocean of *samsara*, worldly existence, and to reach the other shore of enlightenment.

Understanding bandhas

In hatha yoga there are three systems of locks or bandhas. One is called the neck bandha or *jalandhara bandha*. When the chin is locked against the throat, that is jalandhara bandha. The second is known as *moola bandha*; when the perineum is contracted, that is moola bandha. The third is called *uddiyana bandha*, contraction of the abdominal muscle. The fourth bandha is *maha bandha*, a combination of the previous three. These three bandhas are important for their effect on the lungs, the heart, the nervous system, and finally, the brain.

If one makes a study of the different hatha yoga texts, there will surely be some confusion when it comes to mudras and bandhas. Some practices are referred to as mudras in one text and as bandhas in another. Traditionally, bandhas were classified as part of mudras, and were handed down by word of mouth from guru to disciple. Then during the periods when tantric practices were prevalent, it seems they were not considered as separate practices, but their combination was called maha mudra, ‘the great attitude’. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita* deal with bandhas and mudras together, and the ancient tantric texts also make no distinction between the two. In different texts the same practices may be described, but they might also have different names. When the system of hatha yoga was culled from the tantric practices, some of the practices were redefined and mudras and bandhas were separated.

Tracing the roots of bandhas

I have been to different countries and in Columbia have been surprised to see in the district of Tolema the St Augustine's Museum. In its pre-Colombian art, there are statues of hatha yoga mudras, nadi shodhana pranayama, vajrasana, uddiyana bandha and vipareeta karani mudra. These, and many other examples are found in the pre-Colombian and pre-Christian culture. Yoga has survived and will survive.

There are other instances of such evidence everywhere in different cultures. Hara in the Japanese tradition is manipura in the yogic tradition. In hatha yoga, this is considered to be the most important centre. They say that prana goes upwards, and apana goes downwards. A yogi should try to reverse the process, so that prana goes towards the navel, apana goes towards the navel, and at the navel, both energies unite. That is yoga. When these two forces unite at manipura chakra, or the chakra of hara, in the region of the navel, then there is an awakening.

Manipura chakra is also known as the solar plexus, and is the chakra of the solar energy. The awakening of the energy from manipura chakra is the awakening of the primordial power in the Japanese tradition. In order to awaken this shakti, there are two important practices in hatha yoga known as uddiyana bandha and nauli kriya, the contraction of the abdomen for some time, and then churning of the abdomen. The bandhas and mudras were all part of tantra.

Mechanics of bandhas

Bandhas involve the contraction or squeezing of muscles. As there are three bandhas, there are three main muscle groups involved: perineal muscles, abdominal muscles and cervical (neck) muscles. The perineum is in between the excretory and urinary organs. Contraction of the perineum is moola bandha, contraction of the abdomen is uddiyana bandha and contraction of the throat is jalandhara bandha.

Contraction of these muscle groups affects the nervous, circulatory, respiratory, endocrine and energy systems. When

a muscle is contracted a nerve impulse is relayed to the brain, triggering other neuronal circuits and nervous centres. This in turn affects the state of consciousness. In response to this stimulation, the brain adjusts its firing patterns. To further understand bandhas, they must be seen not only as locks, but also as removers of blocks or blockages, in the form of physical and mental impurities.

Moola bandha, uddiyana bandha and jalandhara bandha are specific techniques for accumulating the available supply of prana. Whether they are known or not, they occur spontaneously when one is established in siddhasana. When prana is awakened, the body is naturally guided into various mudras, bandhas and pranayama techniques which may not even have been known to the practitioner. (*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (1:42): Thus, through securing siddhasana, the three bandhas occur by themselves.)

Increasing the voltage

Bandhas are psychic locks used to raise the level of prana and reverse the direction of pranic flow. For example, moola bandha reverses the downward flow of apana and sends it upward, while jalandhara and uddiyana bandhas reverse the upward flow of prana and send it downward. This reversal causes apana and prana to meet at samana and brings about an awakening of the prana in that area.

In hatha yoga, the practice of bandhas creates a negative pressure. When this negative pressure is created, the energy begins to be reversed. When uddiyana bandha, moola bandha or vajroli mudra are practised, the negative pressure begins, because with these bandhas, those doorways, those portals through which the energy flows downwards are being blocked. To make this negative pressure more active and efficient, vipareeta karani mudra is performed. In vipareeta karani mudra the energy channels or other channels are reversed to higher centres. These centres must be necessarily supplied with ample amounts of energy if evolution of consciousness is to take place. If these physical energies or these energies that

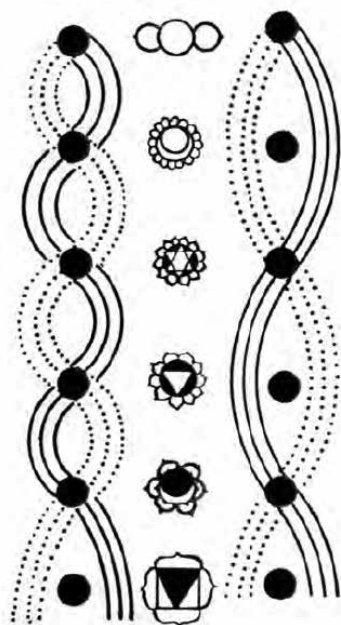


Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 1: Modified wave forms when moola bandha is practised by itself.

Figure 2: Wave forms when the three bandhas are performed together.

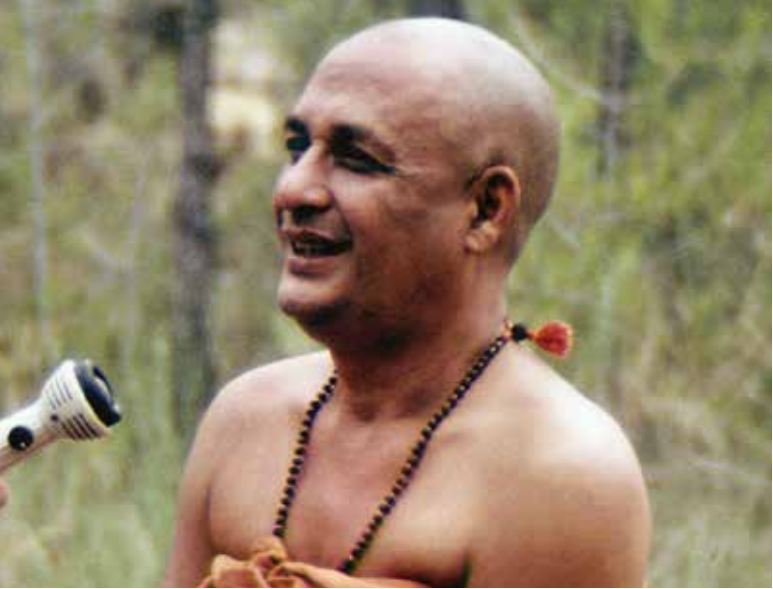
maintain the body are conserved and reversed and directed to a particular higher centre in the brain, then the higher centres begin to develop.

Awakening of that particular portion of the brain, or the awakening of that central part of the brain is not possible directly by any method unless you are able to excite or you are able to bring into operation the different centres. It may be possible that the whole area of the brain, the entire unconscious, the sleeping area of the brain is directly connected with the different psychic centres which in kundalini yoga are such as ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara. Perhaps these psychic centres are the switches which control the different areas in the brain.

Tantra approaches the problem of higher experience by being a friend of the mind and not an enemy. Therefore, no matter what a yogi's personal philosophy may be, the three bandhas are considered as important as eating and sleeping.

2

Exploring Bandha



According to yogic scriptures, control of muscles and nerves controls the breath. Control of breath controls consciousness. Bandhas are a means of extending control over breathing and are thus a means to extend one's knowledge and control over consciousness. The breathing rate and depth is said to be affected by states of consciousness, disease, atmospheric conditions, thoughts, exercise and emotions.

Effect on consciousness

Research has shown that in states of tension and fear respiration becomes short and shallow, while in states of relaxation, people take long deep breaths.

The bandhas induce five different kinds of retention or immobility: retention of muscles, breath, senses, thought and consciousness. When bandhas are performed in conjunction with pranayama, contraction of the muscles takes place simultaneously with *kumbhaka*, internal or external breath retention. The physical lock or contraction is applied and at the same time the breath is also arrested or immobilized. As a consequence, the consciousness is arrested, stopping the flow between the polar opposites of inhalation and exhalation, birth and death, joy and sorrow, gain and loss. Once retention of consciousness is achieved, the yogi is prepared for the next stage of his spiritual rebirth, the awakening of kundalini. The bandhas act as triggering mechanisms for the activation of this powerful force residing at the base of the spine.

Awakening the autonomic nervous system

When you retain the breath then you have to do something more. You have to create a pressure at three points in the body. The pressure is intended to create a force, what you call centrifugal force. This force has to be created by maintaining pressure in three different areas of the body at the time when you are holding the breath. You must contract your throat, the perineum and abdominal muscles, and these three contractions should be practised when you are holding the breath. By maintaining contraction in these three different areas, you try to work upon what you call the autonomic nervous system.

When you practise pranayama and contract the three different areas in the body, the autonomic nervous system is awakened and becomes active. When it becomes active, then both the nostrils flow equally. You must have noticed sometimes the right one flows, sometimes the left one flows. That is due to the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous

systems which are controlled by the solar and lunar cycles. Therefore, those who want to meditate must know, must realize, the right time for meditation; when both nostrils are flowing equally, go ahead.

The right nostril corresponds with the life force. The left nostril represents and corresponds with the mental force. When your left nostril is flowing, if you meditate you will have a lot of visions, psychic visions, forms, imaginations, but no meditation. If you try to meditate when your right nostril is flowing, you won't be able to meditate, your mind will be very active and hyperactive. Therefore, before you start practising meditation you must awaken the autonomic nervous system, it is absolutely a requisite.

Bandhas and the pranic body

The conscious contraction and tightening of specific parts of the body has vast repercussions. The physical contraction or lock has an extensive influence on the pranic body, as the flow of prana that continuously streams through the subtle body is redirected and even stopped. This has direct influences on the mind, as each of the physical and pranic locations associated with the bandhas is related neurologically to a specific area in the spinal cord and brain, and therefore the psyche.

Contraction at the physical level activates and awakens dormant faculties in the brain and mind. The whole body and mind is tranquillized and made receptive to higher states of awareness. Mastery of the bandhas leads to the fullest realization of one's potential. Such is the power of bandhas when they are perfected.

The physical, endocrinological and neurological aspects of bandhas can be better understood when it is appreciated that the body is a complex, yet well-organized field of various energy systems based on one fundamental energy principle called prana. Though the bandhas have major positive physical effects, their main effect and purpose is at the pranic level.

Bandhas and pranayama

In hatha yoga when one practises pranayama, kumbhaka, moola bandha, jalandhara bandha and uddiyana bandha, the prana is controlled. By controlling the prana, the mind is automatically suspended. Pranayama allows control of the flow of prana, the bandha directs it to required areas, thus preventing dissipation. In the context of pranayama, apana moves up with inhalation and prana moves down with exhalation, while a balance between inhalation and exhalation signifies the retention of breath which occurs spontaneously when prana and apana unite. For maximum benefits moola bandha should be practised in conjunction with pranayama.

One gains the maximum benefits from pranayama when the bandhas are practised with breath retention. The practice of pranayama means practising kumbhaka. Kumbhaka is the ultimate definition of pranayama. In conjunction with pranayama, the bandhas must be practised. When the bandhas are performed, the mental and psychic systems are affected. Without bandhas, pranayama is of no use.

Prana, as in the vital energy between the larynx and diaphragm, is an evolutionary force, a non-material force; it is in the physical body and it is in the universe. Apana, meaning the vital energy in the lower part of the body, is an instinctive force or a material force. In this physical body these two forces are to be brought to the central zone in the navel and that can be done only through the practice of uddiyana bandha.

Moola bandha is used with kumbhaka as it helps to turn the apana upwards. In the beginning moola bandha should be practised with internal breath retention. Simultaneously the region of the perineum is contracted and pulled up towards the diaphragm. When the practitioner can perform moola bandha while holding the breath inside, without the slightest strain or discomfort, then he should attempt the more difficult practice of moola bandha with external breath retention which has a more powerful effect. When moola bandha is performed, the apana is forced to flow upwards.

When jalandhara is performed, the prana is forced to flow downwards and unite with apana. When prana and apana unite it is a fantastic experience which generates vitality and helps to awaken kundalini. When the three bandhas (jalandhara, uddiyana and moola bandha) are well perfected the *rechaka* and *pooraka*, inhalation and exhalation, do not function, the flow of the senses is purified and kevala kumbhaka takes place.

Generally, the tendency of the force is to go down. The general tendency of energy and force is to dissipate. In science it is said that any energy, any electromagnetic energy or gravitational force or electrical energy has a natural tendency to dissipate, and in this physical body that is also the tendency. Therefore, the natural tendency towards dissipation must be obstructed by the practice of uddiyana bandha in synchronization with pranayama practices.

If pranayama is correctly practised, it cannot only control the body temperature, it can control the thought waves as well. There are many things which have to be controlled before any spiritual experience. First of all, the mind should be controlled by controlling the thought waves which are a part or manifestations of the mind. Mudras and bandhas should be practised along with pranayama. Though the bandhas are used in pranayama they are considered as separate practices. Bandhas are powerful practices that generate and accumulate prana in specific parts of the physical and subtle bodies; they are essential in the practices to awaken the chakras and sushumna nadi.

Distribution of energy

Each and every fibre of the body is connected with this pranic current through a complex system of energy channels or flows known as *nadis*. The nadis have been researched and their function can be compared to that of an electrical system. Energy is distributed in our physical body in the same way as the electrical system distributes energy from the generating station to your room.

A scientist generates energy then captures it. He accumulates it, and then sends it through the cables to the transformers and to people's rooms and to factories. Nature is creating energy all the time, but man does not know how to tame it. In the same way, when pranayama is practised, energy is created, a force is created and this force is in the cerebrospinal system, in the centre of the spine. Mooladhara chakra is the generating station. From here, the energy is distributed through three high tension wires – ida, pingala and sushumna nadis, to the various chakra points or substations situated along the spine. From the chakra points, the energy is distributed through the main poles or major nadis to the different organs and parts of the body. From the major nadis another distribution takes place through thousands of minor nadis which carry the energy to each and every cell of the body.

When pranayama is practised the pranas in the lower body are stimulated, but a means of forcing this pranic energy up is needed. Somehow, a negative force which will push the pranic energy up through the spinal cord needs to be created. For this reason, pranayama should be practised in coordination with specific bandhas.

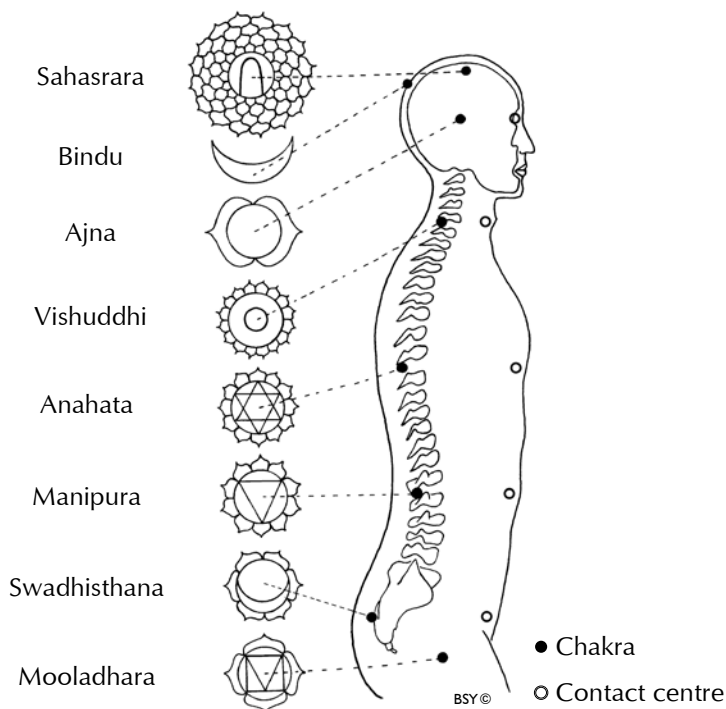
When bandhas are performed with pranayama they create a negative force like the ejecting force used to extract water from a well. There are two forces used for pumping water: the sucking force and the ejecting force. When pranayama is practised with the bandhas, an ejecting force is put into action.

Pranayama generates prana in the lower body. Next, to conduct the prana up to the brain, moola bandha, then uddiyana bandha and finally jalandhara bandha must be performed. In this way, prana is conducted to the brain with the help of the subtle circulatory system.

The network of vessels through which the blood circulates is not just an arrangement of hollow tubes. It is a generator and distributor of prana as well. These vessels become charged and polarized as the blood circulates around the

body. It is as though the whole arterial and venous circulation becomes magnetized. The flow of blood through the vessels generates a biomagnetic force just as a forceful flow of water is used to generate hydroelectricity. This is how prana shakti is able to permeate and enliven even the most distant cells and tissues of the body.

Bandhas and chakras



The chakras are the basis for the beginning of an expanded state of awareness. These chakras are beyond your reach, you do not know exactly where they are, so each chakra has a contact centre. Manipura has a contact centre exactly in the navel. Anahata has a contact centre in the sternum. Vishuddhi has a contact centre in the throat. Ajna has a contact centre in *bhrumadhya*, the mid-eyebrow centre. Sahasrara has no

contact centre. Bindu has no contact centre and mooladhara has no contact centre. Swadhisthana has a contact centre at the root of the urinary organ or the clitoris. What I mean by contact points is like this: if you want to light the bulb the contact point is there on the wall, you just turn on the switch. These are called contact points; you just switch on the switch.

When you practise moola bandha you are tackling mooladhara chakra. When you practise vajroli, you are contacting swadhisthana chakra. When you practise uddiyana bandha you are contacting manipura. When you hold the breath, practise kumbhaka, you are contacting anahata chakra. When you practise jalandhara bandha, you are contacting vishuddhi chakra. When you practise shambhavi mudra or trataka on a particular point, you are contacting ajna chakra, but kumbhaka, retention of the breath is the most important. When the breath is retained and the three bandhas are practised, this is kumbhaka. When kumbhaka takes place, ajna chakra automatically begins to wake up. Initially some people may feel various physical sensations at this point, but these are only important in relation to the fact that ajna chakra is operating.

At the bottom of the spine there is a very important centre in the body. In yoga it is known as mooladhara chakra, which is situated in the perineum which is between the genital, the urinary and excretory systems. It is a very vital point, a very vital organ in the body. According to our modern science, the parasympathetic nervous system connects the brain with the rest of the body through two centres. From mooladhara chakra the impulses can be conducted through the parasympathetic nervous system right into the brain. At the top of the spinal cord is the centre of the pineal gland which is also very important because that also connects the parasympathetic nervous system with the brain – this is known as ajna chakra. This ajna chakra and mooladhara chakra are both carriers, or vehicles of impulses to the brain. The impulses travel through the parasympathetic nervous system in the whole body. There is some interrelation

between mooladhara and ajna. If you practise moola bandha or maha bandha, the effect will be felt at ajna chakra.

The perineum is the place which is the seat for mooladhara chakra, in the masculine body. In the feminine structure it is not the perineum, it is the cervix which is the centre of mooladhara chakra. The lowest portion of the uterus and on its posterior side according to the tradition is the centre mooladhara, or the gland mooladhara. Although mooladhara chakra is situated in a physical gland, energy is inherent within it as in all matter. Matter is nothing but a different form of energy and energy is nothing but a different form of matter. At every stage of creation, matter and energy are inter-convertible. Therefore, we should not wonder how this physical organ could be the source of infinite energy.

The mooladhara chakra, at the base of the spine, has to be awakened. Then energy flows to the highest brain centres, and the brain starts functioning on resonant waves. By the practice of ashwini mudra and moola bandha you awaken your mooladhara. Moola bandha and uddiyana bandha are techniques which redistribute and rechannel pranic heat and nervous impulses from the lower to the higher centres, or from the grosser to the subtler centres.

From the perspective of kundalini yoga, the woman's body is charged by a particular centre, mooladhara chakra, which can be touched with the fingers. In the male body, this chakra is intricately situated in a very congested area; men do moola bandha and still nothing happens. Therefore, awakening can take place in a woman's body much quicker than in the body of a man.

The awakening in manipura takes place like a blast. When prana and apana meet it is like two great forces colliding with each other because prana and apana are both powerful. When they meet at the junction in the navel then they create a kind of force which is conducted to manipura centre in the back, because the nerve channels are there. It is that force that awakens the manipura centre. Therefore, in the practices for manipura you have got uddiyana bandha.

Uddiyana means the contraction of the abdomini and control of the entire navel muscles, intestines, rectus, everything. Nauli means control of the rectos abdomini and churning it completely. Of course you may say that this is good for the intestines. This is a physical aspect of the practice, but the yogic aspect of uddiyana bandha and nauli kriyas is to create a union between prana and apana in the navel, and when that union takes place, then there is a generation of Shakti. Then Shakti is conducted back to the manipura centre and that is how the manipura chakra is awakened. By the practice of jalandhara bandha you can awaken your vishuddhi chakra.

Dr Hiroshi Motoyama, head of the Institute of Religion and Parapsychology in Japan, has invented sensitive machines for measuring the vital energy of the body. The first is an apparatus for measuring the function of the nadis (meridians of acupuncture) and their corresponding body organs. He has taken readings for more than 2,000 people so as to calculate normal values. He is able to use this machine to diagnose disease tendencies before they actually manifest, allowing people to take the necessary steps to avoid the disease. A number of hospitals in Japan are beginning to use this machine to screen patients, and they are comparing the results with other biochemical investigations.

He has also improvised an apparatus which can register the impulses in the chakras. He has a long-size, big machine. If you are six feet, he puts the machine at six feet. If you are short and Japanese, he puts the machine at small. He exactly fits those sections at the chakras, mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, and monitors them.

Then he will ask you to practise bhastrika pranayama, for example, or anything else. When you are practising bhastrika, take the breath in, practise jalandhara bandha, uddiyana bandha, moola bandha and then you see what is happening through the chakras. It is of course no kundalini awakening. It is the chakra becoming active. After this investigation has come out, many medical doctors are keeping quiet, because now the kundalini shakti has been accepted as a force.



Dr Motoyama has also invented a 'chakra machine' which records the impulses emanating from the psychic centres in the spinal cord. He has shown that it is possible to register definite impulses from these areas in individuals who have been practising yoga for many years, and who have awakened their psychic faculties. For example, when a subject practises pranayama with retention of the breath while performing maha bandha, contraction of the perineum, abdomen and thyroid, the machine registers changes in the impulses emanating from the psychic centres. His research showed that energy was being activated by the yogic practices.

Bandhas and granthis

Granthis represent blockages in one's awareness at the different levels of consciousness. They are the psychic blocks and mental problems that obscure the true image of one's essential nature, preventing the individual from soaring into the realms of meditation. The granthis are experienced as tension, anxieties, repressions and unresolved conflicts.

Traditional yogic texts speak of three granthis or psychic knots, located at mooladhara, anahata and ajna

chakras. These three are called the Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra granthis. The three bandhas act directly on the three *granthis* or psychic knots. Moola bandha is associated with Brahma granthi, uddiyana bandha with Vishnu granthi and jalandhara bandha with Rudra granthi.

These blocks or knots have to be removed if one wants to know the experience of higher awareness. They represent psychic blocks and mental problems that prevent an individual soaring into the realms of meditation. They can be removed either permanently or temporarily. Bandhas are one of the most effective means of untying these knots or blockages, at least for a short period of time. With repeated practice, each temporary removal helps to eventually eliminate the blocks permanently.

Brahma granthi is the first knot and it is associated with mooladhara and swadhisthana chakras. It is linked with the survival instinct, the urge to procreate and with deep, instinctive knowledge, awareness and desire. When Brahma granthi is transcended, the kundalini or primal energy is able to rise beyond mooladhara and swadhisthana without being pulled back down by the attractions and instinctual patterns of the personality.

The second knot is Vishnu granthi, associated with manipura and anahata chakras. These two chakras deal with the sustenance of the physical, emotional and mental aspects of human existence. Manipura sustains *pranamaya kosha*, the energy body, governing the digestion and metabolism of food. Anahata sustains *manomaya kosha*, the mental body, and they both affect *annamaya kosha*, the physical body. Once Vishnu granthi is transcended, one is no longer bound by physical, mental and emotional attachments. Relationships and energy become more universal, rather than being limited by personal preferences or aversions.

The final knot is Rudra granthi, which is associated with vishuddhi and ajna chakras. Vishuddhi and ajna sustain *vijnanamaya kosha*, the intuitive or higher mental body, and represent the transformation of an existing form,

idea or concept into its universal aspect. When Rudra granthi is pierced, individuality is dropped. The old ego identification is left behind and the experience of unmanifest consciousness, beyond the phenomenal universe, emerges at ajna and sahasrara chakras.

These so-called knots are in the psychic body, not in the physical body, but physical manipulations such as bandhas can unlock them. Each level of manifestation has repercussions on other levels. It is not realistic to rigidly separate the physical body, pranic body and the mind body. They are all interrelated and part of a whole. They are only divided or categorized for convenience of explanation.

Therefore, the physical body influences the mind and pranic body. The pranic body influences the mind and physical body. And the mind influences the pranic and physical body. Bandhas, like all other yogic practices, act on and influence different levels of individual being. They have profound effects on the physical, pranic and mental levels. The force generated from the bandhas may be likened to that of increased pressure in a tube. Imagine a piece of tubing rising vertically from the ground. This tube represents sushumna nadi, the main pranic energy channel which runs up the spine.

1. Moola bandha seals off the lowest portion of the tube, thus preventing apana, the downward flow of prana, from escaping below mooladhara. It stimulates energy in mooladhara, awakening kundalini shakti.
2. Jalandhara bandha seals off the top portion of the tube, preventing prana vayu from passing upward, beyond vishuddhi. Prana is now locked within this tube.
3. Uddiyana bandha completes maha bandha. It further increases pranic pressure by stimulating manipura chakra, filling and expanding the closed tube.

Thus, when maha bandha is performed, prana is compressed in sushumna. The locks prevent its downward and upward movement, at the same time stimulating energy. Release of the bandhas flushes prana through the whole body, and

as prana is by nature vital, life-giving energy, the body is relaxed, toned and rejuvenated. The granthis can then be pierced and untied, expanding consciousness.

The granthis prevent the free flow of prana along sushumna nadi and thus impede the awakening of the chakras and the rising of kundalini. In yogic language, these granthis prevent the flow of prana into the main pranic passage of the body, the sushumna. When they are released, prana immediately begins to flow through sushumna nadi, which leads to increased receptivity of the mind and in turn higher experiences.

Bandhas, kriya yoga and kundalini

Scientific instruments have been revealing to us the potentialities of yoga practices. Now many people talk about kundalini. About ten years back, one doctor asked me, "Have you seen kundalini?" I asked him, "Did you see it?" He said that he had dissected a whole body and he did not see it. I told him, "What do you mean by it?" He said there cannot be a kundalini shakti, because he did not see it in his dissections. I only asked him one question. I said, "While dissecting the brain did you find a thought?" The doctor had no answer.

Kundalini yoga is not abstract but is based on the physical body and the physical centres. But you cannot revitalize them; you cannot cause vitality by any method except yoga. Therefore, in the yogic practices you have a lot of things, such as *asanas*, the postures; *pranayama*, the breathing; *bandhas*, control of inflexions; *mudras*, the psychic attitudes; *kriyas*, the motion of consciousness; *ajapajapa*, awakening of the subconscious and unconscious; cognition of the conscious, subconscious, and unconscious; *antar mouna*, explosion of the dirty man, elimination of the impurities in man by a spontaneous method; and many other practices are included in the structure of yoga.

The most important preparation for kriya yoga is the practice of mudras and bandhas. You must master them very well. The important bandhas are jalandhara bandha or locking the chin, uddiyana bandha or withdrawing the sacral

plexus, and moola bandha, or controlling the inflexions of the mooladhara chakra or the base centre. When one completes these preparations, one can start the practices of kriya yoga with a master who knows the science very well.

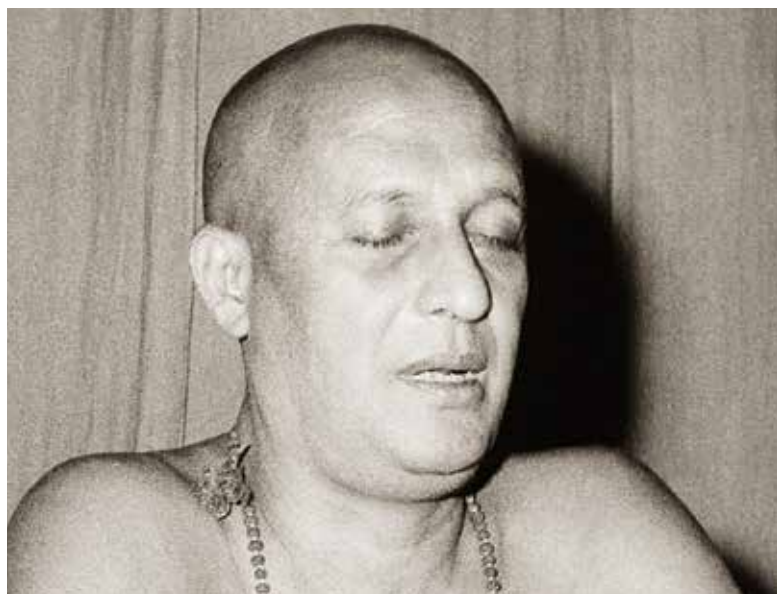
Tantra and kundalini yoga have made it very clear that mooladhara chakra is the generating station, sushumna is the connecting station, and ajna chakra is the local substation. Practise of uddiyana bandha awakens the sushumna passage at manipura chakra by creating a convergence of the vital and mental energies at the solar plexus: then kundalini can rise beyond this centre.

Ida is Shakti and pingala is Shiva. When they unite in ajna chakra it is the real union. The seat of Shakti is in mooladhara. The seat of Shiva is in sahasrara. Shiva is in eternal yoga nidra there, inactive, unconcerned, nameless and formless. He has nothing to do with destruction or creation. His consciousness is homogeneous and total, and there is no vibration in sahasrara. Shakti is in mooladhara, and by the practices of yoga, she is awakened. She becomes aroused and makes her way through sushumna up to ajna. When Shakti reaches ajna chakra, union takes place. In order to have the necessary quantum of energy, mooladhara chakra has to be awakened. Then the energy has to be conducted to ajna chakra via sushumna.

Psychic bandha

The process of bandha starts from ajna to the whole body with distribution and expansion. Then from the whole body to ajna there is withdrawal and contraction. The contraction of the body is something like moola bandha, but it is not the contraction of the perineum alone, it is the contraction of the entire body consciousness.

The body is to be expanded and contracted, not in parts but as a whole, expanded from ajna to the body and contracted from the body to ajna. It is as if ajna is the centre where contraction takes place. The process is to be done mentally.



When the consciousness and the pranas are withdrawn from the whole body back to ajna the body is in a state of psychic bandha. Then again, with inhalation the pranas are distributed throughout the body and the body expands fully. Then the body contracts as the pranas are withdrawn back to ajna; it is a returning process. It is a psychic bandha, not a physical bandha, in which the body as a whole is contracted.

Bandhas and the endocrine and nervous systems

Yoga asanas, pranayamas, mudras, bandhas, and kriyas tend to develop one's psychic awareness. One's behaviour, reactions, interpretations, tolerance, even one's so-called natural responses are based on glandular and cellular secretions of which we are unaware. Development of the pituitary brings about a different state of thinking; thyroid secretions have their own influence on the emotional personality; the presence or absence, the potency or impotency of sex hormones influences one's physical mental and spiritual aspects.

The yoga asanas and pranayamas in combination with the mudras, bandhas and shatkarmas develop psychic awareness in the human being by manipulating the secretions of the glands within the system. These glands secrete hormones and their secretions flow into the bloodstream. Therefore, it is essential that they are kept functioning properly as they not only contribute to the development of the physical organism, but they also influence the personality structure in a subtle way, bringing about a change in one's behaviour and temperament.

Conjunction with other practices

In conjunction with pranayama, you also have to practise bandhas. When you practise moola bandha and other bandhas, naturally your mental and psychic system is affected. If your stomach, mind, or emotions are constipated; if your family or social life are too complicated; and if your mental personality lives like a vagabond dog, you can just imagine what the practice of pranayama with bandhas is going to do.

A strong kumbhaka with jalandhara, uddiyana and moola bandha, creates heat in the body. This heat is known as the fire of yoga. It is not only spiritual or psychic in nature, it is also physical and affects the metabolism as well as the psycho-spiritual system. When enough heat is created, there is a powerful explosion and an awakening takes place.

As we have already pointed out, jalandhara bandha can be combined with various other practices of yoga. It is particularly suitable and powerful when combined with nadi shodhana pranayama. In your daily yoga program, it is best to practise jalandhara bandha after asanas and immediately before meditational practices. This will help you to relax, and also to be attentive and awake, allowing you to gain the most out of the meditative techniques.

3

Types of Bandhas

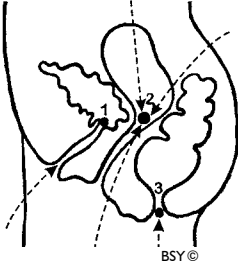


MOOLA BANDHA: THE PERINEAL LOCK

The Sanskrit word *moola* means ‘root’, ‘firmly fixed’, ‘source’ or ‘cause’. In this context it refers to the root of the spine or the perineum where mooladhara chakra, the seat of kundalini, the primal energy, is located. Moola bandha is effective for locating and awakening mooladhara chakra. Therefore, moola bandha is generally known as the perineal lock.

Moola bandha is the contraction of specific muscles in the pelvic floor, not the whole perineum. In the male body, the area of contraction is between the anus and the testes. In the female body, the point of contraction is behind the cervix, where the uterus projects into the vagina.

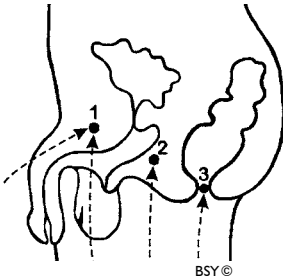
Diagram 1 – for the female



Key to location of contraction points:

1. Sahajoli mudra (clitoris, vaginal walls and urethra);
2. Moola bandha (cervix and vaginal muscles);
3. Ashwini mudra (anal muscles/sphincters).

Diagram 2 – for the male



Key to location of contraction points:

1. Vajroli mudra (penis);
2. Moola bandha (between anus and scrotum; the perineal body);
3. Ashwini mudra (anal muscles/sphincters).

Moola bandha on a subtle level is energizing mooladhara chakra. The perineal body, which is the convergence of many muscles in the groin, acts as a trigger point for the location of mooladhara chakra. Initially, this area is difficult to isolate, so it is recommended that ashwini and vajroli mudras are practised in preparation for moola bandha.

Physiology of moola bandha

Mooladhara is the centre of creation. It is not an impure centre because it is situated in the sexual area. Many people feel hesitant and shy about believing kundalini is in mooladhara and claim it to be in manipura, because they don't want to associate this holy kundalini shakti with the unholy sexual system. But it has been scientifically shown that this tiny gland in mooladhara chakra contains infinite energy. Many psychic and spiritual experiences originate from mooladhara chakra.

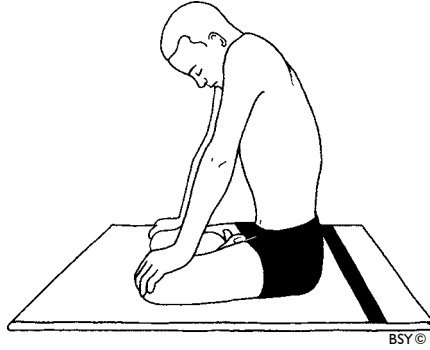
When the perineal body is constantly contracted, the prana shakti which normally escapes through this passage is redirected to the navel centre, which is the seat of the fire element or *agni tattva*. When any chakra is activated heat will be produced, but manipura becomes excessively hot because of the fire element. This centre is responsible for maintaining the body temperature and regulating the digestive fire. The nervous impulses sent from the coccygeal plexus are said to 'fan the fire'. Moola bandha and uddiyana bandha are techniques which redistribute and rechannel pranic heat and nervous impulses from the lower to the higher centres, or from the grosser to the subtler centres. These effects are described in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:66–67):

*Apaana oordhvage jaate prayaate vahnimandalam;
Tadaanalashikhaa deerghaa jaayate vaayunaahataa.*

*Tato yaato vahnyapaanau praanamushnasvaroopakam;
Tenaatyantapradeeptastu jvalano dehajastathaa.*

Apana moves up into the region of fire (manipura chakra, the navel centre), then the flames of the fire grow, being fanned by apana vayu. Then, when apana and the fire meet with prana, which is itself hot, the heat in the body is intensified.

JALANDHARA BANDHA: THE THROAT LOCK



The Sanskrit word *jalan* means 'net'. The word *dhara* means 'stream', 'mass of flowing fluid'. This leaves the meaning of the word jalandhara open to various interpretations. The most likely is that it means 'net' or 'cluster of nadis' or 'pathways'. Therefore, jalandhara is the practice or physical lock that controls the net or network of nadis in the neck. These nadis can be taken to mean blood vessels, nerves or pranic passages. The 'fluid' or stream can cover all these different levels of subtlety, for jalandhara bandha will influence all of them.

An alternative definition is that *jal* means 'water'. Jalandhara bandha is therefore the throat lock which holds the nectar or fluid flowing down to vishuddhi from bindu, and prevents it from falling into the digestive fire. In this way, prana is conserved.

There is another explanation of the meaning. There are sixteen specific centres in the body called adharas. This word

means 'base' or 'substratum'. They refer to chakras which are located in the following sixteen regions of the body: toes, ankles, knees, thighs, perineum, coccyx, navel, heart, neck, tonsils, tongue, nose, eyebrow centre, eyes, back of the head and crown of the head. In various practices one's awareness is rotated through these centres. Prana flows through these regions within the pranic body. Therefore, jalandhara bandha can also be defined as the practice that locks the pranic network in the neck. This prevents the flow of prana between these centres and directs prana into sushumna nadi.

Physiology of jalandhara bandha

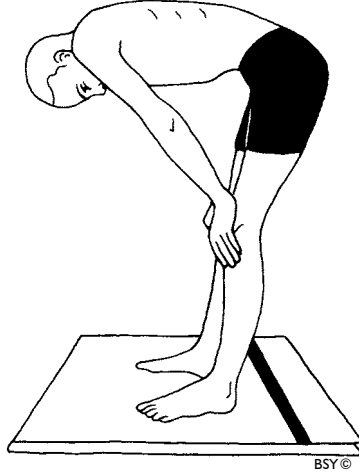
Jalandhara bandha compresses the carotid sinuses. These are bodies located on the carotid arteries in the neck, which are the main arteries supplying blood to the brain. These carotid bodies are called baroreceptors and help to regulate and match the heart rate and blood pressure with the respiration system. These receptors feed messages to the brain through the sinus nerves, which in turn takes the necessary actions to balance the circulatory and respiratory systems. The carotid bodies become compressed if the blood pressure rises. This sends a message to the brain which takes steps to prevent this high blood pressure. Normally decrease of oxygen and increase of carbon dioxide in the system lead to an increase of the heart rate and harder breathing to compensate. This is initiated through the carotid sinuses. The artificial pressure of these sinuses during jalandhara bandha prevents this tendency. Therefore, one is able to hold the breath for much longer periods.

In jalandhara bandha, these receptors are artificially compressed. This tends to prevent a sudden rise in blood pressure which would be expected when the breath is held for some time. This increases the duration of breath retention and so increases the effectiveness of practices such as nadi shodhana pranayama.

The full form of jalandhara bandha used in hatha yoga compresses the carotid sinuses, which are located on the

carotid arteries, the main arteries in the neck supplying blood to the brain. The simple variation used in kriya yoga exerts a subtler pressure.

Uddiyana bandha: the abdominal lock



The Sanskrit word *uddiyana* means ‘to rise up’ or ‘to fly upward’. This practice is so called because the physical lock applied to the body causes the diaphragm to rise towards the chest, creating a natural upward flow of energy. Uddiyana is therefore often translated as the stomach lift. Another interpretation is that the physical lock helps to direct prana into sushumna nadi so that it flows upward to sahasrara chakra. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:55–56) states:

*Baddho yena sushumnaayaam praanastooddeeyate yatah;
Tasmaaduddeeyanaakhyo'yam yogibhih samudaahritah.*

*Uddeenam kurute yasmaadavishrantam mahaakhagah;
Uddeeyanam tadeva syaattatra bandho'bhidheeyate.*

Uddiyana bandha is so-called by the yogis because through its practice the prana (is concentrated at one point and) rises through sushumna. (55)

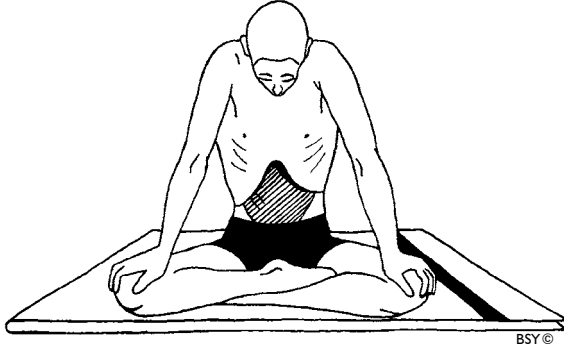
The bandha described is called the rising or flying bandha, because through its practice, the great bird (shakti) flies upward with ease. (56)

Movement of shakti in the body is described as a bird. In the Upanishads, alternating activities of ida and pingala nadis are said to ensnare the consciousness like a bird which is tied to its perch. It tries to fly away time and time again, but is constantly pulled down. In the *Varaha Upanishad* it says, “The breath follows life in the same way that a shadow follows an object. uddiyana is the practice that makes the ever-restless breath fly upwards.” However, if the shakti of ida and pingala can be brought together and released through sushumna, it will ascend and ultimately be freed in sahasrara chakra, the highest heaven.

Physiology of uddiyana bandha

The navel is the area of the manipura chakra which is the centre of prana in the body. Physical stimulation of this area has repercussions on the more subtle flows of prana and its distribution throughout the body. Uddiyana bandha stimulates the solar plexus, which has many subtle influences on the distribution of energy throughout the body. It creates a suction pressure which reverses the energy flow of apana and prana, uniting them with samana and stimulating manipura chakra. Uddiyana also redirects prana into the sushumna nadi. This helps to expand awareness and induces meditation.

MAHA BANDHA: THE GREAT LOCK

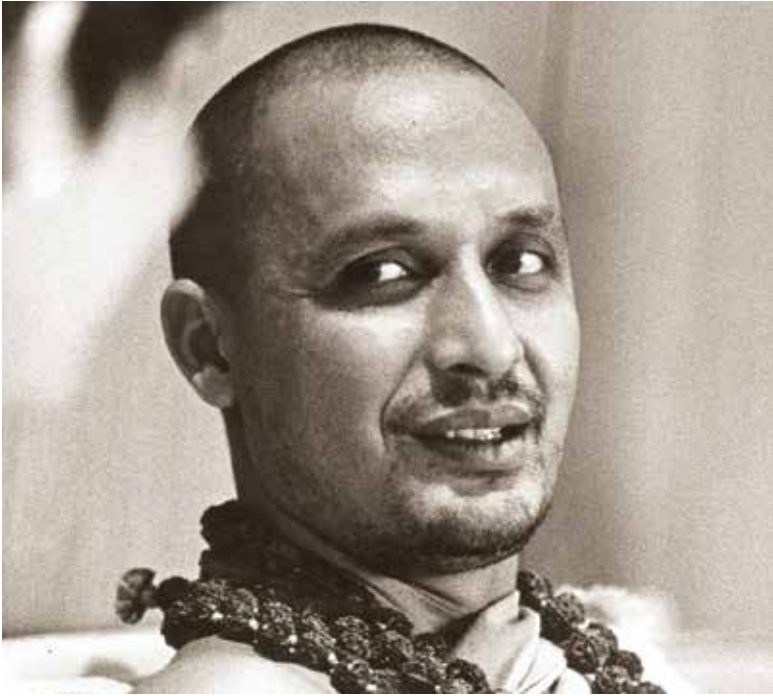


The Sanskrit word *maha* means 'great'. Maha bandha is called the great lock as it combines all the three bandhas in one practice.

There are innumerable techniques which can be practised in the path of self-realization but many involve either forced mental concentration or sensual restrictions. Therefore, it is difficult for the average person to apply himself to accomplish the task. However, it can be achieved by learning to control the body in such a way as maha bandha, without mental conflicts, as in the practice of bandhas.

4

General Guidelines



When you assert that you are the blissful soul, equipoised in every condition of life, you must live up to your claims. You must realize it. You must experience it. So begin to practise any mantras of your choice without inhibition.

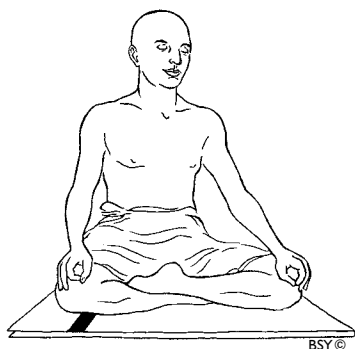
It may be *Om*, *Rama* or Gayatri. Combine your mantra with pranayama and bandhas to accelerate the effect. Learn the three stages of pranayama: *pooraka*, inhalation, *kumbhaka*, retention, and *rechaka*, exhalation. Practise in a comfortable sitting asana. Siddhasana/siddha yoni asana is best, followed by padmasana, vajrasana and swastikasana. Practise bandhas at the time of breath retention. Adjust the mantra with inhalation and exhalation in the ratio of 1:2. If you inhale for one unit of Gayatri, then you must exhale for two units. Five rounds of this pranayama coupled with bandhas and mantra will give sufficient experience of dhyana. These fifteen to twenty minutes every day will go a long way to bringing inner peace and unity into your personality.

When asanas and bandhas are practised one should feel an energy boost afterwards rather than an energy loss. If one experiences tiredness, it means some practices are being done incorrectly.

After asanas, pranayama should be practised to purify the nadis. For this purpose, nadi shodhana pranayama is best. Then mudras should be performed to channel the energy and create specific attitudes of mind, and bandhas to force the energy upward. In hatha yoga the sequence is asanas first, then pranayama, mudras and bandhas.

Bandhas can be beneficially incorporated into mudra and pranayama practices after they have been first practised and mastered individually. When combined in this way, they awaken the psychic faculties and form an adjunct to higher yogic practices.

If bandhas are to be practised perfectly they must be learned from a guru or qualified teacher. In the yoga texts, full details are always omitted, and if one tries to practise according to instructions given in books, one will never know if it is actually practised correctly and according to individual needs and capacity. For perfection of all yogic practices there are two basic requirements: the guru and regular practice. Do not practise pranayama with bandhas without the guidance of a competent teacher or guru.



Sequence for bandhas

First perfect siddhasana, the best of all the postures. Then begin the practice of nadi shodhana pranayama. Inhalation, internal retention, exhalation, and external retention in the ratio 1:2:2:1. When you practise internal retention combine it with jalandhara bandha and moola bandha. With external retention practise jalandhara, moola and add uddiyana bandha. Gradually try to improve the quality of your breath by controlling the inhalation and exhalation.

First practise jalandhara bandha with internal breath retention only. When this has been perfected, combine jalandhara bandha with external breath retention also. When this has been mastered, combine jalandhara and moola bandha with internal and external retention. When this has been perfected, maha bandha can be added during external retention. At the end of the exhalation, practise jalandhara, moola and uddiyana bandhas. Maintain the bandhas throughout the external retention. Release jalandhara, moola and uddiyana, in this order, at the end of external retention. Adjust the ratio of the breath to suit individual capacity.

Posture for bandhas

These bandhas should be practised in the two prescribed asanas. The best one is siddhasana for males and siddha yoni asana for females. *Padmasana*, the lotus posture, can also be used. Why is this important? During pranayama the body is an electrical pole. If there is no circuit, then the energy is

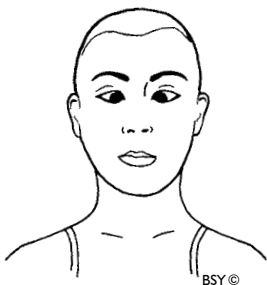
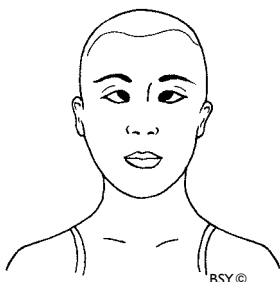


going to be lost through the earth connection. Therefore, there is a scientific reason for using these postures. The left foot carries the cool energy and the right foot carries the hot energy. The cool energy and the hot energy are known as the negative and the positive energy. There must be a complete circuit of both. This is not necessary for a beginner. But for those who want to go further in pranayama, lotus posture, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana are imperative. When the body produces more energy, it can leave through the earth connection. That leakage must be avoided. That is why the proper asanas and bandhas are necessary in pranayama.

Siddhasana directs the energy from the lower psychic centres upward through the spine, stimulating the brain and calming the entire nervous system. The position of the lower foot at the perineum presses mooladhara chakra, stimulating moola bandha, and the pressure applied to the pubic bone presses the trigger point for swadhisthana, automatically activating vajroli/sahajoli mudra. These two psycho-muscular locks redirect sexual nervous impulses back up the spinal cord to the brain, establishing control over the reproductive hormones which is necessary in order to maintain brahmacharya for spiritual purposes.

Bandhas and lifestyle

There are special rules and regulations given in the yogic texts: Neither too much eating, nor too much fasting; neither too much sleeping, nor too much vigil; neither too much talking, nor too much silence. Extremes are not helpful on the path of awakening. The practitioner has to understand the important things; proper food, adequate sleep, and the right kind of social interaction. All these things create a balance, and they also balance the complications that could arise due to the awakening.



Bandhas and pranayama

Pranayama actually involves the practice of breath control in combination with bandhas and mudras. Pranayama should be practised with bandhas, in the proper sitting posture and with the appropriate mudra. Either *shambhavi mudra*, focusing the gaze on the eyebrow centre, or *nasikagra mudra*, focusing on the nose tip should be used. Either the three bandhas: jalandhara, uddiyana and moola bandha, should be done together or in different combinations.

For awakening kundalini, you need to make a lot of preparations. You will have to practise asanas, bandhas and mudras, otherwise you will have difficulty in pranayama. The heat which

is generated cannot be directed to the proper centres. Therefore, jalandhara bandha, uddiyana bandha and moola bandha are practised to lock in the prana from all sides. In order to practise these bandhas correctly, the practice of

asanas is very important. Therefore, we can say that all of hatha yoga is sattwic tapas.

When the breath is retained, it is important to hold the three bandhas. Without practising and perfecting the three bandhas, kumbhaka should not be practised. When the breath is held in, then jalandhara and moola bandha must be practised, and when the lungs are emptied, and the breath is held out, the three bandhas are done. This is called maha bandha.

According to Yogi Swatmarama, uddiyana should be done after retention and at the beginning of rechaka, exhalation. Once exhalation is complete, jalandhara bandha should be done and uddiyana fully employed. Uddiyana bandha is only practised with external retention, or *bahiranga kumbhaka*, as then the stomach and lungs are completely empty and the abdomen can easily be drawn in and up.

In certain pranayama practices the three bandhas cannot be done together. For example, it is inappropriate to perform uddiyana bandha in moorchha pranayama.

Bandhas and nasikagra drishti

Nose tip gazing is subtly yet directly related to the application of the bandhas. Nasikagra drishti helps to tighten the lock of the bandhas. Make sure that nasikagra drishti and the bandhas are done simultaneously and that you do not forget to do them while rotating awareness through the centres nasikagra, uddiyana and mool.

Beginners will find it difficult to practise nasikagra drishti for more than a minute or so without feeling pain and discomfort in the eyes. Do not strain. If necessary, stop doing nasikagra drishti when you feel discomfort but continue the bandhas and rotation of awareness. Slowly increase the duration of nasikagra as the eye muscles adapt themselves to the new practice.

Bandhas and mudras

In order to practise sahajoli kriya and moola bandha you must first assume siddha yoni asana. Siddha yoni asana is: press your left heel on the vagina. Place the right heel against the clitoris and lock the toes. Place a little pillow under your buttocks, thereby the pressure on the vagina is deepened. Then maintain the pressure on your knees. Breathe in, control the breath, press the knees and raise the shoulders, and contract the vagina, little by little. Do it a number of times, to begin with about thirty times. Go up to a hundred or even two hundred times. Every time you contract and for as long as you contract, you should hold the breath, but not for long. It should be ten, fifteen or twenty seconds. So, breathe in with one or with both nostrils, as it may be. Practise jalandhara bandha, hold the breath, contract the vagina, not the stomach, not the abdomen at all. Do not do it with force. Do it very slowly. This is known as sahajoli coupled with moola bandha. This particular practice will help female yoginis. This will control the production of ova and thereby, the energy will be conserved.

Now, for men. They should practise siddhasana. Siddhasana is: press the perineum with the left heel. Press the upper root of the urinary organ with the right heel. Lock the toes. Place a little pillow underneath the buttocks. Place the palms maintaining pressure on the knees. Breathe in, either with one nostril or with both. Retain the breath, practise jalandhara bandha. Now concentrate on the point which the left heel is pressing and contract. Hold the contraction. Then release the contraction. Release the breath. Practise this for about thirty times to begin with. Go up to a hundred, two hundred, even three hundred times. This is known as moola bandha. Just moola bandha.

In the female yogini, sahajoli and moola bandha are combined, but in men it is not combined. For vajroli, again maintain siddhasana. Breathe in, retain the breath, concentrate on the point where the right heel is pressing the root of the urinary organ, just contract a little. Practise thirty

times. You can go up to a hundred, two hundred, even three hundred. This is called vajroli.

GUIDELINES FOR SPECIFIC BANDHAS

Moola bandha

People think that moola bandha is the control or the contraction of the anus, but it is not. By the word moola bandha you should always remember that contraction of the perineum and not contraction of the anus is meant. The complete name of moola bandha is mooladhara bandha. Mooladhara is a chakra, the mooladhara psychic centre and bandha means control. Contraction of the mooladhara chakra is abbreviated as moola bandha. Some say practise ashwini mudra first, contraction and expansion of the sphincter, and then automatically it goes to moola bandha. Ashwini and moola bandha are two different things, not one and the same, and you cannot connect them chronologically. Ashwini mudra is the contraction of the anus, that is to say the sphincter muscle. Whereas mooladhara bandha is control of the perineum in the masculine body and in the feminine structure it is control over the lowest part of the uterus.

Preparation

To practise moola bandha correctly one must have sensitivity in the region of the anus and the perineum (the area between the anus and the sexual organs). Ashwini mudra is an excellent technique for developing this sensitivity. Without mastering ashwini mudra it is very difficult for most people to practise moola bandha correctly.

Contra-indications

This practice should only be performed under the guidance of a competent teacher. Moola bandha raises the energy, and may precipitate hyperactivity. Do not practise during menstruation. Moola bandha should not be used therapeutically in high energy diseases of the physical body

such as high blood pressure, vertigo, high intracranial pressure or amenorrhoea (absent menstrual period).

Jalandhara bandha

Posture

Jalandhara bandha can be done in a large number of different positions. The best positions are padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana. In kriya yoga it will be necessary to practise jalandhara bandha while sitting in siddhasana or siddha yoni asana. In the beginning you can practise in any pose that you find comfortable. This includes ardha padmasana, swastikasana and vajrasana. It is essential that the knees touch the ground, therefore sukhasana is not suitable. Jalandhara bandha can also be done in the standing position but this is not so commonly used. Your aim should be to eventually master jalandhara bandha while doing either padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana.

Kumbhaka

The breath is to be retained during jalandhara bandha. The retention can either be antar kumbhaka, inner retention, or bahir kumbhaka, outer retention, or both, depending on the practice and integration with other techniques. That is, one can either breathe in deeply, fully inflating the lungs, and then do jalandhara bandha, or one can exhale deeply and then do jalandhara bandha. Both methods have their use in association with other practices. The duration of kumbhaka should not be more than is comfortable. This also applies to jalandhara bandha. Don't strain under any circumstances. Increase the duration of breath retention over a period of weeks and months. If you have been regularly practising nadi shodhana then you will find no difficulty doing jalandhara bandha for a reasonable period of time.

Contra-indications

People suffering from cervical spondylosis, high intracranial pressure, vertigo, high blood pressure or heart disease should



not practise jalandhara bandha. Although the neck lock reduces blood pressure, the release of the bandha brings some fluttering of the heart and long retention of the breath strains the heart. Jalandhara is the first bandha to be taught as the effects are light and soothing. Refrain from the practice if any vertigo or dizziness arises.

Precautions

We have not discussed the carotid sinuses to encourage you to tamper with them. We have discussed them to show how jalandhara bandha acts directly on the physical body, and how one must be careful of overexertion during the practice.

Uddiyana bandha

Uddiyana bandha is an advanced technique and should be attempted only under the guidance of a competent teacher. It should be practised after attaining proficiency in external breath retention, and jalandhara and moola bandhas. Jalandhara must always be done with uddiyana. Agnisara kriya is an excellent preparatory practice and must be

mastered before uddiyana is attempted. Uddiyana bandha is performed with external breath retention only.

Uddiyana bandha must be practised on an empty stomach. The consumption of too much food will also make it difficult to do most of the techniques properly, especially pranayama with uddiyana bandha.

The bowels should also be empty. Uddiyana bandha is easier to perform if preceded by an inverted asana. It is ideally performed in conjunction with mudras, bandhas and pranayamas. If practised on its own, it should be performed after asanas and pranayamas and before meditation.

First uddiyana has to be perfected, and it is not perfect until the breath can be retained for more than three or four minutes. Then it has to be practised regularly for months and months in combination with other practices and a conducive diet. In the *Varaha Upanishad* it is said, "To practise uddiyana seriously, the diet should be good and taken in small quantities." This last statement is particularly important if uddiyana is combined with regular and intense practices of pranayama.

Posture

The best position in which to do uddiyana bandha is any meditational asana such as padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana. The important thing is that the knees rest firmly on the ground so that the final lock can be maintained correctly. Alternatively, uddiyana bandha can also be done in a standing position. This is generally easier for beginners.

Preparation

In various yogic practices reasonable control over the abdominal muscles and the ability to manipulate the front wall of the abdomen are required. Most people lack this ability. Agnisar kriya is an excellent preliminary practice to gradually develop effective control of these muscles, while at the same time gaining many other related physical benefits. Sustained practice of agnisara prepares one for uddiyana bandha, the abdominal lock.



The practice of uddiyana bandha needs absolutely clean, unloaded intestines. Especially the smaller intestine must be kept clean because it involves a particular centre in the small intestine. It should be kept completely free from all kinds of heavy and toxic matter.

Contra-indications

Persons suffering from colitis, stomach or intestinal ulcer, diaphragmatic hernia, major abdominal problems, high blood pressure, heart disease, glaucoma and raised intracranial pressure should not perform this practice. It should also be avoided during pregnancy.

Maha bandha

Contra-indications

People suffering from high or low blood pressure, heart conditions, stroke, hernia, stomach or intestinal ulcer, and those recovering from any visceral ailment should avoid this practice. Pregnant women should also not attempt this practice.

Precautions

Do not attempt maha bandha until the other three bandhas have been mastered.

5

Scriptural References



Yogi Swatmarama says in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*:

*Tathaikasminneva dridhe siddhe siddhasane sati;
Bandhatrayamanaasaatsvayamevopajaayate.*

Thus, through securing siddhasana, the three bandhas occur by themselves. (1:42)

*Evamaasanabandheshu yogeendro vigatashramah;
Abhyasenmaadikaashuddhim mudraadipavanakriyaam.*

Thus the best of yogis, being free from fatigue in practising asana and bandha, should practise purification of the nadis, mudras and pranayama. (1:55)

*Mahaamudraa mahaabandho mahaavedhashcha khecharee;
Uddeeyanam moolabandhashcha bandho jaalandharaabhidhah.*

*Karanee vipareetaakhyaa vajrolee shaktichaalanam;
Idam hi mudraadashakam jaraamarananaashanam.*

Maha mudra, maha bandha, maha vedha, khechari, uddiyana, moola bandha and jalandhara bandha; Vipareeta karani mudra, vajroli and shakti chalana, verily, these are the ten mudras which destroy old age and death. (3:6–7)

MOOLA BANDHA

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

Moola bandha is an important yoga-tantra practice which is widely mentioned in the scriptures. One of the fullest descriptions is given in (3:61–64):

*Paarshnibhaagena sampeedya yonimaakunchayedgudam;
Apanamoordhvamaakrishya moolabandho'bhidheeyate.*

*Adhogatimapaanam vaa oordhvagam kurute balaat;
Aakunchanena tam praahurmoolabandham hi yoginah.*

*Gudam paarshnyaa to sampeedya vaayumaakunchayed balaat;
Vaaramvaaram yathaa chordhvam smaayaati sameeranah.*

*Praanaapaanau naadabindoo moolabandhena chaikataam;
Gatvaa yogasya samsiddhim yachchhato naatra samshayah.*

Pressing the perineum/vagina with the heel and contracting the rectum so that the apana vayu moves upward is moola bandha. (61)

By contracting the perineum the downward moving apana vayu is forced to go upward. The yogis call this moola bandha. (62)

Press the heel firmly against the rectum and contract forcefully and repeatedly, so that the vital energy rises. (63)

There is no doubt that by practising moola bandha, prana and apana, and nada and bindu are united, and total perfection is attained. (64)

Here, the word apana refers to the function of the body, at all levels, gross and subtle, which expels energy and waste materials from the body. In the context of pranayama, apana refers to exhalation. Prana refers to the specific functions of the body which supply energy to maintain the body. This prana is contained in food and air that is breathed, as well as subtle prana in the environment. In the context of pranayama, prana refers to inhalation.

Balance of prana and apana implies that there is equilibrium between the incoming and outgoing energies of the body. In the case of pranayama, balance of inhalation and exhalation signifies kumbhaka, the retention of breath.

By performing moola bandha and thereby influencing the release of sex hormones and the sexual impulses, a constant flow of nectar is induced from bindu visarga. This is experienced as nada, transcendental sound. By controlling bindu visarga, one controls creation within the microcosmos.

*Tena kundalinee suptaa santaptaa samprabudhyate;
Dandaahataa bhunjageeva nishvasya rijutaam vrajet.*

*Bilam pravrishteva tato brahmanaadyantanram vrajet;
Tasmaannityam moolabandhah kartavyo yogibhih sadaa.*

Through this (meeting of apana and prana), the sleeping kundalini is aroused by the extreme heat and it straightens itself just as a serpent beaten with a stick straightens and hisses. Just as a snake enters its hole, so

kundalini goes into brahma nadi. Therefore, the yogi must always perform moola bandha. (3:68–69)

Gheranda Samhita

Moola bandha is also clearly described in the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* and the *Gheranda Samhita*. The latter text sums up by saying (3:15): “Those who wish to swim across the ocean of *samsara*, the world of delusion, should practise this bandha in a lonely place. Practice brings about control of the prana residing in the body. Do it in silence, with care and determination. All lethargy will vanish.”

JALANDHARA BANDHA

The word *hanu* means ‘chin’, so Hanuman means ‘he who has a prominent chin’. Chin here refers to jalandhara bandha, the chin lock, which is a yogic practice. Hanuman’s duties, accomplishments and achievements are all feats of yoga, whether he was flying in the sky, leaping across the ocean or burning the city of Lanka. All his actions and miracles are not the deeds of a wrestler or a muscleman, they are yogic siddhis, manifestations of yogic power.

No muscleman can fly, cross the ocean in one leap, lift a mountain, or burn a city. Only a person who has perfected yoga could do all these things. Hanuman was a great yogi. His name relates to jalandhara bandha, a practice that awakens the prana vayu for which he was so famous. Being a master of prana he could change his form and increase the dimensions of his body. In fact, it was said that he was an aspect of Shiva. So, when Lord Rama was born, Shiva was born as Hanuman. Vishnu was born as the avatar Rama and Hanuman is an avatar of Shiva.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

*Poorantake gaadhataaram badhva jaalandharam shanaih;
Rechayenmoorchchanaakhyeyam manomoorchchaa
sukhapradaa.*

At the end of inhalation gradually become fixed on jalandhara bandha, then exhale slowly. This is called the fainting or swooning pranayama as it makes the mind inactive and thus confers pleasure. (2:69)

There are numerous scriptural references to jalandhara bandha. The following are a selected few from the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*:

Contract the throat and firmly press the chin against the chest. This is called jalandhara bandha and helps to prevent old age and death. (3:70)

It blocks all the nadis in the neck, checks the fall of amrit (divine fluid) which drops from the heavens. It should be done to cure throat ailments. (3:71)

The contraction of the throat during jalandhara bandha prevents the amrit falling into the digestive fire. In this way prana is conserved (that is, the prana is controlled and directed only into the sushumna; flow of prana in the other nadis ceases). (3:72)

This contraction of the throat also immobilizes the flow of prana in the ida and pingala nadis (associated with the flow of breath in the left and right nostrils). Again this blocks the flow of prana to the sixteen adharas and directs it into the sushumna. (3:73)

These four verses give fertile ground for thought and indicate the importance of this bandha.

Yoga Chudamani Upanishad

The *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* also has much to say on jalandhara bandha:

The sadhaka or aspirant should sit in padmasana with hands folded across his lap. The chin should be firmly pressed against the throat. One should reflect completely

on Brahman (the supreme) with the breath retained. In this manner, the sadhaka will attain immense power and knowledge.” (verse 40)

He who is able to retain the element *akasha* or ether and the fluids which have a downward tendency, will remove all frustration and dissatisfaction. (verse 50)

By the practice of jalandhara bandha, the nectar amrit which tends to flow downwards from the centre of the head is restrained. The nectar does not fall into the fire (is not burned up) and the pranic forces of the body are prevented from moving hither and thither. (verse 51)

There are many more quotations in other texts, but this is sufficient to give you an idea of the importance of this practice. We leave it to the reader to fully understand the meaning of these verses through personal experience.

UDDIYANA BANDHA

Uddiyana bandha is mentioned in a large number of scriptures. These include the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the *Gheranda Samhita* and the *Baraha*, *Yoga Sikha*, *Yoga Kundalini*, *Dhyana Bindu*, *Yoga Tattwa* and *Chudamani Upanishads*. We don't intend to give all of the quotations from these texts for they are very similar. We will merely give a few examples. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* gives the most detail:

That lock which causes the prana to fly up the sushumna is called uddiyana by all yogis. (3:55)

The practice to be described causes the bird (of prana) to fly upwards after taking a period of rest. (3:56)

In other words, the latent prana is directed into the sushumna.

Drawing the abdomen backwards and upwards in the navel region is called uddiyana. It is the lion which challenges the elephant of death. (3:57)

That is, the practice helps to transcend normal states of awareness so that one gains insight into the nature of existence and mortality and the purpose of life.

The practice of uddiyana bandha described by yogis is very easy to do. Regular practice makes even an old man youthful. (3:58)

Uddiyana bandha revitalizes the whole body and can help to lead to states of meditation that can make even an old man feel young.

*Uddeeyanam tu sahajam gurunaa kathitam yadaa;
Abhyasetsatata yastu vridhho'pi tarunaayate.*

Uddiyana is easy when practised as told by the guru. Even an old person can become young when it is done regularly. (3:59)

*Sarveshaameva bandhaanaamuttamo hyuddiyanakah;
Uddiyaane dridhe bandhe muktih svaabhaavikee bhavet.*

Of all the bandhas, uddiyana is the best; once it is mastered, mukti or liberation occurs spontaneously. (3:60)

*Bhaanoraakunchanam kuryaatkundaleem chaalayet tatah;
Mrityuvaktragatasyaapi tasya mrityubhayam kutah.*

Contracting the sun in manipura, kundalini should be moved. Even if such a person should be on the verge of death, where is the need to fear death? (3:116)

We could give many more pages of quotations but we have given enough to show the importance and traditional method of doing uddiyana bandha.

MAHA BANDHA

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

*Poorakaante tu kartavyo bandho jaalandharaabhidhah;
Kumbhakaante rechakaadau kartavyastooddiyaanakah.*

*Adhastaatkunchanenaashu kanthasankochane krite;
Madhye pashchimataanena syaatpraano brahmanaadigah.*

At the end of inhalation, jalandhara bandha is done.
At the end of kumbhaka and beginning of exhalation,
uddiyana bandha is done. (2:45)

By contracting the perineum, contracting the throat
and drawing the abdomen up, the prana flows into the
brahma nadi. (2:46)

Yogi Swatmarama specifies that maha mudra, maha bandha
and maha vedha mudra should be practised during each
three-hour period. As this means they are being performed
during different phases of the brain's cycle, they must surely
induce radical changes in the brain and psychological
structure of the practitioner. This instruction is given:

*Etattrayam mahaagruhyam jaraamrityuvinaashanam;
Vahniṛiddhikaram chaiva hyanimaadigunapradam.*

*Ashtadhaa kriyate chaiva yaame yaame dine dine;
Punyasambhaarasandhaayi paapaughabhiduram sadaa;
Samyakshikshaavataamevam svalpam prathamasaadhanam.*

These are the three great secrets which destroy old age
and death, increase the digestive fire and bestow the
siddhis of anima, etc. (3:30)

They should be done daily at every yama (three-hour
period). They bring out the virtues and destroy vices.
Those who have perfect instructions should practise
them gradually. (3:31)

It must be kept in mind that the specifications laid down in this text are for a recluse who lives away from society, free from family and social obligations, and who is practising directly under the guidance of a guru. If a householder were to perform these practices so frequently, there would be little time and energy for anything else.

*Moolasthaanam samaakunchya uddiyanam tu kaarayet;
Idaam cha pingalaam baddhvaa vaahayetpashchime pathi.*

By contracting the perineum, performing uddiyana and locking ida and pingala with jalandhara, sushumna becomes active. (3:74)

*Anenaiva vidhaanena prayaati pavano layam.
Tato na jaayate mrityurjaraarogaadikam tathaa.*

By this means (maha bandha) the prana and breath become still. Thus death, old age and sickness are conquered. (3:75)

*Bandhatrayamidam shreshtham mahaasiddhaishcha sevitam.
Sarveshaam hathatantraanaam saadhanam yogino viduh.*

The great siddhas practise these three best bandhas. Of all the sadhanas in hatha yoga and tantra, the yogis know this practice (maha bandha). (3:76)

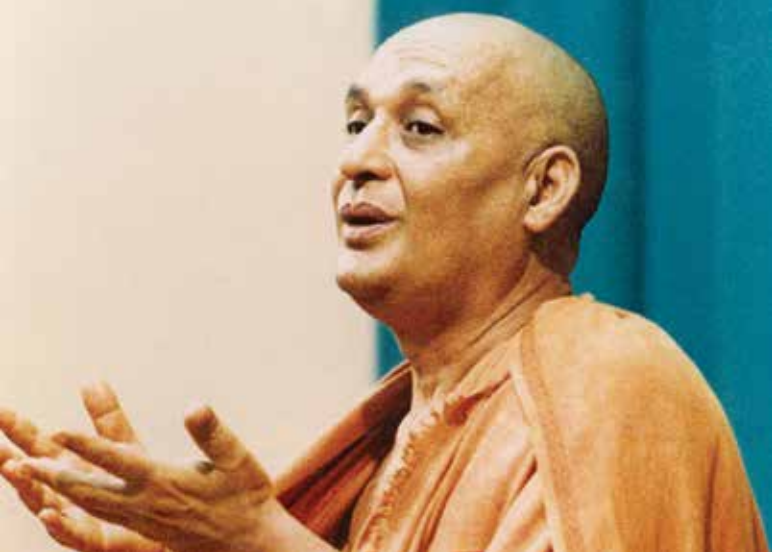
Yogataravali (Sri Adi Shankaracharya)

*Jaalandharoddyaananamoolabandhaa
njalpanti kanthodarapaayumoolaan.
Bandhatrayesminparicheeyamaane
bandhaha kuto daarunakaalapaashaat.*

Jalandhara bandha, uddiyana bandha and moola bandha are situated respectively in the throat, abdomen and perineum. If their duration can be increased, then where is the fear of death?

6

Benefits of Bandha



Due to the inextricable interlinking of body and mind – ‘as in the body, so in the mind,’ an effect on one cannot pass unnoticed by the other. Moola bandha, and bandhas in general, are physical practices which are a powerful means of relaxing the body and mind. The performance of bandhas with pranayama affects the whole body: the organs, muscles, nerves and various physical processes are massaged, stimulated and controlled through the will of the practitioner.

All the practices which unite the two opposite forces, prana and apana, generate and release immense heat in the body. This increases the metabolic rate for a short period, and as a result, elimination and degeneration are decreased; absorption and assimilation improved, and the nervous system, blood circulation and brain functions are greatly stimulated. The mind becomes alert, sensual desires and the need for sleep decrease, and even during the dream state, there is greater awareness. When moola bandha is practised regularly the physiological need for food decreases, and the same symptoms which appear due to perfection of pranayama and uddiyana bandha, manifest. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it is said (3:65):

*Apaanapraanayoraikyam kshayo mootrapureeshayoh;
Yuvaa bhavati vridhho'pi satatam moolabandhanaat.*

With constant practice of moola bandha, prana and apana unite, urine and stool are decreased and even an old person becomes young.

Digestive and excretory systems

The digestive system is toned, massaged and revitalized due to the pressure exerted on the internal organs; harmony in the activity of the urogenital system occurs as a result of reflex action via the nervous system.

Uddiyana bandha is the contraction of the abdomen and the control of the muscles of the abdominal wall, as well as control over the small and large intestines and the other digestive and visceral organs. The functions of the liver, gallbladder, spleen, pancreas and stomach are brought into harmonious and controlled interaction when uddiyana bandha is perfected. Uddiyana bandha is a panacea for the abdomen. It stimulates the function of the pancreas and liver and strengthens the internal organs. The digestive fire is stimulated and the abdominal organs are massaged and toned. The adrenal glands are balanced, removing lethargy and soothing anxiety and tension. It improves blood circulation throughout the torso.

Uddiyana cures constipation and stimulates the digestive fire, removes intestinal disorders and worms, and activates the liver and the kidneys. It regulates the function of the adrenal glands and hypogastric plexus.

Endocrine system

The bandhas bring harmony and efficient functioning to the endocrine system. Jalandhara bandha brings about a total control of the glands which are known as the thyroid system and one has to know how to control these glands by practice of jalandhara bandha. It also directly influences the pituitary, pineal, thyroid, parathyroid and thymus glands; uddiyana bandha directly influences the adrenal glands and pancreas; moola bandha directly influences the gonads and the perineal body/cervix (which are said to be vestigial endocrine glands). All bandhas have an indirect effect on the pituitary, pineal and brain.

Nervous system

Parasympathetic fibres emerge from the neck and pelvic areas, while sympathetic fibres emerge from the upper back and lower back areas. The parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems are both rebalanced by the stimulation of the bandhas. This has a direct effect on the hypothalamus, (responsible for the endocrine system), which relays its information to the limbic (emotional) system and the cerebral cortex (outer layer of the brain).

The performance of bandhas has been experimentally shown to activate all parasympathetic activities in the body which includes a decrease in heart rate, respiration and blood pressure (only in an individual with normal blood pressure), and a general sense of rest and relaxation. Sympathetic activity in the body is decreased, a further sign of relaxation. Additionally, alpha brainwaves increase, a sign of deep relaxation indicating a slowing of nervous system activity. Confused and/or crossed neuronal circuits in the brain are reordered, in effect retraining the brain.



Together the systems of mudras and bandhas form the basis of many of the important meditation techniques, and without their knowledge and practice an aspirant is very limited in the extent to which he can progress. Mudras and bandhas are methods of stimulating nerve plexuses and endocrinal secretion, and for activating prana in the body.

Awakening kundalini

In the average person, the energy which flows through the central nervous system is of such a low voltage that it is only sufficient to power the instinctive consciousness and body functions. Most of one's energy flows out through the sense organs. By practising moola bandha, that same energy can be redirected up to the higher brain centres, which normally do not receive much of a charge.

To manifest the so-called 'super human' qualities, the entire pranic capacity has to be increased and the central nervous system and brain have to be charged with the high voltage energy of kundalini shakti. In order to purify and

strengthen the chakras, moola bandha, jalandhara bandha, uddiyana bandha and kumbhaka are practised.

Uddiyana is said to be the most powerful of all the bandhas because it can draw apana upward within a short time and bring about the awakening of kundalini. Due to its suction force, the shakti can be pushed through sushumna to ajna chakra, the great door to liberation. On a pranic level, uddiyana pulls the apana vayu up from the abdominal and reproductive organs towards the chest. Through uddiyana and jalandhara the prana is carefully locked into the navel region where union of prana and apana with samana can occur and induce the awakening and ascent of kundalini. Powered by udana vayu, it is taken up to the higher centres. Of course, this is a major event in the course of one's sadhana and it does not take place with one or two rounds of practice. It requires patient and ardent performance in combination with other techniques.

When kundalini is awakened the whole central nervous system becomes active and charged with energy. Then, when kundalini rises, it will pass through brahma nadi, the innermost layer of sushumna.

Benefits of specific bandhas

Moola bandha

Moola bandha has a twofold role in the treatment of disease as both a therapeutic and preventive practice. At the therapeutic level it allows one to regain health on the physical, emotional and mental planes, while at the preventive level it allows one to maintain health and expand the normal, stable function to the cosmic level where so much more can be accomplished and enjoyed. By this subtle yet powerful practice, control is gained over many of the neural, pranic and psychic faculties which have not been consciously used due to ignorance of their existence.

Moola bandha is an important tool in the treatment of physical diseases of the lower abdomen, such as digestive ailments and sexual disorders. At the physical level, moola

bandha is directly effective in such diseases as piles, constipation, anal fissures, ulcers, prostatitis, some cases of prostatic hypertrophy and chronic pelvic infections.

Because it releases energy, it is also effective in other illnesses especially psychosomatic and some degenerative illnesses. Its effect spreads through the body via the brain and endocrine systems, making it beneficial in cases of diseases such as asthma, bronchitis and arthritis. It relieves depression and promotes good health. Moola bandha has the immediate effect of creating a deep sense of mental relaxation, which is the direct or indirect effect of stress, tension and anxiety. It is an energy-charging practice with specific benefit for many diseases of mental and pranic origin where there is depression of physical energy, imbalance in the pranic body or imbalance of the mental body. It helps to realign the physical, mental and psychic bodies in preparation for spiritual awakening.

In the male body, moola bandha alleviates spermatorrhoea (leakage of semen), helps prevent inguinal hernia, and controls testosterone secretion and sperm formation; it pacifies passions, which influences coronary behaviour. Moola bandha is a means to attain sexual control. It may be used for *brahmacharya*, the sublimation of sexual energy for spiritual development, or for enhancement of marital relations. Moola bandha is highly effective when applied to sexual and psychological problems.

Research was done into the effect of moola bandha and vajroli kriya on the production of sperm. Subjects who were unable to produce sperm were taught these practices. It was found that through these practices the reproductive and genito-urinary systems can be influenced, and sperm production could be controlled.

Jalandhara bandha

Jalandhara bandha influences the individual at all levels: physical, psychic and mental. This bandha closes the windpipe and compresses various organs in the throat.

Notably it massages the thyroid gland which is located in the cavity of the throat. The whole body depends on this gland for perfect development and maintenance. Jalandhara bandha massages this gland and helps to render it efficient. The stimulus on the throat helps to balance thyroid function and regulate the metabolism. This bandha has considerable curative value in disorders of the throat.

Jalandhara bandha allows one to hold the breath for longer periods of time. This also helps to induce one-pointedness of mind for meditational practices. It controls the flow of prana in the body. This induces mental relaxation and can help to induce meditation. The pressurization of the carotid sinuses also helps to bring mental balance by slowing down the heart. Furthermore, this encourages introversion – one tends to become oblivious to the outside world. The whole nervous system and brain become sedated. One tends to become more one-pointed. All this is a great help in meditational practices.

Uddiyana bandha

Improper functioning in the alimentary canal is the most basic cause of disease. Uddiyana effects optimal functioning in this area, thereby overcoming many related diseases. The processes of digestion, assimilation and elimination are directly affected. The entire abdomen is squeezed like a sponge. This pushes out all the stagnant blood. All the inner organs are revitalized. It can help to alleviate or prevent a large number of abdominal ailments including indigestion, constipation, diabetes, colitis and so forth, if they are not too serious and chronic.

The adrenal glands are regularized thereby giving energy to a lethargic person and relaxation to an anxious or overwrought person. The solar plexus is also normalized. This centre is sometimes called the abdominal brain and it is the centre of energy in the whole body. This centre directs the correct flow of energy to all the different organs, whether abdominal, respiratory or whatever. Uddiyana bandha

normalizes this centre and thereby helps to regulate the energy level in the whole body.

Uddiyana bandha also strengthens the diaphragm and other respiratory muscles and renders them more mobile. Improper respiration and gas exchange is the other major cause of disease and degeneration. The lungs are tightly squeezed during uddiyana and this induces a greater efficiency of gas exchange, better absorption of oxygen and expulsion of carbon dioxide. Because the brain is deprived of oxygen for a short period during retention, its capacity to absorb oxygen is also increased.

With regular practice of uddiyana the effects become visibly apparent. Vitality increases as uddiyana has a powerful toning effect. The suction created stimulates blood circulation and absorption. The heart is squeezed and gently massaged by the upward pressure of the diaphragm. The suction or negative pressure in the thorax draws venous blood up from the abdomen into the heart and at the same time, arterial blood is drawn into the internal organs. The autonomic nerves comprising the solar plexus are strengthened. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:59) it says:

*Naabheroordhvarvamadhashchaapi taanam
kuryaatprayatnatah;
Shanmaasamabhyasenmrityum jayatyeva na samshayah.*

The region above and below the navel should be drawn backward with effort. There is no doubt that after six months of practice, death is conquered.

Even if the degenerative process is not completely reversed, at least there will be noticeable physiological and psychological benefits and the ageing process is definitely slowed down. With so many wonderful benefits, it is not surprising that uddiyana can slow down the natural process of degeneration and ageing and make even an old person look young: according to the sloka, after six months of practice, death can be averted. However, old age and death are natural processes

and today there are few adept yogis who have perfected themselves to the extent of reversing the ageing process and overcoming death.

Maha bandha

Maha bandha gives enhanced benefits of all three bandhas. It affects the hormonal secretions of the pineal gland and regulates the entire endocrine system. The degenerative and ageing processes are checked and every cell of the body is rejuvenated. It bestows good health and vigour. It introverts the mind prior to meditation. When perfected, it can fully awaken prana in the main chakras. Maha bandha leads to the merger of prana, apana and samana in manipura chakra, which is the culmination of all pranayamas.

There is a story which illustrates the power of bandha. Years ago, a lady came to me when I was staying in New York. She rang me one night and said, "I want to die, but first I want to meet you." So I told her, "Okay you can, but there is no point in meeting me and then dying because I am a man who gives life. I won't allow you to die. If you want to die please don't come to me." Next morning, she came and I taught her maha bandha, which is moola bandha combined with jalandhara and uddiyana bandhas. She practised in siddha yoni asana, because mooladhara in the feminine body is situated in the cervical area. She practised moola bandha regularly, up to twenty times every day, and by this simple technique she got a new life. When she first came to me she was suffering from conflicts and guilt, and wanted to commit suicide. Now she is very much alive and is one of my assets, teaching yoga to many others.

Bandhas for specific conditions

Mental imbalances

As a mental relaxant, moola bandha has been found extremely useful in the treatment of such mental disorders as depression, neurosis, some phobias, hysteria and mania. Many cases of severe depression have cleared up quickly and

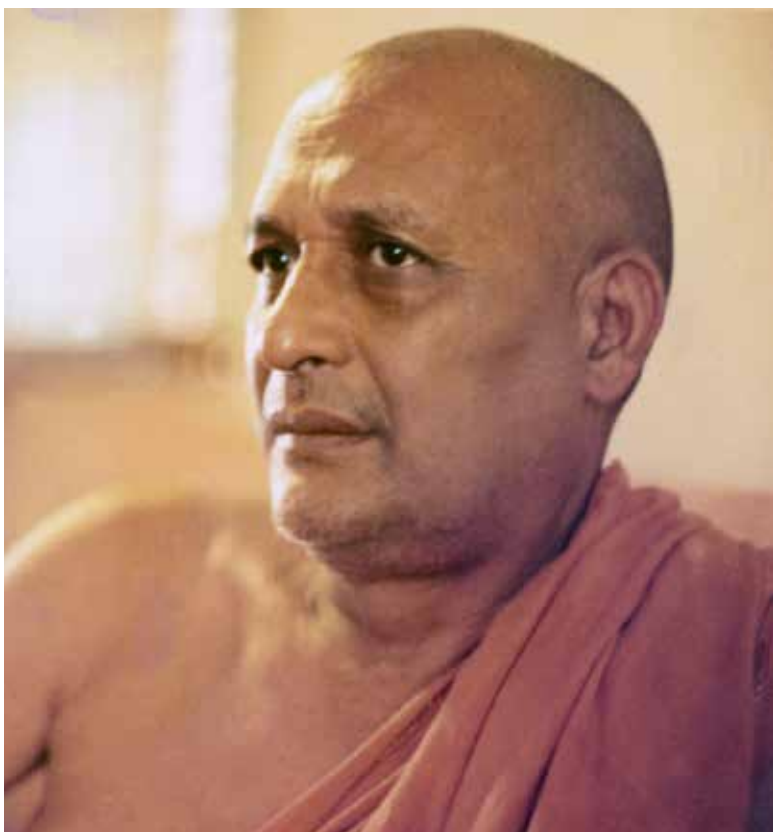
without emotional or psychic trauma through the practice of moola bandha, even when the individuals concerned were close to suicide. They experienced old memories, emotions, and experiences, but because of training in detached awareness, the memories passed into consciousness and out again, like bubbles floating harmlessly to the surface and bursting.

Little experimental evidence exists to substantiate the effects of moola bandha on psychosis. However, because of its effects on the brain and by virtue of the fact that moola bandha is effective in the treatment of both mania and depression, it has proved useful in correcting the extreme moods characteristic of manic-depressive psychosis, and in some cases of schizophrenia, especially in the early stages if the personality has been previously stable. This is because moola bandha is a mental purgative, releasing the subconscious and unconscious mind of suppressed anxieties and hidden mental blocks which are beyond the consciousness, yet cause difficulties in life.

So moola bandha has the potential to release one from the depressions, neuroses and other psychological problems that dampen joy in life and prevent fulfilment of one's potential through raising of kundalini shakti. Moola bandha is safe as long as it is practised according to the instructions, efficient and simple. Coupled with its purgative qualities, capable of spring cleaning the mental and emotional body, moola bandha is a technique to open the door to freedom, joy and liberation.

There is one more practice for acute nervousness. It is the practice of jalandhara bandha and moola bandha with the breath retained inside. Practise this twice a day on an empty stomach.

It must be remembered that such problems should be handled under the expert guidance of an experienced teacher, guru, or healer who will combine moola bandha with other practices such as asanas, pranayama, kundalini kriyas, bandhas, mudras, and so on.



Parkinson's disease

The best practice for people with Parkinson's disease is *nadi shodhana pranayama*, alternate nostril breathing. In this method there are two stages of retention – first with the breath held in, and then with the breath held out. When holding the breath in, practise jalandhara bandha and moola bandha in which the perineum is contracted. These two locks are held while retaining the breath in. After breathing out, hold the breath outside and practise uddiyana bandha, contraction of the abdomen, along with jalandhara and moola bandhas. With internal retention there are two contractions, and in external retention there are three contractions.

Female infertility

Sometimes female infertility is due to a major structural abnormality present since birth. In such congenital deficiencies, little can be done with yoga, and rarely some surgical correction can be made. However, the most common cause of female infertility is amenorrhoea (failure to menstruate) due to disturbance or imbalance of the endocrine glands. More specifically, there is a problem in the hormonal axis between the pituitary body in the brain and the ovaries, which are responsible for producing the female sex hormones oestrogen and progesterone. Or, thyroid imbalance, which can be corrected by yoga asanas. As a result of these hormonal imbalances the menstrual cycle is absent, either since puberty, or the last pregnancy, or since some period of psychic anxiety or emotional stress.

These forms of infertility respond well to a program of yoga asanas and bandhas designed specifically to activate and awaken dormant energy in the pelvic and reproductive organs. Specific asanas should be practised daily and should be followed by uddiyana bandha.

Prolapse of the uterus

Many ladies suffer from prolapse of the uterus, where its supports become weak and it comes down. Of course we have a system of surgery for this, but in yoga we use only three postures practised over a period of time, which bring the whole genito-urinary system into working order and make it strong.

The practice for prolapse is uddiyana bandha. The entire genito-urinary and digestive tracts are contracted. When at the same time you block the throat by extending the arms and pressing the knees in jalandhara bandha, the blood circulation is concentrated in the navel region, and we know that wherever the blood concentrates, repair work takes place very fast.

7

Applications of Bandha



There are two forms of pranayama. One type is learned in yoga class: breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out. The other form is used in tantra, when pranayama is combined in a systematic way with mudras and bandhas. This

is known as kriya yoga. Pranayama is a powerful method – with the help of pranayama, awakening takes place all of a sudden.

Bandhas enhance pranayama

Pranayama is not only a breathing exercise: when the breath is held and jalandhara, uddiyana and moola bandha are practised, the kundalini is heated. Though hatha yoga is guaranteed to awaken kundalini when practised under the given conditions, kriya yoga is an even more powerful practice for those who are predominantly rajasic and who should not force their minds directly into concentration. Kriya yoga combines the asanas, pranayamas, mudras and bandhas of hatha yoga which specifically induce pratyahara, for example, siddhasana, padmasana, ujjayi pranayama, khechari, shambhavi, vajroli and yoni mudras, nasikagra drishti, uddiyana, jalandhara, moola and maha bandhas.

By working on the subtle, underlying structure of the mind and body, the principles constituting the mind are gradually disintegrated. Through shatkarma, asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha, the physiological and subtle elements are controlled.

Establishing equilibrium between mind and body

Prana is in a constant state of flux in the body, sometimes being directed through the external senses, sometimes towards the internal organs. Sometimes prana shakti in pingala predominates and sometimes chitta shakti in ida, and this creates various biorhythms and states of mind. The yogic practices moderate these fluctuations between the extremes of ida and pingala. It is most important to remain aware of these extremes. It means developing the state of balanced awareness where mind is neither extrovert nor introvert, no matter whether you are working, thinking, eating or practising asana or meditation. If a state of conscious awareness cannot be maintained while awake, then in deeper states also, the awareness will be lost. When sushumna

awakens or when the breath stops, it should be a conscious experience, only then can the experience of death be altered.

Though there are many techniques for establishing a state of equilibrium and union between mind and body, the most effective is said to be the combination of these three bandhas. Maha bandha is the culmination of asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha. Perfection in it induces a state of perfect equanimity which unfolds into pratyahara or even spontaneous dhyana.

Achieving the ‘eternal now’

According to many esoteric philosophies, the downward flow of prana, apana, represents the part which leads man’s consciousness to the lower, more earthy elements: satisfaction of instinctive desire, over-indulgence, lethargy, apathy, laziness and so on. According to these philosophies, it is believed that an individual’s essential nature is godlike and that in order to reunite or realize this, one’s consciousness must be redirected. In relation to this, the role of bandhas, and especially moola bandha, is to block the descending movement of consciousness and redirect it upwards.

A useful analogy is to liken bandhas to the locking, stopping, obstructing and redirecting power of a dam wall. Water is contained so that it can be redirected for useful work as desired by the controller. Just so, bandhas hold and centralize physical, mental and psychic energy, focusing it at the site of contraction so that it can be redirected for useful work as desired by the controller. These areas are infused with a fresh, vital force capable of checking imbalances in the body systems.

Through the perfection of bandhas, the yogi is able to lock himself into the ‘eternal now’, devoid of the dualities of existence, motion and change. His consciousness, unfettered by the modifications of thought, is able to merge into the field of unified consciousness. As such, the bandhas induce *pratyahara*, sense withdrawal, and are preliminary techniques for meditation.

An aid to meditation

Anyone who has to go deep into meditation has to start from exoteric practices, because the body is the basis. Finer than the body are the senses. Finer than the senses is the mind. Finer than the mind is the intellect. Finer than the intellect is emotion. Finer than emotion is the ego. This ego is of two kinds: lower ego and higher ego. You know Socrates used to say, "Know thyself." He meant the higher Self.

Meditation has to start on this basis. First, one should practise yoga postures, then pranayama or breathing. Both the practices can take more than twenty minutes, then one should choose for oneself one or two practices in which the mind and the senses are separated. In other words, the mind should be isolated. It is a prerequisite for concentration and meditation that the mind should be isolated. If the mind is constantly fed by the stimuli of the senses from outside, it cannot concentrate, just as the flame of a candle cannot become steady and straight as long as there is a wind blowing. You close all the windows, that's all.

First of all, the senses must be hypnotized. I'm using the word hypnotize, don't mind it. There are practices like chanting, certain mudras and bandhas, certain forms of concentration: on an object, on light, on sound, whereby the senses are numbed for the time being. When the mind is isolated, it does not receive external sensations and perceptions. At that time, one should select for oneself one practice of concentration.

Pranayama is the gateway to dhyana. Through pranayama a sadhaka can go as deep as he wants. Nothing has to be done except to go on practising pranayama with jalandhara, uddiyana and moola bandhas, and some of the kriyas. There is no need to control or fight with the mind. Just do the practices for ten or fifteen minutes every day and in the course of time the mind will enter dhyana. This is the hatha yoga system.

Bhastrika can be used as a pathway to meditation. Concentration during bhastrika must be on counting the



breaths, up to 100, 200, 300, 400, or more. Kumbhaka is then held with uddiyana, jalandhara and moola bandhas and concentration respectively on mooladhara, manipura and vishuddhi chakras, followed by correct release of the bandhas. In this way, another round should be practised. If one can hold the awareness, the quality and depth of dharana, concentration, will improve. In fact, dhyana, meditation, results from deep concentration in bhastrika.

According to hatha yoga, the practice of yama should be integrated with the three bandhas: jalandhara bandha, uddiyana bandha and moola bandha. Along with this one has to learn the ratio and proportion that should be held in between each inhalation and exhalation.

Cosmic potential in sensual experience

If you ask me which is the exact centre of the maithuna experience, I will reply, ajna chakra. However, an experience is created at a lower point. This experience is not an experience of the awakening of kundalini because the kundalini cannot be awakened directly. You can't handle the kundalini directly. Therefore, through maithuna, an experience is to be created. And that experience has to be conducted through sushumna nadi to ajna chakra. As a result of this transference or transmission, the experience takes place in the higher centre and not in the lower centre.

When the experience takes place in the lower centre, you know exactly what it is. It ends in exhaustion, fatigue and depression, because the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems cannot hold this energy. So, how can one have this experience in ajna chakra? There are a few practices in hatha yoga. One of the practices which conducts this energy to the higher centre is known as uddiyana bandha. Through this practice the energy is conducted upwards. Then, in order to experience this energy, you should practise shambhavi mudra, which brings you in touch with ajna chakra.

After this experience takes place in ajna chakra, there is a descent. First there is an ascent of the experience. Then there is an experience, and that experience again descends. It comes down through the sushumna passage and then the awakening of kundalini takes place. Those of you who have studied the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo will be able to understand me better. Sri Aurobindo was the greatest of yogis who lived in Pondicherry in South India. He spoke about the ascent and descent of divine energy. This is the exact process.

8

Conclusion



The nature of the mind is uniform in every age, the only difference is some people get affected by it and some don't. For example, a person may be prone to anger, he is aware of this and also that there is no cure for his anger. He is affected by that and feels guilty. This is one state. The other is, he gets angry, and is aware that he got angry, but says it is

all right. He leaves it behind – the way a car leaves milestones behind. Some people are able to leave thoughts behind, but there are many who continue to carry the thoughts. However, the thoughts are uniform among all people because thoughts are a product of the body's chemistry.

The higher thoughts that appear in the state of turiya are a different subject matter, but the thoughts that appear in the jagrita, waking, *swapna*, dreaming, and *sushupti*, sleep, states are a product of the chemical laboratory of the body. These are lower experiences of the consciousness. Consciousness has three grades. The highest grade is *satyata*, the state of truth, and the three experiences of jagrita, swapna and sushupti are material experiences produced from the chemical laboratory in the body. Thoughts of lust, anger and greed are products of these processes.

If you take a little marijuana, your thoughts will change because it will influence the chemicals in the body. Take a sleeping pill and it will immediately enter your chemical laboratory and make you sleepy. If you eat dhatura (thorn-apple) you will have strange experiences. When the chemicals in these things enter the body, they encounter the juices of the body and according to the age of the person, create an effect. This is external influence.

There is also internal influence brought about by hormones which change according to age. Their activity produces emotions such as restlessness, anxiety, excitement, lust, anger, greed, envy, dislike, cruelty, compassion, kindness and love. The thoughts of inferiority, egoism, superiority, lust or anger do not come from somewhere outside; they are attached to your body. These are experiences that are produced from the chemical laboratory of the body. This is why yoga says keep the food, air, water and internal activity unadulterated. The hormones can be controlled through the yogic practices such as asana, pranayama, bandha, mudra, meditation. These practices reduce the influence of the chemicals to an extent, though they don't stop them entirely. To accelerate this process of awakening, combine the prac-

tices of pranayama, bandha and mantra.

I am not a man or a woman, a brahmin or a kshatriya, a Bihari or a beggar. I am mantra, moola bandha, jalandhara bandha and uddiyana bandha. So, take ten minutes of your daily life and practise yoga. What can you lose in this short time? During your practice forget your money, your relationships, your work and your telephone. These ten minutes every day makes three hundred minutes every month, three thousand six hundred minutes every year. If

you lose your health, the doctor will send you to the hospital for fifteen days. These ten minutes a day is the premium you pay for your spiritual happiness.

Yoga is not a para-science but a definite science which we have to work out in a most sincere, honest and diligent way. This is just the beginning of the beginning. We have to work hard in order to find out exactly what happens when yoga is practised. If yoga is just a myth or a type of occultism, then we don't need it. We have had plenty of occultism and black magic in every religion. But if yoga is a concrete, tangible and interpretable science like mathematics, if it has any logic in it, then there is no reason why we should not accept it, practise it, preach it and do whatever we can to help it reach more and more people, so that they can understand it fully and practise it in their daily lives.





Satyam Speaks Series presents compilations of Sri Swami Satyananda's teachings on yoga. Each book explores a specific topic, concept or practice. The aim is to provide an easy way to understand and incorporate various components of the immense science of yoga vidya into one's daily life. *Satyam Speaks Series* is a tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda, his teaching and to yoga vidya. *Satyam Speaks Series* is an invitation to all sincere seekers to live yoga and thereby make the world a better place.

Bandha explains the four *bandhas* or inner locks which are part of hatha yoga. They hold and release prana and are thus an integral part of pranayama practices. This volume highlights the importance and benefits of bandha.

Note: This series is for knowledge only. The practices must be learnt from an accomplished yoga master.

