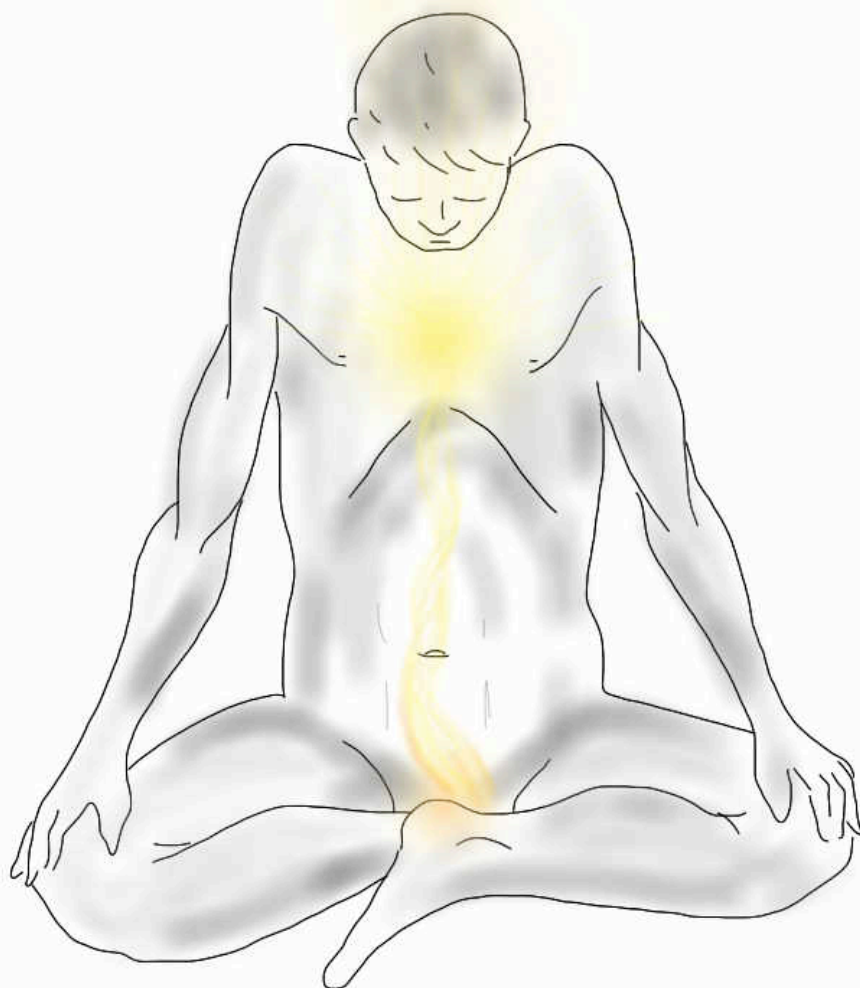


THE ACCIDENTAL YOGI'S MANUAL



A simple guide to blissful living

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

PRELIMINARIES

- Diet
- Exercise
- Breathing

SADHANA – PRACTICES

PRIMARY PRACTICES

LOCKS AND SEALS

- Root lock – Moola Bandha
- Abdominal lock – Uddiyana Bandha
- Neck lock – Jalandhara Bhandha
- Seal of the void – Khechari mudra
- Seal of Shiva – Shambhavi Mudra
- Sealing the six gates – Shanmukhi Mudra

SUPPLEMENTARY PRACTICES

FIRING UP THE KUNDALINI

- The great seal - Maha mudra
- The great lock - Maha bandha
- The great piercing - Maha veda
- Fire cleansing - Agni sara
- Awakening the saraswati nadi - Saraswati Chalana

MANTRA

- Bija mantra
- SOHUM – The snake charmer's song

FANNING THE FIRE WITH LOVE – A GENTLE OPTION FOR AWAKENING

- Compassion

INTRODUCTION

The reason I'm writing a yoga manual isn't because I want to educate people about yoga and the amazing benefits it has on the body and mind. My reason is completely selfish. I simply want to validate and understand, from a westerner's perspective, my unusual, and mostly spontaneous, experiences of yoga, which at times have been both mystical and insane (two words that are somewhat synonymous in my experience).

The result of my search for a scientific explanation of what's usually labeled as new aged hippie nonsense has led me to realise that I'm not as insane as I once thought. It turns out that there's reams of scientific validation for what I've experienced over the past few decades (the experience of what many of us "new age hippie folk" call kundalini awakening). In this manual I've taken the once secretive and mystical discipline of kundalini yoga and put it into a western biological context so that those of us who aren't mystics or master interpreters of Sanskrit texts can understand and use this beautifully simple yet incredibly effective ancient system of personal growth.

Kundalini awakening is a natural biological process that results in expanded states of blissful awareness, a sense of oneness or connectedness with all things, and a continuous outpouring of love and compassion for all living beings. It's a process that can happen of its own accord in some people, or that can be initiated or catalysed in others by a life event or the application of specific exercises (such as a psychological or physical trauma, or a meditative practice, respectively). What's most important for people to understand is that Kundalini awakening isn't something that only a few "special" people have access to, it's a process we can all go through if we choose to. I believe when we're born, just as the Buddha said, we all have the potential to become Buddhas. We come into this world primed to evolve into super-conscious beings within a single lifetime. That's to say the hardware for the mind's evolution is present, in the form of our endocrine and nervous systems. We simply need to train the body and mind by introducing them to specific exercises, emotional states, and environments conducive to higher states of consciousness.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

My yoga journey has never been one that I'd class as being normal or usual. In fact, I've never even been to a yoga class nor have I had a Guru, in the traditional sense. When I think about it, I don't think I ever really practiced yoga. My journey has been more of a case of yoga happening to me.

Yoga, for me, has always been a spontaneous process. But it's only over the past 10 years that I came to realise that fact. The muscle contractions, the strange breathing patterns, the rushes of electrical energy through my body, the patterns of coloured light I saw every time I closed my eyes, all of these things have been known to Yogis for centuries as kriyas, or spontaneous manifestations of kundalini.

REVERSE ENGINEERING

As I realised what was happening to me was a natural awakening process, it dawned on me that this same thing had happened many times throughout history to countless other people, and was still happening to people all over the

world. That was when I realised that the many different systems of Yoga were, in fact, the result of some of those people delineating their own awakening process and reversing the order of that process so that others could follow the path they had laid. Those Yogis of the past had, in a very practical way, reverse engineered their awakening process.

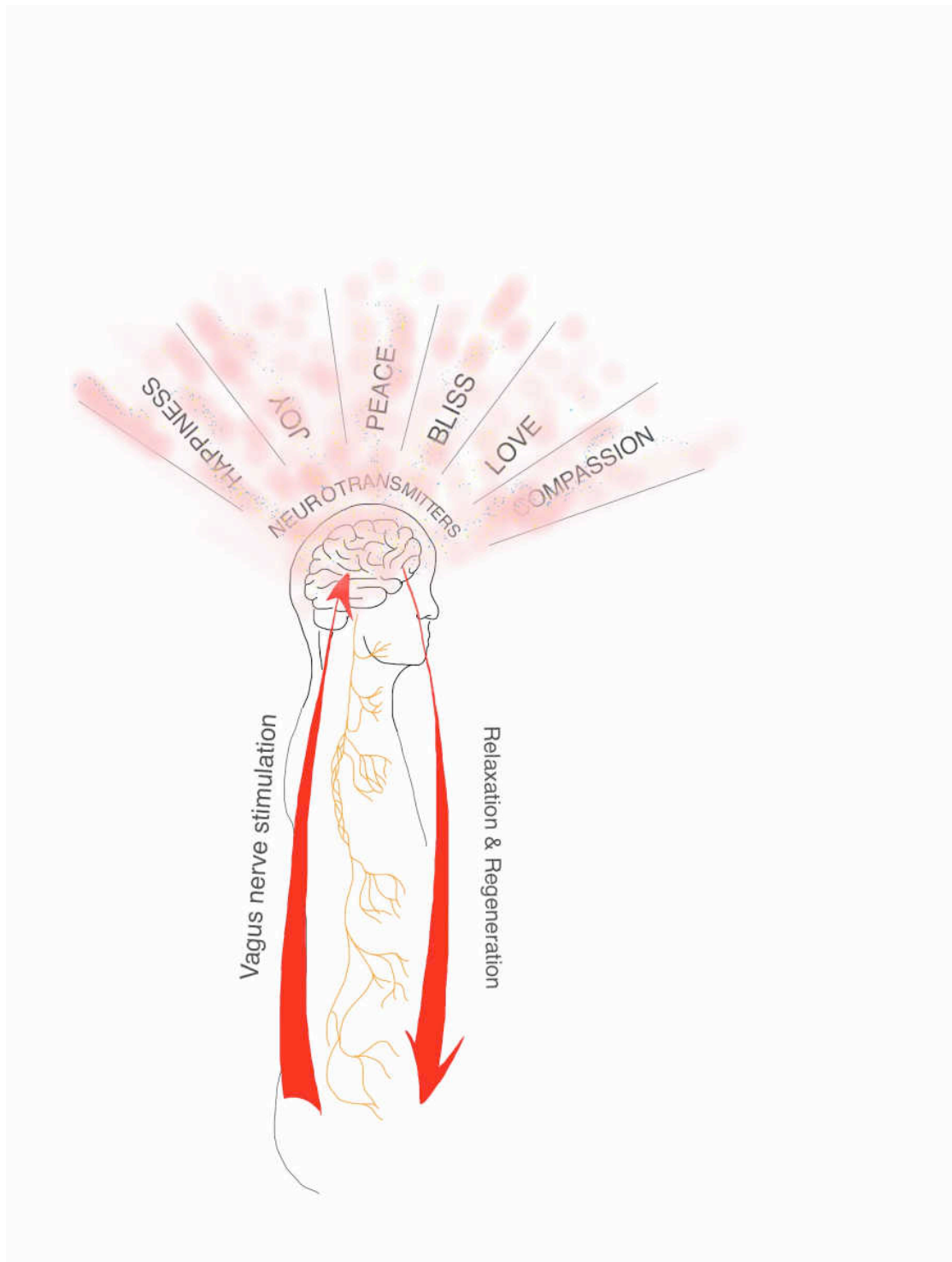
By applying this same understanding of reverse engineering, I have put together this manual based on the process that has been unfolding in my body and mind for the past 33 years.

Biology of Awakening

Awakening, in a nutshell, is a biological process in which the body undergoes a series of physiological changes. These changes in the body have a direct effect upon the mind, triggering experiences of expanded states of consciousness and a feeling of deep love and connectedness to all beings. The idea of reverse engineering is to manipulate the body's inner workings and kick-start the awakening process. In order to gain a good understanding of what we'll be doing and how it works there are a few biological "switches," that have a particularly strong influence on the mind, we need to look at. One of those switches that's of particular importance is the hormone/neurotransmitter called oxytocin, or as I've come to call it "the hormone of awakening."

Why is oxytocin so important and central to the awakening process? It turns out that oxytocin is released from the brain at every major point in your life. Oxytocin flooded your parent's body's at the time of your conception, it was released in copious amounts when your mother gave birth to you; it was released into you and your parent's bodies every time they lovingly gazed into your eyes, as you were feeding and every time they hugged and kissed you. As you began to grow and form your own romantic relationships oxytocin was released every time you gazed into your lover's eyes, when you both embraced, and when you made love. And if you've had children or plan to have children that same cycle will continue. So what does oxytocin do? It helps us bond, it promotes feelings of belonging, it generates feelings of love and affection, and even altruism and a sense of connectedness and oneness. On a more physical level oxytocin triggers a relaxation response in the body, which promotes healthy organ function and a peaceful state of mind conducive to meditation.

How do the practices of yoga influence the production of oxytocin? From a physiological perspective, we can cause a release of oxytocin and a bunch of other neurochemicals that sharpen the mind and lift the mood by waking up some of the deep brain structures. We can do this by stimulating various nerves in the body, namely the vagus and trigeminal nerves. All of the techniques in this manual have a stimulating effect on either one of these nerves.



When stimulated, the vagus and trigeminal nerves-

- Positively alter your emotional state (enhancing positive moods to promote happiness, compassion, love, and altruism)
- Alter the activity of the nervous system, inducing relaxation and a slowing down of the body's biological processes (reducing blood pressure, heart rate, respiration, etc), which makes the mind calm and meditative.
- Reduce pain in the body.
- Switch on the frontal lobes (to make you more intelligent, while enhancing mental focus and critical thinking).
- Enhance memory function.

There's also a third bunch of nerves called the pelvic splanchnic nerves that can be stimulated to cause a release of oxytocin into the body. Stimulating these nerves has an indirect effect on the brain that works by generating a type of pre-orgasmic state in the yogi. Oxytocin is released just prior to orgasm in both men and women. The yogi, by maintaining a pre-orgasmic state through the stimulation of the pelvic splanchnic nerves, is able to maintain a constant supply of oxytocin in his/her body.

By regularly stimulating the vagus, trigeminal, and pelvic splanchnic nerves you're training your brain and nervous system to act and behave in a way that's conducive to deep states of meditation, inner peace and bliss. However, it should be pointed out that training the brain and nervous system is just like any other type of training, to get good you must practice regularly. By doing these practices, you're making physical changes to your nervous system and brain. You're literally re-engineering your body in a way that causes your mind to experience expanded states of awareness and spontaneous realisations of your unity and connectedness with all things.

A second hormone that plays an important role in expanding our state of consciousness is dopamine, which is also released when the vagus, trigeminal, and pelvic splanchnic nerves are stimulated. Dopamine, released during orgasm, is what makes you feel high and elated, it's also the same hormone released when heroin addicts shoot up, giving them their high and ultimately leading to their addiction. Dopamine also works as an aid to help focus the attention, the very basis of meditation.

The key to using dopamine is not to have too much or too little present in the body as either excessive or depleted levels can have an ill effect on the body and mind. When we stimulate specific nerves through our yoga practices we are essentially drip-feeding the body dopamine, which causes a general sense of wellbeing and excitement. These feelings add to the sense of love and compassion a yogin feels towards others while enhancing that sense of blissful unity experienced in the depths of meditation.

(Interestingly dopamine plays a key role in time perception, something that is often reported as being distorted during meditation)

Your Ever Changing Brain

An important element of the awakening process we need to be aware of is how our brains change as we progress through our practices. Neuroscience says that your brain is in a constant state of change. Every thing you do and experience you have causes your brain to rewire itself. For example, when you ride a bike for the first time neurons from all around your brain start firing at the same time. As those neurons fire together they form connects with each other. Every time you ride a bike from then on, those same neurons will fire together again and again, forming stronger connections each time you ride. This is why the more you practice the better you get.

Applying this understanding of neurological rewiring to yoga, each time you do a specific practice it becomes easier because your brain and nervous system are being conditioned every time you repeat the same exercise. This is why regular and consistent practice is better than sporadic inconsistent practice. This

rewiring applies to both physical techniques and meditative practices. What's really interesting about this is that when we start combining both physical and mental practices together we create a type of neurological switch. So for example, if I join my hands in a specific way (in yoga this is called a hand mudra) each time I meditate, a neurological connection is formed between my meditative state of mind and that specific hand position. This means after repeating my meditation, while using this hand position, a number of times it will become possible for me to trigger a spontaneous meditative state simply by forming that hand mudra. In this instance I'll have used a physical technique to trigger a mental state of mind. It should be noted that this also works in the opposite direction, whereby you can focus your mind to trigger a specific physical response, as in the advanced practice of moola bandha discussed later.

Progress

I should point out that while you may often feel as if the practices aren't having any affect on you, know that many changes are taking place deep below the surface. And while some of these changes are obvious, such as the slowing of your breathing and heart rate, and the deep sense of relaxation and pleasure you may feel, other changes aren't so quick to take effect. For instance, the changes and physical restructuring triggered in the frontal lobes and emotional centres of your brain by the stimulation of the vagus nerve take place weeks and months before their benefits are realised. This is interesting because it can just hit you one day. You simply wake up one morning and realise you're happy, really happy, much happier than you ever remember being.

Effects of the practices

Once you begin doing the practices explored in this manual you'll begin to notice a few changes taking place in your body and mind. Some of those changes will be subtle and barely noticeable while others will be blatant and unmissable. The following is a list of things that may or may not happen to you, based on my personal experience and the experience of other people I've spoken with who have gone through a similar process:

The aim of this yoga isn't to attain some mystical state of consciousness that's beyond the grasp of "normal" people, nor is it to gain the super human powers spoken of in the ancient yogic texts. The aim of this yoga is to allow the practitioner to realise the full potential of his/her body and mind, which, incidentally, reveals the true nature of who we are.

By engaging in simple daily practices, the yogi's true nature is gradually revealed. In this way even one who has never meditated is capable of achieving states of awareness and consciousness normally thought to be reserved for only the sternest yogic adepts. This yoga is for everyone. If all you can do is breathe then you can still practice.

Breathing pattern: One of the first and most obvious things many people notice when they begin these exercises is a change in their breathing pattern. In the beginning your breathing may fluctuate between fast and slow, and deep and shallow due to the changes taking place in your nervous system, however this will settle down within a few days or weeks. After a short time your breathing will become slow and deep almost all of the time, closer to how it is when you're asleep. This is one of the first outer signs that your parasympathetic nervous

system has become dominant over the sympathetic system. Inwardly you'll notice a quieting and focusing of your thoughts accompanied by a sense of deep peace as your breathing slows and deepens.

At times, as you progress, your breathing will stop entirely. When this happens the mind enters into deep meditative states. Initially this can cause some people to panic, but there's nothing to panic about, it's a natural part of the process that will happen more and more often and for extended periods of time. This is known in yoga as Kevala (the breathless state), and in Taoist chi gong as the immortal breath. It's said in yoga that the breathing stops when the practitioner awakens kundalini, which acts as an alternate source of energy for the body. Once the breathing starts again and the mind slowly emerges from meditation there is often a feeling of being connected with everything, a sense of oneness, and as if nothing is separate. It's rather like that yogic saying "we're but single drops in an ocean of water."

Thirst and hunger: Many people experience changes in their eating and drinking habits. This is because of the stimulation of the vagus nerve, which has a large supply going to the stomach and intestines. There are times, when your body needs extra fuel for building, restructuring, and detoxifying, that you will have an almost insatiable hunger and thirst. Then there will be times where you won't feel the need to eat or drink at all. An increase in hunger is usually felt in the early stages, whereas in the later stages of practice you'll be able to go without food or water for long periods of time with no side effects.

Detoxification (Physical and emotional): Throughout your practice you'll notice a constant detoxification process taking place in your body and mind. This process will be more intense in the early days as your body throws out all the waste produced from the higher functioning of your cells. After some time (times are different for everyone) things will ease off and become barely noticeable as the new you begins to emerge. This part of the process reminds me a bit of a snake shedding its skin. Quite apt when you think about how Kundalini is symbolically represented as a snake.

Blood pressure and heart rate: Blood pressure and heart rate changes will occur early on in your practice although these changes aren't noticeable or apparent unless you actively monitor them. Almost from day one you'll be able to measure a decrease in blood pressure and heart rate due to the stimulation of the vagus nerve. These changes aren't dangerous, they're completely organic and natural as your body slows down and your heart becomes stronger and healthier.

Sensory experiences: You'll most likely experience many different sensory "explosions," ranging from the not that unusual to the borderline insane. The less unusual experiences will be changes in how you perceive things, for instance colours sometimes seem extra vibrant and almost otherworldly, sound levels can go from normal to exceedingly loud or quiet, your sense of smell and touch can also become hypersensitive-a bit like the early stages of pregnancy for some women. In fact, many of the hormones released by these practices are those that increase during pregnancy.

On the borderline insane side of things, you may hear sounds and voices that other people can't hear. Sometimes you might hear a voice speaking to you just as if there was someone standing in front of you talking. It's a very different experience than hearing an "inner" voice. This feels objective, as if it's coming

from an outside source. You may also see all sorts of things that no one else can see, especially colours and lights - they're quite common. You may feel other people's pains and intuitively know when they are sick and what's wrong with them. It's like a type of hyper extrasensory empathy on the physical level.

All of these things will quiet down over time. The important point is not to let them distract you from your daily routine. It's a process, sometimes a very strange process that can make you feel abnormal, but that's ok because normal is overrated anyway.

Empathy: You will without a doubt experience increasing levels of empathy. This is one of the biological triggers set off by increased vagus nerve activity. We become more emotionally tuned to other people, more emotionally intelligent. A sense of connection and belonging develops within us for other people. Even racial and tribal barriers come crumbling down when we regularly engage the vagus nerve.

Better functioning of your body: As your parasympathetic nervous system becomes dominant, your entire body will begin to do things more efficiently. This is because the parasympathetic nervous system has the job of putting the body's systems in repair and regeneration mode. Everything will be easier, even physical healing will accelerate.

Sexual attraction: Because the biological mechanism we are manipulating with these practices is tied directly into our drive to survive and procreate, you will without a doubt experience heightened feelings of sexual attraction. In fact, you will soon begin to see attractive features in everyone and everything. This is because all of these practices aim at keeping you in a perpetual state of heightened arousal. You'll learn to live with it and enjoy it. But be careful not to abuse it, I think this is where many problems arise for a lot of people. It's also probably why you hear about so many sexual scandals in ashrams (spiritual centres) across the world.

Imagine a nymphomaniac Guru owned one of these ashrams. Knowing everyone is feeling happy, high, and sexually charged, it would be easy pickings for him.

Synchronicity: Something you'll probably notice after meditating for a short time is an increase in what Carl Jung described as synchronistic events. What's a synchronistic event? It's an event that benefits you in some way, an event that just seems to fit into place. It's like the universe is working for you. Things just fall into place without you having to apply any effort. This is one of my favourite side effects of meditation.

DIET AND AWAKENING

An entire volume could be written on yogic diet, but my intention in this manual is not to give you reams of pages telling you what to eat and how to eat it. Instead, I'll offer you a few pointers based on my own experience. Feel free to use all or just a few of my recommendations. And don't worry, I won't be offended if you decide not to use any of my dietary tips at all. You know best what your body does and doesn't need.

We're all different and as such we all have different dietary needs, however, when the body and mind are going through the process of awakening there are a

few things that are pretty much universal and apply to most people. When the awakening process kicks into full swing the body's energy needs increase due to the dramatic physiological changes and restructuring that takes place in the nervous and endocrine systems. Along with the body's increased energy needs there is also an increased need for detoxification. This is because increased cellular activity creates more cellular waste.

So what type of diet is beneficial to the awakening process? A high fiber diet that consists of about 30% fats, 30% proteins, and 40% carbohydrates, that supports detoxification, hormonal balance, and myelination of the nervous system seems to offer the most support to the awakening process. Specific foods that meet these dietary needs are as follows:

- **Nuts** (in particular whole almonds, walnuts, and brazil nuts). A handful each of walnuts and almonds per day is a good amount. As for brazil nuts, you should limit your intake to between three and four nuts per day. This is because, on average, one brazil nut contains 50mg of selenium, and too much selenium is toxic to the body.
- **Seaweed**, in particular Kelp, is an excellent source of Iodine (which is essential for maintaining a healthy endocrine system responsible for hormonal balance in the body). You can get Kelp supplements. They're very cheap, and for me, a more convenient option than buying seaweed. In terms of dosage, the RDA for Iodine is 150mcg, however, up to 50mg (50,000mcg) can be taken per day without side effects. Note// In Japan, the average person consumes 12mg (12,000mcg) of Iodine per day. During the awakening process your need for Iodine increases significantly. So be sure to get at least 500mcg per day.
- **B vitamins** are essential for proper nerve function (including myelination-insulating the nerves and providing faster and smoother functioning of the brain and nervous system-full myelination doesn't happen until you reach your mid 20s, often the age that natural awakening begins). Whole foods such as grains, beans, lentils, and whole-grain rice provide a good source of B vitamins. Of particular importance to the awakening process is Choline, as it is what the body uses to synthesise acetylcholine (the primary neurotransmitter of the vagus nerve, which plays a central part in awakening). Choline is found in high doses in egg yolk (soft boiled eggs are a particularly good option). Another B vitamin that is often neglected (especially in the vegetarian and vegan diet) is B12. Unfortunately for vegans B12 is only found in animal meats and products, especially in organ meats. A good source of B12 for vegetarians is milk and cheese, however, I'm not particularly fond of those options, so I use a sublingual B complex. Note// Some vegans promote algae as having B12. The form of B12 found in algae, such as spirulina, can't be used by the body. In fact taking B12 in this form can create conflicting medical issues because the symptoms of B12 deficiency are present yet blood tests will show that the person has sufficient B12 in their body.
- **Magnesium** is essential for the awakening process. It provides your body with the extra energy it needs as you go through, sometimes

challenging, physiological changes. Magnesium also plays an important role in maintaining healthy nervous system and brain function. Apart from these benefits, probably one of magnesium's most important functions in the awakening process is to quiet down the sympathetic branch of the nervous system (the part of the nervous system responsible for the stress response). This quieting of the sympathetic nervous system allows the parasympathetic nervous system to do its job of keeping the body relaxed and healthy while stimulating the release of powerful neurotransmitters in the brain that generate the shifts in consciousness necessary for awakening to take place. The RDA for Magnesium is around 400mg, but during the awakening process this should be doubled, especially when you feel stressed or particularly sensitive.

- **Phytonutrients** found in brightly coloured fruits and vegetables should be taken every day as they act like a secondary immune system, mopping up any free radicals your body has been producing as a result of the higher cellular activity taking place. Of particular benefit are berries of all sorts, and vegetables from the cruciferous family such as cauliflower and broccoli.
- **Nutricuticles** found in spices and herbs should be eaten regularly as they have a synergistic effect that creates what I can only describe as a super healthy state in the body and mind. My favourites, and some of the most potent of these, are Turmeric, Ginger, Cinnamon, cayenne pepper, and Oregano (AKA: cilantro).
- Drink plenty of water to help with any detoxification that's going on. At least 2 1/2 liters per day.
- A good quality multivitamin and mineral tablet is worth investing in to accompany the above dietary changes.

When it comes to raw food versus cooked food, I like to go for a diet that contains around 40% raw food and 60% cooked food. Why eat cooked food? Because the body needs foods that it won't need to use a lot of energy digesting. This isn't specific to the awakening process, it applies to everyone.

When we eat only raw foods a tremendous portion of the body's energy is taken up in the digestion process. Cooking food breaks it down enough so that digestion takes up a lot less energy, energy that is needed for the restructuring and reconditioning of the brain, nervous system and endocrine system. One of the best dishes you can eat when practicing yoga is Dahl (lentils & spices). Using Dahl as a base, you can add pretty much any type of vegetable you like for a tasty and nutritious meal that will support your awakening process. The recipe I use is as follows:

- 1 cup of red lentils mixed with 3 cups of water. Bring to the boil and add 1 teaspoon of turmeric, 1/2 teaspoon of high mineral content sea salt and 1 teaspoon of coconut oil. Allow simmer for about 40 minutes. That's your basic Dahl recipe.

If you like, you can add the following to create a Dahl curry:

- Heat 1 tablespoon of coconut oil in a pan. Add two cloves of finely chopped garlic, 1 teaspoon of cumin seeds, 1 teaspoon of powdered coriander, 1 teaspoon of ginger powder, and 1 finely chop one large onion. Fry for a couple of minutes, then add two large tomatoes (chopped or crushed into a pulp). If you're adding vegetables, you should do it now. Cook for a few more minutes, then add this mixture to the Dahl. Mix together and allow to simmer for another 10 minutes. And there you have it, curried Dahl. This goes great with boiled brown rice and a raw food salad.

FOODS AND DRINKS TO AVOID

Where possible you should avoid processed foods and drinks. They're full of chemicals that tend to excite and over stimulate the nervous system, which is the opposite to what we're trying to achieve. Many processed foods also contain excitotoxins that have negative effects on the nervous system and brain when taken regularly. So it's best to avoid them. MSG, a popular excitotoxin in takeaway food, has even been shown to erode brain tissue in rats to the point where holes have appeared in the rat brains. Nasty stuff.

Other foods and drinks you should steer clear of are those that have been sweetened with sugar or high fructose corn syrup. Regular consumption of these sweeteners can wreak havoc on your body by creating glycolysis (were the cells in your body literally become sticky instead of smooth and slippery), or by creating massive imbalance in your endocrine system that begins with glucose intolerance and spirals out of control until you end up with type two diabetes (which creates all sorts of other problems in the body).

P.S, I'm not trying to scare you into changing your diet. It's fine to have sugary treats and artificial sweeteners as long as you're not taking them all day every day. It's important to be aware that regular consumption of these products can impact negatively on your yoga practice. That's all I'm saying here.

A NOTE FOR MEAT EATERS

If you eat meat try your best to avoid the processed stuff, there's just nothing beneficial about it. Instead, try eating organ meats, and reducing the amount of animal fats you consume. Additionally consider reducing the size of your meat portion. For example, if 30% of your meal is made up of meat try reducing that to 15 or 20%.

A SIDE NOTE ON SUNSHINE:

When considering your diet make sure you get plenty of vitamin D. Vitamin D has powerful effects on your genes that promotes health and vitality. Apart from being an excellent disease preventative, vitamin D has strong positive effects on the brain and nervous system that aid in the awakening process.

Getting vitamin D from food is difficult, so it's best to spend about 15 minutes out in the sun every day (minus the sun block) to get your daily dose. If you live anywhere above 42 degrees latitude, you'll need to take a supplement. From what I can see between 2,000 and 5,000IU per day is a good amount to take.

ON PHYSICAL EXERCISE

The practices in this manual are primarily made up of what the yogis call Bandhas. A bandha, in yoga, is a specific type of muscular contraction that activates different nerves within the body. Or in the mystical language of the old yogic manuscripts, a bandha is an energy lock that causes the different energies in the body to flow in certain directions that are conducive to meditation and awakening of the dormant Kundalini (spiritual force). So if you were expecting a manual exploring exotic body postures (asanas) you're in the wrong place. However, that doesn't mean the yoga asanas don't have a place in the awakening process.

Yoga asanas practiced alongside the techniques shown in this manual will make the process a whole lot easier. Relaxing, stretching, and toning the body with asanas enhances the functioning of the parasympathetic nervous system, which we know is one of the most important elements of awakening. So if you have a regular yoga asana routine, by all means do it before the routine I outline in this manual.

Personally, I like to do some simple stretches as well as some cardiovascular exercise. This keeps the body in good shape, the benefits of which are felt when sitting in meditation for extended periods. Put simply, the fitter your body is, the easier it will be for you to sit in meditation. My personal practices include a simple sun salutation routine that I start slowly and build up some speed. Usually 10 to 15 repetitions of the sun salutation is enough before each practice session. You can find lots of sun salutation variations on youtube, so I won't spend time trying to explain it to you here.

BREATHING

The average person takes 16 breaths per minute. In yoga the aim is to deepen and slow your breathing rate so that you take 4 to 6 breaths per minute, which should drop to 1 to 2 breaths per minute or less during meditation. The best way to achieve this isn't to start counting your breaths, but to think about making your breathing as light and quiet as you can. Doing this naturally slows and deepens your breathing rate.

Why is slowing and deepening the breath important? We'll look into this in more detail later when describing specific breathing practices, but for now the simple answer is that slowing your breath stimulates the glossopharyngeal branch of the vagus nerve, while deepening your breath stimulates its gastric branch. This stimulation results in a peaceful and clear mind due to the neurotransmitters released from the brain and the general relaxing effect initiated in the body.

Even when you're walking around not doing any formal practice, you can always take a few seconds to quiet your breathing. The effects of doing this are cumulative. Over time you're training your breath to slow and deepen. One day you'll notice that your breathing has become steady and slow. It's one of those things you just notice yourself doing one day, and then you realise you've been doing it like that for weeks or even months.

There are two specific types of breathing we'll be using throughout the practices taught in this manual, they are Bhastrika, and Ujjayi. Bhastrika should be used before your physical practices and again just before meditation as it creates stillness, clarity, and a sense of lightness in the body and mind. Ujjayi, on

the other hand, should be used at all other times unless stated, as it has a powerful stimulating effect on the vagus nerve. In saying that, both Bhastrika and Ujjayi stimulate the brain and nervous system in a way that strongly influences your state of being in the short and long term. Lets have a look at how to practice these techniques, while examining how they work.

Bhastrika

Bhastrika, or bellows breath, uses a pumping action to forcefully inhale and exhale air from the lungs a number of times, followed by retention of the breath. This cycle is repeated a number of times. The pumping action of Bhastrika causes the brain to lightly pulsate to the rhythm of the breathing cycle. This pulsating pumps cerebrospinal fluid up and down the spine and around the brain and nervous system. This effect, combined with an increased blood flow through the body, cleanses, oxygenates and revitalises your cells. Interestingly, this technique also lowers systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

Along with the cleansing effect, Bhastrika induces an immediate slowing of the normal breathing rhythm after the practice. This is due to the oxygenating effect of the technique on the body, which tells the brain to slow down the breathing rate. This is one of the most beneficial effects of the practice as slower breathing creates a still mind.

Bhastrika practice:

1. Sit in Siddhasana (described in the next section, "Sadhana").
2. Forcefully inhale and exhale in and out of your abdomen. In the beginning you can do 20 breaths per round (this can be increased over time to 200 breaths).
3. After your last exhalation take a deep breath and hold it for as long is comfortable (apply moola bhandha, jalandhara bandha, shambhavi mudra, and kechari mudra while holding your breath, if you know them).
4. Exhale and repeat the cycle.

Five minutes of bhastrika is plenty. Practice four times per day for maximum benefits.

Ujjayi

Ujjayi is a method of slowing your breathing rate down in order to stimulate the vagus centres of the brain. This is done by contracting your glottis as you inhale and exhale, causing a hissing sound as you breathe. This contraction of the glottis stimulates the hypoglossal branch of the vagus nerve.

Ujjayi practice:

Lightly contract your glottis and breathe out, as if you're steaming up a mirror with your breath. Maintain the contraction of your glottis and slowly breathe in and out. That's it. Simple, right?!

SADHANA – PRACTICES

POSTURE

Of the thousands of postures used in yoga, there's one that stands out and surpasses all others in its ability to switch on or stimulate the pre-orgasmic state yogis use to release the hormone of awakening, oxytocin, from the brain. That posture is Siddhasana. Perfecting this posture makes it possible to achieve a full orgasm at will. However, for our purposes we're not aiming to achieve a full orgasm, rather we're looking to get to the stage where we can induce a pre-orgasmic state.

Siddhasana is the only posture you'll need to learn for the practices used in this manual. It forms a powerful foundation for the practices that follow by priming the parasympathetic branch of the nervous system through stimulation of the pelvic splanchnic nerves, which, as well as promoting deeper states of concentration and meditation, pumps an initial surge of oxytocin into the body. So in a sense, simply sitting in this posture regularly prepares the body and mind for the awakening process. In fact, it's said that one who perfects this posture

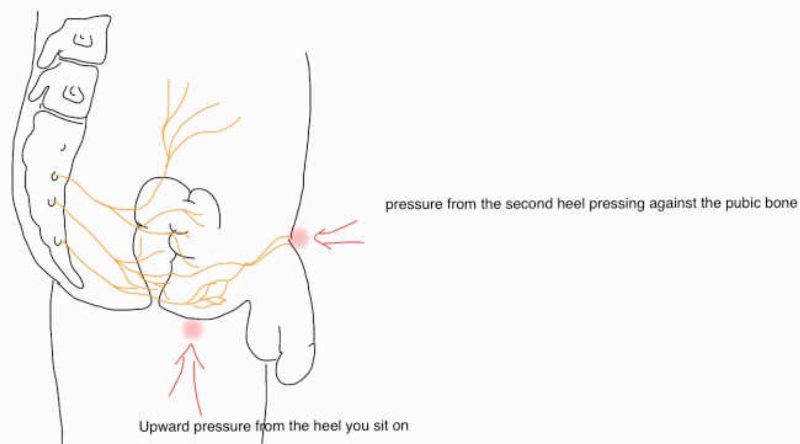
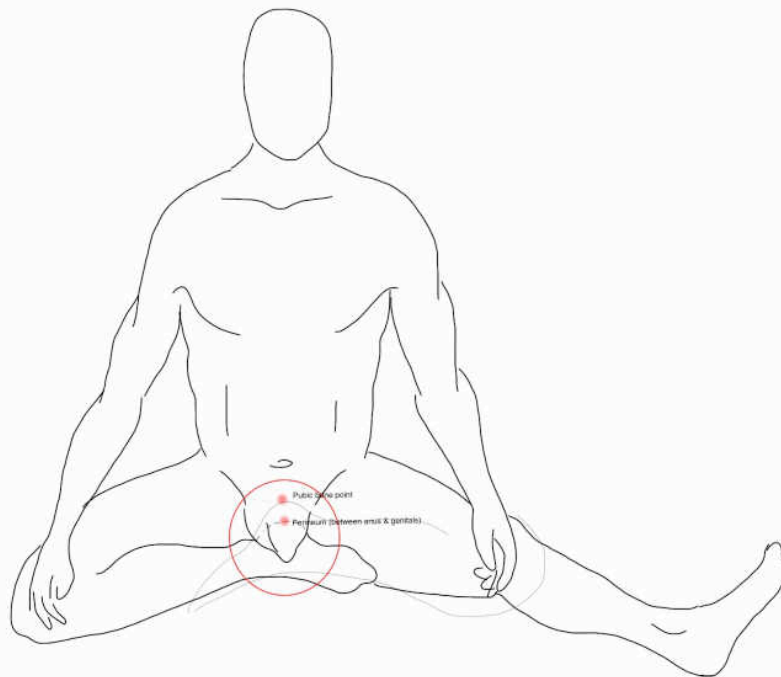
Importance of a straight back and open posture

Keeping your spine straight offers quite a few benefits that spill over into our everyday lives. An open, expansive, and erect posture, such as Siddhasana positively influences our hormone levels by decreasing cortisol and increasing testosterone levels which together lowers stress, increases overall health and disease resistance, and generates a confident state of mind (http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are.html). Psychologically, a straight sitting position makes us feel happier (<http://www.sfgate.com/health/article/How-posture-influences-mood-energy-thoughts-4784543.php>). This is reflected in the teachings of taoism where you are told to straighten your spine and lift your head to raise the spirit, while slumping the spine and dropping the head is conversely said to dampen the spirit (this is also reflected in modern research where the exact opposite effects of good posture have been observed when slouching your body).

Another reason for using Siddhasana, and by far the most obvious reason, is that it creates a solid sitting position which is essential as you progress through the later stages of meditation when the body, if in an unstable position, can move spontaneously and damage itself without the yogi being aware.

Below I'll describe three methods of sitting. The first is a beginners version of siddhasana in which only one point is used to stimulate the pelvic splanchnic nerves. The second is a more advanced version of siddhasana in which two points are used to stimulate the pelvic splanchnic nerves. And the third is a normal seated posture in a chair that uses one point to stimulate the pelvic splanchnic nerves. Of the three methods, the advanced version of siddhasana produces the strongest results. However all three positions work.

Activating the parasympathetic nervous system by stimulating the pelvic splanchnic nerves



How to practice Siddhasana:
The basic posture:

1. Sit on the edge of a cushion that lifts your bottom an inch or two off the ground.
2. Position your right foot so that your heel is pressing up into your perineum (on a male: between the anus and scrotum, and on a female: just at the lower end of the vaginal entrance). Pressure should be firm but not uncomfortable.
3. Position your left foot on the floor in front of your right foot.

4. Sit with your spine straight and bring your attention to the point between your eyebrows.

Advanced Siddhasana:

1. Sit on the edge of a cushion that lifts your bottom an inch or two off the ground.
2. Position your right foot so that your heel is pressing up into your perineum.
3. Position your left foot so that it sits into the fold of your right leg leaving the heel of your foot pressing in against the pubic bone.
4. Sit with your spine straight and bring your attention to the point between your eyebrows.

Chair posture (alternative to siddhasana):

1. Wrap a piece of cotton or other organic material into a firm ball. Position the ball so that it applies firm but comfortable pressure on the perineum when you sit down. Then simply sit so that your thighs are parallel to the floor with your back straight. Hold your attention on the point between your eyebrows.

Note/ You can also stimulate the second point on the pelvic bone when in the chair position or the basic siddhasana posture by placing a solid ball (something like a snooker ball) on the point and securing it in place with a scarf wrapped tightly around your hips. However, this method of stimulation isn't as effective as using the correct foot position taught in the advanced version of siddhasana.

Siddhasana is described in numerous ancient texts as the most important posture to be practiced amongst the 8,400,000 asanas of yoga. Its importance can be seen echoed in the following two excerpts:

- *Place one heel against the perineum, put the other ankle above the penis, place the chin on the chest, and remain motionless with the sense organs restrained while staring between the eyebrows. This is called Siddhasana and it breaks open the door to liberation. - Gheranda Samhita*
- *Success in one Siddhasana alone becoming firmly established, one gets Unmani (no mind, or the state where mind no longer distorts Reality) at once, and the three bonds (Mula, uddiyana, & jalandhara Bandhas) are accomplished of themselves. - Hatha Yoga Pradipika*

Moola Bandha - Root lock

Moola bandha is the first in a series of specialised muscle contractions, which, when integrated with each other, have a synergistic effect on the brain, nervous system, and endocrine system that culminates in a powerful awakening of the mind. However, before we can learn how to combine all the bandhas into one practice we must first be able to do them individually. It's a bit like learning to crawl before you walk, and walking before you run. So let's look at mula bandha.

Moola Bandha, or root lock, as it is translated, forms the base or root of our practices. Its practice stimulates the nerves of the perineum, so just like siddhasana, moola bandha primes the nervous system and brain and sets the body and mind up for the rest of the awakening process.

There are two distinct stages of the moola bandha practice. The first stage involves physically contracting the muscles of the perineum. This can be more difficult than you might think because the fibers of the muscle groups in this area of the body are so closely knitted together, which makes it particularly hard to gain control of individual muscles. However, with a bit of time and effort you'll have it mastered before long.

The advanced stage of the moola bandha practice works on the level of the mind. This stage can take many years to accomplish, or for some people it can happen quite quickly. At this level of practice the yogi simply wills the perineal muscles to contract. There is no physical effort used. When this stage is reached simply bringing your awareness to the perineum is enough to cause the muscle to contract and flutter (identical to a male genital orgasm, only without the ejaculation, in my experience. With continued practice, the same mental control is gained over other areas in the body that are normally out of conscious control). This is a powerful practice as it allows the yogi to release a flood of beneficial hormones from his/her brain at will. In fact, this practice alone is capable of sending the practitioner into deep, blissful states of expanded awareness and mental silence.

How to practice Moola Bandha:

The physical practice:

1. Sit in siddhasana or an alternative position, with your back straight.
2. Bring your awareness to the area of your perineum. This is an important step in the physical practice as it lays down the neural circuitry needed for the advanced mental level practice of moola bandha.
3. Draw up your anus and perineal muscles together to begin with. This is called aswini (horse) mudra and has similar benefits to moola bandha. Repeat this action a few times, holding the contraction for a few seconds or minutes (as long as you can). Relax for a few minutes.
4. Now try to only contract the perineal muscles, the same muscles you use to stop the flow of urine when you're going to the toilet. Repeat this a number of times, holding the contraction for as long as you can each time.
5. Once you gain control of the perineal muscles you should do the practice by timing your contractions with the inhalation phase of your breathing cycle, remembering to relax the muscles as you exhale.

6. When practicing moola bandha your eyes should look towards the point between your eyebrows even though your attention is maintained on the perineal area (this is called shambavi mudra and will be explained in detail later).

The mental practice:

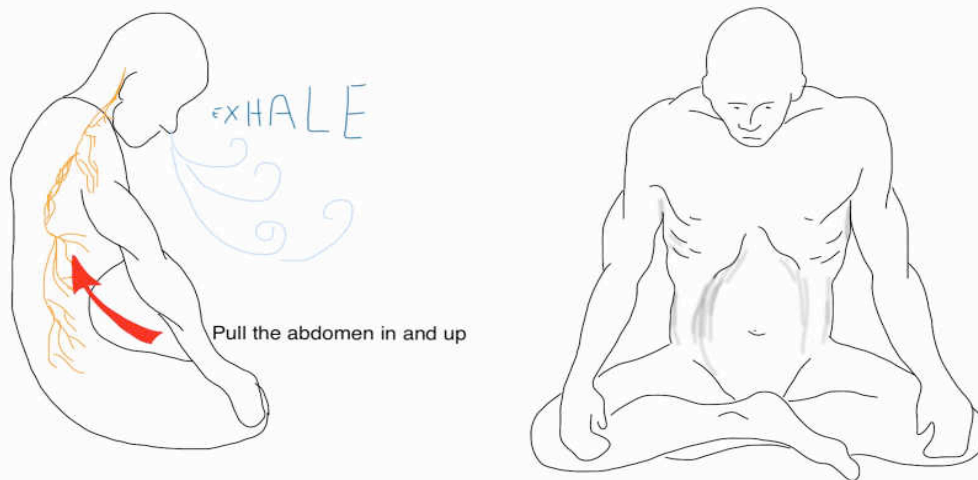
This is somewhat difficult to explain because it's more of a progression that takes place as a result of steady and consistent practice of the physical moola bandha as opposed to a specific practice you can employ. However, there are a few things you can do that will become apparent as you read on. We'll come back to this point a little later.

Uddiyana Bandha - Upward Flying Lock

Uddiyana Bandha is the second of our primary practices. Traditionally, it involves breathing all of the air out of your lungs and then pulling your abdomen in towards your spine. When we first learn Uddiyana Bandha we'll do it in the traditional form, however, later as we learn to integrate it with our breathing practices we'll apply it at different stages of the breathing cycle in order to maximize its effects on the body and mind.

What are the effects of Uddiyana Bandha?

Uddiyana Bandha - Activating the vagus nerve

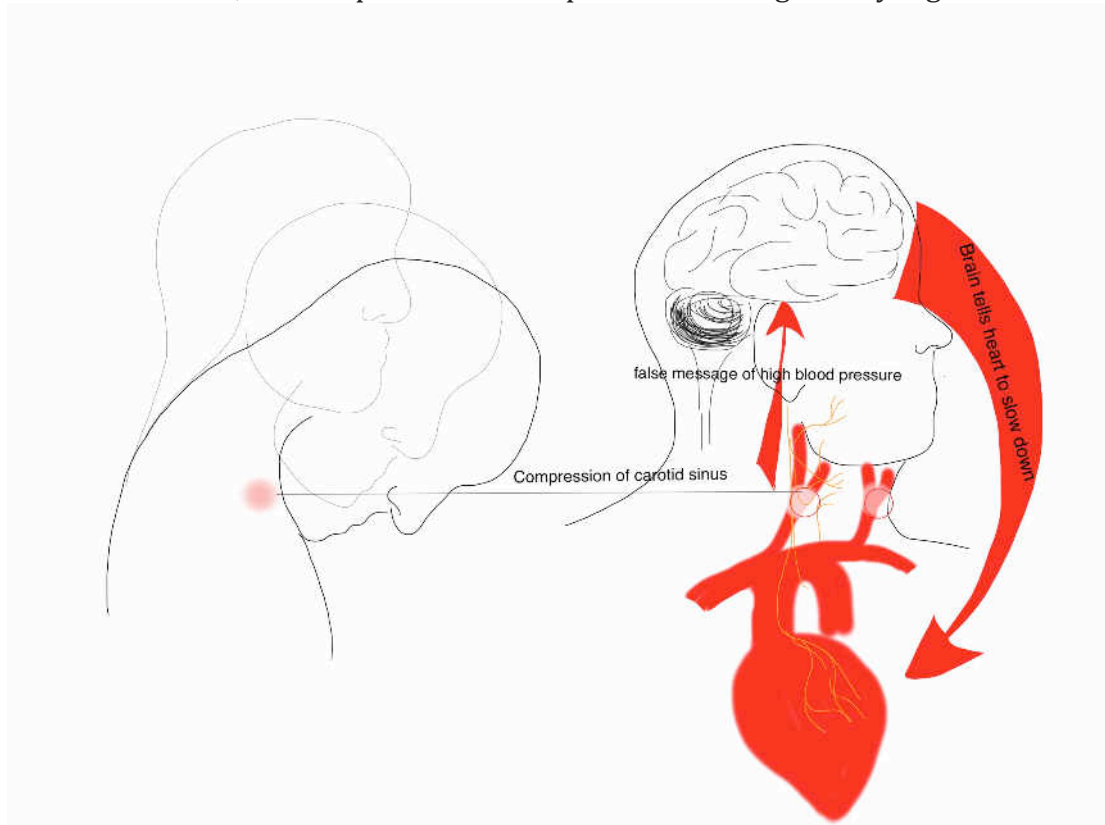


Jalandhara – Neck Lock

Jalandhara is the third of our primary practices. Like Uddiyana Bandha it has a powerful influence on the vagus nerve. In fact, of all the bandhas Jalandhara probably has the most direct and physically observable effect on the nervous system.

The practice itself is, like many yoga practices, is deceptively simple in that it's just a well timed movement of your head where you tilt your head forward so that your chin presses down onto or towards your chest. What does this simple movement do? It compresses a structure in your neck called the carotid sinus. Why is that important? The carotid sinus is one of a number of receptors in your body whose job it is to monitor your blood pressure. When you compress the carotid sinus with Jalandhara Bandha you trigger a false signal of high blood pressure. Your brain responds to that signal by switching on the vagus nerve to slow your heart rate and drop your blood pressure.

An interesting point to make here is that medical doctors often use a maneuver called carotid massage, where they physically massage the carotid sinus in the neck, when a patient's blood pressure is dangerously high.



How to practice Jalandhara Bandha:

1. Sit in siddhasana or an alternative position, with your back straight.
2. Bring your awareness to the area of your neck (at the base of your throat).
3. As you inhale, lower your chin towards your chest.
4. Hold your breath for a moment, while keeping your chin pressed onto your chest.

5. As you exhale, lift your chin. That concludes one round of Jalandhara bandha.

To incorporate Mula, Uddiyana, and Jalandhara into one synergistic practice simply apply all three bandhas as you inhale and relax them as you exhale, while sitting in Siddhasana. Doing this for just a short time will have a powerful stimulating effect on the vagus and pelvic splanchnic nerves. You can further enhance this practice by tilting the pelvis forward as you apply the bandhas and tilting it backwards as you release them.

The practices that follow ramp up the activation of the deep brain structures by including strong stimulation of the Trigeminal and Vagus nerves.

Khechari Mudra

If I could sum up the effects of Khechari Mudra in just a few words, I'd say that it brings contentment, excitement, deep inner peace, and a sense of well being to the yogi no matter what circumstances arise in his or her life.

Anatomy of Khechari

Khechari has a powerful stimulating effect on the deep brain structures. In fact, of all the physical techniques used in yoga Khechari mudra has the strongest influence over our brain's neurochemistry. The reason for Khechari's powerful influence over the brain is due to the direct stimulation the tongue has upon five of the cranial nerves and the erectile tissues in the nasal cavity - the stimulation of which is directly linked to left and right brain dominance (which plays an important roll in the awakening process).

By inserting the tongue into the nasopharyngeal cavity (Khechari Mudra) you are stretching and lightly contracting the tongue, which stimulates the vagus, facial, glossopharyngeal, and hypoglossal nerves, all of which lead directly to the deep brain structures responsible for the release of the hormones used in the awakening process. By pressing your tongue against the nasal septum (the divide between your left and right nostrils) you directly stimulate the nasopalatine and lingual branches of the trigeminal nerve, another nerve whose stimulation causes the activation of our deep brain structures.

With all of this deep brain stimulation and the resulting release of mind altering neurochemicals going on we can see why Khechari has been thought of, by yogis for millennia, as being the king of the mudras. This simple, yet admittedly difficult to achieve, placement of your tongue can have a deeply profound effect upon your brain and the way it functions, and consequently on the way you see the world and act within it. In the short term all of this change going on in your brain can manifest as emotional highs and lows that you might not even notice, though people around you probably will.

Noticing these types of changes is a bit like being in an airplane, when you're in the plane it barely feels like your moving, but to people looking up at the plane from the ground it's quite obvious that you're moving at great speed.

With all of these dramatic, life-altering changes happening it's interesting and reassuring to note that the practice of Khechari mudra also induces a

comforting sense of non-attachment - as if you're just watching the process unfold before you.

Khechari and your sexy brain

A curious fact that's somewhat related to the practice of Khechari mudra is a woman's ability to have an orgasm through the stimulation of her nipples. Normally for an orgasm to occur there needs to be direct genital stimulation of the pelvic splanchnic nerves, however it turns out that biology has designed a secondary pathway through which women can reach orgasm. That pathway is the vagus nerve which, when stimulated through the nipples, causes contractions in the cervix that trigger orgasm. While this vagus nerve pathway explains how the practice of Khechari Mudra can generate ecstatic sensations moving up through the body of a woman, it doesn't explain the mechanism at work in men.

When a man practices Khechari Mudra for some time (times vary from person to person) he will begin to experience contractions or spasms in the perineal muscles precisely like those experienced during ejaculation, only in this instance there is no ejaculation. The spasms are, however, still accompanied by waves of ecstatic energy moving up through the body - similar to orgasm. The main difference between these spasms and those experienced during orgasm is that the Khechari induced spasms and accompanied sensations can go on for long periods of time - half an hour or more, in my personal experience. So if there's no direct nerve pathway connecting the tongue and male genitals, the question arises, how does the practice of Khechari mudra trigger a male orgasm, of sorts? While I don't have a solid scientific explanation for this question, I believe in the initial phases of the practice the connection between the genitals and tongue is psychological. Then as you continue with the practice the psychological connection becomes neurological.

What do I mean by that? Imagine this, every time you insert your tongue into the nasopharyngeal cavity the phallic symbology combined with the release of orgasmic neurochemicals from the brain trigger sexual arousal. Repeated practice of Khechari Mudra will cause your brain set up neural connections linking the act of inserting the tongue into the nasopharynx with feelings of sexual arousal. Repeated practice will strengthen those connections until eventually sustained non-ejaculatory orgasm can be triggered.

Synergy of Mudras - laying down the neural connections

By incorporating Khechari Mudra into our Bandha practice we create a type of master switch in the body. Practicing all of the bandhas together along with Khechari mudra builds new neural pathways in the brain that associate the muscle contractions of the perineum, diaphragm, and neck with the movement of the tongue into the nasopharynx. Continuing to do this practice for a number of weeks strengthens those neural pathways. Eventually the simple act of inserting the tongue into the nasopharynx is enough to trigger a type of full body mudra in which all of the muscles involved in the bandhas undergo subtle contractions that accentuate the waves of orgasmic energy moving up through your body. This full body mudra acts like a type of kundalini energy dynamo, generating deeper states of bliss, calm, and well being each time we do it.

Extraordinary effects of khechari practice

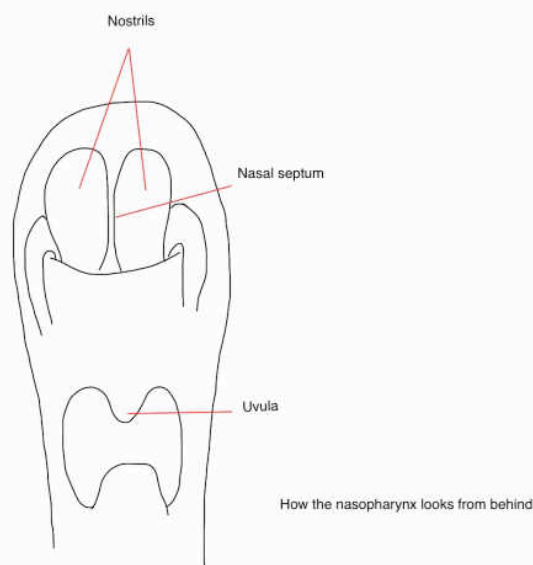
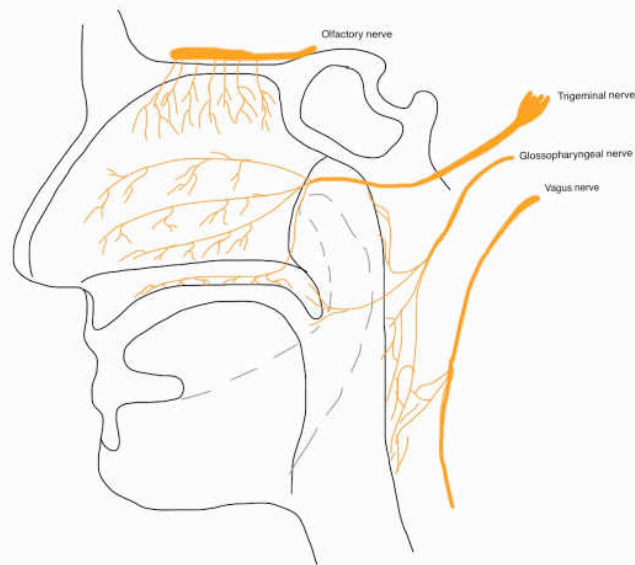
When the tongue enters the nasopharyngeal cavity a number of physical reflexes occur in the body that can cause dramatic changes to take place in our metabolic rate. These changes are so dramatic that the body's metabolism can slow down to the point where some yogins have been known to go into a type of conscious hibernation for as long as one month while buried under the ground without food, water or air. The reflexes responsible for these changes are the nasocardiac reflex, and the nasobronchial reflex.

When the tongue presses against the media turbinates in the nose, signals are sent along the trigeminal nerve to the brain centres that control respiration and heart rate. Pressure applied to the media turbinates tells the brain to slow down breathing and heart rates. As this happens, the rest of the body adjusts its metabolic rate, slowing down all of the body processes. To add to this the stimulation of the vagus nerve has a suppressing effect on the appetite. This metabolic slowing and appetite suppression is highly advantageous to the advanced yogi as it allows him or her to meditate for extended periods of time. No wonder yogic literature is filled with tales of yogins living for hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of years.

Interestingly, the application of khechari mudra seems to work by the same mechanism responsible for something called the dive reflex. The dive reflex is the name given to a set of dramatic physiological changes that take place in the body when the face is submerged in water at or below a temperature of 21 degrees celcius. Once the dive reflex is triggered the body strives to preserve energy for as long as possible, it does this by shifting venous blood into the lungs and redistributing blood from the less important extremities to the vital organs (in particular the brain, heart, and lungs). As well as the blood supply being shifted around the body the heart slows to around 40 beats per minute and cellular metabolism slows down dramatically by rapidly cooling their temperature by a few degrees.

The dive reflex is triggered when the trigeminal nerve is stimulated by cold water hitting the face above the lips. The effects of the dive reflex are further amplified when the breath is held. At this stage it should be pretty clear how khechari mudra stimulates a similar response to the dive reflex. Hopefully this correlation will help you understand why Khechari mudra has such a dramatic effect on the body and mind.

Another, more dramatic, reflex that occurs in an advanced form of Khechari mudra (where the tongue moves back down the throat to seal the trachea) inhibits the breathing reflex entirely.



Practicing Khechari Mudra

Khechari mudra is best experienced as a natural phenomenon. What I mean by this is that your tongue will naturally begin to move back and up into the nasopharyngeal cavity as your nervous system and brain go through the changes brought about by the other practices. In saying that, if you feel a strong desire to do khechari mudra, there are a few things we can do to encourage our tongue to get moving in the right direction.

Firstly, we can help to stretch the tongue and stimulate the cranial nerves by doing a practice called talabya kriya. To do this lift your tongue to the roof of

your mouth, then create a vacuum by sucking it while opening your mouth. Finish by dropping your tongue, making a clicking sound, and then sticking your tongue out of your mouth, stretching it down towards your chin. Repeat as often as you like. This is one of the simplest and most effective things we can do to encourage our tongue to move towards Khechari mudra. The added benefit of practicing talabya kriya is that it has a calming effect on the mind and body.

Some people advocate cutting the frenulum, the tendon at the bottom of the tongue, in order to get faster results with khechari. Personally I don't advise anyone to do this as it can potentially do irreversible damage to your body. It's at this point that I will say while khechari mudra is extremely beneficial to anyone travelling the path of yoga, awakening can still happen without its use. In fact, it's important to understand that some people will never achieve Khechari mudra because they are anatomically incapable of it. So if you can't do it, don't worry, just carry on with the other practice, enjoy talabya kriya, and move on to the practice of shambhavi mudra.

Where do you put your tongue once you've entered the nasopharyngeal cavity? There are a few tongue placements you can use once you're inside the nasopharyngeal cavity. The first position is the lower end of the nasal septum. The second position is about mid way up the nasal septum. Some say this point is the most stimulating. The third position is above the nasal septum, where you feel a slight indentation. This, for me, has the strongest effect on the awakening process. The fourth position is inside the left or right nostril, which is extremely sensitive and stimulating.

If you want to rapidly stimulate the vagus nerve you can churn your tongue so that it moves back and forth across the nasal septum. This also stimulates the flow of Soma if used regularly.

SHAMBHAVI MUDRA – THE SEAL OF SHIVA

Throughout tantric and yogic texts you will find images Lord Shiva directing his eyes to gaze towards the centre of his forehead (ajna chakra, sometimes called the third eye). You will also find many other paintings of Sadhus and yogis holding their eyes in this position if you scan through the literature. So what is this eye position and what's its significance to our practice?

Shambhavi mudra, or the seal of Shiva, is described in the Gerandha Samhita as follows: "Direct your eyes toward the middle of the eyebrows and meditate upon your own self (in the form of light). It is Shambhavi Mudra, the most secret practice of all the Tantra scriptures."

In the tantric scripture Sochanda Tantra, the following is said about Shambhavi: "Touching eyeballs as a feather, lightness between them opens into the heart and there permeates the cosmos." This verse tells us that through the practice of Shambhavi we can attain cosmic consciousness.

By turning our eyes in and up into the position of Shambhavi mudra we are stimulating a number of nerves and brain centres. One of the nerves stimulated is the optic nerve. By stimulating the optic nerve, over time and with regular practice, we begin to see a light appearing in the centre of the forehead. Focusing on this light makes it easy for the mind to become still and for pure awareness to become our new state of being. But this isn't all that's going on when we practice Shambhavi mudra, there are a few other things happening too, which all add fuel to our awakening process. Let's take a look.

There are a few things to think about here. Firstly, your brain uses a whopping 20% of your body's energy supply. That's more energy than any other organ uses. 30% of your brain's cortex is dedicated to visual processing. That means a huge amount of the energy your brain uses is taken up by visual processing. Think about that for a moment, then think about how refreshing and revitalising it is to simply close your eyes for a few minutes when you're feeling tired.

By applying shambhavi mudra, and temporarily shutting off your sense of sight, you are allowing your brain to rest and recuperate. Shambhavi mudra allows the brain to redirect the energy normally used for visual processing, making it much easier for the mind to concentrate and achieve deep meditative states.

Next we need to think about what happens when we still our eyes? Normally when you close your eyes many thoughts will flow through your head in the form of images and words. What's interesting about this flow of thoughts is that for every thought you have there's a muscular movement happening simultaneously in your body. For example, if you close your eyes and imagine wiggling your index finger, although your index finger won't physically move your brain will still send signals to the muscles as if it was trying to get it to wriggle. So while, to an observer, there are no obvious movements of your finger there are in fact tiny micro movements taking place in your finger muscles.

What does this mean in terms of our eyes? Normally, with your eyes open, when you look at something your eyes constantly move around the object in order to form the clearest possible image in your mind. These movements are called saccades. Because the brain doesn't differentiate between real and imagined images, when we close our eyes they continue to function as if they're open and seeing objectively. This means when we see something in our mind's eye, we experience the same eye movement, or saccade, as we would if our eyes were open. What's interesting about Shambhavi mudra is that by locking the eyes into the correct position we can override or reverse engineer the mind's ability to produce images. By stilling the eyes and stopping the mind from forming images our internal chatter stops and pure awareness arises. This awareness is called shambhavi consciousness.

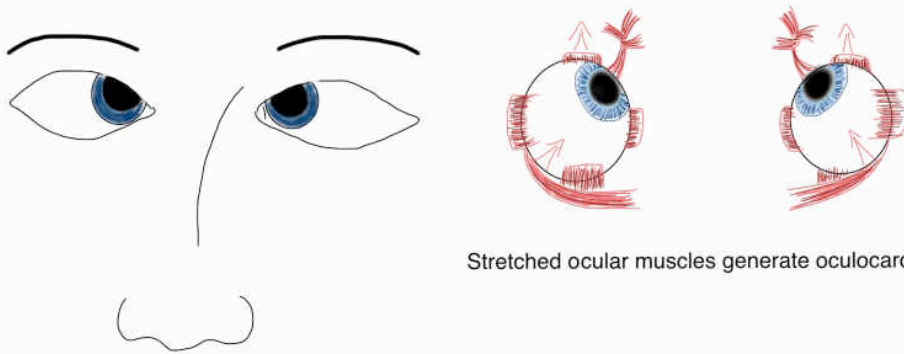
The same principle of stilling the eyes also applies to the tongue. When we think using words, our tongue makes subtle movements that correspond with the normal movement of the tongue during speech. So when there's internal chatter going on in the mind your tongue moves (to a much lesser degree) as if you were speaking out loud. When the tongue is kept completely still, through the practice of Khechari mudra, mental chatter stops. This is why Shambhavi and Khechari are used together where possible.

Oculocardiac reflex

Something else interesting, and very significant with regard to the awakening process, happens when we apply Shambhavi mudra. As the eyes turn in and up, the muscles controlling our eye movements are stretched. This stretching action on the eye's muscles stimulates the vagus nerve and induces a relaxation response in the body causing a slowing down of all the vital process, similar to but not as intense as the effects of Khechari mudra. This response is called the oculocardiac reflex and can also be induced by applying pressure to

the eyes.

Shambhavi Mudra



Practicing Shambhavi:

The basic practice of shambhavi mudra is done by closing your eyes and turning them in and up to look at the space between your eyebrows. If you find it difficult to hold your eyes in this position placing your finger on the point you're focusing on can be helpful. In the beginning you may feel quite a bit of eyes strain, however this will go away after a few days of practice. When you notice a light appearing in your head it should be your focus for meditation.

Advanced: Shambhavi consciousness

The advanced form of shambhavi mudra doesn't involve any physical positioning of the eyes, rather it's a state of mind. One who enters a state of shambhavi consciousness sees reality as it is, without the labels the mind puts on things. In this state the yogin, while looking out at the world, holds his attention within himself.

Shanmukhi Mudra – Sealing the six gates

Shanmukhi mudra, in spite of its apparent simplicity, is an advanced yogic technique capable of catapulting the yogin into a state of cosmic consciousness, especially when used in conjunction with the practices we've explored so far. The mudra stimulates the deep brain centres responsible for the release of a cocktail of neurochemicals that all stimulate deep states of consciousness. This is achieved by applying finger pressure to specific points on the head. Along with the release of neurochemicals the parasympathetic branch of the nervous system is also activated.

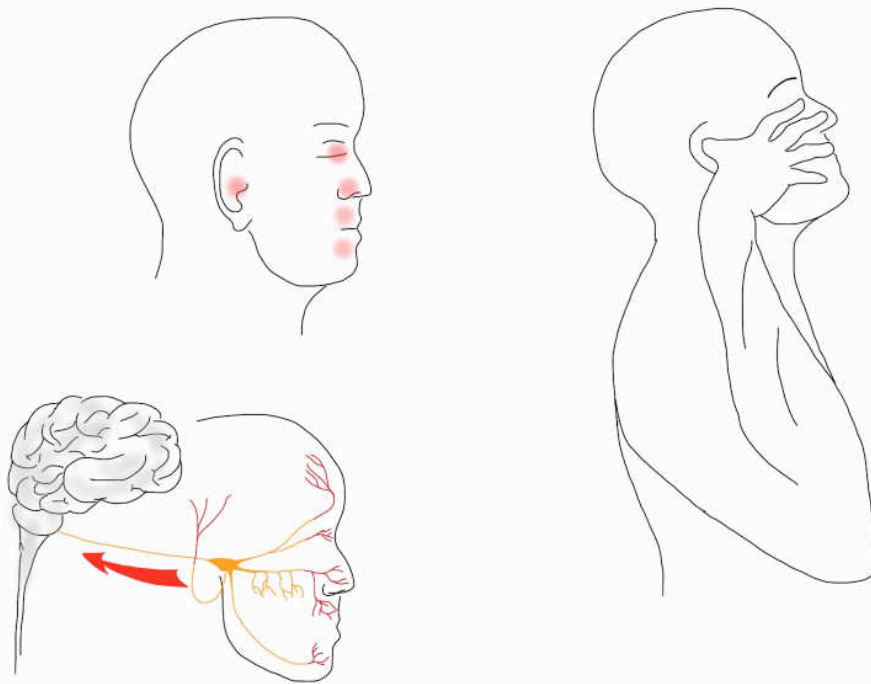
Along with all of the stimulation mentioned above, Shanmuki mudra also engages a type of assisted shambhavi mudra as the fingers apply pressure against the eyes. To better understand what's going on in this mudra you need to see where the fingers are applying pressure relative to the nerve supply in the head.

In shanmukhi mudra, the thumbs press against the opening of the ears. This has a twofold effect. Firstly it stimulates the vagus nerve, which surfaces in the ear. Stimulation of the vagus nerve, as we know, has a profound effect upon the body and mind leading to deep relaxation and a meditative state. Secondly, by blocking the ears, our attention is turned inwards to the inner sounds (also called the heart sounds) produced by the mind. This is the auditory equivalent to staring at a blank wall. After a while of staring you will start to see colours and images produced by your mind as it seeks to make sense of the lack of sensory input. As you close off your ears your mind will make its own sounds. These sounds, when focused upon, make the mind one-pointed, which allows us to progress further towards a state of pure awareness.

The index fingers apply pressure against the eyes. This, like the thumb placement, has a twofold effect. Firstly it induces an oculocardiac reflex, as I mentioned when describing shambhavi mudra. Secondly, the fingers stabilise the eyes, which, as we know from our explanation of shambhavi mudra, stops the mind from producing images and causes a light to appear in our forehead. By gazing at this light while listening to the heart sounds, the mind is drawn inwards and becomes absorbed in its self.

The middle fingers are placed on both sides of the nose, the ring fingers are placed above the lips, and the little fingers are placed below the lips. Pressure on these points stimulates the trigeminal and facial nerves, stimulating the deep brain structures to release beneficial neurochemicals.

Shanmauki Mudra activating the Trigeminal and vagus nerves



Trigeminal nerve stimulating deep brain structures

Practicing shanmukhi mudra

Basic practice:

1. Sit in Siddhasana and apply shambhavi mudra with your eyes closed.
2. Press your thumbs into the entrances to your ears.
3. Place your index fingers across your eyes. Apply pressure against your eyes and into the inner corner of your eye sockets (against your nose).
4. Press your middle fingers against the points on both sides of your nostrils.
5. Press your ring and little fingers into the points above and below your mouth, respectively.

6. Focus on the sounds and lights produced by your mind. It may take a few days or weeks for your mind to quiet down. As with all of the practices in this manual, persistence and consistency are the keys to success.

Advanced practice:

The advanced practice is the same as the basic practice with a few additions. In the advanced version of the practice you apply moola, udiyana, and jalandhara bandha on the inhale, and release them on the exhale. When you become smooth and established in the advanced practice you can add the mantra SO HUM.

Breathe in SO and breathe out HUM. Have a look at the section on mantras for an explanation of sohum and how it works.

FIRING UP THE KUNDALINI

Now that we've learned to integrate the primary mudras and bandhas into one synergistic practice, it's time to introduce a second set of practices that will further accelerate our nervous system's development. To integrate these techniques into your routine they should be used as a type of warm up to the main practice. This particular set of techniques fires up the pelvic splanchnic and vagus nerves, setting up the rest of the nervous system and brain for your bandha and mudra practice.

The first three exercises, maha mudra, maha bandha, and maha veda, are really just three parts of the one technique. So in order to gain the most benefit from them they need to be practiced together. The Shiva-Samhita says, "Mahamudra and Mahabandha become fruitless if they are not followed by Mahavedha; therefore, the Yogi should practise all three successively with great care."

The great seal - Maha mudra

Practice:

1. Sitting on the ground, press your left heel against your perineum. Extend your right leg, and grab your right foot with your hands.
2. Apply Moola Bandha, Jalandhara Mudra, and Shambhavi Mudra as you inhale and hold your breath for as long as is comfortable. Release the Moola Bandha and Jalandhara Mudra as you breathe out.
3. Repeat the above process 5 times to begin with (increasing the repetitions as you progress).
4. Reverse your foot position and repeat the process.

The great lock - Maha bandha

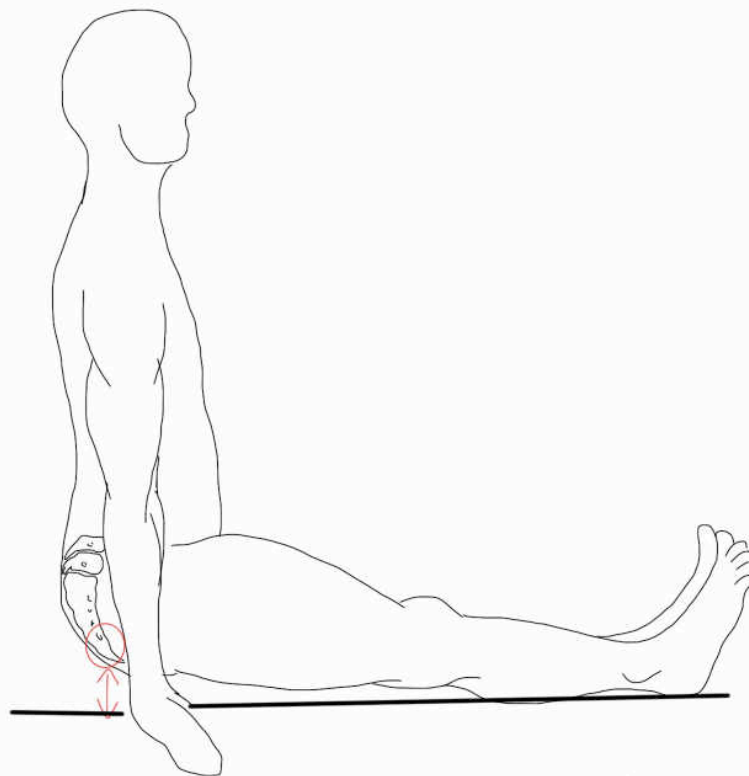
Practice:

1. Assume the siddhasana position.
2. As you breathe in apply Moola Bandha.
3. Hold your breath while pushing the air down into your lower abdomen (as if you're compressing the air between your diaphragm and anus).
4. Relax your muscles as you release your breath.

The great piercing - Mahavedha (sometimes called Tadan Kriya)

Practice:

Tadan Kriya, activating the parasympathetic nervous system



Lifting and dropping your bottom on the floor to stimulate the pelvic splanchnic nerves

1. Choose either to cross your legs in the full lotus, the easy posture, or to simply extend your legs in front of you. The full lotus position will give you the best results in this practice, however, the two other postures are perfectly acceptable. Apply Shambhavi mudra throughout the practice.
2. Inhale, hold your breath, and apply Moola Bandha.
3. With your hands pressing against the ground lift your buttox from the ground and allow yourself to drop back down again. Repeat three times. Now exhale. That equals one round.

Because Mahavedha is quite stimulating I suggest starting of with three rounds and slowly increasing the number of rounds. Take your time with all of these practices. There's often more happening in your body and mind than you might be able to notice!

Fire cleansing - Agni sara

Agni sara warms up the nervous system by vigorously stimulating the pelvic splanchnic nerves and the end of the vagus nerve in the lower abdomen. Using this technique regularly generates strong sexual sensations in the pelvis that, with practice, spread to the legs, chest, arms, and brain generating a feeling similar to a post orgasm after-glow. As you continue the Agni sara practice, the orgasmic after-glow sensation will stay with you for increasing lengths of time until eventually those sensations become a permanent state of blissful being.

Agni Sara practice:

1. Sit in Siddhasana and place your hands facing down on your knees.
2. Take a deep breath in, then empty your lungs. With your lungs empties simultaneously pull up your perineal muscles while pulling in your lower abdomen (the area below your navel). Then release the muscle contractions.
3. Repeat contracting and relaxing your perineum and lower abdomen in a pumping action four more times.
4. Relax and breathe in. This is one round. You can gradually increase the number of pumping actions you make per round as you get used to the practice.
5. Start with five rounds per practice session, increasing the number of rounds as you progress.

Awakening the saraswati nadi - Saraswati Chalana

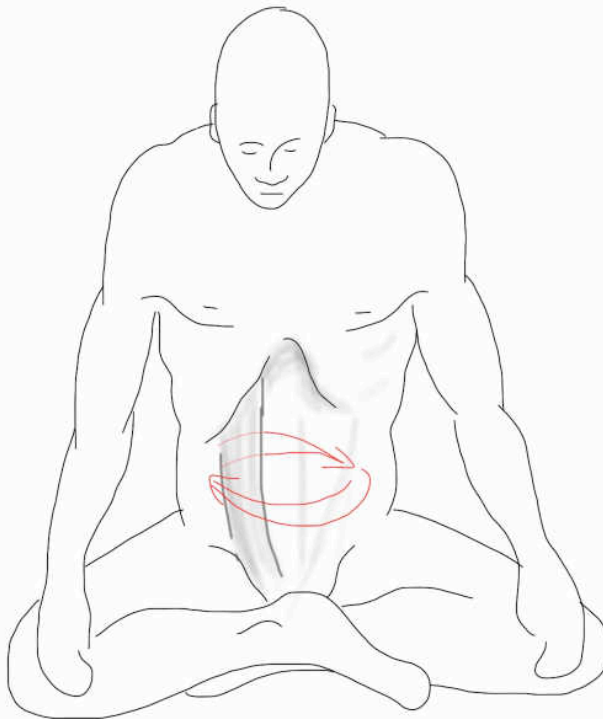
This technique works by stimulating the gastric branch of the vagus nerve through vigorous manipulation of the abdominal muscles. Regular practice generates intense heat in the abdomen that dissipates throughout the rest of the body leaving the practitioner with a healthy glow.

Saraswati chalana (nauli) practice:

1. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, then lean forward to place your hands on your knees, which you should bend slightly. (Later, when you progress with this practice, you can sit in siddhasana).
2. Take a few deep breaths. Then breathe out completely. Push your hands down onto your knees and pull your stomach in towards your spine, as in uddiyana bandha.
3. Contract your central abdominal muscles. The shape made in your abdomen will resemble an elephant's trunk.
4. Lean to the left, contracting the left rectus muscles while relaxing the right.
5. Now shift your weight to the right, contracting your right rectus muscles, while relaxing your left.

6. Continue to shift left, right, left, etc, creating a rolling type of movement with your rectus muscles. It should look like a sideways moving wave in your abdomen.
7. Relax your abdomen and breathe in. Repeat the process in the opposite direction. Begin with five rotations in per breath and work it up slowly from there.

Nauli - churning the abdomen to activate the vagus and splanchnic nerves



Swirl the abdominal muscles left to right, then right to left.

MANTRA

Mantra can be practiced in three ways: Vocally (with the voice), sub-vocally (whispering), and mentally (in the mind). Each of these methods have specific effects on the body and mind. The normal way to practice is to begin with vocal repetition and then to progress to sub-vocal, and finally mental repetition. All methods of repetition are ultimately designed to lead the mind into a meditative state. For the purpose of our practice we will just be using vocal repetition as this has the strongest effect on the nerves involved in the awakening process.

When we repeat a mantra out loud the following things happen in our body:

- The vagus nerve (supplying the ear) is stimulated.
- The vagus centres in the brain are also stimulated to slow the breathing process down. After chanting a mantra for some time you'll notice that your exhalations become very long. This is particularly noticeable when chanting single syllable mantras, such as the bija mantras, which I'll list below. The effect of this on the mental level is a calming and focusing of the mind.
- The third important effect vocal chanting has is the vibratory stimulation to the brain and central nervous system, which induces a trance like state. This is felt as vibrations in the head that reverberate all the way down the spinal column. It should be noted that in order for this to happen the posture must be held in the correct way.
- The subtlest effect of vocal chanting is produced by the movement of the tongue in the mouth. It is said that each mantra causes the tongue to move in a specific way, which in turn stimulates various nerves in a set repeated pattern that rewires the brain. This neural rewiring produces a very specific effect in the mind of the yogi. That effect is said to be the mantra siddhi (or psychic power).

For our practice we will use the bija mantras of the traditional chakra system. Chanting these mantras is said to awaken each of the chakras or psychic centres along the spine, which correspond to the nerve plexus. As these chakras are awakened kundalini is said to ascend to brahmarandra (the brain). On a physiological level this corresponds to various areas of the brain being stimulated. My personal experience of bija mantra practice is that it greatly enhances the process initiated by the other practices I have shared in this manual. The immediate effects are a serene state of mind. This effect lasts longer each time you practice until eventually it becomes a stable personality trait that fits perfectly with the sense of excitement and bubbling orgasmic happiness generated by the bandhas and breathing methods we have already learned.

Bija Mantra Practice:

1. Sit in Siddhasana and do a few rounds of Bhastrika breathing. Bring your attention to the base of your spine and chant the mantra LAM four times. The LA should be short and the M should be long. It should be like this: LAMMMMMMM

2. Move your attention up to the pubic bone and chant the mantra VAM six times. It should be pronounced VAMMMMMMM
3. Move your attention to your navel and chant RAM ten times. Pronounced RAMMMMMMM
4. Move your attention to your chest and chant YAM twelve times. Pronounced YAMMMMMMM
5. Move your attention to the pit of your throat and chant HAM sixteen times. Pronounced HAMMMMMMM
6. Move your attention to your third eye and chant OM up to 108 times. Pronounced OMMMMMMM
7. Finish by holding your attention at the top of your head (visualising a bright light there if it helps). Enjoy the peace.

SOHUM – The snake charmer’s song

SOHUM is a silent mantra practice. And because we repeat it mentally it has a particularly strong developmental effect on the brain’s frontal lobes. As the frontal lobes become more active with the SOHUM practice the limbic system quietens down. This causes us to experience increased joy, concentration, and creativity. It also allows us to think abstractly, while decreasing the frequency of negative states of mind such as depression and anxiety. While all of these side effects are highly beneficial to us let’s not over look what is perhaps the most important effect of frontal lobe development, the enhancement of our ability to concentrate, which in turn will eventually lead us into states of Samadhi (absorption).

Why use the sound sohum? What is its significance?

Fanning the fires with love – A gentle awakening

Compassion has an interesting effect on the body and mind, an effect that’s particularly important for the yogin. When we experience compassion we directly influence the activity of the vagus nerve. In a study it was found that people trained in Buddhist practices, aimed at increasing compassion, enhance vagal tone or the ability of the vagus nerve to function at its optimum capacity. This means practices that enhance our ability to be compassionate also function as a stimulant for the awakening process.

From a reverse engineering perspective, if compassion increases vagal tone does increased vagal tone enhance compassion? Yes, increased vagal tone is associated with higher levels of compassion. This means compassion practices and the yogic techniques shown in this manual are mutually supportive. Practicing them along side one another creates an upward developmental spiral, where increased vagal tone increases compassion, which increases vagal tone, so on. Learning to be compassionate is probably one of the easiest and gentlest ways to evolve your brain and develop expanded states of awareness.

Something worth mentioning are the benefits of increased vagal tone, apart from those already mentioned in relation to the awakening process. As vagal tone increases there is an overall reduction in stress, the heart becomes more resilient, social intelligence increases, and, most importantly, inflammation – the primary cause of illness and one of the main reasons we physically age – is greatly reduced. The bottom line: increasing your vagal tone enhances your mental, physical, emotional, and social health.

The following is a simple Buddhist practice aimed at increasing your propensity to feel compassion.

Loving kindness practice:

Stage 1

- Begin by visualizing something that represents pure love. That might be Buddha, Jesus, your mother or father, pure light, or something else. It doesn't matter what you visualize, as long as it represents love for you.
- Each time you breathe in, visualize the love generated by that image flowing into your heart in the form of light. And as you breathe out, see it flowing back out to the universe.

Stage 2

- Visualize friends and family members you have a good relationship with standing around you.
- Now, as before, breathe in love and this time, as you breathe out, see that love flowing to the people you're visualizing. At the same time, wish those people happiness and wellness.

Stage 3

- In this stage you do exactly the same as you did in stage two, only this time you change the people you're visualizing. This time you visualize people you know but don't feel good or bad about, people with whom you have a neutral relationship.

Stage 4

- Stage four only differs from stages two and three in the people you visualize. At this stage you visualize people you have a bad relationship with.

Stage 5

- At this stage you take the meditation practice into the real world. As you go about your day try to visualize love flowing to the people and creatures you meet, while wishing them happiness and wellness.