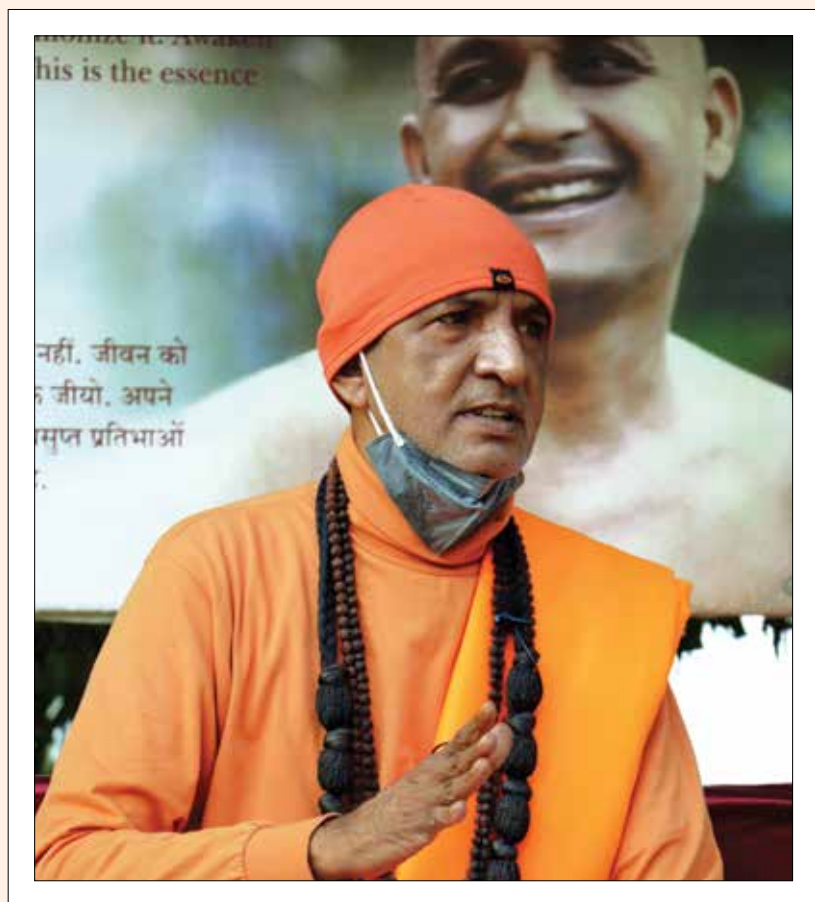


SWAN Speaks Shavasana



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Shavasana

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

SWAN Speaks Shavasana

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

Online Yoga Chakra Series



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

SWAN Speaks Shavasana

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

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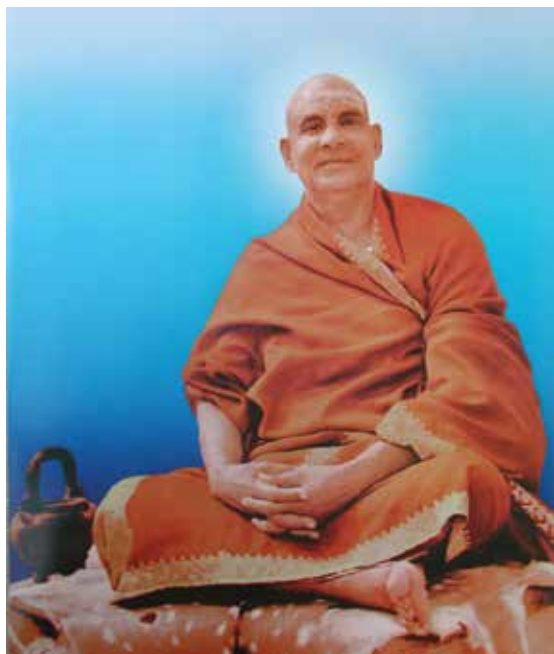
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Dedication

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



Dedication

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

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Preface

SWAN Speaks Series is a collection of yoga practices illustrating the depth inherent in the science of yoga or *yoga vidya*. Under the inspiration of Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati, this series is another testimony of the Second Chapter of Bihar School of Yoga to take yoga from yoga practice to living it as a yogic lifestyle from moment to moment.

Dedicated to fulfil the mandate of his Guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, 'to develop yoga and explore yoga vidya', Swami Niranjanananda embarks on a novel method of sharing his knowledge and wisdom. Based on readings from the teaching of Sri Swami Satyananda, he establishes an expanded understanding of known practices. Each practice is seen from many angles and reference to classical scriptural sources is made. The relevance of the practice to all dimensions of human existence, be it the five koshas or the three gunas, is explained. The teaching comes alive as the significance of each practice in the daily life of aspirants is highlighted and the means to incorporate the teaching with simplicity and ease are given.

Each satsang and one specific angle allow aspirants to experience the importance, value and truth of theory and its practical application. Swami Niranjanananda offers the possibility to enlarge and deepen the connection to yoga vidya and make it a part of life.



SWAN Speaks Series is a tribute to yoga vidya, the eternal science of yoga, to Sri Swami Satyananda, who initiated the process of sharing this science with aspirants of all walks of life, and to Swami Niranjanananda. The series adds depth and complexity giving a new experience for serious aspirants.

The Art of Relaxation



Hari Om Tat Sat.

Greetings of 2021 to all of you with our prayers for your health, wellbeing, enhanced immunity, stamina and spiritual awareness to be cultivated during the year. Today we start the exposition on yoga with a simple practice and an understanding of relaxation.

What is relaxation and how can relaxation be perfected? In order to understand this subject better I am going to do a reading from a satsang of our guru, Sri Swami Satyanandaji, who spoke in a very precise manner on the subject of relaxation in 1971. Sri Swamiji says:



Relaxation is an art for there are various practices which one can develop and use to bring about relaxation of the mind and body, transforming life into an expression of wellbeing. Relaxation is also a science for it is based on solid scientific fact. Relaxation sounds easy, one merely closes the eyes and sleeps, but for most people relaxation, deep relaxation is very difficult. While resting their mind is in a state of turmoil and the bodies are continuously tossing and turning, and the muscles are twitching. The biggest obstacle to overcome is for people to actually take active steps to bring about relaxation and use the various yogic techniques to achieve this relaxation. Most people cannot relax in the real sense of the word. They will find that their whole life will change by just being able to relax.

Relaxation is essential in everybody's life. By relaxation we mean a release of tension in both the mind and body for a period of time to allow complete rest and revitalization. This is the whole reason for sleep, but because of the tension-filled lives that most people now lead in the daytime, sleep no longer performs its functions properly. Many people find that they don't relax even during sleep, they continue to worry and try to solve their problems. This does not lead to the rest that the body and mind require.

People wake up in the morning still exhausted and this state remains with them throughout the day. It is a vicious circle for they again go to sleep that same night with the accumulated tensions of the day as well as the exhaustion that has accumulated from numerous nights of insufficient sleep and insufficient rest during sleep. It is no wonder that when the weekend and holidays arrive, many people spend much of their time sleeping. They need it.

It is for this reason that a person needs to know systematic techniques which specifically induce relaxation. Sleep is still necessary, but it needs to be supplemented with techniques that quickly and efficiently remove worry, stress and tension. It seems to be a contradiction, but it is nevertheless true that those persons tend to have smoother social relationships in all spheres of life. A person who can truly relax is able to recover and recuperate mental and physical powers and focus it in one direction when required. This is in fact willpower – the ability to direct one's whole being toward the attainment of one objective without distraction. Relaxation leads to strong willpower. Tension leads to dissipation of energy and attention in all directions.

Many people walk into a yoga class with tension written on every line of their face and on every word they speak. Their bodies are filled with tension, worry and unhappiness. They begin the yoga practice and

slowly but surely the stress and emotional turmoil begin to evaporate. The students only realize their relaxation at the end of the lesson when they find that they are smiling, really smiling not superficially, for the first time in days, and that they are actually singing to themselves as they walk. They find that in comparison to before the lesson, they are feeling light, carefree and have confidence in themselves.

These people by the systematic process of relaxation techniques have changed their whole attitude toward themselves, to other people and life in general. This transformation may only last for an hour or so, but it leaves a wonderful impression on the mind and helps to permanently encourage a more relaxed attitude towards life. It is a starting point from which you can fully begin to enjoy mental and physical relaxation as a normal part of your life whether during an intense activity or sleep and not as something that you experience only occasionally, perhaps only during yoga practice.

Yoga wants your life to be an expression of relaxation and joy. The way is by cultivating the ability to rest



under all conditions and at all times. Everything you practise in yoga brings about relaxation and a thorough revitalization of the body and mind. There are some special techniques which are very simple and which specifically bring about relaxation in a short period of time.



Relaxation begins with shavasana. The word shavasana is translated by different people either as corpse pose or dead man's pose or the pose of relaxation, but scriptures have defined shavasana in a very eloquent manner.

*Uttaanam shavavat bhoomau shayanam tu shavaasanam,
Shavaasanam shramaharam chitta vishraanti kaaranam.*

The meaning of this is: Relax the whole body on the floor like a dead person, *shava*, inert body. What is the nature of an inert body? It is still, not tense, not tight but stillness is the nature of an inert body. This stillness defines stillness of the senses and mind together. In shavasana the physical senses have to become still and the mental activity must cease. The purpose is defined as *shavaasanam shramaharam chitta vishraanti kaaranam* – Through shavasana one is able

to remove physical fatigue and relax, tranquillize the mind. *Shram haram* means to release the fatigue, *chitta vishraanti kaaranam* means to allow rest to the mind. This is defined as the purpose of shavasana. Another name for shavasana is vishramasana. Where one is able to relax completely.

These practices are also known as asanas for a very specific reason. It is a condition which you have to create in the body and even the body posture in shavasana has to be proper and correct. Shavasana is not an asana to be practised when the body feels tired with the practice of yoga asanas. If there is an imbalance created in the pranas with the practice of asanas, then at that time it is advised to practise shavasana along with the practice of other asanas. That shavasana is done for a very short time, just to avoid the tension building up in the body. In reality shavasana is part of pratyahara practices. Stilling of the senses and mind indicate the beginning of pratyahara. Just as kaya sthairyam becomes the foundation for the development of meditation, shavasana becomes the foundation for the development of a restful condition of the senses and mind, which is required before you move on into the dharana or even the higher pratyahara practices.

We are not talking of shavasana here as a posture to relax in between the practice of asanas but as the ABC of pratyahara. Understand that the name shavasana indicates the purpose for which you have to do this rest practice. Vishramasana is the outcome when you are completely without effort, without action, without spikes and agitations of the senses and mind. Both names are complimentary to each other.

The body has to be correctly positioned for shavasana; it is not merely an act of lying down on the floor without being aware of the position of your own feet and hands. Some people keep the feet together, some people spread them wide apart. Scriptures tell us, which I am sure even many of the yoga teachers are unaware of, that the feet placement has to be in the same width as the width of the hips. That is for the legs. In that posture there is no type of muscular tension



being created. All the muscles are in their normal position without any stretch or contraction.

Then the hands – the hands are not supposed to be far apart or too close to the body but *ek bitta door* that is about nine to ten inches away from the body. *Ek bitta* is the length of the hand from thumb to little finger when you stretch them fully. So one bitta from the body is about nine inches, more than that you are stretching the muscles. Less than that there is discomfort, but place them at nine inches, ten inches you will find your arm muscles are able to let go of all fatigue, tension and tiredness.





Another important point of shavasana is that the hands are placed with palms facing up, with fingers relaxed not open and tight, a little bit curled in the normal manner, but it is the back of the hand which is on the floor. Initially some people will find discomfort in this posture because they are not used to it. They will feel that the arm is twisted, but once you get used

to it you will discover that there are very few sensory nerves in the back of the hand. So even the pressure of the hands is not triggering any stimulation or response to the brain. But if you keep them on the side the pressure is still triggering response in the brain. Therefore, for shavasana, for vishramasana it is advised that you always have the back of your hands on the floor with palms open and with fingers curled. That is the right manner for doing it. This is the reason why there is the recommendation to keep the palms open and facing upwards.

The mouth should remain closed with the lower jaw relaxed, the tensions of the mouth are in this region, in the



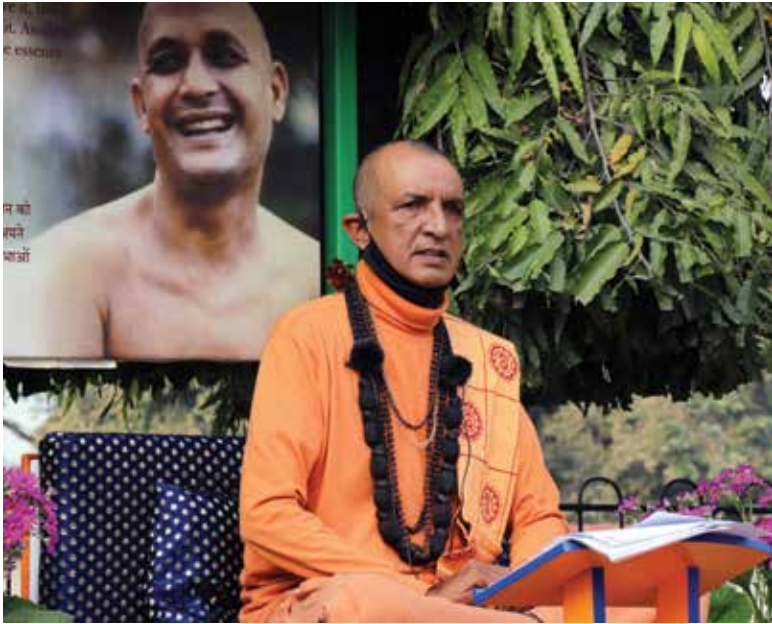
region of the lower jaw. If you make the conscious effort to relax the muscles of the face you will not be successful, but if you will allow the lower jaw to relax in a few minutes' time the other facial muscles will also come to their natural form. This is another important point.

A thin pillow or folded blanket can be placed under the head and if necessary under the shoulders, which will help relax both the shoulder muscles and throat muscles. If you lie without any support many people find that their throats are stretched and they have difficulty breathing. Just by putting a small one-inch cushion or folded blanket behind the head or behind the shoulder and under the neck will ease that feeling of discomfort and allow you to move into the practice more smoothly. The head and spine should always remain in a straight line meaning that the head should not be tilted to any side. The head should not be tilted to any side and all physical movements should gradually diminish and stop once you have established yourself in this position. Try to become motionless and gradually bring about the feeling of stillness; that is important.



2

Causes of Physical Tension



Relaxation is an art and it is a science. By relaxation we mean the relaxation of the physical body as well as the mental dimension, release of tension from both of them for a period of time to achieve total physical and mental rest. For this there are systematic techniques that induce relaxation, and one of the techniques is shavasana.



We introduced the subject of shavasana with the definition given in the scriptures:

Shavaasanam shramaharam, chitta vishraanti kaaranam.

The purpose of shavasana is to remove physical fatigue and to relax the *chitta* or greater mind. The purpose of shavasana has been defined: first, to remove the tensions from the body, and second, to relax the total mind. Sri Swami Satyanandaji has spoken at length on the mechanics of tension and I will be reading some passages from his satsangs which he has given in the early 1970s on relaxation and the mechanics of tension. Sri Swami Satyanandaji says:

The root cause of mental and physical tension is faulty thinking in relation to other people and to our surroundings. Our way of thinking does not harmonize with our external environment. This results in conflicts of interest between ourselves and other people. Our internal environment does not match our pattern of existence. In other words, we live in the same way as a fish would out of water, continuously fighting with our surroundings instead of merging and flowing with life.



Consider life as a jigsaw puzzle, if each piece of the puzzle fits and is in the right position, then the picture is complete and in balance. But if some pieces don't fit, or if they belong to a different jigsaw puzzle, then there is no unity. It is the same with people in the world. When there is conflict with their outer surroundings, there is disharmony.

Generally, there are few changes that an individual can make to the external environment, one's attitude to life and other people. When you peacefully coexist with your surroundings and no longer separate yourself, then tension is released and you begin to relax.



The factors that prevent somebody from fitting in with their surroundings are fear and the six friends – *kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *moha*, *mada* and *matsarya*, or desire, anger, greed, attachment, arrogance and jealousy. These are accumulated since birth and cause a disruptive interaction with others. These remain mainly in the subconscious layers of the mind, but have an enormous influence on our daily life.

A simple example: one person is scared of the dark because as a young child he was accidentally left alone in the dark. The resulting fear continues into adulthood, so that now he is always afraid of the dark. Whenever that person has to walk in the dark, he becomes tense and fearful. Other people have different forms of complexes and inhibitions, all because of previous unpleasant experiences. Our minds are full of such fears and complexes and these are the major causes of tension in our lives.

Sri Swamiji speaks on the physical manifestations of mental tension:

Normally the body's muscles are supplied with a continuous weak influx of nerve impulses from the brain. This is known as muscular tone and maintains the muscles in a healthy and prepared condition for instant action if required. Every psycho-physiological disturbance, every negative and destructive emotion causes conflict in the brain. This interferes with the normal rhythm of the muscles and keeps them in an abnormally high state of tension. This over activation of the muscles without the corresponding muscular activity results in a continual drain of prana from the body. This is like leaving the car lights on. After some time, they drain all the power out of the battery. If you turn the lights off when they are not needed, then the energy of the car battery will be conserved. It is the same with the muscles. If you turn off the tension in life, then you conserve your body prana.



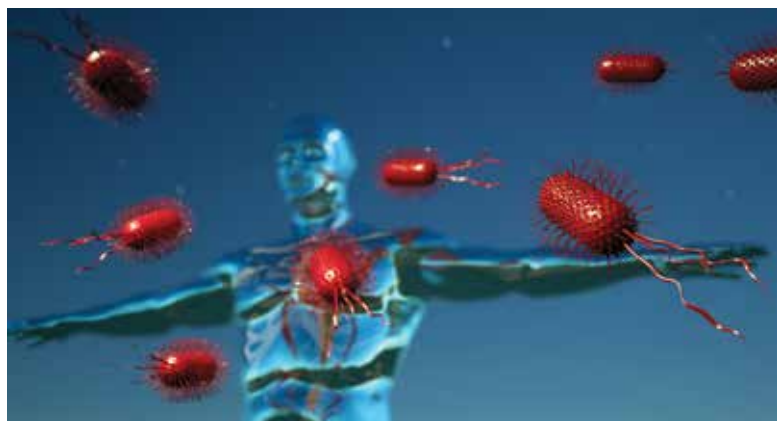
Why does this drainage of prana through muscular contraction happen? The reason is simple, when you think something, the body automatically prepares itself to transfer the thought into action. The brain and body are two parts of the same unit; they are not separate. For example, after a hard and particularly tense day at work, a person returns home feeling angry and looking for a way to relieve the frustrations. As a result, the person may become angry with a dog for no apparent reason, but just as he begins to walk towards the dog to kick it, an inner order from the brain centres warns him – the dog might bite. This causes indecision and the muscles remain in a state of tension ready for action. This kind of emotion, with or without translation into physical action, results in dissipation and wastage of prana shakti. The result is chronic fatigue. For many people these emotional disturbances and the corresponding detrimental physical effects are a regular part of life. People are continually feeling anger, fear, jealousy



etc., which makes them perpetually tense in mind and body and ultimately leads to disease, either physically or mentally or both.

With certain emotional responses, adrenalin is automatically injected into the blood stream from the adrenal glands. It is an instinctive mechanism which prepares the body for maximum efficiency and readiness during emergencies. The adrenalin causes contraction of the muscles, constriction of blood vessels, increases the heart and respiratory rates, speeds up the thought processes, and all the things that are necessary to resist danger.

As it is to be expected, its continual presence in the blood stream leads to continuous muscular, general body and mental tension. It is impossible to relax with adrenalin being continuously pumped into the blood. This adrenalin response system is absolutely necessary but only in times of emergencies. An example would be if a car suddenly and unexpectedly appeared around a blind corner where you are walking. It is the adrenalin which is most instantly released into the blood, which makes you afraid and jump to the side of the road to avoid injury. But its use is only intended for emergency situations.



In the fast modern world of today, this emergency response system is abused, for most people view every situation in life as a crisis. They are continually tense and on their guard. The adrenalin is pumped into their blood system almost as fast as it can be manufactured. How is it possible for them to relax? The whole endocrine system is forced to operate at high level, to cope with the corresponding high level of body functioning.

As the body becomes weaker through tension, it simultaneously becomes less and less able to face the onset of bacterial infection. When a body is strong and healthy, it has a very powerful auto-therapeutic strength to resist bacteriological disease. This power is weakened in a body that is unhealthy or tension ridden. The body becomes a target for the onset of diseases and illnesses. The body is like any other machine, even though it is infinitely more complex, if it is misused, or made to work abnormally, it starts to



develop faults. These are in the form of arthritis, heart trouble, constipation, diabetes, respiratory disorders, etc. These elements are so prevalent today, even children of just a few years of age are starting to manifest disease symptoms.

Removal of most ailments, their prevention, a happy life and a flight into higher consciousness is impossible unless we can learn to completely relax. To be permanently relaxed takes time and effort. Permanent relaxation is a very advanced state of yoga called *sahaj samadhi*, spontaneous and natural equanimity, which automatically implies higher consciousness. Systematic relaxation for a few minutes when one feels tired can easily be carried out. The tranquillity that you gain will give you a new, more relaxed platform from which to continue your daily life.

Sri Swamiji speaks on the mechanics of relaxation techniques:

Relaxation techniques start by taking your awareness away from emotionally charged thoughts and directing it to activities that are neutral, such as awareness of your breath, or visualizing different parts of your body. It is almost impossible for anyone to remain, or to become tense and angry when their attention is directed towards their big toe. In this way, relaxation techniques stop the ceaseless and futile cycle of brooding on problems. Simultaneously the muscles are consciously relaxed. Most people, however, may find this a difficult process.

During yoga lessons people are told to relax and though their bodies remain stiff and tense, they believe that they are fully relaxed. Relaxation techniques require you to consciously relax your muscles. Over a period of time of practice, it should become possible. It is absolutely normal with animals to be able to consciously command the muscles to let go. When an animal or child relaxes or sleeps, the muscles sink towards the floor, and where possible assume the same shape as the floor. This is a



good indication that there is no undue muscular tension remaining.

The amount of benefit gained from relaxation techniques is in direct proportion to the degree of mental awareness on the practice in hand. If you are not aware during the practice, then there is no benefit. If you are aware during the practice, then there is more benefit. If you are not aware then you will gain little or no results. But if you remain aware throughout the practice, then a few minutes' relaxation in this way can be worth more and be more refreshing than many hours of sleep.

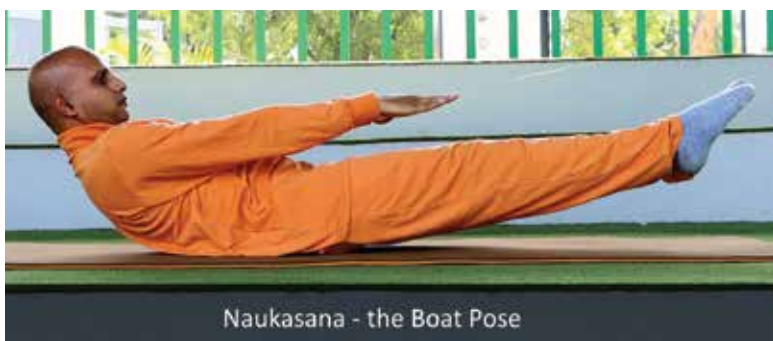
Many ailments are caused by inhibitions imposed on the body functions by the higher brain centres. By disconnecting your awareness from your body, the brain centres are allowed to carry out their duties without hindrance from the higher brain centres. The lower brain centres start to restore equilibrium to the muscle body tone and the endocrinal system. Further, your awareness on different parts of the body, or as prescribed by the practice, removes stress and fear. Such as the adrenal glands stop injecting adrenalin into the blood system. A

reduction in thoughts and worries reduces the adrenalin level in the blood. The reduction of adrenalin in the blood reduces the intensity of emotional and mental conflicts. This brings the body down to a lower level of activity. The whole body is allowed to rest from its continual stimulation.

Sri Swamiji continues by saying:

It may seem surprising, but the first step in attaining deep relaxation through asana is to tense the whole body. It is only after applying muscular tension to the entire body that you can subsequently allow your body to relax. Think of when you did a particularly hard day's physical work. Do you remember how easy it was to lie down on the bed and rest or sleep?

Sri Swamiji then speaks of a particular asana to be practised before shavasana and that is the practice of *naukasana*, the boat pose. You lie flat on your back with your feet together, arms beside the body, inhale deeply, lift your feet, heels and legs off the floor – twelve inches. Lift your head, trunk and upper back off the floor – twelve inches. Lift your hands and arms off the floor – twelve inches. And your body takes the shape of a boat. You are balancing on your buttocks, holding this position for five to ten seconds and tightening each and every part of the body, as tight as you can. Then slowly



Naukasana - the Boat Pose

come back down to the floor and relax completely. Allow the whole body to just rest and relax, and when you relax after tightening of the body, then in the second round tense your body more than the first round. In the third round, tense your body more than what you did in the second round. After completing the three rounds of naukasana, remain in the shavasana position and relax the whole body, rest the whole muscular system of the body completely. This will remove the physical fatigue.

People always practise shavasana in between every asana believing that in yoga everyone has to be very calm and relaxed, but that is an incorrect idea. Shavasana is to be practised at the end of the asana practices, not in between. If in between you need to practise shavasana after exerting in asanas, then, yes you can, but for a very brief period, very brief time, just to allow the physical body to come back to its normal condition. The actual shavasana as a practice has to be done at the end of the asana series.

Shava means a dead body. *Shava* means a corpse, indicating that there is no activity of the senses and the different internal body systems. Everything is still peaceful, restful and relaxed. So it is the absence of activity which is defined



in shavasana. People think of dead man's body and they feel frightened, but there is nothing to be frightened about, because shavasana indicates absence of all muscular, physical, internal, sensorial systems along with the mental activities. Absolute stoppage of all physical and mental functions, and that is the meaning of the word shavasana.

It is identified as a posture, it is identified as an asana, because it is something that you hold on to. Just as when you hold onto a posture in an asana, in the same manner, you hold onto the no-activity state for as long as you can. That is the condition, that is the state in which you have to be for an extended period of time. Total stoppage of all sensorial, physical, muscular, internal body systems and functions along with the mental activities indicate the state of shavasana.

Therefore, you can understand that the purpose is to remove the fatigue and to still the mind, to relax the mind. We have seen till today the effect of shavasana on the physical body. Sri Swamiji has spoken about the tension at the physical level, the hormonal secretions as the cause of tension, which have to be lessened.



3

Samskaras and Conditioning



We have spoken about the mechanics of tension, which is very much physiological in nature. After the physical level of shavasana, we come to the mental level or the *manomaya kosha*, and Sri Swami Satyanandaji has the following to say:



By performing shavasana and the prescribed relaxation technique, you have rested your body and experienced a state of calmness. You feel good, yet ten minutes later when you meet someone whom you intensely dislike, your tranquillity and wellbeing immediately disappears. Again adrenalin is released. You become your abnormal-normal self – a disappointed, angry, aggressive and up-tight self. The same mental reactions take over because your mind is conditioned to respond in that manner.



Your brain is a computer and it has been conditioned since birth. You responded in the way that you did because of your mental programming. You are at the mercy of the way that your mind has been conditioned to act. The root cause of the chronic tension lies in the emotional reactions to people and situations around you and your reaction is determined by your conditioning.

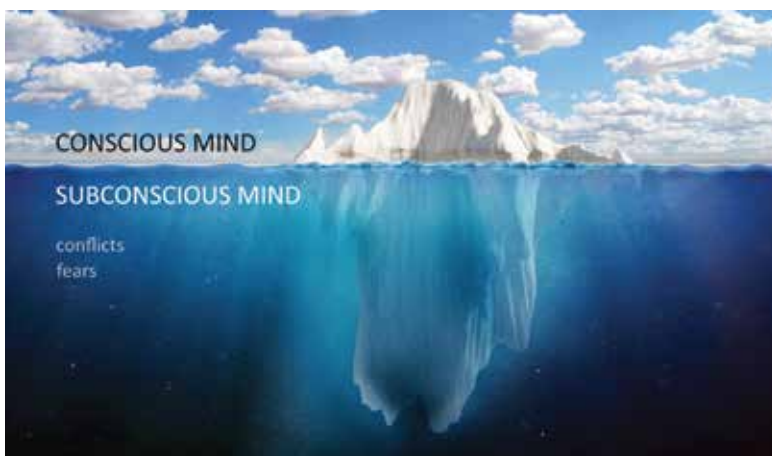
Is there no way out of this dilemma? The answer is to change the program in your brain, so that you don't respond in a negative way when you encounter a particular situation. However, this cannot be achieved overnight but with patience it can be done. Remember, shavasana as short-term relaxation practices are essential in order to rest and revitalize the entire body and mind. During these periods of calmness and clear-mindedness, we can take a more realistic look at our life. When we are relaxed, we are able to laugh at situations that only half an hour before made our blood boil.

When we become relaxed we can see the same situation in a new light and this more understanding approach helps to bring about positive changes in life. We clearly see the problem that caused the disruption and work out new ways of coming to terms with our

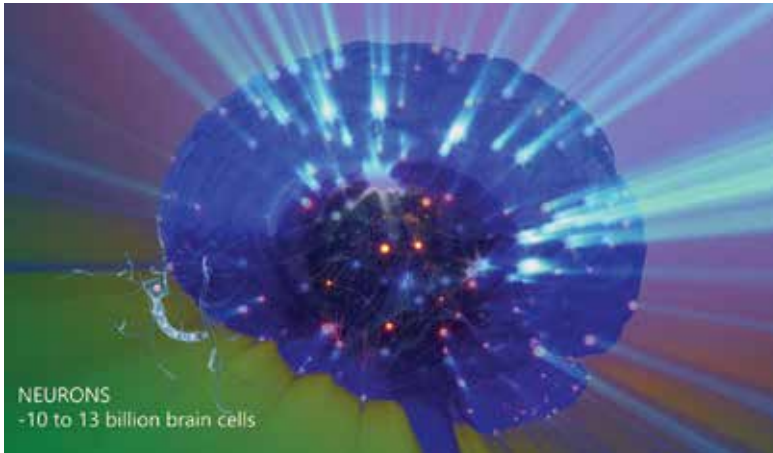


environment and people. For this reason, even a few minutes of conscious relaxation can help to remould the life pattern along more effective and harmonious directions.

However, this only touches the surface of the problem of tension and inability to relax. The root cause lies in the mind. The cause lies with the conflicts and fears which are embedded in the subconscious mind and whose nature we are not aware of. All we feel is the tension and emotional upsets that they cause to manifest in our lives. We experience the results often without knowing the source of the problem. The unhappiness and tension is a certainty, but the reason is an uncertainty.



These subconscious impressions in yoga are known as samskaras. There is only one method of eliminating them and the method is to know the mind. One has to explore the mind and come face to face with these subconscious mental impressions. This requires physical and mental relaxation. This is necessary so that we can disentangle our awareness from the outer environment and direct it inwards. Most people have so many problems that their awareness is completely involved in worries



and outdoor distractions. Your head is the home of the most incredible computer in existence. The brain is a bio-computer of complexity beyond even our wildest dreams. It consists of an estimated 10 to 13 billion brain cells known as neurons and of an unaccountable number of interconnections between these cells. The work of this computer is to receive, store, compare, analyze and direct all the data that we receive from the body and its surroundings via the sense organs of the ears, skin, eyes, nose and tongue. The brain has a memory of past experiences, of advice given by parents, teachers, friends, and everyone and everything we have been in contact with and interacted with till the present day.

Just for your information, there was one article in the *Scientific American* in the year 2010, which mentioned that the total memory capacity of a human being is the same as watching television for three million hours. So if you watch television twenty-four hours a day starting today, for three hundred years, the television will have to run to fill your mental capacity of memory.

These experiences determine how we react to different life situations. At any given moment data from the



internal and external environment is sent via nerve impulses to the brain. A particular part of the brain called the limbic system compares this incoming information with the previous experiences stored in the memory of the cerebral cortex. In the light of these memories we respond to the data in a fixed, programmed manner. In other words, the response of our mind and body to life situations is determined by previous mental conditioning.

Our brain is a continual hive of activity although we are never aware of this, except for the tiny portion which reaches our conscious perception. All the sensory data is being processed in the subconscious realms of the mind. Data is being continuously received from all parts of the body and from the external environment via the sense organs, and either acted upon, stored or ignored. Unawareness of all this activity is essential, for it allows one's consciousness to freely deliberate on a limited field of interest. If a person was aware of all the subconscious activity, they would be inundated and overpowered by the continual influx of millions of bits

of information. What is important is which information reaches the conscious perception.

A part of the brain called the reticular activating system situated at the top of the spinal cord performs this function. This system acts like the sluice gate allowing only a small percentage of the incoming data to the brain to reach conscious perception. How does it decide what should reach the conscious attention and what should not? It allows information to arise to our consciousness only if the data reinforces, or fits in with the patterns of mental conditioning, or if the incoming information is particularly urgent. So perception is dependent on what a person's mental state will allow him to perceive. Other incoming data, which doesn't fit in the mental program, remains in the subconscious realms of the mind and so a person is unaware of it. We perceive the world around us in accordance with the dictates of our present mental apparatus.



For example, if you meet someone you like or dislike, then the information which tends to reach your awareness is that which confirms and reinforces your conditioned prejudices. If you like a person, then

you tend to become aware of that information, which confirms the friendship. We generally see the good points of our friends and the worst points of our enemies. Of course, if incoming sensory impulses tell us something different and are very powerful inputs, then this can overcome the programming. For example, sometimes we see good features in our enemies and bad features in our friends. Our perception of the world depends very much on our mental conditioning.

We are at the mercy of our programming. If mental programs have been written to see hatred all around, then we will interpret all phenomena in this light. If our program says that all people in general are friendly, then we interpret others as being friendly. Our attitude towards life depends on our mind. An unsuitable, narrow, unrealistic, incompatible mental state leads to continual conflict with our surroundings and to unhappiness and stress as a consequence. An expansive, realistic mental program leads to harmonious interaction and good relationships with the environment and with other people, which must lead to happiness and relaxation. Our lives can either be an expression of joy or an expression of discontent. It all depends on the content of the mind.

Are we then completely at the mercy of our mind? Yes, we are, but at the same time we have the ability to throw out those contents of the mind that cause so much havoc in our life. We can change our mental program, or at least modify it by removing all the dross and the unwanted parts. All that is required is the desire to re-orientate our life along new pathways and to translate this desire into personal effort. The eventual method is by exploring the mind, facing the inner contents and clearing out the rubbish. But before we can do this effectively, we need to bring a measure of relaxation into our lives to enable us to relax sufficiently in the first place, to direct our awareness inwards.



Four identifications of the mind

People have been talking about mind, but in reality what is mind? According to yoga, the mind is composed of four different conditions, experiences or states. The first experience of the mind is manas. The second experience of mind is buddhi. The third experience chitta and the fourth experience is ahamkara. These four together constitute the total mind. When yoga speaks of mind, we have to consider all the four aspects to understand the depth of the mental influence and conditionings.

This mind is guided by awareness and identification. One component of mind is awareness and the other component of mind is identification. You can become aware of something and not identify with what you are becoming aware of. Or you can identify with something and be aware of it at the same time. Or you can identify with something as a memory, as a past act or an event, without the present awareness. Whatever may be the outcome, awareness and identification are the two arms of the mind. One arm is awareness; the other arm is identification. The four components, manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara, of the total mind enter into identification with senses and sense objects, with people and with the environ-

ment. Stress and tension are not only at the mental, rational level, but they extend to all other aspects of the total mind.

When there is awareness and identification by *manas* with an object, then that identification will give birth to *sankalpa* and *vikalpa*, thought and doubt. *Sankalpa* and *vikalpa* is the fluctuating mind. Like a question that comes to the mind, ‘Should I do this? Should I not do this?’ and the state of indecision predominates. The state of indecision is also a conditioning of the mind which comes with awareness and identification. There is dissipation. A mind can get bored fast from focusing, from concentrating on one thing at a time, on one aspect. It needs stimulation, change. If it focuses on one thing for a long time, the mind becomes drowsy, introvert, awareness diminishes and sleep comes. The nature of mind is to be continuously active, and therefore, it is difficult for people to concentrate and focus, as that is not the natural behaviour of mind.

Mind also experiences tensions which are mental and sensorial. This is the outcome of mental identification.

Similarly, when there is *buddhi* identification or intellectual identification with something, for example, a figure, a number for a scientist or a mathematician, there will always be a question as to why that figure should not be something else. Analysis is the identification of *buddhi*. What is the purpose? If it is 27, why not 28? If it is 29, why not 50? All this type of questioning and analytical thoughts will come up due to *buddhi* identification. The outcome of this will be intellectualization, where you will be theorizing about practices but not practising and not experiencing them. Another aspect of the *buddhi* identification is doubt. Am I doing it right? Am I not doing it right? So analysis, questioning, intellectualization and doubt, these are the effects of the *buddhi* identification.

Chitta identification is definitely memories – all the stored impressions, images in our deeper subconscious and unconscious mind are there as information. That is the realm of *chitta*. The memories of this life are known as memories,

but memories of previous lives are known as *samskaras*. The outer memories and the inner *samskaras*, both are identified by *chitta*. Those events are identified by *chitta* because of its deep identification – something that has caused strife, conflict, pain, suffering and trauma in life.

The fourth identification that happens is of *ahamkara*, and of course it is related to *chitta* as well as. *Ahamkara* is triggered by the experiences of *chitta*. *Ahamkara* is triggered by the existence of memories in *chitta*, so there is always an emotional reaction to *ahamkara*, to ego. There is always an association with a memory of the past.

Sri Swamiji mentioned that all that is required is the desire to re-orientate life along new pathways and to translate the desire into personal effort. This is attainable by transforming the mental identification from negative to positive. Mental identification means the state of mind experienced in *shavasana*, which indicates the predominant conditioning and where the awareness is focused.

Now just imagine, you may not have had the full capacity of your memory, the three million hours of visual input, but whatever memory you have from birth till now is in itself a substantial amount. Those people who always see their life as crisis and themselves going through the crisis of life will find it difficult to relax. Even in *shavasana* a lot of latent memories will surface. In *yoga nidra*, a lot of deep memories will surface. Proper relaxation and rest will not be achieved.

The effort to re-orientate our lives begins with transforming the mental identification from negative to positive and always focusing the awareness in *shavasana* on a positive condition of body and mind. This is an important aspect to understand in *shavasana* as the start of the *pratyahara* practices. When you practise *shavasana*, not as a technique of physical relaxation, but as a technique of *pratyahara*, then you become aware of the different levels of awareness. You have to first purify the *manas* level of identification with the senses and the senses objects, the environment and people. That effort has to happen now by converting the negative into

positive, by transferring from the sensorial awareness to subtle awareness and by developing different conditions in the physical body to allow you to experience the subtle dimensions of your own body and the different koshas of the body.

You can purify the chitta level identification by experiencing the opposites, the pratipaksha bhavana of Swami Sivananda. You can purify the ahamkara level of identification by cultivating the *drashta* component, becoming the observer and the witness, and remaining unaffected by the barbs that the senses and the sensorial world can throw at us. With the drashta bhava you maintain objectivity. To manage the buddhi level of identification, the practices of dharana and visualization become important.

Yoga has recognized the entire range of mental tensions from manas to buddhi to chitta to ahamkara. We begin the process of rest and relaxation with a simple practice of shavasana, allowing the whole body to simply be free of all tightness, tensions and stresses. This simple first step, allows us to take many more steps in order to rediscover the equanimity and tranquillity that is the birth right of every individual.



4

Antahkarana



In the discussion of shavasana, we spoke of the total memory capacity of the individual, which is about three million hours of recording. That is how much memory we can store during the course of our life. Whatever has been said to us is always inside in form of memory, in form of knowledge.

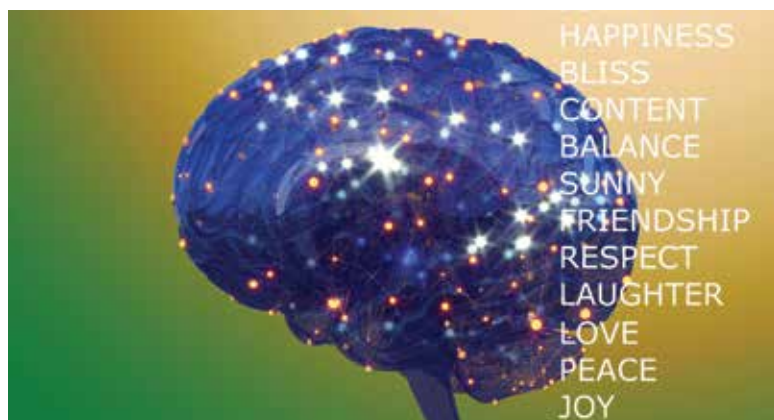


In this manner, the brain becomes a continual hive of activity. We are not aware of what goes on inside except for the tiny portion that reaches the conscious mind. That tiny portion of information that reaches the conscious mind is through the window of awareness which links us with our present moment.

We also perceive the world in accordance with the dictates of the mental apparatus. How we have been conditioned reflects on how we live. If we have been conditioned to see the glass half full, then the glass will never be seen as half empty.



The awareness of the glass being half full is always there. If the mind has been conditioned to see the emptiness of the glass, then the perception will say that the glass is always half empty. In this manner, you are what you live in your mind, and you can be an expression of either joy or sorrow in your life depending on your mental content.



The question arises: are we at the mercy of the mind? The answer is yes; we are at the mercy of the mind, but there is also the possibility to remove those unnecessary aspects of the mind which create havoc in our life. One can modify the conditioning of the mind. One can purify even more the expressions of the mind. One can harmonize even more the expressions of the mind. Although we are subject to the mercy of the mind, there is always the possibility of re-programming the mind to become better.

When you go to a yoga class, during the class the teacher asks you to relax, lie down, and relax your body and mind.



You have been given the instruction to relax the body and mind, but then what do you relax? You are able to drop the tensions which are muscular and nervous in nature. You are able to drop the tightness of the body momentarily. But how do you relax the mind? Even the yoga teachers have no idea of how to relax the mind. It is this mental tension which we are going to understand today.

Antahkarana

From the yogic perspective, mind has four different compartments and these four different compartments are named *manas*, *buddhi*, *chitta* and *ahamkara*. *Manas* is the outer form of the mind, the interactive mind, the logical mind, the window of consciousness that opens into the outside world. That is one compartment – the first outer level of the mind. It is the mind which is responsible for reflection, thinking and becoming aware of the present.

The second compartment of the mind is *buddhi*. *Buddhi* is intelligence and it is the area where knowledge, the capacity to analyze, weigh different options, know the right and wrong, and decide on an appropriate course of action happens. The third compartment of the mind is *chitta*, the area where impressions and memories are stored which create the conditioning that we live in our life.

The fourth compartment of the mind is *ahamkara*. *Ahamkara* is the ego component, but not in a negative manner. *Aham* is I or the self, *akara* is the form, the shape or awareness. When we become self-aware that is *ahamkara* – I know that I exist. For example, we sleep at night in an absolute unconscious state. At that time the conscious knowledge ‘I know that I exist’ is not there. The moment you open your eyes in the morning and the first light enters your eyes, you become self-aware. You know that you exist. That is the beginning of a new day for our *ahamkara*.

These four components of the mind in yoga are known as *antahkarana*, *antah* meaning internal, *karana* meaning causes which give birth to internal or subtle expressions and

experiences which influence our external life and behaviour patterns. This is the concept of mind according to the Samkhya tradition of India. Awareness is an expression of this antahkarana.



Let us understand this a bit better: one – we have manas; two – we have buddhi; three – we have chitta; four – we have ahamkara. Two things are important attributes of this greater mind. One is awareness and the second is identification. We identify with our body when we wake up. We identify with our hunger when we are hungry. We identify with the need to rest when we are tired. There is always a component of identification with the senses, with our interactions in life, and with sense objects that we interact with. Identification is one component and awareness is another component of the total mind.

For our understanding, awareness is the light coming through this open window of consciousness shining outside. Since manas is the first expression of the greater mind, awareness becomes part of the manas component. It shines in the world of the senses and senses objects. At the same time, awareness also extends backwards into buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. Although awareness is an activity of manas, awareness is an expression of manas shining its light outside,

it is also shining it in the inner dimensions of buddhi, chitta and ahamkara.

On the other hand, identification, the ability to identify with something and connect with it, is an experience or an expression of ahamkara, the ego component, or the self-awareness, 'I know that I exist'. Identification begins with that understanding, 'I know that I exist'. The beginning of ahamkara is identification of the self. This ahamkara then identifies all other objects as individuals and independent entities of experience. Awareness belonging to the realm of manas, and identification belonging to the realm of ahamkara become the primary expressions of the greater mind.

Antahkarana in shavasana

When you are practising a technique of relaxation, specifically the yogic techniques of relaxation known as the shavasana practices, when you are trying to relax and rest in shavasana, the behaviour of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara becomes different to the normal conditions and behaviours. When you are active in the world walking, talking, eating, drinking, working, doing your routine things, you are simply moving by the impulse of your prana and mind. Prana makes you move; mind makes you think. You are moving at the



impulse of prana and mind, simply going through your daily routine and chores that you have to accomplish.

You are not even aware of how your body or your mind is responding, or your emotions are responding at different times, in different situations and circumstances, with different people, or with your own inner conditioning. Which aspect of yourself is being brought out by your nature and behaviour? In shavasana, when there is this intent to relax and rest, when there is the desire to de-stress yourself, release the tensions of body and mind, then all the four compartments of the mind give a different type of response.

The first thing you have to understand is that when you are practising shavasana, you are gradually stopping the sensory inputs of the senses. In shavasana there is very little input coming into your brain and mind. Maybe thirty percent of the normal? Maybe forty percent of the normal? There is much less sensorial input going into the brain and into the mind. A sixty percent disconnection with the senses has already happened. The remaining forty is what you have to deal with in your mind.

The outer sixty percent has been reduced. Your eyes are closed, there are no visual distractions. You have heard all the sounds around you. There is nothing new to distract your auditory senses. You have felt the body, the floor, so there is



nothing to distract you. You have already eliminated sixty percent of the sensory input by becoming aware and allowing them to relax. The remaining forty is the internal one, the awareness that has come to the level of buddhi, chitta and ahamkara.

Ahamkara in shavasana

Before we go to the description of sensory blockage, let us see what comes out from the ahamkara component side. The waves of ahamkara are self-awareness, self-identity, self-preservation, self-importance. They come out influencing chitta, influencing buddhi, and influencing manas. They are energies in motion, which by the time they reach manas are known as emotion. What comes out from ahamkara, due to the self-identity and awareness, is the emotion: I like this. I enjoy this. I love this. I hate this. I dislike this. I am jealous of this. All these different emotions will come from the ego, and the awareness will go from manas towards ego.

If awareness is one hundred percent at the manas level, it becomes seventy-five at the buddhi level, it becomes fifty at the chitta level, and it becomes twenty-five at the ahamkara level. From the ahamkara side, if the emotion is of strong self-preservation, it is one hundred percent. By the time it comes to chitta, it is seventy-five. By the time it comes to buddhi, it is fifty percent which is fine, as buddhi has to balance between life and death. By the time it comes to manas, the emotion becomes twenty-five percent, disregard for life, misuse and abuse of life. The emotions colour themselves in that manner.

There is this pattern of awareness and identification emerging. When you are practising shavasana, there is less of sensory distraction, so the sensory, outer awareness lessens. That awareness is directed to the internal experience; in the internal experience, you go through oscillation. Many times when you practise shavasana, you don't hear the instruction, you are thinking something different. Or in the middle, you find that you are in some other place, which means that at that moment the condition of your manas is stronger and

more powerful than your attempt to practise relaxation. This is known as oscillation of the mind.

Manas in shavasana

It is known as *sankalpa* and *vikalpa* in Sanskrit, the oscillations of the mind. You cannot hold something, and whatever is the predominant conditioning of the mind, that thought will appear first in shavasana. Therefore, the first struggle in shavasana begins when you have to pull your mind back to hear the instructions and to follow them accordingly. That oscillation comes first because you are confronting the inner stuff. If you have had a discussion with somebody, in shavasana it will be that discussion which will be prominent. If you have enjoyed something very much, in shavasana it will be that thought of enjoyment which will be prominent. In that way, you will be able to observe your own mental conditioning which is distracting your willpower into moving in some other area of distraction and diversion.

In this manner, in shavasana, the oscillation is happening at the manas level. At the manas level, there is dissipation. There are times when you are so dissipated that you cannot



control yourself, you simply slip off into state of unconscious sleep, and you say, 'Oh, I was feeling very disturbed'. Why were you feeling disturbed when you were trying to sleep, when you were trying to rest? It is because of mental dissipations.

The mind is being pulled and pushed in too many different directions without your conscious knowledge. This leads again to sensorial and mental tension, because the purpose of shavasana is defeated. If your mind keeps running back and forth and you are struggling to bring it back, then how can there be rest and revitalization? Rather more mental and sensorial tensions are created. At the manas level, one becomes unable to follow the instructions and the guidance given. If you are told to count your breath back from 27 to 1, it will be a miracle if you come to 24. At 26 you will be dissipated, at 25 you will be dissipated, at 24 you will be dissipated. One is unable to hold that manas distraction; one is unable to still that manas distraction.

Buddhi in shavasana

The level of awareness and identification of buddhi being expressed in shavasana is also different. Whatever is the predominant thought in the mind will be analyzed. If you are Archimedes, in shavasana you will be thinking of the mathematical problem and not practising shavasana. You will be shouting 'Eureka' during shavasana and not in your bath. That is the buddhi component, always active, always analyzing. What is the purpose? Why is it 27, why not 54? Why is it 54, why not 108? Why 108, why not only 100? It will be incessant questions and answers will not be heard. Such people are not interested in answers, they are interested in throwing out random questions.

Then there are intellectuals who will create a whole new philosophy from a sentence without having undergone any experience or even understanding of the subject. Like our own modern-day yoga teachers. They undergo one month of yoga training and one year later they are advertising training in kriya yoga and kundalini yoga, without having any

qualification or degree, or even understanding or learning of the benefits and pitfalls of the practices; and that is very common.

One can intellectualize and theorize something without any personal experience or understanding, and that is a natural human trait. This human trait does not allow the light of wisdom to dawn in life. This intellectualization can be also a critical intellectualization: ‘Oh, I am learning this here, and I learnt that there, which is better?’ The mind is not on the practice; it is more on seeing which is a better option for you. That is the buddhi component. Another aspect of the buddhi component is self-doubt: ‘Am I doing this right? Am I doing this wrong?’ Whatever is the predominant mental conditioning, the thought will come to the mind during shavasana.

Chitta in shavasana

Then there is the chitta identification and awareness. You have to understand that the chitta identification is much stronger in shavasana than the manas or buddhi identification. The definition of shavasana is *chitta vishraanti kaaranam* – relaxing the chitta. Chitta is the main component of shavasana, not manas and buddhi. Although we are experiencing, we are going through manas and buddhi experiences, it is chitta that we have to come to eventually. Chitta is the memories, chitta is the samskaras, the so called incidents that our mind has labelled as good and bad, pleasant and happy, unpleasant and unhappy experiences of life.



You have to understand that chitta is a collection of the past. In the kitchen you get a toast. The thickness of the toast is maybe half inch to three quarter inch, to maybe one inch. The layer of butter on top is just a scrape, not even a thick layer. It is just a scrape. The scrape of butter on top of the toast is the present awareness, and the bread, the one-inch-thick bread which you hold, is your past.

What is your present awareness? How much are you involved in the present? Only this moment. Your present half a second ago is not present any more. The present is a very tiny window, but the past is a deep well. In shavasana, it is the stuff from this well that comes up to the surface. The moment you lie down, what happens? If you have observed yourself lying down in the evening, at night, before rest, before sleep, what happens to you? The moment you close your eyes to rest or sleep, you go into the realm of memories; you don't remain in the realm of manas and buddhi.

Sometimes people like to daydream or night-dream, fantasize, imagine or visualize. Many things happen and you are in the dimension of the past. Of the future, you have no idea what it is going to contain, so you don't even bother about it. Even when you sleep at night, you will discover that your thoughts are all of the past. This chitta identification has to be purified, harmonized and regulated in the practice of shavasana.

The ahamkara identification and awareness is related to chitta. the conditions, the memories, the impressions and the emotional reaction. When these things are converted into action, then what emotion do they convey? That is the purpose of ahamkara. These are things that we experience when we practise shavasana. In the procedure of relaxation, the effort has to be made to transform the mental identification of ahamkara, the inner identification of ahamkara, from negative to positive. Mental identification means what is the state of mind experienced in shavasana. The first conditioning that is cropping up is the object of your identification when you are trying to rest. It is

that object of identification with which you have to work, whatever is coming to the surface of the mind. It indicates the predominant conditioning and where the awareness is focused.

Purpose of shavasana

Yoga describes the method of purifying these four compartments of the mind in shavasana. That is release of mental tension from the perspective of yogic science. When people think of mind or to relax the mind, they generally believe 'I should stop thinking in order to relax the mind'. That is the general belief: to relax the mind, stop thinking. In the yogic traditions, mind is always seen as the total mind having these four compartments. It is the activity of each compartment which has to be balanced, reorganized, restructured and reprogrammed, and that becomes the purpose of shavasana.

How do we purify the manas level of awareness and identification? The manas level of awareness and identification is transmuted, transformed, sublimated, purified when we are able to transform the sensorial awareness into subtle awareness – point 1. When we are able to link the body and breath together – point 2. When we are able to experience different conditions in our body voluntarily, consciously and wilfully, for example the feeling of lightness when you practise yoga nidra. Can you experience that lightness at any given moment during the day without having the need to lie down, while you are sitting on a chair, while you are travelling or enjoying yourself? Can you experience that lightness when you are in pain? These are conditionings that can be developed.

For the buddhi level of awareness and identification, the drashta culture has to be cultivated to balance and harmonize it. Objectivity has to be cultivated; without getting entangled in the experience you should be able to observe it and remain unaffected by it at all times. Then only will buddhi be balanced and purified.



For the chitta level of awareness and identification, it is experiencing the opposites and allowing the disturbing components of the mind which create havoc in our life to be broomed and swept away by cultivation of the positives. Pratipaksha bhavana can play a major and important role to achieve this.

For the ahamkara level of awareness and identification, awareness and visualization have to be practised. Visualization has been considered to be a very powerful tool in yoga. If the visualization is perfected it can change the mental programming and it can change the mental identification. For any type of identification, the self has to visualize something, there has to be a visual component. If I see a person, I see a visual component of the person and I identify with that. It is the visualization or creation of a positive visual component, which holds my attention, which will bring peace, equipoise and harmony to the ahamkara level.

This all indicates the process of pratyahara, clearing the mental dross, purifying, transforming the mental conditions and changing the outlook towards life where life is not seen as a crisis situation at all times but as an expression of one's peace and joy.

5

Transference and Expansion of Awareness



During our discussion, we have spoken about the tensions which are generated in the physical body by the senses and sensorial interactions with the brain and hormones, and those tensions which are generated by the mind due to the overactivity of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. The benefit gained in shavasana is in proportion to the level of awareness that one cultivates during the practice. That awareness is a function of manas, while identification with the sense object is the function of ahamkara.

Keeping this in mind, today we ask, ‘What is awareness and what is consciousness?’ At the same time, it can also be asked, ‘What is mind?’ In the last satsang, I told you that yoga sees the mind in four parts. The total mind is seen in four parts. Manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara represent the total mind-concept of yoga. Manas is the reflective component of the mind, the one which is interacting with the outside material, sensorial dimension. Buddhi is the intellectual, logical component of the mind, the rational component of the mind. Chitta is the storehouse of impressions, memories; and ahamkara is the self-identity. The question is, if this is the total mind, then what is consciousness?

The mind-ocean

This total mind is the mind which makes you aware of your existence and your life in this dimension. Consciousness is the experience of expansiveness of life. Our master, Sri Swami Satyanandaji, has explained: imagine consciousness to be like an ocean, then the surface of the consciousness is the conscious mind. The mid-region of the ocean is the subconscious mind. The bottom part of the ocean, the deep part of the ocean is the unconscious mind. The ocean is one. In the same manner, consciousness is one. These three



conditions of consciousness – the top, the middle and the lower – are the three stratas of upper part, middle part and lower part of the ocean and they are known as the conscious mind, the subconscious mind and the unconscious mind.

To these states of consciousness, a label has been given of mind and whenever the label of mind is attached to consciousness, it defines a specific functionality or a specific



purpose. As a diver you have to dive down into the ocean. You take a dive from the top of the ocean and you start going down. For the sake of discussion, let us say that for the first fifty feet of the ocean you have a clear vision because sunlight filters through the waters and everything is clear, colourful, visible. As you go deeper than fifty feet, gradually the sunlight diminishes, the visibility becomes less, the colours become less. As

you go further down beyond one hundred feet, the sunlight is cut off completely and there is total darkness.

This is how the awareness is graded from conscious to unconscious levels. The consciousness, which is holding our life and our interaction with this world, the outer dimension and the inner dimension, is one. According to the level of interaction, awareness and identification, it has been divided in three parts, the conscious mind, the subconscious mind and the unconscious mind. This total mind-concept is further understood as functions of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara.

The ocean is a big space, and you are only diving in one part of the ocean, so your interaction with the ocean is limited or confined to the regions near yourself, near your body. As you dive down, you turn on the lamp on your head which enables you to see in the dark, in the deep. The torchlight



which is shedding light becomes your guide and directs you on your onward journey. In the same manner, the mind is a big field, but when we become aware of that time, place and location where we are at present in the field of mind, then our awareness becomes complete. It is like shining the torch in the dark and the torchlight is the awareness that falls on the object.

For example, a million pieces of information are being processed by the brain every second, and in all that information there is also a mosquito bite. Out of that million information, the brain selects one incident, one experience and that happens to be of the mosquito bite. Suddenly you realize, ‘I have been bitten’. There is itchiness, there is some swelling, there is some redness – I have been bitten by a mosquito. How come that out of the million information that is being processed by the brain, your torchlight, your awareness suddenly focused on the mosquito bite? For only then you take the necessary steps to see how you can find relief from the mosquito and mosquito bite. Awareness also begins the action.

Awareness and identification go hand in hand. Awareness is one extreme of the mental functionality, identification is the other extreme of the mental functions. Identification comes from *ahamkara*, the ego, and awareness is the light of *manas* shining and focusing on the moment which is needing your active participation. When you look at an object, first there is identification. You look at a rose. How do you know that that flower is a rose? The object is seen by the senses. Senses don’t know it is a rose, they see the form, but *chitta* knows that this form is the form of the rose.

Identification begins at the point when *chitta* identifies the imprint of the senses to be this or that. Identification



begins and awareness comes in. We see so many things in our moment of life. Even now we are seeing so many things all around us, but we are not aware of them. We are aware only where our attention is directed to, which at this time, is what I am speaking about. Other visions, other perceptions, although they are being received by the brain, are not acknowledged by the brain.

The sound is, the speech is, but not other things. This awareness, which is the torchlight, is seen in two ways, two forms: one the external, sensorial, material, the other the mental, internal, non-sensorial.

Transference of awareness

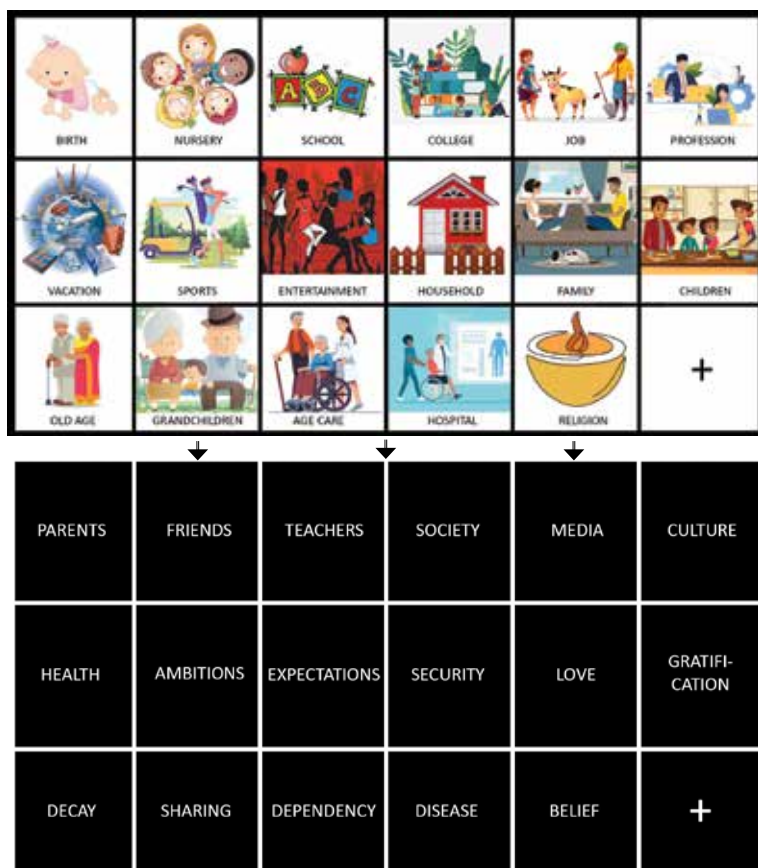
This is something important, because people many times are aware of their bodies, but only the outer body. Very few people are aware of their internal or subtle experiences of the body. I have come across many people, and I have mentioned this in the past as well, when they practise

yoga nidra for the first time, say, 'Today for the first time I experienced my toe, or my armpit or my lower back', or any other part of the body. Although we know that we have a body and there are different body parts, we have never consciously become aware of them or observed them. Many times, after a yoga nidra session, people say, 'For the first time, today I was able to acknowledge my body. Today, for the first time I was able to feel my toes, which I have never done before in my life'.

This is an indication that our awareness is more external. We know things are there, but we don't have any experience of that. We know the body is there but we don't have any experience of that. Have you ever gone inside your big toe? Many times when people close their eyes they think, 'I am inside my head'. Yes, because all you see is the dark space in front. If you can take your attention, if you can take your awareness down inside to the centre of the big toe and see the space there in your big toe, just as you see it in front of the face, then that will be a level of awareness which is more subtle than what you are used to.

Our understanding of awareness is more outer and external. Yoga makes this awareness an internal awareness. This is important because through awareness you are able to disconnect and still the sensory inputs into the brain and the motor outputs from the brain. When these activities lessen or cease, then you are able to experience better and greater relaxation. The role of awareness is quite important because in the technique of relaxation, in the technique of shavasana, the awareness has to be transferred from the outer dimension to inner experience, from outer experience to inner experience and this is the beginning of relaxation.

The transference of awareness from outer dimension to inner dimension and its journey has to be gradual and slow. It is not that you are able to shut off or switch off one light, one switch, one door and open the other one instantaneously. The mind has to be gradually trained to disconnect from the sensory experiences which create dissipation, distraction and



fragmentation of the brain faculties and brain power and shakti, the prana shakti. This will be possible if you are able to practise shavasana and in shavasana move your awareness away from the outer levels of experience to inner levels of experience.

In normal life, in the material world the expression of awareness is always very dissipated and fragmented. When you practise asana for example, then, at that moment, you are training your awareness to become static, still. When you practise an asana, like *bhujangasana*, cobra pose, you are told to take your awareness down to a specific part of the

body whether it be the lower back, whether it be the throat, whether it be the eyebrow centre, and to hold your attention, your awareness on the experience that you are having at that particular point in your body. The fragmented and dissipated awareness is being pulled together and told to become still and develop the experience of focus and concentration. The asana practice makes your awareness static. Pranayama practice makes your awareness static.

The pratyahara practice makes your awareness mobile not static. What are the guidelines of relaxation practices whether it be shavasana or yoga nidra? You are continuously moving your mind from one visualization to another visualization. You are continuously attempting to develop one experience and then change it to another experience. You don't hold your attention for long in one practice of yoga nidra. You are moving your awareness, your attention all the time, keeping it dynamic and mobile. In an asana you are telling yourself – focus on one thing. In relaxation you are telling yourself focus on this, then this, then this, then this, and the list goes on and on.



Expansion of awareness

When awareness becomes mobile like this, then awareness expands, like the focus of the torch. When it is in narrow beam, the light on the ground is just a very small circumference, but you can adjust the focus and make it broad beam. When you make the narrow beam into broad beam, it is known as expansion. Expansion of awareness means that you become aware of more and more, every



time. It is not only a meditative experience but also a very practical experience.

I will give you one example of an incident. When Sri Swamiji was in Ganga Darshan, one day he came down to the kitchen for a meal. He was crossing the area where people sit to serve. Pots were placed there, everything was neat and clean. Spoons were placed there. As we came walking to where the food was placed, Paramahamsaji stopped. With his finger he simply turned a spoon around and continued walking. The majority of people who were there did not even notice what he had done, but some of us did notice what he had done. You know the spoon was in the way, inside the pot, but pointing towards the path. He simply turned the spoon around so that nobody would hit it or get hurt by it. A very simple thing, something that nobody would even dream or think about, but that was the level of awareness. He simply with his finger turned the spoon and kept on walking. Other people may think, 'Oh, Swamiji was playing with the spoon', because that is the level of their thinking. The few of us who were in management and administration knew exactly what he had done – he made something safe. That was it.

This is known as expansion of awareness. We have gone through the kitchen hundreds of times, every day and we see everything being everywhere but nobody does anything,



and the excuse is – ‘that is not my duty’. If everything has to be done because of duty, then nothing will be done on this planet. But if things are done because of my awareness and my appropriate action at the right time, then I can work wonders; everyone can work wonders. So it is that level of awareness which has to be expanded and this level of expanded awareness increases the mental ability to grasp more things.

Swami Sivanandaji, our grandfather, used to do seven things at a time. He could dictate a letter, he could listen to somebody, he could write something. He could do seven things at one time. There is a Hindi word *savadhana*. Generally, *savadhana* is translated as ‘attention’. In reality it is a deviated form of the word *saptavadhana*, aware of seven things. You have to be aware of seven things, that is known as *saptavadhana*, and the word *savadhana* came from that.

It gives you enhanced capacity to do your things in a better manner. If there is no awareness then everything is finished, if you do things with awareness, then everything happens properly. Expansion of awareness is the sadhana of a yogi.



When you shine the torch on the ground at night in the narrow beam you see one little pebble, but if you can broaden the beam, instead of one pebble on the ground, you will see many more. If you keep expanding the light more and more, suddenly the light will become one with the universal light. Then there won't be any torchlight anymore. The expansion has happened so much that it simply becomes one and that is the awareness of dhyana and samadhi. Awareness of dhyana and samadhi is the expansive awareness where I have become one. Everything is dissolved, the identity is dissolved.

Until I come to that point I have to work with my awareness to expand it, to develop it, to grow it. The easiest manner to do that is to follow the practices of rest and relaxation as they are the stepping-stones into the inner dimension of consciousness, meditation, rest and relaxation at the physical and psychological levels. Awareness has to be understood as where our mind focuses at a given time. If we can enlarge that focus, broaden that focus, then that is the expansion of awareness.

6

Prana Shakti



We have been talking about shavasana to give a better and deeper understanding of how shavasana can be applied to achieve complete physical and mental rest and tranquillity. In the course of our discussion, we have spoken about the body-mind complex because that is the purpose of shavasana – to release the fatigue from the body and to release the stresses of the mind. From this perspective we have dealt with the body and with the mind.

But questions come up: Why are we fatigued physically? Why are we stressed mentally? What is the cause of the physical fatigue and mental stress? From the yogic perspective, physical fatigue sets in when there is loss of energy from the body. Mental tensions come in when there is depletion of energy from the mind. An example – you run in the morning after sleeping the whole night. During the night the body recharges itself. In the morning when you wake up, you go for a jog, you feel fresh, you feel vital, you feel dynamic. Then you run for a few hours, for one hour, and by the time you finish running, the body has depleted itself of the stored energy, and the muscles and joints feel the strain, the stiffness, tiredness and fatigue. So it is not the muscle, it is not the joint, it is not the physical body, but the energy in the body, the muscles, joints and different organs of the body. When this energy is depleted, the physical body experiences fatigue, and the same applies to the mind as well.

The body functions because of prana shakti. Mind thinks because of prana. This energy system, or the *pranic* system, or the vital system of the body is the system which gives energy to the physical and to the mental dimension. From the yogic perspective, it is this experience of prana shakti which has to be enhanced, which has to be generated, awakened and



experienced. Yoga speaks of five different bodies. The first is the material body which is known as the *annamaya kosha*; second is the *manomaya kosha*, the mental dimension; next is *vijnanamaya* body, the dimension of consciousness, and next is the *anandamaya* body, the body of spiritual and transcendental experiences. All these four bodies are interconnected, linked and energized by the fifth which is

known as the *pranamaya* body, or the body of energy.

Now in this sequence, first comes annamaya kosha, the physical body; then comes pranamaya kosha, the energy body; then comes manomaya kosha, the mental body, vijñanamaya kosha, the body of consciousness, anandamaya kosha, the body of spiritual, transcendental experiences. Just as there is a direct connection of the individual with the

annamaya kosha, the physical body; just as there is a direct connection of the individual with the manomaya kosha, the mental body, in the same way there is direct connection of the individual with the pranamaya kosha, or the body of energy.

From the yogic perspective, this pranamaya kosha in the physical body is identified with the functions and activities of the pancha pranas: prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana. These are the five manifestations of prana shakti in the physical body and these different pranas control, regulate different body systems providing them with energy so that they function optimally. Similarly, the mental dimension is supplied by manas prana to manas, by buddhi prana to buddhi, by chitta prana to chitta and by aham prana to ahamkara. These four subtle pranas combined are known as chitta shakti. So the physical dimension is governed by the five pranas which are physical in



nature, which manifest in the physical body; the mental behaviour is dictated by the mental pranas which are four, and the pranamaya kosha itself is the manufacturing or the generating plant of this prana shakti. In pranamaya kosha the prana is generated in all frequencies and the frequencies which relate to the physical body direct the prana to the physical body. The frequencies which relate to the mental dimension direct the prana to the mind, and frequencies that influence our spiritual awareness are directed towards the spirit.

The prana which is directed towards the body is controlled by a condition which is known as the pingala effect. The prana which is being directed to the mental body is the chitta effect, or ida effect. The prana which is being directed to discover the inner dimensions is the sushumna effect.



So ida, pingala and sushumna are also flows, but at the same time they are generators of prana shakti. The prana shakti, which is generated in pingala, ida and sushumna channels, is then distributed throughout the system by seventy-two thousand nadis, or the carriers of this vital force in the body and in the mind, in both areas. The imbalance in the pranic structure leads to illness and disease. Sri Swami Satyanandaji states:

Ida and pingala are the two energy principles. If they are not supplied to different parts of the body, one suffers, just as one suffers from malnutrition. For example, if someone can't go to sleep at night, what can be done? People take tranquillizers because they only know that much, but yoga says change the flow of nadi and sleep will come. For most people total health cannot be ob-

tained. People constantly experience a fluctuation of energies, moods, periods of health and ill health, and the general ups and downs of life. This is the normal life process and is explained in yogic terms by the continual shift of energies from ida to pingala and then back again to a starting point in approximately ninety minutes. This is the cycle of ida and pingala.



An illness situation arises when an extreme shift in energy occurs outside of the normal range or flux experienced by relatively healthy individuals, or if the rhythm of shift is broken. For example, if we dwell extensively on our thoughts or on some event in outer life, we evoke a continuous stream of mental energy which may be inappropriate. This is called neurotic situation, an extreme accentuation of internal mental pressures which can cause an already weakened mind, unbalanced mind to break. It is possible through our lifestyle to live in a predominantly pingala extrovert existence, or in a predominantly ida introvert existence. Though there is no extreme or acute stress, this situation evokes a generalized, chronic and weakening imbalance which can eventually lead to an acute breakdown, and the manifestation of a disease later in life. At the same time, such imbalance is detrimental and not conducive to a happy existence.

A person, who is a pingala dominant individual, is mainly extrovert, has very little access to internal experiences, seeking to fill the inner void with external pleasures, desires and ambitions. Constantly grabbing outwards for securities and happiness cannot satisfy

inner needs. This leads to increased frustrations and inner tensions which in turn motivate more outward seeking behaviour. Pingala dominant individuals tend to over-activate their sympathetic nervous system, secreting too much acid, causing ulcers, producing angina pectoris, or rise in blood pressure. They are constantly in a state of preparation for fight or flight, secreting too much adrenalin and performing too little exercise to burn up the excessive chemical secretions.

The ida dominant individual is introverted by nature, is a daydreamer who thinks a lot but does not act on his thoughts. Some individuals are acutely aware of their feelings and usually oversensitive to outer events and interpersonal experiences. They may think of catastrophes and usually have little perspective on reality. There is little inner happiness due to a generalized inability to get things together on the outside. These people are rarely active, they are not the physical types, they do not have enough vital energy to act efficiently in the world and are unable to carry out their plans, although the less severely unbalanced may be able to express themselves externally. In extreme cases physical vitality is low and problems such as constipation, depression, anxiety, colitis, eczema, and a host of psychosomatic conditions develop in this mental climate. Therefore, we see two main patterns of illnesses and diseases. One, high physical energy diseases, usually pingala dominant, a rajasic or dynamic state, and second, low physical energy illnesses and diseases, usually ida dominant, a tamasic and passive state.

Sri Swamiji continues:

The energy in ida and pingala nadi is both physical and psychic in nature and is distributed from the junction points of the chakras to all the cells, tissues and organs of the body. When there is some sort of weakness or shortage of energy in ida nadi, then the organs associated

with ida suffer. Similarly, when there is blockage in pingala nadi, the organs related to pingala are affected. All psychic and somatic diseases originate in precisely this manner. The seventy-two thousand main channels conduct the pranic energy and the mental energy throughout the body and feed the entire system along with the two nervous systems, the motor and the sensory; the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems.



The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems act as shock absorbers. Each and every sense experience passes through these nervous systems. If the sense experience is normal, then the nervous systems act normally. If, however, the sense experiences are explosive the nervous system receives shocks. Therefore, balance between ida and pingala is essential, there must be equilibrium between introversion and extroversion. When this is not the case the human system eventually takes steps to compensate for the imbalance. This takes the form of conditions such as illness, fatigue, stress or depression.

It is a natural law. If the law of the body is broken, if the law of the mind is broken, then penalty has to be paid. If you feel tired then rest, if you feel active then work or play hard. Try to follow the natural rhythm of body and mind. It is when the body is pushed too hard due to ambitions, fears, desires or sensory gratification or whatever, that imbalance occurs. One must listen to the body and mind and follow its laws. That is not easy but through the practices of yoga it becomes progressively



possible. Sushumna flows as the outcome of harmony between ida and pingala. We can discover this through observation that when the right or the left nostril is flowing the other will be blocked, or sometimes both will function simultaneously for a minute or so. This is called the sushumna flow, but this is a temporary flow and it does not indicate any spiritual attainment or spiritual experience. This

flow happens when there is a shift of breath flow from the right to the left nostril. At the time of shifting from right to left or left to right, for a few moments sushumna begins to flow, both nostrils flow.

Paramahansa Swami Satyanandaji says:

If both nostrils are flowing for longer time, let us say for five minutes or more, then you have to be very careful, because when sushumna flows, when sushumna is active and you are involved in physical activity, there is tendency towards destructive behaviour. However, if you are practising meditation at the time when sushumna is flowing, then the tendency is to unite with the Self.

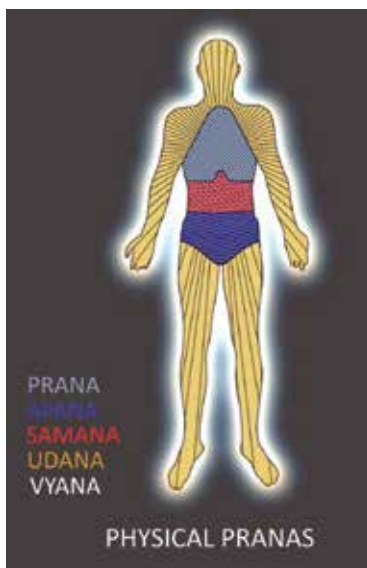
So remember that this temporary flow of sushumna is not spiritual, but indicating a flow of prana in the body. These are the statements that Sri Swami Satyanandaji has made in relation to ida and pingala. The aim of shavasana is to recharge and revitalize body, mind and the pranas too. Shavasana is an effective method not only to relax the physical body, not only to release the mental stress and tension, but also to recharge and revitalize the prana shakti.



Prana shakti, you can imagine to be a battery. The more you use the battery, the faster it is going to go flat. If you use the battery when required, the energy in the battery will last much longer. That is the principle applied in yoga as well.

As I have mentioned before, balance out the physical pranas, balance out the mental pranas, and that is the beginning of relaxation. The five physical pranas are affected with shavasana and I will only focus on the physical pranas, not on mental – ida, and not on spiritual – sushumna.

The physical pranas are: *prana*, number one, responsible for inhalation, heart, lungs. Yoga says it is the incoming breath. Second prana is known as *apana*, the outgoing breath, and it is in the region of navel to perineum, responsible for the expulsion



of all the waste matter from the body. *Samana* is in the abdominal region to digest the food, to assimilate the food, to extract the energy from the food, and to supply that energy to all the cells of the body. *Udana* is the fourth prana, giving energy to arms and legs, to eyes and ears, to nose and mouth, to head and brain. So all the extremities, like legs, arms, head, are controlled by *udana*. The fifth prana is *vyana*, which means all pervasive. It is like the second wind that runners experience when they run a marathon. So these are the five pranas and their imbalance in the physical body will give rise to different illnesses and diseases in the course of time.

This is also a clear indication that the *annamaya kosha* or the material body, is one hundred percent supported by the *pranamaya kosha*, in the absence of which the *annamaya kosha* would not be able to function. There is this very close connection between the *pranamaya kosha* and the *annamaya kosha*. Now let us for the sake of clarity and understanding, imagine the gear box of a car. The car has first gear, second gear, third gear and fourth gear. First gear is *annamaya kosha*, second gear is *manomaya kosha*, third gear is *vijnanamaya kosha*, fourth gear is *anandamaya*



kosha. Then there is the neutral gear and that is pranamaya kosha. So when you are moving from gear one, to gear two, you have to come to neutral before going to the next gear. From two to three, you have to come into neutral to go into third. In this manner, the neutral gear becomes the pathway through which you are able to shift the gear stick from one, to two, to three, to four. This neutral space is the pranamaya kosha, that neutral gear is the pranamaya kosha. So pranamaya kosha is reaching out and extending to all the physical and subtle bodies, but we begin our work with the physical.

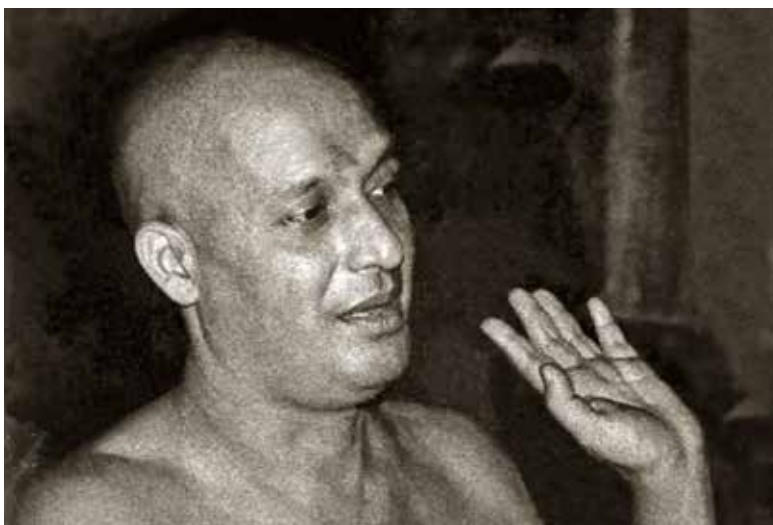
When there is imbalance in the physical body, when there is illness in the physical body, when there is dissipation of energy from the physical body, the physical pranas have to be first channelled. That happens very easily because one is able to regulate these five pranas, balance them and channel them through shavasana. How do we control or channel the prana shakti? By watching the flow of breath from navel to throat, throat to navel. How do we regulate and channel the apana flow? By watching the breath move from toes into mooladhara and exhaling from mooladhara out through the toes. How do we regulate and channel the samana flow? By seeing the expansion and relaxation of the abdomen, the rise and fall of the navel. How do we channel the udana force? By breathing from the toes right up to the eyebrow centre, by breathing from the fingers right up to the eyebrow centre. So the extremities are being used – toes, legs to eyebrow centre and then out; fingers to eyebrow centre and then out. This influences the karmendriyas and the jnanendriyas. How do we influence the fifth, the vyana energy? By breathing in through the whole body, by breathing out through the whole body. Each pore breathes in and expands the body, each pore breathes out and relaxes the body. So it is expanding and contracting which channels the vyana.

7

The Journey of Shavasana



In this series of Yoga Chakra, we have been discussing different aspects of shavasana. As mentioned earlier, shavasana is the first step into relaxation, and relaxation is the first step into the fifth aspect of raja yoga which is pratyahara; and pratyahara is the first stage of the esoteric yoga.



We have been looking at the various aspects of shavasana as taught and developed by our Master, Sri Swami Satyanandaji. I would like to conclude the series on shavasana by reading a passage from his early teachings, and to wind up the subject of shavasana, and show how we can also practise it regularly in our daily life. Sri Swami Satyanandaji speaks of sensory withdrawal. He says:

When the senses do not carry the impulses to the brain, then that is pratyahara. When the five indriyas, or the physical senses are isolated, invalidated, and the mind does not receive the necessary stimulus from outside, then that is pratyahara. This means the mind is isolated from the sensory experiences and sensory identification. If you are able to isolate your mind from the sensory identification and the sense experience, then you begin your journey into yoga.

Withdrawal of the senses is pratyahara. What is the withdrawal of senses? There are five senses, five sense objects, and five sense experiences. How is it possible to withdraw

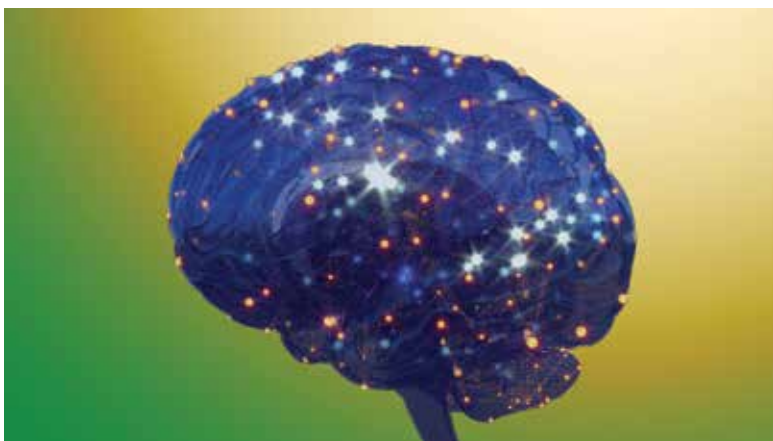
the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching? First you close your eyes and become aware of the sense experience around you, however disturbing they may be. For example, there may be a sound in the next room or in the same room with you. Hear the sound, understand and grasp the significance of the sound, separate the sense from the sense experience and only become aware of the sound vibration, and not the source, or the words, but only the vibrations.



To illustrate this further, imagine the ring of a bell. First, the sense organ is the ear; next is the identification of the sound, which is the bell sound, and third, there is total awareness of the sound only, dropping the awareness of bell. Become aware of the sound which is the sense experience. Isolate the sense organ which is the ear, isolate the sensory identification which is knowing that a bell is ringing. Isolate these two components and just become aware of the sense experience, which is the sound vibration which you are hearing now. The bell, the sense object, belongs to the outer world, and by realizing it, you accomplish the first step of the sense withdrawal.

It is important that you realize that meditation or concentration is not an absent-minded comprehension, but rather a present-minded awareness of the objective reality which you are trying to grasp. You may take one experience and analyze it fully, or you may take many, one right after the other, but sooner or later you have to come to the point where you are able to analyze and understand your perceptions, and then experience alone remains. Sri Swamiji continues by saying:

The problem of trying to isolate the mind comes because there is an unholy alliance between the mind and the



senses. For incarnations, the mind and the senses have lived together. When you isolate the mind from the senses, it becomes restless. Therefore, there are certain yogic techniques and practices for isolation of the mind.

Pratyahara is an act of disassociating the mind from the sense impulses. However, intense concentration, tense effort, working hard to focus the mind, will not give any positive result. It may appear to you that you are hurrying up the whole process, but ultimately you will realize that you will not be able to walk any further. Each indriya or sense organ is a channel, which contributes to the influence in the brain, and if one of the channels is obstructed, then the mental experience becomes very keen.

Usually when people do their work during the day, they are not at all aware of their mental problems and distractions, although they are there. However, at night, when all the work is finished and people sit down to meditate or to rest, all the thoughts start to come. It is not because thoughts only come at night, the thoughts were also there during the day, but at that time the sense channels were not obstructed. Everything was functioning, so you were not aware of what was going on inside you.

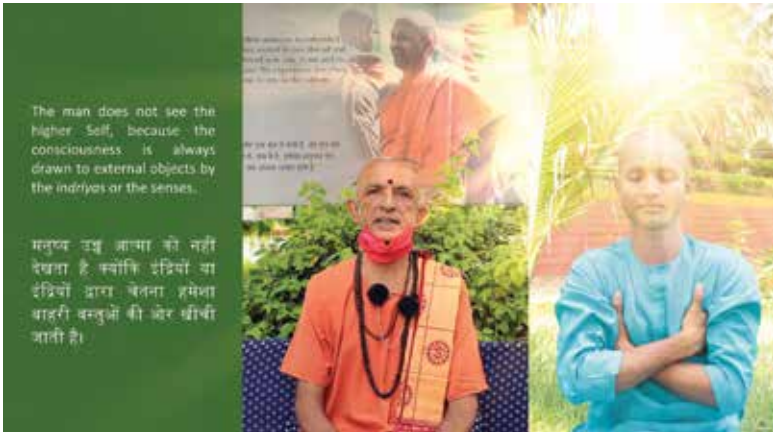
The *vritti* or the mental attitude, was an extrovert *vritti*. At night, all the sense channels withdraw and it is at that time that you become aware of troubles and anxieties.

In the practice of *pratyahara*, we are blocking the sense organs one by one, eliminating the sense organs one by one. Not to inhibit them, but to enable us to sit quietly and see the fantastic panorama of awareness inside, which at present is not available to us due to our extrovert tendencies.



The obstruction of the passages of experience that contribute to the activities of the brain is one of the methods of stimulating the consciousness, the *samskaras* and the *vasanas*. The mind functions under two attitudes, *bahiranga mukha vritti*, the eternalized attitude, and the *antaranga mukha vritti*, the internalized attitude, the internal attitude. The external attitude has its basis in the sense organs, and through the attitude the mind becomes extrovert.

In the *Kathopanishad* it is stated that man does not see the higher Self because the consciousness is always drawn towards the external objects by the *indriyas* or the senses, and in fact, the *indriyas* or the senses are the root cause of this extrovert tendency of the mind.



If you light a candle and at the same time you keep the fan running, the flame will never become steady. In the same way, it is stated in the *Bhagavad Gita*, just as a lamp can remain absolutely steady in a place without any breeze or wind, the practitioner of yoga should also try to avoid the cause of that wind or breeze, that brings about mental fluctuations and distractions.

This was what Sri Swamiji said about pratyahara. He mentioned that there are practices and techniques which can allow the isolation of the senses from the sense objects and the sense objects from the sense experience, and their effect on the brain and mind.

We started this journey with shavasana and we have covered many aspects of shavasana. So let us review them once. We begin with the definition of shavasana:

Shavaasanam shramaharam chitta vishraanti kaaranam.

Shava is the inert body, motionless body, the still body and relaxed body. *Shram haram*, means to release the fatigue

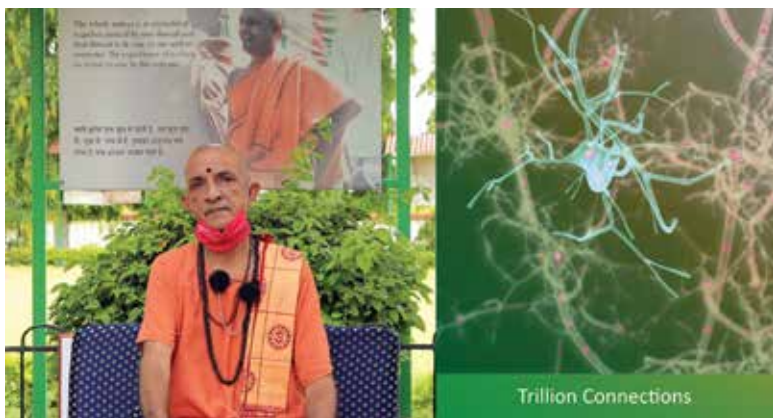
and the stress that comes with effort. This indicates a physiological change with the practice of relaxation. Then *chitta vishraanti kaaranam*, means to relax the mind, to de-stress the mind, to achieve the state of complete relaxation, and that relaxation will lead you into the development of pratyahara in your life. At the physical level, the practice of shavasana is identified with the posture, how we lie on the bed or floor. It is identified by stillness, making the body still and motionless. It is identified by putting the physiological systems to rest. The circulatory, the heart, the respiratory, the lungs, the nerves, the nervous systems – all the systems are put to rest.

All the *karmendriyas* are put to rest, which are the organs of action, the sense organs of action. The *jnanendriyas*, the mental sense organs of perception, remain active and this rectifies all the physical imbalances caused by stress, tension, and fatigue. If we do not deal with these symptoms in the right manner, eventually chronic fatigue syndrome will set in. Therefore, the practice of shavasana on a regular and daily basis is very important for physical de-stressing, releasing of tension and fatigue.

At the pranic level, shavasana helps to conserve prana by becoming still and not allowing the body to move randomly



and unconsciously. The *pancha pranas*, the five pranas of the body, are redirected where they are required, activated and balanced through breath and awareness. Harmonizing of ida and pingala is the main cause of mental, emotional and physiological balance and of stopping agitations and distractions. These are the benefits of shavasana at the pranic level.



Then we come to the mental level. First it relaxes the brain, because we know that a human brain consists of about one billion neurons. Each neuron forms about one thousand connections with other neurons amounting to more than one trillion connections. When the body is relaxing, senses are stilled, and activity has stopped, then the brain also relaxes. The effort that the brain is putting in reduces and cerebral relaxation takes place. With that, rejuvenation of the brain also happens, and emptying of the hard drive from the negative and detrimental content can also happen, if you make the effort. Then through shavasana we disconnect the mind from the senses. *Chitta shakti*, or the mental prana, is then redirected.

When connected to the senses in a normal daily situation, active and working situation, the chitta shakti is being directed outwards to interact and relate with the environment where we are and where we are engaged in. When the senses



are withdrawn, then the prana flows inwards to the mind. It flows to different centres and the faculties of the mind are activated. This leads to progression of awareness from gross to subtle and mental tensions are released. You develop objective awareness, objectivity, and you develop the witness attitude, the *drashta bhava*. Identification drops at whatever level of mind is predominant in each individual, which could be manas, which could be buddhi, which could be chitta. The identification will lessen, and with the lessening of identification, latent impressions of chitta will be released, and higher states of experiences will be accessible leading to the experience of *sahaja samadhi*, or the natural internal awareness, equipoise and wisdom. So these are the various benefits of shavasana for the beginners.

I have not spoken of the intermediate levels of shavasana or the advanced levels of shavasana. That is the subject of direct training, not through website. Whatever technique you have been exposed to will, if practised sincerely, seriously and with commitment, lead you deep inside you to explore the possibilities that exist within. The application of shavasana should be integrated in our daily routine. In fact, if we look at shavasana, there are two reasons why we practise it. One is to release stress, when fatigued, during illness, and to release tensions. That is physiological shavasana. Then there is the

practice for the mind, to relax the mind, to de-stress the mind and to develop a special quality and capacity of the mind.

The final statement is that shavasana is a state of physical inertness and mental rest, that initiates the creative learning process and opens the door to knowledge. It is an established fact, and you also have had the experience, that when the mind is agitated, dissipated or distracted, learning does not take place. When the mind is relaxed then at that time learning happens spontaneously. Many experiments have been done globally to validate this point.



Let us look at the life of Newton, who discovered gravity. When did he discover gravity? When he was lying down under a tree, he was in a state of relaxation. His mind was relaxed, he saw the apple fall, he said, “There is something behind that!” He was relaxed. Another example is Archimedes. He was in his bath, suddenly an idea flashed, and he came out shouting ‘Eureka!’ and ran naked to the palace. This is the story, but you don’t know the full story. He had been given a task to





weigh the gold in the crown of the king. He was thinking about it, “How can I weigh the gold in that crown?” With this thought in his mind, he came to his home and filled up the bath tub. Then he entered and observed the



water spilling over the side. Maybe he did not realize it then. He lay down, again the water spilled. Suddenly the bulb lights up – volume and displacement of water – and he got the idea of how to measure the weight of the crown. That was his Eureka moment at the time of relaxation. If he had been bothered, or in a discussion with his fellow scientists and associates on how to measure the weight, the distractions would not have allowed him to have his Eureka moment.

These are the two examples which I am giving. I am sure that many times in your life too the solution to the problems that you are facing comes when you are relaxing, not when you are intensely thinking about them. When you think about them you are involved, there is no clarity. You are entrenched in that thought, you can't wiggle out, yet many times at night you think, “Oh! I could have done this. Yes, I am going to do it!” The thought comes. That is the state of



relaxation. Scientists have known that rest periods are crucial for learning and most of our learning also takes place in rest.

I was involved in a research of learning, with some scientists and doctors in America and Europe, and the chief of this experiment was a Bulgarian scientist, Dr Lozanov, who also had some yogic background. He developed a system called SALT – System of Accelerated Learning and Training. I was a participant in the project along with others. I am talking of 1981 and 82, when I was in the United States. We used to go to schools. Each one would take one class. I would go to a classroom. Other associates would go to other classrooms. For one hour we used to conduct the class on experiment basis. Before starting the class, we used to make students practise a basic nadi shodhana without the use of hands – just psychic breathing – in-out, in-out, and then through both nostrils.

We would ask them to breathe deep, slow and long, and we would synchronize their breathing with a metronome. Breathe in, breathe out, breathe in, breathe out. The class instructions and teaching used to be given when the students would breathe out, not when they were breathing in. Our theory was that when we breathe in, the defences of the body come up. When we breathe out the mental defences, the pranic defences, the physical defences lower. At that time

information is given and that is retained. Then when the barriers go up, you stop giving the instruction. When barriers come down, again you give the instruction. We discovered that approximately thirty-three percent of improvement was seen in the retention of information by the students.

So you see, education and learning, they are two different things. Education is through dissipation, the mind is dissipated, the senses are dissipated. We educate ourselves, but in that education, there is no learning. Learning is another aspect, another level, it is not education. Learning is something that comes naturally, which you realize naturally, either through experience, or through intellect of having known something, read something, told something, through trust, through belief, through will and through determination. The focus and concentration becomes internal and connects to the creative ability when you are able to relax.

Even students, not only those who are stressed out, but also children who go to school, if they can practise shavasana, their education can change into a positive learning. So, rest, recover and recreate your mind, recreate your body with shavasana.



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.

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.

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.



SWAN Speaks Series takes yoga to the level of yoga vidya, where practice is seen as a wholistic application of ancient wisdom so pertinent to modern life. *SWAN Speaks Series* is a tribute to *yoga vidya*, the eternal science of yoga, to Sri Swami Satyananda, who initiated the process of sharing this science with aspirants of all walks of life, and to Swami Niranjanananda. The series adds depth and complexity giving a new experience for serious aspirants.

SWAN Speaks Shavasana, explores the art and science of relaxation. The posture, *shavasana*, the corpse pose, takes on a new dimension. The asana has a definite purpose: to remove physical fatigue and relax the mind. The satsangs contained in this book explain in a systematic, progressive manner, how true relaxation can be attained.

