

Summary of Practices, Witnessing, and Internal Dialogue

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This paper is an expanded explanation of the 7-page *Summary of Practices* paper, and directly follows the outline on the first or summary page of that handout. The purpose of this longer paper is to complement meditation retreats, classes, and one-to-one coaching sessions.

The little boxes in the Table of Contents below may be a convenient way to check off items that you have studied and learned about, and are actively practicing. This can also be an easy way to keep track of areas in which you may still need further exploration or coaching.

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Introduction

This article is an expansion of the one-page Summary of Practices outline which I have used for teaching and training at *Abhyasa Ashram* (Florida, USA) and *Sadhana Mandir* (Rishikesh, India) from time to time since 1996. The outline has been gradually revised to make it ever more clear as an expression of the systematic practice of meditation as taught to me and the world in general by Swami Rama. Similarly, I will continue to revise this article to make it increasingly clear as a learning aid to practicing systematic meditation of the tradition of the Himalayan masters.

In loving service,

Swami Jnaneshvara

Self study guide

As a companion to this paper there is also a 23-page self-study guide which outlines articles from the SwamiJ.com website, books and videos of Swami Rama, and other resources, such as Yoga Sutras and Upanishads. It also contains suggestions for tracking your progress through principles and practices, as well as tracking your group discussion and yoga coaching sessions. This is available online from the website, as well as in print at Abhyasa Ashram, and through lulu.com/swamij.

Printed materials from Swami Jnaneshvara

Several books and shorter booklets are available in print-on-demand through lulu.com. The direct address of these materials is lulu.com/swamij. Most important of these is the 270-page book *Living the Yoga Sutras*.

What meditation can give you

For thousands of years, the science of meditation has been practiced and studied by aspirants who sought to make their lives more serene, creative, and fulfilling. Meditation will give you the capacity to improve your health, your relationships, and the skillfulness of all your activities. This is because meditation can give you something that no other technique can accomplish—it introduces you to yourself on all levels, and finally leads you to the center of consciousness within, from where consciousness flows.¹

¹ Swami Rama, *Meditation and Its Practice*

Systematic meditation through all the levels

The meditation of the Himalayan masters as taught by Swami Rama is a systematic practice dealing with awareness of *all* levels of one's being, gradually leading to the direct experience of the eternal, ever pure center of consciousness that is known variously as purusha, atman, brahman, or the shakti that is one with shiva. It is a process of meditation into and on *atman*, the center of consciousness, as well as meditation on *shakti*, the consciousness which is the source, which flows outward through various levels.

Meditation on breath only

Some systems of meditation teach only breath awareness, skipping over any training of the body, and avoiding introspection of the mind. Some go so far as to say that there is no mind, and that one should therefore not explore it. Eventually many people with such practices come to feel the stiffness and inflexibility in the body and come to learn how to deal with the body in preparation for meditation. So too, people often come to see that, like it or not, there is a mind that needs to be dealt with both during and in preparation for meditation.

Meditation on mantra only

There are popular systems of meditation that sell mantras in weekend seminars and tell the participants that they need not work with the body, breath or mind in any way other than to repeat the mantra for a few minutes every day, claiming that after a prescribed few years they will be enlightened. It is common that after those years have passed such people end up in front of one or another teacher of our tradition trying to fill in the missing pieces of their practices, being somewhat confused about why they are not yet enlightened.

Brand-name kundalini yoga

It is common these days that breathing and pranayama practices are promoted under the name "kundalini yoga" as if other forms of yoga did not involve *kundalini* energy. In fact, there is *nothing but kundalini* and *all* of the yoga practices lead in the direction of kundalini awakening where the individual kundalini is seen to merge with the universal *kundalini shakti*. The systematic practice of the masters of the Himalayas deals not only with pranayama for kundalini awakening, but all levels of one's being, including body, breath, conscious mind, and the various levels of the unconscious or latent mind, all of which are manifestations of kundalini shakti and are part of the process back to full awakening and realization of that shakti.

Many faces of kriya yoga

There are many teachers and organizations which say that their method of meditation is *kriya yoga*. This has led to widespread controversy over which is the real, true, authentic *kriya yoga* and who are the properly authorized teachers of *kriya yoga*. It is very useful to know that at the heart of these various methods, teachers, and groups is the practice of moving awareness up and down the subtle spine called *sushumna*, with or without the use of a mantra. If you were to trace back the lineage of Swami Rama and some of the others who claim to be *kriya yoga* traditions, you would find a common source. While I do not use the term *kriya yoga* as a brand name or marketing term, and do not want to enter any debate or competition, please note the fact that *sushumna kriya* is a very important part of the systematic meditation method of our tradition, and this is discussed in several places in this paper. Regardless of your preference for teachers, institutions, and brand names, *sushumna kriya* is a profoundly useful practice and is highly recommended.

Doing no practices at all

Some so-called *gurus* say that if you surrender yourself to him you will not need to do any *sadhana* (practices) at all; no asanas, no breath work or pranayama, no mantra, no contemplation, and no meditation. All you need to do is become a devotee of this *holy* man, and the rest will be done *for* you. Swami Rama has referred to such modern *gurus* as a *spiritual joke* and not worthy of being called even a *guide*. I completely agree with him, and am saddened to say that I have personally met such people who prey upon emotionally troubled people for their own gains of money and power. Swami Rama has explained that in the journey across the river of life to the other shore, you need a good boat, and the teacher or guide is that boat. However, he adds, you do not *worship* the boat, which is what many of these people promote.

In the tradition of the Himalayan masters the full bestowing of grace (*shaktipata*) comes at the *end* of all the efforts of the aspirant, not at the beginning as a supposed replacement for self-effort. When the aspirant has done everything he or she can, and has no resources to go any further, then it happens; the grace of *shaktipata* comes, which leads to the realization being sought.

Yoga and physical fitness

It may be a hard truth for the sincere practitioner to accept this reality, but the majority of people in the world today are totally confused about the true nature of yoga, thinking it to be a physical fitness system, rather than the enlightenment path of meditation that it truly is. There is a thorough and insightful article about this on the SwamiJ.com website entitled *Modern Yoga versus Traditional Yoga*.

Traditional meaning of yoga

Traditionally, Yoga (Sanskrit: *union*) has referred to the realization through direct experience of the preexisting union between the microcosm of individuality and the macrocosm of universality, atman and brahman, jivatman and paramatman, and shiva and shakti, or the realization of purusha standing alone as separate from prakriti.

Yoga is the union of the

- Microcosm of individuality and the
- Macrocosm of universality

Yoga is the union of

- Prana vayu (the upward flowing prana) and
- Apana vayu (the downward flowing prana)

Yoga is the union of

- Atman (Center of consciousness, Self; Vedanta) and
- Brahman (Absolute reality; Vedanta)

Yoga is the union of

- Jivatman (Soul as consciousness *plus* traits; Vedanta) and
- Paramatman: (Self/soul as *only* consciousness; Vedanta)

Yoga is the union of

- Shiva (Static, latent, unchanging, masculine; Tantra) and
- Shakti (Active, manifesting, changing, feminine; Tantra)

Yoga is the dis-union of

- Purusha (Untainted consciousness; Sankyha-Yoga) and
- Prakriti (Primordial, unmanifest matter; Sankyha-Yoga)

Teachings of the Himalayan masters

The source of the principles and practices being outlined and taught here is the ancient cave monasteries of the Himalayas. For whatever reason, the masters have chosen to make these high practices widely available to humanity; these are the same practices as those traditionally taught to, and practiced only by the most advanced renunciates. I suspect that the masters have made these principles and practices available because there is such a need in our world today. There is a small number of people living busy lives in the world who are prepared for, and long for these practices and the realizations they bring. Such people are not satisfied with the shallow, stress-management or religious styles of meditation that are so commonly available in books and weekend workshops.

From time to time I receive criticism by internet from people complaining about my revealing these teachings to people publicly. It was not I, but the masters of our Himalayan tradition, particularly Swami Rama, who have chosen to reveal these high practices. I am only a small

messenger who is attempting to make the principles clear to people so that the practices of the masters can actually be heard, understood, and practiced.

Of particular note in this revelation of practices are those of samaya sri vidya tantra, sushumna kriya, guru chakra, and meditation on mahatripurasundari (or simply tripura), the great beautiful one who operates through the three cities of reality. This is meditation on the highest, purest form of *shakti*.

There is nothing in existence but pure consciousness, *shakti* (the active or manifesting), which is discovered in direct experience to be one and the same with *shiva* (the latent or inactive), and that *shakti* is ultimately the sole object of all meditations and contemplations. It is both the means and the goal.

Source of Inspiration

One may wonder, “If it is as simple as to ‘Know thyself’ or to ‘Be still and know,’ then why is it so difficult? What’s wrong with me?” Therein is our challenge, reconciling simplicity and not understanding. Students should not be blamed for feeling they cannot retreat to a forest for 12 years of study and practice.

Swami Rama has suggested that the teachings must be put “in as simple a manner as possible,” and that “the presentation should be understandable and beneficial to all.” He suggests that, “balance can be found by bringing together the two great forces of spirituality and science,” and that “problems can be solved by creating harmony between realism and idealism.”

With our modern marketing strategies, we have subdivided and given trademarked brand names to aspects and stages of the ancient practices taught by the masters, terribly confusing ourselves, and losing awareness of the underlying universal simplicity.

The ancient way of teaching by discourses can be greatly enhanced by integrating all the resources of modern educational systems design and technology. By integrating ancient and modern training methods, we can better see how the simple practices of Yoga meditation truly lead to the center of consciousness from where All flows.

The goal of the website, classes and other training is that the ancient teachings of self-awareness be presented in simple, understandable and beneficial ways, while not compromising quality or depth, systematically leading one to the highest Realization of the center of consciousness as guided by the sages of the Himalayas.

NOTE: These comments above were first written around 1997. Except for a couple words in the last paragraph, it remains as written then. These continue to be a guiding force for me today, as they were when they were first written.

Swami Jnaneshvara

My wish for your meditations today

*May your meditations today bring you peace, happiness, and bliss.
The systematic approach to meditation that is described here will
lead you to that.*

In loving service,

Swami Jnaneshvara

SECTION 1: Practice self-observation in daily life

“Meditation” means to “attend.” It means attention to the whole of life. It should not be a strenuous act; it should not be forced. Your whole life can be one of meditation. Instead of making dramatic resolutions, simply make yourself open to observing yourself and decide to experiment in observing yourself. Once purity of mind is attained, then one is fully prepared for the inner voyage. To achieve this state of purity of mind, one should cultivate constant awareness by being mindful all the time. To purify the *buddhi*, the faculty of discrimination, is the most important task.

Attention is the key point that leads you to concentration, then to meditation, and then to samadhi. Mindfulness means paying attention. You have to pay attention to the thing you are doing, and you have to learn to train your mind. This is a very preliminary step and you have to learn that first.

The difficult, yet simple concept of self-observation

One day I was walking with Swami Rama when he said to me out of nowhere, “Witness everything.” I didn’t know what he meant, but chewed on it for a long time and gradually started practicing this in the context of the philosophies of mind that are in yoga, vedanta, and tantra, the three streams of practices of our Himalayan tradition of meditation.

This succinct instruction from Swami Rama had a great impact on me, as it led to the unfolding process of self-observation. It leads me to making the paradoxical statement that this is an utterly simple concept and practice, while at the same time being very difficult. The difficult part is coming to learn (to memorize) the various aspects of our inner being (*antahkarana*) that can be observed. Out of a relatively few inner instruments comes a virtually infinite number of possibilities, and that immense diversity is the beauty of this dance of shakti.

Initially it seems like there is so much philosophy that this self-observation can never be learned. It leaves a bewildering questioning of what is the point of remembering all these concepts. Yet, it has a simplicity to it, as it is somewhat like learning to use a computer program; initially it seems to be quite a challenge, but before long we have learned many of the menus and methods of using the program, which in retrospect seems simple.

Observation through actions and speech

Careful observation of your own actions and your own speech will lead to an understanding of the underlying mental process that is guiding those words and actions. It works something like this: Pure consciousness operates outward through intelligence (*buddhi*), which operates through the mind (*manas*), which employs the ten senses and means of expression (*indriyas*), which utilize the physical body and its various systems and instruments to engage the external world. By observing all of these processes as they are processing, we gradually learn to make awareness systematically move inward through all of the systems and instruments, eventually finding the

original source of them all, which is the pure consciousness from which they operated all along, which is known by a variety of names including *center of consciousness*, *atman*, *brahman*, *purusha*, *shakti*, or *shiva*.

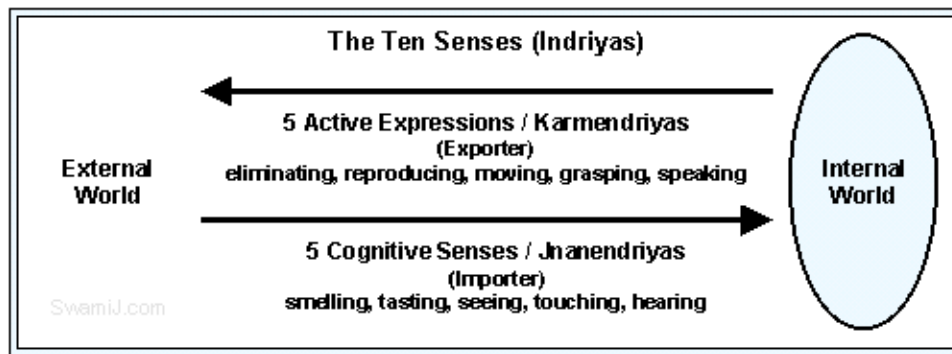
Gestures and body language

Nothing in your body moves without some instruction from somewhere. Each of our gestures and body language expressions come from some signal telling it to happen in that way. By observing these gestures and body language, we can infer the process which led to the expression. This includes witnessing the ten *indriyas*, *manas*, *ahamkara*, *chitta*, and *buddhi*, as well as the *five elements* of earth, water, fire, air, and space, along with the various flows of the *prana vayus*.

It is useful to note and observe that it is the *indriyas* (specifically the *karmendriyas*) through which our gestures and body language are most immediately expressed.

Observing the ten indriyas

In traditional Yoga philosophy and practice, the human being is seen as being like a building with ten doors. Five are *entrance* doors, and five are *exit* doors. Consciously, actively and intentionally *witnessing* these ten senses *as they function* is an important part of both seated meditation and meditation in action.

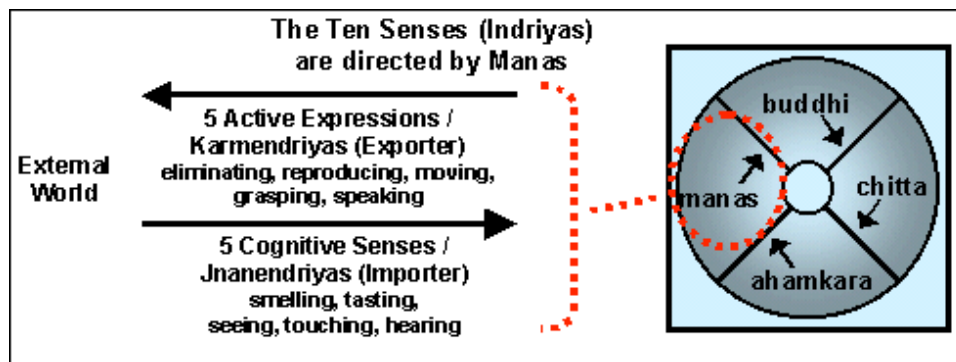


- Karmendriyas: The five exit doors are five means of expression, which are called karmendriyas. (Karma means action. Indriyas are the means or senses.)
- Jnanendriyas: The five entrance doors are the five cognitive senses, which are called jnanendriyas. (Jnana means knowing. Indriyas are the means or senses.)

What the ten doors have in common is that they are all *doors* or *gateways* through which cognitions and expressions occur. By *observing* these ten in daily life through meditation in action, or mindfulness, we become increasingly aware of the indweller. We see more and more clearly how the indweller relates to the external world *through* the means of the mind (*manas*) and these ten instruments that are employed by that mind.

As we come to see that the actions and senses are only instruments (though very good at their jobs), we increasingly see that "Who I am is *independent* of my actions and sensory input and fulfillment". It does not mean that we do not enjoy life, and its actions and sensory experiences. Rather, these are enjoyed more fully, in a spirit of wisdom, freedom, and non-attachment (*vairagya*). When we see through direct experience of observation how the ten senses are doors serving the indweller, we increasingly become aware of the true nature of that indweller.

The Ten Senses are like the employees in the factory of life, and they receive their immediate instructions from *manas*, one of the Four Functions of Mind. *Manas* is like the supervisor in the factory of life. *Ahamkara* (the I-maker, or yogic sense of ego) is like the human resources manager, *buddhi* is like the general manager, and *atman* is like the proprietor.



This is an important part of the practice of meditation in action and witnessing our inner process. Being able to see that this is how the actions and senses operate helps a great deal with the cultivation of non-attachment, *vairagya*. Beyond the fact that *manas* is giving instructions to the ten *indriyas*, is the very important question of whether *manas* is acting out of unconscious habits (stored in *chitta*) or the wisdom of *buddhi*. Withdrawing the senses and sitting still at meditation time naturally comes much more easily as a result of an ongoing mindfulness of the ten senses.

Three problems with experiencing Truth

There are three main problems with directly experiencing the Absolute Truth, Reality, or the Self through the vehicles of the mind and the senses. The *first* of these problems is the fact that the senses are not reliable instruments in that they do not accurately perceive the people and objects of the world. Realizing that the senses are unreliable leads the seeker inward to a more pure form of direct experience. However, to turn inward this way happens best by first being aware of the senses and how they operate. Then attention can be withdrawn from the senses, like withdrawing your hand from a glove. The *second* problem in attaining direct experience is that everything in the external world keeps changing and moving around. The *third* is that the mind itself is clouded by many attractions, aversions, fears, and false identities.

To witness the active senses (*karmendriyas*) in daily life means, for example, that when you are walking you observe that "I am *moving*". It is not just seeing that "I am *walking*," but going one step further inward and observing the process of moving (*karmendriya*) that is behind the walking. Then, as you observe different actions and the many ways of moving, you become increasingly aware of the underlying instigator behind the motion (*karmendriya*), and this is the mind as *manas*, one of the four functions of mind.

*Witnessing the ten indriyas is a very practical tool
in coordinating the four functions of mind.*

Similarly, if you are using some object, such as when writing with a pen or drinking water from a cup, you notice, "I am *grasping*" or "I am *holding*". To be mindful of writing or drinking is one step of the process of mindfulness, but *to observe the karmendriya itself is more interior*, more subtle. It takes attention inward to the *antahkarana* (the inner instrument, including the four functions of mind), leading you to be closer to the awareness of the still, silent center of consciousness, like the center of the hub of the wheel.

To witness the cognitive senses (*jnanendriyas*) in daily life means, for example, that when you are walking you observe that "I am *seeing*" as you navigate around other people and objects. You observe that "I am *hearing*" when some sound captures your attention.

Witnessing the ten indriyas is a very practical tool in coordinating the four functions of mind. By witnessing the ten *doors*, we are better able to become a neutral witness to all of the inner activities of the mind, and thus be more able to find and rest in the silence beyond, or underneath the mind. This is an important part of cultivating non-attachment.

There is a more inclusive article on the ten indriyas on the SwamiJ.com website.

Swami Rama on experimenting with yourself

You need to make internal experiments with yourself: you need to train your *buddhi* to give a correct, clear judgment to your *manas*. You also have to *train your manas* to take the advice of *buddhi*. If you sincerely want to develop personal strength and willpower, you should first learn to *keep yourself open* and *be an observer of yourself* until you observe that your willpower has become dynamic. Instead of making such dramatic resolutions, simply make yourself open to observing yourself and *decide to experiment* in observing yourself.

You have to train your manas to take the advice of buddhi.

There are two different concepts; one is doing an experiment in the external way, and the other involves doing experiments within. That latter system, which leads you to the deeper levels of your being, is an entirely different system. In internal research, you don't have any external means to help you; *you have to help yourself*. Within yourself, you have a lab for experimentation, and you can work with yourself. Don't accept the idea that you are bad or weak

or incomplete. You are a human being. This imposition of the idea that you are bad or good is due to your habits.¹

Most students either follow the instructions of their teacher blindly without understanding them, or they just try to understand the instructions intellectually but do not experiment with them and practice to assimilate them correctly. When a teacher imparts knowledge, he wants his student to use his free will, to be courageous, and to make experiments to experience and then to realize what is right for him. One can develop a dialogue with his conscience, which is not polluted by the fickleness and feebleness of the mind. Experimenting in this way leads one to understand that the real counselor is within each person.²

*The easiest way to make progress is just to know thyself—
to accept and understand yourself on all levels.*

Throughout your life you have done experiments on matter, mind, and energy, but you have not done enough experiments on the real Self within you. The easiest way to make progress is just to know thyself—to accept and understand yourself on all levels. Once you know the way, become aware of the goal, and have determination, then it's easy for you to understand yourself. When a desire is fulfilled, you should *observe whether it feeds your pride*, and if it is not fulfilled, *observe whether it feeds your anger*. You have to watch yourself carefully for these two reactions. You need to learn to make inner experiments with your own emotions when you seek to work with yourself and go within. To the serious student, *there is only one real book to study and learn from*—the greatest of all books—and that is the very manuscript that you, yourself, are. You should continue to do experiments with yourself, and every time you do one, you will find that you are growing and growing. We all have homes, and our homes are meant for our inner spiritual experiments with ourselves.³

*To the serious student, there is only one real book to study and learn from—the
greatest of all books—and that is the very manuscript that you, yourself, are.*

Discipline means self-learning. I am not talking about knowing; knowing is only a small part of learning. Learning means “to know, to experiment, to experience, and to come to certain conclusions and then be firm.” Learning reduces conflict. Conflict comes when you cannot decide anything, when your buddhi cannot make decisions, when you do not know how the ego should be trained and used. That which bothers you is in your mind. That which is to be understood is your mind. According to our lineage, there are *two branches of teachers*. One teaches the scriptures, observing austerities, and following the path of renunciation. The other branch is a branch of meditators and contemplators doing documentation experiments and

¹ *The Art of Joyful Living*

² *Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita*

³ *The Art of Joyful Living*

scientifically collecting data on all levels of life—physical, energy level, level of sense perception, the way things are perceived on the mental level, and finally on a spiritual level.¹

Exercises in self-observation

Appendix A outlines 40 elements of self-observation that are extremely useful as an adjunct to your daily systematic practices of meditation. This meditation in action blends nicely with your regular daily seated meditation practices.

Observing the thinking process within

Observing your thinking process within means observing the interaction of the ten *indriyas* with the mind (*manas*) along with the other of the four functions of mind, which are *chitta* (the storage of deep impressions or memory), *ahamkara* (the “I-maker”), and *buddhi* (intelligence, which knows, decides, assesses, and discerns between this and that).

Daily goals of self observation

Appendix B is a list of 31 daily goals that will help you get started in the process of self-observation. Simply use today’s calendar date and look up that number on the list. Practice that goal for the whole day. Write in a journal, and/or talk with your coach or others about what you have observed and how this relates or interacts with all of the elements of your inner processing (the elements of the *antahkarana*, the inner instrument).

In our meditation retreats in India we do these practices every day for three weeks. It usually takes a week to start to get a feel for how this works and how it is useful. After about two weeks it is usually starting to get pretty clear and lots of insights are coming about inner processing in yogic context. I mention this here because of the fact that this is in a 24-hour per day residential retreat program. If you are not in such a retreat program, it will probably take much longer to fully understand and appreciate these self-awareness practices. Gentle persistence and talking with others about your observations will greatly enhance your progress with this and help you see how this greatly helps your meditation practices.

Swami Rama on introspection

The meditator really becomes an internal explorer and investigator, who is studying the internal reactions and processes of the mind, on both the conscious and unconscious levels. The meditator is an interior researcher. Meditation helps you to fully know and understand all the capacities of the mind—memory, concentration, emotion, reasoning, and intuition. Those who

¹ *Inspired Thoughts of Swami Rama*

meditate begin to understand how to coordinate, balance, and enhance all these capabilities, using them to their fullest potential. Then they go beyond the usual states of mind and consciousness.¹

To research the inner world, one needs a burning desire to know his inner potentials and states.²

Thousands of thoughts remain awaiting to be entertained. The purpose of sadhana is to attend to those thoughts in a systematic manner so that they do not create unrest in the inner world. Slowly one begins discriminating between helpful thoughts and those unhelpful thoughts. This introspective (inspecting within) method leads one to the next step: witnessing. While one is learning, he must be patient.³

The process of inspecting your thoughts, called introspection, means seeing which thoughts are worthwhile to cultivate. The yoga manuals talk about two types of thoughts, *klista* and *aklista*. The first is helpful and the latter is harmful and injurious. You need to inspect your thoughts to determine which help you and which should be eliminated. To be an interior researcher you first need to understand the four states of consciousness: the *waking* state, the *dreaming* state, the state of *deep sleep*, and the state beyond. Once you understand the first three states, then you definitely understand that there is something beyond. If you do not have determination first, do not inspect your thoughts, because otherwise your thoughts will control you. Then you will see how easily you are distracted. Your mind will create many fantasies and images, one after another. Your thoughts are people. They are not mere thoughts; they are people within you. You are a world in yourself. You are a universe, and all your thoughts are people. Just as people are born and die, so too, thoughts are born and die.⁴

Once you understand the first three states, then you definitely understand that there is something beyond.

Learn to introspect, which means “inspection within.” To do this, sit down and observe what you are thinking. You actually already know; you really know all your weaknesses, and actually you are busy hiding them. To burn your samskaras, you sit in deep meditation, build your determination, and tell your mind and your samskaras, “At this time my mind is *only* for meditation. I have to meditate and learn to go beyond this mire of delusion and confusion created by my mind.” Then, *you allow all the impressions to come forward and you don’t get involved with them.* That method is called “inspection within,” or introspection. When you want to study the mind, how do you actually do it? You don’t have any external device or instrument to use to study the mind, so you have to train *one of the aspects* of your mind to study the totality of the

1 *Meditation and Its Practice*

2 *Choosing a Path*

3 *Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita*

4 *Path of Fire and Light, Volume 2*

mind. You have to *train a part of the mind, so that all the functions of the mind can be studied through the use of that one part.*¹

*You are a universe, and all your thoughts are people.
Just as people are born and die,
so too, thoughts are born and die.*

By gaining control over the thinking *process we can gain control over the impressions* stored in the mind and eventually over our *entire karma*. Through introspection, inspection within, one can discover the nature and origin of his thought. Through introspection we can learn to understand and see clearly our habits and their origins. Through introspection we can change our habits and thus change our character and personality. We need to inspect our thinking process. We must recall that what is going on in our minds is produced by us. We should inspect it and recognize it as our own product. Each person's thinking is his own creation. We begin by learning to inspect and analyze our own minds. Through analysis, through introspection we learn to discriminate between the thinker and the thinking process. The first step to control and liberation is self-observation. The *first* stage of meditation is to *clear* the mind. It is essential to observe the thinking process and witness the contents of the mind. To establish ourselves in our own basic nature we need to know how to cleanse the mind.²

In the river of life all our actions, thoughts, and sensations are like pebbles which settle on the bed of the river, and we soon lose conscious awareness of them. These pebbles or sensations thrown into the river create very tiny bubbles in the depths of the river which come up and burst at the surface. All our samskaras reside in the latent bed of memory. Without focusing on the subtle traces of our mind stuff, that is, on the samskaras in their latent form rather than their manifestation at the surface, salvation is not possible.

*You have to train a part of the mind, so that all the functions of the mind
can be studied through the use of that one part.*

All these bubbles actually *originate* in the *bed* of the river of the mind where disturbing pebbles are constantly settling. One often resists these disturbances and can become disgusted with himself on account of them. If the student is patient and determined he will cease to struggle with these thoughts and will start to study them. It is natural for all the hidden tendencies of our unconscious mind to come to the surface, and it is also natural for a student to be disturbed by them. Yet if the student remains aware of his goal, which lies *beyond* the *unconscious* mind, then he will learn to study these thought forms without discomfort. Past samskaras do create problems and disturbances for the student of meditation, but sincere effort, determination and one-pointedness can help him maintain awareness of his goal.

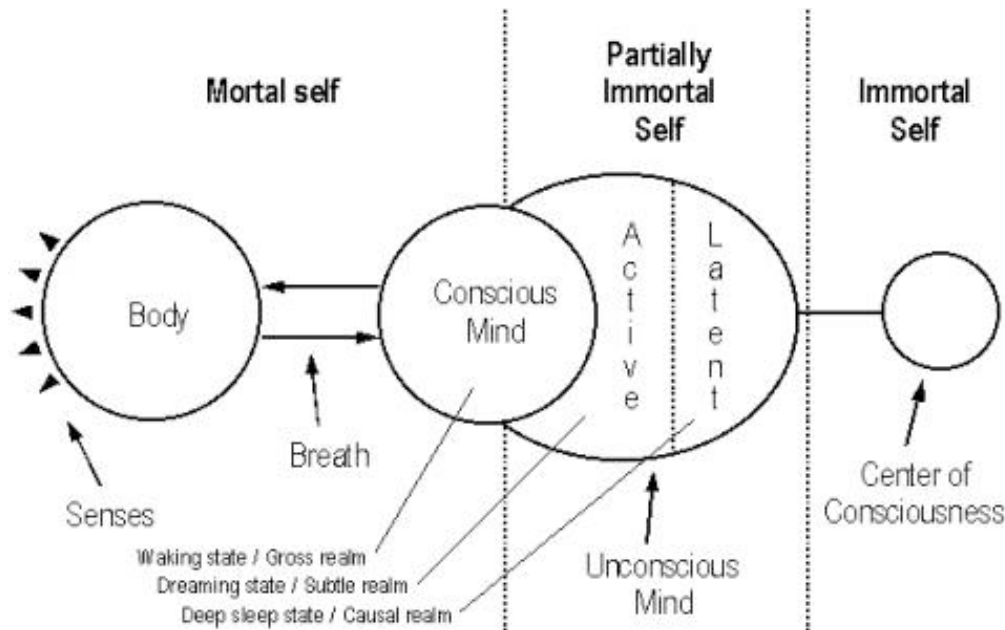
¹ *The Art of Joyful Living*

² *Freedom from the Bondage of Karma*

Constant and exclusive study of the thinking process at the *conscious* level is *not* a sound way to follow the path of meditation. It is self-study of the *unconscious* mind stuff which is important. Many strange thoughts rise to the surface during our thinking process and it is *not* possible for anyone to analyze and get rid of them at the *conscious* level, for these bubbles *form* deep in the unconscious mind.¹

All sadhanas (spiritual practices), techniques, and disciplines are actually means to train the mind.

In meditation, the harmful and injurious dreams that strain and distract the mind and its energy can be analyzed and resolved. All conflicts that are at the root of dreams can also be resolved. The aspirant learns to analyze or resolve all his desires, thoughts, and feelings through the practice of yoga nidra. He learns to consciously place his mind in deep rest.²



One simply has to become aware of this fact, that *the mind* is in direct control of the senses, breath, and body. It is *the mind* that influences the senses and causes them to function in the external world. It is *the mind* that desires to perceive the world through the senses and to conceptualize and categorize those sense perceptions.

All sadhanas (spiritual practices), techniques, and disciplines are actually means to train the mind. And the foremost part of the training is to make the mind aware that Reality lies beyond itself, and that is the immortality of the soul.

¹ Freedom from the Bondage of Karma

² Enlightenment without God

The mind is the finest instrument that we possess. If it is understood well, the mind can be helpful in our sadhana; however, if the mind is not well-ordered and disciplined, it can distract and dissipate all our potentials.¹

Exploring jiva, the individual soul

It is not the mind that goes through the waking, dreaming, and sleeping states. The mind shares the experiences, but it is actually the jiva, the individual self, which is quite different from the ego, that experiences the waking, dreaming, and sleeping states.

The individual self uses a particular vehicle called the unconscious, which is the reservoir of all the past impressions of mind, action, and speech. As long as the self uses the unconscious as a vehicle, it is called jiva, but the moment the Self renounces the vehicle, it is called pure consciousness [*atman*]. Final liberation takes place when the jiva unites itself with the pure Self, which is the Self of all, exactly as a drop of water unites with and becomes one with the ocean.

No power can cut the eternal Atman into pieces and make a small fragment into a jiva. When we see a particular human being, his form and size, he appears to be separated from the whole, and we call him an individual. But that experience of separation occurs because the ego is not in the habit of acknowledging the whole. That makes one think that the individual soul is only a fragment of the whole. In reality it is not. When the yogi fathoms all the boundaries from gross to subtle to subtlemost and crosses all the boundaries of individuality, he realizes that there is nothing but the real Self [*atman*], which is the Self of all [*brahman*].²

When the soul or jiva departs, it is followed by the vital energy, prana. When the prana departs, all the other life supporting organs follow. The breathing system is the vehicle of prana. Physical death is a change, but it does not annihilate the subconscious mind and soul.

The subtle powers of the five organs of action [*karmendriyas*] and of the five organs of sense perception [*jnanendriyas*], the pranas, the manas, and the buddhi constitute the subtle body. At the time of its rebirth, the soul is accompanied by the subtle body. The gross body dissolves at death, but the subtle body continues to exist.

*The relation between the subtle body and the gross body
is akin to that of the seed and the plant.*

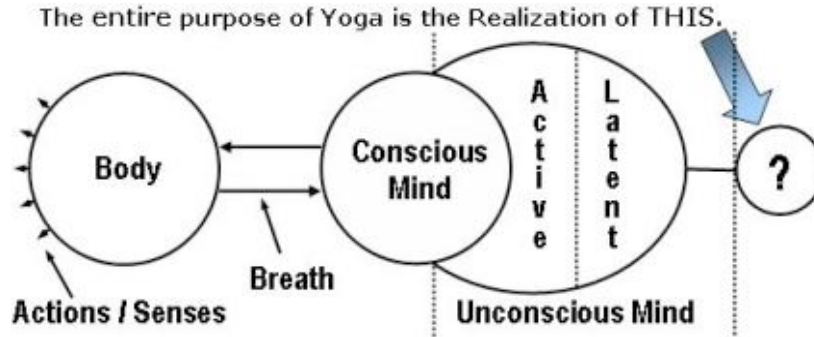
The subconscious mind, which is the storehouse of merits and demerits, becomes the vehicle for the jiva, or the soul. All the samskaras of our many lives remain in the storehouse of our subconscious mind in a latent state like seeds. The relation between the subtle body and the gross body is akin to that of the seed and the plant. As the seed contains all the qualities of the plant in the seed germ, so the subconscious mind retains all the samskaras of our previous lives.³

1 *Meditation and Its Practice*

2 *Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita*

3 *Sacred Journey*

Jiva, the individual soul suffers because the fire of kundalini at the base of the spine is dormant and covered with ashes, and thus remains in a sleeping state. Since the great spiritual fire within every human lies sleeping, the jiva, the individual soul, cannot utilize this higher spiritual energy, and because of this has become a brute. Whenever the jiva learns of kundalini-shakti, it is a great help. With the help of this force, the jiva attains the highest state of consciousness called paramshiva.¹



The unconscious mind is used as a vehicle for the individual self, but when the individual self drops all attachments to the unconscious mind, the individual self establishes itself in its essential nature and realizes that its self is the Self of all. Such a state of realization is called liberation, *turiya*, the very origin of pure consciousness.²

The jiva is the union of atman and the unconscious mind.

What will happen to us after death? Who experiences hell and heaven? It is that unique experience called the individual soul, the unconscious mind, that experiences them. The soul is pure; it is our essential nature; it is pure atman. You are inside a vehicle, the jiva that experiences pain and pleasure. The jiva is the union of atman and the unconscious mind.

The jiva is a vehicle full of memories, desires, and wishes. Atman, when linked to the unconscious mind, is called the jiva. Without the unconscious mind, you are pure atman. That is called moksha, or liberation. The moment you realize that this is your essential nature, that you are pure atman, you are free.

*Without the unconscious mind, you are pure atman.
That is called moksha, or liberation.*

When this occurs you have not lost your identity; you still have your individual identity. You are a nucleus and this universe is your expansion. You are not merely a part of the universe. Atman is not a mere part of Brahman. It is not just a small spark. Atman cannot be diminished.

¹ *Path of Fire and Light, Volume 2*

² *Enlightenment without God*

You are essentially atman, but you need expansion into para-atman. You need to realize this, and not merely through mental analysis. To realize this you have to practice, and to practice you have to understand what creates problems for you and what becomes obstacles in your life. Suffering is a result of ignorance. To know your final goal is to finally leave behind the world of suffering.¹

¹ *Path of Fire and Light, Volume 2*

SECTION 2: Dialogue with your mind as a friend

Contemplation, self-counseling, and friendship

Will you please be my friend

You can literally ask your mind, “Mind, will you please be my friend?” When they first try this, people are often surprised that any answer at all comes from within, especially if that inner response is either a clear “yes” or a clear “no”.

There is a counselor within, teacher within, guru within, which is sometimes called simply *letting your conscience be your guide*. All of us already know this, though we may rarely, if ever, give it any conscious thought or actual practice in daily life. The yoga practitioner actively cultivates drawing upon this inner wisdom in all aspects of life, whether for day-to-day decisions or exploring the deeper meaning of life and how to pursue the path of Self-realization.

Who is asking the questions?

If you are driving your car, who is it that is doing the driving? The answer is that *driver* is a composite identity that includes all of the inner data about cars and driving (the memory traces of learning that are stored in the *chitta*), the *ahamkara* (I-maker, usually called *ego*, which in Yoga psychology is considered the aspect allowing us to be *able* to take on identities), the *manas* (sometimes called in Western language the sensory-motor mind), and the *buddhi* (the faculty of intelligence itself, which knows, decides, assesses, and discerns or discriminates).

In the same way that a car *driver* identity is gradually developed and trained over time, the identity of *sadhaka*, *practitioner*, *yogi*, or *seeker*, etc. comes into being and learns how to operate within its realm of activities. It has insights and experiences stored in *chitta*, uses *manas* (the mind) as an instrument. has *ahamkara* (the I-maker, which provides the determination to do its work), and *buddhi* to see clearly.

*You have to train a part of the mind, so that all the functions of the mind
can be studied through the use of that one part.¹*

This *sadhaka* or *seeker* is a *false identity*, but is *created so that it can explore* the totality of the inner instruments of mind. This *sadhaka* false identity has its own job to do, just as the *driver* identity has its job to do. Through practice, this principle becomes clearer and clearer. The main job of the *sadhaka* identity is to explore all of the other false identities, attractions, aversions, and fears so as to uncover the reality that these have nothing to do with someone called “me” or “I”. You use the *driver* identity to *drive*, but invoke the *sadhaka* identity to *explore* within.

¹ *The Art of Joyful Living*

To whom are you talking?

Most of our identity as a person is unconscious; we are usually only aware of a small percentage of our inner processes, thinking, and identities. Our *buddhi*, the inner faculty of wisdom, which knows, decides, assesses, and discerns or discriminates is always there to serve as our consultant or advisor. Although it knows the wiser of various courses of action, it often operates through a cloud of attractions, aversions, fears, and false identities stored in the *chitta* and colored (*klishhta*) by the *ahamkara*, so its guidance may not be heard. Yet, that inner voice is always there. First and foremost, this is the one with whom we (as the conscious, waking state person) want to cultivate a close relationship. In the broadest sense, this is the one with whom we are consulting when we say something like, “Mind, should I *do it* or *not*?”

*Literally, you can have internal dialogue with
any of the many inner aspects of your being.*

In addition to consulting with *buddhi*, your inner wisdom, you also dialogue with your individual thoughts, impressions, wants, wishes, and identities. As Swami Rama explains, “Your thoughts are people. They are not mere thoughts; they are people within you. You are a world in yourself. You are a universe, and all your thoughts are people. Just as people are born and die, so too, thoughts are born and die.”¹ Literally, you can have internal dialogue with any of the many inner aspects of your being. It may seem odd at first to do so, but once you try it for a while, you will be amazed at the results, both in terms of insights about yourself, and in purifying the mind so that you can deepen your meditation.

Antahkarana is the inner instrument

Antahkarana literally translates as “inner instrument”. It is the totality of the yogic inner instruments of mind. It includes the four functions of mind: 1) *manas*, the thinking part of mind which brings in data through the cognitive senses (*jnanendriyas*) and expresses outwardly through the active instruments (*karmendriyas*), 2) *chitta*, which is the storehouse of all impressions and memories, 3) *ahamkara*, which is the “I-maker”, usually translated as ego (though not meaning ego in the sense of a person being egotistical), giving one the capacity to color the data stored in *chitta* as being *mine*, or relating to *me* in some way, and 4) *buddhi*, which knows, decides, assesses, and discerns or discriminates. As previously noted, it is the *buddhi* which is the most important of these four to cultivate.

Who am I?

The meditator asks in internal dialogue, “Who am I? Am I the body?” Wisdom answers, “No, I have a body, but body is not *who* I am.” Again she asks, “I am a breathing being, but am I the

¹ *Path of Fire and Light, Volume 2*

breath? Is that *who* I am?” Again, wisdom of buddhi answers, “No, there is breath for sure, but this breath is also not *who* I am.” She asks, “I am a thinking being with streams of seemingly thousands or millions of thoughts, images, pictures, and words. Are these things of mind *who* I am? Am I this mind?” Still one more time wisdom comes and says, “No, not even these thoughts and this wonderful, intelligent instrument of mind are *who* I am. These are merely experiences stored in the library or warehouse of the mind-field, and the mind itself, however skilled it is, remains only a useful instrument, but still is not *who* I am.” Buddhi goes on, “All of these are mere phantoms of false identities. I am the source, the power, the pure consciousness of Atman, Purusha, or Self that operates outward through the instruments of intelligence, mind, senses, instruments of action, and the physical body. None of them, however wonderful and useful they are, are *who* I am. I am that absolute reality which was never born and never dies. I am self-existent and not subject to change, decay, and decomposition.”

The meditator has this type of dialogue internally, directly, in his own natural way of speaking. He is not merely reading a script, such as reciting the words above. He literally is having his own personal conversation with the inner wisdom of *buddhi* and the pure consciousness of *atman*, which is the same source that all of the great sages and yogis of history have utilized.

Self-counseling through internal dialogue

Swami Rama describes self-counseling: “How do you begin to counsel yourself? You cannot see an external counselor or therapist every day to solve your problems. First, you should learn to observe and understand something about yourself. One important question is, ‘Is my first thought good or bad—is it clear or clouded?’ You need to learn for yourself, is your first thought a guiding thought or not? Does your second thought guide you more clearly, and does your third thought lead you to confusion or to clarity? This is something you should learn about yourself by observing how your mind operates while self-counseling—to know when you should trust the advice of your mind. When you learn that, it is extremely helpful to you.”¹

Internal dialogue as contemplation

Swami Rama on contemplation: “Inner dialogue, a contemplative method, sometimes replaces meditation. Such dialogues strengthen the faculty of decisiveness and sharpen the buddhi (higher intellect), which can penetrate into the subtleties of the inner levels. The primary step of inner dialogue is a part of contemplation. It inspires the aspirant in his search for knowledge. Knowledge that does not reveal the object as it is, is not knowledge at all, and acquiring mere information is unfulfilling. Non-attachment [*vairagya*, yoga sutra 1.12] and practice [*abhyasa*, yoga sutra 1.12] are the most effective tools in the quest for real knowledge. Contemplation is not a method of escaping from the realities of life; rather through the process of contemplation, one makes a strong mental resolution on which he builds his whole philosophy of life.

¹ *The Art of Joyful Living*

O mind, witness the world of objects, and observe the impermanence of those objects you long to achieve, to embrace, and to save. What difference is there in the objects of dreams and the objects of the waking state? What reason is there for being attached to the unreal things of the world; they are like experiences of the dreaming state. They are constantly changing, and you have no right to own them, for you can only use them. O mind, listen to the sayings of the great sages and teachers; follow in the footprints of those who have already trod the path of light and enlightenment. You will find that Truth is that which is unchangeable; Absolute Reality is that which is beyond the conditioning of time, space and causation.”¹

Dialogue before meditation

Don't be impatient with meditation

Swami Rama explains that in the cave monasteries of the Himalayas the novice practitioners did not start with meditation, but rather were taught to first purify their minds through internal dialogue. He explains that modern people are too impatient and want to master the art of meditation immediately. He goes on to suggest that we “learn to have a dialogue between the observer and that which is being observed. Follow the imagination in this dialogue; analyze and observe the train of mental objects, and slowly control will be gained over these things. We rise above them, and they disappear from the domain of mind.”²

If you don't want to meditate

Swami Rama suggests, “If you don't want to meditate, then do not meditate. You should not have a fight with your mind; you should have a gentle dialogue with your mind. You will learn many things when you enter into self-dialogue. You do not begin with meditation itself. First you learn to set a regular meditation time, and then to have a dialogue with yourself. If you have a dialogue with yourself for a few minutes or a few hours before you do meditation, then your meditation will be good. If you do not do that, then you use your meditation time for self-dialogue, and then the ‘meditation’ is not really meditation.

“Be a close friend to your mind, a very close friend. Let the mind whisper those inner secrets to you, and put all things in front of your mind. You need to make the mind your friend because it is either a great friend or a great foe. That which is an enemy can be converted into a great friend.”³

¹ *Enlightenment without God*

² *Freedom from the Bondage of Karma*

³ *Path of Fire and Light, Volume 2*

Listening to your conscience

Swami Rama explains that “One’s conscience already knows what is right and wrong, good and bad, helpful and unhelpful. One simply has to tune into his inner conscience, which guides him all the time. That is called seeking counsel within before performing action. In practicing not doing that which is not to be done, one will find that he is being guided from within. Then he can dialogue with his conscience, which is not polluted by the fickleness and feebleness of the mind. Experimenting in this way leads one to understand that the real counselor is within each person.

“The first and foremost duty of a true and selfless teacher is to introduce his student to that inner guide which leads one during the waking, dreaming, and sleeping states. When one takes time from his busy life and learns to sit calmly in a quiet place, the inner counselor begins counseling. It would be helpful if therapists and psychologists, as well as priests and spiritual teachers, would learn to listen to the inner counselor and then introduce that inner guide to their clients and students.”¹

Putting questions to yourself

Swami Rama: “Today you cannot face yourself; you don’t want to know yourself because you are afraid. Once you know how to have this kind of dialogue with yourself, it will help you enormously. First, you need to understand what you are doing wrong. Next, you need to create new grooves, so that your mind does not automatically flow in its old grooves, but instead begins to flow in the new grooves.

Learn to counsel yourself and have a self-dialogue. Learn to mentally talk to yourself. Sit down and have a dialogue with yourself; ask yourself why you are doing an action. Many times you will say to yourself, ‘I don’t want to do this, but I have been doing it, so now it’s a routine,’ and then you’ll understand the process of habit formation.

With all your idealization of sadhana and gurus and teachers, you have neglected one thing: you need to know something practical. You need to know a practical method of gaining freedom from those weaknesses that you have formed in your childhood, which have become part of your life, and are difficult for you to resolve. In this kind of training, books can’t help you; nothing external will help you. You need to consider why you often do not do what you really want to do. Put these questions to yourself and you’ll find the answers.²

Dealing with fear

Swami Rama talks of using internal dialogue to deal with fear, “If you learn to have an internal dialogue you will become comfortable with yourself. Fears of the outside world, of others, and of circumstances, will disappear.

¹ *Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita*

² *The Art of Joyful Living*

“With any close friend you are interested in their life and you are sensitive to their emotions. You listen to them. Be gentle with yourself, as you would be with any good friend. Don’t condemn yourself or be judgmental.”¹

Remaining aware of the reality within

“Practicing an internal dialogue can help one remain aware of the reality within while he is doing his actions in the world. One should sit down every morning and talk to himself. This will help him learn more about himself, and knowing about himself, he will not become egotistical. All the ancient scriptures are dialogues. Christ talked with His apostles; Moses talked with the wise men; Krishna talked with Arjuna—these are all dialogues. We should also learn to go through a mental dialogue of our own. You should have dialogue with yourself within your mind every day.

- “A conscious process of inner dialogue can pacify one and wash off all his bad feelings.
- “Dialogue is one of the finest therapies there is and prepares one for meditational therapy.
- “Meditational therapy, if used and understood properly, is the highest of all the therapies and teaches one how to be still on all levels: how to have physical stillness, a calm and even breath, and a calm, conscious mind.
- “Then by allowing the unconscious mind to come forward, one can go beyond it, and that inner reality comes to the conscious field and expands.”²

Thoughts and questions

Swami Rama: “In meditation, you sit down quietly and repeat your mantra. During that period of meditation your mind remains one-pointed, but after that, your mind goes back again to its same previous grooves. This is not the full process of meditation; the full process of meditation is a whole life process.

*‘Meditation’ means ‘to attend.’ It means attention to the whole of life.
It should not be a strenuous act; it should not be forced.
Your whole life can be one of meditation.*

“‘Meditation’ means ‘to attend.’ It means attention to the whole of life. It should not be a strenuous act; it should not be forced. Your whole life can be one of meditation.... People often ask how they can do this. My method is to consider some question that is on my mind... I have questions concerning the welfare of my students, because that is my life’s work.... For example, perhaps I think of someone is a very quiet person, and I want him to become a good teacher. Perhaps this question comes to me: ‘What shall I do with him? What shall I tell him?’

¹ *Sacred Journey*

² *A Practical Guide to Holistic Health*, Swami Rama

“When such questions that are pending in my mind come to me, I say to them, ‘Okay, come.’ What *you* do when such thoughts come, is to try to think of your mantra. This means that you try to use your mantra to avoid and escape from certain situations. Then, when you have done your mantra for a while, your mind again goes back to the same worry. That is not helpful; instead, let everything come before you for a decision—just watch....

“Early in the morning, right after I get up, I go to the bathroom and prepare for meditation, and then I sit down.... I ask my mind what I have to do, and then I set up a dialogue with myself.... Sit down quietly and ask yourself, ‘What do I want?’ When you do this, you will find that there are two types of desires: the simple daily wants, and the higher desires. The two types of desires are mingled together.... Do not let yourself suppress [the mundane thoughts] by reacting, ‘Oh, what I am thinking! I should not think like that!’ That is not helpful: instead, let the thought come before you and become a sort of observer. Start observing your own mind. Do not try to escape; do not be afraid of your own thinking.... The way to work with intruding thoughts is to let each thought come, whether it is good or bad. Simply decide that whatever comes, you will not be disturbed....

*The first lesson in this practice is to simply allow the thoughts to arise.
Then, secondly, bring back before yourself that which is important.*

“Before I practice meditation, I allow all such thoughts, both ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ to come into my mind and then go away, because they are only thoughts.... The first lesson in this practice is to simply allow the thoughts to arise. Then, secondly, bring back before yourself that which is important. You can do this; it does not require any advanced practice of meditation....

“In my practice, when all the thoughts have gone through the mind, then I sit down and start to remember my mantra. Usually you try to remember your mantra from the very beginning, and there are those thoughts waiting for your consultation, but you do not pay attention to them. Then, the thoughts are coming and going in your mind and you are trying to repeat your mantra, and the more the thoughts come, the more you repeat your mantra, and the result is an internal battle. That is not helpful; you need not do that.”¹

Daily internal dialogues

In Appendix C there is a list of 31 daily internal dialogues that can be used for a daily practice. Make note of the date of the current day and practice the internal dialogue that is referenced in that number on the list.

¹ *The Art of Joyful Living*

*Regularity is an extremely important part
of all levels of meditation, whether
one thinks of himself or herself as
a beginning, intermediate,
or advanced meditator.*

SECTION 3: Meditate in silence

STEP 1) Preparation

Prepare the body physically

The quality and depth of meditation is much greater if the physical body is prepared. This involves keeping it healthy through exercise, diet, and cleansing the inner and outer body. At the time of meditation it is helpful even to simply wash the face with water or a wet cloth; this can have a great effect on calming the thoughts and emotions of the mind. Simply put, it feels good!

Regularity is an extremely important part of all levels of meditation.

Bowels and bladder

Ideally, meditation is practiced with totally empty bowels and bladder. This may take some time to accomplish in your meditation practices as diet, exercise, sleep and other practices come into balance with one another. Try to have flexibility when doing your practices. For example, after you get started with your simple postures, hatha yoga, joints and glands, or other exercises, you may find that the movement has led to being ready to empty your bowels. Be ready to pause in your practices long enough to use the toilet.

Time, place, environment

Regularity is an extremely important part of all levels of meditation, whether one thinks of himself or herself as a beginning, intermediate, or advanced meditator. Meditation can be said to be a process of transcending time, space, and causation. The means of doing this is like the Upanishadic story of removing a thorn from your foot by breaking off another thorn from the bush, and using that thorn to remove the thorn from your foot. Here, we utilize the tools of time, space, and causation to go *beyond* time, space, and causation.

*We utilize the tools of time, space, and causation
to go beyond time, space, and causation.*

First, we choose a time for ourselves that we can consistently use for our practices each and every day. We do this mindfully aware of the fact that sometimes the unexpected happens, and we find obstacles on some days. In such a case, we make ourselves aware of our meditation time, even if we have to miss it today, and then do the meditation later the same day. We may shorten our meditation practice today, so that we continue that habit of developing and maintaining our daily practice.

In meditation retreats, I introduce the concept that *walking in the door counts*. If people are in a retreat for, say, three weeks and meditate four times per day, that is 84 meditation times in total. After the retreat, the fact that the sadhaka (practitioner) may have only walked in the door for a moment a couple times will not matter; the habit and fruits of the meditations will have come.

Second, we find or create a space that is conducive to meditation. It is a reasonably quiet space, even though it may not be perfectly quiet. It has a comfortable rug or carpet, a comfortable cushion or chair, and has clean air. It may be a separate room in your house that is used only for meditation and other spiritual practices, or it may be a small corner of one of the rooms in your house. It may even be a living room, bedroom, or other such room that often is used for other purposes, but for which you can spread out your blanket and meditation seat when the time comes for practice.

Finally, causation refers to the habitual actions, speech, and thoughts that we live. This action or thought leads to that one; that, in turn leads to another, and that to still another. Sometimes we may call that our *daily routine*. Most of us have some kind of daily routine, whether we have consciously planned our days, or they have turned into habit solely by living in the world and having that world and its people plan our lives for us, while we may remain in a sort of mental lethargy or sleep. In terms of meditation, we consciously take charge of that causation process, mindfully choosing how we live our daily lives, including having healthy and regular eating, sleeping, and exercising habits. We also participate in learning and planning our own systematic meditation process. We actively engage in these processes of causation, so that the sequential practices lead one into the next, finally resulting in a very still, quiet meditation that is progressing at our own natural and comfortable rate.

Frequency of practice

Swami Rama explains that “Just as one eats morning, noon, afternoon and night, so also will one have to meditate four times a day if one wants to realize truth quickly.”¹ At *Abhyasa Ashram* and the retreats at *Sadhana Mandir* (Swami Rama’s Rishikesh, India ashram) we schedule four meditation times per day (See AbhyasaAshram.org and SadhanaMandir.org).

Near the end of this paper there are suggestions on implementing your practices, including how to do the practices in a variety of different time periods, a few minutes up to an hour or more. A key to practices is to become comfortable with this flexibility. With great flexibility in the *duration* of each practice, it is much easier to practice *four* times per day. If not four, then three (morning, midday, evening), or two (morning and evening), or one (morning *or* evening).

If you are able to have multiple practice times each day, you may find it useful and comfortable to think of one of them as your main, or longer daily practice. For example, your early morning meditation may be your longer practice, whereas the late morning practice may be brief, even as little as 1-5 minutes. Late afternoon or early evening (after a typical work day) you may find that 10-15 minutes is useful and pleasant. Before bedtime may also be shorter than early morning.

¹ *Lectures on Yoga*

STEP 2) Stretches

Having a supple, flexible body is extremely useful, if not absolutely essential for meditation. There is no intent here to prescribe some particular brand-name postures series. Rather, the intent is to strongly urge you to do some form or another of stretches or yoga postures so as to give yourself a sitting posture for meditation which is steady and straight, and comfortable at the same time. The alternatives below include some simple stretches, joints and glands exercises, a comprehensive routine recommended by Swami Rama, a listing of categories of postures, and the well known and effective sun salutation series.

Simple stretches

Do any version of posture for each of these basic categories. These are most helpful for sitting in meditation. Even a minute or two will help prepare you to sit comfortably for meditation.

- | | |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| 1) Forward/Backward Bends | 4) Hip openers |
| 2) Side Stretches | 5) Inverted |
| 3) Twists | |

Joints and glands

*Joints and glands
as taught by Swami Rama*

FACE

Forehead and Sinus Massage
Scalp and Forehead
Half Face Squint
Full Face Squint
Eyes
Mouth
Lion
Face Massage

NECK

Forward and Backward Bend
Chin Over Shoulder
Ear to Shoulder
Turtle
Neck Rolls

SHOULDERS

Lifts
Rotations
Rotation with Hands to Shoulder
Horizontal Arm Swing
Shoulders and Arms
Shoulder Wings

ARMS, HANDS AND WRISTS

Up/Down, Sides, Rotations

ABDOMEN and TORSO

Overhead Stretch
Sideways Stretch
Side Bends
Torso Twists
Taking In and Out of Stomach
Abdominal Lift (Uddiyana Bandha)

TORSO and LEGS

Standing Forward Bend
Twisting Bend

LEGS and FEET

Leg Kick
Knee Swirl
Dancing Knees
Knee Bends
Ankle Squat
Ankle and Feet
Toe Balance

Comprehensive daily routine

The Comprehensive daily routine is a series of twelve postures from Swami Rama in *Choosing a Path*, pp. 131-2. This has been the heart of my personal practice for many years, though I usually add other postures into the sequence, either in addition to, or as alternatives to these.

- | | | |
|-------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1) Tree | 5) Bow | 9) Shoulder stand |
| 2) Triangle | 6) Posterior Stretch | 10) Fish |
| 3) Cobra | 7) Spinal Twist | 11) Headstand |
| 4) Locus | 8) Plow | 12) Corpse |

Hatha postures

Following are a handful of categories of hatha yoga asanas, postures. This is not meant to be a complete list, but rather, a small sample to suggest that you do whatever series of postures you know and feel comfortable with. We are not trying here to prescribe some brand-name method of hatha yoga asanas; we have far too much of that in our modern world already. Hatha yoga is very broad, deep, and flexible in its methods and application. Do what you have learned and what feels natural to you in preparation for meditation. I do suggest, however, that you emphasize postures that work with your spine and opening your hips, as these are crucial as preparation for sitting in meditation.

<p>SHATKRIYAS Neti wash Trataka Kapalabhati</p> <p>MUDRAS for MEDITATION Jnana, Variations Kechari mudra Ashwini mudra</p> <p>STANDING Overhead Stretch Side Stretches Forward Bending Backward Bending Torso Twist Triangle Tree</p> <p>SITTING Squatting Leg Cradles Butterfly Posterior Stretches Twists</p>	<p>BACKWARD BENDING Simple Back Bending Bridge Cobra Crocodile Locust Bow or Half Bow</p> <p>FORWARD BENDING Hand to Foot / Simple Forward Bending Head-to-Knee Child's Pose Posterior Stretch Spread Leg Stretches</p> <p>INVERTED Plow Shoulderstand Headstand</p> <p>MEDITATION POSTURES Cushion and seat variations Head, neck, and trunk Easy and adaptations Auspicious, Accomplished Lotus, Half Lotus</p>
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Sun salutation

- (1) Mountain
- (2) Back bend
- (3) Forward bend
- (4) Lunge
- (5) Plank
- (6) Stick
- (7) Upward dog
- (8) Downward dog
- (9) Lunge
- (10) Forward bend
- (11) Back bend
- (12) Mountain

Stretching into postures

As you perform the postures, stretch into the postures as best you can, along with breathing into the posture. This process of *stretching into* is also done with breathing and mantra for meditation. For example, in a simple forward bend, stretch just a little lower into the bend each time you exhale with breath. Then inhale and follow that with another exhalation that again stretches a little further into the bend. Notice that your *mind* also feels as if it is *stretching* a little deeper inward into stillness with each bend and breath.

Later, during the breathing practices, you will also *stretch* into the exhalations with mind, but then without a physical bend of the body. In a similar felt way, you will later do the same thing with allowing awareness to *stretch* into silence during meditation, such as at the end of remembering an exhaled inner AUM followed by *stretching* into the silence in the heart center.

STEP 3) Relaxation

After doing your simple stretches, joints and glands exercises, or hatha yoga postures, then do some form of relaxation in shavasana, the corpse posture. Following are a few different varieties of these practices. Do the one that feels comfortable and which matches the time you have available in your current meditation session.

Tense and release

This practice is very simple to do and will probably take no more than a couple minutes (longer if it is comfortable). The basic practice is simply to tense muscle groups, and then release the tension. You may find it comfortable to go through the sequence only one time, or to go through it several times. Do both the tensing and the releasing with full awareness. There is no need to

tense at 100% of your capacity—about 50% of your capacity to tense will be sufficient. It is best to maintain breath awareness as you do the practices. You will come to experience the way in which breath is a manifestation of energy, and how that energy flows throughout your being.

- First, tense all of the muscles of the face, including forehead, cheeks, mouth, and upper neck. Then release with full awareness. You will notice the relaxation.
- Gently roll the head from side to side, with awareness of the tightening muscles, and the feeling of release.
- Tighten the shoulders, pulling them upwards and forwards. Then release.
- Tense the entire right arm, from the shoulder down through the fingers. Do this without making a fist or lifting your arm off of the floor. Allow your attention to be deep inside the arm, not just on the surface. Then release slowly, with awareness.
- Tense the left arm in the same way, and observe the release.
- Gently tense the muscles of the chest and the abdomen, while continuing to breathe without holding the breath. Then release.
- Tense and release the right hips and the buttocks.
- Tense and release the right leg, down through the feet and toes in the same way that the right arm was tensed and released.
- Tense and release the left hips and buttocks.
- Tense and release the left leg.
- While no longer tensing any muscles, allow your attention to drift back up through the legs, through the abdomen and chest, through the arms, and back to the face.

After completing the Tense and Release practice, you might want to do it again, go on to the Complete Relaxation, or proceed to the next phase of Yoga Meditation, which is working more directly with the breath, such as starting with breath awareness or diaphragmatic breathing.

Complete relaxation

The Complete Relaxation is an excellent practice to do before meditation. It is subtler than the Tense and Release practice above. Following is one of many versions of this practice:

Lie in the corpse posture with your eyes closed. Lie in such a way that your head, neck, and trunk are aligned. You want your spine to be straight, not turned left or right anywhere along the length of the spine. It is most comfortable to be lying on a soft surface, such as a folded blanket placed on top of a rug. To lie in a bed may not give enough support to your back and body. A thin cushion, maybe an inch or two, makes a nice support for your head. Allow the breath to be smooth, slow, and with no noise or pauses.

- Allow your attention to move through your head and face, including the top of the head, forehead, eyebrows, eyes, cheekbones, and nostrils.

- Be aware of the breath at the nostrils for several breaths.
- Continue to survey mouth, jaws and chin.
- Then survey the neck and throat, shoulders, arms, elbows, wrists, hands, fingers, and fingertips.
- Feel as though you are inhaling from the tips of the fingers up to the shoulders, and then exhaling back to the finger tips. Do this several times.
- Then move your attention from the fingers, back through the hands, wrists, lower arms, upper arms, shoulders, upper back and chest.
- Concentrate at the center of the chest, and exhale and inhale completely several times.
- Be aware of the stomach, abdomen, lower back, hips, thighs, knees, calves, ankles, feet, and toes.
- Exhale as if your whole body is exhaling, and inhale as if your whole body is inhaling. As you exhale, let go of all tension, worries, and anxieties. Inhale as if you are inhaling new energy, as well as a sense of peace and relaxation. Exhale and inhale several times.
- Then move your attention from the toes to the feet, ankles, calves, thighs, knees, hips, lower back, abdomen, stomach and chest.
- Concentrate at the center of the chest, and exhale and inhale completely several times.
- Survey the upper back, shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, wrists, hands, fingers, and fingertips.
- Feel as though you are inhaling from the tips of the fingers up to the shoulders, and then exhaling back to the finger tips. Do this several times.
- Then move your attention from the fingers, back through the hands, wrists, lower arms, upper arms, shoulders, neck, throat, chin, jaws, mouth, and nostrils.
- Be aware of the breath at the nostrils for several breaths.
- Move your attention to the cheekbones, eyes, eyebrows, forehead and the top of the head.
- For about one minute, allow your attention to be aware of the smooth, slow, serene flow of the breath. Let your mind make a gentle, conscious effort to guide the breath so that it is smooth, calm, deep, and without any noise or jerkiness.

The Complete Relaxation can be done in a broad range of time frames, shorter or longer. It is very useful to learn to do this as slowly as the time for *one* exhalation down through the body, and *one* inhalation back up to the top of the head. To do the practice over about 3-4 minutes can be very relaxing, whether for a quick break in daily life, or preparation for meditation. If it is comfortable for you, spending a much longer amount of time can bring tremendous insights about the nature of your inner being, as well as relaxation, and preparation for deep meditation. In other words, *experiment* with different periods of time for doing this practice.

61-Points

The 61-Points exercise is subtler than the Tension/Release or Complete Relaxation practices. You will find that this leads you to a deeper state of calm and quiet.

As you go through the points, you may experience the points as gross body, such as skin, muscles, or bone, or you may experience the points as a feeling awareness. However you experience the points is okay—you cannot do it wrong. If you "see" with your inner eye, that's okay. If you do not "see" with your inner eye, that's okay too. You may experience darkness, or you may experience light, such as a point of light like a blue star. Any way that you experience it is okay. Just gradually, systematically learn where the points are and move from one to the next.

To move from one point to the next every couple seconds, or one or two breaths should be a comfortable speed. If you move too slow, you may find your attention drifts away, so it is better to go just a bit faster through the points. If you go too fast, you will have the benefit of easily moving through the points, but may lack depth in the practice. It is best to experiment with the timing.

- Forehead, throat
- Right shoulder, right elbow, right wrist, tip of right thumb, tip of right index finger, tip of right middle finger, tip of right ring finger, tip of right little finger, right wrist, right elbow, right shoulder, throat
- Left shoulder, left elbow, left wrist, tip of left thumb, tip of left index finger, tip of left middle finger, tip of left ring finger, tip of left little finger, left wrist, left elbow, left shoulder
- Throat, space between the breasts, right breast, space between the breasts, left breast, space between the breasts, navel, lower abdomen
- Right hip, right knee, right ankle, tip of the right big toe, tip of the right second toe, tip of the right middle toe, tip of the right fourth toe, tip of the right little toe, right ankle, right knee, right hip, lower abdomen
- Left hip, left knee, left ankle, tip of the left big toe, tip of the left second toe, tip of the left middle toe, tip of the left fourth toe, tip of the left little toe, left ankle, left knee, left hip
- Lower abdomen, navel, space between the breasts, throat, forehead

The 61-Points exercise is an excellent practice for entering yoga nidra, which is a state where you are in deep sleep, yet are awake. Yoga nidra is deeply relaxing, and is used by the yogis to deal with samskaras (the deep impressions that drive karma) in their latent form. A complete relaxation is on track 3 of the CD *Yoga Nidra: Extreme Relaxation of Conscious Deep Sleep*.

Sushumna kriya in shavasana

Sushumna kriya is practicing awareness moving up and down the subtle spine known as sushumna. Sushumna is the thin stream or nadi of light and consciousness that is often shown as going vertically through the chakras in artists' representations of chakras. Sushumna is actually the substratum of the subtlest nadi out of which the chakras form, rather than being a separate stream that merely *pierces* the chakras as it may appear in the pictures.

Kriya means "action", as in the action of doing practices. As a relaxation practice, this is done in the corpse posture (shavasana). It is also done as part of the meditation practice in a seated posture, as described later in this paper. Sushumna kriya can be done with simple awareness, with Sohum mantra (So going up and Hum going down), or with Om mantra (AUM and silence going up, and then AUM and silence going down).

One method of this practice is with exhalation going downward to the point of the first chakra, the perineum, the flat space between the anus and the genital area. Another method moves awareness down between the legs to a point between the two feet or toes. Still another method is to allow attention downward between the legs as far as attention can go, as far as your conception of infinity allows, past the feet. In each of these methods, attention comes upward to the crown of the head or beyond.

A most important part of sushumna kriya is to make the transition between breaths in such a way that you eliminate the pause between the breaths. This means smoothly transitioning between exhalation and inhalation to eliminate any pause that might otherwise happen. It also means smoothly transitioning between inhalation and exhalation in a way that eliminates any potential pause. This elimination of the pauses brings an incredible calm to the mind and is preparation for very deep meditation.

STEP 4) Breathing and Pranayama

All of the breathing practices which follow systematically balance the energy systems and lead to sushumna awakening, where the subtle energy flows through the subtle spine. This is the most immediate sign that the mind is truly ready to meditate. When sushumna is awakened the two nostrils flow evenly; this is the barometer for knowing your current state of sushumna awakening. It is called *sandhya*, which is the wedding of sun and moon, of pingala and ida, the right and left flowing energies. It leads to *sukhamana*, the joyous mind, which then wants to do nothing but sit quietly for meditation.

In the inner journey of meditation it can fairly be said that the entire purpose of all the preliminary practices is the awakening of sushumna, and while the other practices prepare one, it is breathing which most immediately leads to sushumna awakening.

Breath awareness - removal of irregularities

The whole process of breathing practices and pranayama begins with breath awareness and the removal of irregularities. It means making the breath smooth, with no jerkiness. Thought bubbles arising from the unconscious cause jerks in the breath and jerks in the breath lead to bumps in the flow of the mind. There are no pauses created between the breaths. Intentional retention of breath is a special exercise, but the default practice of breathing is smooth, with no irregularities and no pauses. Breath is also allowed to be comfortably slow. Typical untrained breath is about 15-20 breaths per minute, whereas trained yogic breath is well under 10 breaths per minute, often under 5-6 breaths per minute for those who have practiced for some time.

Diaphragmatic breathing, even breathing

First, establish diaphragmatic breathing with even breathing, where the exhalation and inhalation are of equal duration. To initially practice this, you may silently count internally, such as 1-2-3-4 with exhalation and 1-2-3-4 with inhalation. Count to whatever number feels natural and comfortable.

It is essential to find the actual location of the diaphragm. On the SwamiJ.com website there is an article on diaphragmatic breathing that has graphs, photos, and videos to help make this clear. Start with SwamiJ.com/breath.htm and explore the links from there.

You may find that simple diaphragmatic breathing is your complete meditation for a while, as you establish this as a comfortable habit. It is very useful in calming the autonomic nervous system and quieting the mind. This also has a very beneficial effect on the immune system, as well as preparing one for meditation.

Two-to-one breathing

Gradually learn to elongated the exhalation such that it is twice as long as the inhalation. Initially you may find it comfortable to extend the exhalation only a little, but not quite at the two-to-one ratio. As with even breathing, experiment to find your own comfortable level or count. Two-to-one breathing is a special practice, and is not the default breath during the day; that default breath is simple even diaphragmatic breathing.

Complete breath

The yogic complete breath (deerghswasam) is an exercise that invigorates the nervous system and prana. It involves steadily moving filling of the lungs from the abdomen, through the diaphragm, then the chest, and finally the clavicles raising to complete a full inhalation. Then there is a steady releasing from the clavicles, through the chest, emptying with the diaphragm, and finally complete emptying with the abdomen pushing in. Although it is not rushed, it is done rather quickly without hesitation at any of the steps along the way. There is also no retention; at

the completion of the inhalation, the breath is reversed and the breath is smoothly and steadily exhaled through the steps.

Two or three well executed complete breaths can be sufficient initially for the breathing portion of the systematic practice. Until you add the other practices this can hold the space in the totality of the practice, while itself being very useful. If you have had a very busy day and your mind is running around here and there, even a few complete breaths can break the noisy log jam of the mind and bring the beginnings of silence.

Later, as you learn and integrate agni sara, kapalabhati, and bhastrika, you may find that the complete breath is an excellent bridge between these other practices. For example, you may work up to 100 agnisaras, follow that with one or two complete breaths, and then go on to 100 kapalabhati breaths. The same can be done between kapalabhati and bhastrika.

Agnisara

You should know, understand, and do agnisara. It is a very unique and useful exercise that has the benefits of all the other exercises. If you cannot do any other physical exercise on a particular day, at least do this one exercise. It cures many diseases according to Swami Rama.

Agnisara is different from the stomach lift and it is important not to confuse it. Unlike the stomach lift, which focuses at the navel center, agnisara is an exercise for the lower abdomen and pelvic region. It is called “agnisara” because it energizes the entire solar system of the body. The solar system is the largest network in the human body and agnisara provides warmth to this entire system.

- To do agnisara, stand with your feet about six inches apart and rest the weight of your body through your arms on your knees, keeping the back relaxed.
- To help with the natural flow of the systematic process being described here, agnisara can also be done in a seated posture so that it easily flows into kapalabhati and bhastrika.
- Then as you exhale, contract the muscles in the *lower* abdomen and pull them *in* and *up*. There is a rolling sensation from the point immediately above the pubic bone, rolling up to the navel.
- As you inhale, you gently release the muscles, allowing the lower abdomen to return to its natural position.

When you pull in the abdomen it helps you to expel all the waste gasses of the lungs. When you allow the abdomen to come out, it creates more space in your lungs for oxygen. You should make this exercise a habit.

To do agnisara correctly, coordinate it with your normal breathing. You exhale, pulling in and up and you inhale and release. Exhaling, you contract the lower abdominal muscles and the area just above the pelvis, drawing them inward and upward, more tightly; and then inhaling, you release. It is not a stomach lift; it involves the lower abdomen. This is the real agnisara.

The exercise starts with the pelvis and ends at the pelvis. If you can do agnisara 100 to 150 times a day, you do not need any other exercise. You will have so much energy you will feel like you are floating. It creates perfect digestion and terrific energy. You will become more efficient in any field. Begin the practice of agnisara with twenty-five repetitions and increase to beyond a hundred. This exercise should not be done by pregnant or menstruating women.

It is essential that you *find* the muscles with which you do agnisara. To help find them, lie on your back and slightly move your legs, as if you are going to raise your heels off the floor. You don't actually have to pick up your legs or feet to *feel* the tightening of the muscles immediately above the pubic bone. Create a memory of that feeling and use those muscles to *push in and roll up these muscles* to do agnisara. Agnisara is just about impossible to describe in written words, so you will want to have personal coaching to learn the technique.

Ujjayi and Brahmari

Sitting in stable posture, inhale through the nostrils so that it is felt on the roof of the palate, making a soft, continuous sobbing audible sound with mental *Sooo....* Exhale with a mental *Hummm....* *Brahmari* (the bee) is similar, with an audible buzzing sound on exhalation, like the sound of a bee; this can also be done silently in the mind with exhalation.

Kapalabhati

Also called the "Shining Skull" this practice emphasizes the exhalation in a very quick, thrusting motion at the base of the abdomen. The inhalation is then allow to release naturally. Unless there are health problems, most people can do this practice. To do a few before meditation, such as 10-20 or so can have a centering effect. Gradually work up to 25, and then up to 100 or more over months or years, respecting your own comfortable capacity. This can then be gradually increased to three rounds of 100 repetitions. In the systematic practice, first do agnisara, then kapalabhati, and follow that with bhastrika. Between these practices it may be comfortable and useful to do one or two complete breaths as a transition.

Bhastrika

Also called the bellows, bhastrika is a middle section breath, from the diaphragm. If one does a few of them, say about 10-20, it can have a calming, balancing effect. If more are done, such as in the 100's or more, it is best that one have a solid foundation of good health and stabilized mind. The inhalation and exhalation are both done with an equal amount of pressure, in that same way that you may operate a handheld bellows used to stoke a fire. Gradually increase to 100 repetitions, and then to three cycles of 100 each.

In the systematic practice, bhastrika comes after kapalabhati. If it is comfortable you may wish to bridge these with one or two complete breaths. After the bhastrika practice you may want to do nadi shodhana or go directly on to the meditation phase of the systematic practice.

Nadi Shodhana

Nadi Shodhana is the purifying of the energy channels or nadis. It means balancing the right and left energies (ida and pingala) so that the central channel (sushumna) is flowing.

There are many variations of *nadi shodhana*, or *alternate nostril breathing*. To learn alternate nostril breathing is a simple process which is very effective for helping to calm the nervous system and prepare the mind for meditation. Start with method #1 below, first exhaling (marked “Exhale”) with the active (more “open”) nostril, then inhale (marked “Inhale”) with the passive (less “open”) nostril. After about two months, add the second and third methods until you are doing some of all three. That is the ideal; few are willing to wait several months to go through this learning process. However, doing all three methods in sequence is very useful, something you will notice for yourself by trying it.

<u>METHOD #1</u>		<u>METHOD #2</u>		<u>METHOD #3</u>	
<u>Active</u>	<u>Passive</u>	<u>Active</u>	<u>Passive</u>	<u>Active</u>	<u>Passive</u>
Exhale		Exhale		Exhale	
	Inhale	Inhale		Inhale	
Exhale			Exhale	Exhale	
	Inhale		Inhale	Inhale	
Exhale		Exhale		Exhale	
	Inhale	Inhale		Inhale	
	Exhale		Exhale		Exhale
Inhale			Inhale		Inhale
	Exhale	Exhale		Exhale	
Inhale		Inhale		Inhale	
	Exhale		Exhale		Exhale
Inhale			Inhale		Inhale

Initially nadi shodhana can be done with the fingers (such as thumb and ring finger) pressing against the sides of the nostrils to alternate the flow of air in the breath (or using thumb and finger to ‘plug’ the nostrils). However, it is best to do this mentally, breathing only with a shift of awareness from one to the other. If a nostril is blocked or not flowing totally freely, attention can be placed on that nostril and it will generally open within a few breaths.

When breath is flowing evening in both left and right nostrils, prana is flowing through the central channel of sushumna and the mind does not want to do anything other than meditate.

Yoga Sutras on pranayama

Yoga Sutras 2.49-2.53 (from SwamiJ.com interpretive translation; see the website or book for more detailed explanations.)

2.49 Once that perfected posture has been achieved, the slowing or braking of the force behind, and of unregulated movement of inhalation and exhalation is called breath control and expansion of prana (pranayama), which leads to the absence of the awareness of both, and is the fourth of the eight rungs.

2.50 That pranayama has three aspects of external or outward flow (exhalation), internal or inward flow (inhalation), and the third, which is the absence of both during the transition between them, and is known as fixedness, retention, or suspension. These are regulated by place, time, and number, with breath becoming slow and subtle.

2.51 The fourth pranayama is that continuous prana which surpasses, is beyond, or behind those others that operate in the exterior and interior realms or fields.

2.52 Through that pranayama the veil of karmasheya (2.12) that covers the inner illumination or light is thinned, diminishes and vanishes.

2.53 Through these practices and processes of pranayama, which is the fourth of the eight steps, the mind acquires or develops the fitness, qualification, or capability for true concentration (dharana), which is itself the sixth of the steps. [Note that this preparation for rung six seems to skip over rung five, which is *pratyahara* or withdrawal of the senses (indriyas). Vyasa explains that this is like the worker bees following the queen bee whenever and wherever she goes. With the concentration or *dharana* (rung six) that comes as a result of this kind of pranayama (rung four), the ten indriyas automatically come racing behind without there being some separate technique being needed to accomplish this.]

Swami Rama on sushumna awakening

In the Kathopanishad, the King of Death says, “One who can enter sushumna at the time of death can attain Brahman, the highest goal of life. All other paths are paths of rebirth. Sushumna is the key point of liberation. From the sahasrara or crown chakra, he rises finally to the realm of the absolute Brahman.”¹

Put a tape recorder by your nose and inhale and exhale. You will hear the sound “ham-sa,” a mantra. This is your breath sound. It means “I am that.” The breath is singing the sound, “I am that, I am that, I am that”; you are making a melody of that. The breath is constantly singing this

¹ *Life Here and Hereafter*

perennial sound, so-ham. How do we awaken kundalini-shakti? We awaken it in two stages: first by actually awakening it, and second by learning to lead it. To awaken kundalini there is a very small and succinct technique. To awaken the fire, you blow on it. The sound that arises with that blowing is the mantra so-ham, so-ham, so-ham.¹

Sushumna application is the most important factor in spiritual practice.

According to the yogic scriptures, there are 72,000 nadis, or energy channels. Among them, ida, pingala, and sushumna are the most important. As long as the mind is outward, only ida and pingala remain active. But when the mind is calm and tranquil, *sushumna*, the central channel, is awakened. The joy derived from the mind traveling through the sushumna channel is unique; it cannot be compared with any sensory pleasure. Because of that inner joy, the mind loses its taste for worldly pleasures. Sushumna application is the most important factor in spiritual practice. The moment sushumna is awakened, the mind longs to enter the inner world. When the flow of ida and pingala is directed toward sushumna, and distractions are thereby removed, meditation flows by itself.²

To begin the process of sushumna awakening, focus the mind on the breath as it is felt between the two nostrils. When both nostrils flow freely, that is called sandhya, the wedding of the sun and the moon, or between pingala and ida. Once this experience can be maintained for five minutes, the student has crossed a great barrier, and the mind has attained some one-pointedness. Then the mind becomes focused inward.³

When students of meditation learn to apply sushumna, then they really start practicing meditation, and meditation becomes a joyful experience.⁴

When you attempt sushumna application, ask your mind to focus at the nose bridge. Let your thoughts come and do not be afraid. The whole unconscious mind will become active and bring forward many hidden and forgotten things. Let distracting thoughts come forward, and then allow them to go. You have to go through that process of release in meditation therapy. This is a very good process. After a while, a time will come when no thought patterns disturb you, and you can watch your thoughts. Then, you can witness your whole life. If a disturbing thought comes, you allow it to go away. The first step in sushumna application is learning to change the flow of breath with your mental ability. There are many mechanical methods by which you can do this, but they are not actually helpful; they are not really recommended. To really accomplish this process, you must learn to create a relaxed focus on the right or left nostril. If the nostril is blocked, but not due to some condition like sinusitis, then when the mind focuses on it, that nostril will become active because of the focus of the mind.

¹ *Path of Fire and Light, Volume 2*

² *A Call to Humanity*

³ *Meditation and Its Practice*

⁴ *Choosing a Path*

The first step in sushumna application is learning to change the flow of breath with your mental ability.

When you have learned to change the flow of the nostrils with your mind, then after some time, a time comes when both nostrils begin flowing evenly. This may take some months or perhaps a year, depending on your capacity and the burning desire within you. When the nostrils flow evenly, the mind cannot worry, because it is disconnected from the senses. Mind does not know how to worry then. It attains a state of joy called *sukhamana*, the joyous mind. That state of mind is conducive to deep meditation. This is an accurate and effective procedure for you to follow, and it is important not to rush or be impatient. The science of breath actually ends with sushumna application.¹

For meditation, the finest of all breathing exercises is sushumna application. When you learn how to apply sushumna, there is no way for your mind to go anywhere but into the inner journey. According to the ancient yoga manuals and the science of yoga, there are three important points in the inward journey. The cream of the yoga science is to learn first to apply sushumna; next to awaken kundalini and lead her to the highest dimension; and then to attain the knowledge of the Absolute. This is the entire purpose of the yoga system.²

Stretching into breath

During diaphragmatic breathing and sushumna kriya, breathe as though you are *stretching inward* with and *elongating* each exhalation. This is like the physical stretching deeper into an asana or posture with each exhalation, as was mentioned in the section above on the body. Each inward *stretch* with exhalation brings a greater degree of relaxation of the body and calmness of the mind. Similarly, when you are later doing the meditation phase, you will *stretch* into the silence after the end of mantra, such as the stillness after the *Hum* exhalation of *Sohum* mantra, or the stillness at the end of an inner exhaled *AUM* mantra.

STEP 5) Meditation

Sitting

A comment by Swami Rama well captures the spirit of sitting posture for meditation. He says that he was in his 30's before he realized that the only thing which mattered about sitting posture is the alignment of the head, neck, and trunk (meaning the spine), and that arms, legs, hands and feet don't really matter very much. Those are positioned in whatever way is comfortable, while the greater emphasis is on having a properly aligned spine.

¹ *Path of Fire and Light, Volume 2*

² *Path of Fire and Light, Volume 2*

Surely it is useful to learn and practice proper postures such as *sukhasana* (easy posture), *swastikasana* (auspicious posture), and *siddhasana* (accomplished posture), but this emphasis on the spine is so very important that it serves both beginners and advanced meditators alike. Even sitting straight in a chair (*maitriyasana*, the friendship pose) is a good enough posture, provided the spine is aligned properly.

There are two dimensions to be mindful of, which will greatly help your sitting posture if sitting on the floor. One is the height of your cushion or seat. Too low a height will require you to strain your back to sit straight. Too high a seat may cause discomfort or pain. Find the height that is just right for you for now. Adjust it gradually over time. The other dimension is the distance your legs are apart. This can be assessed by how far your knees are apart. This gives a measure of how 'open' your hips are, which is a big factor in comfort. Hatha yoga asanas (postures) that work with the spine and the hips are extremely useful.

The cushion or seat should be a good combination of *firm* for support, yet *soft* in the immediate area of the sitz bones, the two pointed bones that support your weight when sitting (the proper name is 'sitz' bones, not 'sit' bones or 'sitting' bones). Wrapping a board in a thick wool blanket can form a nice seat. Such a wool blanket can also be folded in a variety of ways without using boards and still provide comfort and support. Large, squishy cushions may feel great when sitting around your house watching television, but they do not provide the proper support for one who is serious about advancing in meditation.

It is useful to remember that in the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali explains that your sitting posture should have two features: it should be both steady and straight, and comfortable at the same time. Initially, this may sound impossible to be steady *and* comfortable, with comfort seeming out of reach. It is important to be patient with your sitting posture and to recognize that it evolves gradually and gently over time. Do the best you can with balancing straight, steady, and comfortable. If you are not comfortable, you will definitely not be able to even get started in real meditation.

Meditation on body

After the preparation practices of postures, relaxation, and breathing, you move to meditation itself. The first phase of the meditation process is to meditate on the body (then breath, mind, and beyond). You may move your awareness systematically through the body as in the complete relaxation above, or you may have a global awareness of your whole body, moving attention here and there as you are drawn to this or that part. It is very useful to explore the body with your attention the way you may explore in nature, such as when walking along a beach or in a forest, simply noticing whatever you notice. Be aware of sensations and inner processes as you explore your body.

If you have the patience to practice systematically, focus on body meditation for a month or two before moving on with meditation on breath and the mind. Few people have the patience for this, but as an alternative, please spend a solid 5-10 minutes at the beginning of your meditation being only aware of the body. If anything else draws your attention, whether breath, mantra, or any

thoughts in the mind, just ignore them and stay with body awareness. It is amazing how extremely useful this body phase of meditation is to the whole process of meditation.

If you want to run an experiment to see how effective this is, set a cooking timer for 10-20 minutes and do nothing during that period other than be aware of your body. Your own experience will tell you the value of this.

Sushumna kriya

Sushumna kriya is practicing awareness moving up and down the subtle spine known as sushumna. Sushumna is the thin stream or nadi of light and consciousness that is often shown as going vertically through the chakras in artists' representations of chakras. Sushumna is actually the substratum of the subtlest nadi out of which the chakras form, rather than being a separate stream that merely pierces the chakras as it may appear in the pictures. Gently inhale as if awareness is moving up the subtle spine, and exhale as if awareness is moving down to the base.

Kriya means "action", as in the action of doing practices. This is done either in the corpse posture (*shavasana*) or in any of the *seated* postures used for meditation. It can be done with simple awareness, with *Sohum* mantra (*So* going up and *Hum* going down), or with *Om* mantra (*AUM* and silence going up, and then *AUM* and *silence* going down).

In the systematic practice being described here, this sushumna kriya is done after the completion of the breathing and pranayama series, and before the one-pointed meditation that is intended to lead you beyond the mind. Seated in your meditation posture, this *sushumna kriya* may be an end in itself in your meditation practice. This practice alone can take you very far in your journey of meditation and awakening. Or, it may be used as a bridge leading to the subtler meditations.

Sushumna awakening

After the sushumna kriya described above, gently shift your attention to the *feel* (cognitive sense of touch) of air flowing in the nostrils. Attention is allowed to gently rest on the bridge between the nostrils (where the tissue between the nostrils meets the space above the upper lip). This can be done with *So* in the mind on inhalation, and *Hum* in the mind on exhalation. Alternatively, this can be with *Aum* on both inhalation and exhalation. See the description of *Sohum* and *Om* later in this article.

While doing this sushumna awakening practice, if you notice that one of your nostrils is slightly closed in relation to the other, shift your attention to resting only on that closed nostril. You will notice that it starts to open, and that when both nostrils are flowing freely there is a strong feeling of peace, tranquility, and one-pointedness in the mind. It is called *sukhamana*, joyous mind.

Remember to *stretch* into the exhalation, as described above.

Three stages of inspecting within

There are three stages of inspecting within to reduce the colorings and impact of latent impressions or samskaras:

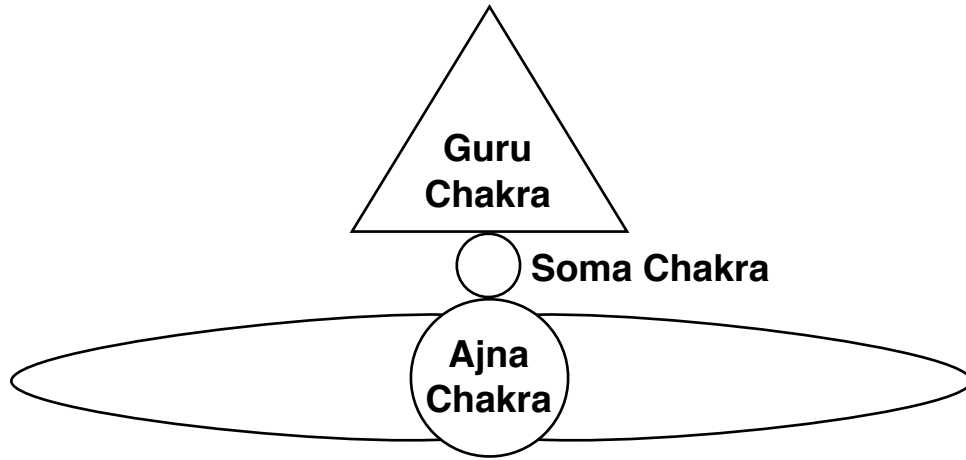
- (1) **To let go:** The first stage is developing the habit to let go when thoughts arise from the unconscious. It is a natural process for impressions to come forward from the unconscious into the conscious. If we do not engage them, it is also their natural habit to recede back into the latent storehouse of chitta from where they arose. However, most of us have become conditioned to grab onto those impressions and be drawn into long trains of such impressions. It is like the engine of a train, which then pulls along lots of boxcars. Our rising impression in mind pulls lots of other thoughts into the mental drama, and off we go with a long train of thoughts. However, by paying attention to this process we can cultivate a new habit, and that is, when an initial impression comes forward, we naturally and immediately let it go. This is not meant as a mere technique, but rather, literally becomes a *new habit* whereby thoughts which naturally *come* also naturally *go*. This is a highly transformative habit to cultivate.
- (2) **To witness:** Once we have developed that habit of letting go, the next process to cultivate is to neutrally witness all of those deep impressions as they come and go, with none of them having the power to drag us into a train of thoughts. These are initial thought impressions, which would otherwise turn into trains of thoughts and emotions; often worry. It is somewhat like having lots of book covers, without ever opening the books and getting lost in all the stories on the pages. Cover after cover after cover, they come and go. We neutrally witness the stream of covers.
- (3) **To inspect:** The third stage rests on the solid foundation of the first two, learning to let go and to witness. Once you can truly witness the impressions in a neutral way, you can then call back individual engines and covers to inspect their true nature, once again, without getting caught up in the trains or the stories. We see the coloring of attraction, aversion, and fear, and how we have mistakenly taken these on as identities of *who I am*. They lose their power gradually over time (This attenuation is referred to in Yoga Sutras 1.2 and 2.4).

This process of *letting go*, *witnessing*, and *inspecting* within allows one to uncover and remove the colorings of the deep impressions that are at the source of actions called *karma*. Another method is through guru chakra, which is described below. These two methods are both employed by the sadhaka (practitioner) of the systematic meditation of the tradition. By either method the thoughts eventually exhaust themselves, and you can then go beyond the unconscious mind.

Guru chakra

Beyond the first six chakras, between there and the crown chakra (sahasrara chakra), many other chakras, levels, or layers of reality are experienced. For the aspirant who is willing to do so, the *guru chakra* or *jnana chakra* is used to purify the mind and to bring down spiritual truths. "Gu" means darkness and "ru" means light. Guru is the light that dispels the darkness of ignorance.

Guru is not any person, although guru may operate through a person. Guru is actually the higher knowledge itself.



- (1) Ajna chakra: Located in the space between the eyebrows. Close your eyes and press into that space with the tip of a fingernail. Allow your attention to rest in that felt place, while allowing your eyes to remain in a level, straightforward position. It is a habit of mind to pull the physical eyes along to the place where attention goes, but we want to disconnect the eyes from the attention so that the attention is free to rest in the space on its own.
- (2) Soma chakra: Another finger width above is the location of the soma chakra. It can take some considerable amount of time to find this place with inner awareness. Soma is thought to be an intoxicating plant that has some spiritual value, whereas the yogi finds the real soma, the inner soma. The joy of meditation on soma chakra is one of divine intoxication.
- (3) Guru chakra: Another two finger widths above soma chakra is the location of the center of the triangular shaped guru or jnana chakra. Experientially, this is much higher in the forehead than the ajna chakra. A common mistake is to have attention in the space immediately in front of the eyes and to merely visualize a triangle. You want to explore and find the real guru chakra with your attention, remembering again to disconnect from the positioning of the eyes so that it is awareness itself that is on the guru chakra.

Guru chakra is the doorway to that knowledge, to the wisdom and guidance of the teacher within. The sixth chakra, at the eyebrow center, is called ajna chakra, which includes "a" and "jna", which means the center *without* knowledge or with *little* knowledge ("a" is *without* or *little* and "jna" is *knowledge*). Guru chakra is experienced in the forehead, and is also called *jnana* chakra, or the center *with* knowledge. The knowledge of ajna is *lower* knowledge, while the knowledge of jnana is *higher* knowledge, and is equated to being the pure *light* of knowledge.

The Yogi invites all of the thoughts and samskaras to arise in the mind field of ajna chakra and offers them into the higher knowledge, the triangular shaped fire of guru or jnana chakra (ajna and guru chakras are also called *drikuti* and *trikuti* respectively). Like ice melting back into its form of water, the colorings of attraction, aversion and fear fall away in the inner fire. It has also been likened to gold being purified in a fire, whereby the dross burns away, allowing the gold to become purer. From that process the pathway is cleared, and higher wisdom and teachings come

down to the ajna. Eventually, awareness itself travels upward, receding through and beyond, to that which is the final abode, the absolute reality, the union of Shiva and Shakti.

It may initially seem that this practice is only inner visualization. It is actually a literal practice dealing with the energy levels of the colorings (kleshas). Like all discussions of practice relating to energy, the energy itself might not be experienced as such initially, though it will in time. In a sense, it really doesn't matter how you conceptualize the practice; it is effective in any case.

In the systematic meditation sequence you practice guru chakra purifying after the breathing sequence, and before your meditation itself. This is done after agnisara, kapalabhati, and bhastrika, for example. The specific suggestions about meditation methods are described in the forthcoming sections.

Swami Rama on guru chakra

Swami Rama describes the use of guru chakra in each of these videos:

- (1) Mundaka Upanishad, lecture 8
- (2) Yoga Sutras, lecture 8 (last 10 minutes or so)
- (3) Saundaryalahari, lecture 4 (of 4) (last 10-15 minutes)

Space in which to meditate

After all of the preparation with body, breath, and mind, attention comes to rest in a one-pointed space, generally the space between the breasts or between the eyebrows, depending on one's personality predisposition as being towards either emotions (the heart center or chakra) or thinking (the eyebrow center or chakra). If one is experiencing low energy of body or mind, or having health issues, the navel center may be used as the space for meditation. Highly creative people find the throat center or chakra to be a fitting place of meditation.

If practicing the guru chakra purifying method in a particular meditation session, you will have done that before moving into this meditation phase of the systematic practice. As you are reading these suggestions, meditation may seem a little complicated by now. This is where one-to-one coaching can be extremely useful, helping to keep the systematic process understandable and simple.

Key to breaking the bondage of time, space, and causation

One of the common ways to describe an enlightened state is that it transcends time, space, and causation. To transcend time, space, and causation, the simplest of these three to regulate is space. To successfully choose to instantly be in the *now* can be quite difficult. To succeed in decisively breaking the chains of thoughts known as the process of *causation* can be even more difficult.

However, while it is necessarily easy to do, it is much *easier* to bring attention inside of a *space* than to directly regulate time and causation. By regulating *space*, focusing attention inside of any of the centers or chakras just mentioned, time naturally shifts to *now*, and the sequencing process of mind (causation) naturally *ends* during that period of meditation. Mind does not like to rest in a single space, especially a *circle* such as the chakras (wheels), but training it to do so is a significant key to breaking the bondage of not only space, but also time and causation. It is extremely important to gently, mindfully practice allowing your attention to gently rest in these spaces for meditation.

Try this even for a few seconds or a minute and notice what happens. If you consciously focus your attention *gently* in one of these spaces mentioned above, such as in your heart center, you will probably notice that your sense of time easily and quickly comes into the *present* and that an otherwise active or noisy mind moves towards *stillness*.

Listening to Om mantra, Sohum mantra, or guru mantra

For meditation on mantra, whether using Om, Sohum, or an initiatory guru mantra, the mantra is allowed to arise and repeat itself and then to recede into silence, where the meaning or essence of the mantra is remembered. It is somewhat like *feeling* the emotion of love rather than just repeating the word like a parrot, “love, love, love, love....” In the silence you experience the *meaning* of *love* or *mantra*, that meaning being the reason for remembering the mantra in the first place.

See the later sections of this paper for descriptions of some of the mantras. Pay particular attention to the explanation of meditation on tripura, the one in the three cities (tri=three; pura=cities) which is represented in most of the mantras we use.

Stretching into mantra

As has already been mentioned with postures and breathing, you also *stretch* into the silence along with remembering mantra in your mind. With only a little practice, this is very easy to experience. Allow your awareness to gently and slowly *stretch into* the stillness and silence at the end of the *Hum* of *Sohum* mantra or *after* the three phases of the vibration of *AUM* mantra. Practice this and you will find the great fruits for yourself, in your own direct experience.

See the descriptions below of tripura for descriptions of these three phases. I can't cram the whole description here in this one section; something has to come first, and something else second. So, get the idea of meditation on mantra here, in this section, and then go to the section on mantras to see the descriptions of the mantras themselves. Please review closely and repeatedly the descriptions of tripura, the one that operates in the three cities. The fruits to your meditations and contemplations will be well worth the efforts to understand this principle.

Meditation on sound or light

Along with the awareness of tripura, one comes to a point of following either sound or light, depending on his or her personal predisposition. Your intuition will tell you which is more resonant for you. If you have difficulty discerning which is right for you, it will probably help to have a conversation with someone who has already tread this later stage of the path. In either case, both (sound or light) lead to the same place out of which they both emerged. It is somewhat like choosing which door to use to enter a ballroom; both doors lead into the ballroom.

With predisposition for sound, the sadhaka listens into the sound of silence, as if the source of all sound will emerge. It has a feeling somewhat like stretching onto silence after mantra, as was described above. With predisposition for light, the sadhaka watches into the darkness, as if the source of all light will emerge. Here, there is also a stretching of awareness into the formless darkness, as was described with body, breath, mantra, and sound. Eventually, the sadhaka experiences the formless source that is common to both sound and light, regardless of which was followed in the practice (like finally being *in* the ballroom that has two entrance doors).

If a mantra has been used as a focal point for meditation, this will have already been followed into its silent, felt sense of awareness, with the syllables having fallen away. The sound or light that is eventually experienced is an aspect of the mantra, only at a very subtle level. Sound and light are then experienced as inseparably mingled. In a higher state, the common source of sound and light are experienced.

Advancing in meditation

A time comes when meditation stirs the unconscious mind and brings forward hidden impressions. It *quickens* the method of analyzing, understanding, and surveying the unconscious.¹

If you are emotional, use anahata chakra, the center between the two breasts. If you are intellectual, or think much, use ajna chakra, the breath chakra, between the two eyebrows. In no way, at this point, should you meditate on the crown chakra, or any lower chakra. If you meditate on the crown, on sahasrara chakra, you might hallucinate.

There is a tiny circle on the space between the two eyebrows. In the center of the circle, there is an unflinching, milky white flame steadily burning. Sound and light come from within. Either you should strengthen visualization or you should engage your mind in listening to the sound coming from within. Those who listen to the sound within begin to hear the anahata nada, the inner sound. When an aspirant is able to make his whole being into an ear, he hears the sound of anahata nada. Finally, you'll hear the sound like OM; your whole being vibrates from within, though your body is still. Your mind is being led by the mantra, toward the silence. When your mind is not following the subtle sound of the mantra, then it becomes aware of the illumination of ajna chakra.

¹ Swami Rama, *Enlightenment without God*

Suddenly your mind enters into something like a tunnel, that leads you to the gateway of sahasrara chakra, the thousand-petaled lotus.¹

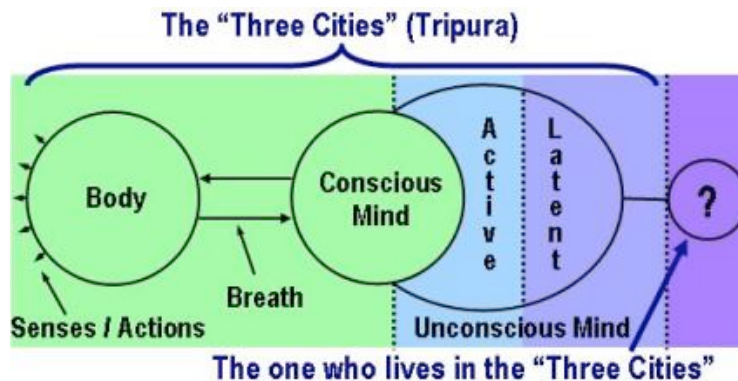
Constant awareness of mantra

When the consciousness of the mantra is deepened, the mantra is able to guide the mind in the inner world.

- The student is then taught to be aware of the inner light that already burns without flickering. The light which is within us is the finest and best form upon which to meditate.
- The mind then begins to see clearly; it is no longer clouded.
- Then the light of consciousness and mantra become one, because at that stage the mantra is not actually remembered, but its meaning and feeling are revealed.
- When one develops the feeling of constant awareness of the mantra, it unites with the mainstream of consciousness where light and sound are inseparably mingled.
- In a higher stage sound and light are united, and in the highest state pure Consciousness alone exists.²

Stillness and silence; meditation on Tripura

At this stage of meditation the mind is still functioning, but barely. Meditation is formless, with no gross or subtle object as such; there are no pictures or words. Rather, there is a pervasive awareness of the existence of tripura (the one in the three cities), shakti, Self, or atman. This awareness is like an intuition, not the literal direct experience of that pure Consciousness; that awareness is to come after the piercing of the bindu, which is described below. See the mantra section for the relation of mantras to tripura.



¹ Swami Rama, *First Step Toward Advanced Meditation* (audio tape)

² Swami Rama, *Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita*

Grace and shaktipata

From here on it is only grace of guru, Self, god, or whatever else you might like to call it, which can take us the rest of the way. I liken it to the space probes sent to Mars. As with sadhana (practices) it took a great deal of energy to break away from the Earth's atmosphere and gravitational pull (like us breaking away from our false identities, attractions, aversions, and fears). Finally, when coming close to its destination, it took very little power to go the rest of the way, as it was the gravitational pull of Mars that pulled the probe to its final destination.

That which *pulls* us the rest of the way is similarly a naturally existing energy (analogous to the gravitation pull of Mars), which for convenience sake is called *grace*. Different people have lots of different opinions about the name and nature of that grace, but such a *gravitational* energy is definitely there to pull us the rest of the way, once we have put in all of the exertion we are capable of putting out. Our job is to do the work we are capable of doing so as to get within reach of that *grace* or shakti. It is also called *shaktipata*, or the bestowing of grace.

Piercing the bindu

At some point of meditation the mind enters into something that is experienced as a tunnel (called *brahma nadi*, which is the energy channel of manifestation itself, as consciousness has come outward to become who we are as a person). The tunnel entrance is near the end of the mind and what it can do for us as a tool on the inner journey. Everything *collapses*, so to speak, into the *point* from which all of our being has originally emerged.

That point is called *bindu*, which is a Sanskrit word that literally translates as *point* or *dot*. Consciousness recedes into and through that point or bindu in what can only be described as being like an intense explosion. On the other *side* (for lack of a better word to describe the indescribable) of the explosion of the bindu is the direct experience of the absolute reality, Brahman in Vedantic terms, or the preexisting union of Shakti with Shiva, in Tantric terms. It is called *Mahatripurasundari* in the samaya sri vidya tantra of the Himalayan tradition. *Mahatripurasundari* is the great (*maha*), beautiful (*sundari*) one who dwells in, and is the substratum of the *three cities* known as waking, dreaming, and sleeping, or the gross world, subtle plane, and causal realm, or simply *Tripura*, the one in the *three cities*. This is the real *Self*, which is the *Self* of all, which is spoken of as the goal of life called *Self-realization*.

There is a further description of bindu in a later section of this paper, as well as an article on bindu on the SwamiJ.com website.

Integrating meditation, contemplation, mantra, and prayer

Meditation is been discussed a great deal here; contemplation is discussed in relation to the process of internal dialogue, and mantra has been discussed with several examples in the context of tripura, the one operating in the three cities. All of these work together, like the fingers of a hand work together. These leaves only *prayer*.

Swami Rama has described *prayer* in relation to talking with the *lord* of life within, which is one and the same with your true Self, which is seen to be the Self of all. Many people have issues with prayer in relation to the religions of their youth.

I looked up the word *lord* in my laptop dictionary, and it is only definition #8 that refers to talking with “God”. The first definition defines lord as “someone or something having power, authority, or influence”. This sounds like a very comfortable match to Swamiji’s suggestion to *pray* to (converse with through internal dialogue) the *lord* of life within.

It is not my wish to talk anybody out of prayer to your chosen deity or teacher if that is your habit or religious practice. In such a case, I encourage you to continue to follow that preference in your prayer. However, if you are uncertain about or questioning this *prayer* part of the practices, you might find this perspective useful, of *lord* as the inner Self being the one “having power, authority, or influence” over your more surface identity as a person and personality. If this feels right to you, go ahead and give it a try, and have a conversation with that deepest part of your own being, the one which is actually one with the totality of consciousness.

Recorded meditations

I have published two meditation CDs, which are also available for digital download through many sources, including Amazon.com and iTunes. These are:

- *Basic Yoga Meditation: 3, 7, 11, and 30-Minute Guided Practices*
- *Yoga Nidra: Extreme Relaxation of Conscious Deep Sleep*

Both beginners and experienced meditators say they have found these guided practices to be very useful. There is more information about them at SwamiJ.com/cd-bm-yn.htm, along with links for purchasing the CDs and the digital downloads. The Yoga Nidra CD has consistently been the most popular Yoga Nidra CD in the world since it was published in 2003. A few times it has also been #1 best seller on Amazon.com in categories of all *yoga* items, and all *meditation* listings. At one point it was #1 best seller in different 13 categories in Canada. I hope that you enjoy these meditations as much as the many others who have told me how much they have.

*I hope that you enjoy these meditations
and find them useful on your journey.*

In loving service,

Swami Jnaneshvara

SECTION 4: Complementary and Evolving practices

Yoga Nidra

Yoga Nidra means yogic sleep. It is a state of conscious deep sleep. How does a yogi sleep? *Consciously!* In meditation, you *remain* in the waking state of consciousness, and gently focus the mind, while allowing thought patterns, emotions, sensations, and images to arise and go on. However, in yoga nidra, you *leave* the waking state, go *past* the dreaming state, and go to the deep sleep state, yet remain fully awake without the awareness or distraction of any pictures, words, or thoughts. All such impressions are in their formless, latent form. This state may not be clear, or may sound totally baffling to the waking state, conscious mind, and must be experienced to be understood.

Yoga nidra is for purifying samskaras

While yoga nidra is a state that is very relaxing, it is also used by yogis to purify the samskaras, the deep impressions that are the driving force behind karma. Yoga nidra brings an incredible calmness, quietness and clarity. Yoga Nidra is one of the deepest of all meditations, leading awareness through many levels of mental process to a state of supreme stillness and insight. By experiencing the samskaras or deep habit impressions in their latent, formless aspect, they lose their potency. Attractions, aversions, and fears lose their power to play out in either the dreaming state or our waking state reality.

Swami Rama on yoga nidra

In the state of samadhi you are fully conscious; you are free. Your consciousness is fully expanded. In deep sleep, you are very close to samadhi, but you are not conscious. Through yoga nidra you can have conscious sleep. Yoga nidra is a state between sleep and samadhi. It is a half- sleep and half-waking state. It is not a waking state, and it is not really a sleep state. It is a state where you can gain complete rest and a little bit of sleep, but remain fully awake.

Normally your mind does not have sufficient capacity because you have cultivated only a small part of it, but in yoga nidra your field goes beyond the waking, dreaming, and sleeping states. The mind is not in turiya itself [turiya is *beyond* mind], but it is between turiya, the fourth state, and sleep.

Yoga nidra is the safest practice in the world. There is no method better than yoga nidra, which is yogic sleep.¹

¹ *Path of Fire and Light, Vol 2, pp. 179-198*

The yogis use the state of yoga nidra to go into a deep state of voluntary sleep in order to simultaneously realize the three manifest states of consciousness—waking, dreaming, and sleep. In this state, the clarity of mind is more profound than in the waking state.

The aspirant strengthens his practice of meditation and contemplation and learns to analyze and resolve all his desires, thoughts, and feelings through the practice of yoga nidra. He attains a state in which he consciously learns to place his mind in deep rest. The yogis use this state for sleep and meditation both. Except through meditation and yoga nidra, one cannot give rest to the totality of the mind.

Careful vigilance and observation lead the student to study the incoming thoughts from the unconscious mind. The yogis recall all their samskaras, watch them, examine, and even select and reject them according to their need. Those thought patterns that are disturbing are rejected by the yogis, and those that are helpful are strengthened. A deep study of these three states—waking, dreaming, and sleeping—reveals that, with the help and practice of yoga nidra, one can go beyond all the levels of the unconscious.

In yoga nidra, the corpse posture (shavasana) alone is recommended.¹

More on yoga nidra

For a more thorough description of yoga nidra, please see the article on SwamiJ.com at SwamiJ.com/yoga-nidra.htm. The best way I know of to start exploring yoga nidra is to use the CD: *Yoga Nidra: Extreme Relaxation of Conscious Deep Sleep*. This has consistently been the most popular guided yoga nidra recording in the world since shortly after it was published in 2003.

Memory Exercise

The following is as described by Swami Rama in *The Art of Joyful Living*:

Presently, your memory is blocked; when the passages between the conscious mind and the unconscious mind are blocked it is because you do not know how to handle the rush of thoughts and information coming into your conscious mind.

Begin by counting from one to a hundred without saying the numbers out loud, at the speed of one digit a second. Note the interruption and the kind of interruption that takes place—they tell you about your mental suppressions or procrastination. Consider the origins of these disturbances and in this way you will learn many things about yourself. Eventually extend up to a thousand and then back. When you can do that without interruption, you'll find that your mind has become very sharp. There is no doubt about the effect of this exercise. The exercise itself doesn't take much time—perhaps only ten or fifteen minutes. You should do such an exercise for at least two minutes every day.

¹ *Enlightenment without God*, pp. 55-65

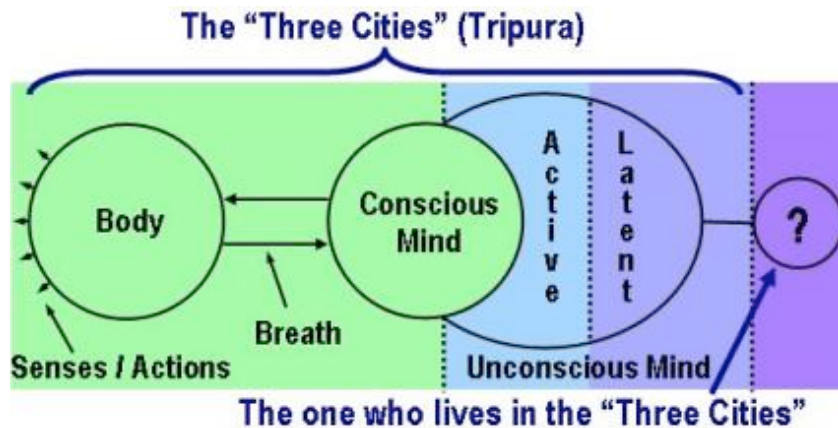
A serious student must learn to train the mind. If you have not paid this price, and have not disciplined yourself in some way or another, you'll never understand the importance of discipline. And if you allow the mind to roam and wander wherever it wants, you'll never achieve much in your meditative training. You have to learn to direct that great force of the mind in a specific way. If you carefully observe the process, you will understand the use of either a geometrical figure or the digital counting system. If you cannot initially count and maintain concentration to a thousand, or if you have a problem with your memory, then begin with counting to one hundred.

Working to train and discipline the mind with such simple exercises can definitely improve memory and concentration, and these are important first steps in all training of the mind. A serious student must learn to train the mind.¹

Mantras

Tripura

All of the mantras used here are intended to lead to the awareness of Tripura (tri=three; pura=cities), the one consciousness that operates in, and is the support of the three cities, the three states of (1) waking, (2) dreaming, and (3) deep sleep, as well as the three levels of (1) conscious, (2) active unconscious, and (3) latent unconscious. It is also that which manifests outward as the three levels or planes of reality: (1) causal (*prajna*), (2) subtle (*taijasa*), and (3) gross (*vaishvanara*).

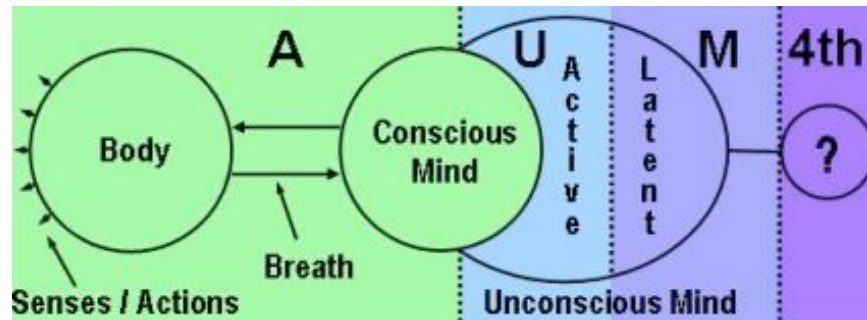


For greater explanations of Tripura please see various SwamiJ.com articles, including those on *Om Mantra* and the *Levels and Dimensions of Consciousness* (these are listed on the Levels tab of the index at the top of the web site). There are also Tripura references in the Philosophy index linked at the top of the website pages.

¹ *The Art of Joyful Living*, pp. 131-148

Om mantra

The OM Mantra is a roadmap for sadhana, spiritual practices (written as either AUM or OM). It is not for the person who seeks only the shallow waters of spiritual life, but rather for those who strive to realize in direct experience the depth of the absolute reality. There are four main levels of consciousness outlined in the OM Mantra, along with three transition levels, which is a total of seven levels. Each of these is experienced on the inner journey of meditation and contemplation.



OM / AUM and the Seven Levels of Consciousness
1. Waking / Conscious / Vaishvaanara / Gross / "A" of AUM
2. Transition / Unmani
3. Dreaming / Unconscious / Taijasa / Subtle / "U" of AUM
4. Transition / Aladani
5. Deep Sleep / Subconscious / Prajna / Causal / "M" of AUM
6. Samadhi
7. Turiya / Consciousness / Absolute / Silence after AUM

SwamiJ.com

It is important to be aware of the fact that these levels of consciousness are realities that exist universally, regardless of whether or not one uses the OM Mantra or the visual OM symbol in any way. In either case, the underlying principles are extremely useful for all seekers in purifying or clearing the mind, and seeking the direct experience of deeper truths.

For a greater understanding of OM Mantra and its use, please read the article *Om Mantra and the Seven Levels of Consciousness* at SwamiJ.com/om.htm. It is useful to be aware of, and keep in mind that while modern people may gather for group chanting of Om mantra with no awareness at all of its deep meaning, it actually encapsulates the entire wisdom of the ancient sages (See the Mandukya Upanishad references in the Om article on SwamiJ.com, as well as the video).

Sohum mantra

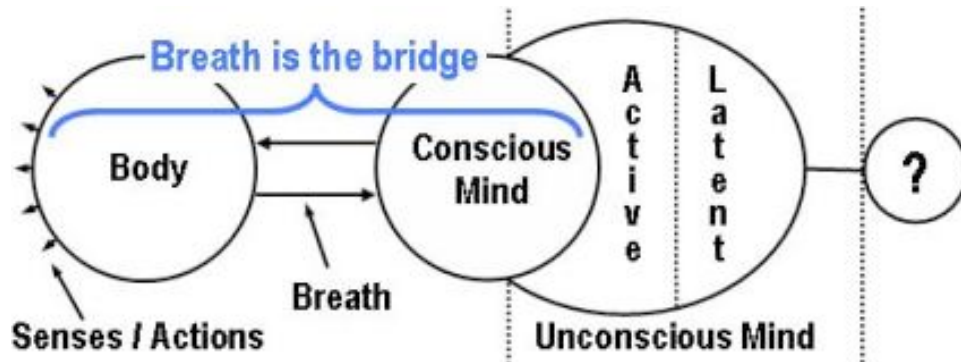
The Sohum mantra is a natural mantra because it is already part of your nature.

- *Sooooo...* is the sound of inhalation, and is remembered in the mind along with that inhalation.
- *Hummmm...* is the sound of exhalation, and is remembered in the mind along with that exhalation.

The Sohum mantra has been called the universal mantra because of the fact that its vibration is already a part of the breath, and everybody breathes. *Sooooo...* is the sound of inhalation, and *Hummmm...* is the sound of exhalation. The mantra is also designated as Hamsa, Hansa, Sohum, So Ham, or So Hum. The Sohum mantra is also called the *Hamsa* mantra. Hamsa (or hansa) poses the question, “Who am I?” Sohum provides the answer, “I am that.”

Breath is a bridge between the body and the mind. When trying to meditate it is extremely common to have tension in the muscles and noisy thoughts in the mind. The nervous system is the arbiter between the tense body and the noisy mind. One of the best ways to regulate the nervous system, and in turn the body and mind, is through the breath. This has been known by the Yogis for thousands of years, and has also come to be widely known in recent years by the modern medical and psychological community.

One of the finest, easiest, and most direct ways to train the breath, and in turn, regulate the nervous system, relax the body, and quiet the mind is through Sohum mantra practiced at a steady, slow speed, with exhalation somewhat longer in duration than the inhalation.



Sohum and diaphragm breathing

The Sohum mantra is extremely useful when practiced along with diaphragmatic breathing. Allow your attention to rest in a space about the size of the palm of your hand, just below the breast bone, at the upper abdomen. As you exhale with *Hummmmmmm*, be aware of how that space gently pushes in, so as to exhale completely. As you inhale with *Sooooo*, be aware of how that space move moves back outward, and how the lower ribs flare slightly outwards, to the sides. Allow the breath to be smooth, with no jerkiness. Allow it to be comfortably slow, and

have no pauses between the breaths. Exhalation gently rounds back into inhalation, and inhalation gently rounds back into exhalation. This may be done either in a seated meditation posture or lying on your back in the corpse posture.

Sohum in breath along the spine

One of the deeper ways to use the Sohum mantra is through spinal breath (*sushumna kriya*), by coordinating body, breath, and mind (Such practice has been popularized as a part of kriya yoga or kundalini yoga, though it is universal practice). As you inhale, allow the mind to be aware of the vibration *Soooooooo* as your attention moves upward along the subtle cord of the spine (sushumna), through the chakras towards the crown of the head. As you exhale, allow the mind to be aware of the vibration *Hummmmmm* as your attention moves downward along the subtle spine towards the perineum at the base of the spine, at the flat place between the genital area and the anus. Be aware of a thin, steady stream of energy and consciousness flowing up and down between this area near the base of the spine and the crown of the head. You may or may not be literally aware of the stream, and you may or may not experience it as a milky white stream of light. However you experience this flow is okay, and you will find it is a very beneficial meditation practice.

Sohum at the nostrils

Meditation with Sohum at the bridge of the nostrils is a very effective practice that stabilizes and purifies the mind, training the mind in one-pointedness. Meditation on the gross breath leads to awareness of the subtler energy of prana, and then to deeper meditation beyond. Focus attention on the feel of the breath, the cognitive sense of touch, as it flows in and out, remembering the vibrations *Soooooooo* and *Hummmmmm*. Gradually allow the exhalation to elongate, becoming twice as long as the inhalation.

Systematic practices

The three methods described above can be used in order, going from outer to inner, from gross to subtle.

- First, work with the diaphragmatic breathing and awareness of Sohum mantra at the space just below the breast bone, at the upper abdomen.
- Second, allow attention to flow up and down along the spine (*sushumna kriya*) with the Sohum manta, exhaling down from the top of the head to the base of the spine, and then inhaling upwards.
- Third, come to rest at the bridge of the nostrils for meditation on the Sohum mantra, feeling the touch of the air in the nostrils.

By doing the practices in this order, your attention moves systematically inward, through the dimensions, to one-pointedness. After these three, you may want to move your attention to the space between the breasts or between the eyebrows, depending on your predisposition, using whatever mantra or focal point you normally use for meditation.

Panshakshara (Om Namah Shivaya)

Panchakshara Mantra (five syllables mantra) is a most potent and popular mantra, which is at the heart of the Vedas and Tantra, and is widely used in this and other variations in the Himalayan tradition, as well as by others. While there are other descriptions of the mantra, the following focuses on meanings for mantra meditation leading to Self-Realization.

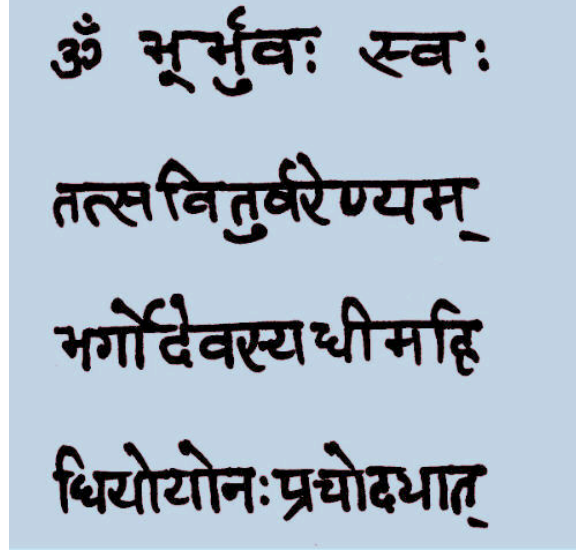
- OM/AUM: The three parts of Om (A-U-M) encompass the three states of waking, dreaming, deep sleep, the three levels of gross, subtle, causal, and the three levels of conscious, active unconscious, latent unconscious, as well as the three universal processes of coming, being, and going. Absolute silence beyond the three levels is the silence after AUM. It also refers to Tripura, the one who live in the "three cities" as in Mahamrityunjaya Mantra, as well as the light referred to in Gayatri Mantra.
- Namah/Namaha: Adoration, homage, respect. Nothing is mine (as an individual person); everything is thine (as the Absolute Reality). The three levels of Om, the three worlds of gross, subtle, and causal, along with the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, as well as the three levels of conscious, unconscious, and subconscious themselves are "not mine" as the true properties of who I really am. Truly, "nothing is mine." Rather, everything, all of these triads is "thine" or *belongs to* the "other" as the absolute nondual Reality.
- Shivaya/Shiva: That Absolute Reality that is the ground out of which the others emerge. It is that "ink," so to speak, that is not separate from the many forms (objects, pictures, symbols, words) which may appear to manifest or be created *from* that ink. In the Realization of this, the sadhaka (practitioner) comes to see that he or she is one and the same with the Absolute Reality (like the wave is one with the ocean). The Mahavakyas, the great utterances, are seen to be true (See the mahavakyas article on SwamiJ.com). Shiva (the static or ground) and Shakti (the active or creative) are seen to be one and the same. She (Shakti), while one with Shiva is realized in direct experience as the one in the three worlds (Tripura) outlined in Om.

The Five Sacred Syllables

The Om Namah Shivaya mantra has five syllables: na-mah-shi-va-ya (sometimes called six syllable mantra by including Om). Thus, Om Namah Shivaya mantra is sometimes called the five-syllable mantra, or *Panchakshara* Mantra (*panch* means *five*). Among other things, these five represent the five elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space. Thus, the Om Namah Shivaya mantra leads awareness in the reverse order from manifestation back to the source from which manifestation arose.

Gayatri mantra

Gayatri Mantra (GUY-ah-tree) is one of the most known and beneficial of the ancient Sanskrit mantras. Gayatri is a mantra of physical, emotional, and mental healing, purifying the subtle karmas, protection from the onslaught of obstacles, and of spiritual awakening or Self-realization.



Aum Bhur Bhuva Svah
Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi
Dhiyo Yo Naha Prachodayat

On the absolute reality and its planes,
On that finest spiritual light,
We meditate, as remover of obstacles
That it may inspire and enlighten us.

In remembering Gayatri, the sadhaka (practitioner) is saying that he or she chooses to follow that light (Savitur) which leads to that absolute reality (Tat) which dwells in the three worlds of bhur, bhuva, and svah (the gross, subtle, and causal; Tripura, the one dwelling in the three cities). He or she is affirming practicing meditation on that light (Devasya) which removes the obstacles that otherwise cloud over that reality, so that the inner instrument of wisdom may be purified.

AUM/OM: Absolute reality. That which encompasses the three states of waking, dreaming, deep sleep, represented by AUM, the three levels of gross, subtle, causal, the three levels of conscious, unconscious, subconscious, and the three universal processes of coming, being, and going. Absolute silence beyond the three levels is the silence after AUM.

Bhur: Physical realm or plane; earth.

Bhuva: The subtle or astral plane.

Svah: The higher, celestial plane.

Tat: That, the essential essence. Refers to the absolute reality, Brahman

Savitur: Bright, luminous, sun-like, inner power of spiritual light, which brings one to Self-realization.

Varenyam: Finest, best, choicest, fit to be sought.

Bhargo: Destroyer of obstacles. Effulgence

Devasya: Divine, resplendent, shining

Dhimahi: We meditate.

Dhiyo: Our being of intelligence, intellect, understanding, mind/heart

Yo: Who, which

Naha: Our

Prachodayat: May enlighten, direct, inspire, guide, impel.

Gayatri and meditation

Gayatri is typically done as a *japa* (repetition or remembrance) practice, not a concentrative meditation practice per se. However, since Gayatri is about *light* to remove obstacles, purify the mind, and to realize the Self, that essence of consciousness and light can be meditated on as a formless reality. That meditation can be on Tripura, as described in the beginning of this section on mantra.

40 day practice

The period of 40 days has been widely recognized as an auspicious period both in the East and the West since ancient times. A traditional way to do an extended mantra japa practice is to choose a number of repetitions per day, and to do that for 40 days. The mind likes to have a beginning and end to a practice, a sense of completion, such as comes with a 40 day (or longer) practice.

- **Fixed time per practice session:** Mind finds comfort in knowing that it will do the practice of one round of 108 repetitions (or some other number of rounds), and that each round will take a predictable amount of time (18 minutes per round of 108 repetitions). This is most easily done with a mala. A mala is a set of counting beads with 108 beads. Only 100 are counted, with the other 8 considered an offering to the divine, however you personally hold

that, whether, for example as God or guru. You might choose to do 1, 2, 3, or 4 rounds of 108 mantras per day, counting with a set of mala beads

- **Same number of rounds:** Mind also likes the predictability of doing a certain number of rounds done per day. Mind may resist at times, but once it gets started in the practice, mind likes the habit.
- **Specific number of days:** Mind also likes the plan of knowing how many days or months a practice will take to complete. This can be very beneficial in stabilizing a noisy mind, which is a common complaint.

It has been said that there is freedom in discipline; choosing to do a regular practice frees the mind from wondering what practice will be done that day. It is also important not to do the mantra practice with rote repetition, but rather, with feeling and awareness. By running your own experiment for 40 days, you can decide for yourself whether or not the practice is beneficial.

Extended practice

A noticeable level of mantra siddhi (power of the mantra) is said to come with 125,000 repetitions of a mantra (Such an extended practice is called a *purasharna*). This is equivalent to 1250 rounds of a mala.

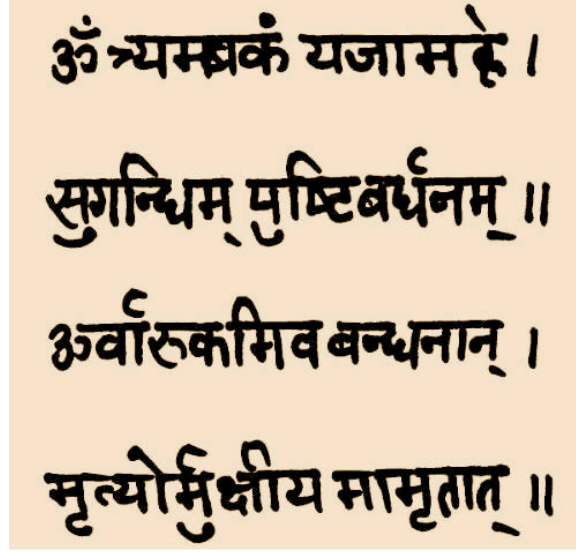
Using an estimate of 18 minutes per mala, this extended practice would take about this amount of time:

Rounds per day	Time per day	Total Days	Approximate Months
1	18 mins	1250	42
2	36 mins	625	21
3	54 mins	417	14
4	1 hr 12 mins	313	10 1/2
5	1 hr, 30 mins	250	8 1/2
6	1 hr, 48 mins	209	7
7	2 hr, 6 mins	179	6

The Mahamrityunaya mantra (below) practice will take a comparable amount of time.

Mahamrityunjaya mantra

Mahamrityunjaya Mantra (maha-mrit-yun-jaya) is one of the more potent of the ancient Sanskrit mantras. Mahamrityunjaya is a call for enlightenment and is a practice of purifying the karmas of the soul at a deep level. It is also said to be quite beneficial for mental, emotional, and physical health.



Om Tryambakam Yajamahe
Sugandhim Pushtivardhanam
Urvarukamiva Bandhanan
Mrityor Mukshiya Maamritat

We Meditate on the Three-eyed reality
Which permeates and nourishes all like a fragrance.
May we be liberated from death for the sake of immortality,
Even as the cucumber is severed from bondage to the creeper.

In remembering the Mahamrityunjaya mantra, one is affirming that he or she is meditating on that consciousness (Shakti) that is looking outward through the three levels of apparent reality, which are, in fact, that one, nondual reality. That Shakti permeates all, in the same way that a pleasant fragrance permeates all of the air in its surroundings. The sadhaka (practitioner) affirms doing this meditation so as to have direct experience of the pure consciousness that is eternal, never being born or experiencing of death.

AUM/OM: Absolute reality. That which encompasses the three states of waking, dreaming, deep sleep, represented by AUM, the three levels of gross, subtle, causal, the three levels of conscious, unconscious, subconscious, and the three universal processes of coming, being, and going. Absolute silence beyond the three levels is the silence after AUM.

Tryambakam: Trya means *three*. Ambakam means *eyes*. It means the *three eyes* of the Absolute, which are the processes of creation, existence, and dissolution, as well as the other triads which are part of AUM. The three "eyes" means experiencing these three stages and triads at one time, from the higher, all pervasive vantage point of the Absolute.

Yajamahe: We rejoice in meditation on all of this.

Sugandhim: Means fragrance. Like a spreading fragrance, all of this permeates the whole of existence, while at the same time being that existence.

Pushtivardhanam: Means that which sustains and nourishes all. Thus, the fragrance that permeates all is the sustainer of all beings, while also the essence of all beings.

Urvarukamiva: Urva means big and powerful. Arukam means disease, like the spiritual diseases of ignorance and untruth, which are like the death of Wisdom or Truth.

Bandhanan: Means bound down, as in bound down to the ignorance and untruth.

Mrityor: Means ignorance and untruth.

Mukshiya: Means liberation from the cycles of physical, mental, and spiritual death.

Maamritat: Means please give me rejuvenating nectar, so as to have this liberation, like the process of severing the cucumber from the creeping vine.

Mahamrityunjaya mantra and meditation

As described above in relation to Gayatri, Mahamrityunjaya mantra is usually done as a *japa* practice, but also can be used to lead into formless meditation, particularly on the essence of Tripura, the one in the three cities.

Longer japa practices

See the descriptions in the Gayatri mantra section above. These longer practices can also be done with Mahamrityunjaya and are extremely useful. Note that Mahamrityunjaya emphasizes the one looking out through three *eyes* (*tryambakam yajamahe*), which is another way of describing Tripura. It is shiva manifesting outward as shakti through those three levels. The mantra also emphasizes purifying the mind, and leads to Self-realization and liberation (*mukshiya*).

Walking exercise

Coordinating body, breath, and mind

There is a simple walking exercise that coordinates body, breath, and mind. The fact that your sequential left and right steps are naturally at a uniform pace is the key to this coordination. Start with internally counting your paces while you inhale “1-2-3-4”. Then exhale while walking, mentally counting “1-2-3-4” with your left and right paces (or right followed by left).

Adjusting the rate of your breathing and walking

Keep doing this and note whether the pace is comfortable, whether the “1-2-3-4” count feels right. If you are not getting enough air, then shorten the breath by counting “1-2-3” with each inhalation and exhalation, along with three left and right paces. If the rate feels rushed, then try lengthening the breath with the paces, such as “1-2-3-4-5” for example. Experiment with the number of counts until you find a comfortable number. If you are walking faster, you’ll need to reduce the number of counts. If you are walking slower, you’ll need to increase the number of counts.

After you are comfortable with the practice, extend the time of the exhalation until it is twice as long as the time for the inhalation, for example, “1-2-3-4” with inhalation and “1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8” with exhalation, or “1-2-3” with inhalation and “1-2-3-4-5-6” with exhalation. If 2-to-1 exceeds your comfortable capacity, then try a lower ratio, such as “1-2-3-4” with inhalation and “1-2-3-4-6” with exhalation (1.5-to-one), or “1-2-3” with inhalation and “1-2-3-4-5” with exhalation.

Walking, jogging, and running

If you are walking very fast, jogging, or running, the count will become very small, such as “1-2” for both inhalation and exhalation, or “1” for inhalation and “1-2” for exhalation. The ratio of 2-to-1 when running can significantly extend your stamina, as has been reported by quite physically fit marathon runners.

If you regularly walk for physical exercise, you will find this a great time to do this practice. This regulation of breath will easily translate into breathing practices during your meditation times. This practice can also be done for very short periods, such as when you park your car and then walk from the parking lot into a building. That short walk can help to regulate your breathing with your body and mind.

Bhuta Shuddi

Bhuta Shuddi is a chakra meditation through which the five elements (bhutas) are balanced or purified (shuddhi). Bhuta refers to the past, and shuddhi refers to purifying that past, or the samskaras that operate in conjunction with the five elements. This is a very useful practice, whether you think of it as preparation for kundalini awakening, or simply as a practice for feeling balanced, centered, or tranquil, etc.

The five elements

The five elements align with, and operate from the five lower chakras, along with the ten indriyas and a seed mantra for each. In systematic Chakra Meditation, you progressively move attention through the chakras while mentally remembering the mantra, along with awareness of the nature of each chakra and its indriyas. Move from the first chakra systematically upward to the seventh and then reverse, coming back to the first chakra.

Mantras in the chakras

For example, for the third chakra, your attention rests on the navel center, while you internally remember the mantra “*Ram-Ram-Ram-Ram-Ram*”.

Chakra	Element	Mantra	Karmendriya	Jnanendriya
7	(consciousness)	Silence	(consciousness)	(consciousness)
6	(mind)	Om	(mind)	(mind)
5	space	Ham*	speaking	hearing
4	air	Yam*	grasping/holding	touching
3	fire	Ram*	moving	seeing
2	water	Vam*	procreating	tasting
1	earth	Lam*	eliminating	smelling

* Pronounced like “Tom”, “Mom”, “CD-ROM”

For the Chakra Meditation of Bhuta Shuddhi, it is necessary to understand how the five elements relate to the chakras. The five bhutas are the five elements of earth, water, fire, air, and space, and they operate in conjunction with the lower five chakras (at the subtle level they are called tanmatras, which are part of tattvas, or subtle constituents). The sixth chakra is of mind, and is beyond or prior to the bursting forth of space, air, fire, water, and finally earth. Consciousness itself (atman or purusha) is prior to, or the source of manifestation of mind, and is the seventh chakra (there are other chakras, including those between sixth and seventh, but the bhuta shuddhi practice itself need not focus directly on these).

Meditations on the chakras

Chakra Meditation - Bhuta Shuddhi: Sequentially move through the chakras in the following sequence. As you read this, please keep in mind that reading about the practice is more difficult than doing the practice. The descriptions are lengthy, but the practices are actually straightforward and simple. You will probably find it useful to have personal coaching on how to do this practice.

- 1) **Muladhara Chakra Meditation:** Bring your attention to the perineum, the flat space between the anus and the genital area. Take several seconds to allow your attention to find the space, and to get settled into it. Allow the mantra *Lam* to arise repeatedly in your mind field, silently. Allow it to repeat at its own natural speed. You may find that it comes 5-10 times and wants to pause, or you might find it wants to come continuously. If it pauses, allow it to return in its own time. The mantra may move quickly or slowly. In any case, keep your attention on that space; this is very important. That space might be tiny, such as a pinpoint, or it might be several inches across. Follow your own inclination about the size of the space. Allow your mind to naturally be aware of earth, solidity, or form. That awareness may come a little or a lot; either way is okay. Allow to come through your mind field the awareness of the karmendriya of elimination (which operates throughout the body), and the jnanendriya of smell (best to become familiar with the nature of the indriyas). Gradually, over time with the practice, it becomes more clear how it is that the indriyas operate from these centers, along with the five elements. Also, you may or may not find that colors and sounds naturally come to the inner field of mind.
- 2) **Svadhistana Chakra Meditation:** When you move your attention upwards towards the second chakra, be mindful of the transition, of the motion of attention and the nature of the shift of energetic, emotional, and mental experience. Allow your attention to naturally find the location of the second chakra. Your own attention will find, and settle into that space. It is important to note that the actual chakra is in the back, along the subtle spine called sushumna, although we usually experience it in the front. Allow the attention to rest where it naturally falls, probably in the front, but be mindful from time to time that the chakra is actually in the back. Gradually attention will find this central stream running up and down through all of the chakras (sushumna is actually subtler than the chakras). Allow the mantra *Vam* to arise and repeat itself, at its own speed, naturally coming and going. Hold your attention in the space, whether a pinpoint or a few inches across. Allow the awareness of water to arise, and come to see how this has to do with allowing forms of flow or fluidity, whether relating to energy, physical, emotional, or mental. Explore the awareness of the karmendriya of procreation and the jnanendriya of tasting (once again, become familiar with the indriyas). Again, colors or sounds may or may not come and go.
- 3) **Manipura Chakra Meditation:** Be aware of the transition as you move to the third chakra, at the navel center, which is also actually along the sushumna channel. Allow the mantra *Ram* to arise and repeat itself, at its natural speed. Keep attention in the space, whatever size at which it is experienced. Be aware of the element of fire, and the many ways in which it operates throughout the gross and subtle body from this center. Be aware

of the karmendriya of motion, and how motion itself happens in so many physical, energetic, and mental ways. Be aware of the jnanendriya of seeing, which you will easily see as related to fire and motion. Colors and sounds may or may not come and go.

- 4) **Anahata Chakra Meditation:** Observe the transition as you move your attention to the fourth chakra, the space between the breasts. Allow attention to become well seated there, and then remember the vibration of the mantra *Yam*, allowing it to repeat at its own speed, while being mindful of the feeling it generates. Be aware of the element of air, and notice how that feels with the mantra. Notice how the element of air relates to the the karmendriya of holding or grasping, whether physically, energetically, mentally, or emotionally. Observe how these relate to the jnanendriya of touching, and how that touching is very subtle in addition to being a physical phenomenon. Colors and sounds may come and go.
- 5) **Vishuddha Chakra Meditation:** Bring your attention to the space at the throat, the fifth chakra, which is the point of emergence of space (which allows air, fire, water, and earth to then emerge). In that space, be aware of the nature of space itself, allowing the mantra *Ham* to arise and repeat itself, reverberating many times through the seemingly empty space in the inner world (a space that is really not empty, but is of potential). Awareness of the karmendriya of speech (actually, communication of any subtle form) is allowed to be there, experiencing how that vibrates through space. The jnanendriya of hearing is allowed to come, also seeing how it naturally aligns with space, speech, and the vibration of mantra. Notice the fine, subtle feelings, which come with the experience. Colors or sounds are allowed to come and go, if they happen to arise.
- 6) **Ajna Chakra Meditation:** Gently, with full awareness, transition awareness to the seat of mind at the space between the eyebrows, ajna chakra. Allow the mantra *OM* to arise and repeat itself, over and over, as slow waves of mantra, or as vibrations repeating so fast that the many OMs merge into a continuous vibration. Be aware of how mind has no elements, but is the source out of which space, air, fire, water, and earth emerge. Be aware of how this space, this mind, itself, does no actions, but is the driving force of all of the karmendriyas of speech, holding, moving, procreating, and eliminating. Be aware of how this chakra, this mind, has no senses itself, but is the recipient of all of the information coming from hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, and smelling, whether the source of this input is the sensations from the external world, coming through the physical instruments, or coming from the inner world of memories or subtle experience, presenting on the mental screen through the subtle senses. Gradually, come to see how Om mantra is experienced as the source or map of manifestation itself. Many senses, images, or impressions may come and go, but they are let go, as attention rests in the knowing beyond all senses, in the ajna chakra and the vibration of OM.
- 7) **Sahasrara Chakra Meditation:** Allow attention to move to the crown chakra, which has no element (bhutas), no cognitive sense (jnanendriyas), no active means of expression (karmendriyas), as it is the doorway to pure consciousness itself. Experience how this is the source out of which mind emerges, after which emerge the five elements, the five

cognitive senses, and the five means of expression. The “mantra” (in its subtler, silent form) is that silence (not mere quiet) out of which the rest have emerged. It is experienced as the silence after a single *OM*, merging into objectless, sense-less awareness. Allow attention to rest in that pure stillness, the emptiness that is not empty, which contains, and is the pure potential for manifestation which has not manifested.

- 8) **Ajna Chakra Meditation:** Briefly bring your attention back to the sixth chakra, allowing the vibration of *OM* to return, which starts the journey of attention back into the body and world. A few seconds, 30 seconds, or maybe a minute should be comfortable, though it may be longer if you wish.
- 9) **Vishuddha Chakra Meditation:** Bring your attention down to the fifth chakra, the throat, remembering *Ham*, as you enter into the realm of space, hearing, and speaking. Again, a few seconds or a minute is good.
- 10) **Anahata Chakra Meditation:** Transition to the fourth chakra, the heart, as you allow the mantra *Yam* to arise, remembering the element of air. Awareness of holding and touching may or may not arise.
- 11) **Manipura Chakra Meditation:** Be aware of the third chakra, the navel center, and the vibration of *Ram*, along with the element of fire, with awareness of motion and seeing coming or not coming.
- 12) **Svadhista Chakra Meditation:** Bring your attention to the second chakra, and allow the vibration of the mantra *Vam* to arise and repeat itself, remembering the element of water, with awareness of procreation and tasting coming or not coming.
- 13) **Muladhara Chakra Meditation:** Transition attention back to the first chakra, at the perineum, allowing the mantra *Lam* to come

Keeping bhuta shuddhi simple

When first practicing Chakra Meditation of Bhuta Shuddhi, it can seem confusing to keep track of mantras, elements, senses, and actions. To make this Chakra Meditation easy, the two keys to emphasize initially are: 1) keeping attention in the space, and 2) remembering the vibration of the mantra (it won't take very long to memorize which mantra goes with which chakra). Then allow the rest to gradually come in time. Both the balancing of the elements (and chakras) and the many insights will come over time, with practice.

Bindu

Bindu, point, pearl and seed

Bindu means Point or Dot, is sometimes likened to a *pearl*, and is often related to the principle of a *seed*. This is not just a poetic choice of words or philosophy. There literally is a stage of

meditation in which all experiences *collapse*, so to speak, into a point from which all experiences arose in the first place. The Bindu is near the end of the subtlest aspect of mind itself, after which one travels beyond or transcends the mind and its contents. It is near the end of time, space, and causation, and is the doorway to the Absolute. To understand this principle is extremely useful, if not essential to advanced meditation.

Awareness of the nature of Bindu helps tremendously in seeing how all of the various practices are complementary, not contradictory, with each, in its own way, leading in the direction of the Bindu. The Bindu is the convergence point of practices of Meditation, Contemplation, Prayer, and Mantra, and is part of the mystical, esoteric aspect of many, if not most religions and meditative traditions.

Bindu is an organizing principle

The experience of Bindu is an actual, internally experienced reality, which is the convergence point of the highest principles and practices of Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra. Seeking to experience and then transcend the Bindu serves as an organizing principle and focal point for all of those spiritual or yogic practices that are intended to lead one to direct experience.

For a further explanation of bindu, please see the article at SwamiJ.com/bindu.htm.

Emergence and convergence

For there to be a manifest universe there first has to be space. From space is the *emergence* of the finest of subtle matter called prakriti, the first manifestation of which is called *air*. From air comes *fire*. Fire thickens and becomes *water*. Water becomes still and is known as *earth*. This is the *emergence* of the world and ourselves as individuals.

The journey inward through meditation is one of reversing this process in awareness. The experience is as if our expanded self is gradually *converging* to a point, the point out of which we originally emerged.

It is suggested that one *not* try to actually dissolve earth into water, water into fire, fire into air, air into space, and space back into that from which it has arisen. This could be very destructive to our physical body, pranic (energy) vehicles, and the mind. However, one of the ways of describing the process of meditation is that *awareness* is allowed to gradually *recede* inward *through* those levels of manifestation so as to experience the source of them all. It is experienced *as if* someone called "I" is moving inward through these levels, although in actual fact, there is no "I" as an individual who is *going* anywhere. Rather, awareness is simply *withdrawing* inward *through* those levels, while leaving them entirely intact; they are not destroyed or dissolved. The *explosion* referred to below in the process of piercing the bindu is an experiential metaphor, not an actual fact of destruction of any part of your being, unless you want to consider the loss of attractions, aversions and identities as a kind of *destruction*.

Piercing the bindu

There are two stages in specific relation to the bindu. One is meditation on the bindu (*bindu bhedana*) and the other is piercing the bindu (*bindu vedhana*). This may play out in one of two ways for the aspirant. One way is that meditation will deepen to the point of finding the bindu, then meditating on it over some extended period of time, and subsequently experiencing the piercing of the bindu. The other way is that meditation will deepen *without* finding and meditating on the bindu, but meditation will have progressed to the point that grace or shaktipata will come in such a way that the bindu is experienced and pierced in what seems like virtually the same moment.

Various texts describe a series of bindus rather than a single bindu; these are described as being like pearls which are black, red, blue, and white. These may be experienced and pierced one at a time over some extended period, or may be experienced all at once in what may seem like a fraction of a second. It is like an explosion of consciousness in which the mind and the bindus all expand to the Infinite in one giant flash. With it comes the realizations in direct experience, “Aham brahmasmi”, “I am That absolute nondual reality” and “Sarvam khalvidam Brahman”, “Verily, all of this, everywhere is That absolute nondual reality”.

Three meanings of Truth

With the piercing of the bindu and the experience of the absolute reality comes three realizations that Truth is the awareness of:

- (1) That which is not subject to change, decay, and decomposition
- (2) That which was never born, so never dies.
- (3) That which is self-existent, never needing any other support.

Three stages of practice

Swami Rama writes of three stages of practice in *A Call to Humanity*:

- 1. Initial:** At this stage, the student thinks that he is practicing, but actually he is preparing himself for the practice. His so-called practice consists of collecting the necessary means and resources to begin and to stay on the path.
- 2. Intermediate:** At this stage, a student is fully equipped with all the resources he needs to practice. His time and energy are not involved in collecting means and learning methods, rather he spends his time in practice.
- 3. Last stage—achievement:** At this stage, a student experiences the Truth. He may have only a momentary glimpse of the Truth, but at least it is a direct experience, which helps him understand the greatness of the Truth. Now, sadhana consists of trying to maintain that state. As his practice matures, he becomes an adept; then he need not try, for the experience of non-dual Reality is maintained effortlessly and spontaneously.

One way of describing the goal of this paper is to help you move from #1 above to #2, where you really do feel fully equipped to practice. If you know how to do the practices, and exercise full faith and effort, stage #3 of having at least a *glimpse* of Truth will definitely come in time. However, that is not the end of the journey. As Swamiji says, you patiently persevere with the practices so as to maintain that level of realization and move ever closer to being an adept in service of others.

SECTION 5: Implementing your practices

Shorter practices

Shorter practices are used either when beginning to do this practice or when less time is available. A short practice may look something like the one below, though this is only an example and not meant to be a specifically recommended practice sequence. Experiment with the choices within the five stages of the systematic practice and find what feels natural, comfortable, and useful for you.

- (1) Preparation: Emptying bowels and bladder; washing face and hands. (5 minutes)
 - (2) Simple Stretches: forward, backward, sideways, twists, butterfly (5 minutes)
 - (3) Simple tense and release relaxation (5 minutes)
 - (4) Diaphragmatic breathing followed by 3-4 complete breaths. (5 minutes)
 - (5) Sohum meditation at the nostrils, with So on inhalation and Hum on exhalation. (10 minutes)
- Total practice: 30 minutes

An even shorter practice:

- (1) Preparation: Empty bowels and bladder; wash hands (3 minutes)
 - (2) Simple stretches in a smooth flowing motion (2 minutes)
 - (3) Simple body survey (2 minutes)
 - (4) Diaphragmatic breathing and brief 2:1 breathing (3 minutes)
 - (5) Sohum meditation at nostrils (5 minutes)
- Total practice: 15 minutes

One can even move through the simple series in as little as 3-5 minutes, including a minute or so for the meditation itself. In this way, it can be relatively easy to do 3-4 meditation times per day. By experimenting with your capacity, lifestyle, and temperament you will find a balanced plan of practice that is perfect for you. For example, you may find that one 30-40 minute complete practice once a day, along with 2-3 other practices of 3-10 minutes works well for you.

Longer practices

Longer practices can be done when you have more time available and feel the inclination for such longer practices. The following is only an example. Experiment to find your own comfortable practice. Remember that it is *your* practice, and that *you* are the only person who can run these experiments for you.

- (1) Preparation: Empty bowels and bladder; shower; brush your teeth; use neti wash to clear your nasal passages. (15-20 minutes)
- (2) Complete practice combining chosen elements of Joints and Glands, and Yoga asana practice (20-30 minutes)

- (3) Complete relaxation and 61-points (20-25 minutes)
 - (4) Diaphragmatic breathing, 100 agnisara, 100 kabalabhata, 100 bhasrika, with each of the bridged with 1-2 complete breaths (10-15 minutes)
 - (5) Susumna kriya in spine while in meditation posture, and with Soham mantra. Soham mantra at the bridge of the nostrils. AUM on exhalation into the heart (15-20 minutes)
- Total practice: 80-110 minutes

Be sure to explore all of the options that are provided in the various sections of the systematic practice, particularly the breathing and meditation sections, which have a wide range of practices that you can experiment with to determine what works just right for you. Keep in mind that *sushumna* awakening is of critical importance, as is *gently allowing* meditation and mantra to lead you into a deep *stillness* and *silence*.

Guidance

Both the *Summary of Practices* handout and this book are designed for you to study and practice on your own, to be used in workshop or retreat settings, and through one-to-one coaching sessions. They are available through the websites (swamij.com, abhyasaashram.org) or at Abhyasa Ashram. Whatever works for you personally, please make use of the help that is available to you.

Appendix A: Observing yourself

“Meditation” means to “attend.” It means attention to the whole of life. It should not be a strenuous act; it should not be forced. Your whole life can be one of meditation. Instead of making dramatic resolutions, simply make yourself open to observing yourself and decide to experiment in observing yourself. Once purity of mind is attained, then one is fully prepared for the inner voyage. To achieve this state of purity of mind, one should cultivate constant awareness by being mindful all the time. To purify the buddhi, the faculty of discrimination, is the most important task. Attention is the key point that leads you to concentration, then to meditation, and then to samadhi. Mindfulness means paying attention. You have to pay attention to the thing you are doing, and you have to learn to train your mind. This is a very preliminary step and you have to learn that first.

In doing practices of mindfulness, internal dialogue, and meditation, including introspection and witnessing, it is extremely useful to have a road-map. Otherwise, the mind can just toss and turn in a confused sort of “dialogue” while one is struggling to be “mindful.” The concepts listed below are important working tools for your practice—they are not just background information. As you come to understand these concepts, you will enjoy knowing and using them, as you also come to know and be friends with your own mind.

You may want to photocopy this page and keep it with you in a pocket until you have learned the concepts. Use the principles often each day to observe your thoughts, words, and actions, as well as your gestures and body language. After you have learned them, mentally scan all of the items from time to time during the day as a means of cultivating mindfulness.

Choose one of the 40 items, and for a day (or a week) observe it in all aspects in the external and internal world. Notice how actions, speech, and thoughts are related, and how that one item also affects the others. Pay particular attention to how the four functions of mind are affected. Check off that item, and on the following day (or week), select another item from a different group and then observe that one item.

Yamas & Niyamas

Yamas:

- Non-violence (ahimsa)
- Truthfulness (satya)
- Non-stealing (asteya)
- Continence (brahmacharya)
- Non-materialism (aparigraha)

Niyamas:

- Purity (saucha)
- Contentment (santosha)
- Training senses (tapas)
- Study (svadhyaya)
- Surrender (ishvara pranidhana)

Five elements

- Earth/solidity/form (prithivi)
- Water/flow/fluidity (apas)
- Fire/energy (agni, tejas)
- Air/lightness/airiness (vayu)
- Space/ether (akasha)

Ten Indriyas / Senses

Five Cognitive:

- Hearing
- Touching
- Seeing
- Tasting
- Smelling

Five Active:

- Speaking
- Holding/Grasping
- Moving
- Reproducing
- Eliminating

Four Functions of Mind

- Manas
- Chitta
- Ahamkara
- Buddhi

Streams of Emotion

The prime desire

- Desire/expectation (kama)

If desire IS fulfilled:

- Pride (muda)
- Attachment (moha)
- Greed (lobha)

If desire is NOT fulfilled:

- Anger (krodha)
- Jealousy (matsarya)

If desire IS or is NOT fulfilled:

- Egoism (ahamkara)

Four Primitive Fountains

- Food
- Sleep
- Sex
- Self-preservation

Appendix B: Daily Goals

In *The Art of Joyful Living* (pp. 128-129), Swami Rama suggests that one develop thirty goals for thirty days, and pick one for each day. These should be small points, but things you work on steadily. For example, you may decide that today you are not going to lie. That does not mean that you will redouble your lies tomorrow, but rather, that today your whole thinking process is about this: that you are not going to lie. You never claim that you will be able to speak the total Truth, but simply decide that you are not going to consciously lie.

If you adopt thirty points to work on for thirty days, you can just watch what you have accomplished in thirty days' time. The point is not, for instance, whether you have lied or not lied: it is that you have built your willpower. This is the real process of building willpower. After thirty days you will conclude, "Yes, I have done what I wanted to do." But do not choose big principles that you cannot fulfill—that is destructive. Instead, select little things.

Later, you may want to do this experiment of "thirty goals for thirty days" using a separate list of goals which you make up yourself, but for now, you will find the following to be a useful practice. You might want to write a few words or sentences each day about what you have observed. Start by using the number on the list which matches today's date. Check-off the goal at the end of the day.

1. Lovingly serve others today.
2. Observe one of the yamas (non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence or Brahmacharya, non-materialism), directing your actions and speech, while observing your thoughts.
3. Allow your actions to come from conscious choice rather than as a result of habit.
4. Observe one of the niyamas (purity, contentment, training senses, self-study, surrender)
5. Observe all of your actions and ask yourself, "why am I doing this action?"
6. Observe one of the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, space), externally and internally.
7. Witness everything, external and internal.
8. Observe one of the five cognitive senses (hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, smelling).
9. Be aware of your breath today, noticing its qualities and how it relates to thoughts and emotions.
10. Observe one of the five active senses (speaking, grasping, moving, reproducing, eliminating).
11. Notice how fears can control you, and how fears are related to imagination.
12. Observe one of the four functions of mind (manas, chitta, ahamkara, buddhi).
13. Speak very little today—only what is accurate, purposeful, and non-hurting.
14. Observe your reactions when a desire, expectation, want, or need is or is not fulfilled.
15. Observe your gestures and body language, noticing how they reflect thoughts and emotions.
16. Observe one of the yamas (non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence or Brahmacharya, non-materialism), directing your actions and speech, while observing your thoughts.
17. Practice one-pointedness, paying attention to whatever you are doing today.
18. Observe one of the niyamas (purity, contentment, training senses, self-study, surrender)
19. Resolve that today "I will love every one and not hate anyone today."
20. Observe one of the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, space), externally and internally.
21. Observe whether your "first thoughts" or "second thoughts" are good or bad, clear or clouded.
22. Observe one of the five cognitive senses (hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, smelling).
23. Be aware of the principle of meditation in action.
24. Observe one of the five active senses (speaking, grasping, moving, reproducing, eliminating).
25. Be aware of how you adjust to changing circumstances around you.
26. Observe one of the four functions of mind (manas, chitta, ahamkara, buddhi).
27. Observe how you relate to other people.
28. Observe your reactions when a desire, expectation, want, or need is or is not fulfilled.
29. Notice which thoughts coming into your mind are "useful" or "not useful."
30. Choose one of the primitive fountains (food, sleep, sex, self-preservation) and observe how it affects your other desires, emotions, thoughts, speech, and actions.
31. Witness everything, external and internal (in months which have 31 days).

Appendix C: Daily Internal Dialogues

Internal dialogue step is a very important step, but is one that few students understand. To succeed in meditation you have to develop this important step. You do not begin with meditation itself. First you learn to set a regular meditation time, and then to have a dialogue with yourself. In this process you are coming in contact with your inner, internal states. You are learning about the subtle aspects of your mind, your own conscience, and at the same time you are also training yourself.

As you develop the practice of internal dialogue, you will dialogue about many subjects. You will not just have a single dialogue on a single topic—internal dialogue will become a normal way of relating to your own mind. However, to help you get started in this practice, you may find it useful to have a specific topic with which to start the dialogue. Start by using the number on the list which matches today's date. Remember, you are having a "dialogue" with your mind, a two-way communication, not just a "monologue," merely talking in the presence of your mind—rather, the conscious, waking state "you" is having a "conversation" with your vast unconscious. Use the suggestions below to start the dialogue and then allow the "conversation" to expand naturally. Check-off the dialogue practice at the end of the day.

The subject of internal dialogue is well described in *Path of Fire and Light, Vol. II*, pp. 102-110.

1. Dialogue with yourself about mistakes you have made. Don't condemn yourself or be judgmental.
2. When sitting for meditation, *ask* your mind to go to, and to heal aching parts. When you attempt sushumna application, *ask* your mind to focus on the nose bridge.
3. *Ask* yourself, "what do I want?" Raise questions about the purpose of life.
4. Explain to your mind that it is too worldly and materialistic.
5. Train the senses by using dialogue; actually dialogue with the individual ten senses.
6. *Ask* yourself if you want to meditate, to explore, to know yourself, and to choose your habits.
7. *Ask* how you think, why you are emotional, and what the problems are with your mind.
8. Establish a relationship, a friendship with your mind; learn to love by being gentle with yourself.
9. *Ask* yourself, "what do I want?" This may relate to small things or to the purpose of life.
10. Tell the mind that it has become dissipated, and should tread the path of light, love, and devotion.
11. Self-counsel about negative emotions. When upset, *ask*, "why am I thinking like this?"
12. *Ask* your mind to open a blocked nostril for you. *Ask* your mind to flow with the breath.
13. Consider some problem and *ask* your mind "what are some solutions? what should I do?"
14. Dialogue with whatever is being observed, including mental objects and thoughts.
15. *Ask* yourself, "what do I want?" Remind yourself of your real identity.
16. *Ask* yourself why you are doing certain actions. How do the actions reflect thoughts and emotions?
17. Say to your mind, "please be my friend." How does your mind respond?
18. *Ask* your mind what you have to do. *Ask* why you sometimes do not do what you want to do.
19. When distracting thoughts come, remind yourself of your purpose; tell yourself that this thought or desire is distracting and will lead you to a fantasy.
20. *Ask* "does my ego get in my way or not?" Spend a few minutes simply being honest with yourself.
21. *Ask* yourself, "what do I want?" This may relate to small things or to the purpose of life.
22. *Ask* why you become emotionally disorganized, forget things, and do not attend to things properly.
23. When sitting for meditation, say to your mind, "mind, please go beyond the senses."
24. While doing breathing practices *ask* your mind to "please flow with the breath."
25. Make a contract with the mind to let the mind whisper those inner secrets to you, and put all things in front of your mind. Discuss this "contract" with your mind.
26. *Ask* the mind why it disturbs you in meditation. How can meditation be improved?
27. *Ask* yourself, "what do I want?" You will learn many things when you dialogue.
28. Consider some choices you face in life and *ask* buddhi, "should I do it or not?"
29. *Ask* "is my first thought good or bad—is it clear or clouded?" Your second or third thoughts?
30. *Ask* your mind what your fears are and what to do with them.
31. Say to your mind "please be my friend." (in months which have 31 days)

Appendix D: SwamiJ.com articles

The following are some of the more important articles from the SwamiJ.com, which should be most useful to your understanding of the principles and practices. From these articles you will find many hyperlinks to other articles of interest.

- Attitudes Meditations and Mindfulness
- Beginning, Intermediate, and Advanced Meditation
- Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces: Two Harmonious Directions in Life and Yoga
- Bindu: Pinnacle of the Three Streams of Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra
- Coordinating the Four Functions of Mind
- Diaphragmatic Breathing
- Four Paths of Yoga: Jnana, Bhakti, Karma, Raja
- Four Practices of Meditation, Contemplation, Prayer, and Mantra
- Himalayan Tradition
- How to use a Mantra in Yoga Practice (13 Tips)
- Karma and the Sources of Action, Speech, and Thoughts
- Kundalini Awakening
- Mahavakyas: The Great Contemplations
- Modern Yoga versus Traditional Yoga
- Mysticism, Yoga, and Religion
- Om Mantra and the Seven Levels of Consciousness
- The Path
- Sanatana Dharma
- Sankhya Yoga, Purusha, and Prakriti
- Self-Realization in the Tradition of the Himalayan Masters
- Seven Skills to Cultivate for Meditation
- Shakti, Kundalini, and the River of Tantra Yoga
- Six Schools of Indian Philosophy
- Three Schools of Tantra
- Training the Ten Senses or Indriyas
- Veiling and Projecting: Avidya and Adhyasa
- Yoga Nidra: Yogic Conscious Deep Sleep
- Yoga Sutras
- Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra

Appendix E: Books, Videos, and CDs

Swami Rama video lectures

The video lectures of Swami Rama are highly recommended, as the richness of his message clearly comes through. Also, these have not and cannot be changed through editing as has unfortunately happened with some of his books after he left the body.

- How to Tread the Path of Superconscious Meditation* (1 lecture)
- Yoga Sutras* (8 lectures)
- Ishopanishad* (7 lectures)
- Mandukya Upanishad* (8 lectures)
- Mundaka Upanishad* (8 lectures)
- Saundaryalahari* (Samaya Sri Vidya tantra) (4 lectures)

Yoga, Vedanta, and Tantra

These books will give a solid overview of the three formal streams of wisdom and practices in the tradition of the Himalayan masters:

- Yoga: Lectures on Yoga*, Swami Rama, ISBN 0893890510
- Yoga: Samadhi*, Swami Rama, ISBN 8188157015
- Yoga: Living the Yoga Sutras*, Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati, ISBN 80005483766
- Yoga: Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*, Rama Prasada, ISBN 8121509624
- Vedanta: Advaita Vedanta : A Philosophical Reconstruction*, Eliot Deutsch, ISBN 0824802713
- Vedanta: Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita*, Swami Rama, ISBN 0893890901
- Vedanta: Shankara's Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, translated Prabhavananda & Isherwood ISBN 0874810388
- Tantra: Shakti Sadhana (Tripura Rahasya)*, Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, ISBN 0893891401 (Swami Rama provided significant editorial contributions to this book.)
- Tantra: Auspicious Wisdom*, Douglas Renfrew Brooks, ISBN 079141146X

Swami Rama books from Himalayan Institute USA

- The Art of Joyful Living*, ISBN 0893891177 (significantly revised; buy only used)
- A Call to Humanity*, ISBN 780893891114
- Choosing a Path*, ISBN 0893890774 (limited availability; possibly only in used market)
- Enlightenment without God*, ISBN 0893890847 (out of print; buy in used market)
- Freedom from the Bondage of Karma*, ISBN 0893890316 (limited availability; possibly only in used market)
- Inspired Thoughts of Swami Rama*, ISBN 0893890863 (out of print; buy in used market)
- Lectures on Yoga*, ISBN 0893890510 (out of print; buy in used market)
- Life Here and Hereafter*, ISBN 0893890022 (possibly only in used market)
- Living with the Himalayan Masters*, ISBN 0893891568 (appears not revised)

- Meditation and Its Practice*, ISBN 0893891304 (significantly revised; buy only used)
- Path of Fire and Light, V. 1*, ISBN 0893890979 (appears not revised)
- Path of Fire and Light, V. 2*, ISBN 0893891126 (appears not revised)
- Perennial Psychology of the Bhagavad Gita*, ISBN 0893890901 (appears not revised)
- Practical Guide to Holistic Health*, ISBN 0893891746 (appears not revised)
- Book of Wisdom: Ishopnishad*, ISBN 0893890030 (appears not revised; may be out of print and only in used market)
- Wisdom of the Ancient Sages - Mundaka Upanishad*, ISBN 0893891207 (appears not revised)

Swami Rama books published by Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust

These books were either written by Swami Rama before he left the body or were extremely well compiled (from recorded lectures) after he left the body. The compiled books very accurately capture the spirit of Swami Rama and his teachings.

- Conscious Living*, ISBN 8188157031 (excellent posthumous compilation)
- Essence of Spiritual Life*, ISBN 8190100491 (unrevised republication of Sadhana)
- Om, The Eternal Witness*, ISBN 9788188157433 (excellent posthumous compilation)
- Sacred Journey*, ISBN 8188157007 (fabulous unrevised book)
- Samadhi*, ISBN 8188157015 (excellent posthumous compilation)

Books by students of Swami Rama

I also recommend these books, which are by students of Swami Rama, and which have great insights about principles and practices.

- God*, Pandit Usharbudh Arya, ISBN 089389060X
- Living the Yoga Sutras*, Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati, ISBN 800054838766
- Shakti Sadhana (Tripura Rahasya)*, Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, ISBN 0893891401 (Swami Rama provided significant editorial contributions to this book.)
- Yoga Psychology*, Swami Ajaya, ISBN 0893890529

Books by other authors

These books by authors other than Swami Rama or his students are also very useful and are recommended.

- Advaita Vedanta : A Philosophical Reconstruction*, Eliot Deutsch, ISBN 0824802713
- Tantric Yoga and the Wisdom Goddesses*, David Frawley ISBN 0910261393
- Vedantic Meditation*, David Frawley ISBN 1556433344
- Shankara's Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, translated Prabhavananda & Isherwood ISBN 0874810388
- Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*, Rama Prasada, ISBN 8121509624 (my 1st choice in Yoga Sutras)

- Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali*, Swami Hariharananda Aranya, ISBN 0873957296 (my 2nd choice in Yoga Sutras)
- The Yoga Tradition*, Georg Feuerstein ISBN 1890772186

Recorded meditations

I have published two meditation CDs, which are also available for digital download through many sources, including Amazon.com and iTunes. These are:

- Basic Yoga Meditation: 3, 7, 11, and 30-Minute Guided Practices*
- Yoga Nidra: Extreme Relaxation of Conscious Deep Sleep*

Both beginners and experienced meditators say they have found these guided practices to be very useful. There is more information about them at SwamiJ.com/cd-bm-yn.htm, along with links for purchasing the CDs and the digital downloads. The Yoga Nidra CD has consistently been the most popular Yoga Nidra CD in the world since it was published in 2003.