

Satyam Speaks Mudra



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Satyam Speaks
Mudra



SWAMI SATYANANDA SARASWATI

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CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS

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Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Satyam Speaks Mudra
Swami Satyananda Saraswati

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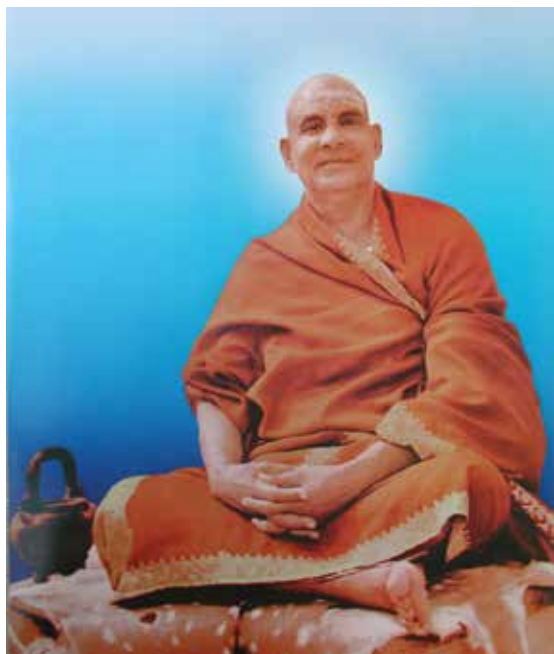
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Dedication

*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.*

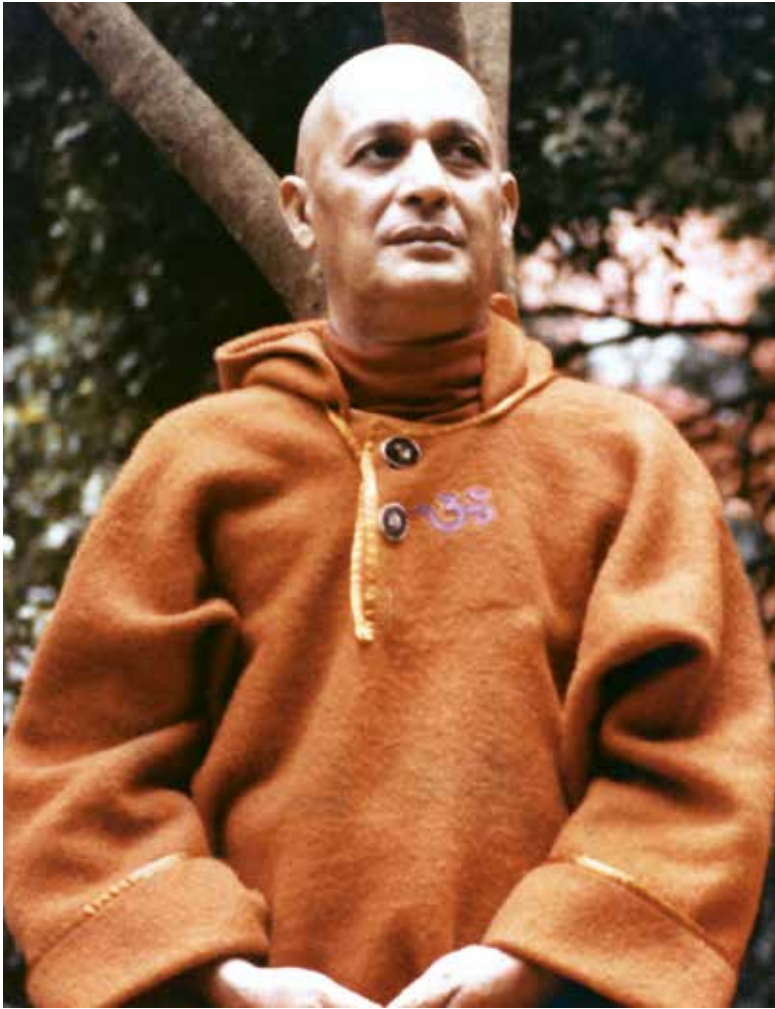
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Preface

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.

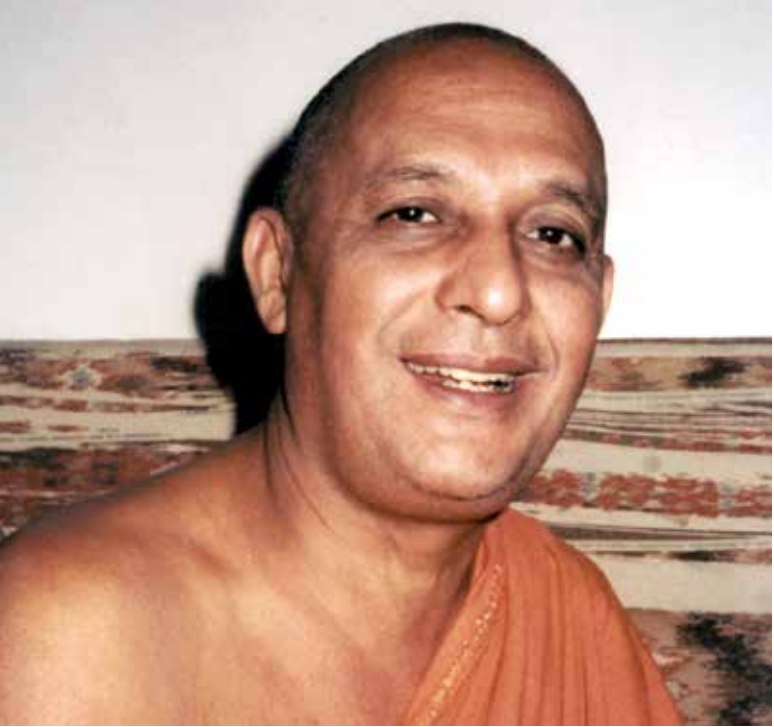


Satyam Speaks Series is a tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda, his teaching and to yoga vidya. *Satyam Speaks Series* is an invitation to all sincere aspirants to live yoga and thereby make the world a better place.

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 Mudra



The system of mudras is very diverse and includes many types of practices ranging from positions of the hands to complex and subtle methods of concentrating the mind.

Mudras are physical and mental attitudes which have a very important role in yoga practice in bringing about controlled psychic states and occurrences.

Mudras have come to mean different things according to usage and people's different levels of understanding. *Mudra* means 'insignia' or 'symbol'. What is insignia and what is symbol? When one is crying, it means unhappiness; so is crying the symbol of unhappiness? A crying person doesn't have to say, 'I'm unhappy'; the tears tell of the unhappiness. When someone dances or sings or laughs, it means they are happy. These are the symbols of emotions. In the same way, the inner consciousness also has a symbol. Mudras appear to be physical gestures or positions made with the hands, eyes or the whole body, but mudra means a position taken by one's psychic attitude. The purpose of the mudras is to handle the problem of inner experience. So, in yoga and tantra *mudra* means 'the attitude of energy flow'. But it is not enough to know this intellectually, you have to practise mudras in order to experience them for yourself.

Mudras are techniques for activating the glandular functioning and the dormant psychic power centres, and have two aspects of utility. One is the physical side and the other is the mental. They are the techniques for controlling the involuntary organs which are connected with the nerves of the body. Along with the mudras which affect the energy circuits, we have other mudras which directly stimulate the chakras. Mudras help one approach nearer to the inner conscious energy. By the practice of mudras and bandhas, we are able to create an opportunity or a field by which the inherent power and bliss are awakened.

In India we have various types of mudras, they occupy an important place in the arts as well as the spiritual sciences. The themes of the Indian dances are generally of a spiritual nature about various gods and goddesses, divine love, mythologies, and so on. In the science of dance, we have hundreds of mudras. Through these mudras the dancer is trying to express the inner attitude. He expresses the quality

of his emotion, his feeling and his intention. When a dancer is performing, he makes these mudras with the help of his fingers, eyes and body in general. There is a famous scripture called *Bharata Natya Shastra* in which sixty-four basic dancing mudras are explained. These ancient dances are laid out step by step, and can build into either subtle and complex pieces of intricate movement, or into cyclonic movements that lift one out of this world and into a new reality. The most important



aspect of communication in Kathakali, for example, are the mudras. There are twenty-four basic hand mudras alone, of which eight hundred variations and permutations exist.

Dance in the Orient has traditionally involved rigorous discipline and various aspects of esoteric traditions such as the use of mudras. In Indian dances such as Kathakali and Bharata Natyam, and in the Chinese and Japanese forms of Kabuki and Noh, the dancer seeks to establish oneness with the audience so as to communicate the theme of the dance through mudras of the eyes, hands and body, music, songs and costume. Mudras are often seen in the portraits, images and idols of saints, sages or gods and goddesses – for example, jnana mudra, chin mudra, shankha mudra and abhaya mudra. *Abhaya mudra*, gesture of fearlessness, is seen in statues of Buddha. In the bhakti cults we have the devotional mudras; this is another aspect. Then there are the mudras for meditation which are another aspect. We also have the yogic mudras such as vipareeta karani mudra, khechari mudra, yoga mudra, shambhavi mudra, nasikagra mudra and many others. Mudras are psychic, emotional, devotional and aesthetic attitudes.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *mudra* is translated as ‘gesture’ or ‘attitude’. The *Kularnava Tantra* traces the word *mudra* to the root *mud*, meaning ‘delight’ or ‘pleasure’, and *dravay*, the causal form of *dru*, which means ‘to draw forth’. *Mudra* is also defined as a ‘seal’, ‘short-cut’ or ‘circuit bypass’. Yogis have experienced *mudras* as attitudes of energy flow, intended to link the individual pranic force with the universal or cosmic force.

Mudras are a combination of subtle physical movements which alter mood, attitude and perception, and which deepen awareness and concentration. A *mudra* may involve the whole body in a combination of *asana*, *pranayama*, *bandha* and visualization techniques, or it may be a simple hand position. *Mudras* induce deeper physiological, psychic and mental changes in one’s being.

Mudra is a specific body position which channels the energy produced by *asana* and *pranayama* into the various centres, arousing particular states of mind. Some *mudras* are done separately after *asana* and *pranayama*, others are done with *asana* and *pranayama* to help awaken the *chakras* and arouse *kundalini shakti*. It is stated in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:5):

*Tasmaatsarvaprayatnena prabodhayitumeeshvareem;
Brahmadvaaramukhe suptaam mudraabhyaasam
samaacharet.*

Therefore, the goddess sleeping at the entrance of Brahma’s door should be constantly aroused with all effort by performing *mudra* thoroughly.

Mudras in ancient literature

Mudras have been described in various texts from antiquity to the present day in order to preserve them for posterity. These include the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, tantric texts such as *Kularnava Tantra*, *hatha yoga* texts such as *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and so on. The practices of *maha mudra*, *maha bheda mudra*, are from the tantric texts.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and other yogic texts consider mudra to be a *yoga anga*, an independent branch of yoga, requiring a very subtle awareness. There are countless mudras that bring about changes and improvements in the body, influence the glands and hormonal secretions, harmonize pranic imbalances and calm the agitations of the mind. In doing so, many physical and mental diseases are alleviated.



The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* states (verse 4:61): “Whatever there is in the world, animate and inanimate, is only the scenery of the mind. When the mind achieves a state of unmani, then ignorance and duality cease.” Unmani implies that state which is beyond thought – meditation. It is a state where all attachment to the world of objects is dispelled. Unmani mudra is a simple technique that helps to induce the experience.

The *Gheranda Samhita* states (3:59): “Direct your eyes towards the middle of the eyebrows. Reflect on your real nature. This is shambhavi mudra, the most secret of all tantric scriptures.” The same text devotes the next few verses to showering praise on this mudra. Among other things it says: “The man who diligently practises and knows shambhavi mudra becomes Lord Shiva himself. He becomes Narayana (Vishnu), the sustainer of all and also Brahma, the creator of the universe.”

The *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* states (verse 65): “Maha mudra is a practice which purifies the entire network of *nadis*, pranic passages, balances ida and pingala and absorbs *rasa*, nectar of bliss, so that it pervades one’s whole being.”

Understanding the role of mudras

Who am I? This is the question, and of course there is an answer, but that answer is not very clear. The answer is not clear because it can only be derived from self-experience and most people do not have that experience. Fortunately, to help us evolve the mind to that height where we can experience our real nature effectively are the practices of kriya yoga. Kriya yoga itself is a combination of mudras, bandhas, pranayamas, asanas and awareness which will lead to an awakening of kundalini. Kriya yoga is a self-contained system of practices from tantra, but unless you have first mastered perfectly the practices of hatha yoga you will not be able to practise kriya yoga successfully.

In the awakening of kundalini, the involvement of the body cannot be ignored. When kundalini wakes up its influence spreads all over the body, not only to the brain, affecting other systems such as the circulatory and respiratory systems. In hatha yoga the practice of the six cleansing kriyas, asanas, pranayamas, mudras and bandhas should not be considered as physical yoga. This insight gives the understanding that hatha yoga is not physical yoga. It is a higher practice carried out in the physical body. Therefore, in the initial stages, hatha yoga should be adopted for purification of the body. The hatha yogis say the practice of shatkarma comes first in order to purify the tattwas, the body, the nadis, prana and chakras – the purification of this vessel. Then come asana and pranayama. Mudras are introduced after some proficiency has been attained in asana, pranayama and bandha, and gross blockages have been removed.

The easiest functions to control are those associated with the voluntary nervous system: the practice of asanas develops this ability. For more subtle control, pranayama is used, as the rate and depth of the breath influences the physiological systems of the body, the brainwave patterns and modes of thinking. Mudras are gestures or practices that redirect the prana or concentrate it in one location, preventing the dissipation of energy. For example, by folding

the tongue back in khechari mudra, vishuddhi chakra, the throat centre, is awakened. The sacral centre is stimulated by contracting the urethra and the anal sphincter muscles in vajroli and ashwini mudras respectively, awakening the energies connected with swadhisthana chakra.

In scientific terms, mudras provide a means to access and influence the unconscious reflexes and primal, instinctive habit patterns that originate in the primitive areas of the brain around the brain stem. They establish a subtle, non-intellectual connection with these areas. Each mudra sets up a different link and has a correspondingly different effect on the body, mind and prana. The aim is to create fixed, repetitive postures and gestures which can snap the practitioner out of instinctive habit patterns and establish a more refined consciousness.

Mudras are higher practices which lead to awakening of the pranas, chakras and kundalini, and which can bestow major siddhis, psychic powers, on the advanced practitioner. Therefore, such references were never detailed or clearly delineated as these techniques were not intended to be learned from a book. Practical instruction from a guru was always considered to be a necessary requisite before attempting them. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it is written (3:129):

*Upadesham hi mudraanaam yo dattte saampradaayikam;
Sa eva shreegururh svaamee saakshaadeeshvara eva sah.*

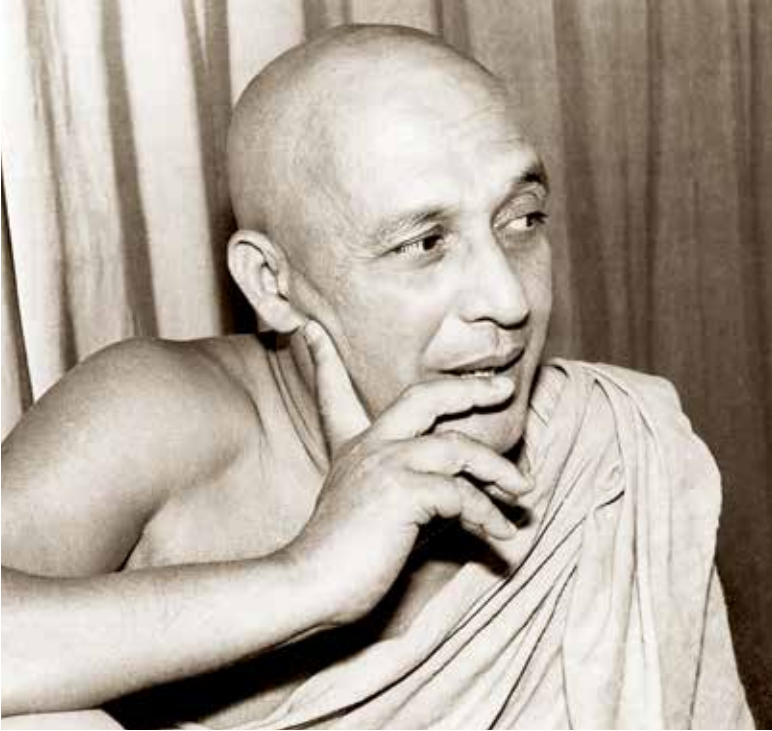
One who instructs mudra in the tradition of guru and disciple is the true guru and form of Ishwara.

Perfection in mudra and awakening of the shakti through mudra depends upon the initiation of the guru and then the practice of the sadhaka. When mudra or any other practice is passed on from guru to disciple it is sure to bear fruit, because the guru's words themselves are the very shakti which manifests in concrete form.

Yogis or aspirants in yoga can never progress unless they have mastered the mudras. It has been found from experience that the mudras are very effective and beneficial.

2

Exploring Mudra



The subject of mudra is mainly centred on the possibility of altering the consciousness by certain means within the body. There are certain untapped secretions in the body.

There are some secretions in the physical body which are dormant. There are certain centres in this physical body which are not functioning. There are certain areas in the brain which are not yet developed. These centres in the brain may be ultrasonic or supersonic; they are not of the nature of mind, they are not in the nature of thinking, they are in the form of what can be called frequencies or rhythms. The study of physics brings better understanding of this.

In this universe there are rhythms or vibrations humans are not aware of. These are sometimes vibrating at many thousand times per second, but they can be registered. It needs to be understood that there is more than is thought of in this physical body. There are areas in the brain which are not at all connected with daily life and experience. There are potential secretions in the physical body which are still closed, sealed; and there are certain centres in the physical body about which we have no idea. The subject of mudra concerns the process of unlocking, or arousing, these potentials.

Asana, mudra, balancing exercises and inner attitudes, and pranayama are the main techniques which are followed to keep the physical system fit and healthy. Mudras are natural exercises aiming at revitalizing the glands and the internal organs. The mudras are also essential yogic techniques for physical health.

Tantric mudras

In tantra, mudra is considered to be the external form of a particular energy. According to tantra, every emotion and expression is a manifestation of energy, sometimes positive, sometimes negative. Suppose you get angry. What do you do? You express it through a mudra. In the same way, when you love someone, you express your love through a mudra. These are external things which I am telling you in order to explain the subject. When you are practising sadhana, something must be happening inside.

There are certain mudras which you practise spontaneously when you enter into a state of trance. These mudras

are very important in tantric practices because they relate to the energy flows in the body. There are two important things that you have to note about this: one, you practise a mudra and express the energy; two, you feel an energy and then practise the mudra. In the beginning, you practise the mudra and help the energy to express itself. Later, energy begins to express spontaneously and then you automatically practise mudras. That is interplay of energy within you and you express it through various mudras, tantric mudras, which are infinite.

Hatha yoga mudras

Hatha yoga mudras are related to the realization of the threefold energy within the body: ida, pingala and sushumna, which represent mind, prana and spirit respectively. The mudras detailed in hatha yoga therefore represent the position of the mental force, pranic force and spiritual force.

According to hatha yoga, it is easier to conquer the prana first and then the mind. Therefore, the hatha yogis combined asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha – which harmonize the pranas – as tools to conquer the mind.

The hatha yoga mudras are practised in different ways. They are not only practised with the fingers. We know that the energy flows through the fingers, through the body and through the toes, and that energy is twofold and not singular.

The hatha yoga mudras can be categorized into

1. Maha mudra
2. Maha vedha mudra
3. Khechari mudra
4. Vipareeta karani mudra
5. Shakti chalini mudra.

Bhakti yoga mudras

When you are practising your worship, you practise various mudras before your deity, expressing your devotion, emotion, piety, surrender and so on. In India, bhakti yoga is not only going to an altar, praying from a book and singing a song.

When you go to a temple to conduct worship, or even before that, the science of mudra begins. During the period of your worship, you practise hundreds of mudras at various times. By practising these mudras, you are letting your inner feelings come out.

Yoga mudras

The yoga mudras can be categorized into approximately five groups, which are as follows:

1. Hasta mudras – hand mudras
2. Mana mudras – head mudras
3. Kaya mudras – postural mudras
4. Bandha mudras – lock mudras
5. Adhara mudras – perineal mudras.

Between them these five groups engage substantial areas of the cerebral cortex. The comparatively large number of head and hand mudras reflects the fact that the operation and interpretation of information coming in from these two areas occupies approximately fifty percent of the cortex. Mudras are performed either in combination with or after asana and pranayama.

1. Hasta (hand mudras)

Hand mudras are meditative mudras. They redirect the prana emitted by the hands back into the body. Mudras which join the thumb and index finger engage the motor cortex at a very subtle level. They generate a loop of energy which moves from the brain down to the hand and then back again. Conscious awareness of this process rapidly leads to internalization. There are many hand mudras, hundreds in fact. The hand mudras taught in yoga are particularly useful, for they can be used in daily meditation with little extra effort and no extra expenditure of time. They are ideally suited for integration with meditative techniques, for they intensify the power and the benefits that are obtained.

Experiments with Kirlian photography have shown that the fingers give out flares of energy. If the fingers touch

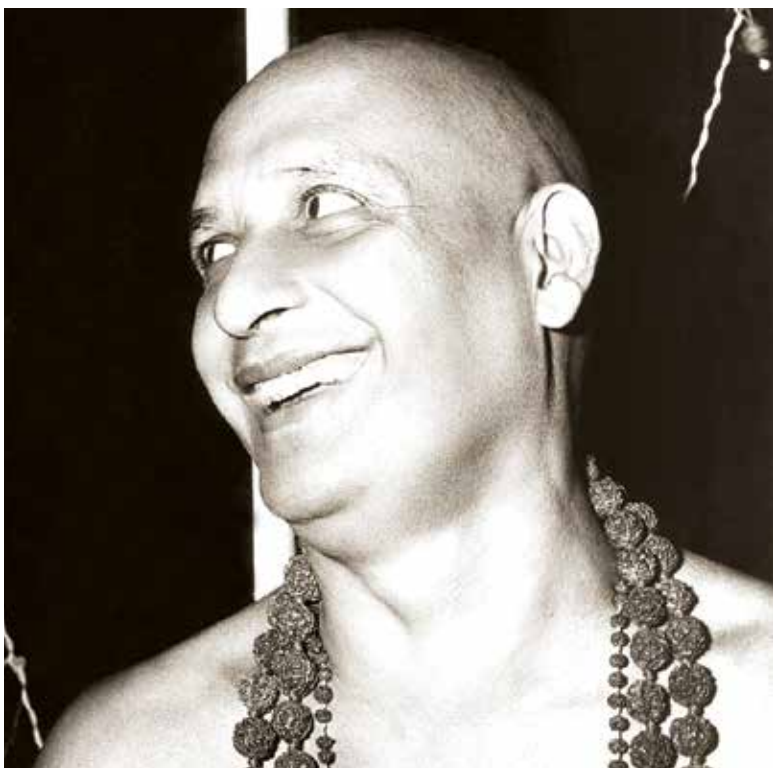
the thumb, a circuit is produced. This allows energy that would normally be dissipated to travel back into the body and up to the brain. The hand is directly connected to a large proportion of the brain's cortex. Therefore, the energy circuit created between the thumb and index finger has a powerful effect on the brain. Using both hands has the effect of bringing both hemispheres under conscious control.

Ancient yogis and sages are depicted displaying characteristic hand mudras. These mudras have symbolic meaning, neuropsychic implications, and they also have the power to evoke forces within the individual. In other words, the individual dwells on and tries to experience the indescribable meaning contained within a mudra. In this way it is possible to call up inner forces which otherwise lie hidden and dormant. This is why mudras are so powerful.

2. *Mana* (head mudras)

These practices form an integral part of kundalini yoga and many are meditation techniques in their own right. They utilize the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and lips. Ajna chakra is situated in the midbrain at the very top of the spine, in the region of the pineal gland. Ajna is the centre which monitors and commands each and every function in the physical body. When this centre is healthy, the balance between the emotions and the body is maintained because the pineal gland is the stop check on the pituitary. However, in most of us, the pineal gland started to degenerate when we reached the age of eight, nine or ten. Then the pituitary began to function and to secrete various hormones which instigated our sexual consciousness, our sensuality and worldly personality. At this time, we began to lose touch with our spiritual heritage. However, through various yogic techniques, such as trataka and shambhavi mudra, it is possible to regenerate or maintain the health of the pineal gland.

Shambhavi mudra relates to the control of a most important psychic centre in the body known as ajna chakra. It is one of the most powerful techniques of kundalini



yoga, designed to awaken ajna chakra by balancing ida and pingala. To awaken ajna chakra and create union between the three conductors of energy in the body (ida, pingala and sushumna), shambhavi mudra should be practised. If the nadis described by yogis are in the brain, then it means that yogic techniques can balance the brain hemispheres.

Research from split brains is revealing that this is so. We know that in normal people, pictures appearing on the left side of our viewing field and sound in the left ear, both transmitted to the right brain, are less agreeable than when they are presented to the other side, according to Kinsbourne. Other research shows us that when we are gloomy we tend to gaze to the left, affecting the right hemisphere, whereas happiness causes the opposite to occur.

This research indicates a definite relationship between eye position and hemispheric dominance. It also indicates that shambhavi mudra and trataka balance brain hemisphere activity because the eyes are held steady at the centre of the forehead, crossed in shambhavi and straight ahead in trataka. Even when we practise these techniques we may feel a very powerful stimulation and pressure within the centre of the head, ajna chakra activation, and the subjective experience is that of simultaneous extroversion and introversion. Shambhavi is the more powerful technique and induces an almost immediate effect. Centralized focusing of awareness appears to affect both nadis simultaneously. Shambhavi mudra directly awakens ajna. Both shambhavi and khechari cause the external mind to 'turn off' and inner awareness to awaken.

The direct concern of khechari mudra is to activate the psychic, physiological and endocrine processes responsible for cellular revitalization and longevity. If khechari mudra is correctly practised in conjunction with ujjayi over a long period of time, the tongue goes into the upper nasal orifice – in the language of Kabir Das, the 'cave of the sky' – where *amrit*, the nectar of immortality, flows constantly. The particular tastes attributed to the nectar are related to the *pancha tattwas* the five elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether. Each creates a definite flavour when it predominates. Tattwas represent specific pranic flows associated with the five vayus and each can be tasted when it is active. According to the flavour, the active tattwa can be known, as each tattwa is characterized by a particular flavour: earth has a sweet flavour; water is astringent, fire is bitter, air is acidic and ether is pungent or hot.

3. *Kaya* (postural mudras)

Some of the techniques included in this category are vipareeta karani mudra, pashinee mudra, yoga mudra and tadagi mudra. The practice of vipareeta karani mudra is directly concerned with reversing the flow of a fluid from the brain. This is possible by reversing the natural upright body position. The force of gravity naturally pulls all body

fluids down to the lower parts. By inverting the body so that the head is down and the feet are up, all the fluids flow back towards the head without undue force or pressure. Vipareeta karani creates pressure in the throat which stimulates the thyroid and awakens vishuddhi chakra.

4. *Bandha* (lock mudras)

These practices combine mudra and bandha. They charge the system with prana and prepare it for kundalini awakening. Some of the techniques included in this category are shakti chalini mudra, maha mudra, maha bhedha mudra and maha vedha mudra.

5. *Adhara* (perineal mudras)

The purpose of vajroli, sahajoli is to reverse the natural downward flow of apana so that the vayu flows upward through sushumna. When this is achieved the external mind becomes instantly tranquil and the awareness enters the inner dimensions. Mental equanimity means a steady mind, peaceful and unflinching in every circumstance.

Additionally, the purpose of these perineal mudras is to convert *retas*, sexual energy, into *ojas*, highly refined pranic or psychic energy. This process is called *urdhvaretas* – the sublimation of sexual energy. Prana is the essence of both *retas* and *ojas*; vajroli and sahajoli help to bring about sublimation of the grosser *retas* into the more refined *ojas*. Sexual energy should give one vitality and strength, it cannot just be denied and refused. It should make one confident, brilliant, full of vigour and vitality. Vajroli achieves this by controlling the production of semen. With vajroli, the energy level is raised. Vajroli gives its practitioner absolute control over the influx of energy and the processes going on in the testicles.

In the region of the perineum where there are many nerve endings, there is a main nadi known as the vajra nadi, which corresponds to the sciatic nerve. There is another nadi, brahma nadi, which runs through the centre of sushumna. These nadis are specifically stimulated or acted upon when

vajroli, sahajoli or ashwini mudra is practised. Brahma represents the creative aspect, the sexual urge, and desire. With the practice of vajroli, sahajoli and ashwini mudras the flow of apana within brahma nadi is reversed, and all the psychological, physical, mental and emotional desires are transcended. Apana is reversed and begins to move in brahma nadi in the other direction.

According to tantra, *bhoga*, or sensual involvement, can be the means to yoga. Sense interaction can lead to higher awareness. The very idea that the ultimate experience can unfold through sensual experience is not one that many people in the last few centuries, and even earlier, have been able to accept. Until one knows the experiences of the senses how can deeper and subtle awareness evolve? Experience is of the mind and not the physical body. First we have to know what the physical experience is. Then by increasing the subtle perception, the experience can be reawakened in the mind without involving the physical senses. During the day we see with our eyes but what happens at night when we dream? We are not seeing through the eyes but nevertheless, the mind is experiencing. We are re-experiencing what has been perceived. In tantra, therefore, the physical body is the means to delve more deeply into the mind and the reality of existence.

Mudras and prana

Prana, vital energy, which corresponds to ki or chi in Chinese medicine, pervades the whole body. Prana follows flow patterns, called *nadis*, which are responsible for maintaining individual cellular activity. Stiffness of the body is due to blocked prana and a subsequent accumulation of toxins. When prana begins to flow, the toxins are removed from the system, ensuring the health of the whole body. As the body becomes supple, postures which seemed impossible become easy to perform, and steadiness and grace of movement develop. When the amount of prana is significantly increased, the body moves into certain postures by itself and asanas, mudras and pranayamas occur spontaneously.

The attitudes and postures adopted during mudra practices establish a direct link between *annamaya kosha*, the physical body, *manomaya kosha*, the mental body and *pranamaya kosha*, the energy body. Initially, this enables the practitioner to develop awareness of the flow of prana in the body. Ultimately, it establishes pranic balance within the koshas and enables the redirection of subtle energy to the upper chakras, inducing higher states of consciousness.

Mudras manipulate prana in much the same way that energy in the form of light or sound waves is diverted by a mirror or a cliff face. The nadis and chakras constantly radiate prana which normally escapes from the body and dissipates into the external world. By creating barriers within the body through the practice of mudra, the energy is redirected within. For example, by closing the eyes with the fingers in shanmukhi mudra, the prana being radiated through the eyes is reflected back. In the same way, the sexual energy emitted through vajra nadi is redirected to the brain through the practice of vajroli mudra.

Tantric literature states that once the dissipation of prana is arrested through the practice of mudra, the mind becomes introverted, inducing states of *pratyahara*, sense withdrawal, and *dharana*, concentration. Because of their ability to redirect prana, mudras are important techniques for awakening kundalini.

Mudras can arouse specific emotions. When the pranic level is increased and the conscious mind withdraws, mudras occur spontaneously. The hands, feet, eyes, arms and legs move slowly into definite positions like those of Indian dancers. Through mudras, specific qualities of Shakti or Devi are invoked and one becomes overwhelmed by that power.

Mudras and balancing of ida and pingala

The mind can be influenced through the practice of pranayama, mudra and bandha, as the practice of pranayama removes the imbalance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. When there is an imbalance or

disharmony between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, the mind cannot be controlled. How can the brain be balanced? It is important to know how. If the right nostril is flowing, either the *yoga danda*, a special staff, or the left hand, must be pressed into the right armpit. Within a few minutes the left nostril will be clear. Likewise, if the left nostril is flowing, press the staff or the right hand into the left armpit. Within a few minutes the right nostril will be flowing. This mudra can also be practised by pressing both armpits at the same time and meditating. It is called swara yoga mudra. This helps create a smooth balance between the ida and pingala energy systems. When both nostrils flow equally, the energy enters into sushumna nadi. Then meditation becomes a smooth experience and one has less problems. It is also possible to create this situation through pranayama, but that often takes more time.

Vipareeta karani mudra is the first of the kriyas in the sequence of kriya yoga for various reasons. One of the most obvious reasons is that it physically induces balance of the ida and pingala breath flows in the nostrils. This balance is vital in spiritual life and should occur on all levels from the physical to the more subtle levels of the mind. Vipareeta karani mudra brings this about in the final pose, since the arms are compressed in order to support the weight of the inverted body. This balance of the breath flow through the two nostrils is essential in meditative practices for it helps one to tread the narrow razor's edge between excessive introversion and absorption in the psychic world (ida) and the opposite extreme, distraction in the outside world (pingala). If you practise vipareeta karani mudra you will find out for yourself that the breath flows are indeed rapidly balanced. When this balance is achieved, then the subsequent kriyas become much more powerful.

Mudras and nada

Shanmukhi mudra is a practice used in nada yoga to hear any internal manifestation of sound in the region of bindu chakra. There may be many sounds or none at all; one just

listens without expecting to hear subtle sounds immediately. Practice is necessary. At first there may be no sound or a confused jumble of sounds. Upon hearing one distinct sound, focus the awareness totally upon it.

Shanmukhi mudra literally means 'the attitude of the six gates'. It is so called because the two eyes, two ears, the nose and the mouth are closed during the practice. These are the six doors of outer perception. It is through these doors that one receives data from the outside world. These doors are closed to allow the awareness to be directed into the mind.

Another name for the technique is *yoni mudra*, which means 'the invocation of the source'. That is, it is a method of merging with the source of nada. When practising yoni mudra and perceiving the inner sound, it must be listened to as if listening for another sound within or beyond that sound. One must keep on searching for finer and subtler sounds. In the initial stage of practice, there is awareness of the external sounds and movements but eventually this awareness drops away and only the nada remains. Just as in the dream state the external sounds and movements are not perceived, so is the mind withdrawn while consciously listening to nada. When the mind is absorbed in nada there are no vrittis. Mind is still like a crystal clear pool of water. The reflection seen inside is the nada.

Nada yoga can be combined with many other yogic techniques. For example, it can be integrated with vajroli mudra and moola bandha.

Importance of the guru

Once the disciple has chosen the guru and the guru has recognized the disciple, only the meaning and application of the guru's advice and instructions and the regularity of the practices have utmost importance in the disciple's life. The interaction with the inner and outer personality of the guru is all important in removing egocentricity. The deep-rooted and inherited *samskaras*, impressions, which stand as blockages to the greater flow of awareness and limit

the expression of greater energy in the practices are to be systematically exposed and rooted out. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:130) clearly indicates the necessity of the guru-disciple relationship in attaining the fruits of mudra practice, namely siddhi and immortality:

*Tasya vaakyaparo bhootvaa mudraabhyaase samaahitah;
Animaadigunaih saardham labhate kaalavanchanam.*

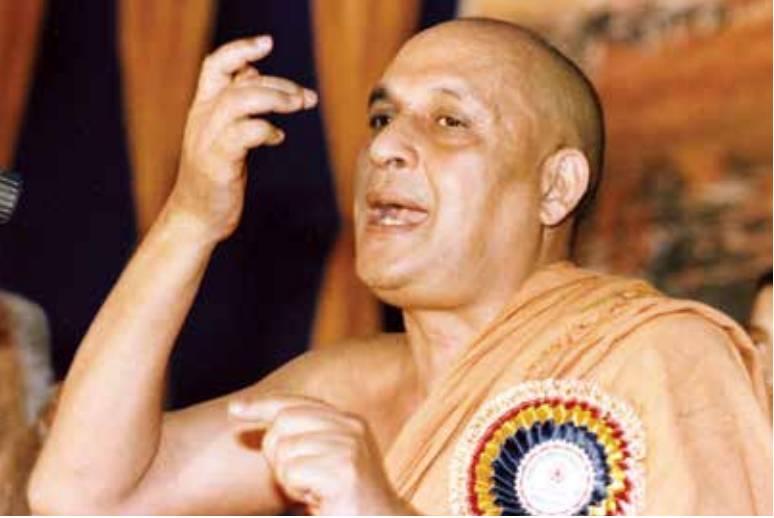
By following explicitly his (guru's) words, and practising mudra, one obtains the qualities of anima, etc., and overcomes death/time.

After the practice of asana and pranayama one needs to practise bandhas and mudras such as vajroli mudra and sahajoli mudra. How can you do them without the guidance of the guru? They are so difficult to understand and practise without the guidance of an experienced teacher.

How is the guru to be approached? The disciple has to use any and every means to bring himself into the light of the guru's awareness. His aspiration and efforts will be noted by the guru, who will give specific cues, which the disciple must be attuned to receive. The greatest capacities for the aspirant are to be able to discriminate and so recognize a fine guru and guide, and then to surrender his ego and conditioning at the guru's feet. Just as a sick person whose bowels are strangulated must soon find an accomplished surgeon, so the aspirant who wants to experience the greater consciousness has to submit his own psychophysiological personality before the guru. Only a fool will consent to an anaesthetic without trusting his surgeon. So the guru-disciple relationship must be established by a process of trust and surrender, if the practices are to bear the greatest fruit.

3

The Power of Mudra



As in the macrocosmos, so in the microcosmos. There should be ida, pingala and sushumna in the microcosmos and also in the macrocosmos. There, ida and pingala are known as Shiva and Shakti – they are the cosmic ida and the cosmic pingala, the great ida and the great pingala. The union of these three should be created by concentrating on ajna chakra with techniques such as trataka and shambhavi mudra. When the union takes place, an effect is created, just as when a light is switched on, the light is the effect.

In the same way, an effect is created by the union of these three nadis. That effect is called *jnana*, higher experience or enlightenment. That effect is the consequence or result of the union. And the union is the result of the sadhanas which have been systematically done. This takes place in the individual body and also in the cosmic body.

Mudras and meditation

The people, who are so weak and who consider the past the most valuable and a greater reality, are disturbed mentally. In order to solve this problem that arises out of meditation, we ask our aspirants to practise khechari mudra. Turn the tongue to the sky, wait until the nectar or ambrosia flows. Once the ambrosia flows you become quiet.

By the introduction of that fluid into the system, the state of meditation that is brought about is not complete because that is influencing the brain through chemical methods. You cannot attain meditation and you cannot make it permanent by introducing just a chemical. You have to change the structure of consciousness by expanding it or by eliminating its limitations. But in the beginning even for a yogi meditation is a great problem. It is such a great problem that when he sits in the asana, he goes on dreaming and dreaming and dreaming. The more he meditates he becomes aware of his past, emotional accidents, business accidents, death; all that the poor man has forgotten and has put into the side cabin, it all comes out. When the mind is full of distractions and it is filled up with the demands of the lower life, you cannot bring it back to the point of concentration. You have to pacify it; you have to bring about a state of equilibrium through some indirect method. That is done through kriya yoga as well as internal pranayama.

Maybe most of you have heard about the external pranayama, such as inhalation, retention and exhalation. There is also internal pranayama, and this internal pranayama takes the form of mudras and bandhas. The kriya yogi takes help from these mudras and bandhas and thereby he

tries to awaken the prana shakti within himself, and with the help of the awakened prana shakti he attains a certain state of equilibrium and tranquillity.

Meditation may be a spiritual practice but its effects on the body are definite and physiologically verified. Alpha waves become intense, respiration becomes minimal, consumption of oxygen decreases, blood pressure and temperature drop. The rishis realized these effects and therefore instructed the use of particular asanas for meditation and also the use of mudras, especially khechari. When sushumna is active, the heart rate and blood pressure drop, and at that time khechari should be used. When meditation becomes deep and the mind is absorbed in the point of concentration, unmani occurs. That is the beginning of samadhi.

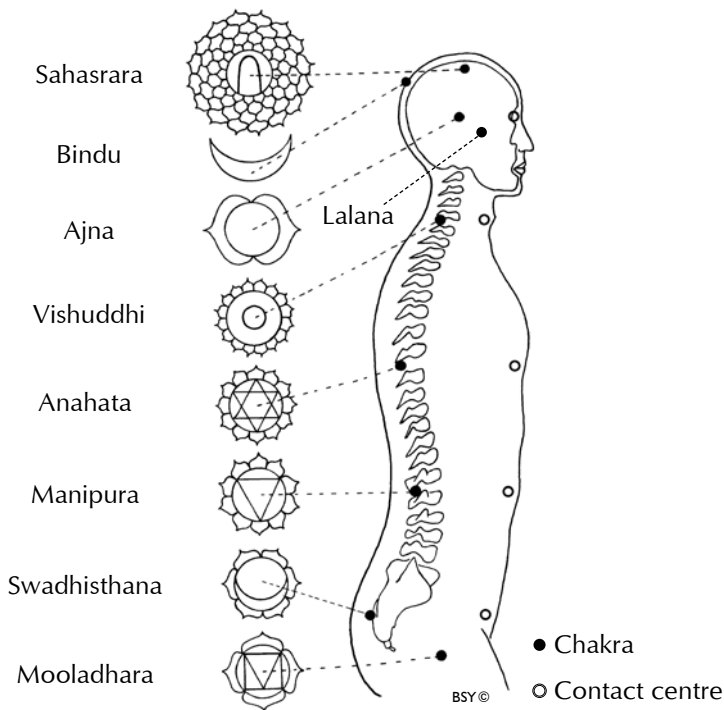
The word 'shambhavi' is the name of the creative power of consciousness, Shiva. All the mudras expand consciousness, but for the aspirant whose mind remains disciplined, and whose awareness remains alert when all internal and external barriers have been dissolved in samadhi, shambhavi brings the greatest perfection. Meditation becomes samadhi when awareness merges with the object of meditation and duality dissolves. In that state, sense perception is completely non-existent, mind is absorbed in the point of concentration, and the eyeballs turn upwards, spontaneously fixed in shambhavi mudra. This is an external sign of the inner mental tranquillity. It requires no intellectual capacity or 'brainpower' to do this, only sincere application to the practice. Shambhavi mudra stimulates ajna chakra in the brain directly behind the mid-eyebrow point. Through this, samadhi develops, as the mind is absorbed and the nada perceived.

Meditation is to remain one-pointed and disciplined in the midst of these inner experiences, and this discipline must continue through the succeeding stages of samadhi. For this purpose, the inner gaze is fixed upon a particular psychic symbol, *ishtha devata*, in shambhavi mudra. This symbol is chosen by the aspirant according to his own inclination, or

it may be assigned by the guru. That symbol becomes the focus of pure consciousness for the aspirant. It becomes a real illumined object in his consciousness by one-pointedness and discipline.

Awakening the psychic centres

In the spine there are six chakras. They are responsible for forwarding and distributing the energy. If these chakras are not functioning properly, an energy block forms.



The first of these centres is mooladhara chakra at the bottom. In the masculine body, it is located between the urinary and excretory organs, above the perineum and below the coccyx. It is a nerve structure, or you could call it a gland, which is physiologically existent but its potentialities are dormant.

In the feminine body, it is located just inside and behind the cervix. In order to awaken this centre, there are certain methods of mudras and bandhas, such as vajroli mudra, maha mudra and moola bandha.

There are many practices that awaken mooladhara. Vajrasana and vajroli awaken mooladhara. Nasikagra mudra focuses energy at the nose tip, this stimulates certain nerves which govern the sense of smell, thereby awakening mooladhara chakra, which is associated with this faculty. Ashwini mudra, the contraction and expansion of the anus awakens mooladhara.

The sadhana of swadhisthana is very peculiar, it is so peculiar that it is only concerned with the vajroli mudra, or the vajroli systems. It is concerned only with the sex complex which includes the gonads, testes; the ovaries or you may use the word genital-ovarian system. The whole sadhana is concerned with the genital-ovarian system. It is also a very important point that vajroli and sahajoli and amaroli are three kriyas of hatha yoga and at the same time in tantra we have the same kriyas. But the way we practise these three kriyas are slightly different.

In the solar plexus, behind the navel, is situated manipura chakra for which uddiyana bandha is included. These three chakras are very important; they are very intricate and very difficult to awaken. Then comes the heart chakra, anahata chakra, and then vishuddhi chakra.

The awakening of vishuddhi chakra has a very important part to play in the rejuvenation of the human body. When the vishuddhi centre is active then the rejuvenation takes place. By rejuvenation I mean the regeneration of the tissues in the body in contra-distinction to degeneration. There is a moment in life or when you suffer from diseases like leukaemia or similar such diseases where the rate of degeneration of cells is too great in comparison to the regeneration, then death, decay, old age and disease come to man. It is definitely said that the awakening of vishuddhi chakra is responsible for the maintenance of health, youth and longevity. The yogi who has

awakened vishuddhi chakra is able to assimilate both positive and negative aspects of life; to retain balance, health and equanimity in the midst of the dualities of pain and pleasure, light and dark, life and death, body and mind, etc.

At the top of the head there is a place that is known as bindu where a kind of fluid is manufactured which is known as ambrosia and that fluid is brought down to a particular gland in the nasal orifice or the upper part of the epiglottis; the passage through which you are trying to push your tongue during khechari mudra. Those glands are situated behind the chakra which is known as lalana or talumula. Lalana chakra is a minor chakra that is closely associated with vishuddhi. Those glands are the reservoirs, they are the magazines actually, not the manufacturers. When the gland is stimulated then the fluid comes down and it is consumed by the body. The purpose of khechari mudra is to stimulate and awaken lalana chakra.

This fluid which is manufactured at the top in bindu is known as nectar but actually it is not nectar. It is a mixed fluid which can act as poison and it can also act as nectar. When it is produced in bindu and stored in lalana or above the centre of lalana, it is neither poison nor nectar. When it is secreted by any mudras, such as khechari, then it goes to vishuddhi and it is the vishuddhi chakra which is the purifier or which is the centre of the refinery. It is said that this secretion is only purified in the area of the throat and if vishuddhi is functioning properly then the whole process of purification or refinement takes place. It is in this particular sense that vishuddhi chakra is supposed to be very important and that is why it is said that it confers immortality.

In yoga there is a strong emphasis placed on the development of ajna chakra. Ajna can be developed by concentration on the eyebrow centre through shambhavi mudra. Shambhavi mudra is practised for the improvement and development of ajna chakra.

By the practice of vipareeta karani mudra, you are able to stimulate the sahasrara chakra, known in modern science

as the pituitary body, which is located in the higher centre of the brain. From different areas of the pituitary, powerful hormones are secreted which control all the other glands of the body, thereby influencing the functioning of all the organs and systems as well as the mind and emotions. Once the chakras are awakened, experiences will begin to flow.

The conjunction of the chakras

Ajna and mooladhara chakras are closely related, and the awakening of one helps to awaken the other. Ideally, ajna should be awakened to some extent before mooladhara, in order to allow an unaffected perception of the energies manifested by mooladhara and the lower chakras. However, the awakening of mooladhara will help to further awaken ajna. In fact, the best way to bring about awakening of ajna is through the practices of moola bandha and ashwini mudra, which are specific for mooladhara. The perineum or the cervix has to be activated first if you want to discover ajna. There is no other proper way.

Bindu is connected with vishuddhi through a particular network of nerves which flow through the interior position of the nasal orifice passing through lalana. *Bindu* means nectar drop, *visarga* means flowing. It is the centre from where the nectar drops or flows. This fluid has to be brought down and it is done by the practice of khechari mudra. The fluid in the cranial passage is very, very little. It's not even one drop. You take a needle and put it in water, and whatever remains at the end of the needle is the quantity. This nectar begins to flow into the body. It is very sweet. So, if you want to overcome your greed for sweets, you should practise khechari mudra.

So bindu, lalana and vishuddhi these three centres are interconnected. Lalana is not a centre of awakening. It is a centre which is helping during the secretion of the fluid. Bindu is also not a centre of awakening. It is only vishuddhi which is a centre of awakening. When awakening takes place in vishuddhi, awakening takes place in bindu and also lalana chakras. The practice of activating bindu visarga concerns

vajroli mudra. By practising ashwini mudra you awaken the existence of ajna chakra, and by practising vajroli mudra you awaken the existence of bindu.

Mudras and kundalini

Awakening of kundalini is a process of the higher mind, which is triggered in the human nervous system. It is the experience of the greater mind and intelligence which is lying beyond the fence surrounding one's mind and personality. In the course of evolution, the kundalini has to become known; it is inevitable because it already exists, suppressed within. It is physiological unfoldment and a scientific destiny. Ultimately the fusion of the two poles within the seat of one's own consciousness has to take place in order to realize reality.

Mudras have been described as powerful practices which awaken kundalini shakti and bestow perfection by regular practice combined with self-control in life. It is stated in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:128):

*Iti mudraa dasha proktaa aadinaathena shambhunaa;
Ekaikaa taasu yaminaam mahaasiddhipradaayinee.*

Thus the ten mudras have been told by Adinath Shambhu. Each one is the bestower of perfection to the self-restrained.

Although ten mudras have been described, it is not necessary that all be practised. They are to be given as an initiation by the guru according to the nature and level of the aspirant. The necessity of self-restraint and purification are repeatedly emphasized by Yogi Swatmarama. Self-restraint is an abiding quality of perfection.

Many practices can be definitely suggested for the awakening of kundalini according to the texts. One is known as maha mudra and another one is known as maha bedha mudra. Maha mudra and maha bheda mudra are intended to awaken sushumna. Then comes the awakening of kundalini. By this time, everything is properly set. The chakras are clear,

the pathways of the nadis are clear, sushumna is clear. Now awakening can take place. A yogi is ready. Now he can handle the experiences. Awakening can be taught by anyone. But what about the experience? People cannot handle emotional experiences. They cannot handle death and birth, love and hatred. Can they handle the higher experiences? If they are prepared, they can.

In the *Mahanirvana Tantra*, in the *Vijnana Bhairava Tantra*, and in other tantric texts it is said that maha mudra and maha bheda mudra are the two mudras which will suffice for a yogi to handle his kundalini or higher spiritual force.

Role of mudras in kriya yoga

Asanas, pranayamas, mudras and bandhas are all aids to the awakening and ascent of the great power of kundalini. There has to be a proper combination of all these in order to implement the scheme. The combination of these four is known as kriya yoga. Not all asanas or pranayamas are helpful in the awakening of kundalini, but quite a few are, and they are combined very well in kriya yoga. It is most important to know that certain combinations of hatha yoga can influence the mind. The combination of hatha yoga practices in kriya yoga make it a more powerful system. An example is vipareeta karani mudra. In kriya yoga a particular concentration and visualization is used in the practice which is omitted in the hatha yogasana technique. The practice is also more powerful when ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra are used.

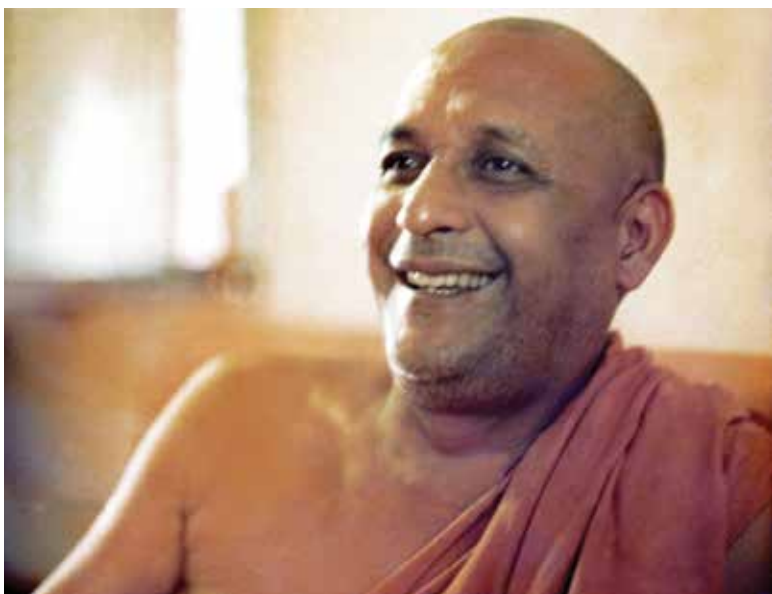
Vipareeta means reversal. *Vipareeta karani mudra* means mudra for reversing something. It also proposes a hypothesis that something must be moving in one direction and that has to be reversed. In fact, we know that the nervous influxes move downwards. The circulatory system also moves downwards. The energies which maintain the heat, etc., in the body, also move downwards. In order to render this negative pressure most efficient, if you assume vipareeta karani mudra, this physical posture, then the negative pressure becomes more efficient, and more active.

Therefore, 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 maintain the body are – one, conserved, two, reversed and directed to a particular higher centre in the brain, then the higher centres begin to develop to the point of elevation.

I can illustrate this by means of an example. Suppose you install a large plant in this room. Suppose that plant requires energy of twenty horse powers. What are you going to do? Because if you supply energy to that plant and at the same time you supply energy to the club, to the restaurant, etc., it would not work. What will happen is that as soon as you switch on the plant some fuse will go off, because the energy is not enough to manage both. So what will we do? We will first disconnect all the lines, for some time only of course. During that period, let us say for half an hour or one hour we will run this plant. Just as this plant requires a lot of energy, in the same way the brain and the mind require maximum energy.

This is what yogis understand and this is what people have failed to understand. The total requirement of energy of the whole body is very little in comparison to the requirement for energy for the brain and the mind. It remains to be established that by walking the distance of twenty to thirty miles you only need a little bit of energy, whereas when you feel anguish, or you get nervous, or you get worried, you utilize a vast amount of energy in one or two minutes. Therefore, it is very necessary that the energy which is flowing throughout the body should be reversed and directed to the brain which is the centre of mind and consciousness.

That is why vipareeta karani mudra is the first preliminary practice in kriya yoga. Because before you practise your kriyas of kriya yoga you should have plenty of energy, you should have plenty of shakti, in the higher centre of the brain which is the seat of meditation and which is the seat of experience.



Maha mudra, maha bedha mudra, are called the life of kriya. It is the prana. Without maha mudra, without maha bedha mudra, kriya yoga is incomplete.

The various practices of kriya yoga regulate the nervous system. They harmonize the pranic forces in the body and equalize the quantity and effects of the positive and negative ions. More than that, they help you to attain a state of peace and tranquillity without beating, kicking and abusing the mind. All this is a result of having induced the flow of certain unused and natural chemicals of the body. Amrit is one of those chemicals and through the practice of khechari mudra, it can be made to flow.

Mudras and siddhis

The perfection of asana and pranayama result in minor siddhis or perfections, such as vitality, good health, mental and emotional equilibrium, and clairaudience. Perfection of mudras and bandhas, however, results in the attainment of major siddhis such as: *anima*, making the body small like

an atom; *laghima*, making the body light; *mahima*, making the body large; *garima*, making the body heavy; *prapti*, the capacity to reach anywhere; *prakamya*, unobstructed fulfilment of desire; *vashitva*, control over all objects and *ishitva*; power to create and destroy. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* Yogi Swatmarama says of mudras (3:8):

*Aadinaathoditam divyamashtaishvaryapradaayakam;
Vallabham sarvasiddhaanaam durlabham marutaamapi.*

Adinath said they are the bestowers of the eight divine powers.

They are held in high esteem by all the siddhas and are difficult for even the gods to attain. The *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali also list these eight siddhis, referring to them as *ashta siddhi*. However, Sage Patanjali emphasizes that siddhis should not be sought and, if they develop, they should virtually be ignored and definitely not exhibited. According to him, they are obstacles on the path to samadhi and can completely hinder one's spiritual evolution. Therefore, although mudras and bandhas can bestow divine powers, they should not be practised for this purpose.

Mudras and maithuna

The sexual act in itself is an animal act. It gives you only momentary bliss which lasts for a few seconds and then gives way to depression and frustration and that is true with everybody. When you practise those basic practices of hatha yoga which are: kumbhaka, vajroli mudra for men, sahajoli kriya for women, shambhavi mudra, awareness of breath in the form of *So Ham*, and a few other practices, before the sexual interaction, it gives you an abiding experience, which represents the awakening of kundalini.

Tantra does not denounce the normal sexual relationships, but it definitely says no ejaculation. For that one has to practise vajroli and the women have to learn sahajoli. When the energy which is produced at the lower centre is

retained, one must then be able to direct it to the higher centre through shambhavi mudra, so that the experience does not become a physical experience, it just remains an experience.

During maithuna the *bindu* or semen is not supposed to be released but if this occurs then it must be drawn up through the generative organ by vajroli. The flow of bindu can be reversed at various stages, for example, through the practices of vipareeta karani mudra and khechari mudra. The semen contains an enormous force in molecular or potential form. It can be compared to the potential contained within an atomic bomb. The seminal fluid discharged in a single emission contains an average of 400 million spermatozoa. Each of these minute sperm possesses enough energy to swim 3,000 times its own length. In relative terms, that is the same amount of energy used up by a six-foot man swimming one and a half miles. That is the proportional amount of the body's vital energy packed into a single sperm cell expelled from the body in a single seminal emission.

When the shedding and ejaculation of semen is habitual, frequent and uncontrolled, that individual is being constantly drained of a quantum of highly potent living essence which the body has no option but to continually replace using a constant supply of metabolic energy. Where has this energy which is lost in the semen come from? From the nutritional viewpoint, it is derived from the dietary nutrients, broken down in digestion, assimilated into the blood and constituted into the nucleic acids and the fatty protein structure of the spermatozoa. Metabolic energy is consumed every step of the way. Constant replacement of discharged semen demands that a diet rich in fats and proteins be consumed. This imposes a heavy working burden on the digestive organs and glands, such as liver and pancreas, as well as on the heart, circulatory and eliminative systems. As a result, the cells and tissues of the bodily systems demand replacement more rapidly, and the higher overall cell turnover leads to greater expenditure of metabolic energy, accelerates the metabolic

rate and elevates the basal body temperature. According to gerontologists, who investigate the ageing and degenerative process, elevation and acceleration of these factors are the major cause of rapid physical degeneration and early death of the human body.

The classical hatha yogic texts state that so long as bindu falls into the 'sun', decay and death are the end result, as it is consumed by the fire during the lifespan. The sun represents rajas in manipura, but rajas also refers to vaginal secretions. Therefore, if the bindu falls into the rajas, the practice of vajroli has not been successful. When bindu falls to manipura, what is actually consumed by the fire are its sattwic, nectarine qualities which enlighten the body and bestow immortality. Below manipura the chakras are concerned with instinctive animal functions and tamasic qualities, and if the bindu is spilled here it becomes a poison, causing suffering and death.

It is not just a matter of control during maithuna which can awaken the higher centres. It is the appropriate combination of the opposite elements and energies. When hydrogen gas and oxygen combine there is an instant explosion. Similarly, in the physical body when the positive and negative elements combine there is an explosion. When the union takes place in the nucleus of mooladhara chakra, kundalini shakti is released.

According to *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, if vajroli is well practised, even in an otherwise free lifestyle, that yogi's attainments in life will be greater, and a greater source of vital and mental power will become available to him. Vajroli, amaroli, sahajoli and maithuna are scientific practices to unite the negative and positive poles of energy within the nucleus of consciousness. A few great yogis and masters had these experiences and consequently instructed their disciples in the oli mudras and other hatha yoga techniques.

In the classical texts of hatha yoga it is repeatedly advocated that the reproductive secretions must be drawn up into the body through the practice of vajroli, so that bindu and rajas, or consciousness and energy, remain within the

body. This enables the sexual impulses to travel up through the central nervous system to the higher centres of the brain. If the potential of the bindu can be exploded, a greater awakening unfolds.

In the practice of vajroli in maithuna, man is the positive pole of energy. He represents the factor of time, while woman is the negative pole and represents space, for these two polarities also exist within each individual. For this reason, *Hatharatnavali* says (2:98), “Only through this can a person become a raja yogi and by no other means.”

Perfection of vajroli is the union within one body of the two opposite forces, prana and mind, which results in the ascent of kundalini. As kundalini travels up to sahasrara through the various energy and psychic centres, specific perfections of mind and body, known as siddhis, become apparent.

The union of the opposite poles to awaken mooladhara is to be accomplished within the body of the yogi by a more subtle process. Mooladhara chakra is the seat of Shakti and sahasrara is the abode of consciousness, Shiva. During maithuna, mooladhara is directly stimulated so that the kundalini shakti can rise to sahasrara. In this stage of vajroli, the union is to be established between consciousness, Shiva, and energy, Shakti, within the yogi's body.

In this context, the terms rajas and bindu are redefined. Whereas in maithuna the rajas of the female practitioner is the manifest Shakti, now Shakti becomes the mind. Shiva remains the male body, as in maithuna, and mooladhara is now awakened by concentrating the mind upon the trigger point of mooladhara in the perineum. Secondly, when mooladhara awakens, *ida nadi*, the mind, and *pingala nadi*, the vitality or *prana*, are drawn together at each successive chakra by vajroli mudra so that the bindu rises through the sushumna nadi in the spinal passage to bindu visarga, manifesting there as eternal nada.

Shiva or pure consciousness now resides in the brain as nada while the total Shakti, energy or rajas, is awakened in

the sun, manipura. The awakening within the adept's body is stabilized at this level. Consciousness remains elevated within the spine of the adept. Mind at ajna is raised to Shiva (pure consciousness) issuing from bindu as nada. Rajas (Shakti) is raised from mooladhara and established in manipura and the bindu has been withdrawn from the two lower chakras.

In the final stage, union of the pure consciousness (Shiva) at bindu and the total energy (Shakti) at manipura is to be accomplished. Accomplishment of the first two stages involves the withdrawal of the bindu from mooladhara and swadhisthana chakras. Shakti, which formerly manifested in these centres as sense gratification, instinctual desire and passion, now manifests through manipura chakra as will, *ichha shakti*, and through anahata chakra as compassion. Will is transcended sensuality, compassion is transcended passion, and enlightenment is transcended mind. Will, universal love and higher awareness become the basic instinct, desire and mind of the adept.

Perfection of vajroli is not accomplished until final union between the Shakti at manipura and the Shiva at bindu is accomplished. Yogi Gorakhnath states clearly that this union is the highest state. This is the final union of yoga, because it means that the yogi's will, intuition, intellect and emotions become conscious manifestations of the cosmic or divine intelligence: such a person is a medium of divine power. Personal desires have been sacrificed in the ascent of kundalini to become the willpower of Shakti. Having surrendered the mind at ajna in that ascent, it has been superseded by the cosmic intelligence (Shiva). Paradoxically, this surrender allows an enormous cosmic power to manifest. The body and mind of the adept have become the possession and expression of Shakti, while individual consciousness has merged with pure consciousness (Shiva). According to Yogi Gorakhnath, it is possible for a sadhaka to accomplish successive stages by ardent practice of vajroli, with guru's blessings and guidance.

Mudra leads to nivritti marga

The bindu is the focal point through which consciousness manifests and expresses itself in all created objects. This also applies to man; it is the direct channel, the lifeline of man. It is through the bindu that man is sustained with both energy and bliss. With most people this energy is poorly directed into disharmonious living in the outside world, into selfish and worldly pursuits expressed through the medium of the manipura chakra. This leads to spiritual death. Man loses contact with his source; he lives blindly. Vipareeta karani mudra and indeed all yoga practices reverse this process, so that human awareness is directed once more through the bindu to the fountainhead of life. That is, awareness increases. This leads to revitalization of one's whole being. It leads to bliss. It leads to wisdom.

This is called the *nivritti marga*, the return to the source; the positions of the sun and the moon are reversed. The normal flow of nectar downwards from the moon to the sun represents the *pravritti marga*, the path of worldly activity. This symbolizes the life of most people. In spiritual life this process has to be reversed so that the path of pravritti is transformed into nivritti. Vipareeta karani mudra symbolizes this process. Vipareeta karani mudra is not only symbolic. It is a method of transmuting energy from grosser to more subtle forms. For this reason, it is included in the kriya yoga sequence.

Vipareeta karani mudra is traditionally linked with sex sublimation for spiritual purposes and it is believed to act extensively on the gonads, sexual glands. This action on the sexual glands is probably brought about by its simultaneous influence on both the pituitary and thyroid glands, which extensively control the operation of the gonads, as well as the other endocrinal glands. The important point to consider is that the ancient yogis had profound respect for this mudra and obviously had good reasons.

4

Types of Mudra



The yoga mudras can be categorized into approximately five groups, which are described as follows:

HASTA MUDRAS

There are large numbers of hand positions called *hasta mudras*. Some of the techniques included in this category are: jnana mudra, chin mudra, yoni mudra, bhairava mudra and hridaya mudra. A few of them have been found to be applicable and helpful for meditational practices. The position of the hands while practising a meditational technique is important. At first it may seem to be an insignificant aspect of meditative practice, yet it has been found by the rishis and yogis throughout the ages and by people today that the wrong position of the hands can severely curtail successful meditative practice. We emphasize the necessity of placing the hands in a suitable position.

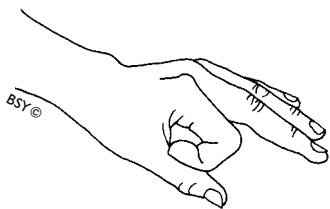
The hand mudras are methods of redirecting the prana inwards; the connections made by the fingers with the hands, and also the contact of the hands with the knees, closes circuits that keep the prana within the body instead of it being lost. Although the pranic body cannot usually be detected due to its subtlety, prana is nevertheless continually flowing within the physical body and some of this prana is discharged from the tips of the fingers.

In tantra there is an important set of meditation mudras practised with the hands. Placing the hands on the knees stimulates a nadi which runs from the knees, up the inside of the thighs and into the perineum. This nadi is known as *gupta* or the hidden nadi. Sensitizing this channel helps to stimulate the energies at mooladhara chakra.

The word *jnana* means 'wisdom' or 'knowledge', and thus jnana mudra is the gesture of intuitive knowledge. Chin, on the other hand, is derived from the word *chit* or *chitta*, which means 'consciousness'. *Chin mudra*, therefore, is the psychic gesture of consciousness.

Jnana mudra (psychic gesture of knowledge)

The Sanskrit word *jnana* means 'intuitive knowledge' and the word *mudra*, for the purpose of this discussion,



means 'attitude'; thus this hand position is known as the 'attitude of intuitive knowledge'. Jnana mudra is often performed with the tip of the thumb and the index finger in touch with each other. In other words, the thumb and the index finger form a circle.

This mudra is not only very comfortable for meditative practices, it also has various symbolic meanings. The following is the most common: the straight fingers, small, ring and middle, represent the three categories of nature. That is, nature is divided into three arbitrary aspects: *tamas* or inertia, laziness, darkness, ignorance, *rajas* or action, passion, movement, and *sattwa* or understanding, purity. These three states have to be transcended one after the other, in order to pass from darkness into light and from ignorance to knowledge. The bent index finger represents the individual manifestation of consciousness, the *jivatma*. The thumb symbolizes the all-pervading consciousness or reality. The individual (index finger) is bowing down to supreme consciousness (thumb) and acknowledging its unsurpassed power. Yet at the same time the index finger and the thumb touch each other, which shows that though they seem separate, in fact the individual being is one with the Supreme. It symbolizes yoga at its culmination.

Chin mudra (psychic gesture of consciousness)



Chin mudra is the symbol of spiritual life. The Sanskrit word *chit* means 'consciousness'; therefore, this hand position can be translated as the 'attitude of consciousness'. In this mudra you bring the thumb and the

index finger together and leave the other fingers free. These three fingers represent the three gunas and *prakriti* or nature: time, space and object. The thumb represents the highest consciousness and the index finger represents the ego. When you maintain chin mudra, it means that you separate the three gunas and place the ego at the feet of the Supreme Being. This mudra can be performed in other ways also. You may join the thumb with the middle finger. This means the self is interacting with the sattwic principle. When you join your individual consciousness with the absolute consciousness, keeping it aloof from the three gunas, that is the symbol of spiritual life.

This mudra is very similar to jnana mudra. The tip of the index finger can be either placed at the root of the thumb or so that the tip of the index finger is in contact with the tip of the thumb. The difference lies in the arrangement of the hands on the knees. During chin mudra the hands are placed so that the palms face upwards with the backs of the hands resting on the knees. When the palms face upward in chin mudra, the chest area is opened up. The practitioner may experience this as a sense of lightness and receptivity, which is absent in the practice of jnana mudra. The unbent fingers should also point forwards away from the body. The symbolic meaning is the same as jnana mudra.

Bhairava mudra

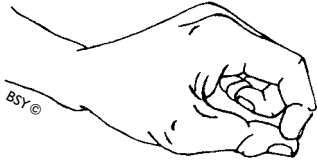
Bhairava mudra is one of the forms of Shiva, said to be fearsome and formidable. The consort of Shiva in this case is called Bhairavi or Shakti . . . that is, the power that manifests this particular aspect of existence. For the purpose of meditative practice, this is a

particularly comfortable mudra. What is easier than placing the hands one on top of the other in the lap, while sitting in



a meditational asana? It is a mudra that people do almost automatically. Bhairava mudra is used in the practice of prana mudra, the invocation of energy.

In bhairava mudra the right hand is placed on top of the left, so that the palms of both hands are facing upward. Both hands rest in the lap. When the left hand is placed on top of the right, the practice is called bhairavi mudra. Bhairavi is the female counterpart of Bhairava. The two hands represent ida and pingala nadis, and the union of the individual with the Supreme consciousness.



Chinmaya mudra (gesture of manifested consciousness)

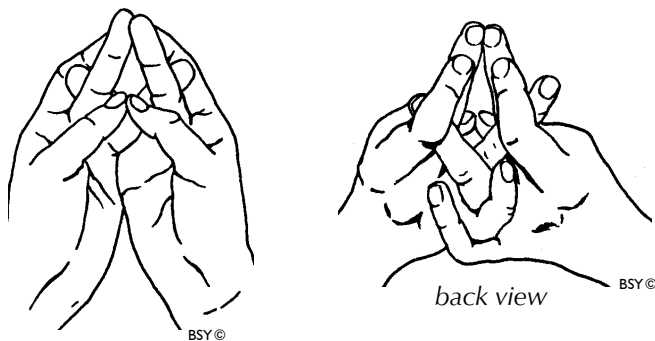
The Sanskrit word *chinmaya* means ‘manifested consciousness’; in other words, the phenomenal world around us that has arisen from the underlying consciousness.

The four folded fingers represent the finite aspects of the world around us. The closed fist shows that the phenomenal world seems to be severely limited, blind and unconscious. The thumb pointing forwards indicates the consciousness and the transcendental aspect of existence that pervades everything. It is often regarded as different to or separate from the material world, yet in fact the manifested universe is really identical and permeated with consciousness. The material world is linked intimately with consciousness. This is indicated by the contact between the index finger and the thumb.

Furthermore, the folded fingers represent the physical, bioplasmic and mental aspects of life. These are not the complete aspects of man, for there is also consciousness. All of these aspects are intimately linked, yet it is the consciousness that is transcendental and capable of contacting infinity and the whole. This is indicated by the thumb, which points away from the finitude symbolized by the four fingers.

Again this mudra symbolizes yoga – the realization that the individual (four fingers) is identical to and connected directly with consciousness. The four fingers can also represent the gradual unfoldment of higher states of awareness. That is, the little, ring and middle fingers represent different facets of the material world, from stones and trees to animals and birds, all becoming increasingly aware. Eventually there is humanity, which appears to be no more than mind and body, yet as far as we know, humans alone can develop sufficient awareness to know the integral identity with consciousness. This again is shown by the joining of the thumb and index finger.

Mahayoni mudra



The word *maha* means ‘*great*’ or perhaps even better in this context ‘*supreme*’. The word *yon*i means ‘womb’, ‘source’ or ‘origin’. Therefore, this mudra can be called the ‘supreme source mudra’.

This is such an important mudra for it symbolizes the unity between the individual and consciousness. It symbolizes the return of the individual to his source, his origin. It is not only a symbol, for this mudra is used to help invoke this realization and experience. It is such a simple looking practice, but it possesses vast power of invocation, if it is done under the correct circumstances.

To perform this mudra you will need to wrap and bend your fingers in a weird combination of directions. Having

secured the mudra as shown in the two figures you can either hold the hands in front of the chest or rest them on your lap. The choice is yours.



Nasagra mudra (nose tip position)

The breath through the nostrils is controlled by the fingers of one hand held in front of the face. This position of the hand is actually called *nasagra* or *nasikagra mudra* or nose mudra. This is one of the numerous hand mudras. Nasagra mudra is very important for pranayama practices.

Shankha mudra



The word *shankha* means 'shell' or 'conch', the type that one can so easily find on a quiet beach. Therefore, the English translation of this mudra is 'conch mudra'. The conch is an integral part of religion, for many of the deities, such as Vishnu, Lakshmi and Shiva are shown blowing or holding this symbolic object. Even in the opening chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna and Arjuna blow their

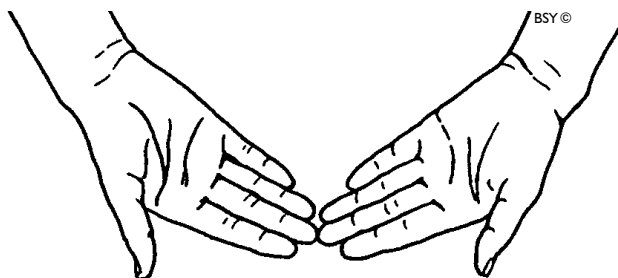
conches (1:14): "Then, Madhava (Krishna) and the son of Pandu (Arjuna) who were seated in their magnificent chariot, yoked with fine white horses, blew their divine conches." In ancient European tradition also, the conch is often utilized. For example, the tritons used the conch as a trumpet.

The most obvious thing that this conch or rather its sound represents is the cosmic, inner sound of each and every individual. This is the sound that links the individual with highest consciousness, like a puppet on a string. This is called

nada, or *shabda*, in Sanskrit. When the conch is blown it makes a penetrating sound like a long *Aum*. This is the reason it is sounded during religious ceremonies.

While sitting for meditational practice the most comfortable method of holding this mudra is to position the hands as shown, then rest them on your lap.

Shoonya mudra



The word *shoonya* means 'voidness' or 'emptiness'. It is used very much by Buddhists to describe the indescribable state of *nirvana* or supreme enlightenment. In this context it does not mean, as so many people think and write, a state of nothingness; it means exactly the opposite: a state of totality, of oneness, devoid of ego, devoid of even the slightest turmoil, craving or dissatisfaction.

Yoni mudra

The word *yon*i means 'womb' or 'source'. Yoni mudra invokes the primal energy inherent in the womb or source of creation. The interlocking of the fingers in this practice creates a complete cross-connection of energies from the right hand into the left and vice versa. As well as



balancing the energies in the body, it helps to balance the activities of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. In yoni mudra you fix forefinger with forefinger, thumb with thumb, and interlock the other three fingers. This mudra is the symbol of shakti.

While performing this mudra it is natural for the elbows to point sideways, helping to open the chest. This mudra makes the body and mind more stable in meditation and develops greater concentration, awareness and internal physical relaxation. It redirects prana back into the body which would otherwise be dispersed through the hands and fingers.



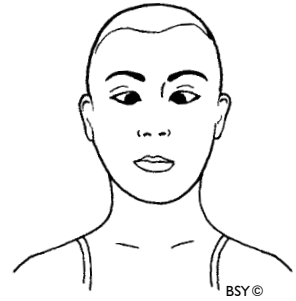
MANA MUDRAS

It is said in yoga that there is a system of ida and pingala which join at the medulla oblongata that is the centre of the pineal gland. In modern physiology we know very well that there are nerves called sympathetic nerves and parasympathetic nerves. Parasympathetic nerves begin from the medulla and sacral centres, and sympathetic from other centres of the spinal cord, and have their centres in the brain. If we are able to have some knowledge about this, we can definitely have meditation without any fighting. The mudras and the bandhas are meant to tackle the problems of kundalini physiologically and also psychologically.

Some of the techniques included in this category are: shambhavi mudra, nasikagra drishti, khechari mudra, kaki mudra, bhujangini mudra, bhoochari mudra, akashi mudra, shanmukhi mudra and unmani mudra.

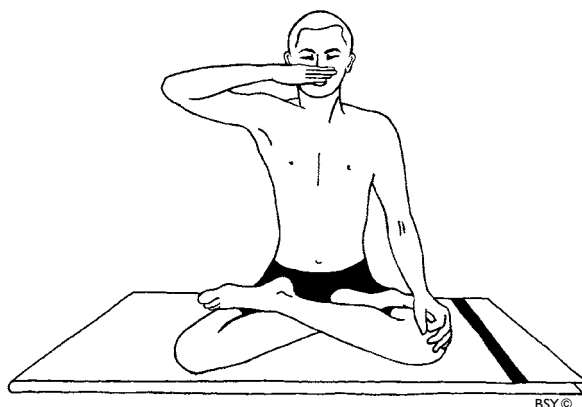
Agochari mudra

The word *agochari* literally means 'unknown', so it is possible to call this mudra the unknown mudra. However, in this context agochari comes from the Sanskrit word *agocharam*, which implies something that is beyond sense cognizance. In other words, this mudra is a mudra that allows one to transcend or go beyond normal awareness.



Agochari mudra is an excellent form of outer trataka. Because most people are habituated to being continuously extroverted during their lives, they find it almost impossible to close the eyes for more than a few seconds, unless they are intending to sleep.

Bhoochari mudra



The word *bhoo* means 'earth', and *chari* means 'moving' or 'dwelling'. As such we are not going to attempt a sensible, literal translation into English. We prefer to call this practice 'nothingness gazing'.

Bhoochari mudra is an allied technique to agochari and shambhavi mudras and all three are excellent forms of trataka. Agochari and shambhavi mudras are often integrated with other yogic techniques or done specifically during one's yogic practice program. Bhoochari mudra on the other hand, though it can be done in your daily program, can easily be practised in everyday life. It can be done without other people realizing that you are practising a yogic technique. It is an excellent, simple, yet effective practice that brings tranquillity and concentration of mind if done for a reasonable period of time with awareness.

This mudra can be practised in any position and almost any place, though it is preferable to practise it in a meditative asana. You can do it while standing, sitting, lying, as you wish. You can do it in the privacy of your own house, at work or at play, whatever is convenient. However, if you practise at home in a sitting pose, it is best to face a blank wall. This ensures that there are no obstructions in your vision which can distract your attention from the practice. It can also be

practised facing an open space such as the sky or a body of still water. This is not essential, only preferable.

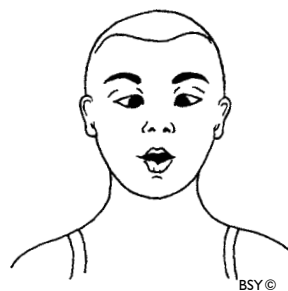
Bhujangini mudra

Bhujangini mudra is also known as vatsara dhauti, one of the shatkarma practices. The art of burping has long been controversial in various societies throughout the world. This art has been lost in modern societies, as it is considered both crude and distasteful. The main reason for doing the practice is to clean the stomach of stale, foul smelling gases. It also helps to eliminate and prevent hyperacidity and especially heartburn. Furthermore, many processes of digestion work far better when there is a liberal supply of oxygen in the stomach. Thus it increases the digestive power of the body by improving the chemical reactions taking place within the stomach. When one considers that a large number of ailments arise from digestive disorders, the necessity of a healthy digestive system becomes obvious. Bhujangini mudra is one method of attaining this end.

Kaki mudra

This practice is really a mudra, but we regard it as a pranayama practice because of its close similarity to sheetali and sheetkari pranayama.

The word *kaki* means 'crow'. This practice is so called because, during inhalation, the mouth is shaped like a crow's beak. It is also said that regular practice of this mudra leads to a disease-free, long life that is often associated with the crow.



Khechari mudra

The name khechari mudra literally means 'the attitude of flying upward'. Khechari mudra is a simple but very important technique, which is utilized in most of the kriya

yoga practices. It involves folding the tongue back and placing it against the upper palate. In the course of time, the tongue becomes elongated and can be inserted into the nasal orifice. Then certain glands which are connected with the cranial passage and bindu are stimulated and, as a result, *amrit* or nectar begins to flow. When amrit is released you experience a special type of 'high' or intoxication.

The word *khe* means 'in the sky' and *chari* means 'one who moves'. Therefore, khechari means 'one who moves through akasha, space'. Khechari mudra is associated with *amrit*, the nectar or elixir of life which is secreted from *bindu*, a point situated at the posterior fontanel, and then collected at vishuddhi chakra. Perfection of this practice enables the yogi to trap the descending drops of amrit at vishuddhi, rejuvenating the entire body. The direct concern of this mudra is to activate the psychic, physiological and endocrine processes responsible for cellular revitalization and longevity.

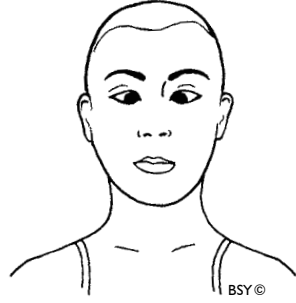
This practice should be done only in close relationship between the guru and chela. It might take you a few years to perfect khechari mudra and to stimulate the flow of amrit, but it is well worth the effort.

If the tongue can reach the eyebrow centre internally, the pineal gland, and also ajna chakra, will be stimulated. There is a close relationship between the pineal gland, vishuddhi chakra and lalana chakra. Bindu visarga, the psychic centre at the top back of the head, is also influenced by khechari mudra. Bindu is said to be the place where the moon resides, and when it is full it sheds its nectar or ambrosial fluid down to permeate the entire body, just as the external moon pours its light over the surface of the earth at the time of the full moon.

By its practice the yogi attains immortality and overcomes death. He has no fear of losing himself in unconsciousness, and the influences of sleep (absence of awareness), hunger and thirst (urges of the senses) will no longer affect him.

Nasikagra mudra

Another name for nasikagra mudra is nasikagra drishti. The word *nasika* means 'nose', *agra* means 'tip' and *drishti* means 'gazing'. This is an exact description of the technique, namely 'nose tip gazing'. It is also known as agochari mudra. Nasikagra mudra is an excellent form of trataka.



At first nasikagra mudra will seem a little strange and difficult, for it requires a fixed gaze at the nose tip. The eyes have to assume a position to which they are normally unaccustomed. With practice, however, the eye muscles adapt themselves to their new role, strengthening the eyes and in turn improving the eyesight. If practised for some time with awareness, nose tip gazing can induce high states of concentration and tranquillity of mind. Those who concentrate on the tip of the nose for a particular time develop the ability to smell psychic fragrances. Nasikagra mudra is a practice of hatha yoga which directly awakens the kundalini shakti in mooladhara.

Naumukhi mudra

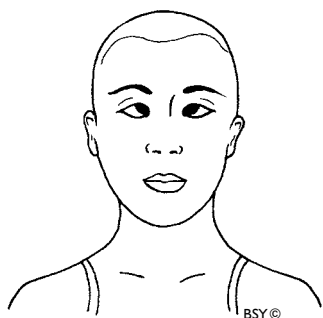
In the human body there are nine openings or gates through which one perceives all the sense experiences of the outside world. These are: the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, the mouth, the anus and the sexual organ. The Sanskrit word *nau* means 'nine' and *mukhi* means 'gates'. Through this mudra you plug all these nine gates. In naumukhi mudra you plug the seven gates and the urinary and excretory passages by the practice of moola bandha and vajroli kriya. A more widely used name, however, is 'the closing of the nine gates'.

When all the nine gates are plugged, you can awaken the kundalini which resides in mooladhara and moves upwards through sushumna to the higher centres in the brain.



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

Shambhavi mudra



Shambhavi is the name of the wife or consort of Shambhu or Shiva. She has many other names, such as Parvati, Shakti, all of which have special significance in Indian mythology. It is believed that Shambhu taught Shambhavi the practice of shambhavi mudra and urged her to practise it diligently if she wanted higher awareness. It is

said that the practice of shambhavi mudra will stir Shambhu (superconsciousness) and make him appear before you. This infers that by practising shambhavi mudra for a sufficiently long period of time, one can transcend the fetters of the individual ego. Gradually there is withdrawal of the

individual awareness. As the individual awareness withdraws, the higher, expanded awareness takes its place. In this way a significance and essence is seen behind everything, and it is realized that one's real nature is far more than can normally be conceived.

Shambhavi mudra is a tantric practice. Shambhu refers to Lord Shiva, 'the one born of peace', and *bhava* is 'divine emotion', or the elevation of human emotion into intense spiritual longing. Shambhavi is the energy principle of Shambhu. The mudra instils peace. The practice is also known as *bhrumadhya drishti*. The word *bhrumadhya* means 'eyebrow centre', and *drishti* means 'gazing'. It is an excellent method of developing sensitivity to the *bhrumadhya*.

Shambhavi mudra may be performed externally with the eyes open or internally with closed eyes. When the eyes are open, one tries to look at the mid-eyebrow centre. With the eyes closed, one concentrates on the mid-eyebrow centre. When shambhavi mudra becomes effective there is light within. Concentration is on that point of light.

Shambhavi mudra is very similar to agochari mudra. The main difference is that the eyes are focused on the eyebrow centre instead of the nose tip. It gives fundamentally the same benefits and the two mudras are equally good. They are both an integral part of kriya yoga and should therefore be mastered to a reasonable level of proficiency before starting to learn and practise kriya yoga.

Though this technique is called a mudra, it is also a meditative practice in its own right. As such the practitioner can perform shambhavi mudra (or agochari mudra) for a prolonged period of time to gain the same benefits and experiences as other meditational techniques. When you practise shambhavi mudra then prana is brought up, or rather sucked up by force in the frontal area of the brain.

Shambhavi mudra is centralizing the pupils of the eyes between the two eyebrows. It awakens the ajna chakra. Ajna chakra is the terminating point of ida, pingala and sushumna, which means that ajna chakra is the confluence

of these three forces. When you practise shambhavi mudra, you bring about a union of these forces.

Of course, the technique of shambhavi mudra is to be perfected gradually. First, if you find it difficult, practise *trataka*. Then concentrate on the middle of the eyebrow centre and gradually increase the period of shambhavi mudra. When you practise shambhavi mudra you can visualize a spot of light in the middle of the eyebrows. When you visualize this spot of light, the heartbeat becomes very slow. In fact, it has been found that during the practice of shambhavi mudra, the body is under total relaxation. Many scientific experiments have been conducted on this and all the studies prove that when you practise shambhavi mudra, the body becomes free from tension.

In order to operate ajna chakra, or in order to do anything with ajna chakra, there is no other way except to practise shambhavi mudra. Shambhavi mudra is a means of attaining higher awareness and inducing higher consciousness within the practitioner.

Nabha means sky. Nabho mudra is to direct the tongue towards the palate while looking at the space between the eyebrows. Nabho mudra is perfect when you achieve shambhavi and twist the tongue backwards and touch the palate.

Shanmukhi mudra

The word shanmukhi is comprised of two roots: *shat* means 'six' and *mukhi* means 'gates' or 'faces'. Shanmukhi mudra involves redirecting the awareness inside by closing the six doors of outer perception: the two eyes, the two ears, the nose and the mouth. This practice is also known as *baddha yoni asana*, the locked source pose; *devi mudra*, attitude of the great goddess; *parangmukhi mudra*, the gesture of inner focusing; *sambhava mudra*, the gesture of equipoise and *yonimudra*, attitude of the source.

Shanmukhi mudra is a more advanced practice than bhramari. It is slightly more difficult as it is not preceded by a vocalized humming sound, and it is combined with retention



of the breath. Shanmukhi mudra is suitable for those who have a reasonably harmonized mind and are not beset by distractions.

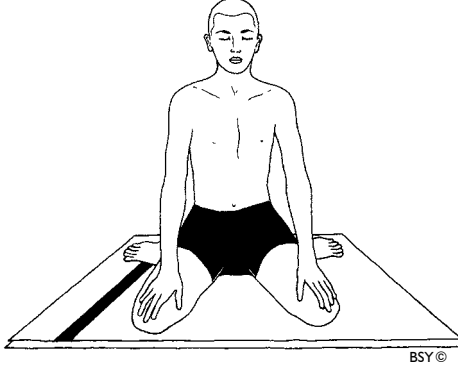
Unmani mudra

The word *unmani* literally means ‘no mind’, ‘no thinking’. Therefore, *unmani mudra* can be called ‘the attitude of thoughtlessness’ or ‘the attitude of meditation’. The state of unmani arises during meditation. Though one may be acting in the world there is a state of thoughtlessness. This is called *unmani avastha* or the state of no thought, a state where all attachment to the world of objects is dispelled. In this state, the awareness functions without the hindrance of conflicting thoughts and analysis. One is conscious and the mind functions, but it seems to be nowhere. In this state, the eyes perceive, but one does not see.

Unmani mudra is an excellent practice for developing awareness of the chakras in the spine, from bindu down to mooladhara. It is also an integral part of many of the kriya yoga practices (nada, pawan and shabda sanchalana, maha mudra and maha bheda mudra), and therefore it should be mastered before attempting to learn and practise these techniques.

KAYA MUDRAS

Manduki mudra



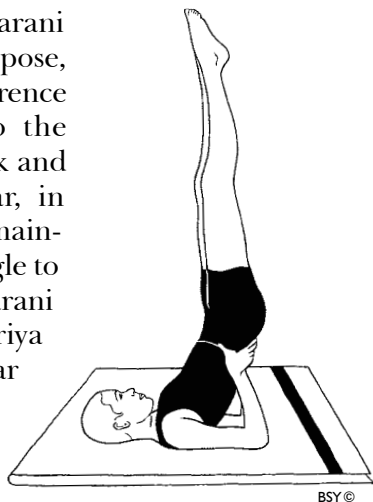
The word *manduki* means ‘frog’ and *mudra* means ‘psychic attitude’. This kriya is therefore known as ‘the frog psychic attitude’. This mudra is named *manduki mudra* as it does resemble the sitting position of a frog. This practice is also widely called *manduki kriya*.

In Sanskrit, nose tip gazing is called *nasikagra drishti* or *agochari mudra*. *Manduki mudra* is an advanced variation of *nasikagra drishti*, nose tip gazing: while sitting in *manduki asana* one performs *nasikagra drishti*.

Vipareeta karani mudra

In Sanskrit *vipareeta* means ‘inverted’, *karani* means ‘one who does’, and *mudra* is usually interpreted as a gesture that symbolizes by means of the body, an inner feeling or attitude. Hence, it is called the inverted psychic attitude. English names of the asana, though not direct translations of the Sanskrit name, include: the half-shoulder stand pose, the inverted gesture, and the inverted pose. Though its name signifies that it is a mudra, *vipareeta karani* is generally classified as an asana by present-day authorities, possibly due to its close resemblance to *sarvangasana*. Classical hatha yoga texts attach great importance to this mudra.

The practice of vipareeta karani is similar to the shoulder stand pose, *sarvangasana*. The major difference is the angle of the back to the floor. In *sarvangasana* the back and legs should be perpendicular, in *vipareeta karani* the back is maintained at a forty-five-degree angle to the floor and legs. *Vipareeta karani mudra* is the first practice in *kriya yoga*. In *kriya yoga* a particular concentration and visualization is used in the practice, which is omitted in the *hatha yoga* technique.



Vipareeta karani means reversing the process of the nectar. This nectar again is responsible for the lower and gross experience. The sensual experiences related to pain and happiness, experiences related to sexual interaction and the bliss is a lower experience on account of the intermingling of this fluid in the body. But when it is reversed and not allowed to be mixed in the lower areas of the body, then the experience never takes place at a lower level.

Your car has a reverse gear, hasn't it? What happens when you drive in reverse gear? The car goes back to the same point from which it has come. If you drive your car out of the garage and then you put it in reverse gear, it will go back into the garage, not forward to burn up its petrol on the road. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and in tantric texts, there is a wonderful statement regarding this reverse action: "From the moon the nectar emanates. When the sun consumes the nectar, the yogi becomes old. His body decays and he dies. Therefore, by constant practice, the yogi should try to reverse the process. The nectar which is flowing towards the sun should be reversed and sent back to the higher centres." What will happen then? The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* says further: "When you are able to reverse the flow of amrit or nectar, it will not

be consumed by the sun. It will be assimilated by your pure body,” that has been purified by hatha yoga, that has been purified by pranayama and that has been purified by a pure diet.

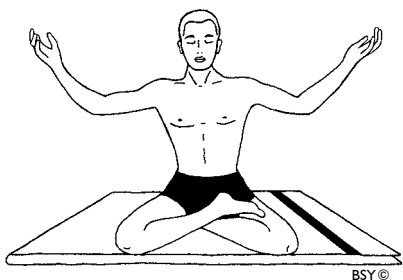
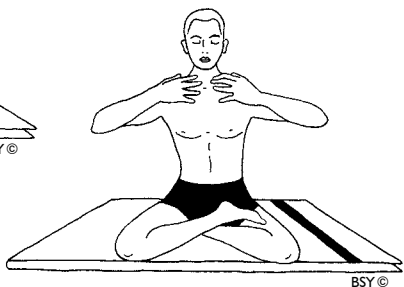
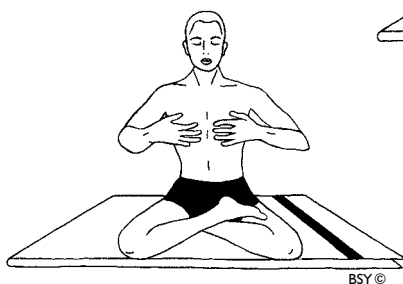
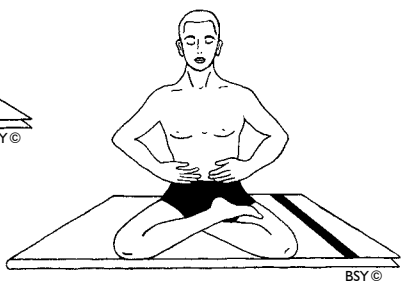
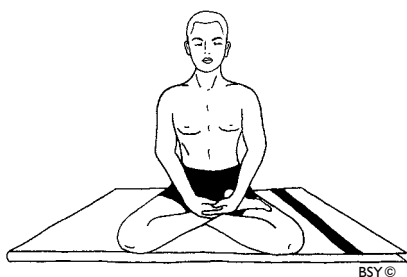
First it comes down to vishuddhi. In vishuddhi chakra it is refined. Then the body assimilates it. It comes down to manipura chakra. Manipura chakra is considered to be the centre of the sun or fire. When this fluid reaches manipura chakra, the heat or fire of manipura chakra dries this fluid. Therefore, in yoga it is said that you will have to reverse the process of flow of this fluid. In vipareeta karani mudra, by conscious force this fluid is sent back to vishuddhi chakra.

When this fluid begins to flow into the body and the body assimilates it, then you develop a quality of feeling. Gradually, the senses, the sense impressions, the sense experiences are influenced. Let me give you an example. Not to recommend it but to give an example. When you take ganja, bhang or hashish, what happens? Consciousness alters. This change which is taking place in the realm of consciousness is due to the chemical effect which may be good or which may be bad. Some people think it is bad. Some think no, it is necessary.

When this nectar has been assimilated by the body, as a result of this you awaken or you experience a high mental state. Sometimes you say, I am very high today. Many people take hashish, then they feel very high, other people take LSD, they go very high. They go so high that they are afraid what may happen if they do not come down. But of course the people who do take hashish they do go a bit high. I am not asking you to take hashish, I am just explaining what I mean when the nectar flows backwards and is not consumed by the sun and, if it is brought back to the higher centres in the brain, then you begin to feel a sort of quietness.

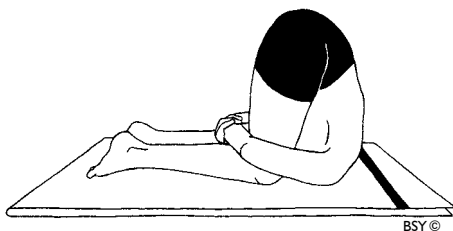
Prana mudra (gesture of invocation of energy)

Prana is the vital energy that sustains not only the individual body, but also creation at every level. Prana exists in sentient beings as the energy that drives every action, voluntary and



involuntary, every thought, every level of the mind and body. In this practice, with the help of the breath and hand gestures, the quantum of prana in the body is enhanced, to the point that it radiates out to the whole environment, in an invocation of peace. Therefore, this practice is also known as *shanti mudra*, the peace mudra.

Pashinee mudra



The word *pash* means ‘noose’ and *pashinee* means, ‘bound in a noose’, which reflects the physical form of the mudra. Pashinee mudra is a variation of *halasana*, the plough pose. In pashinee mudra, as well as bringing about general benefits of an inverted posture, the neck muscles are given a powerful stretch, the cervical vertebrae loosened, the associated nerves toned and the thyroid and the parathyroid glands in the throat are squeezed and massaged. It brings about balance and tranquillity to the nervous system and induces *pratyahara*, sensory withdrawal.

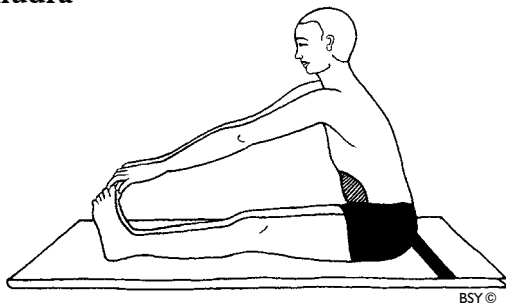
Swara yoga mudra

An important mudra which yogis practise before meditation in order to balance the flow of breath is swara yoga mudra. Often during meditation, the mind is out of gear and you don’t know the reason why. This is usually due to an imbalance in the flow of the breath. When the right nostril is flowing the mind plays games. This is because the right nostril is connected with the left hemisphere of the brain, which is the centre of *rajoguna*, dynamism. Sometimes we feel very relaxed and composed as though we had taken a tranquillizer. The mind refuses to act and goes to sleep. This is not a good condition either. It occurs when the left nostril is flowing. The left nostril is connected with the right hemisphere of the brain, which is the centre of *tamoguna*, inertia.

When both nostrils are flowing, the right and left hemispheres of the brain are harmonized and begin to function in a greater dimension. In this way meditation can

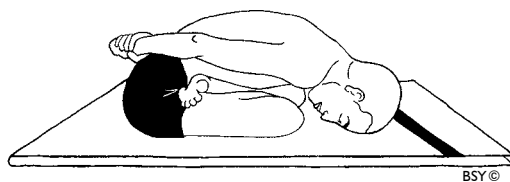
be accomplished. This helps in creating a smooth balance between the ida and pingala energy systems. When both nostrils flow equally, the energy enters into sushumna nadi. Then meditation becomes a smooth affair and you have less problems with yourself.

Tadagi mudra



The word *tadagi* literally means ‘water pot’, which resembles the shape of an extended abdomen. This mudra stimulates manipura chakra, the centre of energy distribution, and raises the levels of prana generally.

Yoga mudra



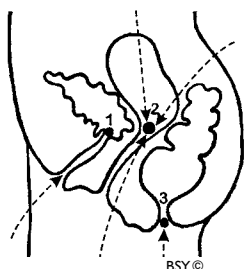
The Sanskrit word *yoga* means ‘union’ and a *mudra* is a mental or physical expression of an inner feeling or attitude. It is not only an expression of a feeling, but it is also a means, if properly used, of invoking inner power and realization. This asana is so called as it is said to unite the practitioner with his inner being. In English this asana is usually called the ‘symbol of yoga’ or the ‘psychic union pose’. These are inadequate translations, for the two words ‘yoga mudrasana’

convey far more and have vast implications. Yoga mudra is so called because it unites the individual consciousness with the Supreme Consciousness, or the outer nature with the inner nature.

ADHARA/PERINEAL MUDRAS

What is the difference between moola bandha, vajroli/sahajoli mudra and ashwini mudra? Often there is confusion between the three practices of moola bandha (used for awakening mooladhara chakra) and vajroli/sahajoli mudra and ashwini mudra (both used for awakening swadhisthana chakra). The following diagrams for both male and female locations will help to clarify the difference in the points of contraction.

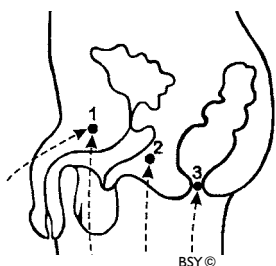
Diagram 1 – for the female



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).

Ashwini mudra

The word *ashwini* means 'horse' and in this context the word *mudra* means 'attitude'. Therefore, this practice can be literally translated as 'the attitude of the horse'. It does not take much imagination to understand the reason for the name; if anyone has ever watched the anus of a horse, he will see that the horse very often does the yogic practice of ashwini mudra. That is, the horse rhythmically contracts and relaxes the anal muscles. Ashwini mudra prevents the escape of pranic energy and redirects it upward for spiritual purposes.

Vajroli mudra

The word vajroli is derived from the word *vajra* which has various meanings and implications. It is the weapon of Lord Indra and also means 'mighty one'. Vajra in this context refers to vajra nadi, which governs the urogenital system. It is the second innermost layer of sushumna nadi. Vajra nadi is the energy flow within the spine which governs the sexual systems of the body. This pathway is directly connected with the unleashing of powerful psychic forces. In mundane life it is responsible for the sexual behaviour, or libido. Vajroli is therefore the force which moves upward with the power of lightning, and sahajoli is the psychic attitude of spontaneous arousing. In the context of vajroli mudra, *vajra* can be regarded as the name of a nerve which connects the sexual organs with the brain. In tantric sadhana this energy is not suppressed, it is awakened and redirected. Vajroli, sahajoli and amaroli are mudras which specifically sublimate sexual energy into *ojas*, vitality, and kundalini shakti.

There are two types of vajroli – one is concerned with maithuna (sexual intercourse under prescribed conditions) and the other is a simple raja yoga form in which the urethra is contracted upward. It is the latter that is commonly taught and that is used in kriya yoga. The full practice involves years of preparation which commences with the simple contraction of the urogenital muscles and later the sucking

up of liquids. Through this practice of vajroli, the sexual energy, hormones and secretions are reassimilated into the body. Its outcome is the union of the negative and positive poles of energy within one's body. It is also important that vajroli mudra be correctly performed, for this too heightens the sensations experienced during this practice. When vajroli mudra is perfected, the contraction of vajra nadi can be achieved without contracting the anal sphincter muscle. The sensation is like an electric current running the full length of vajra nadi to the brain.

Vajroli mudra is an important practice today in the Kali Yuga when the ability and need to express oneself in the material and sensual world is predominating. There is a need to act in the external world and simultaneously develop inner awareness. The purpose of life should be to attain a deeper and more fulfilling experience beyond the empirical sensory experience alone.

Sahajoli mudra

Sahaj means 'spontaneous'. Sahajoli is an important part of vajroli, just as jalandhara is part and parcel of uddiyana. In tantra, vajroli is done by men and the same practice when done by a woman is sahajoli: just as a man should practise gradual contractions of the urogenital muscles so should the woman. The entire vaginal passage has to be contracted. Sahajoli is performed in siddha yoni asana. Once siddha yoni asana is perfected, the practice of sahajoli should be developed gradually.

LOCK MUDRAS (BANDHAS)

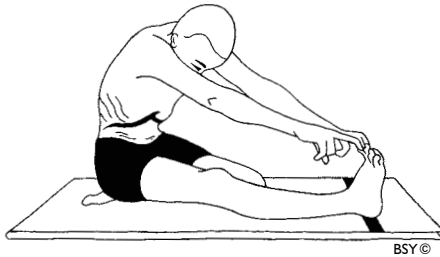


Maha mudra

The Sanskrit word *maha* means ‘great’ and *mudra* means ‘psychic attitude’. In English this kriya can be called the ‘great psychic attitude’. There are two methods, one of which should be chosen. Maha mudra is the first of two closely related kriyas. The second is called maha bheda mudra. Together they create and release a lot of energy in the physical, pranic and mental bodies.

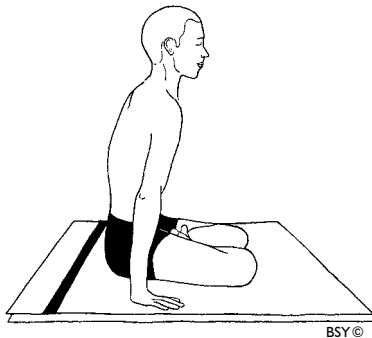
Maha mudra and maha bheda mudra act as stepping-stones which simultaneously supercharge the whole system and concentrate the mind. They intensify awareness.

Maha bheda mudra



The Sanskrit word *maha* means 'great'; *bheda* means 'piercing' and *mudra* means 'psychic attitude'. This kriya is therefore called 'the great piercing psychic attitude'. It supplements and directly follows maha mudra. Together they supercharge the whole mind-body.

Maha vedha mudra



Maha vedha mudra means 'the great piercing attitude'. The purpose of maha vedha mudra is to pierce mooladhara chakra and channel the kundalini energy upwards by gently beating the buttocks on the floor. The technique belongs to hatha yoga and is a preparatory technique for the kriya yoga practice of *tadan kriya*, 'the beating action'. It should not be confused with the kriya yoga practice of maha bheda mudra which is similar to maha mudra.

5

General Guidelines, Preparation and Precautions



There are many mudras and bandhas. Most of the mudras and bandhas are very powerful practices; they are intended to be so, for power is necessary for progress. They should, therefore, be learned very gradually and carefully so that they are not able to harm the body or mind of the practitioner. If any difficulty is experienced while attempting to practise the mudras or bandhas, or if any minor physical imbalance is noticed after practice has been initiated, then you should stop the practice and seek expert guidance.

Posture for seated mudras

Siddhasana is a purely meditative posture. It is designed to channel the prana or vital energy directly to ajna chakra. The classical hatha yoga texts describe siddhasana with shambhavi mudra and the chin on the chest. Shambhavi mudra stimulates ajna chakra so that the pranic impulses coming up from the lower centres can be received. When the chin is placed on the chest, simplified forms of jalandhara bandha and ujjayi pranayama are automatically performed. This adjusts the heart rate, blood pressure and brainwave pattern.

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. Prolonged periods in siddhasana result in noticeable tingling sensations in the mooladhara region which may last for ten to fifteen minutes. This is caused by a reduction in the blood supply to the area and by a rebalancing of the pranic flow in the lower chakras. This posture redirects blood circulation to the lower spine and abdominal area.

When one first starts to practise meditation other postures can be used, but in the final stages, when the external consciousness drops and inner consciousness begins to pervade, siddhasana is the best posture as it enables one to handle the changes that take place in the body during deep meditation. In the *Hatharatnavali* it is written (3:28):

*Naasanam siddhasadrisham kumbhakam kevalopamah.
Na khecharyaa samaa mudraa na naadasadrisho layah.*

There is no asana like siddha, and no kumbhaka like kevala; there is no mudra like khechari, and no laya like nada.

Diet

All the practices of hatha yoga will release an internal heat in the course of time. Swami Muktananda of Ganeshpuri describes how, as a result of asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha and meditation, a type of fire was liberated in his body. No matter what he did to cool himself, still his body burnt internally. Consequently, his body became emaciated. He had to adjust his diet, taking boiled rice water rather than solid food. This reiterates that yoga practices are very powerful and the sadhaka must be guided by a guru.

There are a number of basic rules which have to be followed when practising any of the hatha yoga techniques. It is therefore important to learn under expert guidance. The practices have a specific effect on the body and mind which has to be watched by the person who is guiding you.

Time of practice

According to the yoga shastras, the twenty-four hours of a day are divided into sixteen parts, each of ninety minutes, called *ghariya*; or eight periods of three hours, called *yama*. In each period the flow of energy throughout the body varies and different organs function more actively. Also, as the brain hemispheres alternate their functioning every sixty to ninety minutes, one's mode of thinking also changes. 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.

It is obviously impossible for the average person to practise so frequently, and it is not really recommended. It is quite sufficient to practise in the morning and again in

the evening if time allows. Therefore, when the yoga texts are read they must be viewed in a practical manner. The techniques can be practised according to the instructions given, but which techniques to do and how much they should be practised has to be decided upon according to one's physical and mental capacity, and the amount of time that can be devoted to sadhana. Of course, it is preferable if one has a guru to make the decisions, and this is always advised by the texts themselves.

Breath and mudra

In many of the kriyas, such as maha mudra and maha bheda mudra, most people will initially find difficulty in completing a full round in one respiration cycle without strain or suffocation. In the beginning, it may be necessary to break in the middle of each round, or to take a short rest at the end of each round and take a few normal breaths. As you develop the capacity to hold the breath for longer periods, and to control inhalation and exhalation, this concession may be disregarded. Do not hold your breath for longer than is comfortable.

In many of the kriyas, such as maha mudra, maha bheda mudra, naumukhi and shakti chalini, where the breath is held inside for prolonged periods, there is a tendency for the lungs to lock. The best way to overcome this problem and release the lungs is to breathe in slightly before breathing out. This will make the kriyas much easier to do.

GUIDELINES FOR SPECIFIC MUDRAS

Hasta mudras

Jnana and chin mudras are often performed with the tip of the thumb and index finger touching and forming a circle. Beginners may find this variation less secure for prolonged periods of meditation, as the thumb and index finger tend to separate more easily when body awareness is lost. Otherwise, this variation is as effective as the basic position.



The effect of chin or jnana mudras is very subtle and it requires great sensitivity on the part of the practitioner to perceive the change in consciousness established. With practice, however, the mind becomes conditioned to the mudra and when it is adopted, the signal to enter a meditative state is transmitted.

Mana mudras

Akashi mudra

It is recommended that the practitioner be completely familiar with the practices of ujjayi, khechari and shambhavi before commencing akashi mudra. At first ujjayi pranayama may irritate the throat when performed with the head back. However, with practice, it will become more comfortable. As soon as faintness is felt, the practice must be stopped. This technique is to be practised slowly, under the guidance of a competent teacher. People suffering from high blood pressure, vertigo, brain disorders or epilepsy should not practise akashi mudra.

Bhoochari mudra

It may be performed as a preparation for meditation and as a meditation technique in its own right. It belongs to a group of techniques featuring gazing at an external focal point as a means to achieve dharana or the meditative state of relaxed concentration. Whilst practising bhoochari mudra one is fully engrossed in gazing at a point of nothingness. Simultaneously, one should be aware of any thought processes. Awareness is of space only; there should be no registration of outer events in the field of conscious perception.

At first this simple practice is reasonably difficult for there are so many outer distractions that continually lure one's attention in other directions. As with every other yoga technique it is a matter of practice makes perfect. Practise bhoochari mudra when you find that you have nothing to occupy your attention for some time. Instead of reading the newspaper try bhoochari mudra – it is far more restful.

Kaki mudra

In kaki mudra shape your mouth like a crow's beak and inhale slowly and gradually. Exhale through the nose, your awareness must simultaneously be fixed on the nose tip. Practitioners should be thoroughly familiar with nasikagra drishti prior to commencing this technique.

The eyes must be kept open throughout the practice and nasikagra drishti should be continuous. If the eyes become tired, relax them for as long as necessary before recommencing the practice. Be aware of the flow and the sound of the breath, as well as the mechanics of the practice.

One of the fundamental laws of yogic practice, and breathing in general, is that one should inhale through the nose if possible. Sheetalī, sheetkari and kaki mudra are unique in that they break this law – inhalation is through the mouth instead of the nose. This infringement is acceptable providing you:

- Do not practise in a dirty, polluted atmosphere.

- Do not practise in excessively cold weather. The nose heats up and cleans inhaled air before entering the delicate lungs. If you breathe through the mouth then this air conditioning is bypassed. The induction of freezing and/or dirty air directly into the lungs for prolonged periods may cause harm. Therefore, do not practise sheetali, sheetkari or kaki mudra unless you live in reasonably clean, mild surroundings.

Khechari mudra

The simple form of khechari mudra is also known as nabho mudra. To practise this form the tongue is simply rolled backwards so that the lower surface touches the soft upper palate. The tip is brought as far back as possible and kept there for as long as possible, from half a minute to ten or twenty minutes. It is suitable for most people, although it still takes a long time to perfect.

Once the tongue has been sufficiently elongated, it has to be inserted into the nasal cavity at the back of the throat. This is not an easy process and at first it is necessary to push the tongue into position with the fingers. When the tongue is strengthened, it can be pushed right into the back of the nasal cavity by itself, and when prana is awakened in the body, the tongue will move into that position spontaneously.

Khechari mudra is practised in a hatha yoga manner and also in the tantric way. The hatha yogic people cut the root of the tongue and elongate it until the tongue becomes so flexible and elastic that it enters into the upper part of the epiglottis. That is the area between the upper nasal point down to the throat, it is something like a hollow passage. Through this elongated elastic tongue, they stimulate the glands that are situated in that area. These glands indirectly send the messages to the higher centres in the brain and stimulate this nectarine fluid and then it begins to flow.

Khechari mudra is practised in another way also, but not everybody should do it. Those who use this method take a crystal piece and rub it against the root of the tongue every

day for months together. It is not cutting; it is rubbing. It is just creating friction. After that, they apply a little turmeric powder. After a few months they take fresh cow's butter, place it on the tongue and rub the tongue; the tongue is milked just as a cow is milked. It's massaging the tongue. When the tongue is milked, it gets elongated and becomes even longer than a dog's or tiger's tongue. Then the tongue is able to touch the middle of the forehead. Now the tongue is turned inside and inserted into the epiglottis, the nasal passage. It is blocked or corked with the tongue and the breath is also stopped. This is the khechhari mudra practised by hatha yogis and through this mudra they even attain jada samadhi. They can remain in this samadhi for many days, even underground. Through khechhari mudra they suspend their breathing process and the pumping of the heart. This form of khechhari mudra is a very difficult practice and should be attempted only at a very early age.

There is another form of khechhari mudra in which the root of the tongue is slowly rubbed by friction and cut. When the simple form, nabho mudra, is done, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, the tongue becomes flexible and elongated. Once it can enter into the epiglottis, the same result can be achieved as with the actual khechhari.

Neti is an important practice for those who want to practise khechhari mudra.

Precautions: Khechhari revitalizes the nectar glands, which are related to vishuddhi chakra. If khechhari is done during physical action, a bitter secretion may be tasted in the upper passage of the nose. This can be harmful.

When you practise khechhari mudra then you can also create ambrosia. If your body is pure, has no toxic matter and the metabolism is ideal, then after some time you will experience a sweet taste in your saliva. If the body is impure, there is a lot of toxic matter in it and the metabolism is not functioning properly, then you will get a bitter taste. If the tip of the tongue constantly touches the roof of the nasopharyngeal cavity there is a constant flow of the stream









of the juice which tastes saltish, pungent, chilly, like milk, honey or like ghee. Therefore, those who practise it give up salt and meat because animal protein and salt both make the arteries and the system hard.

Nasikagra mudra

Sitting either in siddhasana or siddha yoni asana, one gazes steadily at the tip of the nose. The eyes become slightly convergent and the two sides of the nose are seen. Concentration should be centred right in the middle. At first the vision will be unsteady and the eyes will tire quickly. With a little practice each day the eyes become accustomed. While gazing at the nose tip, concentration is on the movement of breath in the nostrils so that it can be determined which nostril the breath is flowing through. When both nostrils are open, sushumna is flowing, and the practice is taking effect. After five to ten minutes one closes the eyes and looks into the dark space in front of the closed eyes, the *chidakasha*. When a light is seen in the darkness, one concentrates on it: that is the light which can completely absorb the consciousness.

The technique of nasikagra mudra can be practised at any time as it needs no preparation. This mudra can even be practised while sitting on a bus or a train. The ideal times for its practice are early in the morning and late at night. Just before sleep is an especially good time, as the calmness of mind it induces prepares one for deep, restful sleep.

Naumukhi mudra

The sitting position for naumukhi mudra is siddhasana for men, and siddha yoni asana for women. These two asanas are most suitable since they apply a constant pressure at the mooladhara chakra trigger point in the area of the perineum. If you cannot sit in one of the above asanas you can choose any other comfortable sitting pose as an alternative. If necessary, you can use a cushion.

Shambhavi mudra

In order to master shambhavi mudra, practise trataka. Trataka is not merely gazing at one point, although in the beginning the eyes must be kept fixed on something. Gradually the eyes become concentrated at the eyebrow centre and shambhavi mudra develops, bringing ida, pingala and sushumna into union and triggering the flow of kundalini energy.

Direct your eyes towards the middle of the eyebrows and meditate on your own self. This is known as shambhavi mudra. It may produce profound experiences and should only be performed under the guidance of a competent teacher.

Kaya mudras

Manduki mudra

Manduki mudra is an advanced variation of nasikagra drishti. This kriya cannot be practised in darkness; it has to be practised in mild light, so that one can see the end of the nose. Physical awareness is at the nose tip; spiritual awareness is at mooladhara chakra.

Prana mudra

The awareness should move in a smooth and continuous flow from mooladhara to sahasrara and back to mooladhara, in coordination with the breath and the movement of the hands. When the practice has been perfected, the breath can be visualized as a stream of white light ascending and descending within sushumna nadi.

Swara yoga mudra

If both nostrils are not flowing freely the position of the hands should be as follows. Place the right hand under the left armpit and the left hand under the right armpit and press. The arms should be relaxed. This is called swara yoga mudra. At the time of meditation both nostrils must flow freely. If they do not, then one part of the brain remains inactive and you cannot meditate properly. When both the

nostrils flow freely, both hemispheres of the brain are equally active and meditation can be accomplished without any difficulty.

Unmani mudra

Physically, the mudra is very easy to perform. Sitting in any comfortable meditation asana with the eyes fully open, one inhales slowly and deeply. Whilst holding the breath inside, the awareness is focused at bindu for a few seconds.

Exhaling, the awareness descends through the chakras – ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana to mooladhara – the eyes should slowly close. Though the eyes remain open, your attention should be on the chakras and the descending awarohan psychic passage . . . your eyes are open, but you should be looking inside.

The eyes can be completely closed or slightly open when your awareness reaches mooladhara chakra. Choose that which you like best through experience. When you do this mudra do not try too hard; let it happen. The practice is done more mentally than physically; that is, though the eyelids are slowly closed, the important thing is to feel the process mentally. Though the eyes are open they should not perceive anything outside. This is unmani mudra.

Vipareeta karani mudra

Vipareeta karani mudra resembles sarvangasana, the shoulder stand. Lie down flat and first assume sarvangasana. Then gradually move your hands to your hips and slowly bring your body to a slanted position, so that the trunk is in an inclined position and the legs are vertical. In this position practise ujjayi pranayama. With the help of ujjayi pranayama, you create a process of reversal in the spinal column. By the practice of vipareeta karani mudra, the bindu is reversed. That means the process of assimilation of hormones in the lower part of the body is reversed.

Vipareeta karani mudra should be done daily at a consistent time, preferably early in the morning. The position



should only be held for a few seconds in the beginning or until discomfort arises. Over the period of a few months the duration of practice can slowly be increased. When pressure builds up in the head, slowly come down. Count the number of respirations taken during the practice and increase by an extra breath each day.

The *Hatharatnavali* advises (2:71):

*Adhah shiraa oordhvapaadah kshanam syaat prathame dine;
Kshanaachchetkinchidadhikam abhyasechcha dine dine.*

On the first day one should remain for a very short time with one's head below and feet above. The duration of this practice should be increased day by day.

Do not practise for such a long duration on this basis, because the body will be unable to cope with its influence. It takes years of sadhana to reach this stage. Most important is that during the practice the position is perfect and concentration is one-pointed. To gain full benefit from the practice it is necessary to go slowly. Gradually build up the duration and adhere to the rules of the practice.

Bandha mudras

Maha mudra and maha bheda mudra

Both maha mudra and maha bheda mudra are strenuous practices, especially in the beginning. If you wish you can take a short rest just after maha mudra before starting maha bheda mudra. During this short rest, say one or two minutes, you should close your eyes and fix your awareness on breathing.

Before commencing this practice, the practitioner should be familiar with the techniques of jalandhara, uddiyana and moola bandhas and bahir kumbhaka. Although maha mudra is a technique of hatha yoga it is also one of the kriya yoga practices. It involves asana, kumbhaka, mudra and bandha and makes a powerful pranic lock which spontaneously arouses meditation. The kriya yoga practice of maha mudra incorporates ujjayi pranayama, khechari mudra, awareness of arohan and awarohan passages and the chakras, and unmani mudra. The hatha yoga variation is a good preparation for the kriya yoga technique which should not be attempted without the guru's instruction.

Adhara or perineal mudras

Ashwini mudra

Ashwini mudra can be done in almost any asana, including any of the meditation asanas. It can be integrated with any asana performed in one's asana program. For example, it can be performed while holding paschimottanasana or sarvangasana.

This means that two practices can be done at the same time, bringing additional benefits. It is impossible to confine the muscular contraction only to the small area of the anus. Other pelvic muscles and muscles associated with the sexual organs will also contract. But one should try as much as possible to concentrate on the contraction at the anus. At first this is difficult, but with practice it becomes easier and easier.

Vajroli mudra

Having sat either in siddhasana or in the lotus pose, close your eyes. Concentrate first on the abdominal viscera, the lowest part of the abdomen, exactly at the point where the vasectomy operation is performed and contract that point. Go on contracting slowly and then the whole urinary tract is contracted inside. It goes on step by step, and stage by stage. The lower abdominal viscera and the area of the entire genitalia is all withdrawn inside. Then you have to release it as slowly as you have withdrawn it. Again you have to contract the lower abdominal viscera and then gradually, stage by stage, the entire area of the genitalia has to be withdrawn as much as it is possible for you. This should be practised while you are practising internal retention or *antar kumbhak*, that is, breathing in and retaining the breath inside. But it is very important that jalandhara bandha is performed during that moment. Go on practising this mudra, vajroli, as long as it is practical or for as long as you have time to devote to it.

A novice will not be able to find a guru to teach him the traditional method of this practice. Nor will a guru teach any person who is untrustworthy or cannot understand the

purpose of the practices. Likewise, one has to be careful when reading about these practices as interpreted by non-yogis because incorrect descriptions have surely been given. Precisely for this reason many people have a misconception concerning vajroli. Preparation for vajroli, therefore, must specifically be done under the guidance of a guru and not just any teacher.

In the hatha yoga tradition, a tube or catheter is inserted into the penis for practising this stage of vajroli mudra. First air is drawn into the bladder, then water, later oil, honey and finally liquid mercury. In raja yoga, vajroli is done just by voluntarily controlling the nerves, the nadis and the system.

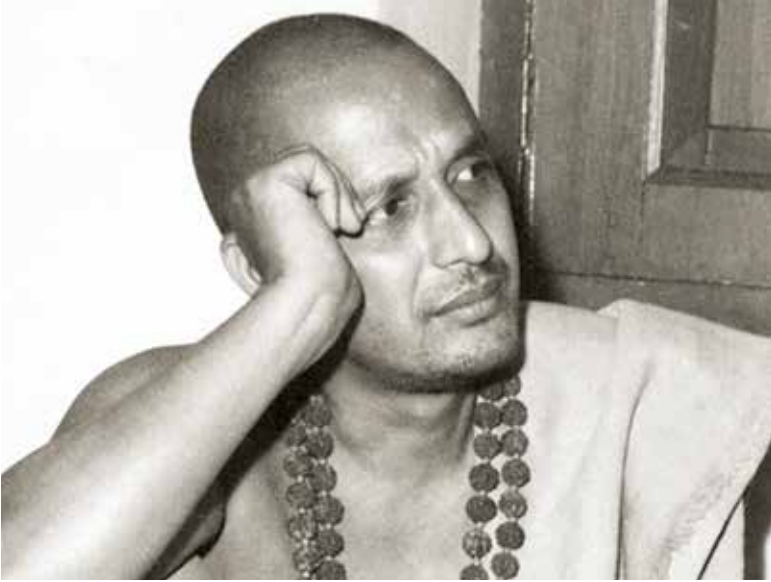
Instead of going into the practice of vajroli directly, it is better that you make yourself more perfect by shalabhasana, dhanurasana and uddyana bandha. These three and a few others will train the entire genital system, ovarian system, urinary system, reproductive system, the prostate glands, the urithyroids, and the particular nerve which controls both the testicles called the vajra nadi.

Sahajoli mudra

Just as a man prepares for vajroli by practising contractions and then drawing up air and water through a catheter via the urethra, so a woman can practise in a similar way. Instead of inserting a catheter into the urethra, however, a tube is inserted into the vagina so that a portion of it extends outside. She then sits on a bucket of water and practises uddiyana bandha. When these practices are perfected, the tube is discarded and water is taken in directly. When the water can be retained inside only by the practice of moola bandha and without uddiyana, the perineal muscles associated with moola bandha and vajroli/sahajoli have become strong.

6

Scriptural References



Hatha Yoga Pradipika

*Evamaasanabandheshu yogeendro vigatashramah;
Abhyasennaadikaashuddhim 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)

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. Lastly, one should sit quietly in a meditative pose and concentrate on a symbol. If the inner sound can be heard, concentrate on that.

*Aasanam kumbhakam chitram mudraakhyam karanam tathaa;
Atha naadaanusandhaanamabhyasaanukramo hathe.*

Asana, the varieties of kumbhaka, practices called mudras and concentration on the inner sound (nada) comprise the sequence of hatha yoga. (1:56)

Therefore, in the systematic science of hatha yoga, one must first of all prepare the physical body as it is the grossest manifestation of prana. Activate the prana through asana, then practise pranayama to purify the energy channels and to process and balance the prana. Then perform mudras to channel the prana and arouse different faculties of the mind, and bandhas to draw prana upward from the lower centres.

Sushumna is the carrier, the conductor, of a different energy. It is a high-tension line. When awakening begins in sushumna through sadhana, by the grace of guru or through meditation, a fantastic energy is released which needs a transporter to conduct it from its base in mooladhara chakra to ajna chakra at the top of the spine. That conductor is sushumna nadi. Sushumna begins to wake up when breath retention with mudra and bandha is practised according to the rules and as per the instructions of a teacher. Then the path is clear.

*Praanasya shoonyapadavee tadaa raajapathaayate;
Tadaa chittam niraalambam tadaa kaalasya vanchanam.*

Then indeed sushumna becomes the pathway of prana, mind is free of all connections and death is averted. (3:3)

The traditional texts repeatedly mention that neither the practices, the siddhis, nor the sadhana should be divulged to anyone. It is the guru's decision who should be given the knowledge, and it can only be gained through experience. There is no merit in trying to share one's spiritual experiences with another.

*Gopaneeyam prayatnena yathaa ratnakarandakam;
Kasyachinnaiva vaktavyam kulastreesuratam yathaa.*

These must remain secret just like precious stones, and not be talked about to anyone, just as one does not tell others about his intimate relations with his wife. (3:9)

Gheranda Samhita

Progress in yoga depends on various physical and mental qualifications in an individual that have to be gradually cultivated and awakened. All these qualifications are listed in a yogic text called *Gheranda Samhita* as follows:

1. *Shodhanam* – body purification
2. *Dridhata* – steadiness of the body
3. *Sthairyam* – determination
4. *Dhairyam* – patience
5. *Laghavam* – lightness of the body and mind
6. *Pratyaksham* – direct perception
7. *Nirlipta* – unaffectedness; detachment; to be untouched by the woes of the world and life.

The text continues as follows: “Bodily purification is attained by the practice of the shatkarmas, steadiness of the body by asana practice, determination by the practice of mudras, patience by practising meditative techniques to induce pratyahara, lightness of body and mind by pranayama practice, direct perception by the experience of dhyana and unaffectedness by samadhi (perfect merging).” (1:10–11) These practices and experiences are the means to achieve perfection.

Shiva Samhita

*Suptaa guruprasaadena yadaa jaagarti kundalee;
Tadaa sarvaani padmaani bhidyante granthayopi cha.*

*Tasmaatsarvaprayatnena prabodhayitumeeshvareem;
Brahmarandhramukhe suptaam mudraabhyaasam
samaacharet.*

When the sleeping goddess Kundalini is awakened through the grace of guru, then all the lotuses and the bonds are readily pierced through and through. (4:13)

Therefore, in order that the goddess, who is asleep in the mouth of the brahmarandhra (the innermost hollow of sushumna) be awakened, the mudras should be practised with the greatest care. (4:14)

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES TO SPECIFIC MUDRAS

Agochari mudra

Bhagavad Gita

The practice of agochari mudra is mentioned in a number of ancient yogic texts. It seems so simple and inconsequential that one might easily regard it as insignificant. But in fact if it is done for a long time with intensity it can induce high states of introspection and in turn, meditation. The sublime and inspiring *Bhagavad Gita* refers to nose tip gazing in sloka (6:13):

*Samam kaayashirogreevam dhaarayannachalam sthirah;
Samprekshya naasikaagram swam dishashchaanavalokayan.*

Holding his body, head and neck erect and motionless, the aspirant should gaze at the tip of his nose without once turning around.

This verse is included in the chapter describing the method that one should adopt in order to purify and steady the mind to make it one-pointed. The *Bhagavad Gita* says that

by sufficient practice and by keeping the mind in a continual state of balance and concentration one attains meditation and higher illuminative knowledge.

Kaki mudra

Shiva Samhita

*Kaakachanchvaa pibedvaayum sheetalam yo vichakshanah;
Praanaapaanaavidhaanajnah sa bhavenmuktibhaajanah.*

When the skilful yogi, knowing the laws of the action of prana and apana, can drink the cold air through the contraction of the mouth in the form of a crow's bill, then he becomes entitled to liberation. (3:70)

*Kaakachanchvaa pibedvaayum sandhyayorubhayorapi;
Kundalinyaa mukhe dhyaatvaa kshayarogasya shaantaye.*

*Aharnisham pibedyogee kaakanchachvaa vichakshanah;
Pibetpraanaanilam tasya rogaanaam sankshayo bhavet;
Doorashrutirdooradrishtistathaa syaaddarshanam khalu.*

When he drinks the air through the crow bill, both in the morning and in the evening twilight, contemplating that it goes to the mouth of the kundalini, consumption of the lungs is cured. (3:74)

When the wise yogi drinks the fluid day and night through the crow beak, his diseases are destroyed: he acquires certainly the powers of clairaudience and clairvoyance. (3:75)

Khechari mudra

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

*Kalaam paraanmukheem kritvaa tripathe pariyojayet;
Saa bhavetkhecharee mudraa vyomachakram taduchyate.*

Having turned the tongue back, the three channels of ida, pingala and sushumna are controlled. This is khechari mudra and it is called the centre of ether. (3:37)

When the tongue is inserted right up into the nasal cavity, the breath can be directed into either nostril by the tip of the tongue. The tip of the tongue will be able to block the right or left passage or be placed a little lower so that both nostrils are open. To actually elongate the tongue to the extent that it can move up to the eyebrow centre takes many years of consistent practice. The effects on the body are described (3:38–39):

*Rasanaamoordhvagaam kritvaa kshanaardhamapi tishthati;
Vishairvimuchyate yogee vyaadhimrityujaraadibhih.*

*Na rogo maranam tandraa na nidraa na kshudhaa trishaa;
Na cha moorchchhaa bhavettasya yo mudraam vetti khechareem.*

The yogi who remains with the tongue going upwards for even half a second is freed from toxins, disease, death, old age, etc. (3:38)

One who accomplishes this khechari mudra is neither troubled by diseases, nor death, lassitude, sleep, hunger, thirst or unconsciousness. (3:39)

Knowing the neuro-endocrinal functions of the brain helps one to understand this sloka concerning the powerful effects of khechari mudra on human psychophysiology and destiny.

The benefits attributed to khechari mudra are those which result from the experience of supraconsciousness or samadhi.

*Peedyate na sa rogena lipyate na cha karmanaa;
Baadhyate na sa kaalena yo mudraam vetti khechareem.*

*Chittam charati khe yasmaajjihvaa charati khe gataa;
Tenaishaa khecharee naama mudraa siddhairniroopitaa.*

One who knows khechari mudra is unafflicted by disease, unaffected by the laws of cause and effect (karma) and free from the bonds of time (death). (3:40)

Mind moves in Brahman (khe) because the tongue moves in space (khe). Therefore, the perfected ones have named this mudra khechari, moving in space, or Brahman. (3:41)

Here we are told that khechari is so powerful that the practitioner can reach a state beyond karma (i.e. cause and effect), time, death and disease, which are all aspects of the influence of Shakti or maya. The state of supraconsciousness is that of universal awareness, beyond duality and the finite mind. It is called kaivalya, nirvana, moksha, samadhi or Brahma – these are all synonymous terms indicating the final stage or accomplishment of raja yoga.

*Khecharyaa mudritam yena vivaram lambikordhvatah;
Na tasya ksharate binduh kaaminyaaah shleshitasya cha.*

*Chalito'pi yadaa binduh sampraapto yonimandalam;
Vrajatyoordhvam hritah shaktayaa nibaddho yonimudrayaa.*

When the upper cavity of the palate is sealed by khechari mudra, the bindu or semen cannot be lost even if one embraces a beautiful woman. (3:42)

Even when there is movement of the bindu and it enters the genitals, it is seized by closing the perineum and is taken upward. (3:43)

Khechari mudra regulates hormonal production and activity in the brain centres while other practices directly control the secretory behaviour of the reproductive organs.

According to hatha yoga, if the practice of khechari mudra can be perfected, after two weeks the process of degeneration in the body is reversed.

*Oordhvajihvah shtiro bhootvaa somapaanam karoti yah;
Maasaardhena na sandeho mrityum jayati yogavit.*

With the tongue directed upwards, the knower of yoga drinks the fluid of the moon. Within fifteen days physical death is conquered. (3:44)

However, it takes a long time to perfect khechhari, but one should consider the fact that during the process of perfecting it, the body is slowly readjusting itself, and once it is perfected, it will only take a short time to release the fluid from bindu.

*Nityam somakalaapoornam shareeram yasya yoginah;
Takshakenaapi dashtasya visham tasya na sarpati.*

The yogi's body is forever full of the moon's nectar. Even if he is bitten by the king of snakes (Takshaka), he is not poisoned. (3:45)

Through the practice of khechhari mudra the prana is maintained in the body even while the consciousness moves into the higher realms during samadhi. This is achieved by channelling the total pranic force through sushumna.

*Indhanaani yathaa vahnistailavarttim cha deepakah;
Tathaa somakalaapoornam dehi deham na munchati.*

Just as fuel kindles fire and oil a lamp, so the indweller of the body does not vacate while the body is full of the moon's nectar. (3:46)

The process involves the release of the body fluid the yogis call amaravaruni. *Amara* refers to immortality or the moon and *varuni* is wine. Amaravaruni is the wine of immortality or of the moon. This wine is the fluid secreted by bindu visarga. It is the nectar of pure consciousness.

*Gomaamsam bhakshayennityam pibedamaravaaruneem;
Kuleenam tamaham manye chetare kulaghaatakaah.*

By constant swallowing of the tongue he can drink amaravaruni. I consider him of high lineage (heritage). Others destroy the heritage. (3:47)

Just as the result of the union between a man and a woman is the release of reproductive secretions, so the union of ida and pingala with sushumna in ajna chakra releases the

fluid from bindu. At that time one experiences the climax of spiritual experience which is more fulfilling than any empirical experience. With the release of amaravaruni the body is impregnated with spiritual or cosmic force and gives birth to higher consciousness or *atman*. The physical body is the feminine principle of Shakti. Mind is the masculine principle of Shiva, consciousness. The union of the two is realization of the indweller, the Self. Yogi Swatmarama says that the person who can drink amaravaruni is from a worthy or high lineage. Those who live, procreate and die without attaining any spiritual knowledge have not been fulfilling the purpose of life or evolution. They are only continuing the generations of families.

However, once a person endeavours to know the spirit or pure consciousness, the whole physical structure undergoes a rearrangement and even the genes of that person change. Consequently, the generations that follow are influenced by the achievements made in sadhana. The children of such a person, and their children, have a greater chance of achieving the same perfections. Therefore, the person who can drink amaravaruni is truly venerable to his family.

*Goshabdenoditaa jihvaa tatpravesho hi taaluni;
Gomaamsabhakshanam tattva mahaapaatakanaashanam.*

The word 'go' means tongue (and also means cow). When it enters into the upper palate, it is 'eating the flesh of the cow'. It (khechari) destroys the great sins. (3:48)

The meaning of 'eating cow's flesh' is clarified by Yogi Swatmarama: *gomansa* is the tongue and should not be literally interpreted to mean 'cow's meat'. When the tongue is swallowed back up into the nasal cavity, that is called 'eating cow's meat' in hatha yoga. A Hindu considers a cow most sacred; it is worshipped as a form of Devi. For any Hindu, to eat cow's meat is one of the worst crimes, incurring the worst karma. Therefore, Yogi Swatmarama had to elucidate on the practice of eating cow's meat.

By practising khechhari mudra, heat is produced in the physical and subtle bodies. This is the same type of heat as that which may be produced through pranayama.

*Jihvaapraveshasambhootavahninotpaaditah khalu;
Chandraatstravati yah saarah saa syaadamaravaarunee.*

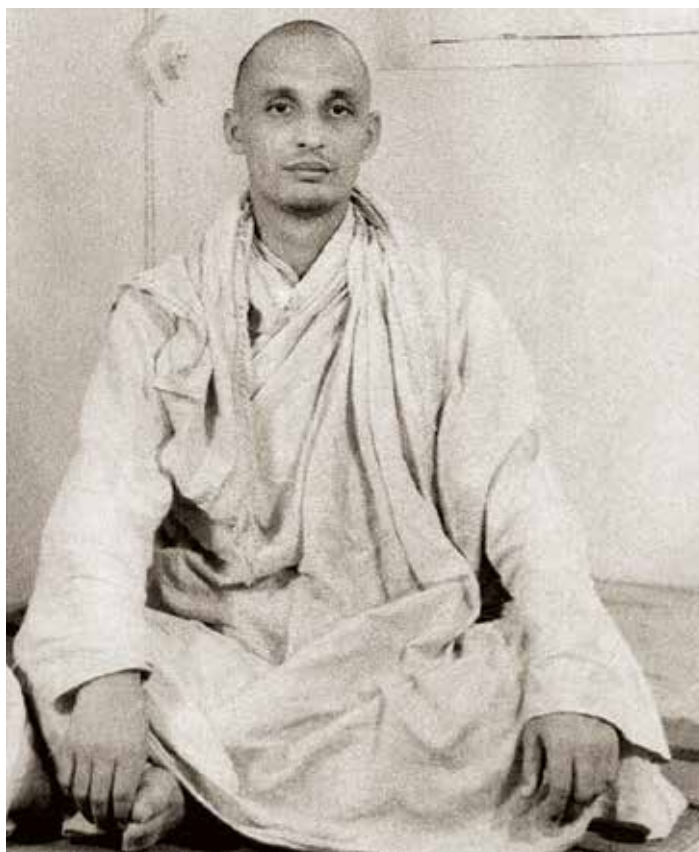
When the tongue enters the cavity, indeed heat is produced and the nectar flows from the moon. (3:49)

This heat is extremely important for the release of the nectar from the moon. Just as metal becomes liquid when it is heated, ice becomes water and paraffin wax becomes liquid paraffin, so the nectar in the body which has 'solidified' begins to run like a fluid when it is heated. The release of this fluid within the body is extremely important for arousing a higher state of consciousness. The flavours that are released by the practice of khechhari are listed:

*Chumbantee yadi lambikaagramanisham jihvaarasasyandinee;
Sakshaaraa katukaamladugdhasadrishee madhvaajyatulyaa
tathaa;
Vyaadheenaam haranam jaraantakaranam
shastraagamodeeranam;
Tasya syaadamaratvamashitagunitam siddhaanganaakarshanam.*

When the tongue constantly presses the cavity, the moon's nectar flows and has a saline, pungent and acidic flavour. It is like the consistency of milk, ghee, honey. Fatal diseases, old age and weapons are warded off. From that, immortality and the eight siddhis or perfections manifest. (3:50)

*Moordhnah shodashapatrapadmagalitam praanaadavaaptam
hathaa-
Doordhvaasyo rasanaam niyamyā vivare shaktim paraam
chintayan.
Utkallolalakalaajalam cha vimalam dhaaraamayam yah pibe
Nirvyaadhih sa mrinaalakomalavapuryogee chiram jeevati.*



Fluid drips into the sixteen-petalled lotus when the tongue is inserted into the upper throat cavity; the paramshakti (kundalini) is released and one becomes concentrated in the experience which ensues. The yogi who drinks the pure stream of nectar is freed from disease, has longevity, and has a body as soft and as beautiful as a lotus stem. (3:51)

The sixteen-petalled lotus spoken of in the sloka is vishuddhi chakra. It describes the mechanism of consuming the nectarine flow by khechari mudra. When the tongue becomes flexible and can be inserted into the upper epiglottis, a

nectarine secretion begins to flow. It drips from bindu visarga to soma, lalana and vishuddhi chakras. This is the technique of preservation and rejuvenation adopted by the yogis to gain radiant health, longevity and physical attractiveness.

*Sushiram jnaanajanakam panchastrotahsamanvitam;
Tishthate khecharee mudraa tasminshoonye niranjane.*

Five nadis convene in this cavity and it is the source of knowledge. Khechari should be established in that void, untainted (by ignorance). (3:53)

*Savyadakshinanaadeestho madhye charati maarutah
Tishthati khecharee mudraa tasminsthaane na samshayah.*

*Idaapingalayormadhye shoonyam chaivaanilam graset;
Tishthate khecharee mudraa tatra satyam punah punah.*

*Sooryaachandramasormadhye niraalambaantare punah;
Samsthitaa vyomachakre yaa saa mudraa naama khecharee.*

*Somaad yatroditaa dhaaraa saakshaat saa shivavallabhaa;
Poorayedatulaam divyaam sushumnaam pashchime mukhe.*

*Purastaachchaiva pooryeta nishchitaa khecharee bhavet;
Abhyastaa khecharee mudraapyunmanee samprajaayat.*

When the prana which is in the right and left nadis moves in the middle nadi (sushumna) that is the condition for khechari mudra. (4:43)

The fire (of shakti) being swallowed (suppressed) midway between ida and pingala in that shoonya (of sushumna), is in truth the condition for khechari mudra. (4:44)

The middle of the sun (pingala) and moon (ida) is the 'unsupported', in which is situated vyoma chakra or the centre of space (void). This mudra is called khechari. (4:45)

In the flow from the moon (bindu) is the beloved of Shiva (consciousness). The opening of the unequalled

divine sushumna should be filled from behind (by the tongue). (4:46)

The sushumna being completely filled at the rear (upper palate) also is khechhari. The practice of khechhari mudra is followed by the state of unmani (consciousness devoid of mind). (4:47)

Hatharatnavali

*Utkallolakalaabhritam cha vimalam dhaaraamritam yah
pibet;
Nirdosho hi mrinaalakomalavapurयोगे chiranjee vati.
Sevante yadi lambikaagramanisham jihvaarasasyandinee;
Sakshaaraakatutinktadugdha sadrisham
madhvaajyatulyaathavaa.*

Imbibing the surging streams of nectar one lives long in a body soft like a lotus fibre, and is free from all diseases. If the tip of the tongue constantly touches (the roof of the nasopharyngeal cavity) and takes on it the constant flow of the stream of the juice which tastes, saltish pungent, chilly, like milk, honey or like ghee. (2:139)

Shiva Samhita

*Rasanaamoordhvagaam kritvaa yashchandre salilam pibet;
Maasamaatrena yogendro mrityunjayati nishchitam.*

Pointing the tongue upwards, when the yogi can drink the nectar flowing from the moon (situated between the two eyebrows), within a month he certainly would conquer death. (3:72)

DhyanaBindu Upanishad

*Khecharyaa mudrayaa yasya vivaram lambikordhvatah;
Binduh ksharati no yasya kaaminaalingitasya cha.
Yaavadbindow sthito dehe taavanmrityumayam kutah;
Yaavadbaddhaa nabhomudraa taavadbindowurna gachchhati.*

*Galitopi yadaa binduh sampraapto yonimandale;
vrajatyoordhvam hathaachchhaktyaa nibaddho yonimudrayaa.*

He who is able to close the upper palate by khechari mudra will become the master of *vajroli*, locking of the nadi through which the sexual energy flows, because by this mudra the *bindu* or semen becomes steady forever. Even at the climax of a passionate embrace, when the bindu remains steady in the body, then where is the fear of death? (verses 79–84)

Maha mudra

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

*Paadamoolena vaamena yonim sampeedya dakshinam;
Prasaaritam padam kritvaa karaabhyaam dhaaryeddridham.*

*Kanthe bandham samaaropya dhaaryedvaayumoordhvatah;
Yathaa dandahatah sarpo dandaakaarah prajaayate.*

*Rijveebhoota tathaa shaktih kundalee sahasaa bhavet;
Tadaa saa maranaavasthaa jaayate dviputaashrayaa.*

*Tatah shanaih shanaireva rechayennaiva vegatah;
Mahaamudraam cha tenaiva vadanti vibudhottamaah.*

*Chandraange tu samabhyasya sooryaange punarabhyaset;
Yaavattulyaa bhavetsamkhyaa tato mudraam visarjayet.*

Press the left heel into the perineum (or vagina), straighten the right leg, and with the hands, firmly take hold of the outstretched foot. (3:10)

By locking the throat and retaining the breath, the prana rises straight, just like a snake beaten with a stick becomes straight. (3:11)

So the kundalini shakti becomes straight at once. Then the two (ida and pingala) become lifeless as the Shakti enters sushumna. (3:12)

Then exhale slowly and gradually, not quickly. Indeed, this is described as maha mudra by the great siddhas. (3:13)

After practising on the left side, practise on the right side. When the number of rounds is even, discontinue and release the mudra. (3:15)

*Na hi pathyamapathyam vaa rasaah sarve'pi neerasaah;
Api bhuktam visham ghoram peeyooshamapi jeeryati.*

*Kshayakushthagudaavartagulmaajeernapurogamaah;
Tasya doshaah kshayam yaanti mahaamudraam tu yo'bhyaset.*

For one who practises maha mudra, there is nothing wholesome or unwholesome. Anything can be consumed, even the deadliest of poisons is digested like nectar. (3:16)

Abdominal disorders, constipation, indigestion and leprosy, etc., are alleviated by the practice of maha mudra. (3:17)

Yoga Chudamani Upanishad

*Shodhanam naadijaalasya chaalanam chandrasooryayoh;
Rasaanaam shoshanam chaiva mahaamudraa abhidheeyate.*

The method taught for purification of the entire nadi structure governing the movement of the moon and the sun and absorption of the vital fluid is maha mudra. (verse 65)

Maha mudra rapidly eliminates mental depression as it removes all energy blockages which are the fundamental cause of the problem. The practice stills the mind and body and increases one's sensitivity to subtle experiences. It is therefore a highly recommended and powerful preparatory practice for meditation.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika (3:14, 18):

*Iyam khalu mahaamudraa mahaasiddhaih pradarshitaa;
Mahaakleshaadayo doshaah ksheeyante maranaadayah;
Mahaamudraam cha tenaiva vadanti vibhuddhottamaah.*

*Kathiteyam mahaamudraa mahaasiddhikaraa nrinaam;
Gopaneeyaa prayatnena na deyaa yasya kasyachit.*

Maha mudra removes the worst afflictions (the five kleshas) and the cause of death. Therefore, it is called ‘the great attitude’ by the ones of highest knowledge. (3:14)

Thus maha mudra has been described as the giver of great siddhis. It must be kept secret and not disclosed to anyone. (3:18)

Maha vedha mudra

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

*Samahastayugo bhoomau sphichau santaadayechchhanaih;
Putadvayamatikramya vaayuh sphurati madhyagah.*

*Somasooryagnisambandho jaayate chamritaaya vai;
Mritaavasthaa samutpannaa tato vaayum virechayet.*

Placing the palms of the hands on the ground, one should slowly and gently beat the buttocks on the ground. The prana then leaves the two nadis, ida and pingala, and enters into the middle channel, sushumna. (3:27)

Ida, pingala and sushumna become united and verily, immortality is attained. A death-like state occurs; then the breath should be exhaled. (3:28)

Shiva Samhita

*Apaanapraanayoraikyam kritvaa tribhuvaneshvari;
Mahaavedhashthitau yogee kukshimaapoorya vaayunaa;
Sphichau santaadayeddheemaanvedho'yam keertito mayaa.*

*Vedhenaanena sambidhya vaayunaa yogipungavah;
Granthim sushumnaamaargena brahmagranthim
bhinattyasau.*

Oh goddess of the three worlds! When the yogi, while performing maha bandha, causes the union of the prana and apana vayus, and filling the viscera with air drives it slowly towards the buttocks, it is called maha vedha. (4:23)

The best of the yogis having, through the help of the vayu pierced the knot which is in the path of sushumna, should then pierce the knot of Brahma. (4:24)

Manduki mudra

Bhagavad Gita

*Samam kaayashirogreavam dhaarayannachalam sthirah;
Samprekshya naasikaagram swam dishashchaanavalokayan.*

Let him (the sadhaka) hold his body, head and neck erect and motionless and gaze at the nose tip without looking elsewhere. (6:13)

This verse describes both nasikagra drishti and manduki mudra, since they are very similar. The purpose of the practice is to make the mind one-pointed, calm and receptive. Manduki mudra is mentioned in the *Gheranda Samhita* (3:57–58); and also in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (1:53) under the name ‘bhadrasana’.

Nasikagra mudra

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

Nasikagra mudra, nose tip gazing, is a practice of hatha yoga which directly awakens the kundalini shakti in mooladhara.

*Ardhonmeelitalochanah sthiramananaa naasaagradatteksana
Chandraarkaavapi leenataamupanayatri spandabhaavena
yah*

*Jyoteeroopamasheshabeejamakhilam dedeepyamaanam param;
Tattvam tatpadameti vastu paramam vaachyam
kimatraadhikam.*

With the mind steady, eyes semi-open, gaze fixed on the nose tip, the moon or *ida*, and sun or *pingala* suspended, without any movement, physical or mental, one attains the form of light, *jyoti*, which is endless and is complete, radiant, the Supreme. What more can be said? (4:41)

By external gazing at the nose tip, a vision of the inner light is aroused as the flow of shakti in the mind and body becomes concentrated. When a light switch is turned on, light emanates from the bulb. The same applies in the physical body when kundalini shakti is released from mooladhara and is drawn up to ajna chakra, the inner light appears. That light should be concentrated upon, as it is the essence of being, the inner light or *jyoti*. The purpose of practising nasikagra mudra is to arouse that experience.

Shambhavi mudra

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

*Abhyaase tu vinidraanaam mano dhritvaa samaadhinaa;
Rudraanee vaa paraa mudraa bhadraam siddhim
prayachchhati.*

For those who are alert and the mind is one-pointed (disciplined) in samadhi, rudrani or shambhavi mudra is the greatest mudra for bestowing perfection. (3:125)

*Vedashastrapuraanaani saamaanyaganikaa iva;
Ekaiva shaambhavee mudraa guptaa kulavadhooriva.*

The Vedas, shastras and Puranas are like common women, but shambhavi is secret like a woman of good heritage. (4:35)

This sloka is not ridiculing the scriptures, it is merely stating that anyone can read these shastras and understand

what he may, but those intent on attaining substantial spiritual experience will have to practise. For this purpose, shambhavi mudra is recommended, but it has to be learned from the guru. If shambhavi is practised with sincerity and perseverance, it is bound to awaken higher experiences. The word shambhavi is a name of the Shakti, or creative power of consciousness, Shiva. Shambhavi can stir Shambhu or supraconsciousness.

Shambhavi mudra is also known as bhrumadhya drishti, gazing at the eyebrow centre. Shambhavi is likened to a woman of good heritage or *kula*. The tantras explain shakti, the female aspect and principle as *kula*. Shiva, the male principle is *akula*, without heritage. The union of the two is *kaula*. That is known as vama marga tantra. Shambhavi is a technique employed in tantra to arouse deeper states of experience. Only the initiated are taught these practices. Therefore, what is being said in the sloka is that scriptures such as the Vedas are for the general public, but shambhavi is for the initiated.

In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* shambhavi is not given in the chapter on mudras, it is included in the chapter on samadhi for a good reason. In the state of samadhi, shambhavi mudra takes place of its own accord, as described:

Antarlakshyam bahirdrishtirnimeshonmeshavarjitaa.

Eshaa saa shaambhavee mudraa vedashaastreshu gopitaa.

Antarlakshyavileenachittapavano yogee yadaa vartate;

Drishtyaa nishchalataarayaa bahiradhah

pashyannapashyannapi.

Mudreyam khalu shaambhavee bhavati saa labdhaa

prasaadaadguroh;

*Shoonyaashoonyaavilakshanam sphurati tattattvam padam
shaambhavam.*

Introverted, one-pointed awareness with an unblinking external gaze, this is shambhavi mudra which is preserved in the Vedas. (4:36)



If the yogi remains with the chitta and prana absorbed in the internal object and gaze motionless, though looking, he is not seeing, it is indeed shambhavi mudra. When it is given by the guru's blessing, the state of shoonyashoonya arises. That is the real state of Shiva (consciousness). (4:37)

*Rasanaamoordhvagaam kritvaa kshanaardhamapi tishthati;
Vishairvimuchyate yogee vyaadhimrityujaraadibhih.*

Shambhavi and khechari states, though there is a difference in the place of concentration or influence, both bring about ecstasy, absorption in void, in the experience of *chit sukha*, the pleasure of consciousness. (4:38)

Swami Muktananda states that during the period of his sadhana secretions sometimes flowed profusely from the cranial region and his eyeballs would spontaneously roll upwards into shambhavi. In deep meditation his tongue would automatically go upwards through the nasal pharynx,

and a voice from within instructed that this would create a greater state of experience by opening the passage to sahasrara.

Shambhavi mudra stimulates ajna chakra in the brain directly behind the mid-eyebrow point. Through this, the mind is absorbed and the nada perceived.

Unmanyavaaptaye sheeghram bhroodhyaanam mama sammatam.

*Raajayogapadam praaptum sukhopaayo'lpachetasaam.
Sadyah pratyayasandhaayee jaayate naadajo layah.*

In my opinion, contemplation on the eyebrow centre leads to a mindless state immediately. It is a suitable method even for those with less intellect to attain the state of raja yoga. The laya attained through nada gives immediate experience. (4:80)

Contemplation on the eyebrow centre refers to shambhavi mudra. It can be done with the eyes open or closed. Even simple concentration on ajna chakra itself is effective. It requires no intellectual capacity or 'brainpower' to do this, only sincere application to the practice. When the mind is absorbed in the point of concentration, the eyes spontaneously turn upwards. Samadhi thus develops.

Shanmukhi mudra

Shiva Samhita

*Angushtaabhyaamubhe shrotre tarjaneebhyaam dvilochane;
Naasaarandhre cha madhyaabhyaamanaamaabhyaam
mukham dridham.*

Let him close the ears with his thumbs, the eyes with index fingers, the nostril with the middle fingers, and with the remaining four fingers let him press together the upper and lower lips. The yogi, by having thus firmly confined the air, sees his soul in the shape of light. (5:22)

*Tattejo drishyate yena kshanamaatram niraakulam;
Sarvapaapavinirmuktah sa yaati paramaam gatim.*

*Nirantarakritaabhyaasaadhyogee vigatakalmashah;
Sarvadehaadi vismritya tadabhinnah svayam gatah.*

*Yah karoti sadaabhyaasam guptaachaarena maanavah;
Sa vai brahmavileenah syaatpaapakarmarato yadi.*

When one sees, without obstruction, this light for even a moment, becoming free from sin, one reaches the highest end. (5:23)

The yogi, free from sin, and practising this (shanmukhi) continually, forgets his physical, subtle and causal bodies, and becomes one with that soul. (5:24)

He who practises this in secrecy, is absorbed in the Brahman, though he had been engaged in sinful works. (5:25)

The nada heard in shanmukhi mudra is described:

*Gopaneeyah prayatnena sadyah pratyayakaarakah;
Nirvaanadaayako loke yogoyam mama vallabhah;
Naadah sanjaayate tasya kramenaabhyaasatashcha vai.*

*Mattabhringavenuveenaasadrishah prathamo dhvanih;
Evamabhyaasatah pashchaat samsaaradhvaantanaashanam;
Ghantaanaadasamah pashchaat dhvanirmegharavopamah;
Dhvanau tasminmano dattvaa yadaa tishthati nirbhayah;
Tadaa sanjaayate tasya layasya mama vallabhe.*

*Tatra naade yadaa chittam ramate yogino bhrisham.
Vismritya sakalam baahyam naadena saha shaamyati.*

This should be kept secret; it at once produces conviction; it gives nirvana to mankind. This is my most beloved yoga. From practising this (shanmukhi) gradually, the yogi begins to hear the mystic sounds. (5:26)

The first sound is like the hum of the honey-intoxicated bee, next that of a flute, then of a harp; after this, by the gradual practice of yoga, the destroyer of the darkness of the world, he hears the sounds of ringing bells; then sounds like the roar of thunder. When one fixes his full attention on this sound, being free from fear, one gets absorption, O my beloved! (5:27)

When the mind of the yogi is exceedingly engaged in this sound, he forgets all external things, and is absorbed in this sound. (5:28)

Unmani mudra

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

The state of unmani is widely mentioned in the traditional yogic-tantric scriptures as the state of meditation – unmani.

*Niraalamban manah kritvaa nakinchidaapi chitayet;
Sabahyaabhyantare Vyomin ghataavattishhati dhruvam.*

Without support for the mind, one should become thoughtless; then one will remain like a space which is both inside and outside a jar. (4:50)

Vajroli mudra

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

The complete method of practice is not given in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

*Svechchhayaa vartamaano'pi yogoktairniyamairvinaa;
Vajroleem yo vijaanaati sa yogee siddhibhaajanam.*

Even one living a free lifestyle without the formal rules of yoga, if he practises vajroli well, that yogi becomes a recipient of siddhis or perfections. (3:83)

According to this sloka, sexual life can be elevated from the sensual to the spiritual plane if it is practised in a particular way, for this, vajroli has been described. The process of

sucking liquids into the urethra in vajroli mudra is briefly described:

*Yatnatah shastanaalena phootkaaram vajrakandare;
Shanaih shanaih prakurveeta vaayusanchaarakaaranaat.*

By slowly drawing in air through a prescribed tube inserted into the urethra of the penis, gradually air and prana traverse into the vajra kanda. (3:86)

*Naareebhage patadbindumabhyaasenordhvamaaharet;
Chalitam cha nijam bindumoordhvamaakrishya rakshayet.*

The bindu (semen) that is about to fall into the woman's vagina should be made to move upwards with practice. And if it falls, the semen and the woman's fluid should be conserved by drawing it up. (3:87)

Therefore, during the practice of maithuna a sattwic state of mind has to be maintained at all costs, even though the lower chakras are activated; the rajasic and tamasic tendencies of those centres are to be recognized and controlled.

*Chittaayattam nrinaam shukraam shukraayattam cha
jeevitam.*

*Tasmaachchhukram manashchaiva rakshaneeyam
prayatnatah.*

*Ritumatyaa rajo'pyevam nijam bindum cha rakshayet;
Mendhrenaakarshayedoordhvam samyagabhyaasayogavit.*

A man's semen can be controlled by the mind and control of semen is life-giving. Therefore, his semen and mind should be controlled and conserved. (3:90)

The knower of yoga, perfect in the practice, conserves his bindu and the woman's rajas by drawing it up through the generative organ. (3:91)

At that time, if vajroli is practised, the energy rises up sushumna and the central nervous system to ajna chakra in

the brain. The purpose of the practice is neither indulgence nor birth control but specifically to expand the consciousness. The experience has an impact that can last for hours, days or weeks. When vajroli has been perfected, the expanded state of consciousness becomes a permanent experience.

*Ayam yogah punyavataam dheeraanaam tattvadarshinaam.
Nirmatsaraanaam vai sidhyenna tu matsarashaalinaam.*

Verily this yoga (vajroli mudra) is perfected by virtuous and well conducted men who have seen the truth and not those who are selfish. (3:95)

Just as a man should be adept in the practice, the woman also has to be well practised and adept. There are few references in the hatha yoga texts specifying practices meant for women.

*Pumso bindum samaakunchya samyagabhyaasapaatavaat;
Yadi naaree rajo rakshedvajrolyaa saapi yoginee.*

If a woman practises vajroli and saves her rajas and the man's bindu by thorough contraction, she is a yogini. (3:99)

Just as a man should practise gradual contractions of the urogenital muscles so should the woman. According to tantra that is sahajoli.

*Tasyaah kinchidrajo naasham na gachchhati na samshayah;
Tasyaah shareere naadashcha bindutaameva gachchhati.*

Without doubt, not even a little rajas is wasted – through vajroli, the nada and bindu in the body become one. (3:100)

*Sa bindustadrajashchaiva ekeebhooya svadehagau;
Vajrolyabhyaasayogena sarvasiddhim prayachchhatah.*

The bindu and the rajas (consciousness and energy) in one's own body unite through the union by practise of vajroli, thus bestowing all perfections or siddhis. (3:101)

*Rakshodaakunchanaadoordhvam yaa rajah saa hi yoginee.
Ateetaanaagatam veti khecharee cha bhaved dhruvam.*

She is verily a yogini who conserves her rajas by contracting and raising it. She knows past, present and future and becomes fixed in khechari (i.e. consciousness moves into the higher realm). (3:102)

*Dehasiddhim cha labhate vajrolyabhyaasayogatah.
Ayam punyakaro yogo bhoge bhukte'pi muktidah.*

By the yoga of vajroli practice, perfection of the body fructifies. This auspicious yoga even brings liberation alongside with sensual involvement (bhoga). (3:103)

This important sloka states a basic concept of tantra that contradicts and shatters puritanical ideas: we have a physical body and cannot deny its existence. For this reason, they are incorporated extensively into kriya and kundalini yoga practices.

*Chitte samatvamaapanne vaayau vrajati madhyame.
Tadaamarolee vajrolee sahajolee prajaayate.*

When the mind is in equanimity and (prana) vayu proceeds through sushumna, then amaroli, vajroli and sahajoli are attained. (4:14)

Reversal of apana vayu through sushumna is the primary aim, yet it is difficult to cope with that experience and positively sustain it. In this sense, vajroli, sahajoli and amaroli are not physical practices but indwelling attitudes or states of perfection.

Hatharatnavali

*Vajroleem kathayishyaami gopitaam sarvayogibhih;
Atee tadrasyam hi na deyaa yasya kasyachit.*

*Svapraanaistu samo yasmaat tasyaiva kathayedghruvam;
Putrasyaapi na daatavyaa gurushishyakramam vinaa.*



Now I will talk about vajroli which is kept secret by all yogis. The secret process of this should not be revealed to an unsuitable person. (2:74)

The person whom the guru feels to be like his own prana, verily it should be told to him. It should not be given even to one's own son without the guru-disciple tradition. (2:75)

*Tasmaachchhukram manshchaiva rakshaneeyam prayatnatah;
Evam yo bhajate naareem taameva manasaa ramet.*

Therefore, semen as well as chitta (consciousness) should be preserved with effort. The person should love mentally that lady only, with whom he practises vajroli. (2:92)

*Sindoorasadrisham yonau streenaamaasthaayikam rajah.
Ritumatyaa rajo'pyeva rajo bindum cha rakshayet.*

*Tatah param samarthahsyaadoordhvam aakunchayedrajah.
Tasyaah shareere naadastu bindutaameva gachchhati.*

*Sabindustadrajashchaiva ekeekritya svadehajau;
Vajrolyabhyasayogena yogasiddhih kare sthita.*

*Ajnaata yogashaastrena vajroleem stree to naabhyaset;
Ayam yogah punyavataam dhanyanaam tattvashaalinaam.*

*Nirbhatsaraanaam sidhyeta na tu matsarashaalinaam;
Sarveshaameva yogaanaam ayam yogah shubhankarah.*

Rajas is permanent, like red lead, in the reproductive organ of a woman. The rajas should be saved during menstruation like bindu is to be saved. The woman should practise vajroli. (2:93)

After that she should draw up the rajas if possible. The nada in her body moves like bindu. (2:101)

Bindu and rajas produced in the body should be mixed through the vajroli practice of yoga. Then success is at hand. (2:102)

The lady who does not know the science of yoga should not practise vajroli. This yoga is successful to the courageous and the pious yogis who have an insight into reality. (2:103)

Success in yoga can be achieved only by those who are in no way selfish. It cannot be achieved by self-seeking ones. This yoga is auspicious among all the yogas. (2:104)

Therefore, even though instructions and techniques are given it should not be attempted out of curiosity.

Shiva Samhita

*Bindurvidhumayo jneyo rajah sooryamayastathaa;
Ubhayormelanam kaaryam svashareere prayatnatah.*

*Aham binduh rajah shaktirubhayormelanam yadaa;
Yoginaam saadhanavataam bhaveddivyam vapustadaa.*

Know that the seminal fluid is the moon and the ovarian fluid is the sun. It is necessary to coalesce the two within one's own body. (4:86)

In fact I (Shiva) am the seminal fluid and the ovarian fluid is Shakti. When the two are united in the body of the yogi, he attains a divine body. (4:87)

There are two processes: one is the process of uniting the sun and the moon through vajroli and maithuna. Secondly, that process has to take place within one's own body. Only the guru can further illumine this to the disciple.

Gorakshasatakam

Bindu is Shiva or consciousness, rajas is Shakti or energy. Bindu is the moon or ida and rajas is the sun or pingala. (verse 74)

From the mingling of these two, one obtains the highest state. Shukra bindu is joined with bindu (the brain centre), and rajas is joined with the sun (manipura). One who knows how to unite the two is an adept. (verse 76)

Vipareeta karani mudra

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

The moon emits its nectar, and due to the natural body processes the nectar falls into the sun. The moon not only represents bindu visarga, but also consciousness. The sun not only represents manipura but also prana, the body. From this it can be understood that the consciousness streams into the body and is wasted through the sense organs.

Vipareeta karani mudra is one of the few kriyas mentioned in various traditional tantra-yoga texts. The most comprehensive description is given as follows:

*Yatkinchitsravate chandradamritam divyaroopinah;
Tatsarvam grasate sooryastena pido jarayutah.*

*Tatraasti karanam divyam sooryasya mukhavanchanam;
Guroopadeshato jneyam na tu shaastarthakotibhih.*

*Urdhvanaabheradhastaloroordhvam bhaanuradhah shashee;
Karanee vipareetaakhyaa guruvaakyena labhyate.*

*Nityamabhyasayutkasya jatharaagnivivardhinee;
Aahaaro bahulastasya sanpadhyah saadhakasya cha;
Alpaahaaro yadi bhavedagnirdahati tatksanaat.*

*Adhahshiraashchordhvapaadah kshnam syatprathamam din;
Kshanaachcha kinchidadhikamabhyasechcha dine dine.*

The secretion of the moon (bindu), the nectar of immortality (amrit), is normally consumed by the fire of the sun (manipura chakra). It flows downwards and results in ageing of the body. (3:77)

There is a wonderful means by which the nectar is averted from falling into the opening of the sun. This is obtained by the guru's instructions and not from the hundreds of shastras (treatises). (3:78)

With the navel region above and the palate below, the sun is above and the moon below. It is called vipareeta karani, the reversing process. When given by the guru's instructions, it is fruitful. (3:79)

Digestion is strengthened by continual, regular practice and therefore, the practitioner should always have sufficient food. If one takes only a little food, the heat produced by the digestion will destroy the system. (3:80)

Therefore, on the first day, one should only stay a moment with the feet up and head down. The practice should be done daily, gradually increasing the duration. (3:81)

This is a warning that applies to all kriya yoga practices. One must be careful with diet. In the above quotation, a warning is given that the metabolic rate may increase; therefore, it may be necessary to increase your food quantity to prevent

loss of weight. The reader should use his discrimination and regulate his food input according to prevailing needs.

Gheranda Samhita

*Naabhimoole vasetsooryastaalumoole cha chandramaah;
Amritam graste sooryastato mrityuvasho narah.*

*Urdhvam cha yojayetsooryam chandram chaapyadha aanayet;
Vipareetakaree mudraa sarvatantreshu gopitaa.*

*Bhoomau shirashcha samsthaapya karayugmam samaahitah;
Urdhvapaadah sthiro bhootvaa vipareetakaree mataa.*

*Mudraam cha saadhayennityam jaraam mrityum cha
naashayet;
Sa siddhah sarvalokeshu pralaye'pi na seedati.*

The solar region is located in the navel and the lunar region is located at the root of the palate. Nectar drops downwards from the lunar region to the solar region and is absorbed; so do men die. Hold the navel upwards and the lunar region downwards. This is called vipareeta karani mudra, secret of the tantras. The head should be placed on the ground together with the arms. Point the legs upwards, keeping the head firmly on the ground. This is vipareeta karani mudra according to the yogis. Place the head on the ground, provide support with both hands and raise both legs; this is vipareeta karani mudra. By practising it daily, old age and death are eliminated. The practitioner of this mudra attains siddhi or perfection in all the lokas or worlds and is not grieved even at the time of dissolution of the universe. (3:45–48)

No detailed description of the method of performing vipareeta karani is given in old texts. The brief descriptions that are given – legs upwards, arms and head on the ground – describe all the inverted poses. The ancient treatises say that vipareeta karani should be learnt from a guru, which is presumably the reason why its technique is not described.

Hatharatnavali

*Yatkinchitsravate chandraadamritam divyaroopinah;
Tatsarvam grasate sooryastena bandham jaraayutam.*

*Tatraasti divyam karanam sooryasya mukhabandhanam;
Guroo padeshato jneyam na tu shaastraardha kotibhih.*

*Oordhvam naabhiradhastaluroordhvam bhaanuradhah
shashee;*

Karanee vipareetaakhyaa guruvaakyena labhyate.

All the nectar that flows from the splendid moon (in the throat) is swallowed up by the sun (at the navel) and it is for this reason that the body gets old. (2:66)

There is a superb practice which binds the mouth of the sun in the navel. It can only be known from the instructions of a guru, not from millions of discussions. (2:67)

The practice in which the navel is above and the palate below, the sun above and the moon below, is known as vipareeta karani. It can only be learnt from the words uttered by the guru. (2:68)

It is possible that the practice as it is known and understood today is but one version of a number of possibilities, including perhaps sirshasana and sarvangasana. In other words, it is plausible that vipareeta karani mudra was originally a collective name of all the inverted poses, the names sirshasana and the others being of recent origin. This would certainly explain why an asana as important as sirshasana is not even mentioned in the old books.

7

Benefits of Mudra



Mudras concern the mind. They represent a seal; sealing the mind with the soul or *atman*. They do not allow the mind to wander outside toward objects. They direct the

externalizing mind towards atman in the chambers of the heart and fix it there. It is said that the practice of mudras and bandhas will bestow all one wants.

Mudras and cancer

Cancer can be successfully treated by yoga therapy. Here is an example. A patient, the son-in-law of a multimillionaire, who was himself an eminent medical doctor in India, was brought to the ashram. He had been in London and had to be brought back to India because of cancer in the spine. He came to the ashram and only one practice was recommended to him: revitalizing breathing. He had to do nothing except khechari mudra – folding back the tongue and touching the upper palate with it, then practise a particular pranayama called ujjayi, in which the breath sounds like steam escaping from an engine. This is known as psychic breathing. With his eyes open or closed, he was instructed to breathe this way fifty, a hundred or a hundred and fifty times. First of all he was highly sceptical. He asked, “Will it cure me?” He was told, “If there is any other system available which you think can cure you, then take that course.” He was himself a doctor and had given up all hope of survival. He was told, “Practise it with inspiration and enthusiasm.” He practised for one full year or more, and he is still very much alive today. He no longer has cancer.

Mudras and the heart

Hridaya mudra diverts the flow of prana from the hands to the heart area, improving the vitality of the heart. The middle and ring fingers relate directly to nadis connected with the heart, while the thumb closes the pranic circuit and acts as an energizer, diverting the flow of prana from the hands to these nadis. Hridaya mudra is therefore beneficial for the heart. It is very simple and may be used safely and easily, even in acute situations. The heart is the centre of emotion. Hridaya mudra helps to release pent up emotion and unburden the heart. It may be practised during emotional conflict and crisis.

Mudras and high blood pressure

Tension and stress are associated with high blood pressure. Ujjayi pranayama, by applying a slight pressure on the sinuses in the neck, causes them to react as though they have detected high blood pressure. The heartbeat and the blood pressure then reduce below normal and one becomes physically and mentally relaxed. *Khechari mudra*, the tongue lock, accentuates this pressure in the throat region and consequently on the two carotid sinuses. Anyone can experiment by doing ujjayi firstly without khechari mudra, and then with, comparing the difference in pressure.

Sheetali, sheetkari and kaki mudra besides cooling the physical body, cool the mind and soothe mental tension. They are, therefore, useful for alleviating psychosomatic diseases such as high blood pressure. The practices also purify the blood and improve digestion.

Digestion

One of the initial positive effects of vipareeta karani mudra is an increased capacity to digest and assimilate food. Digestive secretions and appetite are definitely increased, therefore, a moderate diet should be taken at regular intervals. Food should be taken after practising hatha yoga. If food is not taken, if one fasts, the gastric acids and digestive enzymes will burn the lining of the stomach and duodenum. However, this is unlikely to happen when vipareeta karani mudra is practised for only a few minutes. The metabolic rate may increase when this mudra is practised for extended periods. If this happens, the food intake should be adjusted accordingly. The effect of vipareeta karani mudra on the digestion is described in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:80–81):

*Nityamabhyaasayuktasya jatharaagnivivardhinee;
Aahaaro bahulastasya sampadyah saadhakasya cha;*

*Alpaahaaro yadi bhavedagnirdahati tatkshanaat.
Adhahshirashchordhvapaadah kshanam syaatpratham dine;*

Digestion is strengthened by continual, regular practice and therefore, the practitioner should always have sufficient food. If one takes only a little food, the heat produced by the digestion will destroy the system. (80)

By its influence even faulty diets are easily digested and poison can be digested like nectar. Therefore, on the first day, one should only stay a moment with the feet up and head down. The practice should be done daily, gradually increasing the duration. (81)

Kaki mudra, together with the contact of the indrawn air with the membranes of the mouth, stimulates digestive secretions, aiding the digestive process generally. It may be performed at any time of the day when the air is relatively pure, although it is best practised early in the morning or late at night. It should not be performed in cold weather.

Yogamudrasana is particularly useful for massaging the abdominal organs and helping to remove various associated ailments. The upturned heels apply pressure to the inner organs. The blood flow to the legs is reduced and thereby diverted to the abdominal and pelvic region, contributing to the functioning of the associated organs.

Effect of mudras on piles and constipation

Many people have weak anal muscles or sphincters. This is closely associated with such widespread ailments as constipation and piles or haemorrhoids.

Piles are characterized by an accumulation of blood in the region of the anus. The practice of ashwini mudra helps to squeeze this stagnant blood away from the anus. This process is intensified if the mudra is combined with sarvangasana. Ashwini mudra physically draws the blood away from the anus and sarvangasana allows the blood to drain downwards back to the heart. Every sufferer of piles should definitely practise this combination daily.

Ashwini mudra helps to stimulate intestinal peristalsis, the wavelike motion that propels the stool through the intestines

to the anus for evacuation. Therefore, it is a great help in alleviating constipation and thus improving the general health and wellbeing of the practitioner.

Haemorrhoids are a common ailment associated with constipation. It can develop directly from constipation and from coagulation of blood through bad circulation. This is related to lack of exercise and is similar to varicose veins. For haemorrhoids inverted asanas help to drain the blood and also alternate contraction and relaxation of the anal muscles (ashwini mudra).

Those people who suffer from prolapse of the anus or rectum should also do ashwini mudra. By strengthening the associated muscles, these ailments will slowly disappear.

Bhujangini mudra tones the whole stomach, removes stagnant wind and helps alleviate abdominal disorders. Retaining air in the stomach enables the practitioner to float in water for any length of time.

General benefits and conservation of prana

Tadagi mudra relieves tension stored in the diaphragm and pelvic floor, tones the abdominal organs and stimulates blood circulation to these areas. The nerve plexuses in the visceral area are stimulated and toned. Bending forward and extending the stomach stretches the diaphragm and pelvic floor, and creates pressure throughout the trunk of the body. This stimulates manipura chakra, the centre of energy distribution, and raises the level of prana generally.

Each and everybody is wasting his energy. The wear and tear in the body is taking place at a great rate. Therefore, vipareeta karani mudra is an important method of conservation of sublimation of this energy which is necessary for all. Ashwini mudra strengthens the anal muscles. It prevents the escape of pranic energy and redirects it upward for spiritual purposes. Vajroli and sahajoli mudras regulate and tone the entire urogenital system. It helps overcome psycho-sexual conflicts and unwanted sexual thoughts. It conserves and redirects energy, enhancing meditative

states. By their practice swadhisthana chakra is awakened as awareness is held on swadhisthana during the practice.

How is the connection between semen and immortality to be understood? It is twofold. In common life, union of these cells creates another bindu, another individual and another universe. This is the glimpse of immortality through one's progeny. Additionally, according to Yogi Swatmarama, if seminal release from the body can be quelled a man has tapped within his own body that same primal source of life.

In the practice of yogamudrasana the individual vertebrae are separated. This helps to release pressure on the spinal nerves as well as giving them a profound stretch and massage. These nerves connect the entire body to the brain and their improved health and functioning has beneficial repercussions throughout the body. The legs are not stretched as in other forward bending asanas but the articulation of the joints is loosened. *Akashi mudra*, which means 'look at the sky', helps to relieve the discomfort in your neck. It will also help to remove the pain in your shoulder joints and the back.

With practice of khechari mudra, the tongue will automatically ascend into the sinuses to stimulate many vital nerve centres in the brain. This gives extensive health benefits to the body. One who perfects khechari does not suffer from hunger, thirst, tiredness or languor. It is used in kundalini awakening.

Pashinee mudra stretches the spine and back muscles, and stimulates all the spinal nerves. It massages the abdominal organs. Ailments like tuberculosis, leprosy, piles, indigestion, and other diseases are destroyed by those who practise maha mudra. Maha mudra can give great siddhis to men, and should not be given to ordinary persons.

Mudras, introversion and meditation

Jnana mudra and chin mudra are simple but important psychoneural finger locks which make the meditation asanas such as padmasana, siddhasana, siddha yoni asana, sukhasana, vajrasana and others, complete and more

powerful by redirecting the nervous impulses from the hands upwards to the body. With regular practice this enables one to sit in padmasana for many hours. Yogamudrasana is most useful for relaxing the whole mind and body. As such it is an excellent prelude to meditative practices.

Yogamudra is an excellent preparatory practice for meditation, engendering a sense of relaxation. It relieves anger and tension, inducing tranquillity. It develops awareness and control of psychic energy and is used to awaken manipura chakra.

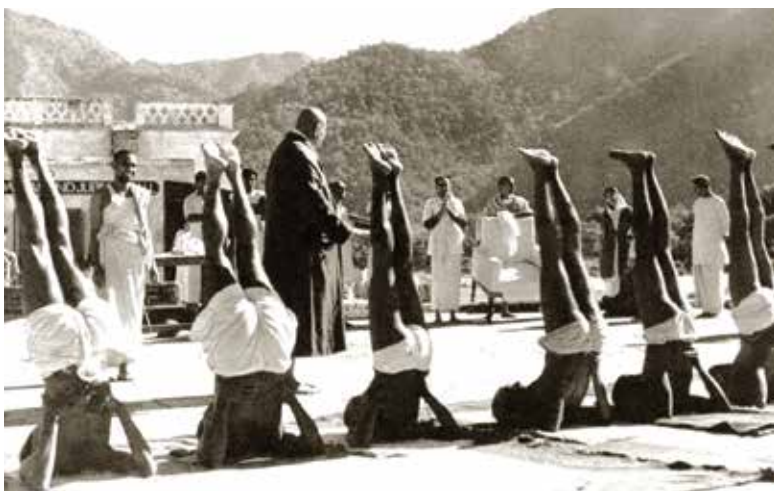
Maha vedha mudra is a powerful practice for introverting the mind. It awakens psychic faculties and kundalini which resides in mooladhara chakra.

In shanmukhi mudra the energy and heat from the hands and fingers stimulate and relax physically the nerves and muscles of the face. Mentally, it introverts the awareness. Spiritually, it induces the state of *pratyahara* or sense withdrawal. Pashinee mudra brings balance and tranquillity to the nervous system and induces pratyahara.

The bindu visarga is supposed to be the centre where the nectar is produced. When the flow of nectar begins, it is absorbed by the body, and mental consciousness changes. You get a sort of disidentification with the realities of sense objects and they begin to lose their relationship to you, as they were related to you before. You are neither sleeping, nor are you awake, nor do you see the objects. The eyes become quiet and the mind becomes quiet. This is called unmani mudra.

Mudras and the endocrine system

Khechari mudra exerts a controlling influence upon the network of endocrine glands throughout the body. This is achieved by regulating the production of the powerful secretions of the brain itself, which are produced in tiny amounts to control the pituitary gland and thereby the whole orchestra of glands associated with the centres below ajna. These dependent glands include the thyroid, mammary, thymus, adrenal and reproductive glands, as well as many



other dependent processes, which continually go on in the body.

The practice of khechari mudra also influences the centres in the hypothalamus and brainstem which control autonomic breathing, heart rate, emotional expression, appetite and thirst. The hypothalamus is strongly connected with the thalamus and the RAS (reticular activating system), which assumes a vital role in the sleep and wake mechanisms and all degrees of central nervous system activities, including the ability to concentrate. The practice also influences the salivary gland and the faculty of taste, which in turn are connected to the lower nerve plexuses involved in the digestive and assimilative processes. Khechari mudra has a powerful effect on the endocrine system and the pineal gland.

The thyroid influences the metabolism of the whole body including the digestive processes. Correct functioning of the thyroid ensures efficient operation of the digestive processes, and ensures that the body maintains its youthful vitality as mentioned in the ancient scriptures. Vipareeta karani mudra assists in maintaining the health of the abdomen and thyroid. Vipareeta karani mudra, by not constricting the throat as

much as sarvangasana, allows a larger proportion of blood to flow to the brain and to the pituitary gland. Since both the thyroid and pituitary glands act in conjunction with each other, this in effect could give a more profound influence on the bodily metabolism.

Physiologically, the symbology has relevance to the thyroid gland in the front of the neck and its relationship with the pituitary gland. The thyroid gland is responsible for regulating the body's metabolic rate. It differs from other endocrine glands in that it has the capacity to secrete and store the hormones synthesized by its secretory cells within the follicles of the gland itself, and these pooled secretions can be understood as the nectar of vishuddhi. Thyroxine is essential in maintaining the normal activities of the central nervous system, body growth and movement, memory, thought process and speech, and emotional and behavioural stability. It also exerts important effects on the biochemistry of the liver, heart and skeletal muscles, is essential in maintenance of the cells of the anterior pituitary, and has other important functions. Thus, thyroid imbalance has far-reaching effects on the whole body.

It is interesting to note that Yogi Swatmarama mentions the body becoming as soft as a lotus stem with the trapping of nectar, as thyroxine maintains skin pliability and texture. In hypothyroidism the skin becomes dry and puffy, and with hyperthyroidism the skin becomes warm, moist and clammy. Correct proportion of thyroxine is clearly essential for balanced functioning of the body and mind. This is a part of the physiological aspect of the 'dripping of nectar', a phenomenon associated with the practice of khechari mudra.

In yoga the sex hormones are known as *retas*, and it is said that they are responsible for arresting degeneration. As long as the body is saturated with *retas*, one remains young and the body emits a pleasant odour. The preservation of this hormone is known as *brahmacharya*. When this hormone goes down to the navel region, it turns into *veerya* or semen and leaves the body by emission. As a result of this, restlessness

is created in the mind and one becomes mentally and physically broken. This cycle of degeneration is prevented by the practice of vipareeta karani mudra. Before the retas turns into veerya, you reverse the whole process and send the hormone and prana back to the brain. If one has control of the reproductive fluid, one has control of nature, the body and the mind. Of course, it is not easy to develop this control, but hatha yoga provides the methods.

Mudras and sexual maturation

Shambhavi mudra is considered to be a very important practice. Its effect is transferred to the pineal body. The pineal body is subject to decay. When it begins to decay, at about the age of seven to ten years, then the sexual hormones are released; the lock is opened. As long as the pineal body is intact and healthy, the sexual hormones are under lock and key, and emotional balance exists. The influence of shambhavi mudra on the health of the pineal body and the effects of pineal degeneration on emotional balance and imbalance has also been studied.

One means of conducting prana to the frontal portion of the brain is by the practice of shambhavi mudra. It is beneficial for children to practise shambhavi mudra in order to influence ajna chakra inwardly and to delay sexual maturity until the correct time. When shambhavi mudra is practised, the pranas are sucked up by the force to irrigate the frontal area of the brain. In the brain there are two important glands, the pineal gland and the pituitary gland. In yoga they are associated with ajna chakra and sahasrara chakra. Ajna chakra is related to the pineal gland and it has great control over the autonomic nervous system and the blood circulation.

The practice of shambhavi mudra is essential for maintaining the health of the pineal gland. A few simple practices starting from the age of eight will help to balance the mental and vital energies and preserve the pineal gland, thus delaying sexual maturation and preventing needless psychoemotional distress.

Mudras and ageing

Mudras are beneficial to physical health. They are also preparatory exercises useful for developing spiritual powers. All the practices of hatha yoga which help relax the body and mind, and which stimulate pranic capacity, slow down the ageing process.

One statement by the ancient yogis which is reasonably easy to interpret is their reference to the fact that flabby skin will disappear after six months' of practice of vipareet karani mudra. The benefits of inverted poses in general are that the extra flow of blood in the facial region gives better nourishment of the skin tissue and so revitalizes the skin. Further, by improving the metabolism of the body, unnecessary fat and flabbiness of the body are removed.

It is said, "The moon secretes nectar, the sun consumes the nectar, the yogi becomes sick and dies prematurely." Through the practices of kriya yoga, you can reverse this process, which means that instead of the sun consuming the nectar, it should flow back to the moon. On this basis, vipareeta karani mudra, this process of reversing the flow of nectar, is responsible for a high state. According to *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:82):

*Valitam palitam chaiva shannmaasordhvam na drishyate;
Yaamamaatram tu yo nityamabhyaset sa tu kaalajit.*

After six months of practice, grey hairs and wrinkles become inconspicuous. One who practises it for a yama (three hours) conquers death.

By practising khechari mudra for two to five years, these two important centres, bindu visarga and vishuddhi, can be stimulated. When this occurs nectar will flow, rejuvenating the body. About this Kabir Das has written: "When this nectar is tasted all fears, diseases, guilt and ignorance are burned away. Inside you will shine like the full moonlit night." When the eyes are closed, what does one see? Only darkness. But if the eyes are closed when the nectar

is flowing, only light is seen. The whole brain, the whole consciousness is illumined.

Nabho mudra, a simpler form of khechari mudra, is a very mysterious practice which cures several diseases. When the tongue is turned upward and that position is maintained for several minutes, the submaxillary glands begin to secrete. This secretion should be gulped down. This salivary juice is very good for the appetite and maintenance of youth. Touching the palate with the tongue is also very important as there is a special yogic centre in the palate region.

Maha mudra and maha vedha mudra are powerful techniques that introvert the mind and awaken psychic faculties. They affect the pineal and pituitary glands and thus the whole endocrinal system. By activating the pineal gland, the pituitary is kept under control, hormonal secretions are regulated and catabolism is curtailed – consequently, the symptoms of old age are either annihilated or reduced. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it is said (3:29):

*Mahaavedho'yamabhyaasaanmahaasiddhipradaayakah;
Valeepalitaravepaghnah sevyate saadhakottamaih.*

This is maha vhedha, and its practice bestows great perfections. Wrinkles, grey hair and the trembling of old age are evaded, thus the best of practitioners devote themselves to it.

Mudras and women

A woman is normally compelled to experience the mental and physical fluctuations of the menstrual cycle. The loss of energy which accompanies the shedding of menses is obligatory. During the monthly periods of ladies, the practices of maha mudra and maha bheda mudra help to overcome depression which is natural during the monthly cycle, and they help to maintain emotional balance which is often lacking during this period.

If the ovum is withdrawn by the practice of sahajoli, this continuing loss of energy is averted and the menstrual

loss diminishes. A yogini who has perfected sahajoli and withdrawn the bindu becomes very powerful. She experiences the awakening of a higher energy force within her body and her consciousness effortlessly expands into transpersonal awareness. This readily occurs because a woman can intuit the nature of higher consciousness and understands the hidden power. Siddhis manifest more easily to a woman because her intuitive faculties are by nature more highly evolved. She has actually always been aware of them in a rudimentary, dormant form. A woman is more aware of her own subconscious mind and that of others and if she can withdraw the bindu by sahajoli, the individual consciousness easily moves into the universal mind space, *chidakasha*, and the attitude of khechari mudra spontaneously occurs. As the tongue moves back into the upper palate, becoming fixed there without support, so the mind moves from the centres below vishuddhi and enters the total space of consciousness where the barrier of time dissolves and the past, present and future become known.

Mudras and depression

Depression is a disease which everyone suffers from at some period of life. Some suffer during youth, others suffer in middle age, and before death most people suffer from depression. Therefore, it is necessary for all of us to know how depression is an important part of our personality and how it should be dealt with in order to have a better standard of experience.

Many people who were heading towards suicide, suffering from manias, or on the verge of a nervous breakdown have been helped by *maha mudra*, the great posture. Maha mudra, brought about a tremendous change in their psychological makeup. Why is this? Maha mudra is very simple and it only takes seven to nine minutes to perform, although it has to be done perfectly, systematically, according to the instructions of the teacher. This mudra is a way, a panacea, a remedy for everyone. Suicidal tendencies, manias, psychological and

psychosomatic ailments are international in nature, so an international system is needed to eliminate them.

In many cases of chronic depression, of constitutional and habitual depression, there is no better way than maha mudra. One person who had decided to commit suicide, happened to inform me of what he was intending to do, and wanted me to tell him what he should do because he wanted to die. I said, "One way is to shoot yourself, the second way is to take some drastic drug, and the third way I will teach you, so come tomorrow morning." And of course, he lives even today; he told me that he had been thinking of committing suicide for over five years but was not sure which way to do it. After the practice of maha mudra, he overcame this state of utter depression on a permanent basis. This does not mean that maha mudra is only meant as an anti-depression method, because maha mudra is intended to awaken the higher mind.

Mudras and the mind

Practices like vipareeta karani mudra, improve the physiological, psychological and emotional factors related to each other, so that a certain higher spiritual state is attained. Then, the aspirants who are very ordinary in their life, who may not know any way to control their mind, or who may not even have the firm willpower to handle the mind, suddenly find that they have become quiet – the state of pratyahara, withdrawal of the senses has occurred. With the accomplishment of pratyahara, you can then go ahead with meditation.

Bhoochari mudra develops the power of concentration and memory. It tranquillizes and introverts the mind and is particularly beneficial for calming anger and stress. It develops mental stability and the state of thoughtlessness. It helps to awaken ajna chakra and induce meditative states. It takes the practitioner into the psychic and spiritual planes of consciousness.

Akashi mudra combines the benefits of kumbhaka, ujjayi, shambhavi and khechari. It induces calmness and tranquillity, and develops control over the senses. When perfected, it

arrests the thought processes and induces higher states of consciousness.

Physically, shambhavi mudra strengthens the eye muscles and releases accumulated tension in this area. Mentally, it calms the mind, removing emotional stress and anger. It develops concentration, mental stability and the state of thoughtlessness. Concentration becomes much easier through the practice of shambhavi, and the brainwaves can be controlled at will. The moment shambhavi mudra is practised, concentration takes place, and when concentration takes place there is union between ida and pingala nadis in ajna chakra. When these two nadis touch each other then there is an explosion of light. Concentration is perfect when the totality of awareness knows only the object upon which it is concentrated. Perfect concentration is meditation, perfect meditation is samadhi. It is stated in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (4:39):

*Taare jyotishi samyojya kinchidunnamayed bhruvau;
Poorvayogam mano yunjannunmaneeakaarakah kshanaat.*

With perfect concentration, the pupils fixed on the light by raising the eyebrows up a little, the mind is joined and instantly unmani occurs.

The eye movements tell whether a sleeping person is worried, frightened, anxious, dreaming, thinking, sleeping or in samadhi. When a person is dreaming, there are fluctuations in the eyeballs, which can be seen, felt and also measured by machines. In deep sleep the eyes may automatically assume shambhavi mudra. In states of profound meditation the eyeballs generally go straight up, they never stay at the centre. An anxious person's eyes are unsteady and by stilling the eyes the uncontrolled fluctuations of an anxious brain can generally be overcome by shambhavi mudra.

The practice of shambhavi mudra gives control over thoughts and the breath. The mind is suspended within for a short time and entrance into the psychic world becomes



easier. It is a very important technique for passing into the astral domain. Insomnia is cured by the practice of this mudra.

Nasikagra drishti is an excellent technique for calming anger and disturbed states of mind. Although the eyes are open, the aim of this practice is to create introspection. This mudra develops the powers of concentration and induces meditative states. It takes the practitioner into the psychic and spiritual planes of consciousness. Symbolically, in nasikagra drishti the bridge of the nose is related to the spinal cord. At the top is the eyebrow centre, ajna chakra, while at the bottom is the nose tip, mooladhara chakra. Just as shambhavi mudra aims to activate ajna chakra by gazing at the eyebrow centre, nasikagra drishti aims to activate mooladhara chakra by gazing at the nose tip.

The practice of khechhari is said to destroy 'the great sins'. What are these sins? The great sins are not overt crimes, but defects in character which are the cause of crimes. The defects are lust, greed, anger, fear, ignorance and jealousy. These are also known as the 'six enemies' in some texts.

Khechari helps one to overcome gross emotions and passions that compel a person to react with anger, greed, etc. The very pattern of one's thoughts and desires can be overhauled, and in this way it can be said that the sins are destroyed. However, it's important not to misunderstand sin in this context due to its religious connotations. Sin should be understood as something that is an obstacle to spiritual progress. These 'negative modes' of mind which grip the body and force one to act can become a powerful bondage to lower levels of awareness and can hinder further development. They are not to be suppressed, yet they have to be overcome and khechari mudra gives a direct method of doing so, by helping one recognize their subtle forms.

Becoming established in khechari can bring about a change in consciousness so that one learns from a mistake and does not make it again, so that one learns how to manage these inner forces properly without any unnecessary residue of guilt or anxiety.

When khechari mudra becomes successful, you feel a heightened experience whenever you use it. The effect of a successful khechari mudra is intoxicating. The mind becomes quiet, the body steady and the body emanates a very good fragrance. You see many psychic visions in meditation. You can realize yantras and mandalas in meditation.

Mudras to awaken prana shakti

Prana mudra awakens the dormant *prana shakti*, vital energy, and distributes it throughout the body, increasing strength, health and confidence. It develops awareness of the nadis and chakras, and the subtle flow of prana in the body. It instils an inner attitude of peace and equanimity by adopting an external attitude of offering and receiving energy to and from the cosmic source.

Maha mudra clears the nadis and particularly stimulates the flow of sushumna. It increases one's awareness and brings about clarity of thought. Maha mudra stimulates the shakti in the energy circuit linking mooladhara with ajna chakra and

its effects can be strongly felt on a psychic level. The whole system is charged with prana which intensifies awareness and induces spontaneous meditation. Energy blockages are removed. Physiologically it stimulates the digestive capacity; pranically it generates circulation of energy in the chakras; psychologically it develops the mind and inner awareness, and psychically it arouses receptivity.

Maha bheda mudra has a profound influence at a pranic level. It influences mooladhara, manipura and vishuddhi chakras, harnessing their energies to induce concentration of mind and meditation. Maha bheda supplements and follows maha mudra; together they supercharge the whole body-mind complex.

Khechari mudra has a very subtle influence. It preserves the vitality of the body and is especially beneficial for inner healing. In the back of the mouth and the nasal cavity there are various pressure points and glands which are stimulated by this practice and influence the whole body. A number of glands are also massaged, stimulating the secretion of certain hormones and of saliva. This practice reduces the sensations of hunger and thirst, and induces a state of inner calm and stillness. Ultimately, this mudra has the potential to stimulate prana and awaken kundalini shakti. In its full form this practice can cause the astral body to detach itself from the physical body. The consciousness thereby dwells in *akasha*, the space between the astral and physical planes.

In order to be tranquil in mind, you must have ample force in the brain. When there is ample force in the brain, the mind stops and kundalini wakes up. When the brain is weak and has no prana, the mind grows restless. Many people sit for dhyana, but instead of becoming peaceful, their minds become anxious, fearful and nervous. The reason for this is very simple: there is not ample prana shakti in the higher centres. If you practise vipareeta karani mudra for nine minutes every day and are able to reverse the process of prana, there is no reason why your mind should not stop. Another reason for practising vipareeta karani mudra

first is that it increases wakefulness. That is, the inversion of the body directs an extra blood supply to the brain and increases alertness. Vipareeta karani mudra acts on the brain in a similar manner to sirshasana, though the effect is less extreme.

Balancing ida and pingala

Practices of vipareeta karani mudra, khechari mudra, moola bandha etc. control the nervous system. They equalize the pranic force. They balance the pranic impulses going into the brain through the right and left nostrils. They also create a balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

Vipareeta karani mudra balances the activities of the thyroid. The posture reverses the downward and outward movement of energy, revitalizing and expanding the awareness. The flow of prana in ida and pingala nadis is balanced, resulting in an equal flow of breath in the nostrils. The balancing effect also helps to prevent disease on the physical and mental planes.

Manduki mudra activates mooladhara chakra. It calms the disturbances and fluctuations of the mind and balances ida and pingala nadis, leading directly to meditation. It creates harmony between extroversion and introversion and leads to the awakening of sushumna.

The interlocking of the fingers in yoni mudra creates a complete cross-connection of energies from the right hand into the left and vice versa. As well as balancing the energies in the body, it helps to balance the activities of the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Placing the tips of the index fingers and thumbs together in the form of a triangle further intensifies the flow of prana. Yoni mudra invokes the primal energy inherent in the womb or source of creation.

Khechari mudra directly influences brain functions and awakens the higher centres of awareness. Our mind functions within the confines of time and space, ida and pingala, but it is possible to transcend these two poles of duality. Normal

brain functions have to undergo a transformation and restructuring so that supernormal functioning takes place.

Time and space are concepts of the finite mind and perception. They are the laws of nature, and finite mind is the product of nature. If consciousness can be expanded beyond the awareness of finite mind and natural phenomena, it will enter the realm of the infinite.

Initiating the flow of amrit

At the top back of the head, there is an important centre called bindu visarga, a tiny gland is situated there which is known as the seat of nectar. The practice of khechari mudra stimulates that centre and the nectar begins to flow. When this nectar begins to flow and is assimilated by the body, every part of the body, as well as the mind, becomes calm, quiet and tranquil.

Amrit is surely an endocrine secretion. It comes down and is assimilated by the body through the blood vessels. When it is properly assimilated, the body changes. Catabolism, the decaying process, is arrested and a proper balance between anabolism, metabolism and catabolism is created, so that decay and degeneration in the blood vessels, cells and whole body is arrested. In this way the yoga practitioner achieves rejuvenation, *kayakalpa*. *Kayakalpa* means changing the total content of the body.

The nectar produced in bindu is said to intoxicate the conscious mind and make the body resistant to toxins in the system. At a certain stage of spiritual evolution this is an inevitable process which takes place irrespective of the type of yoga that is practised. There is a well-known story about Mira Bai, one of the greatest saints and bhaktas of India. Her devotion to Lord Krishna was so intense that she lived in constant ecstasy by remembering him. Even when her mother-in-law fed her deadly poison she remained unaffected. People say that Lord Krishna turned the poison into rose water or milk. Actually, her system was immune to it because of the 'flow of nectar from the bindu'.

The effects of this nectar on the body, if it is not wasted, are two. One effect is that you become virile and produce children. I am a product of that and so are you. Other effects can be experienced also if you can stop the drop from falling and being consumed by the solar plexus. This is achieved through the practice of vipareeta karani mudra. The solar plexus which is in the navel, is the centre of the sun, of heat. In yoga it is the meeting point of two important forces in the body – prana and apana, the up-going force and the down-going force. If these two forces can be reversed, they are brought together, and the coalition takes place in the navel centre. Then the effects of this nectar are felt by the higher consciousness, or by the subtle body or the astral body. As a result, you become calm and quiet, even if your mind was distracted, confused, wandering and vacillating a few moments before. Then everything stops and you feel total brightness. The eyes are open; you can hear sounds and see everything around you, but the mind does not move. It appears as if time, space and object have ceased, as if the whole universe has ceased to function. You feel a total full stop.

Conclusion

All these mudras bestow power and health on the regular practitioner. All of them are very important and very effective. If you practise them, you will know their merits yourself; there is no proof more convincing than one's own experience. The benefits of mudras are undoubted. They are scientific and aim at correcting the organic disorders of the body. Mudras encourage awareness of vital energy currents (prana), mental, psychic and spiritual attitudes.

8

Applications of Mudra



Mudras and hatha yoga

Surya namaskara, being an active and dynamic series, exerts its major influence on pingala nadi, especially when practised quickly. However, when practised slowly and completely with chakras and mantras, it stimulates both ida and pingala almost equally, depending on the practitioner's abilities.

When surya namaskara is practised slowly, less emphasis is given to pingala nadi and more time is given to mental development. The practice transforms itself from a series of asanas to a series of mudras leading to a more balanced development. It is for this reason that a combination of both fast and slow practice is recommended, for most people require a little extra pingala stimulation and refinement, due to the nature of modern lifestyles.

Before delving into the human psyche with mudras or meditation, the body must be made strong and healthy. The channels for the elimination of impurities must be free. In hatha yoga, certain requisites are necessary for self-realization, without which life is meaningless.

Mudras and meditation

Mudra is one of the most important aspects that hatha yoga has inherited from tantra to expand the consciousness.

Mudras definitely affect the quality of meditation. This can be verified by experiment: one can practise meditation of a passive type for six months, then change the practice to an active type incorporating mudras like maha vedha, and others, especially khechari mudra. The nature of the experiences will definitely alter.

Jnana mudra and chin mudra are simple but important psychoneural finger locks which make meditation asanas more powerful. The palms and fingers of the hands have many nerve endings which constantly emit energy. When the index finger touches the thumb, a circuit is produced which allows the energy that would normally dissipate into the environment to travel back through the body and up to the brain.

The effect of chin or jnana mudra is very subtle and it requires great sensitivity on the part of the practitioner to perceive the change established in consciousness. With practice, however, the mind becomes conditioned to the mudra and when it is adopted, the signal to enter a meditative state is transmitted. One of these two mudras

should be adopted whenever practising meditation, unless otherwise specified.

Khechari mudra is a tantric practice. While it is held, concentration is on bhrumadhya and the vision of a shining light. As long as there is a shining light, the breath is retained. When the light begins to diminish, one starts breathing in. Have you heard that some yogis go underground for many days? The compartment is completely sealed with cement; no oxygen is allowed to enter. They stop the heart and they survive. How? Through khechari mudra. Khechari mudra was traditionally practised by yogis from the age of ten or twelve, because at that time there are very few toxins in the body and it is very flexible and supple. This is the secret of the yogis who take samadhi underground.

Mudras and kundalini

Mudras and bandhas are intended to awaken kundalini, which arouses meditation spontaneously. Even if one does not know how to meditate, or does not have sufficient willpower, if khechari mudra is practised, after some time a 'serum' flows into the body. When it mixes with the blood and other secretions, the state of mind and flow of prana changes. One begins to feel 'high', and the brainwave patterns alter. Even with the eyes open, one can have an altered experience. With the eyes closed one is able to have inner experiences. Music can be heard internally. The beauty of flowers can be seen in any season, anywhere. The moon can be seen even when there is none. It is not hallucination, it is a real and conscious experience. The body becomes quiet and the mind steady. What is this quietness? This quietness is a result of the assimilation of a secretion known as *amrit* and the literal meaning in English is 'no death'. Amrit is nectar, ambrosia, which gives immortality, so this immortality means deathlessness.

Traditionally and according to the texts, it is said that at the base of the spinal column in mooladhara chakra is the place of Shakti, which is residing there as a dormant

potential energy. Through the practices of yoga, the Shakti is stimulated, the Shakti is disturbed and it rises up with a terrific speed and goes up and becomes one with Shiva in sahasrara where both of them unite. According to one tantric system, it is said that awakening of kundalini can take place with the help of mantra and meditation. According to another system of tantra, it is said that through the practices of hatha yoga mudras and bandhas the awakening can also take place. Other great yogis have also declared that by the practices of the yogic asanas, the yogic postures, the awakening can also take place. These yoga asanas or postures have been taken by the people of our time as gymnastics or physical exercises, but they are part of kundalini yoga and of course they are an integral part of tantra.

Mudras and worship

The method of worship in tantra is not only devotional, it is a preplanned method so much so that the worshipper has to remain conscious of those minute rituals at every step; as such he cannot manage to perform the worship mechanically. The process of guiding the awareness is fully defined and you cannot manage to remain unconscious of what you are doing. One has to employ mantras, mudras, bhavana and kriyas during the practice. Therefore, the method of worship brings a state of fineness in the structure of the individual awareness.

Rites are concerned with worship, set actions, mantras, mudras and other actions. These make the mind calm, receptive and one-pointed. This is conducive to the experience of meditation, which will transform one's understanding and relationship with life, oneself and other people. Thus we repeat again that rituals are the means to something else.

The object of worship is usually a deity. This represents the whole purpose of the practice. It is a symbol of that which is to be invoked. In a sense, it is the power incarnated. This symbol represents Shakti, the power of a particular aspect of existence. This Shakti is to be invoked by feeling or devotion

or *bhava*, concentration or *dharana*, incantations or *mantras*, symbolic gestures or *mudras* as well as other practices. This brings about a change in one's being. One becomes receptive to that power symbolized by the deity

The Shakti cult, which is the principal mainstream of tantra, has a beautiful system of *poojas* or worship. One is Devi Pooja; the other, Shiva Pooja. In their poojas they use mudras. Mudras, such as yoni mudra, chin mudra, shambhavi mudra, nasikagra mudra (agochari mudra), which are used to create a total unification of the forces of the body, mind and spirit.

Many of the tantric deities are depicted performing abhaya mudra. This is a mudra that indicates that everything will be all right. Everything that you are thinking now is incorrect and in time all your misconceptions and fears will disappear. These deities are indicating a great truth but without words. They are speaking through this mudra. Listen to them. In time you will find that they are 'speaking' the truth.

Mudra and maithuna

The sexual act is the one means to totally concentrate and captivate the mind, but in tantra it should not be the ordinary experience. The experience has to be more than the gross or sensual one. Awareness and control have to be developed. The senses have to be used, but only as the means of awakening the higher consciousness, not the animal consciousness, and for this vajroli mudra and various tantric rituals must be perfected.

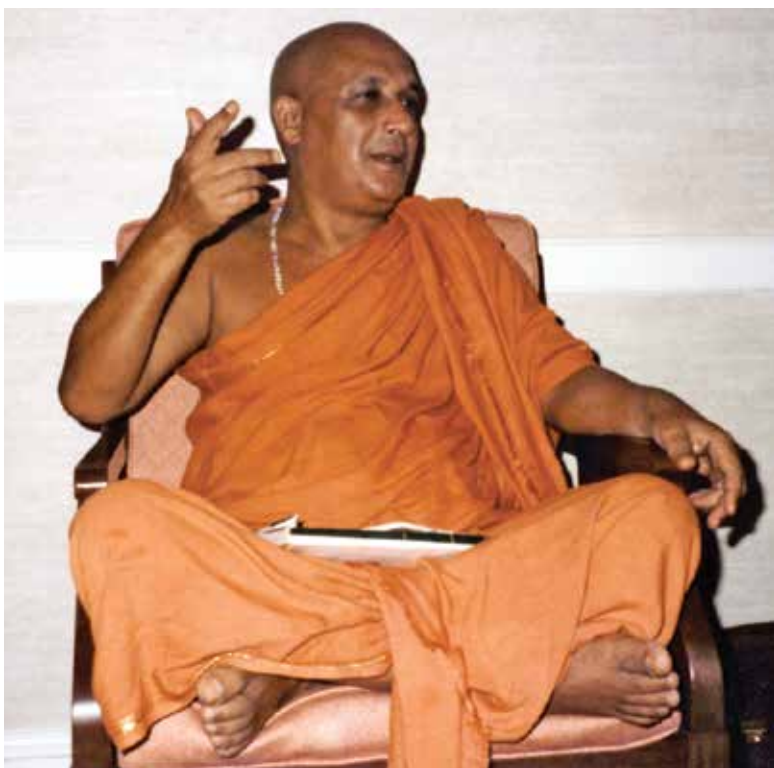
In the tantric process, the experience of energy explosion at the sexual peak has to be controlled. As long as the experience continues, you can direct it to the higher centres. In vajroli the experience takes place in the brain, not in the lower organs. The purpose of vajroli is to maintain this experience for as long as possible without ejaculation. If you can do this, heat is generated in the brain and at the peak of sexual interaction, sushumna comes into operation and kundalini is awakened.

At the end of the sexual act there is an experience. Where does this experience take place? It takes place in the higher centres, but where is it experienced? At the lower centre. If one can have that experience at the higher centre, then both the act and the experience have been sublimated. But how can it be sublimated? By the practice of vajroli mudra. By the practice of vajroli and sahajoli, an experience that originally takes place in the higher centre, but is experienced at a gross centre, is sublimated.

Vajroli and sahajoli are practised by householders to improve and spiritualize the marital relationship. Vajroli is the practice for males which gives control over vajra nadi, the nerve centre responsible for sexual passion. When ejaculation takes place during the normal sexual act, the vajra nadi is filled with blood and vajroli mudra takes place spontaneously, just for a few moments, even if you are not aware of it. But those who have mastered vajroli can control the ejaculation so that it only occurs when they choose, or does not occur at all.

After ejaculation there is a drop in the energy level and depression in the nervous system. But if there is no ejaculation, the energy level remains high, nervous depression does not occur, the blood pressure level remains steady and heat is generated in the brain. At the same time, you will be free from the sense of loss, depression, frustration and guilt. Sexual life is not a cause of weakness. If practised correctly, it brings about a great awakening of energy. Sahajoli is the parallel practice for females.

The functions of the reproductive organs can also be influenced and eventually controlled by the practice of vajroli mudra, over a sustained period of time. Release of reproductive secretions is not only a physiological process, the mind is also involved. Without mental involvement the release cannot occur. In vajroli, the role of sensory pathways, *jnanendriya*, and mental imagery in initiating sexual responses must be witnessed. Control of mind begins by becoming aware of the process. By isolating awareness, the mind remains unexcited



in the midst of sensory perception. When the mind can be witnessed in this way, excitation of the motor responses, *karmendriya*, can be controlled, and semen can be withheld. Control of mind means control of the whole process.

When delicious sweets are eaten, where does the experience take place? In the tongue? No, the tongue has no mind. The experience takes place at a higher centre, but we are not capable of experiencing it there because our experiential faculty is too gross, so it is experienced in the tongue or mouth. If the capacity of experience can be sublimated, then the sweetness will be experienced straight away in the brain, and that experience will be everlasting.

In mundane life, the climax of sexual experience is the one time when the mind becomes completely void of its own

accord and consciousness beyond the body can be glimpsed. However, that experience is short-lived because the energy is expressed through the lower energy centres. This energy which is normally lost can be used to awaken the dormant power of kundalini in mooladhara. If the sperm can be withheld, the energy can be channelled through sushumna nadi and the central nervous system, to the dormant areas of the brain and to the sleeping consciousness.

The purpose of liberating the energy through vajroli is to go beyond personal identity and the limitations of the ego. If yoga is practised only to gain psychic power, or if vajroli is an excuse for any lesser fulfillment, the practices are being misused.

Mudras and brahmacharya

Abstinence from sexual life is not advocated. This is one of the important points that must be understood very clearly. It is a scientific point. It is not that celibacy is out of the question. Celibacy has its own merits, but it is not good for all. It is opposing the very realities and processes of nature. Then what to do? Hatha yoga came up with a suggestion. It is called the principle of preservation. One who is able to master the technology of preservation, is a brahmachari. One can be a brahmachari even if one is married and a householder, if the technology of preservation can be handled. Preservation is important, the act is not important.

Vajroli has got to do with the two nadis that flow on the two sides and feed the scrotum and they are responsible for the production of sperm. There are two types of vajroli. One type is by contracting the whole complex of vajra nadi; the vajra nadi feeds the scrotum. It is responsible for ejaculation or control of ejaculation. If you control vajroli, you control ejaculation. If you control vajroli you can control the production of sperm and if the sperms are not produced, nothing happens. Nothing happens and this has also been tested because many scientists around the world are now studying the possible effects of some of these mudras that we

are talking about in tantra on the production of sperm and ovum. If the sperm and the ovum are controlled, then you control certain energy material within you. Sperm and ovum are not just a simple life, they are emissions of the energy and that is why there is a great emphasis on *brahmacharya* what you call celibacy in many spiritual traditions.

There are many ways of practising birth control in yoga. The first practice is, don't ejaculate. For that you have to practise vajroli mudra. Secondly, you have to practise vipareeta karani mudra. Vipareeta karani mudra is praised highly in every tantric text because they all say one thing: Shakti, energy, goes down; you raise it up. By practising vipareeta karani mudra, you can control the production of sperm and when you practise vipareeta karani mudra, it can stop ovulation temporarily. By the practice of vajroli, the production of sperm and testosterone is affected and the semen can be withheld. On account of this, even if the yogi is a householder, he does not have to lose semen. The yogini practises sahajoli and withholds and redirects her secretions. This is the principle of preservation, which hatha yoga believes is an important point. Man must preserve his *veerya*, semen, and the woman must preserve her secretions.

Mudras, longevity and the fear of death

In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* Yogi Swatmarama has written (3:88):

Evam sanrakshayed bindum mrityum jayati yogavit.

Maranam bindupaatena jeevanam bindudhaaranaat.

Therefore, the knower of yoga conquers death by preserving the bindu (semen). Release of the bindu means death; conservation of semen is life.

This sloka demands detailed discussion. The word *bindu* means point or nucleus. The nucleus of every cell is this same bindu. It contains the chromosomes which encode the entire memory and evolutionary potential of the species. Of course, it is not only loss of semen which causes death.

Cell degeneration, death and replacement is continually occurring at a certain rate in all the tissues of the body (except in the central nervous system where the neurons are not replaced). Semen and menses are specifically referred to because their rate of formation and turnover exceeds by far the turnover rate of other cells, and therefore has the most metabolic significance.

According to Yogi Swatmarama, preservation of the semen in the body conserves energy and bestows upon the yogi a power and experience not known to a man accustomed to losing semen throughout his life. He declares that semen which is withheld is the very nectar of immortality.

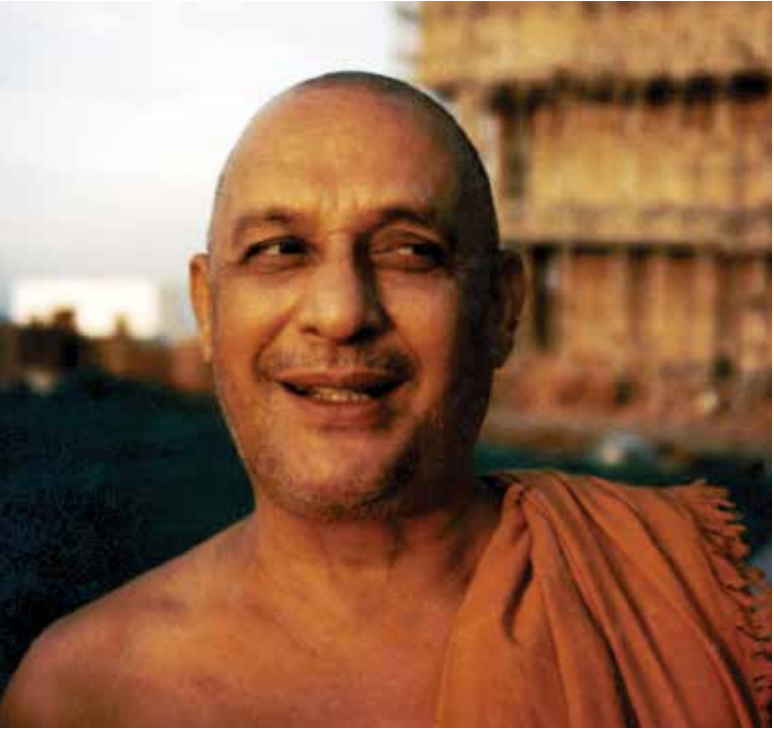
Fear of death is one of the most fundamental motivating forces governing human personality and behaviour. It has been identified as one of the *kleshas*, or afflictions, by Sage Patanjali, as it is a root cause of suffering. Fear of death stems from identification of the self with the physical body. Release of semen strongly reinforces this identification. When a yogi can control the bindu, preventing its release from the body even in maithuna, identification with the body ceases, and consciousness is freed from physical identification. Then the fear of death dissolves.

Mudras and dance

There is a classical book on dance in Sankrit translated in many languages. It is called *Bharat Natyam*. It is the basic of all the dances, of all the mudras, of all the *bhavas*, emotions, of all the *bhangimas*, the different styles of dance. Dance is a language through which you can narrate a total story. In Bharat Natyam style there is a system called Katha Kal Kshapam in that you narrate the entire story, the birth of Shiva, the birth of the universe, and the incarnation of Gods just by dance, mudras, and there are thousands and thousands of mudras. As the twenty-six letters of the alphabet constitute the entire gamut of your language and literature, in the same way these mudras are combined. They represent the entire gamut of expression.

9

Mudra in Other Traditions



Global evidence strongly suggests that an ancient civilization has already realized, recognized and understood the reality of the universal mind and the individual mind.

However, in spite of all the evidence, the universal mind is still just a concept or hypothesis. Only very recently have scientists been able to discover that the human mind possesses its own archetypes and endless forms, symbols and languages, and that the understanding of language and perception depends on what is already contained in the universal mind.

In almost every country, the tantric tradition is completely lost today. The tradition was quietly maintained in India by some very sincere people who had the help of the more conscious and influential people of the country. If you read through the most ancient books – the Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas, you will realize that the tantric tradition was the basis of every kind of knowledge in former times. Many people were not satisfied with this path, so they made it more powerful by adding the practices of yoga – asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, hatha yoga.

The elements of tantra

Whether people are aware of it or not, the tattwas are part of their religion and culture even today. It is most important that they understand the nature of these five elements because they are necessary for the awakening of kundalini from mooladhara to swadhisthana. The five *tattwas* or elements of tantra are *madya*, wine, *mansa*, flesh, *maithuna*, sexual union, *mantra*, the chanting of scriptures or psychic sounds, and *mudra*, practices like shambhavi mudra, vajroli mudra. If you have been to church during the communion, you will have seen the flesh, the wine and the chanting of scriptures. It is a tantric practice.

In tantra, the wine is of two varieties. One is the common wine that most people drink. The other is produced in the cranial passage at bindu chakra. This wine is called amrit, or ambrosia. It is extracted through the practice of khechari mudra, and refined in vishuddhi chakra. There are specific rites which the practitioners must perform utilizing these tattwas. For example there is a specific ritual for taking bath and dressing and there is a ceremony involving mantra and

incantation for purification of the physical, mental and emotional bodies. The practitioners must also know in which particular order the mantras have to be repeated, on which centre of the body they should be concentrating, what mudras are to be performed and when, for how long they should meditate and at which moment they should drink the wine, offer the meat and perform maithuna.

Nose tip gazing

This is exquisitely and lucidly described in the Chinese scriptures called *T'ai Chin Hua Tzung Chih* translated by Wilhelm: "What then is really meant by this? The expression 'tip of the nose' is very cleverly chosen. The nose must serve the eyes as a guideline. If one is not guided by the nose either one opens the eyes too wide and looks into the distance so that the nose is not seen, or the lids shut too much so that the eyes are not seen. But when the eyes are opened too wide, one makes the mistake of directing them outwards, thereby one is easily distracted (by outer events). If they are closed too much, one makes the mistake of letting them turn inwards, thereby one easily sinks into a dreamy reverie (lost in thoughts; unawareness). Only when the eyelids are lowered properly, halfway, is the tip of the nose seen in just the right way. Therefore, it is taken as a guideline . . ."

Elixir of life

Amrit is symbolized in different ways in all world religions. In the Vedas it is called *soma*, the intoxicating fluid of bliss. In Christianity and tantra it is symbolized by wine. It is variously called the elixir of life, the nectar of the gods, the nectar of immortality and ambrosia. Many poets have endlessly praised the 'sweet wine' that brings unspeakable happiness – they are referring to amrit which comes not from grapes, but from spiritual evolution. In the Bible, John (4:14), Christ said: "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The amrit cascades down from the bindu to the vishuddhi chakra which is located in the throat. It is stored in a small chakra called lalana, located in the soft palate at the back of the mouth. It is the area which is pressed by the tongue during khechari mudra. This storehouse of amrit can be awakened through yogic practices, including kriya yoga. When this fluid or substance enters the body it revitalizes every cell and each and every tissue. It is a sort of resurrection. The influences of that nectar are also present in the experiences of Saint John. In the Bible it says: "But God clave a hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water there out; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived . . ." (Judges 15:19). The verse is describing not water, but amrit emerging from the lalana chakra. This leads to spiritual awakening and bliss as described, ". . . and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived . . ."

Some people call it ambrosia, some call it amrit, others call it divine water. In the days when the apostles used to baptize, they did not pour water externally. They did not sprinkle water. It was exactly the same practice. The apostles used to teach their disciples to practise khechari. When they practised khechari mudra, this amrit, the nectar, the divine water came down. When this happened, the person was considered baptized. Now everybody has forgotten about this, but we remember it. Baptism can never take place unless this water flows. Practise khechari mudra, let the nectar drip, and then you are baptized.

Practices of the druids

The power of the Druids developed from long training in a strict and ascetic way of life. Initiation into their higher orders was only achieved after many years of selfless service as a monk. Living in strict abstinence they studied the natural sciences, preserving the deepest secrecy and admitting new members only after long probationary periods. Many members lived and worked in ashrams or monasteries like the ascetics, yogis and bhikkhus of India and Asia. Although



celibacy was not demanded, few married. Many Druids retired from the world to live as recluses in caves, rough stone houses or shacks built in the depths of the forest, where they could continue to practise their meditation without disturbance, emerging to advise or perform religious rituals for those who sought their assistance. Entry into the higher orders was determined by successfully completing difficult tests or sadhanas. As only the strongest survived these tests, the number of successful candidates was fairly small.

In one test the initiate was sent out to sea in a small open boat to face storms and exposure. If the monk returned he passed the test, but many were lost. In another form of initiation, the monk was locked alone in a cave overnight after ingesting a mixture of hallucinogenic herbs and mushrooms, in order to confront and overcome the demonic and terrifying mental forms thus generated by his own mind. This rite is almost identical to certain tantric and Tibetan sadhanas and very similar to modern techniques of sensory deprivation. The graduate of these and similar tests was considered to possess the strength and wisdom necessary to fulfil the role of a Druid.

In another test, the initiate was buried in a coffin for several days, symbolic of the death of the sun god. This is identical to the practice of various yogis who have entered

into higher states of meditation and have been placed in airtight boxes or beneath the earth for the benefit of scientific investigation. Survival during this procedure is attained by mastery of the tantric technique known as khechari mudra, by which the prana is located above the nasopharynx, eliminating the need for respiration of the tissues and cells and placing the body in a state of suspended animation or hibernation.

The Druidic initiates who passed their tests were considered 'born again' and were qualified for the highest truths of the Druidic priesthood. Such men were the rulers of ancient Britain and Gaul often taking part in political and religious life with the universal respect and following of the people. In this way sound, enlightened government, based on wisdom and understanding was maintained, at least at some periods.

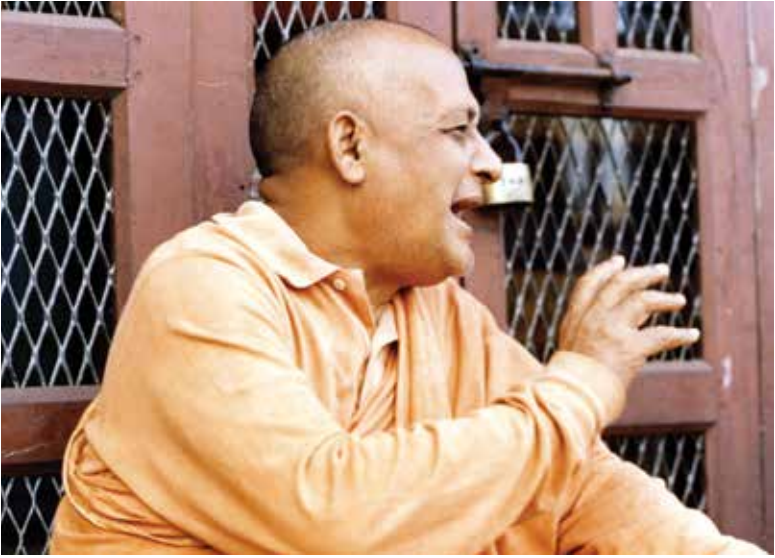
Mudras in Far Eastern traditions

The practices of karate were very useful to the monks of both China and Japan, who were being continually robbed and harassed by numerous warlords and samurai. Karate and its various forms, allowed them to resist and evade attackers using only their bare hands and skill. Karate followed the Buddhist doctrine of non-violence for it enabled the monks to resist violence by receiving and altering an attacker's energy, and it was performed in an effortless way free from fear and the desire to harm or take a life.

Mudras and mantra were employed to direct the flow of energy in the body and mind. When an attack was imminent, the monk would take up a praying position, intone a mantra and block the attack using mudras called semmui (fearlessness). Only a minimum of force was used to divert the assailant's blow and this usually left him in a confused state on the ground. To accomplish this the monk needed to have training in zazen (sitting meditation) which enabled him to free his mind and his body movements and to channel his energy.

10

Conclusion



Spiritual life and experiences are independent of academic stability and intellectual or mundane knowledge. Spiritual knowledge, power and experience exist on a different plane altogether. There is unity amidst seeming diversity; the many fragmentary experiences, seeming realities, individuals and distinctions one confronts are only elements of a greater Self, which includes all diversities and relative contradictions within itself.

Oneness of experience

How is the yogi to realize within himself the entire creation in all its diversity, which has been studied in a thousand disciplines? Physics, chemistry, history, biology and geology are just a few of them. Even a lifespan of academic study could not hope to keep abreast of all these fields of research. Yogically, these types of knowledge are not absolute, but are the various aspects of a single creative seed and source, like rays emerging from the sun. The realization of creation, time and space, including his own body and mind, as the outpouring of the one cosmic maha bindu, is the attainment of a yogi.

Different men appear separate and distinct from one another, with distinguishing features and characteristics. However, from a greater standpoint these distinctions fall away and we can see that all men are essentially the same – all are born by the same process, with the same hopes and aspirations, fears and desires. Similarly, individual minds and personalities can be endlessly defined by their differences, but it is to their similarity that a yogi directs his attention. All minds are only minute parts and expressions of a single collective mind. To realize this collective mind in operation is called *manonmani*.

A yogi gains this experience by grasping within himself the bindu of consciousness. The unity of consciousness, creation and mind is comprehended by one who realizes the *bindu*, the seed from which all thoughts, minds, bodies, deities, devas and mudras spring forth. Khechari mudra is linked with cosmic consciousness through bindu, the seed of creation and khechari mudra maintains bindu in the brain centre. This leads to the expansion of finite consciousness and realization of Shiva, Brahman, atman. This is a state that transcends the mind; it is samadhi. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it is written (3:54):

*Ekam srishtimayam beejamekaa mudraa cha khecharee;
Eko devo niraalamba ekaavasthaa manonmanee.*

There is only one seed of creation and one mudra – khechari; one deva independent of everything, and one state – manonmani.

This sloka indicates the experience of oneness, union with the Supreme, which is realized by the yogi. There is an experience of oneness which is to be realized. The one who has steadied the bindu comprehends in a single eternal crystalline experience all the scattered and fragmentary pieces of individual and collective perception, knowledge and aspiration. He alone sees the world through the eye of Lord Shiva, the one who wishes well to all beings and sees only unity amidst apparent diversity.

Mudra and systems of yoga

Our ancient system of hatha yoga is an answer. It purifies the body. Pranayama and mudras silence the agitated centres of the mind and adjust faulty endocrine secretions. The practices automatically bring sobriety. Character and sobriety are the expressions of the inner purity of mankind. These cannot be infused from outside solely by speeches. The practices must be performed.

Yogic texts are pervaded by the theme of an immortal nectar and the techniques and practices by which it can be trapped and consumed within the human body. The divinization of man is considered to be a process of physiology rather than a philosophical or religious idea. When this amrit is absorbed by the body during the practice of khechari mudra, then the restless mind becomes quiet and one-pointed. Passions, desires, imaginations, dissipations, just drop away. They disappear. We do not know why they are even happening and why they are not happening any longer. This is how the so-called problems of the mind are solved.

All the mudras and other practices of hatha yoga lead towards khechari, the attitude of unsupportedness in space; consciousness existing alone and independently, without a second. In the same way, all the devas, deities, gurus and

evolved personalities are to be realized as the work pieces of a single absolute consciousness and experience. How is the yogic aspirant to gain this experience of yoga? How to realize the one containing the many, and the unity within diversity? How to realize that he is none other than all names, forms, ages, times and personalities which have ever existed or will ever exist, to have the experience that all these are already within himself? How to span the seemingly infinite chasm between the individual and cosmic awareness? By realizing the bindu, the seed, the nada within his own body, mind and consciousness. By the outpouring of the bindu, one has become many. By its retention, many again become one.

When Yogi Swatmarama says that in his opinion eyebrow centre gazing leads immediately to mindlessness, he is narrating from his own experience. Those who have become highly established in spiritual consciousness through hatha yoga and raja yoga, gain control of the mind and are able to transcend its modifications and enter into the samadhi states at will.

Mudras and the evolution of man

Man has four basic desires known as *purushartha* or *chaturvarga*, the first of which is *kama* or sensual gratification. This needs to be fulfilled to a certain extent, but it should not pull the consciousness down. It should be a means to accomplish a greater result. Every action, including the sex act, should be directed towards realizing the truth of existence. Then one is living a spiritual life. Spiritual life does not depend on living up to puritanical morality. If one can follow puritanical ideals and attain enlightenment, then practise them, but do not condemn others who cannot. The moment rigid ideals are created stating that the spiritual path has to be like 'this' and cannot be like 'that' one's ability to have a total experience becomes limited.

In order to bypass the very basis of man's mind and desire there is something very important that has to be done, and what is that? Vipareeta karani mudra diverts the whole process of energy in manipura chakra, the navel centre, back up to

sahasrara. Then the energy is installed in its pristine glory. Those of you who have been practising yoga and also those of you who will be doing it in the future, must remember that what you are doing is a process of getting over the eternal struggle and finding the real spirit and the light within.

We use mudras, bandhas and pranayama for this can help us utilize a type of secretion or nectar in the body which creates a spiritual attitude. You may not taste it every day but you can taste it sometimes. When this happens, then you have no mind at all. Thoughts evaporate and tranquillity comes automatically. The whole physical body is immediately controlled. Afterwards mental control comes by itself without trying to eliminate the conscious tendencies of the mind. Higher awareness can be apprehended even when your awareness is external. Homogeneous awareness is potential in everyone, but in order to have that experience we must widen the capacities of mind and consciousness.

Yoga was responsible for weaning man from the material to the transcendental world. It was the yoga movement which ushered in the spiritual awakening at large. Without yoga, humanity would not have turned to spirituality. Yoga has completed its mission successfully. Asana, pranayama, hatha yoga, bandha, mudra and other yogic practices proved extremely useful in bringing humanity to the path. Had yoga not been revived humanity would never have come to spirituality.





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.

Mudra describes the many mudras, which are gestures, attitudes and means to attain happiness. Their vast application in ritual, art, yoga and classical Indian dance indicates their importance in controlling and directing pranic flow. This volume shows how mudras enhance physical and mental wellbeing.

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

