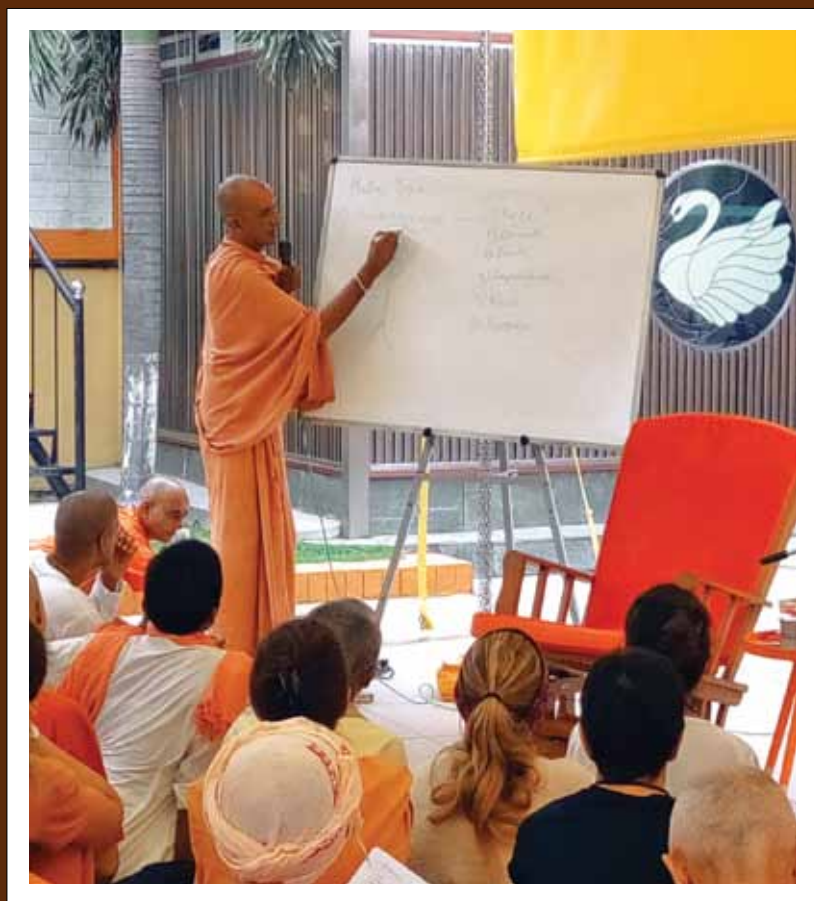


Hatha Yoga Yatra I

Understanding Shatkarma

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Hatha Yoga Yatra I

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

Hatha Yoga Yatra I

Understanding Shatkarma

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Discourses given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati during
the training of Hatha Yoga Module 1: Shatkarma Intensive,
held from 24th to 30th September 2016 at Ganga Darshan
Vishwa Yogapeeth, Bihar School of Yoga, Munger,*



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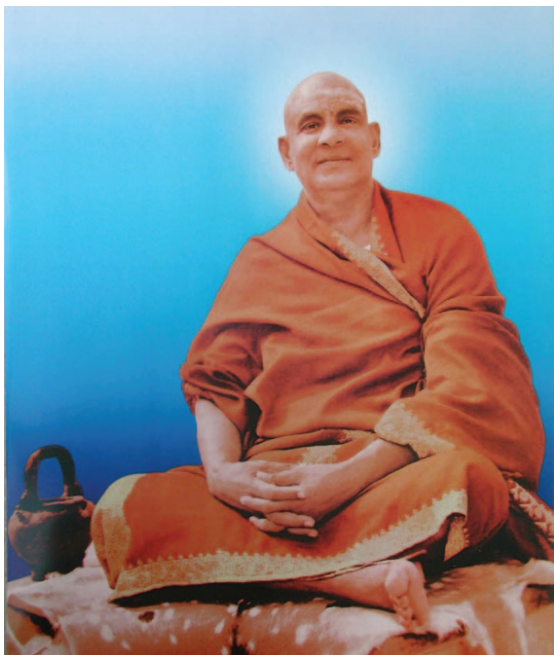
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Dedication

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

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Preface:

The 2nd Chapter of Yoga

Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati established the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963, in order to fulfil the mandate of his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati. The mandate Swami Satyananda received was to propagate the science of yoga and take yoga from “shore to shore and door to door”. In the days of Swami Sivananda, yoga was far from the globally recognized and accepted word it is today. Yoga was considered a spiritual practice reserved for sannyasins and renunciates who had renounced society and were seeking enlightenment. It was not seen as something that could be incorporated into society and practised by the general public.

When the Bihar School of Yoga was established, the philosophy, practices, applications and lifestyle of yoga as practical and scientific systems were unknown, even in Indian society. From the beginning, yoga training and propagation by the Bihar School of Yoga took the form of intensive residential programs, in which yoga was taught as a way to qualitatively enhance physical health, mental peace, emotional harmony. A sequence of progression in yoga was defined fifty years ago by Swami Satyananda, by giving systematic training first in hatha yoga, raja yoga, and kriya yoga, as *bahiranga yoga*, external yoga. Simultaneously, training in *antaranga*, internal, aspect of karma yoga, bhakti and jnana yoga was provided through the lifestyle and inspiration of the ashram environment. A holistic or integral yoga system developed in which the yoga aspirant

could awaken and integrate the faculties of head, heart and hands. The different *angas*, limbs, of yoga become the means of attaining this personal harmony and integrated expression.

In the early 1940s, the subject of yoga was propagated across the world by teachers and masters of different traditions, introducing the idea that through the practice of yoga one could explore the body, mind, emotions, and have a glimpse into one's spiritual nature. The first-generation teachers focused on bringing the knowledge of yoga to human society according to the need of the society at that time. In the 1960s, yoga was seen as a physical culture. In the 1970s, it was seen as a way to overcome stress, anxiety, tension and to improve the physical and mental functions. In the 1980s, research into the various possibilities and potentials of yoga to assist and promote physical and mental health took the forefront. By the 1990s, a rapid increase in the popularity of the practice of asana was evident across the globe. The asana component of yoga had been accepted worldwide and other components of yoga were relegated to the background and largely ignored by the mainstream practitioners and majority of yoga teachers. Today, 28 million people are practising yoga in the United States alone and statistics estimate 300 million practitioners worldwide.

In 2013, the World Yoga Convention was conducted in Munger to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga. Over 50,000 yoga practitioners, teachers, students and aspirants participated in this historic event either in person or through the internet. The Convention was a milestone that marked the completion of fifty years of yoga propagation. The mandate of taking yoga from shore to shore and door to door was fulfilled. Over a fifty-year period, with the help of yoga aspirants and well-wishers all over the world, a yogic renaissance had taken place. The chapter of yoga propagation was complete and when one chapter closed, the next chapter opened.

Thus the World Yoga Convention also heralded the beginning of the second chapter of the Bihar School of Yoga.

The hallmark of this second chapter is a new vision of yoga not as a practice but as a *vidya*, a wisdom to be understood, imbibed and expressed in life. This understanding of the fundamental need for integral development was the vision of Swami Satyananda, which he imparted and taught through the concept of the *yoga chakra*, or the wheel of yoga.

The second chapter of the Bihar School of Yoga and the teachings which are being presented are not concerned with propagation of the practices of yoga. Isolated practices of yoga do not bring about the qualitative change and spiritual evolution intended and envisaged by the seers. The transcendence of the negative and restricting conditions and the real evolution and growth of the personality takes place only when the *vidya* of yoga is comprehended, absorbed and realized.

The profundity of yogic understanding must increase and the depths of yoga must be fathomed, if the *vidya* is to be realized and maintained for future generations. The experience and wisdom of accomplished yogis and spiritual scientists is recorded in the scriptural and classical texts detailing each *anga* of yoga. The second chapter teachings are a progressive effort to discern and elucidate the experiences and realizations of the ancient seers, within the blueprint of the *yoga chakra*.

For individual aspirants, the challenge of the second chapter is to deepen the understanding and experience of yoga. Practice is merely an introduction to yoga, which is limited by personal motivation and constraints. The *yoga vidya* dimension is accessed only when one moves from practice to *sadhana* and makes a sincere effort to experience the aims defined by the different *angas* of yoga. Until that sincerity awakens, the commitment to adhere to the system and the *vidya* of yoga is lacking. With sincerity, seriousness and commitment, each aspirant has to accept responsibility for their own development and betterment in life.

Ultimately, yoga is a lifestyle. It is not a practice. For, once the yogic principles are imbibed and become part of life, the attitudes, perceptions, interactions, the mind, actions and

behaviours will improve. To meet the challenge of the second chapter, the expressive and the behavioural components of yoga, the antaranga and the bahiranga aspects, have to come together. When head, heart and hands unite, an ordinary moment can become divine. An ordinary life can become a divine life.

Introduction: Understanding Hatha Yoga

24 September 2016



To give a background to this training of Hatha Yoga, I will take you back in time. In 1956, Sri Swami Satyananda established the International Yoga Fellowship. The idea behind it was that globally, irrespective of where people are or what they are involved in, they can live a yogic life in which self-awareness and perfection is the sadhana, and positive expression is the behaviour. For self-perfection he established the Bihar School of Yoga as the mother centre in 1963 and for positive expression he established Rikhiapeeth.

Over a period of time, the Munger town was called Yoga Nagari and Munger ashram became known as Vishwa Yogapeeth, as the Munger town housed many institutions of

yoga, such as Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first yoga university in the world; Yoga Research Foundation, an organization that conducts scientific and applied research into the practices of yoga; Yoga Publications Trust, which undertakes the work of publication and has over 350 book titles and over 600 CDs and DVDs on yoga. All these combined aspirations represent the yogic vision of Sri Swamiji.

Sri Swamiji believed that through awareness one can improve the quality of life, experience perfection and express creativity through 'head, heart and hands'. This is the sadhana or the learning component. It is 'becoming', you become better than what you were. This is the principle followed at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger. The expressive component is 'being', which is experienced in Rikhia. They all form part of the International Yoga Fellowship, a fellowship of people who are committed and dedicated to the development and furtherance of Sri Swami Satyananda's aspirations and vision.

A new chapter

In 2013, the Bihar School of Yoga completed fifty years and its golden jubilee was celebrated with the World Yoga Convention. At that time it was announced that the first chapter of yoga propagation is over. For fifty years we propagated yoga, beginning at a time when people hardly knew what yoga was, in India as well as abroad. Today, after fifty years, there are yoga teachers in every nook and corner of the world, and the goal of yoga propagation has been accomplished. During the World Yoga Convention it was also announced that now the next chapter will begin, in which experiencing the depth of yoga will be the focus.

When Sri Swamiji first taught us yoga in the sixties, it was not to make us yoga teachers. I haven't joined any teacher training program in my life though I have conducted hundreds. When we learnt yoga, it was to experience yoga, and the first generation of sannyasins remained true to that aspiration. However, as the work of yoga propagation gained

momentum globally, more and more people wanted to learn yoga and also to teach yoga. Thus the training started, but now the focus in the minds of people undertaking the training was teaching, not experiencing. The focus of people was on learning as much as one can and get stamped a certificate. Go out, open your own centre, and become a yoga teacher. Accordingly the yoga programs changed: the focus shifted from experiencing to teaching.

To teach in society, limited practices and theories of yoga were put forward. Therefore today ninety percent of yoga centres in the world teach hatha yoga asanas. Bihar Yoga is one of the few traditions where, as per Swami Sivananda's guidelines, the focus is on 'head, heart and hands': body, mind and emotions. The thrust at BSY is not yogasanas but methods that can help one manage the mind, get rid of the stresses of emotions and anxieties, lead one to experience peace and silence, and make one aware of the possibility of adopting a spiritual direction in life.

Even with this approach, we were limited to provide training in selected asanas and pranayamas which everybody in society could do without delving into the deeper benefits of asana and pranayama. Pratyahara was taught in the form of yoga nidra and other systems of concentration including ajapa japa, antar mouna, and a few other practices. Most yoga teachers trained by BSY focused and still focus on four items: asana, pranayama, relaxation, and some form of concentration.

This type of training became part of the first chapter of yoga, the chapter of yoga propagation. Everybody adopted this system: the combination of the physical, the breath, the mental and the meditative. Now the time has come to move into the next chapter, away from propagation back into experience. Of course if you have the right experience and understanding, you can also propagate the subject better.

We started to plan for the second chapter in 2014 and to develop the ideas that were originally given to us by our master, Sri Swami Satyananda, when he trained us in yoga.

We recognized that the Bihar Yoga training has become diluted, as the first generation teachers have trained others who have in turn trained others; therefore what is now seen in society is a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy of a photocopy, the fifteenth or twentieth photocopy of the original. With each photocopy the clarity reduces; the understanding, the involvement and the commitment reduces.

Thus, in the second chapter of yoga, the focus is on providing depth in our own yoga practice and understanding, and new programs were developed in 2014 and 2015 towards this end. In fact, today the Bihar School of Yoga is not conducting any course or program that it conducted in the past for the last fifty years. That is a closed chapter. In the new programs that have started from 2016, the first focus is on knowing about the system of yoga as taught by Swami Satyananda. The focus is to again look at the original document.

Hatha Yoga Intensive training

The Hatha Yoga Intensive training was developed keeping in mind the above purpose. The first course in the series is called ‘Module 1’ as hatha yoga is a vast subject. The majority of people in the world know of hatha yoga as the yoga of physical postures. They practise twenty dynamic postures and say, “We are practising hatha yoga.” Globally, beyond the physical practices of hatha yoga people do not have any idea of what it is.

In the Hatha Yoga Intensive training, in the course of time we will provide training in all aspects of hatha yoga. The first module is restricted to the purificatory practices, the shatkarma. We will not be delving into asana, pranayama, mudra or bandha in Module 1. Of course they will be practised, as they aid what will be done in the shatkarma, however, the focus will be on the practice and understanding of shatkarma.

The practices will be taught in a capsule form, as it is not possible to convey everything the subject contains

in one week's time. Nevertheless, an important aspect of hatha yoga will be understood and applied, the purpose being to experience yoga. Keep in mind that what is learnt in this training is not for teaching other people, it is for experiencing the depth of yoga as Swami Satyananda made his first groups experience it.

Meaning of hatha yoga

The word 'hatha' is made up of two mantras: *Ham* and *Tham*. These are the two mantras of ajna chakra. *Ham* on one side representing the solar energy and *Tham* on the other side representing the lunar energy. The location where there is balance between the solar and the lunar energies is ajna chakra, represented by the mantra *Om*. Thus the logo of BSY represents the fundamental idea of hatha yoga: attaining balance between the solar and the lunar energies leading to the awareness and experience of *Om*.

What is the meaning of these two mantras, *Ham* and *Tham*? *Ham*, according to yogic knowledge, is the mantra of the sun, represented in the body as *prana shakti*, the vital energy. In the absence of prana shakti, there is no life, no physical movement, expression or activity. Anything that brings life to the outer, material dimension is prana shakti, the solar energy, signified by the mantra *Ham*. *Tham* is the mantra of the moon, which in yoga symbolizes the mind, the mental faculties and behaviour. This mental energy is known as *chitta shakti*. These are the two behaviours of the cosmic energy in creation: one governing and controlling the material and the physical, and the other governing and controlling the subtle and the mental. The purpose of hatha yoga is to liberate these two energies, which are restricted and blocked, to remove the energy blocks from the body and the mind.

Classical literature of hatha yoga

There are two common classical texts on hatha yoga: *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* and *Gheranda Samhita*. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* is by Yogi Swatmarama and *Gheranda Samhita* by Sage

Gheranda. The two texts represent two different schools of hatha yoga and present different ideas.

Hatha yoga is not one system; there are many schools of training and thought in hatha yoga. While *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* focuses more on the physical aspect of hatha yoga, *Gheranda Samhita* is more representative of the mental, psychological and spiritual aspects of hatha yoga.

BSY has published commentaries on both hatha yoga texts, as ultimately the focus of hatha yoga is to use the body to come to the energy level, and from there move to higher levels of experience. Thus *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* is like the primary class of hatha yoga and *Gheranda Samhita* is like the secondary class, and then there are other literatures that represent university education. This third level of training is not commonly given, as society is not yet ready to imbibe those practices. In this training we will look at the first two texts.

History of hatha yoga

Hatha yoga is considered to be the first yoga, and the original work on it is the *Shiva Samhitas*. They contain the teachings given by Shiva, the originator of yogas. He gave these teachings to Parvati, his wife and disciple.

The story goes that once Parvati asked Lord Shiva, “What is the method of overcoming pain and suffering?” In answer to her question, before beginning his discourse, Shiva told Parvati to keep acknowledging that she had understood what she was hearing, to let him know whether she was following the satsang or not. Then Shiva closed his eyes and started to speak on yoga, and Parvati was listening. Now you know human nature, if you focus too hard the mind becomes introverted, there is drowsiness and sometimes you fall asleep. Parvati went to sleep. However, Shiva continued, as he kept hearing, “Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.” At the end when he opened his eyes, he saw Parvati in yoga nidra, sleeping. He wondered who then had been acknowledging his teachings all throughout, so he looked around, and saw a fish in a brook.

When gods speak, they speak in all languages. You can understand God in English, I can understand God in Hindi or Sanskrit, somebody else can understand God in their own language. Therefore when Shiva was speaking, even the fish was able to understand him.

As the fish had listened to all the instructions on yoga, Shiva gave it a boon: “Become the first propagator of yoga in human society.” The fish became Matsyendranath, the first hatha yogi who propagated yoga. Credit goes to Matsyendranath for bringing the teachings of hatha yoga to the level at which ordinary people could understand them. He was the first human visionary, the first disciple who understood what hatha yoga was.

The tradition that Matsyendranath started, the Natha sampradaya, still carries on today since antiquity. The Nathas are considered to be adept hatha yogis. They don’t have many ashrams, yet they number in thousands. They don’t stay in any one place; they are constantly travelling, and diligently practising their hatha yoga. They are masters of hatha yoga.

Development of different schools

From the first tradition of hatha yoga, as propagated by Matsyendranath, evolved different branches and teachers, who in different ages focused on the prevalent need of human society and propagated the subject accordingly.

When Yogi Swatmarama was propagating hatha yoga, he was teaching in villages and towns, to people in active social life, therefore his approach was different. Sage Gheranda, on the other hand, was teaching not in society but to students who came to his ashram and had a spiritual bent of mind. Therefore his focus was more on using hatha yoga for spiritual gain, whereas Swatmarama’s purpose lay in helping people manage their difficulties.

It should be clear to all that hatha yoga is not only dealing with the physical aspect of the body. It is a complete subject in itself with progressive levels.

Progressive levels

The term ‘progressive’ indicates a specific yogic sequence. From the yogic perspective, within this physical body there are four other bodies; we are the owners of five bodies. Just as when you open up a Russian doll, inside there is another doll; you open that up and inside there is another doll, and it goes on like that. The first one is big and the rest are progressively smaller. Our bodies are like that.

The outer body is known as *annamaya kosha*, the body made up of matter. *Kosha* means dimension and *maya* means filled with; therefore, ‘annamaya kosha’ means dimension filled with *anna* or matter. The inner body is known as *manomaya kosha*, the body of mind, the mental dimension. Then there is *pranamaya kosha*, the energy dimension; *vijnanamaya kosha*, the consciousness dimension – *vijnana* means specific knowledge of the self or consciousness; and *anandamaya kosha*, the bliss dimension – *ananda* or bliss arising out of spiritual realization. These are the five bodies or dimensions, koshas, all contained within each other.

When all the koshas work at their optimum positive level, then that is the perfection of hatha yoga. When your body is functioning optimally, there is good health and the senses are all fired-up and active, there is a sense of physical vitality, lightness, euphoria and dynamism. When the mind is happy, there is a feeling of buoyancy, contentment, positivity, optimism; nothing appears dark, everything is seen as light and bright. This optimum condition of body and mind is the perfection of hatha yoga.

Blocks in koshas

Blocks are formed at the five levels of koshas naturally and unconsciously due to lifestyle and circumstances. For example, when you are under stress, certain areas of the body become affected: three regions in particular. One, the neck region, where the neck and the shoulders become tight; two, the abdominal region, where the muscles of the abdomen become tight, when you pull the abdomen in, in the ‘fight

or flight mechanism'; three, the perineum – you pull in the perineum whenever there is stress.

A normal experience of stress can unconsciously create muscular stiffness and blocks that reduce circulation of blood and prana. The natural pattern of sleep and hunger can become disturbed. Sometimes when you are mentally and emotionally burnt-out, you cannot sleep; the stress affects the relaxation pattern. The hunger is also affected, some people cannot eat and some people overeat under stress.

Just as there are blocks of the body, there are blocks of prana, which are also three. The pranic blocks are perceived in the *granthis* or knots that are created in the pranic body unconsciously and naturally. These blocks have to be cleared for the prana to flow. Once the prana begins to flow, the behaviour of the mind changes and there is a sense of euphoria and happiness. One has to harmonize the five bodies to attain an optimum state of being.

Clearing the koshas

Hatha yoga takes you from annamaya to pranamaya to manomaya. Raja yoga will take you from manomaya to vijnanamaya, and kriya yoga will take you from vijnanamaya to anandamaya. Therefore Sri Swamiji has given us these three yogas as the progression in yogic life.

You start with hatha yoga and rectify the imbalances and blocks of annamaya kosha or the body, pranamaya kosha or the energy, manomaya kosha or the dissipated mind. Then you move into raja yoga and work with manomaya kosha. The dissipated mind is now focused, channelled and guided. You move into dharana and dhyana, leading to a balance in the manomaya and vijnanamaya experience. Then in kriya yoga dhyana is intensified, leading to the experience of anandamaya, the spiritual dimension. In this way, these three yogas indicate Sri Swami Satyananda's progressive teaching in yoga.

Sri Swamiji gave six yogas for those who live in society, who have their obligations, commitments, ties, desires and

ambitions. Together they make the *yoga chakra*, the wheel of yoga. On one half of the wheel are hatha yoga, raja yoga and kriya yoga, which represent the effort that one puts into yoga to come to a point of balance and mastery over oneself. They represent the sadhana. On the other half of the wheel are karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga, which represent the expression. Karma yoga represents the creative performance using the faculty of the hands, bhakti yoga represents the creative and positive expression of the heart, and jnana yoga represents the creative ability of the head. This is the yoga chakra developed by Sri Swamiji for people everywhere, including sannnyasins. If you can learn and imbibe these six aspects in your life, there is an experience of completeness and wholeness.

Cause of blocks

Hatha yoga says that blocks in the body restrict the free expression of the body and the senses, blocks in the mind restrict the creative expressions of the mind, and it is the same with the heart and emotions. Why do these blocks form? The answer is given by Sage Gheranda in *Gheranda Samhita*. He says that these blocks form due to one's improper interaction with life. There is no control over habits, no awareness of the requirement of the body systems. Do you know how much food is good for you, or does your greed decide how much is good for you? In most cases it is the greed that decides the food intake.

According to Ayurveda, during any meal the stomach should receive fifty percent solids, twenty-five percent liquids, and twenty-five percent should remain empty. That is the requirement of the body for nourishing itself. However, people fill their stomach one hundred percent with solids, the oesophagus with liquids, and air in the mouth! The outcome: physical imbalance, gas, acidity, bile, indigestion, loose motions, aches and pains. This then reflects in all other body systems. In this way, diet is one factor that leads to physical and pranic blocks.

The second factor is the environment: how you cope with the environment, whether you allow stress to be created in your mind due to external situations or you let those situations flow by you without getting affected. The outer factors have a major impact on the mental behaviour, and the mind thinks about those events for an unnecessarily long time.

Everyone tends to use more time in thinking why and how, and less time in doing, implementing and moving on. These two words, 'why' and 'how', divert the mind from its clarity and focus. If you observe your life, you will also find that these two are major factors that cloud your understanding.

All these blocks, the pranic, the emotional, the mental, the physical, lead to spiritual blocks. These blocks have to be removed to experience the spiritual dimension, and that is the purpose of yogic practices.

Removing the blocks

The blocks are known as 'mal' in Sanskrit. *Mal* means a covering. If there is a film of dust on the mirror, you cannot see your image in it. That is mal. In order to see your image, what do you have to do? Take a cloth and give it a wipe, and then the mal is gone. If you enter a room and it is dirty, you pick up a broom and clean it. What you have cleaned is mal: something that has accumulated.

Mal does not mean something dirty or bad; it means the dust that you have accumulated over a period of time. You don't spread dust over your room, it just happens, it accumulates. Therefore, that which is accumulated in the normal course of events is known as mal.

There is another word: *nirmal*. It means the absence of impurity. Nirmal is the opposite of mal: you clean what has been accumulated and bring back the original, clean, pure form. That is nirmal, which means without accumulation. Therefore, the accumulation has to be removed to clear the blocks that have formed.

Sequence of hatha yoga

Hatha yoga begins with the understanding that purification has to take place first. Towards this purpose, the yogis taught the practices of shatkarma or shatkriya. *Shat* means six, *karma* or *kriya* means action. *Shatkarma* means the six actions of hatha yoga to externally and physically detoxify the body, to rectify the imbalances occurring due to dietary irregularities, stresses and anxieties, and other harmful habits.

After shatkarma, hatha yoga prescribes the practice of dynamic asanas. Asanas are taught in only two branches of yoga: hatha yoga and raja yoga. The hatha yoga asanas are dynamic and the raja yoga asanas are static. Hatha yoga asanas can number anywhere from hundreds to thousands, and raja yoga asanas number less than ten, as they are static and meditative. Therefore when Patanjali speaks of asanas in the *Yoga Sutras*, he is not talking of the asanas that people commonly practise. What people practise is the hatha yoga asanas, not the raja yoga asanas.

The dynamic asanas are the second component of hatha yoga. The third component is pranayama. The fourth component is mudras and bandhas. The fifth component is practices of concentration. The sixth is *laya*, dissolution. These are the six aspects of hatha yoga, according to Sage Gheranda.

Now, if you look at your own practice and ask which of these aspects of hatha yoga you incorporate, the majority will point their finger to asana, some to asana and pranayama, and a third group may point to asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha. You may have practised the shatkarma once or twice in your life. In concentration you do not follow a systematic method, your meditation is more whimsical than sequential; you do what you like to do. And the final aspect, *laya* or dissolution, is never experienced. So you are restricted to asana, pranayama and mudra-bandha – three categories. The majority think of hatha yoga as a combination of these three categories only.

In the traditional system of hatha yoga, you start with physical purification and detoxification, elimination of blocks

that are physical in nature. Then you move into asana to gain flexibility, reduce the stiffness and open up the nadis for the prana to flow. Asanas also improve the circulation, the condition and health of the internal body organs and their functions; there is improvement in the actions of the heart, in breathing, digestion, elimination, circulation, and so on. So purification and detoxification come first, and then physical improvement. After this you move into pranayama, to increase the vital energy, to recharge the battery.

Prana is like the energy in the battery of life. When you are filled with prana you can remain awake, but when you don't have prana you fall asleep. When you are exhausted you sleep, as the energy is depleted, and sleep allows you to rebuild that energy. Sleep is like plugging your charger to the socket, you are plugging yourself to prana. The body sleeps, but the vitality is recharged in that state of relaxation. This prana has to be consciously developed, guided and utilized, which is achieved through the practice of pranayama.

There are different stages of pranayama. The first is to develop breath control, the second is to realize the different pranas in the body and to move them, the third is awakening the prana in the chakras, which is called *pranotthana*. The fourth aspect is attainment of the *kaivalya* state, the meditative state of pranayama. In this way, there are various levels of pranayama. People think of pranayama as only breathing practices, however, there are many levels of pranayama, leading to the kaivalya state.

With pranayama you are also able to regulate the solar and the lunar energies. Thus the purpose of hatha yoga is served when you arrive at the practices of pranayama. The shatkarma and asanas are preparations, and with pranayama you begin to balance the *ida* and *pingala*, the solar and the lunar energies. This process is aided with the practices of mudras and bandhas, as they create pressures on nerve plexuses in the body which are connected to the chakras and to the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems. Mudras and bandhas focus the pranic energy into

the chakras, and allow the awakening of chakras to take place.

Then the fifth aspect is concentration. This relates to the aspiration of hatha yoga to stop the dissipation and distractions of the mind, and to develop the ability to consciously and wilfully focus one's awareness. There is a story about concentration. A teacher was teaching his students the science of archery. In order to take their test, he called them all and said, "Today you have to show your excellence in archery. I am going to place a bird made out of earth on top of a branch in a tree. You have to shoot the arrow and hit the bird in the eye." All the students said, "Yes, we will do it." He called the first student and said, "Pick up the bow and arrow, and aim." The student took aim. The teacher said, "Before shooting, tell me what you see." The disciple said, "Oh, I see everything, I see the tree, the leaves, the branches, the bird, the sky, the clouds." When you look at a scene, you see many things, and he was describing what he was seeing. The guru said, "Put the bow and arrow down." Unfit.

Another student was called. "What do you see?" "I see the same as he did." Unfit. The third one. "What do you see?" The third student was a bit clever. He focused on the tree and said, "I only see the tree and the branch." The guru said, "No, not good enough. Put your bow and arrow down." So everybody failed until one student came at the end, and picked up the bow and arrow. The same question was asked, "What do you see?" He said, "I see nothing but the eye of the bird that I have to shoot." The guru said, "Shoot." The arrow flew and hit the bird's eye.

This is a story from the *Mahabharata*, and the person who was able to shoot the arrow was Arjuna. He was the only one who said, "I see only the bird's eye." Now, when you look at something directly, through your peripheral vision you see many other things. So by logic even Arjuna should have been disqualified, but his statement "I only see the bird's eye," meant that his entire focus was on the bird's eye only

and not on other objects, and therefore the guru said, “Yes, shoot,” as he knew that Arjuna’s mind was not being diverted to a leaf, cloud, branch, a person standing nearby, the guru, the environment, the location. His mind was not distracted, whereas for everyone else even while they were looking at the bird’s eye, their mind and attention was being diverted by all the other objects around. Arjuna represented the state of awareness in concentration. When the mind is not diverted and remains focused, that is concentration.

Concentration is not difficult to achieve when you like something. If you are talking with somebody you like, three hours will fly by like fifteen minutes, you are so engrossed, immersed and focused in what you are doing that you forget everything else. Even at work, if you like what you are doing you will find it easier to concentrate. When, in the mid-eighties, Ganga Darshan received its first computer I was the only one who knew how to use it, as I had had a computer in the USA. In the early eighties, you had to do the programming yourself, and I had some basic understanding of the language, which was Basic at that time. After completing the day’s work in the ashram, I would sit in front of the screen planning to work with the computer for one hour. However, the next time I would look at the watch, it would be two or three in the morning. There had been no awareness of time, hunger or thirst. I had been so engrossed and focused that six hours had gone by and I had not even realized it.

This happens due to the state of focus. Even children do it; however, what you don’t realize is that this state has to be maintained and developed in other situations as well. It is known that as the ability of concentration develops and is intensified, you begin to dissolve the *pratyayas* or impressions that alter your behaviour and perceptions. The impressions that you have received continuously from your childhood until your dying day, and which are registered in the mind in the form of a memory or experience are known as *pratyayas*. *Pratyayas* are different from *samskaras*. *Samskaras* are also

impressions, however, the baggage that you brought with you when you came here is *samskara* and the baggage that you acquire here is *pratyaya*. What you acquire in this life is *pratyaya* and what you have acquired previously is *samskara*.

The *pratyayas* that you receive can manifest in the form of a habit, a *samskara*, a *karma*; they can take the form of destructive and negative behaviour or constructive and pious behaviour. If the right *pratyayas* are there, you can become a saint. If the wrong *pratyayas* are there, you can become a sinner. It is these *pratyayas* or impressions that have to dissolve. The remnants of the *tamasic* impressions in life that hold you to the gross negativity have to dissolve.

When you are born, you are born with six ‘friends’: *kama*, passion; *krodha*, anger; *lobha*, greed; *moha*, infatuation; *mada*, arrogance; *matsarya*, envy. These are the natural habits of the mind. A child who does not know anything will express anger. A child who does not even know language, will express desire, *kama*. A child will express envy if chocolate is given to somebody else. From where do these traits come? One may analyze them, yet they are there right from birth. It is as an adult that you ask, “How can I become more kind and compassionate?” “How can I become more loving and happy?” Nobody asks, “How can I become more envious and angry?” These are natural traits, and these negative and *tamasic* traits or *pratyayas* have to be dissolved for the luminous being to emerge: that is *laya*. So these are the six systems of *hatha yoga*.

Focus of Hatha Yoga Yatra 1: shatkarma

For the first *Hatha Yoga Yatra*, we focus on *shatkarma*, the six purificatory actions. Until and unless you understand these, the other practices of *hatha yoga* will have no meaning for you and you will only consider them as physical exercises.

The six actions of *shatkarma* are: *neti*, *dhauti*, *basti*, *kapalbhati*, *nauli* and *trataka*. The first is *neti*, and *neti* is not one practice, it is a series of practices for the head region. The second is *dhauti*, which is for the abdominal

region. The third is basti, for the lower perineal region. Together the three achieve detoxification for the entire body. This detoxification is physical, nervous and organic. Then kapalbhati is practised for clearing of ajna chakra.

No other pranayama has been given as much importance in hatha yoga as kapalbhati, even though other pranayamas are mentioned. This is for a very specific reason: it clears ajna chakra, it allows the nadis of ida and pingala to become open and clear in the head region. Kapalbhati is ajna chakra oriented, while nauli, which is a combination of bandha and mudra, is manipura chakra oriented. So kapalbhati and nauli relate to the chakras. Then there is trataka, which is the first practice of concentration. Trataka is also a part of pratyahara in raja yoga. In hatha yoga, trataka is used for accessing the deeper layers of the mind for meditation. Trataka leads to laya, thus it is a practice of concentration.

This is the design of hatha yoga. Neti is for the head; dhauti is for the chest, the lungs, the heart, the oesophagus, and the stomach; basti is for the intestines and colon, for the lower abdomen; kapalbhati for ajna chakra; nauli for manipura chakra; and trataka for concentration. These are the six practices of hatha yoga, called shatkarma.



Ayurvedic perspective

From the perspective of Ayurveda, three major imbalances can occur in the body due to the three *doshas*, the humours. The increase of *kapha* or mucus, *vata* or wind, *pitta* or bile, can cause imbalances in the body. For example, when you have a cold, phlegm or mucus is produced in large quantities, also, when there is excess mucus in the body it creates an imbalance leading to the condition of cold. You will begin to sniffle, get a headache and congestion in the chest. The mucus will affect the nose, the head and the chest. Similarly, when there is excess mucus in the intestines, you get diarrhoea.

Excess of bile or acidity causes another form of imbalance. The acid causes burning, affecting the chest and even the functioning of the heart. Many times when there is heartburn, people also feel pain in the chest as if they are having heart problems, but it is due to the bile. People take Alka-Seltzer and other tablets to reduce the acidity. It reduces the sharpness or the pungency of the acid but it does not eliminate the acid. Excess of wind or gas can cause gastritis, so much so that sometimes the stomach becomes extremely bloated and stiff.

The three humours are balanced with *neti*, *dhauti* and *basti*. With *neti* the *kapha* in the head is balanced and it also sharpens the *jnanendriyas* – the eyesight and the hearing improve. With *dhauti*, the *kapha*, *pitta* and *vata* are balanced in the chest region. With *basti* the excess *pitta*, *vata* and *kapha* in the intestines are forced downwards and eliminated. These are the three main cleansing techniques of *hatha yoga*.

This was a small introduction to the subject of *hatha yoga*, which should make it clear to you that *asanas* are not *hatha yoga*. They are only a branch of *hatha yoga*, and they are to be practised after attaining purification through *shatkarma*. Therefore, the focus in this *Hatha Yoga Yatra 1* is *shatkarma*, so you can detoxify the body and mind, and experience the lightness and health that *hatha yoga* aims to bestow.

Seven Stages of Hatha Yoga

26 September 2016



Hatha yoga was much favoured by the ancient raja and kundalini yogis, as they used to meditate for long periods. To compensate for the hours of sitting, they needed some exercise to recreate a proper circulation of blood and prana shakti in the body. Therefore the dynamic practices of hatha yoga were used by them. This hatha yoga, which was practised and taught in the ashrams and gurukuls where the yogis and rishis lived, is the classical hatha yoga. There are seven angas, or limbs, in this classical hatha yoga.

The first anga is shatkarma, the second is asana, the third is mudra and bandha, the fourth is pratyahara, the fifth is pranayama, the sixth is dhyana, and the seventh is samadhi. In hatha yoga there are certain basic components of raja yoga as well, however, these practices are different in hatha yoga and in raja yoga.

The practices of pratyahara, dhyana and samadhi in hatha yoga were to assist the raja yoga practices that the rishis were already engaged in and performing. Hatha yoga was like a complementary boost to the raja yoga practices, which would lead to the deeper states of meditation and the experience of samadhi.

A few centuries down the line emerged a householder yogi: Swatmarama. He was not a renunciate, sannyasi or sadhu. Therefore, his inclination in practising hatha yoga was not centred on meditation, the experience of the mind or the spiritual experience. His focus was more towards bringing the teachings of hatha yoga to the common populace, to people who have to deal with day-to-day responsibilities, health issues, professional problems and other aspirations they may have in social life. Therefore he modified hatha yoga from the classical to something simple, and that is what is found in the book *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

If you study the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, you will find that Swatmarama begins with asanas, then he moves into the practice of shatkarma in the second anga. Pranayama is part of the second anga along with shatkarma. Then he goes to mudra and bandha in the third anga. The fourth anga is dhyana and samadhi. Thus the system of Swatmarama changed from the classical ashram to a modified social version, based on the needs of the people.

There are many literatures of hatha yoga that are equally important, such as *Hatharatnavali*, which is another treatise of hatha yoga. *Gheranda Samhita* of Sage Gheranda is another school. In the classical hatha yoga, the purpose was to create specific conditions in the body through the practices of the seven angas.

The first stage: shodhanam

The first condition of the body to be attained in the classical tradition is *shodhanam*, or purification. When you go through the practices of shatkarma and detoxify yourself, you attain the first level of hatha yoga – purification and harmony of the body, the mind and the senses. There is complete purification after the practices of shatkarma; there is lightness and buoyancy as the body becomes free of toxins, and sharpness of the senses as they become more acute. This enhancement or sharpness of the body systems and energies, this ‘upgrading’ of the body systems and energies, leads to the state of shodhanam, the physical and psychological state of purity. Ultimately, this is the type of body that yogis want, as in this state of physical purity and harmony there is no possibility of any illness. When you die, you die a natural death, not due to any disease.

Anything toxic or detrimental to health, anything that goes against life is removed from the body. In the state of shodhanam the cells rejuvenate, there is less decay of the cells, the ageing is pushed back and the body maintains a level of harmony at all times. Whether or not longevity can be attained with the practice of shatkarma cannot be ascertained, nevertheless there are stories of yogis who were able to attain this state.

There is the story of Mahavatar Babaji, who is ever-youthful, whose body always looks like that of a sixteen-year-old boy. His body has attained that level of shodhanam, purity, where the cells continue to rejuvenate themselves and there is no ageing. Another example that I have seen in my life is my own guru: after a certain time in his life it was as if he looked younger, the wrinkles reduced, the skin became brighter. One reason was that he took a simple, clean and pure diet, never masala or grease. If you gave him five boiled potatoes and some milk, without any salt or sugar, he would have that pure food. His entire life represented purity, he would eat the pure and live the pure. He did not have hypertension, cardiac problems or respiratory problems, he

did not have diabetes or any other debilitating illness that people suffer from in old age. As there was no toxin in his body of any type, he was able to attain samadhi consciously and wilfully.

Thus shodhanam is not just purification of the internal organs, rather it has a snowballing effect. Once you come to a point of purification and clarity in the physical organs of the body, once they are functioning properly and you are not doing anything to disturb their proper functioning, that effect goes into other areas of your life. After all, you do many things to disturb the body, such as eating at the wrong time. Sri Swamiji was very particular about his timings. If he had to eat at ten o'clock, he would not eat at five past ten or five to ten. Many times I used to be busy with administrative duties, so I would forget mealtimes and he would rebuke me. He used to say, "No matter what you do, do everything on time." This is what he lived. His timings were accurate, you could set your clock by his routines.

This is possible when you identify with that pure nature, when you maintain the inner integrity and harmony even while you are engaged outside. Most people are not able to maintain their integrity and harmony, their balance of mind when they are active outside. The outside world pulls them and they become caught up in it. For a yogi, that balance has to be there. That is shodhanam or purity.

The second stage: sthairyam

The condition of sthairyam is attained through asana. *Sthairyam* means stillness. There are two types of asana. One is the hatha yoga asana and the other is the raja yoga asana. Hatha yoga asanas are dynamic and raja yoga asanas are meditative. Generally when you say 'asana', you are not referring to raja yoga asanas but to the hatha yogic, dynamic practices of asana. Eventually, these dynamic practices have to bring about sthairyam or stillness; in hatha yoga asana is associated with stillness as an aim. In raja yoga also Patanjali says, *Sthiram sukham asanam* – "Asana is stillness and comfort

in your posture.” Patanjali is making you aware that you have to be comfortable in the feeling of stillness, while hatha yoga is saying that through the practice of asana you should be able to still yourself, you should develop that mastery over the body.

Can you still the agitations of the nervous system or the palpitations of the heart? Can you regulate the different autonomic functions taking place in the body? Can they be controlled or stilled? Can you attain that level of stillness which will lead you to the higher experiences of meditation?

Physical disturbance is a barrier to experiencing a deeper meditative state. You may be in meditation, but if there is knee pain, your meditation will break; if there is a mosquito bite, your meditation will break; if the body gets cold, the meditation will break; if there is bladder problem, the meditation will break; if there is gastric problem, the meditation will break. All these indicate disturbances in the harmony of the body. The practice of asana aims to provide that harmonious stability where one is free from the distractions created by the body: by the body limbs, the body systems and the body humours.

Body limbs means the arms and the legs; body systems mean the respiratory system, the cardiac system, etc., and the humours mean kapha, vata and pitta. The balance has to come about at all these levels with asana. Hatha yoga asanas are practised to create this condition in the body, where the body is not disturbed by its own experiences and can be still for an extended period of time. You might have heard of yogis who can sit for many hours without moving. That is *sthairyam* or *sthirata*, and in this *sthira* condition, in this still condition, even the respiration slows down. Respiration is not a distraction.

The third stage: dridhata

The third condition is *dridhata*, firmness. Hatha yoga practices along with mudra and bandha lead to dridhata. Mudras are physical gestures that allow the re-absorption of prana back into the body.

Kirlian photography shows that there is emission of energy and light around the organs of the body, which is not seen by the naked eye but which can be seen through the Kirlian machine. Once I was involved in a Kirlian research. There were six people, all from different professions: I was a sannyasin and yoga teacher, another person was a wood-worker, another a psychiatrist, another a driver, another a secretary, and so on. All of us had to take our handprints and measure the emission of light and colour first thing upon waking in the morning, then engage in our normal work during the day. When we returned in the evening, again we had to take a print of our hands and measure the parameters. The results were interesting.

At the end of the day, the psychiatrist would have no emission at all while the yogi's emissions remained constant and sometimes even increased but never decreased. Similarly, others who used their brain more, showed a dramatic reduction in their emissions. Those who did physical work, such as the wood-worker, would show short emissions, but intense and bright. In this way, we would record our emissions and write down what activity we had done during the day. How many patients the psychiatrist had seen, how many classes I had taught, how many letters the secretary had written, and so on. Then we used to practise different techniques – yoga nidra, pranayama, concentration, mudras – to see whether the energy could be again increased and our batteries recharged, and record the change. In the pictures taken while performing mudras, there was no emission of energy out of the body, but rather it was contained in the body. For example, when we performed chin mudra, instead of the energy going out and dissipating, it would come back in.

There is a subject called marma yoga, which is the grandmother of acupuncture and acupressure. Marma therapy is based on the function of the *nadis*, the pranic channels, and according to the science of marma, the index finger and the thumb have major nadis. Therefore the large emission of prana from the nadis in the finger and the thumb is sent back with

the performance of chin mudra. Similarly, the placement of hands and performance of different movements like nasikagra drishti or shambhavi mudra create certain conditions that alter the flow of prana in these sensory locations.

All mudras are practised in the extremities, the fingers, the head, the eyes, as it is in the extremities that the major discharge of energy takes place. With the practice of mudras, this discharge is arrested, and when there is no dissipation of prana shakti there is a gain in stamina and strength.

Many times athletes, when they are running cross-country and get tired, experience a syndrome called 'second wind' or 'second breath'. They get a rush of energy and again they start running. This burst of speed and energy is the burst of prana shakti. That second wind or breath is actually prana. If that prana was not there, how would you have the strength in your muscles or the inclination to continue running? The first breath is the normal breath where you are breathing in and out, running and getting exhausted, huffing and puffing. When all the huffing and puffing is done and the body is tired, yet you have to continue running and the body can't do any more, then prana kicks in. You get this rush and you continue until you cross the finish-line and then fall flat on the ground. Then you are totally exhausted. But until you cross the finish-line you are in that burst of speed and energy. That is the prana shakti kicking in when breathing fails. This explosion or presence of prana is very powerful. After all, it has the power to move a tired, exhausted body and take it another ten feet and put it in the frontline. Mudras help to conserve and channel this prana shakti.

There are three regions in the body that become blocked in the state of stress. Whenever there is stress in your workplace you will become tense in the neck and shoulders. The first block is felt there. Whenever you are fearful, insecure and nervous, the abdomen, the manipura region, will become tight; you will feel the block there. Whenever you are under a lot of pressure and tension, the perineal muscles will become tight. Therefore the perineal region

or mooladhara chakra kshetram, the abdominal region or manipura chakra kshetram, and the neck region or vishuddhi chakra kshetram – these are the three regions where the body holds tension. These blocks can alter the normal condition and health of the body. Bandhas are blocks that are consciously created to release stress and tension.

Bandhas work at these three levels. Jalandhara bandha is for the neck region, uddiyana bandha is for the abdominal region, and moola bandha is for the perineal region. The practice of these bandhas releases the blocks of energy from the chakras, which in physiology can be observed as nerve plexuses in various parts of the spine. The nerve plexuses are the areas that become tight due to stress: the circulation of blood and movement of prana becomes blocked, then you experience symptoms like inflammation of muscles, veins and arteries, headache, red eyes, and so on. All that begins to occur when there is excessive tension. These are all symptoms of blocks in the flow of prana and in the circulation of blood. Bandhas are the tools by which you can reopen the three blocks, so the prana can flow without any obstruction.

Mudras and bandhas lead to dridhata, a firm, unshaken, strong and steady body, and mental clarity. In physical terms the cosmic energy is known as prana shakti, which is responsible for the motion of matter. However, the mind does not live on prana shakti; it lives on chitta shakti. Thus the gross energy is known as prana shakti and the subtle energy is known as chitta shakti. Prana controls the physical body and chitta controls the mental body. If you are working with prana shakti, the result is also being felt in chitta shakti, in the mind. With the regulation of the pranic flow in the body, the chitta shakti flow in the mind will also become harmonized.

In an experiment, researchers placed fifteen grandfather clocks in one room. The pendulums of all the clocks were swinging at random: one was going right, one was going left, one was half-way through, another was full-way through, and so on. They left the clocks like that, and in the evening when they opened the door they found that all the pendulums

were swinging in perfect synchronicity with one another. The continuous, unbroken motion forced all pendulums to fall in line and they started moving together. This example indicates the influence of prana shakti on chitta shakti. If the prana shakti is moving harmoniously and in synchronized manner through your body, then it will also get chitta shakti moving in the same speed, manner and style. Therefore clarity of mind and physical firmness is the outcome of mudra and bandha and the condition created by them is dridhata.

The fourth stage: dhairyam

The fourth stage of hatha yoga is pratyahara, which creates the condition of *dhairyam* or patience. Why do people suffer? Why do people become anxious? Why do people get agitated, stressed and disturbed? It is because there is no patience in them. The major cause of mental dissipation, distraction and disturbance is lack of patience. There is even no patience in thinking. Sometimes you think so fast that you cannot control the speed of your thoughts. If you analyze objectively, one of the root causes of suffering is lack of patience.

There is a sloka in *Gheranda Samhita*: *Nasti maya samam pasham* – “There is no noose bigger than delusion.” Everyone is deluded in life, there is no clarity. *Maya* is delusion, and everything that you experience in the mind is subject to maya and therefore all mental behaviour is an expression of the deluded mind. What are ambitions? What are desires? What are likes and dislikes? What are attachments and repulsions? Everything is an identification of the mind. The mind is the source from which maya manifests, not the senses, not the brain. From where does the light come in a torch? From the bulb. The torch is the body and the bulb is the mind. Whenever the mind is active, that is maya. ‘I like this person, I don’t like this person. I like this environment, I don’t like this environment. I like this dress, I don’t like this dress. I like this job, I don’t like this job.’ Everything that you think is an expression of maya, which is the *pasha*, the bondage, the noose around the neck. This is the statement of Sage

Gheranda: *Nasti maya samam pasham*. There is no greater noose to hang oneself with than maya.

The next statement he makes is: *Nasti krodhat samam ripuh* – “There is no greater enemy than anger.” Your own anger is your biggest enemy, not the other person. If you did not have anger, the other person would not be your enemy; he would be your friend. It is your anger that makes you see the other person as an adversary or enemy. Anger comes from frustration, and frustration is the outcome of not having what you desire, so again back to maya.

Maya and anger are the two topics covered by Sage Gheranda. Everything that happens through the mind is maya. ‘I like you, I don’t like you.’ That is maya. The justification why you like her and don’t like her is also maya, as that is not really true. In reality you should like both. Why do you like one and not like the other one? It is due to certain conditions that you create in your mind that make you see one person as a friend and the other person as an enemy. It is a condition of the mind. If you remove that condition, then who is your adversary and who is your friend? You like both. That conditioning is maya, while unfulfilled expectations and desires lead to frustration, which in turn leads to anger, your biggest enemy, and anger is the shortcut to all mistakes in life.

In continuation, Sage Gheranda says: *Nasti jnanat paro bandhu* – “There is no greater friend than wisdom.” *Nasti yogat param balam* – “There is no greater strength than yoga.”

Wisdom is understanding, it is not ‘knowing’. You can know but you may not understand. This wisdom is the biggest quality in life. Love is not the biggest quality, compassion is not the biggest quality. People say they are, but I don’t agree. What is love without understanding? What is compassion without understanding? When you understand, then you can give true love and compassion. This is what is reflected in the sloka, “There is no greater friend than wisdom.”

Wisdom is the right understanding of a person, a situation, an event, an environment. This understanding comes when you are able to extend your awareness and

analyze. In the story of *Ramayana*, Bharata goes to Chitrakoot with his army and the entire royal retinue to bring Rama back to Ayodhya. While he is travelling, everybody on the way says, “Why is he taking the army? He must be going to kill Rama.” Even Bharata’s own brother Lakshmana comes to Rama and says, “You know that Bharata is coming with the army; his intentions are not good.” Rama says, “How do you know that his intentions are not good?” Lakshmana says, “Why is he bringing the army? If his intention is good then he should come without the army. An army symbolizes warfare. If I’m your friend I should come to you without my weapons, with my hands open, ready to say, ‘Let us shake on it.’” Rama says, “Hang on, you haven’t analyzed the nature and character of Bharata. If you analyze his nature and character you will know that it is not his intention to kill us, but to take us back with all the royal paraphernalia.” He was right. He was Bharata’s brother and so was Lakshmana, but Lakshmana and Bharata were competitive with each other, whereas Rama used to observe the nature, the trait, the character, the behaviour, and the intention of their actions and therefore he knew the truth. That is application of wisdom.

That wisdom was possible because of an extended awareness and the ability to keenly analyze and remove the fluff from the real. Therefore, the definition of pratyahara as dhairyam is very apt. It creates the state, the condition, the nature of patience so that you are able to observe, regulate and modify the mental behaviour. The reactive aspect is managed efficiently and effectively with patience. Everyone is a reactive animal. You don’t think, you react, when you react, you lose your clarity, your judgement, your knowledge, your understanding, your sympathy. Two friends are ready to fight when they react. So what is this reactive nature that everybody has? It is a conditioning of dissipation, distraction and absence of patience.

Patience allows you to rein in the hyperactivity of the mind and body, and control it. This is possible with the practice of pratyahara, as in pratyahara the first component

is development of awareness: the faculty or capacity of observation. That is the first thing. You should be able to extend your awareness to observe. Then the second component is disconnecting from those areas where your involvement is not necessary; to disconnect from the sensory involvement so you are not pulled by the senses in ten different directions. Gaining this ability to introvert the mind, to remove it from its outer associations and look inwards to find its inner associations, is pratyahara.

The fifth stage: laghavam

After pratyahara the next stage is pranayama, which creates the condition of laghavam. *Laghavam* means lightness, light like a feather. Perfection in the practice of pranayama bestows the condition of laghavam.

I will tell you a story. In 1976, Sir Edmund Hillary, the conqueror of Mt Everest, made an epic journey from Ganga Sagar to Gangotri, where the river Ganga meets the sea to where the Ganga originates. He travelled against the current of the Ganga, from the ocean to the mountaintop. He used three motor boats which were the most modern of that time, with mega horse power, to go up to Rishikesh and beyond.

When they were travelling between Haridwar and Rishikesh, in the middle of the river there was a rock, and sitting on that rock was an extremely lean yogi practising his morning meditation. Sir Edmund Hillary was curious, wondering what this guy was doing in the middle of the river. He stopped the boats and asked him, "What are you doing?" The yogi replied, "I am doing my yoga sadhana." They climbed on to the rock, sat down, and chatted with him for ten minutes or so. Then they jumped back into their boats, asking the sadhu to help hold the ropes of the boats. The sadhu did so, and he didn't let go.

They started the engine and kicked the boat into gear, but the boat would not move. They went full throttle and still the boat would not move. There was enough water but the

boat would not move. Now Sir Edmund Hillary said to the sadhu, “What are you doing?” He chuckled and said, “I’m not doing anything.” He was so lean and thin that you could blow him away with a whiff of air, but Sir Edmund Hillary got a notion of what he was up to, so after a few minutes he asked him, “How are you able to achieve that feat?” The sadhu now replied, “With the practice of pranayama. I am able to make my body heavier than the biggest rock in the river. If I hold your rope then even your three boats with mega horse power will not be able to move.” That is the effect of pranayama, and it is believed that it is possible.

With pranayama you are able to focus the energy on any part of the body, and then the body can become like an immobile object. Pranayama gives the ability to also change the centre of gravity and therefore the lightness. The centre of gravity shifts from the *nabhi*, the navel, or manipura chakra, to anahata chakra with the perfection of pranayama, therefore the body feels lighter.

There are adepts who perform other feats, like my own guru uncle, Swami Nadabrahmananda. He was able to control his breath for one hour. Another yogi, Swami Rama, was able to stop his heartbeat for one hour. These kinds of achievements, the control over the autonomic functions of the body, is acquired with the practice of pranayama naturally and spontaneously. Thus the condition created by pranayama is lightness and strength.

The sixth stage: pratyaksham

Then we move into dhyana, which is the sixth stage. Dhyana creates the condition of *pratyaksham*, which means establishing oneself in the inner experience. When you meditate, then you meditate on something, for example a candle flame. Normally it is only imagination, you don’t see the flame like a photograph, you don’t see it in 3D. However, in the state of pratyaksham the object manifests before your inner vision. The candle flame is not just imagination; you are actually seeing it as if with open eyes. That is pratyaksham, to make

visible your experience: seeing, feeling and establishing yourself in that experience.

Once I was travelling on a forest road during one of my journeys. A sannyasin was driving the car and I was sitting on the passenger side. I was seventeen or eighteen years old at that time. We came across a lake beside which was a huge willow tree with half the roots in water and half on land. I looked at that willow tree and for a moment I lost consciousness: I became the tree. It was just an instant but it felt like hours to me. I had become the tree, I could feel the lapping of water on my roots, the crawling of insects on my trunk, the movement of the air in my leaves and branches, the claws of birds sitting on the branches. It was a living experience of the tree. When I came back to reality, my heart was palpitating; it was not a pleasant experience. We had not even gone past the lake, maybe three or four seconds had gone by but those few seconds had become like a few hours for me. That is the state of pratyaksham.

This can happen in meditation, you can become one with the object of your meditation. Whether that happens voluntarily or involuntarily is another matter, but the condition created in the mind with hatha yoga is that of pratyaksham. You are able to see, feel and identify with the inner experience; you are able to merge with and establish yourself in that experience.

The seventh stage: nirlipta

The seventh state is samadhi, which leads to the condition of *nirlipta*. It is a state of mental non-involvement. You are not involved with the mind, you are nirlipta. When you are not involved, you are free from the noose of maya and you come out of moha. You come out of that delusion. When you reach the state of nirlipta, there is total non-involvement. You go beyond the state of attachment to the experience of the higher self. You are not attracted to any sense object, you are free from the fetters of maya.

These seven conditions define the progression of hatha yoga in the classical tradition.

Practices of Shatkarma: Nauli, Trataka, Neti

27 September 2016



NAULI

One of the shatkarmas of hatha yoga is nauli and the preparatory practices for nauli are agnisara kriya and uddiyana bandha. To understand these practices, let us go to the granthis.

The role of granthis

Granthis are areas in the body where pranic, psychological and psychic blocks can take place easily. There are three granthis: Brahma granthi, Vishnu granthi and Rudra granthi. These are the Sanskrit terms for the psychic knots and their associated nerve plexuses, located in the perineum, in the abdominal region, and in the neck region. The three granthis create restrictive conditions in the physical and mental functions, as a result of stress, anxiety, insecurity, fear, pressure, aggression or ambition. The bandhas aim at releasing the blocks of the granthis.

Brahma granthi is in the perineal plexus, and becomes activated when there is suppression, frustration or insecurity. Anything related with the deeper mind, the insecurities and the fears, triggers a block in the Brahma granthi. Anything related to the aggressive nature, the drive or the motivation to achieve, such as a competitive attitude in profession, activates the *Vishnu granthi*, which is in the abdominal area. Whenever you are in a competitive mode, you will notice that your abdominal muscles become tight. That is an indication of blocks being formed in the Vishnu granthi. The *Rudra granthi*, in the throat and head area, is affected by stress that comes from outside, such as pressure to complete something.

Of the three, the abdominal block has been given more importance in hatha yoga, although all three are important. The reason is that it is the centre of manipura chakra, the centre of vitality and energy, and if it becomes sluggish diseases can set into the body. If diseases come into the body due to the dampening of manipura chakra they are difficult to cure, as manipura is like your armour against illness or any physically debilitating condition. It is what maintains health, stamina and energy at optimum level. Manipura chakra also controls the activities of pranamaya kosha.

Nauli is utilized to maintain the health of manipura chakra, deepen the pranamaya experience and remove the blocks of Vishnu granthi.

Physiology of nauli

Nauli is an advanced practice and not everybody can perform it. You contract the abdomen in and then bring all the muscles close together, so the front of the stomach looks as if a solid rope is in there. In contraction the muscles go in and in holding they come around together to form a pillar of muscles. In that contracted condition, all the nerves and *nadis*, the pranic pathways, are firing impulses. That in turn hyperactivates the nervous system and you experience a burst of energy. So the associated nerve plexus is activated due to the intense activity of prana, and nauli also activates manipura chakra itself.

A preparatory practice for nauli is agnisara kriya, the rapid contractions of the abdomen. That is the first stage, where you learn how to bring the stomach in. Then in the practice of uddiyana bandha, you bring the stomach in and pull up the internal organs, creating a vacuum in the abdominal region; everything is pulled up against the diaphragm. Some nauli experts are able to pull in the muscles to such an extent that you can see their spinal cord in the front, vertebrae and all. Even if that level of mastery is not achieved, with regular practice the basic nauli can be performed.

Lifting the kundalini

According to kundalini yoga, when the kundalini rises from mooladhara and makes its way to swadhisthana, it can again return to mooladhara and go back to sleep. Kundalini does not always ascend, it also descends. Up to manipura the danger is that kundalini can again become dormant. Once it crosses manipura, then it ascends, and the speed of evolution does not slow down any more. Therefore the yogis attempt not only to awaken the kundalini, but ensure that she goes beyond manipura.

People think that if they have awakened the kundalini that is good enough. What they do not realize is that kundalini can raise the head and again go back to sleep, just as you

do every morning. The alarm goes off, but you put on the snooze button and go back to sleep. It is the same with the kundalini. She only leaves her bedroom zone after she crosses manipura, until then she is only opening and shutting her eyes, moving from mooladhara to swadhisthana then back again to mooladhara.

The kundalini has the tendency to revert back to its materialistic condition until it crosses manipura chakra. Nauli is the practice used by kundalini yogis to ensure that there is a boost of energy in manipura so kundalini can shoot up to sahasrara, without dillydallying in other chakras.

Attainment of amaratva

It is also said that with the activation of manipura, the vital energy goes so high that one becomes immortal. Immortality does not only mean that one does not die, but it also means that the enhanced vitality improves the physical health and one overcomes disease and decay.

From the yogic perspective, there are two conditions that come between *janma* and *mrityu*, birth and death: vyadhi and jara. *Vyadhi* means sickness and *jara* means old age. Therefore, *amaratva* is to be free of these two conditions that debilitate the experience of life. This idea is conveyed by the Sanskrit word ‘amara’; amaratva is overcoming disease and old age.

The hatha yogic practice of nauli aims to take one to the level where amaratva can be attained. It can provide mastery and control over the conditions of illness that debilitate the physical and psychological conditions and dampen the sharpness of the senses and the mind. With this mastery, you can be at the optimum state of both body and mind.

TRATAKA

Another shatkarma is trataka. *Trataka* means to gaze, and it is an important practice of pratyahara. It is a practice of pratyahara, which leads to dharana.

In trataka the mind is fixed on a visual object. In your practice of yoga nidra, you go through a gradual introversion. From body awareness you move to sound awareness, then to rotation of consciousness through body parts, breath awareness, and so on. You gradually go deeper, withdrawing the mind from its external associations and connections. In trataka in one hit you are there, you have to be there, for there is no gradual movement to concentration. You have to have that state of concentration right from the word go.

Sage Gorakhnath's mastery

Trataka involves sight, and sight is connected to ajna chakra. There is a story that Sage Gorakhnath, one of the main propagators of hatha yoga, perfected hatha yoga spontaneously through trataka.

In his childhood, he was sick and bedridden. An earthen lantern with a burning wick was hanging from the wall of his room, as it used to be in the olden days. In the dark room the lamp would be burning continuously, and lying on the bed he would gaze at the lamp. By doing this he perfected trataka. While he was sick, he watched the flame and perfected his trataka. That perfection bestowed certain special abilities upon him, and then his guru Matsyendranath came and took him as his disciple.

Different methods of trataka

Trataka is a visual practice and it uses sight to bring about a state of concentration. It uses vision to still the dissipations of the mind, and therein lies its beauty.

There are many methods of practising trataka and each brings about a different experience. For therapy purposes the method is different, for achieving mental concentration

the method is different, for psychic experience the method is again different. Trataka is not one practice, though usually only one method is taught as that is the safest. If the other methods were taught, you could have experiences that you may not be able to manage. Remember, this is not a subject of curiosity or of bravado, where you do things just to find out if you can manage it; you have to work at where you are and gradually go up.

It is believed that trataka opens up the human psyche. It activates ajna chakra, due to which you begin to foresee things; you become the seer of events. That, however, is the final attainment of trataka. In the primary class of trataka, it is practised for two purposes: therapy of the eyes and concentration. At the Bihar School of Yoga, trataka has not been taught for psychic discovery or awakening.

In terms of therapy, the practice improves the eyesight. In fact, whenever you feel that your vision is deteriorating, perhaps at the age of forty or forty-five, practise trataka. When you begin to have a little blurriness in the vision and notice that you need to hold the paper some distance away when you read, at that time if you practise trataka regularly for six months your eyesight will improve. After some time, when you again notice a slight blurriness and there is an urge to move the paper away, again practise trataka for fifteen days. That is how trataka is used for therapy purposes.

For the purpose of concentration, to stop the dissipation of mind and improve focus, trataka on a candle flame is practised at night. That is the technique used in the Bihar Yoga system more than any other. Rather than trying to teach twenty different variations of trataka, which will not be used properly, this single practice helps improve the eyesight and concentration. Swami Satyananda emphasized this particular technique while everybody else was doing trataka on yantras, symbols and black dots. Swami Satyananda said, "No, they may be practices of hatha yoga but they are irrelevant to the needs of today. We will use what is relevant for physical and mental health." Thus, in the Bihar Yoga

system, trataka using a candle flame is the style that Sri Swamiji introduced.

Stages of trataka

There are four stages of trataka. First is *bahir trataka* or external trataka. This uses an external object on which the vision is fixed; one has to look at it without flickering the eyelids. That is the rule of trataka: while you are looking at something you cannot flicker the eyelids. The moment you have the urge to blink or move the eyes for any other reason, you have to stop the external gazing, close the eyes, look at the after-image, and remain with the eyes closed until that inner image disappears.

Initially, when you are not used to the practice, the nerves and the muscles become tired quickly and there is a strong urge to close the eyes, and when you close them tears begin to flow. The tear ducts become activated due to the pressure exerted on them by steady gazing, and that is a good sign, as the eyes are being lubricated, but it shouldn't be overdone.

The second stage is *antar trataka*, internal trataka, and here a symbol is used. For example, at the beginning of a class during Shanti Path you are asked to visualize a candle flame at the eyebrow centre. That is the beginning of antar trataka, where you are recreating the image of a flame in your mind. You have to recreate the flame as a 3D image: the colours, the height, the width, all have to be seen. In antar trataka, the effort is to actualize the form that you visualize or think of.

Then the third stage of trataka is *shoonya drishti*, which means gazing into nothingness, into void. How this is practised will become clear if you recall the practice of antar mouna. You would have noticed that in antar mouna when you are asked to become aware of your thoughts, there are no thoughts, you find that you cannot think. That is because the moment you begin to observe something, that activity stops. The moment you move your mind away, again the thoughts begin to come. That applies to trataka as well.

Vision is considered to be one of the major causes of dissipation in the brain. You receive information through all the senses, whether touch, smell, taste or sound, but the volume of information received through the eyes is much more than all the other four senses put together. Of course there are individual differences regarding which sense predominates, but generally, out of the two billion bytes of information that your brain receives every second, maybe sixty percent is vision-related, ten percent is hearing, ten is touching, ten is smelling and ten is tasting. Therefore vision always creates mental disturbance, and here in *trataka* the vision is being focused.

If you close your eyes and remain with the eyes closed for five minutes, your brainwaves will change. They will become alpha waves. Then, when you open your eyes and reconnect with the world, the brainwaves will again change instantly, as the shapes, forms and colours are being again recognized and absorbed. At that moment beta waves will predominate. In *bahir trataka* you are focusing your *jnanendriya*, the physical organ of the eyes, on an object, and with that the agitations connected with sight stop. The brain becomes less active, as the influx of information has reduced.

When you practise *antar trataka*, there is disconnection from the outside influx and you are more self-contained. You don't move out of yourself into what is outside. With the intensity of concentration, all chatter is forgotten and you come to a state of *shoonya*, nothingness, void. The mind becomes absolutely still, not a single thought comes. Even if you try to think, you will not be able to, you won't know where to pick a thought from. It is a condition of absolute void.

The fourth stage of *trataka* is *chaitanya trataka* or continuous *trataka*. It refers to one's ability to remain focused at all times. Once I said to Sri Swamiji that it would be nice to have an ashram in the Himalayas. He looked at me and said, "The idea is good but remember the purpose. If you are thinking of peace, then you won't find peace in the Himalayas if your

mind is not at peace. If your mind is at peace then even in a place like Munger you won't hear a single sound, as you won't be distracted by what is around you. You will be one with the experience of peace." That is chaitanya trataka, where the focus and the sharpness of the mind is so intense that there is no deviation of attention or awareness. Right now your awareness can fluctuate at any moment. A big bang behind will make everybody turn around and question, 'What was that noise?' In chaitanya trataka, when you are maintaining the state of trataka continuously, you can be in the middle of a battlefield and remain as peaceful as Buddha.

One who is able to maintain equipoise in all the critical and difficult conditions of life practises chaitanya trataka. One who enters the state of samadhi experiences shoonya drishti. One who becomes established in pratyahara and dharana experiences antar trataka. One who learns about disassociation and disconnection from the external influences performs bahir trataka.



NETI

We have covered nauli and trataka, and now neti. Neti is one of the first practices of shatkarma; nauli and trataka in fact come later.

Purpose of neti

Neti is a practice that covers the entire head region while dhauti covers the region from the throat to the abdomen and basti covers from the navel to the perineum. So neti is the first practice to clear up the first section of the body, the top part.

Now, in the head region there are four holes: the nose, the mouth, and the ears. If you put something in one ear it won't come out through the other. If you put something in the mouth it will disappear in the well. The nose is the only organ into which you can put something on one side and it will come out from the other side.

The speciality of this organ is that the bridge of the nose is an extremely sensitive location. That is the point where the sinus glands are located, and it is also the point where the nerves of the eyes and the nose are close together, and also the nerves that go to the ears. When you have a cold and you blow the nose, the ears pop due to the pressure at the sinuses. The area is so sensitive that one punch here will knock a person down. It is also the closest location to the brain without any covering of the skull or bone. Inside is the base of the brain, the brain stem, the beginning of the brain. So this particular area around the head at the level of the eyes is catered to by neti kriya, which affects the eyesight, hearing, and smell.

The purpose of neti is to bring a balance in *kapha* or mucus. The head is affected by mucus, not by bile or gas, and it accumulates in the sinus area. When you have a cold, the nose and the nasal passage are blocked, the eyes become red, there is pressure on the ear channels, and there is difficulty in breathing. All these symptoms indicate that the *kapha*

humour has become critical. That condition was rectified by the ancient yogis with neti, when there were no nasal drops and such things.

Posture for performing neti

The neti pot is a kettle-like pot with a spout that is big enough for it to go inside one of the nostrils and block it completely. Once the nostril is plugged with the spout, you tilt the head to the opposite side of the plugged nostril so that when the water flows in one nostril, it goes through the bridge of the nose and comes out the other nostril. You don't have to breathe the water in or out, it is gravity which is doing the job. The only thing is that the angle of the tilt of the head has to be correct.

If the tilt of the head is too little or too much, then the water can go into other areas and you may not like it. You will get the sensation that you get when you swim and the water goes up your nose, and that can be an uncomfortable feeling. If you experience this, then the intention of neti will not be served. So the posture of head has to be such that it allows the water to flow straight into one nostril and then out through the other nostril. You will also not get the right result if you are holding the pot incorrectly. Neti will be successful if the spout of the pot is aligned with the nose.

Neti water

Water is the medium through which the mucus is cleaned in jala neti. However, it was found that cold water is not good for this purpose, nor is hot water as it will burn the membranes. In the earlier days, people used to use river water. While bathing in the river they would fill the lota with river water and do their neti. However, river water is too polluted now. Also, in winter it is a problem, as cold water gives rise to other problems such as a head cold and sniffles. So ensure the temperature of the water used for neti is the same as normal body temperature. Also the mucus membrane of the nostril is like a sponge and absorbs anything liquid. So the

next idea is to put some salt into the water; the saline water is not absorbed by the body like the normal water. It also helps break the mucus particles so the elimination of mucus is easier.

In this way, warm water with salt became the trademark of neti kriya. You don't use just any water, it has to be body-temperature water with just enough salt, not salty like sea water, but salty like tears. The salt should be only enough to change the property of the water.

Benefits of neti

Neti has been found very effective in the management of eye, nose and ear problems, and many times throat problems also. Therefore I call the neti lota E-N-T lota: ear–nose–throat lota.

Neti is also a good practice for you if you are living in a city and continuously inhaling the black smoke of the cars and the pollution of the city. If you practise neti in the evening after returning from work in such a place, you will see that the colour of the mucus that you expel is black from all the pollution. People think, “My nose is dry and clear, what do I have to worry about?” That is a fallacy. The major particles are stopped by the filters of the nose: the nose hairs; the minor ones go a bit further, and the small ones go even further up to the sinuses and remain there.

All the pollutants and small particles of dust stay in the sinus. The pollutants get stuck to the mucous membrane. If you do an X-ray vision of your nose you will possibly find that the upper part is dark and dirty even though your nose feels clear. This accumulation of pollutants in the sinuses can lead to reddening of the eyes and headaches, and you will find these are common occurrences for people who live in polluted places.

Neti is a good technique to be done even at night before sleep. Do your neti, clear the nasal passage, and then sleep a good night's sleep where you are oxygenating your body better. Thus the neti kriya is an important practice to manage the humour of mucus.

Types of neti

The most common form of neti is with saline water. For therapy reasons this is enough. In specific conditions, neti is also done with oil, milk, buttermilk, ghee, urine, and so on. Some advanced hatha yogis even practise neti with mercury, and this is mentioned in the literatures. They use refined mercury, nevertheless mercury has a thick density, and it is not a practice that just about anyone can do, or that we advise.

Hatha yogis have utilized many different styles and methods, but an average practitioner should stick to water. That is the safest. For therapy, however, a different style of neti has been prescribed: water and urine, *svamutra* or *amaroli*, means your own urine, and *jala* means water. It has been found that people who do neti with amaroli become immune to allergic reactions. So for therapy it is water and urine, and for sadhana or spiritual purposes, other liquid agents are used.



There is another style of neti, *sutra neti*, in which liquid is not used, rather a catheter or a soft string is used. There are people with deviated septums who require surgery to correct the nasal deformity. Some people also have some growth inside the nose that blocks the air passage, causing difficulty in breathing. It is a condition where the person cannot breathe properly in sleep, resulting in snoring apnoea. In that situation a thread, or *sutra*, is used for neti; therefore it is called *sutra neti*.

In this practice you put the catheter or a special silky thread up one nostril and put your finger into your throat and pull the other end out, so you have one end coming out of the nose and the other through the mouth, and then you gradually pull the *sutra* back and forth so it rubs against the inside of the nose. With one month's practice, the internal growth can be rectified without the intervention of surgery, but of course precautions apply. It has to be done at the right time, for example, if there is inflammation and you are forcefully trying to push the catheter inside, you will have counter-effects. It is not something that a layperson can do without any training, it has to be done under the clear direction of a competent teacher.

Revisiting the purpose of hatha yoga

In our first discussion I told you about hatha yoga: the background, the purpose, the meaning, the intention. In the second discussion we talked about the seven *angas* or branches of hatha yoga and what condition each branch creates in the body: from shodhanam to the final condition of laya. These conditions represent the aspiration of each practice of hatha yoga. Just as the purpose of raja yoga is *chitta vritti nirodha*, and whatever you are doing in raja yoga, the focus is 'I should attain *chitta vritti nirodha*'. Similarly, hatha yoga has clear aims.

Remember, hatha yoga was primarily a practice of the yogis and rishis, who performed long hours of meditation and therefore needed dynamic movements to compensate.

For example, when I do my panchagni, I am sitting for six to eight hours, so how do I compensate with physical activity? After all, the body can sustain intense activity for one or two hours at the most. Even if I run thirty loops around the ashram, that burst of activity is not enough to compensate for eight hours of sitting. For this reason, hatha yoga was much favoured by them.

When you are practising the asanas of hatha yoga, your focus should be in the experience of *sthairyam*, stillness. No matter what asana you are doing, the awareness should be that ‘I should attain sthairyam, stillness.’ When you are doing shatkarma, the intention and the awareness should be that of *shodhanam*, detoxification and purity. At each level of the practice of hatha yoga, the aim, which creates that condition, should be kept in mind. You should try to live that while you are practising the technique. Keep those conditions in mind as the final aim of the hatha yogic practices.

Ten yamas and ten niyamas of hatha yoga

Now, thirdly, a brief discussion on the ten yamas and ten niyamas of hatha yoga. In raja yoga, Patanjali speaks of only five yamas and five niyamas. However, in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* Swatmarama mentions ten yamas and ten niyamas, and other literatures of hatha yoga, such as *Hatharatnavali*, mention many others yamas and niyamas that correspond also with lifestyle.

In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, four yamas and niyamas are the same as raja yoga yamas and niyamas: ahimsa, satya, asteya and brahmacharya. The fifth is *kshama*, forgiveness; the sixth is *dhriti*, endurance; the seventh is *daya*, compassion; the eighth is *arjavam*, straightforwardness; the ninth is *mitahara*, moderate or balanced diet; and the tenth is *shaucha*, cleanliness. These constitute the ten yamas of hatha yoga.

Among the ten niyamas, a few are the same as raja yoga: the first is *tapas*, austerity; the second is *santosha*, contentment. The others are different: third is *astikyam*,

belief in connection with the higher self; the fourth is *daan*, charity; the fifth is *Ishwara poojanam*, worship of divinity; the sixth is *siddhanta vakya shravan*, listening and understanding the principles of philosophy. Every subject has a philosophy behind it, an explanation behind it, an understanding behind it. This niyama indicates that that understanding should be realized. Then the seventh is *hri*, modesty; the eighth is *mati*, the discerning intelligence; the ninth is *japa*, mantra meditation or repetition of the mantra; and the tenth is *hutam*, performance of havan.

The classical hatha yoga integrates the yamas and niyamas with the ashram life where they were practised. For instance, *hutam* is a remnant of the ashram culture; it is the influence of the ashram culture on hatha yoga. Similarly, *tapasya* or austerity is an influence of the ashram culture on hatha yoga. The yamas and niyamas also received emphasis when yoga began to be moved out of ashrams into society. In order to create a mental condition in society, to experience and realize the depth of yoga and to help people in their own life, the cultivation of positive qualities was introduced in the form of yamas and niyamas.

The yamas and niyamas became the regulators for human interaction in society and also in sadhana. When everybody was following these precepts of positivity in society and in ashrams, it gave birth to a different culture, which is recognized and known as the vedic culture. Vedic culture was not a religious culture, it was living according to the precepts of dharma. Anything that is good and uplifting is dharma. Anything that is denigrating and harmful to someone is adharma. The yamas and niyamas enforced the cultivation of the good and the beautiful in the life of the individual.

Once the transformation towards the positive takes place in the human mind, yogic experience assumes a different dimension. It no longer remains a medium of physical change or removal of illness, rather there is an experience of vitality and beauty. That was the purpose of integrating the yamas and niyamas with hatha yoga.

Sequence of Shatkarma Practices

28 September 2016



Today we talk about dhauti, basti and shankhaprakshalana. It is the combination of dhauti and basti that has been developed as shankhaprakshalana by Sri Swami Satyananda.

DHAUTI

Dhauti is the cleansing technique for the upper trunk region, from the throat, the oesophagus, down to the abdomen. This is the most crucial area of the body, as all the sensitive organs are located here: the heart, the lungs, the stomach. All the motions taking place due to these organs are also centred

here: the pumping of the heart, the constant expansion and deflation occurring in the lungs, the swallowing of the food and its movement down the oesophagus, the continuous production of digestive fluids in the stomach. This area is the most active area of the body, and its working is affected by the three humours: mucus, bile and wind. Excess of any of the three alters the functioning of these organs and their respective systems, whether blood circulation, respiration or digestion. Therefore dhauti has been given much importance in the shatkarmas.

Gaja karani and kunjaj

First there has to be elimination of excess bile, and that is done through a practice called gaja karani, its modern name being kunjaj. In this practice you drink several glasses of water until the stomach is filled to the brim, and then there is a natural gag reflex and the water comes out of the mouth.

When you drink a lot of water it dilutes the bile in the stomach, and then when you bring the water out through the gag reflex it also brings up the excess bile. At the same time, the mucus from the oesophagus and the windpipe are pushed up and thrown out. You will notice that there is yellowness and froth in the water that is regurgitated during kunjaj, indicating that bile and mucus are being released.

Gaja karani is the old name; it indicates that like an elephant you bring up the water that you have drunk through a natural gag reflex. Kunjal is the new name given by Sri Swamiji for the same practice with a small difference. You drink water and then insert two fingers inside the mouth and gently rub the back of the throat to create the gag reflex. So gaja karani is without the help of the fingers and kunjaj is with the help of the fingers.

Therapeutic benefits of kunjaj

Therapeutically, kunjaj is beneficial for people with respiratory problems such as asthma or eosinophilia. Any kind of respiratory problem is helped by kunjaj, as the expulsion

of excess mucus from the lungs due to the squeezing effect clears the lungs. You can breathe in a larger volume of air, the chest relaxes and you feel relief and lightness.

Kunjal is also an effective tool for managing certain conditions related to the cardiac system. For example when there is excess bile, it results in a burning sensation in the entire chest region and you experience what is called heartburn. Heartburn is nothing but bile accumulating in centres that are close to the heart; the heart responds to that and there is palpitation and even angina pain. This condition can be helped with kunjal.

Kunjal training

One point that you have to remember while practising kunjal is that you should not force your gag reflex. The first time when you are anxious and a bit nervous about regurgitating, there is a tendency to overexert the gagging or pressing the abdomen. This should not happen. In fact, there has to come a time eventually when you can simply drink water and expel it through the mouth without using the fingers. That will indicate your level of proficiency and ease in the practice.

It is recommended that you drink the water and see if it comes out naturally. If not, then use the fingers. Just for a few seconds press down the back of the tongue. Do not rub it but only press the back of the tongue and the gag reflex will take place and the water will come out.

Types of dhauti

You are only familiar with kunjal with water, but yogis also use air. They drink air as you drink water, by simply gulping it in. After a few moments the air comes out in the form of big belches. This clears the gas from the stomach, the excess wind or the humour of vata. Sometimes excessive air or flatulence can become such a condition that the stomach becomes taut and bloated and there is even difficulty in breathing. At that time that gas can be released with air-kunjal. After the practice the stomach will again loosen up and become relaxed

and comfortable. This is called *vata dhauti* or *vatsara dhauti*.

Thus water-kunjal is for pitta and kapha, and air-kunjal is for vata; water and air are used here to balance the three doshas. Generally, water-kunjal is practised since that is the safest and easiest, but you can also experiment with air-kunjal if there is a need. These are the simple forms of dhauti.

There are many other forms, such as dhauti with a cloth, *vastra dhauti*. In this a long strip of muslin cloth is used, which is about three-metres long and three inches wide. The cloth has to be right, you cannot take just any cloth and do the practice. There should be no loose threads in the cloth, its thickness has to be proper, and so on. This cloth is soaked in water and then pushed down into the stomach by swallowing it. Some water may be sipped to help push it down. When about two-and-a-half metres of the cloth has gone into the stomach and about 30 cm remains out, then you gradually pull the cloth out. As it comes out you will be surprised by what comes with it! It soaks in everything in the stomach, the mucus, the bile, and brings it all out. That is *vastra dhauti*.

There are some hatha yogis who practise *danda dhauti*, dhauti with a stick. In this a flute-like tube made from the stem of the banana plant that is neither too hard nor too soft is sent down the oesophagus. It is a hollow open tube and when it goes into the stomach, it pulls out all the undigested contents of the stomach, which create burning or even ulcers. This is an extreme type of dhauti which is not recommended for an average person. It is done more for the purpose of sadhana, not for therapeutic or general purposes.

In this manner, there are other advanced methods of practising dhauti for sadhana, which you need not know about as you are not going to practise them. There is no need to be curious about them either, as curiosity kills the cat. So only try to understand what you need to understand and understand it well.

BASTI

The next part of the body that has to be cleansed is the intestines, the small and the large. This is covered by basti.

An important point to know in relation to this shatkarma is its association with the different pranas in the body. There are five prana shaktis in the body. The first, simply called *prana*, is located between the throat and the ribcage, above the diaphragm. The second prana shakti, called *apana*, is located below the diaphragm down to the anus. The prana shakti called prana is an inward drawn breath; its movement is upward but it assists with intake in the region where it operates, whereas apana is a downward force that assists with expulsion from the abdominal region.

In the process of dhauti when expulsion takes place from the mouth, the force of prana is reversed. Whether you are regurgitating in gaja karani and kunjaj or belching in vatsara dhauti, the whole process of prana is being reversed. Instead of taking in from the mouth, you are bringing everything out.

In basti you have to draw in water from the anus and that creates a reversal of the apana shakti. Basti is like enema. The only difference is that in the enema that is given in medical treatment, you clear only the large intestine and the water does not go into the small intestine. It goes into the ascending colon, the transverse colon and the descending colon, so it mainly works on the large intestine.

Basti works on both the large and the small intestines. It was done originally in a tank – you submerged the body waist-deep in water, opened up the anus, created a vacuum, and sucked in water through the anus naturally and spontaneously, held it for some time, and then expelled it. That technique is not known to many people now, and those who know it don't want to teach it, as it can be dangerous to the body if performed incorrectly.

Sri Swamiji came up with the idea of practising basti in a simpler way, so the small intestines can be cleared using water. This is the practice of shankhaprakshalana.

SHANKHAPRAKSHALANA

Shankhaprakshalana was the result of two yogic minds coming together for a common purpose. In the sixties, Swami Satyananda and Janardan Swami, from Guwahati, Assam, who was one of the pioneers of yoga research, would be sitting together in the old ashram and discussing how to combine basti and dhauti to facilitate the cleansing of the stomach. The practice of shankhaprakshalana came up as a result of their discussions.

Here you drink water and practise asanas, so that instead of bringing the water out through the mouth as in dhauti, you allow the water to move into the small intestine, and then go out the anus. The asanas create a pressure in the intestines, helping the water to come out.

Method

Shankhaprakshalana is a complete practice of shatkarma. In order to do the full process, vegetarians need to drink about 30 to 40 glasses of saline water and non-vegetarians about 60 to 70 glasses. Every glass of water that you drink comes out through the anus.

Initially, the solid waste is expelled, then watery stool comes out, then yellow water with particles of waste. These are the dried particles of food that remain between the folds of the intestines and putrefy there, as they are not cleared in the normal bowel movements. This goes on for some time, as it takes time for every pocket of the intestines to be cleared. Therefore the initial cleansing happens in the first six to eight glasses, but then when this process begins – of the warm water breaking down the particles stuck in between the folds of intestinal muscles – it just goes on. You see the whole universe being cleared from your body!

The full shankhaprakshalana follows the precept that you have to keep on drinking water until the water that comes out has the same colour as the water that you drink: crystal clear. That indicates that the entire system, from mouth to anus, is absolutely clean.

Effects of practice

Let me tell you my personal experience with the practice, as everybody has different experiences. Whenever I do it, I find that my immunity improves. If there is a cut, and it heals in ten days in the normal course, after shankhaprakshalana it will be healed in three or four days. That is how I realized that the practice was boosting immunity. If a cut does not heal for eight or nine days, then I know that the body is toxic. I do shankhaprakshalana and then I notice that it clears in three days, indicating that the body has returned to its normal condition. So that is one effect: the improvement of physical immunity and strength to fight off any external bacteria and virus, as well as heal cuts and boils.

Another effect of the practice is regulation of bowel movements. Due to a sedentary lifestyle, people are often not able to regulate their toilet habits. However, after the practice of shankhaprakshalana, you can train your body to clear its toxins at specific times. In the beginning, as an experiment, I changed my body-clock a few times after shankhaprakshalana, to see whether it would actually happen. And it did. So you can create new habits and conditions in the body after shankhaprakshalana. Your body becomes like a new-born baby's body. It is so clean from inside as if you have just taken birth from your mother's womb.

When you do the full cleansing, there are also dietary restrictions for forty days. You cannot have meat, eggs, high proteins, and many other things that create a shock to the system during this period. The body has to gradually build up its stamina and begin to produce its own vitamins and minerals and everything that it requires. Today, everybody is popping a vitamin pill every morning, but thirty or forty years ago, nobody used to pop any pill. The body could fulfil its own requirements.

In shankhaprakshalana the body comes back to that condition where it can regenerate and fulfil its own needs. Therefore it is also an effective practice for the management of diabetes, as it can improve the production of insulin. In

one practice it can drop the sugar level from 400 to 80 or 90, which however is not advisable, as you will suddenly feel a vacuum and again need to have that sugar high. Nevertheless, it has that capacity to again force the production of insulin. Bear in mind though that in yogic therapy, shankhaprakshalana for the management of diabetes is always used under competent guidance.

In this way, shankhaprakshalana is a most effective and efficient method to improve health, and it is taught only at the Bihar School of Yoga. Other places don't teach shankhaprakshalana, they teach the various forms of the shatkriyas – gaja karani kriya, vatsara dhauti, vahnisara dhauti, etc. The complete combination of practices for clearing from top to bottom is unique to Bihar Yoga.

Laghoo shankhaprakshalana

Sri Swamiji created another sequence: the short form of shankhaprakshalana or *laghoo shankhaprakshalana*. It is done with drinking only six to eight glasses of water. This is good enough for general purposes, you don't have to do more. If you do more than ten glasses, then certain regulations come into force, what you can eat and cannot eat, which apply for an extended period of time.

Minor dhautis

When you are practising laghoo shankhaprakshalana, kunjai and neti, then it is better to also practise the minor dhauti and basti kriyas. After kunjai, do dantamoola dhauti and jihva dhauti.

Dantamoola dhauti is for teeth and gums. Normally, you clean your teeth with a brush, but that does not go to the gum region, so you clean your teeth but do not strengthen your gums. In danta dhauti, you rub the gums vigorously with your fingers, both front and back, in a manner that helps the gums become strong.

Jihva shodhana is for the tongue. In this you pull the tongue and clean it. This also helps reduce the thickness of the

tongue and allows for better articulation. Those who stutter or stammer, or have thick tongues and cannot articulate words properly, will benefit from the practice of *jihva shodhana*.

After *neti*, the *dhauti* practices for the eyes, the ears and the forehead should be done. These are called *chakshu dhauti*, *karnarandhra dhauti* and *kapalarandhra dhauti*. In *chakshu dhauti*, you splash water on your eyes. In *karnarandhra dhauti* you wet the index or ring finger and rotate it inside the ear, creating a vacuum-like effect so that the dirt and wax from inside is pulled out. Make sure that you do not push the finger too far inside. In *kapalarandhra dhauti*, you massage the sinuses with the thumb.

With these practices, the acupuncture or marma points in these areas are pressed, so that the nadis that are connected to sight, the sinuses, the nose and the ears become active. The tiredness from these regions goes away and there is a feeling of lightness there. All these five practices can also be done daily.

RULES & REGULATIONS

The rules of practice for *shatkarma* are different for *sadhana* purpose, for therapy purpose, and for general maintenance purpose. So if you are not doing it for *sadhana* or therapy, follow the rules for general maintenance, as that can be applied in your life wherever you are.

Frequency of practice

The full practice, *poorna shankhaprakshalana*, should be done once a year. The short one, *laghoo shankhaprakshalana*, can be done every six months or even every month, depending on the purpose. If you are trying to treat certain stomach problems, you can do it on alternate days for one week or even for three-four days continuously, and then take it from there. If you find that the problem reoccurs, then you may have to continue the practice once a week or once every three days to ensure that there is no reoccurrence and you can create a better condition in your body.

Laghoo shankhaprakshalana is a need-based practice; how often you do it depends on the purpose for which you are using it. It can be done every day for a certain period of time, it can be done once a week, it can be done on alternate days. That decision lies with the teacher.

Kunjali, from the sadhana perspective, can be done once a week; for general purpose it can be done once a fortnight. As for neti, if you live in a polluted environment where there is a lot of dust, smoke and pollution, then it should be done every day. For example, we had an ashram in Dhanbad, in the middle of a coalfield, and by night all our clothes would become black with coal dust, so one can imagine the condition inside the body. We did neti every night and black particles of coal would come out with the neti water. So, neti helps to remove the traces of pollution, clearing the nose and the head, and then you can have a good night's sleep. Remember, just as you take your car for servicing, shatkarma is servicing the body, and has to be done at regular intervals.

Season of practice

The practice of shankhaprakshalana should be done when the weather is stable and there is no seasonal fluctuation. It should not be done in rains or winter; it has to be done in spring or summer. It cannot be done in the rainy season, as the high humidity is not conducive to the practice. It cannot be done during the change of seasons when the allergens are high in the air. It has to be done in the middle of spring when the weather is stable, or the early part of summer when it is still not too hot. Keeping this perspective in mind, you can work out when you can do it, based on the climatic conditions where you live.

Dietary restrictions

In laghoo there are no dietary restrictions. You can do your six to eight glasses of water cleansing, flush out the system, and then eat your normal diet. In poorna shankhaprakshalana, however, non-vegetarian food and all milk products have to

be avoided for a month, all spices and alcohol have to be avoided for forty days, and cold drinks have to be avoided for fifteen days. There are many other dietary restrictions as well, and that is why poorna shankhaprakshalana is not taught to everybody. Half an hour to one hour after the practice you have to eat about half a glass of *ghee*, clarified butter, along with a specially-prepared khichari. The ghee lubricates the entire system from the oesophagus to the anus. The salt water that was taken during the practice dries up these parts, so they have to be re-lubricated, and for that ghee has to be taken in good quantity: not just for a good taste but enough to re-lubricate the internal organs.

Once, a practitioner refused to take ghee. He said, “I don’t like ghee, I won’t have it,” and he did not. He got severe constipation, as everything was dry inside and there was no lubrication to help the waste-matter move. Therefore when you are practising hatha yoga, never think ‘I can’t have this’ or ‘I can have this’. The choice is not yours; as a process of therapy, you have to follow the rule.

The rules of hatha yoga have to be seen from that perspective, not from the point of view of personal like and dislike. If you don’t follow the rules or if you do the practices incorrectly, you may get counter-results, and there may not be proper guidance or intervention available to you where you are. So your practice has to be kept simple; do what you can understand and practise without much change in your routine or lifestyle.

Sequence of shatkarma

In the sequence that Sri Swamiji taught, he instructed to practise the dhauti and basti combination first, which is shankhaprakshalana. Drink your water, do your asanas, let it go down the intestines and come out the anus. After this do kunjal, to bring out the remaining water from the stomach and to empty it. Then do neti, as the bilious water that comes up during kunjal can get in the nostrils and begin to burn. Neti will clear that. After the practice of laghoo

shankhaprakshalana, kunjla and neti, kapalbhata pranayama is to be practised, which is also part of the shatkarmas, and helps to clear the remaining water. Then to re-energize the body, practise nauli, and finally, to move into the meditative state – trataka. This is the way you do the six cleansing practices of hatha yoga.

This sequence of shatkarma is not from the perspective of classical hatha yoga, as they have given many different procedures and variations, which cannot be done by average people. This is Sri Swamiji's teachings, who understood the needs of today and combined it with his own yogic mastery.

KAPALBHATI

Kapalbhata in hatha yoga has two purposes. When it is done in conjunction with the shatkarmas, then it is to clear the pockets of water that remain in the body after the performance of the shatkarmas. Kapalbhata is forceful exhalation, focusing on the forehead, so it is like blowing the nose. After you have done neti then you do kapalbhata to clear all the water that has remained in the sinus glands and the nasal passage.

The kapalbhata that you practise after the cleansing techniques is done standing up. First you close one nostril, inhale normally and then exhale forcefully. As you are breathing out forcefully, you bend your body forward until you come to the horizontal level. You can even go down to the knee level, and then come back up. All the while as you move down and up, you are doing the kapalbhata pranayama. Then you repeat with the other nostril, and then with both. You do three to five rounds like this: minimum three rounds and maximum five rounds. The forceful exhalation combined with the movement ensures that not a single drop of water remains in the head region. Thus the first purpose of kapalbhata is to clear the water as an aid to neti kriya.

The second purpose of kapalbhata as a pranayama and meditation is to awaken ajna chakra. Here you are sitting

down in your lotus pose with eyes closed. Now through the practice you are stimulating the frontal lobe of the brain, the region where ajna chakra is located. The forceful respiration with emphasis on the forehead induces a state where *sushumna nadi*, the central nervous system, becomes active.

Many people teach kapalbhati only with both nostrils. However, the classical hatha yoga emphasizes closing alternate nostrils, as each nostril will alter the flow in that particular nadi. If you have the right nostril closed and you are forcibly breathing out through the left nostril, it is one nerve that is receiving more pressure and stimulating ajna chakra. Similarly, when you close the other side, the other nadi will become activated. In this way, both ida and pingala become activated and then when you do both together, sushumna, the pathway of the kundalini, begins to flow.

NAULI

The activation of sushumna is further stimulated by nauli. As previously stated, the kundalini can awaken but again go back to sleep. It is like my dogs: they are sleeping and suddenly there is a noise, they open their eyes and look around, and if everything is okay, they again close their eyes and go back to sleep. Kundalini is like that, it can awaken, go up to swadhisthana, then return to mooladhara and go back to sleep.

Swadhisthana is the bathroom, mooladhara is the bedroom and manipura is the dining room and kitchen. When the stomach is full, kundalini can go back down to the bedroom to sleep. When you do nauli, however, after eating kundalini goes to work, to the office. There are three offices: anahata, vishuddhi and ajna. The three offices are the gross, subtle and causal levels. When it has reached ajna, kundalini has finished its journey. So nauli is used after kapalbhati to clear the passage of sushumna and allow the ascent of kundalini beyond manipura.

TRATAKA

The last practice is that of trataka, for attaining the state of dharana and stilling the mind. When the mind is still and not distracted by the outside world of the senses and sense objects, then it realizes its own nature and becomes the *drashta*, the witness. The same idea has been given in the *Yoga Sutras*. The dissipation of the mind has to stop, the chitta vrittis have to be stilled. In raja yoga it is said the chitta vrittis have to be stilled, in hatha yoga it is said the mind and the pranas have to be stilled, as prana is the vital force and mind is the subtle force: *prana shakti* and *chitta shakti*.

The basic understanding is the same in both raja yoga and hatha yoga, and both lead to the same experience. You cut off from the world of sense objects and senses, find stability in your inner nature and develop the ability to observe, to become the *drashta*. Nevertheless, there is a difference in the attainments of hatha yoga and raja yoga. As hatha yoga is physically oriented, the stillness of the mind that you experience here is due to the stilling of the superficial activity of the mind, not the vrittis of the mind. It is in relation to your daily behaviour that you are controlling the mind here, whereas in raja yoga it is the behaviour of the whole personality that is worked on. In one it is modification of habits and in the other it is modification of deeper traits.

Thus the journey of shatkarma takes you through the aims of hatha yoga: from purification, *shodhanam*, to *sthairyam*, stillness, in the practice of yogasanas, to *laghavam*, lightness, in the practice of pranayama, to *dridhata*, firmness, in nauli, to *ekagrata*, one-pointedness, in trataka. This is shatkarma, which is the first part of hatha yoga.

Be True to the Yoga Vidya

30 September 2016



From Sri Swami Satyananda's teachings, hatha yoga has to be mastered first before you embark on the raja yogic journey. Most people don't realize this. Even I used to think in the early days that meditation, pratyahara and dharana are the important practices and hatha yoga can be bypassed. However, I realized that if these are practised without the right preparation which hatha yoga gives, they remain incomplete practices, as the body is not ready and the pranas have not moved, whereas doing them after the proper preparation with hatha yoga, I could easily observe the

difference in the practices of raja yoga and kriya yoga. The body responds, the mental resilience, emotional stability, pranic activity, everything alters when a sequential process is followed, moving from hatha yoga to raja yoga to kriya yoga.

Deepening the understanding

We are introducing different modules of hatha yoga practices or journeys in hatha yoga at the Bihar School of Yoga to deepen the awareness and understanding of the practices. For most yoga practitioners, their practice of yoga is not a holistic practice; it is superficial. It is the primary class, using limited practices of asana and pranayama, one practice of relaxation, and a few basic practices of concentration. For a long time that level has been maintained; however, it is necessary that now we review what we know, deepen the experience, and explore new systems that yoga has to offer.

Therefore, even though there will be different trainings of hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga and other programs at BSY, it is recommended that if you have started with the hatha yoga training, then complete the hatha yoga series, and adhere to each module for at least six months. Practise Module 1 for six months, then stop, go back to your other yoga practices, and you will notice the difference in your own practice.

The intention of these programs is to deepen the experience of yoga, not to make yoga teachers. Sri Swamiji did not teach me or my generation of sannyasins to become yoga teachers. However, the focus of most people who come to yoga today is to become a yoga teacher. To train such people, a syllabus is followed but that syllabus is not complete yoga; what you learn in a teacher training course or an instructor's program is the basics and beginning of yoga. Some people may be competent enough to do advanced postures but then they can't do advanced breathing techniques or advanced bandhas.

You have to ask yourself what has been the level of your involvement in yoga, where have you reached with your

practice of yoga. If you have learnt yoga only in order to teach others, then you have gone down the wrong road. That should not be the intention or purpose of learning. The intention should be to experience yoga yourself. That is what we imbibed from Sri Swamiji; the learning that we received was not from the perspective of teaching but from that of practising, experiencing and developing our own understanding. Ultimately, if you teach what you have experienced, the understanding in the students' mind is also that much better.

Yoga vidya

Through the ages yoga has been a *vidya*, a knowledge that has been transmitted. 'Transmission' means something that you experience, not what you practise, for you can practise without experiencing. That is the situation now. People do their yoga and talk about peace, balance and harmony; they talk about meditation and goodness, but it is only talk, as they have not had direct or in-depth experience of these precepts.

The involvement with yoga is limited to a lot of discussion, but there is no understanding. It is a little practice with no depth. You can talk about kriya yoga for one week, kundalini yoga for another week, samadhi for the third week, but how does that help you? It is all theory, but is it helping you in your daily life? No. Even your practice of kundalini yoga or kriya yoga is superficial. For one month you have the drive so you do it and then everything is relegated to the background. You want to do the advanced practices but you are not prepared to make the commitment that is required to achieve the awakening of chakras and kundalini. So there is no depth. There is sincerity in yoga aspirants, but no depth and no understanding of the practice or what can be derived from the practice.

I will give an example. There are machines that measure the stress of muscles; electrodes are placed over the body and they help to measure the stress-level while you are performing an activity. Once, that experiment was done with

asanas. The asana chosen was paschimottanasana, the back stretching pose in which you touch the toes with the legs extended forward. While doing this asana, the muscular stress reduced by 90 units. It looks like a difficult asana as you are stretching every muscle and trying to touch your toes; your whole body is in a state of chronic tension. However, what is perceived as difficult or causing chronic tension, is actually relaxing the muscular system of the body. When you release the posture and lie down in shavasana, the whole body flops and relaxes more than before, just as you stretch a rubber band and then release it.

Now, if you use this knowledge to create a specific condition in your body, that can counteract stressful situations, then no matter where you are in life, in a profession or in renunciation, you can manage the psychological effects of stress and anxiety in a much better manner. This is an indication of understanding and applying the yogic practices to create a change in the pattern of the body and psychology. If you can do this, then yoga does not remain a mechanical practice that you are doing every morning or evening; instead it becomes a conscious practice to create or alter a condition in your life.

That is what we learnt from Sri Swamiji and it is this teaching that we are again presenting, for in the last fifty years there has been a significant dilution in yoga teaching. Practices are remembered but not the original intention or the instruction that Sri Swami Satyananda gave. We are reviving that and connecting with the spirit with which he taught us the practices: not to become teachers but to become experiencers of yoga.

Complementary yogas of yoga chakra

Sri Swamiji emphasized the learning of six yogas, which become part of the *yoga chakra*, the wheel of yoga: hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga. Generally, we believe that the first three – hatha, raja and kriya – are the practical yogas; while the other three – karma, jnana and bhakti – are the expressive yogas.

What is not realized is that each yoga from the first three has a complementary yoga in the other three. Hatha yoga is complemented by karma yoga, raja yoga is complemented by bhakti yoga, and kriya yoga is complemented by jnana yoga.

Although many people define karma yoga as hard work, bhakti yoga as the yoga of devotion, and jnana yoga as the yoga of self-enquiry, that is incorrect. The external aspects of karma, bhakti and jnana have no relevance in yoga. Yoga is a discipline; karma yoga is a discipline, bhakti yoga is a discipline, jnana yoga is a discipline. All these disciplines are intended to improve the traits of human nature and to fine-tune the human personality.

Karma yoga is not hard work, selfless service, or the work that you do in an ashram; that is one interpretation but not the real understanding. Karma yoga is an awareness, an attitude, a perception of the mind that regulates the effects of one's actions, and that cannot be practised by sweeping or cleaning. That has to be realized and understood, and through that understanding a direction is given to oneself in pratyahara and dharana. The book *Yoga Chakra* tells you about the three goals of karma yoga: atmashuddhi, akarta bhava, and naishkarmya siddhi. These three goals have to be present in every action that you undertake. This has to be attained after you complete your training in hatha yoga. First you attain mastery over the body and the senses through hatha yoga, and then you use every action of the body and the senses with a different awareness and understanding. Thus hatha yoga and karma yoga are practised in a complementary way.

Similarly, raja yoga is where you are working with your mind. Along with that bhakti yoga must be practised – not the ritualistic bhakti but bhakti yoga as a psychological process of developing the emotional body. Ringing bells and lighting incense is not bhakti yoga, that is bhakti. Ritual is bhakti, not yoga. When we add the word 'yoga' to it, it becomes a personal inner experience, not an outside show. The same kirtan that is sung in a temple is sung in

a yoga ashram. However, there it is done with a religious belief and perspective in mind, and here the perspective is to experience the vibration generated by the kirtan. In this manner, what you derive from one practice is dependent on what you want to experience. Thus raja yoga and bhakti yoga, representing mind and emotions, are clubbed together.

Then comes kriya yoga. The psychic awakening is assisted by jnana yoga: understanding, knowing, realizing and living. Jnana yoga is not enquiring ‘Who am I?’ It is living an understanding and realization. The presence of this jnana is necessary during psychic awakening, so that you don’t lose your head but have a proper understanding of what you are experiencing and where to go.

Therefore, never think that karma yoga, jnana yoga and bhakti yoga are separate from hatha yoga, raja yoga and kriya yoga. They are integral parts of each other, and support and facilitate the progression from one into the other state of yogic experience. This is the process of yoga as devised by Sri Swamiji. Hatha yoga and karma yoga balance and strengthen the body and the senses, raja yoga and bhakti yoga balance and strengthen the intellect and the emotions, kriya yoga and jnana yoga balance and strengthen the psyche and the understanding. These are the tools through which the aspirations of yoga and human life are achieved, according to Swami Sivananda, according to Swami Satyananda, and according to my own realizations.



Organizing Your Practice Program



Every yoga practitioner should follow a systematic approach in practising the shatkarmas. To gain the most from the practices and to ensure that no adverse effects are experienced, they should be done in the correct sequence and frequency, keeping in mind your body condition and the purpose for which you are practising them.

Believe that you have to practise this module of hatha yoga for six months. In fact, it is good to keep a target of six months to attain the necessary purification and to bring

your body to an optimum condition of wellbeing and health. So what practice should you begin and end with in these six months?

Laghoo shankhaprakshalana

The first practice should be laghoo shankhaprakshalana. Do it once every month, which means twelve times per year, or six times for six months. You can decide on a day of the month when you are relatively free, such as the first Sunday of the month, and do it on that day every month. This is the frequency for general practice.

For therapeutic purposes, for example if you are suffering from constipation or gastritis, you can do it more often. In this case, the frequency should be discussed with a competent teacher. If you have been a long-term yoga practitioner yourself, then that ability to observe your own body and realize how to do the practices has to be there and you should be able to take your own decision on how frequently you need to do it, making sure you follow all the rules and regulations.

The practice of laghoo shankhaprakshalana should be followed by kunjal and neti. All three have to be done together when you are practising laghoo.

Kunjal

Kunjal should be practised once every fortnight for general practice. For therapeutic reasons you can do it more frequently under consultation; however, once the purpose is over, come back to the fifteen-day period.

Neti

The third practice of neti should be done once a week in normal circumstances. In heavily-polluted areas, you can practise it every night before going to sleep. If you are suffering from a cold and a runny nose, you can practise it daily until the sinuses are clear. You can also do neti if you have a headache; it will help ease the condition. Similarly, when you are overcome by exhaustion, tiredness and tension,

and the eyes are bloodshot and the vision is blurry, at that time neti can be practised to experience relief.

Thus, in general practice, neti is to be performed once a week, and for other therapeutic purposes it can be practised more frequently according to need. Once the purpose is over, revert back to the once-a-week schedule.

Minor dhautis

The minor dhauti techniques can be used on a daily basis. Every day, after brushing your teeth, rub the front and back gums with your fingers. This is *dantamoola dhauti* and it will help the teeth and gums to become strong. *Jihva shodhana*, pulling and cleaning the tongue, *chakshu dhauti*, splashing water on the eyes, *karnarandhra dhauti*, massaging the ear orifices with the fingers, and *kapalarandhra dhauti*, massaging the sinuses with the thumb, should also be done on a daily basis.

Every day, when you go to the bathroom to brush your teeth and take a shower, at that time practise the five minor dhautis. They should become part of your daily routine.

The five minor dhautis should also be done when you do the three practices of laghoo shankhaprakshalana, kunjla and neti. Do dantamoola and jihva shodhana after kunjla and the other three after neti.

Asana, pranayama, bandha

Your shatkarma practices should be complemented by a regular asana and pranayama practice, particularly the asanas performed for the purpose of shatkarma: tadasana, tiryak tadasana, kati chakrasana, tiryak bhujangasana, and udarakarshanasana. Along with these, surya namaskara and vipareeta karani asana should also be practised.

You can divide the asanas in two parts and practise each set on alternate days. For example, on the first day perform tadasana, tiryak tadasana, kati chakrasana, and their variations: all the standing ones. The next day do the remaining: surya namaskara, tiryak bhujangasana,

udarakarshanasana and vipareeta karani asana. This means that each day your asana practice will be for about fifteen to twenty minutes, no more.

Include three pranayamas in your practice: kapalbhati, nadi shodhana and bhramari. This is to be done regularly. To do all the three it will not take more than fifteen minutes. Begin with five rounds and increase up to ten maximum.

Then the practice of agnisara kriya can be done every alternate day, followed by uddiyana bandha. This will prepare you for the practice of nauli.

If you follow this sequence, your daily morning program will not be for more than half an hour to forty minutes, and that is the amount of time people can devote easily.

Pratyahara and dharana practices

At this stage also include some basic practices of pratyahara, which is the fifth component of the classical hatha yoga. The most common and likeable practice of pratyahara is yoga nidra, which from the physical perspective, de-stresses the body, from the psychological perspective relaxes and focuses the mind, and from the psychic perspective brings you to a state of silence and stillness within, allowing you to move into concentration or dharana. Also try to keep up a daily practice of either ajapa japa or antar mouna: breath and mantra awareness and observation of thoughts.

The final practice is trataka. That should be done at night, or early morning, or in a dark room if you do it during the day. Trataka should be done on alternate days.

In this way, you can have a daily, weekly, fortnightly and monthly routine of the practice of hatha yoga, which you can follow for six months. Maintain a daily practice of asana to facilitate the practices of shatkarma and include a few practices of pratyahara, so you can develop a complete yogic routine and work on a comprehensive program for the whole body and mind.

* * *

IMPRESSIONS OF PARTICIPANTS



Brimming with excitement

Like everything in life there are moments. For me this has been one of the biggest of my life so far.

Arriving at Ganga Darshan for the first time brought feelings of excitement, anxiousness and a big sense of wonder. It reminded me to trust and be myself at all costs, to try not to have expectations and be open to the newness and surroundings.

The Hatha Yoga Training allowed this process to unfold with ease, comfort and safety. I am today overwhelmed with joy and gratitude for the amount of information and detail that we received. I have a mind brimming with excitement at the possibilities that may lie ahead.

I will be back home practising the shatkarmas and the sequence of the limbs of hatha yoga. I imagine that the process will continue to unfold many things and clear the pathways to allow this process to take me where it is supposed to.

—Eilish Murray Brady, Ireland

Complete sadhana

Swamiji is amazingly flexible to switch between the gross and subtle aspects of hatha yoga. He made it a complete sadhana for us, covering the whole range from the physical dimension to the vital dimension and thereby tuning the mental dimension. I observed, admired and was inspired by Swamiji's ways to impart intricate knowledge through smile, joke, philosophy, analogy and living examples.

The Hatha Yoga Training has equipped me fully for my future journey to create and maintain equipoise of mind.

—*Jignasu Atmavishwas, Patna*

An eye-opener

This Hatha Yoga Training has been an eye-opener for us. Every householder suffers from pitta, vata and kapha imbalance, but the purification process Swamiji has shown us now makes sense.

We have perhaps understood one percent of hatha yoga, and all these thirty-five years of doing yoga, which we treated as an exercise, was perhaps only 0.1 percent of yoga. Swamiji is doing a great service to humankind by spreading these teachings which may help millions of people worldwide. We will definitely come for all the future modules to experience yoga and try to implement it in our daily life.

—*Taroon Vaswani, Mumbai*

Just what I needed

Let me begin by saying that the Hatha Yoga session was flawless. It exceeded my expectations of doing asana and improving my physical abilities.

Having come from a corporate setup and with a very hectic social life, this was just what I needed. My purpose of achieving physical and mental wellbeing is completely met. The highlight of the session was being able to spend quality time listening to Swamiji and understanding the actual

meaning of yogic life. The ashram experience was very good. Being away from the mobile phone and disconnected from other distractions was helpful in making the sessions more effective.

I look forward to Hatha Yoga Module 2 and also other yoga sessions for maintaining a good, healthy life.

—*Ratin Menon, Kolkata*

A living tradition

During the Hatha Yoga Training I realized what a ‘living tradition and master’ mean. The ancient science of hatha yoga was transmitted to us in a simple and understandable way. Behind each word of Swamiji I could feel deep knowledge and personal experience. The most important thing for me was that the ancient texts are valid and applicable today, and everyone can be benefited by this wisdom.

—*Sannyasi Sumitra, Bulgaria*

Clarity and consistency

First, we liked the choice of practices and the way they were conducted with total clarity and consistency.

Second, we really appreciated the focus Swamiji set on making clear the real goal of hatha yoga and inspiring us to embark ourselves in experiencing yoga and not just practising it.

It was a real blessing having Swamiji guide the practices and sharing the vidya from different hatha yoga traditions so clearly and succinctly. We look forward to coming back for more.

—*The Uruguay Group*

Horizons widened

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to revisit hatha yoga with fresh eyes. The course widened my horizons.

What I liked was the structure, providing a balance between theory and practical experience. I felt many of the asanas in a new way. I appreciated the depth with which the original teaching was presented yet making it so applicable to daily life in a city.

—*Sannyasi Vidyadhara, Bulgaria*

Sadhanatmak way found

I have been studying spiritual texts, the lives of saints and yogic literature, and practising asana and pranayama for some time now. I created my own daily sadhana, an amalgam of asana, pranayama, pratyahara and japa learnt from BSY and other schools.

After living overseas for twenty-one years and then returning to India, I have been searching for a yoga teacher who would teach me yoga from a spiritual sadhana perspective, but all yoga teachers want to teach asana for physical toning.

So, when I first heard Swami Niranjan speak on Day One at the Akhara, it was as if God had heard my prayers and sent me to the right place. For a long time, I was not able to understand why yoga teachers would quote the *Yoga Sutras* and then make the class do asanas that do not exist in the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali.

Swami Niranjan's explanations of the yoga chakra cleared a lot of my confusion and has given me clarity. I came here believing I had a reasonable understanding of the subject of yoga, but I leave knowing that I know very little. It was a truly incredible learning experience for me.

The Hatha Yoga Training has given me a clear daily routine to follow for the next year, a way to measure my progress and a clear aim to be ready for Hatha Yoga 2. I am thankful to the Divine and the grace of the guru for this event and opportunity in my life.

—*Chetan Nath Roy, Mumbai-USA*

History being changed

My insight more refined . . . my faith more strengthened . . . inspired by my guru to do small and still smaller things the right way with awareness and understanding. Making yoga my lifestyle . . . to see, feel, be in the practice over a long period of time with regularity, sincerity and the attitude of learning from repetition . . .

The slow but sure steps with which we were introduced to hatha yoga made us aware of our shortcomings and also made the practice of shatkarma more effective and pleasant to do. I have done them quite a few times in the past, yet this time I felt a great difference in the results.

I feel Swamiji is changing the course of history with his foresight and giving a new and dynamic direction for the yoga movement. And I feel proud to be part of this great tradition.

—*Sannyasi Atmamantra, Mumbai*

Shift of perception

I have gained many important and uplifting insights and understandings while being here, a certain shift of perception. I have been reminded of the importance of self-effort. I feel more deeply connected with what moved and inspired me many years ago, and the zeal to protect and nurture it with utmost sincerity.

Swamiji's teachings are so clear, easy to understand and interesting. His lighthearted and down-to-earth approach is so encouraging. I learnt many things during the training that will help keep me focused. It has been an experience that I will integrate and live in my life.

—*Sannyasi Lavina, Australia*

A new me

The week has been beyond my imagination. I feel like a new me. A new way of living, a new way of looking at things, to stay connected with positivity and goodness, the yama and

niyama of japa for happiness and namaskara for forgiveness . . . hatha yoga practices to balance and harmonize the prana shakti and the chitta shakti . . .

The whole week was like an inspiring holiday full of learning to apply and live.

—Sannyasi Gyantara, Indore

Ganga Darshan Lanes

Along with the early morning sun,
came ancient white flowers, elegantly placed aside.
We are; I am on my path, uphill,
they are on their way,
flourishing in a rejuvenating light.

So I pause, every morning, bend over
and put my nose in them,
leaving my lyrics,
so vain and well-remembered
on silent leaves that refresh my veins
and nourish my mind, so still.
Oh, and all you butterflies wiggle,
all you dragonflies stare,
all you mighty crows dare,
and all the easygoing squirrels seem to giggle,
while this fragile and gentle old soul
strolls over shiny Ganga Darshan lanes
leaving nothing but sweet shadowing behind.

So I stand, I sit and lie down once again.

You see, my tiny days are filled
with amazing silence, whispering winds and strange delight.

And oh, my wrinkles of old age and good times
have disappeared once again
along with the early morning sun.

—Sannyasi Satyasandhan, The Netherlands

Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

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SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

At the World Yoga Convention held in 2013 on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Niranjanananda announced: “The first chapter of yoga propagation is over. Now the second chapter begins, which is focused on consolidation of yoga and better application of yoga, with sincerity, seriousness and commitment.”

In writing the second chapter, a complete change in the training programs at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth has come about since 2016. The new programs are setting a standard of understanding the practices and principles of yoga from the perspective of the original intentions of yoga.

Among these programs was Hatha Yoga – Module I: Shatkarma Intensive, during which the focus was on understanding and applying the first stage of hatha yoga: *shatkarma*, or the six purificatory actions. During the program, the practice, experience and understanding of this most preliminary stage of yoga through which purification at the physical level takes place, was taken to a different dimension altogether.

This book presents the satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda during the program.



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