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Pranayama in Theory and Practice

by

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List of Abbreviations

For the sake of simplicity, I offer this list of abbreviations which will be adhered to in this essay. On three occasions I will be quoting. The first is with a translation of a Sanskrit sutra. Generally I will give only one translation. The second kind of quotation will be of an interpretive quality. I will distinguish between interpretations, either of translated sutras or of commentaries, which belong to a scholar or are mine. The final type of quotations will be those which are of an informative nature. These will have little to nothing to do with interpreting a sutra but will act as supports to a running discussion or argument. Most of these can be found in the chapter entitled Yoga Philosophy and Cosmology. One final note is that the abbreviations of titles are italicized.

Abbr	Author (or Translator)	Work
SP	Arthur Avalon	The Serpent Power
OS	Joseph Campbell	The Inner Reaches of Outer Space...
IK	Mircea Eliade	Yoga: Immortality and Freedom
YS	Georg Feuerstein	The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali
LY	B.K.S. Iyengar	Light on Yoga
CC	Trevor Leggett	The Complete Commentary by Sankara.
	Adi Shankaracharya	Vyasa
SY	I.K. Taimni	The Science of Yoga
BY	Swami Vishnudevananda	The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga
RY	Swami Vivekananda	Raja Yoga
AY	Paramahansa Yogananda	Autobiography of a Yogi
HS	Swami Sri Yukteswar	The Holy Science

Introduction

According to the ideals of Yoga, true knowledge, vidya, comes from within through the practice of interiorizing the consciousness, not from without through the medium of the senses. For this reason have Yogis, from the Buddha to Ramakrishna, rebuked the lovers of books and adored the lovers of pranayama and meditation. This work is therefore by no means intended to take the place of the invaluable practice of pranayama nor even substitute for direct and personal guidance in the practice of pranayama. As a disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, I was never one to intellectually study pranayama without at the same time practicing the techniques; to do so would be unthinkable, even deplorable. Further, scholars who believe that they retain a level of objectivity in the study of pranayama by refraining from the practice of pranayama have, in my view, no objective standard at all. However, such scholarly activity does lend itself to the cultural, historical, and philosophical understanding of Yoga. Still, it is the practicing Yogi who can observe the effects that the techniques of Yoga have on the body and mind, not to mention experience the changes in consciousness. While self-deception among practitioners of Yoga is not lacking, the single rule by which true mastery of pranayama is measured, breathlessness, cannot be simply imitated. I submit that anyone who authoritatively speaks about Yoga and at the same time does not practice Yoga should not be taken seriously.

The underlying motive behind all my writings on this subject, including this essay, has always been to portray pranayama as a method and a science which lies at the foundation of the true experience of religion. That is to say, every individual's experience of the spirituality can and must be evaluated against the rigorous demands set forth by Yoga philosophy. How can I make such a statement? Yoga claims that superconsciousness begins to manifest in an individual only through the attainment of the ability to enter the breathless state at will. The various methods of attaining breathlessness are only varieties, some stronger, some weaker, of the high technique of Raja pranayama.

Though Yoga has been reduced to an intellectual or physical exercise in the West, I strongly feel that the understanding and practice of the principles of pranayama are as vital to every human being as are perhaps the more common habits of eating, drinking, and sleeping. While it may be that relatively very few people in the world will ever know of real pranayama let alone practice it regularly, my convictions regarding pranayama are no less true. Indeed, many Yogis, especially those who combine strict ascetic practices with Yoga, would conclude that the daily practice of Yoga is far more important than the above pastimes that we, after all, share with the animals.

I would now like to introduce my panel of translators, interpreters, and commentators whose writings I have chosen to incorporate into this work. I will also note my personal view on each one, informing the manner in which I will employ them and what my biases are so nothing is hidden from the reader. Before I do this, however, I would first like to make it clear that my objective is to present a complete system of pranayama as it is taught and practiced by modern Yogis. I will therefore employ modern sources in addition to my own personal experiences in the practice of pranayama. While disagreements among ancient and modern teachers are not lacking, my intention is to fit together from these various sources a complete and fully developed practice which is in itself consistent.

The results are a portrayal of pranayama as a practice which is both central in Yoga and uniquely superior to all other Yogic practices in its capacity to bring the practitioner to the breathless state. While this implies that I will be treating pranayama as a philosophy and a discipline which evolved over centuries, I will also look closely at the Sanskrit sources which these modern Yogis refer to in their teachings, namely the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali and the texts of Sankhya philosophy.

In presenting an overview of Yoga cosmology necessary for an understanding of pranayama, I find myself referring to Sankhya philosophy. There are very few disagreements between the Yoga school of Patanjali and Sankhya. Sankhya, like Vedanta and the other orthodox disciplines of Sanatana Dharma, refer to the practice of Yoga as a means by which the one may attain kaivalya. I have heard it said that as Sankhya is the “why,” Yoga is the “how.” I will be referring to Sri Yukteswar's (1855-1936) book *The Holy Science (HS)* for the translations and commentary of the Sanskrit sutras entitled *Kaivalya Darsanam*. These sutras give a complete but brief outline of the Yoga system. While the translations of the Sanskrit sutras into English were not done by Sri Yukteswar, he wrote the commentaries in English; Sri Yukteswar, like Patanjali, assumes a tremendous amount of knowledge on the part of the reader. Still, Sri Yukteswar's thorough knowledge and mastery of Yoga science makes his exegesis very useful for an essay on pranayama. In particular, I am fond of his theories in regard to the yugas which I will present in chapter IV. Therefore, these sutras represent a fully developed and modern system of Yoga which incorporates elements from the earlier disciplines of Sankhya, Yoga, and Vedanta.

Two popular works, both primarily dealing with Hatha Yoga asanas and pranayama, will be referred to in my representation of Hatha pranayama and in explaining the difference between Hatha and Raja Yoga. Though there are some disagreements between the two authors, I believe that the differences are more in regard to style than to substance. The first book is *The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga (BY)* by Swami Vishnudevananda. As the foremost disciple of Swami Shivananda, Swami Vishnudevananda clearly describes the various techniques of Hatha pranayama in a manner readable even by beginners. The second work is B.K.S. Iyengar's *Light on Yoga (LY)*. Though Iyengar has published a book on pranayama alone, I found his *Light on Yoga* to give all the necessary information without being overly technical. I decided to refer to popular Yoga books of today also to give an idea of what the majority of people are currently reading.

Georg Feuerstein's translation of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras is found in his book *The Yoga Sutra of Patanjali (YS)*. The first thing I want to note is that I will be referring to Patanjali's work as the Yoga Sutras, pluralizing the word “Sutra,” when in fact the complete work is called a Sutra. This is merely a convention adopted by many Westerners. So, the Yoga Sutra and the Yoga Sutras are one and the same work. Though I am not overly fond of Feuerstein's actual translations, I like Feuerstein's work as it offers a technical understanding of Sanskrit. He has the right to translate the sutras as he deems fit, but since he often gives the reasons behind his decisions the experienced reader may choose an alternate translation based on the philological material presented. Most of his interpretations are brief and are to a certain degree borrowed from other authorities such as Vyasa and Taimni.

The next translator to be used whose commentaries go into greater depth than those of Feuerstein's is I. K. Taimni. Unlike Feuerstein, Taimni does not explain his choice of words directly but rather devotes his time to a comprehensive understanding of the import of each of Patanjali's sutras. Taimni also offers a wealth of information concerning Yoga that may not be directly related to the sutras in question, and in any case is difficult to authenticate. Considering the subject is Yoga, a rather supernatural topic, a certain amount of extraordinary information is to be expected.

I will refer to frequently to Swami Vivekananda whose writings on Patanjali's Yoga Sutras can be found in his book Raja Yoga (RY). It certainly seems that the more an individual is involved in the Yogic life the less he or she is interested in the academic aspects of Yoga. Swami Vivekananda gives absolutely no hint as to how he arrived at his English translation and for some sutras gives no commentary, obviously considering them to be self-explanatory. Still, as a master of Raja Yoga and one of the greatest disciples of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, it is not doubted that Swami Vivekananda can shed much light on Yoga and the Yoga Sutras. Likely the most important exegetes are Vyasa and Shankara. I will be using Trevor Leggett's The Complete Commentary by Sankara on the Yoga Sutras (CC). Again, while I am not too fond of the translations of the sutras themselves, Shankara's commentary and subcommentary on the sutras and on Vyasa's Bhasya (exegesis) is of inestimable value. Vyasa's commentary is, of course, the undisputed basis for all other exegeses that followed it. I will, therefore, be frequently referring to the above interpretations.

The remaining texts listed in the bibliography and in my notes on abbreviations will be used as reference material. Further, as a practitioner and teacher of Raja Yoga myself, I retain the right to comment upon any and all material presented. I may also enter upon a particular subject without citations where I feel my knowledge to be adequate and where bringing in other authorities will not add any new dimension but only slow down the discussion. After all, there are many subjects on which all scholars of Yoga agree, especially when they are very general. Furthermore, I will at times employ terms from modern physics in an attempt to describe the internal effects of certain techniques of pranayama. Illustrations like these are merely estimations, not exact parallel descriptions, and as such must be taken metaphorically as opposed to literally. I will generally opt to use original Sanskrit terms instead of giving a comparable English word. All Yogic terms will generally be defined once in the text and most can be found in the glossary. All Sanskrit or otherwise Yogic terms will be italicized.

Titles of works and their abbreviated counterparts will also be italicized, but proper Hindu names will not be. While the term "Yoga" and variations of it will always be capitalized, the various branches of Ashtanga Yoga such as yama and pranayama will not be. Proper names of Yogic techniques will not be capitalized. I find the over-capitalization of Yogic terms to be misleading and uninformative. However, where a term denotes an aspect of Divinity, that term will always be capitalized whether in English or Sanskrit. It might even be unnecessary to capitalize a term like Yogic, especially when it carries an English suffix. However, as the writer I choose to exercise the right to retain this formality.

The order in which the subjects are presented are given in the table of contents. The emphasis of the essay will neither be in the first chapter dealing with Sankhya and Yoga philosophy nor in last chapter and conclusion which will primarily broaden the scope of the discussion in order to place pranayama in the context of evolution and answer the question regarding the importance for all humanity to be familiar with the science of Yoga. The emphasis of the essay will be placed on the discussion of the actual techniques of pranayama and their effect on the human body, mind, and most importantly, on the raising of human consciousness.

A note to the student interested in learning and mastering the science of pranayama: The techniques described in the book are merely given as examples of how pranayama is concretely applied in actual practice. They should not be tried at home without direct supervision in their performance. Some of the techniques listed in this work are very powerful and hence very dangerous for the uninitiated to attempt. While many of these techniques, or variations of them, are taught to advancing students of pranayama, all sincere students must consult their instructor in regard to what techniques are best suited to them.

The Pranayama Institute, Inc. is dedicated to making available to all earnest students all the various techniques of pranayama for their betterment in body, mind, and spirit and is not a religious nor proselytizing movement. The ideals expressed herein are simply a faithful exposition of the science of pranayama as it is originally presented in Yogic texts. Since this philosophical systems uses words like "God, Spirit, Truth, etc." these terms are retained but by no means are intended to sway the reader's belief system in any way.

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Chapter I: Yoga Philosophy and Cosmology

According to Sankhya philosophy on which Yoga cosmology is based, creation, both manifest and unmanifest, is divided into seven swargas or spheres (RY, 18). These spheres of existence commence from the Infinite Absolute beyond material creation down to the physical universes which constitute the grossest form of creation. Kaivalya Darsanam sutra I:13 reads, "This universe is differentiated into fourteen spheres, seven swargas and seven patalas" (HS, 32). The word "universe" here does not imply the physical universe or even physical universes, which actually constitute only the lowest of the seven swargas. "Universe" is here intended to be a general term which includes all the planes of manifest creation and all the levels of existence beyond material creation. Another word for swarga is loka, which is a plane, a sphere of consciousness where energy is guided to manifest itself in a certain way (HS, 33). For example, in the physical universe energy is guided to condense itself into matter while, as will be shown, in the astral universe energy is guided by Divine Consciousness to manifest itself as light and electricities devoid of any physical material (HS, 34).

The seventh and highest loka is satyaloka, the sphere of sat, the Eternal. As it is beyond the comprehension of any being in the creation of light or darkness it is called anama, or the Nameless. The sixth loka is termed tapoloka, called the sphere of the Unlimited as it cannot be designated by any limiting idea. It is the highest sphere of the creation of light, satyaloka being beyond both the creations of light and darkness. Tapoloka is called agama, the Inaccessible, for the Perfect Beings which have yet to renounce the vain idea of their separate existence from sat, the only real existence, cannot ascend to it. Continuing, the fifth loka is janaloka, the swarga of the perfected Yogis which have risen beyond the creation of darkness. Janaloka is also called alakshya, the Incomprehensible, for it is beyond the comprehension of any being residing in the creation of darkness who is under the influence of maya (HS, 33).

The science of Yoga is designed to free the soul from delusion inherent in the creation of darkness and bring the soul to the door of the creation of light (HS, 37). The middle or fourth sphere begins the creation of darkness and is called maharloka (HS, 33). As it is the door to the creation of light it is also called dasamadwara, or the tenth door. The third loka is called swarloka, or the causal universe. It is also called mahasunya, or the Great Vacuum, as it is marked by the absence of any matter, fine or gross, and contains only divine magnetic attributes (HS, 34). The enlightened beings that reside in this loka are clothed only with karana sarira, or the non-material causal body of subtle ideas. (For a further explanation of this and other Sanskrit terms, see the Glossary in the back). The second loka is called bhuhariloka, the sphere of the divine electricities, also called the astral universe of light for it contains no gross matter but only light, the fine material of creation. It is thus referred to as sunya, or the Vacuum. Beings in this sphere are covered with the shukshma sarira (and the karana sarira), the astral body of light and energy. The first and lowest loka is bhuloka, the universe of matter which, simply stated, "is always visible to everyone" (HS, 34).

A Yogi practicing pranayama, and attaining nirvikalpa samadhi through it, can transcend the physical, astral, and causal universes and enter into dasamadwara. These three swargas must therefore be looked at more closely in light of the practice of Yoga; to transcend a loka in the creation of darkness implies the removal of all karmic tendencies that force rebirth on that particular loka.

That is, even after all physical karma is burned up, there may exist both astral and causal karma which force rebirth in the astral and causal lokas (AY, 487-91). The actual method by which pranayama burns all the karma which chains the soul to the creation of darkness will be discussed in Chapter II.

The lowest three lokas plus maharloka constitute the creation of darkness, also called maya or delusion (HS, 34). Maya, meaning “the measurer,” is the power of darkness which seemingly creates division in the cosmos which is but the manifestation of the Ever-Indivisible God. Maya accomplishes this through the power of time and space, thus causing the illusion of division between the Creator and creation. Strictly speaking, Sankhya does not posit the existence of a creator God. However, Yoga philosophy, agreeing that to postulate the existence of a Brahma is unnecessary, still maintains that there is a transcendental Iswara, though this Being is not a creator. I therefore use the term "Creator" in its broadest sense to include illumined Yogis that reside in the causal universe, a concept which will be explained later. Sutra I:4 reads, “The cause of creation is Anu or the Atoms. En masse they are called Maya or the Lord's illusory power; each individual Anu is called Avidya, Ignorance” (HS, 24). Atoms are the cause and substance of the creation of darkness; the delusory power inherent in creation is called maya while in the individual it is called avidya, ignorance.

The body of human beings, like the cosmic body of God, also houses seven spheres of consciousness called patalas or padmas (lotuses) (HS, 34). In Yoga science they are referred to as chakras, or “wheels” of light and consciousness located along the cerebrospinal axis in exact correspondence with the seven vital plexuses of the physical body (SP, 103-4). These seven chakras directly parallel the seven lokas in their ascending manifestations of consciousness from the first and lowest chakra at the base of the spine to the seventh in the brain. To begin, the first chakra is associated with the instinct for survival through the assimilation of nourishment. A precondition of existence in the physical world of bhuloka is that life must feed on life (OS, 63). The consciousness of the second chakra manifests itself through the will to create. In human beings this energy manifests itself in the sexual urge toward the procreation of the species; the procreative organs are located opposite the second chakra. In parallel, Bhubarloka, the astral universe, is the blueprint and activating energy by which the physical universe is created. The same is true for the shukshma sarira (astral body) which is the guiding creative power behind the physical body, or sthula sarira (BY, 285).

The third chakra parallels swarloka, the causal universe, as both this swarga in the infinite body of God and its corresponding patala in the finite body of man represent the will to power and mastery (OS, 63). The innumerable thoughts emanating from the causal universe power and structure the whole of the creation of darkness. Causal beings, souls thinly clothed with the karana sarira, have the will power which brings universes like ours into manifestation (AY, 487-490). According to some modern Yogis, such Yogis are postulated to be the creators of the numerous physical and astral universes (AY, 490). The elevation of human consciousness from animal instincts intent on survival, procreation, and control to divine consciousness rightly begins at the fourth chakra, at the level of the heart, which is the door to chakras five, six, and seven. The fourth chakra parallels dasamadwara, the fourth loka which is the door to the spiritual creation of light.

Though I have seen no commentary on why maharloka is called the tenth door, I believe that as in the cosmos, paralleling the body of the human being which, for the male, has nine orifices, dasamadwara refers to the tenth exit out of the physical body which necessitates the Yogi's entry into the spinal pathway (brahmanadi, or "path to God") of the chakras and results in expansion of consciousness.

Cosmic energy (prana) and consciousness enter the human body at the medulla oblongata, travel up to the brain then down to the base of the spine and out to the physical body (BY, 243). With the descent of energy from the brain to the base of the spine and out to the sensory and motor nerves, consciousness descends and becomes tied to the satisfaction of sensual desires. The result is ahamkara or ego-consciousness. The soul's awareness is limited to bhuloka, the plane of matter, and is constrained by the shortcomings of the senses and their ability to receive vibrations only within a certain range. Just as, starting from bhuloka, one swarga is higher than the other in the cosmic body of God, so too are the states of consciousness from one chakra to another, starting from the base of the spine, higher than the one below it in the astral body of man. We may now look at each chakra more closely.

The first chakra is called muladhara, meaning "root, base." It is located at the coccygeal plexus at the base of the spine and has four petals or rays that carry out specific bodily functions (SP, 104). The Yogi who meditates on this chakra has a number of experiences. First, this chakra appears as a yellow square which is seen, as with all the chakras, reflected in the forehead (BY, 328). It has a sound like a swarm of buzzing bees. A very sweet flavor permeating the tongue accompanies meditation on this chakra. With the awakening of the muladhara chakra the kundalini sakti, or "serpent power," is roused and is directed to ascend the spine to the brain (SP, 303). Though in most texts on Yoga the kundalini is described as lying dormant at the muladhara, through the practice of pranayama it becomes clear that this kundalini energy is in fact nothing other than cosmic prana which has entered the medulla oblongata and has traveled down the spine and out to the body and its senses. Therefore, it is called dormant or sleeping simply because the energy is directed outward, causing the consciousness of the soul to "sleep" in the realm of the senses. Strictly speaking, though the muladhara is called the only immobile part of the body, there is no prana that is not always flowing (BY, 322). In fact, the congestion of pranic energy means death to the body (BY, 243).

The second chakra is called swadhishtana, which translates as "(energy's) designated standing place." This chakra is located at the sacral plexus and has six petals; its element is water and it appears as a white crescent moon (BY, 329). The sound of AUM, nada, is clearer at this chakra than at the first chakra; the Yogi meditating on swadhishtana hears the sound of a high-pitched flute. The third chakra is called manipura or "city of the shining jewel." Manipura chakra has ten petals and is located at the lumbar plexus; its element is fire. This chakra appears as a blood red triangle and has the sound of smoothly strumming harp (BY, 329).

The fourth chakra is situated at the dorsal plexus opposite the heart and is called anahata. The literal translation of anahata is "not hit." The name of this chakra is a reference to the sound of a bell which emanates from it that is not made by two objects striking each other. Anahata has twelve petals and is the seat of the air element.

Through meditation on this center the Yogi perceives a throbbing dark blue sphere. Anahata, paralleling dasamadwara, is the door to the three higher centers of consciousness in the spine and brain.

The fifth chakra is called vishuddha chakra. It is located at the cervical plexus, its element being ether (akasha) (BY, 329). Vishuddha means "clean, pure." Nada at this center, nearing the pure sound of AUM, sounds like a running river. This chakra appears smoky colored with specks of white light; vishuddha has sixteen petals. According to other authorities, the fourth chakra is smoke colored while the fifth chakra is clear "pure" blue (BY, 329). I can only assume that the discrepancy enters in when the name of a chakra ("pure" in this case for the fifth chakra) is mistakenly thought to refer to its color (clear blue). The sixth chakra, or ajna chakra, is located at the medulla oblongata, the physiological opposite of the pineal gland at the point between the eyebrows. Ajna means "command." This chakra regulates the flow of cosmic prana which enters the body at the medullar plexus. The pure nada of AUM is heard at this chakra as the sound of a roaring ocean. Ajna has two petals. Yogis generally concentrate on this chakra during their practice of pranayama and meditation (BY, 330). The seventh and highest chakra is called the sahasrara or the "thousand petal lotus of light." This chakra is located in the cerebral plexus and is the seat of omniscience (BY, 331).

According to Yoga science, shukshma sarira contains 72,000 nadis, or astral nerve channels. Of these, three are of utmost importance in the study of pranayama (BY, 326). The seven chakras of the astral body run along the holiest of nadis called the sushumna. The sushumna, meaning "supremely blessed," is the innermost nadi in the spine through which the techniques of pranayama takes prana to the brain and back out the medulla oblongata into infinite consciousness (BY, 326). When prana enters the sushumna, ananda, or bliss, is felt in the spine and the mind begins to rise above the dimensions of time and space (BY, 327). Sushumna is also called brahmanadi, or the path to God (BY, 326).

Two nadis must be purified through pranayama before prana will enter the sushumna (BY, 266). These are the ida and pingala nadis that run along the left and right side of the sushumna, respectively (BY, 262). Ida, meaning "refreshing," is the cool energy channel which conducts lunar energy. Ida is associated with the cool, reviving breath in the left nostril. Pingala nadi, or the "tawny" nadi, runs from the right nostril down the spine and conveys solar energy (BY, 262). Ida and Pingala intertwine themselves with the sushumna nadi, converging at each of the lower six chakras. Controlled breathing through the left nostril only is called chandra nadi ida while breathing through the right nostril alone is termed surya nadi pingala.

Three knots, called granthis, lie along the sushumna nadi obstructing the free flow of prana to the brain, keeping the vast majority of human beings in spiritual ignorance. Through the proper performance of pranayama, these three granthis are broken. The first granthi is the brahma granthi located at the muladhara chakra. The second granthi is located at the manipura chakra and is called vishnu granthi. Rudra granthi, the third knot in the sushumna, is located at the ajna chakra (By, 274). Once the granthis are untied and the nadis are purified through pranayama, prana can easily be directed by the advanced Yogi up the spine, to the brain, and out the medulla oblongata into infinite consciousness.

Most Sanskrit philologists agree that the root of the word Yoga is “yuj,” whose meaning is “to bind.” The same root can be found in the English word “yoke” (IF, 4). Yoga therefore means “union;” what things are implied to unite is another question. As human beings are not merely physical entities but are also endowed with emotions, thoughts, senses, reason, and certain degree of awareness which is a product of all of these faculties, Yoga implies the union of all of these aspects with God (LY, 23-4). Yoga may further be defined as the union of the individual soul with the Cosmic Spirit. These definitions all hit close to the mark, but those who study and practice pranayama, techniques designed to control (yama) the energies (prana) of the body, further call Yoga the union of human sense-bound consciousness with Infinite Cosmic Consciousness.

What binds human consciousness to the physical senses? In the ultimate sense, the answer to this question can only be one thing: desire. It is the desires of the individual soul bound by manas, mind, and ahamkara, or ego-consciousness, that keep the consciousness of the soul absorbed with sensory impressions being input from the world of matter (LY, 22). Ahamkara results from the union of the jnanendriyas, or sense organs, with the tanmatras, or objects of sense in their subtle elemental form (HS, 29). The next question is then how; how is the soul's consciousness chained to the senses? Yoga claims that it is the outward flowing energies of the soul which keep the attention riveted to the objects of the senses. An important maxim to remember in the study of pranayama is this: wherever there is energy, there is consciousness. So, if prana is lighting up the sense organs, one is in sense consciousness. If however, through some method of interiorization, a technique of withdrawing the mind from the senses, an individual can direct the energies of the soul from the senses to the higher centers of energy and consciousness in the spine and brain, the consciousness of the individual will also be directed to unite with higher states of divine consciousness (RY, 57). This is pranayama, and with the withdrawal of the energy from the senses the result is the stilling of the breath.

Drawing from the writings of modern Yogis, I would now like to present an overview of the various types of Yoga that is generally agreed upon. I will further add my own commentary which I have received orally. Broadly defined, any method whose goal is the reversal of prana from the senses to the spine in order to unite human consciousness with a cosmic one may be classified as Yoga. Various systems of Yoga have evolved, each fitting a certain personality type for its practice. For example, Karma Yoga, or union with the Infinite through action, is a path intended for individuals who best find divinity in the world through selfless service.

Karma Yogis also practice simple methods of meditation, but the emphasis of this path is placed on external actions that benefit others, bring good karma to the Yogi, and burn off retributive karma. Though called a Yoga, it is generally understood that attaining higher states of consciousness is not possible through Karma Yoga alone, but that Karma Yoga does propel the soul to higher states of understanding by which the soul in future rebirth may receive initiation in higher paths of Yoga (LY, 22). As a Raja Yogi, I have learned of an esoteric level of Karma Yoga that, paradoxically, is too difficult for strict Karma Yogis to aspire toward. Raja Yogis are taught a technique by which the body's prana can be lifted to the ajna chakra and kept there during outer activity, thus spiritualizing all outer actions. The technique itself is a variety of pranayama which, being an action performed internally, is called antara (inner) Karma Yoga.

Bhakti Yoga is a path intended for those individuals whose emotions are in predominance. Bhakti Yoga implies union with the Infinite through intense devotion and love of a personal God (LY, 22). A follower of this path of Yoga is called a bhakta, or a devotee. This path too involves methods of prayer and meditation. It is generally understood that bhaktas do engage in Karma Yoga and that Karma Yogis may engage in devotional services of some kind. In a sense, Christianity is a religion of Bhakti and Karma Yoga. Again, Bhakti Yoga does have an esoteric aspect not generally approachable by the average bhakta or, I believe, even through Bhakti Yoga as it is commonly practiced today. Kaivalya Darsanam sutras 3:21-21 read: "Hence arises samyama ("restraint" or overcoming the egoistic self), by which one experiences the AUM vibration that reveals God. Thus the soul (is baptized) in Bhakti Yoga (devotion). This is the state of Divinity" (HS, 75). Samyama comprises the highest three limbs in the science of Raja Yoga which is admitted as the greatest of all Yogas. In order for the Raja Yogi to attain samyama, the Yogi must perfectly master pranayama which is not often practiced by bhaktas of whatever religion (SP, 195). Antara Bhakti Yoga is attained after deep stillness is achieved. This baptism in the stream of the sound of AUM has also been called Laya Yoga, or union with the Infinite through absorption in nada, the AUM vibration.

Laya Yoga is accomplished when the Yogi hears the roar of AUM and merges with it (SP, 220). Mantra Yoga may be considered the external practice of Laya Yoga as the Yogi is instructed in repeating, either aloud or softly or mentally, universally rooted sounds that mimic variation of the holy AUM sound (SP, 196). Mantra Yoga is considered the simplest of Yogas and is therefore intended for spiritually undeveloped students that cannot aspire to practice the rigorous discipline required for the other Yogas (SP, 197). Mantra Yoga includes the reciting of scriptures and prayers, the performance of rituals, and the manufacturing of devotional items (SP, 196). Japa Yoga, which similarly involves the constant repetition of a mantra or prayer, is a close cousin to Mantra Yoga. A Catholic nun repeating her "Hail Mary" with rosaries is a Western example of Japa Yoga.

Jnana Yoga (pronounced "nyana") is union with the Infinite through wisdom (jnana) and buddhi or discriminative intelligence. The Jnana Yogi must discriminate through wisdom between the temporal self and eternal Self. The Jnana Yogi engages in contemplative meditations and can generally be considered a philosopher or intellectual (BY, 249). With Plato's efforts at accessing the world of being, a timeless realm, through reason and contemplation, Plato in my view can justly be called a Jnana Yogi. Jnana Yoga is a very slow and cumbersome path intended for those whose intellects are in predominance over their emotions. Jnana Yogis meditate on the inner light of knowledge which is later revealed to be but a manifestation of the light of the chakras.

Although Patanjali does not specifically refer to the eight limbs of Yoga as the path of Raja Yoga, the science of Yoga presented in the Yoga Sutras (Yoga aphorisms) is referred to by most modern Yogis as Ashtanga (eight-limbed) Yoga or Raja Yoga, the Royal (raja) path (marga) of Yoga. Since the practice of pranayama in Raja Yoga is accomplished by mental means, it is extremely difficult to begin Yoga practice as a Raja Yogi. The physical method of controlling prana is called Hatha Yoga, the Yoga of "force" or intense physical, emotional, and mental discipline. Through the mastery of Hatha Yoga, the Yogi naturally advances in his ability to control prana with the mind.

In a sense, the techniques of pranayama that fall under the rubric of Raja Yoga are very simple, as simple as a thought itself. Their difficulty lies in the degree of mastery over prana and the power of concentration they presume a Yogi to have already attained.

Hatha Yoga has the same eight limbs of Raja Yoga as presented by Patanjali in the second chapter of the Yoga Sutras (BY, 237). Here I partially translate sutra II:29: “Yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi are the eight limbs [of Yoga].” Patanjali refers to the eight parts of Yoga as *angas*, limbs, not as stages or steps. This is an important point, considering that rungs or steps imply a definite progression while limbs do not. While a mastery of pranayama is essential for the Yogi to enter pratyahara, or the state where the mind is withdrawn from the senses, and in turn the last three limbs require the mastery of pratyahara, it is conceivable that a Yogi may practice asanas (postures intended for physical culture) and pranayama alone and disregard the moral and spiritual injunctions of yama and niyama. However, the vows which constitute yama and niyama are the foundation upon which the Yogi builds the superstructure of spiritual attainment through pranayama. Therefore, a Yogi who does not practice yama and niyama is not, strictly speaking, a Raja Yogi.

Yama means “control” or “restraint.” The five proscriptive rules of yama are non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and greedlessness (YS, 80). The five prescriptive rules of niyama, or the observances, are purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, and devotion to God (YS, 81). After listing the five yamas and five niyamas, Patanjali has written that “(These are valid) in all spheres, irrespective of birth, place, time and circumstance (and constitute) the great vow” (YS, 81). I agree with Feuerstein’s commentary that Patanjali is here commenting upon the universally applicable nature of these ten spiritual injunctions (YS, 81). These vows are, after all, found in the traditions of the world’s religions in one form or another.

In order for the Yogi’s efforts at pranayama to have the greatest chance of success, Patanjali suggests in sutra II:46 that the Yogi master asana, or the “steady and comfortable” meditative sitting position (YS, 90). Concentration is exceedingly difficult if the body is restless and tends toward motion. Through regular practice of immobilization in a meditation posture, the body gradually learns to sit quietly for hours on end. It must be noted that nowhere does Patanjali refer to the rigorous practice of Hatha Yoga asanas which later evolved (YS, 90). The practice of physical culture is not discussed in Raja Yoga nor can it itself be called Yoga, even if that system of exercise evolved under the auspices of a school of a particular branch of Yoga. An individual who practices asanas alone is not a Yogi, Hatha or otherwise, any more than is an individual who goes to work out at a gym regularly. Similarly, the adherence to yama and niyama alone does not qualify one to be called a Yogi any more than can the strict obedience to the Ten Commandments be called Yoga. Indeed, it is the practice of pranayama, I believe, which is distinctly Yogic as its goal is the interiorization of energy and consciousness.

The result of perfect mastery in the performance of pranayama is pratyahara, or the withdrawal of the mind from the senses. Many translators, ignorant of pranayama from a practical standpoint, translate pranayama as “breath control.” In fact, breath control is both the goal of pranayama and an aspect of the techniques of Hatha Yoga pranayama.

This breath control, or the stilling of the breath, allowing the Yogi to sit without breathing for hours, is accomplished through pranayama, or “energy (prana) control (yama).” This mistake in translation is natural and to be expected because the techniques of Hatha Yoga pranayama achieve a control of prana through the regulation of the breathing mechanism. Further, prana has also been translated as “vital air” in many Yogic texts. The higher practice of Raja Yoga pranayama does not involve the regulation of breath as it aims at the control of prana through the power of the mind. Once the Hatha Yogi can begin to guide the flow of prana with his mind alone, he is deserving of the title Raja Yogi. As the breath stills, the heart slows down as well. The result is the withdrawal of the energies of the soul from the senses to the spine and brain, or pratyahara. With the reversal of the flow of prana, the mind and consciousness of the Yogi also return to their source in the spine.

Dharana means concentration. True concentration is impossible until the breath is stilled and the mind is not distracted by the senses. Once the Yogi has attained pratyahara, one-pointed concentration on the AUM vibration heard within the spine and brain becomes effortless. Anyone who has attempted to sit still and concentrate knows of the obstacles that the body and mind pose. The promise of dharana, effortless concentration, is a boon for all Yogis who persevere in their practice of pranayama. Once the prana, and with it the consciousness, fully withdraws from the senses, thoughts automatically stop and vikshepa, the scattering nature of the mind, is overcome.

According to Hatha vidya, or Hatha knowledge, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi are only different levels in the mastery in the withdrawing of the prana from the senses (SP, 195). While this is true, some more explanation is necessary. According to the school of Raja Yoga to which I belong, in the state of dharana, the interiorized mind or chitta, consciousness, is riveted to the vibration of AUM as it is manifest in the sthula and shukshma sariras. The sphere of AUM's vibration is limited to the sariras (bodies). In the state of dhyana or meditation, the Yogi realizes the magnitude of AUM as the Cosmic Vibration, an aspect of Iswar (God), and concentrates on AUM both in the body and in the cosmos. The Yogi's consciousness expands with the expanding AUM vibration to encompass the planet, solar system, galaxy, physical universe, all of bhuloka, and beyond. Then, by forgetting the self and merging with AUM, the Yogi attains savikalpa samadhi.

Samadhi means “to direct together.” Through pranayama, the prana, and with it the consciousness, of the Yogi is directed to the ajna chakra, the point (dhi) between the eyebrows. Savikalpa samadhi is the state of samadhi “with (sa) difference (vikalpa).” That is, in this initial state of samadhi the Yogi still feels a slight separation from the Infinite. Further, savikalpa samadhi is a reference to a type of samadhi which can only be maintained so long as the Yogi is in the motionless state. In nirvikalpa samadhi, or samadhi “without (nir) difference (vikalpa),” the Yogi can maintain the state of cosmic consciousness even during outward activity. According to the oral tradition which I received in the context of a higher initiation in pranayama, in nirvikalpa samadhi the prana pierces the brain and exits the body via the medulla oblongata.

It must be made clear that the goal of Yoga is not the attainment of samadhi. Rather, samadhi is but one of the limbs of Raja Yoga which the Yogi must master in order to attain kaivalya, or the absolute, irreversible union with Sat-Chit-Ananda, Eternal Existence-Infinite Consciousness-Ever New Bliss.

Kaivalya Darsanam sutras II:14-15 read: "Man's purpose is complete freedom from unhappiness. Once he has banished all pain beyond possibility of return, he has attained the highest goal" (HS, 50). As stated before, while an individual is subject to desire, there can be found no happiness. Physical, astral, and causal rebirths are all a result of unfulfilled desires. Sat-Chit-Ananda, the true nature of human beings, quenches the thirst of lifetimes of unrealized longings. Through the regular entry into the state of samadhi, the Yogi quickly satisfies every desire and so destroys the seeds of karma lodged in the astral spine. Moksha, liberation, is achieved by samadhi first from rebirth in bhuloka in the sthula sarira, then from rebirth in bhuvan and swar lokas. Arriving at dasamadwara, the gate to the creation of light, the bodiless soul enters the spiritual world. Renouncing any existence apart from Sat, the Real, the soul rises to satyaloka and achieves kaivalya.

Chapter II: Pranayama Defined

Patanjali is the foremost exponent of Yoga, the system of Ashtanga Yoga presented in the Yoga Sutras being later referred to as Raja Yoga. The science of Raja Yoga centers on the practice of an advanced method of pranayama, or energy control (RY, 45). As has been shown, the last three angas of Raja Yoga, classified as antaranga or the “inner limbs” of Yoga, can never be achieved until the Yogi has gained a high degree of mastery over prana. Again, in order to correct a common misconception concerning the nature of pranayama, I quote Swami Vivekananda: “Pranayama is not, as many think, concerned solely with the breath; breath indeed has very little to do with it. Breathing is only one of the many exercises through which we get to the real pranayama. Pranayama means control of prana” (RY, 34).

In each swarga, creation is intelligently guided to manifest itself in varying degrees of subtlety, from gross matter in bhuloka to the divine magnetic auras in swarloka. In the physical universe, of which the human body is a part, the raw material which condenses into planets, stars, animals, etc. is akasha or ether (RY, 34). The power and intelligence behind creation's manifestations, however, is prana (RY, 34). The holy AUM vibration, Sabda Brahma or the Cosmic Sound, manifests as the various forms of prana found in the human body and in all the cosmos. Prana also creates all of the forces of nature including gravity, electromagnetism, and the weak and strong nuclear forces. Prana manifests as thought, feeling, and motion (RY, 35). Like the “strings” of the Super-String Theory of modern physics, Prana is solar systems finer than the atom. The control of this all-pervading divine cosmic energy is the goal of pranayama.

Prana is classified broadly as brahmanda prana or cosmic prana, which is inexhaustible and pervades the cosmos, and pinda prana or individual prana which pervades a particular living organism (LY, 44). Cosmic prana, as stated earlier, enters the human body at the medulla oblongata (BY, 243). Through pranayama, Yogis are able to absorb many times more prana from the unlimited cosmic source than can most individuals and use that energy to rejuvenate and regenerate the spine and brain that they may be fit to manifest divine consciousness (RY, 46). The practice of pranayama magnetizes the spine and brain so they may at once draw in more energy through the gateway of the medulla oblongata and further pull in the prana from the heart, lungs, and senses. I have been asked many times when lecturing or commenting on pranayama how a Yogi may remain still without breathing and not starve the brain of oxygen. The answer is simple: brahmanda prana is drawn in via the antenna of the medulla oblongata, electrifying the body and maintaining it in a state of perfect suspended animation, making the oxygenation of venous blood with air unnecessary. The breathless state is therefore not a forced cessation of breathing but rather a natural recession of the breath; the breath only stills to the degree that breathing becomes unnecessary. Continuing, pinda prana, liberated from its incessant preoccupation with the material body, is freed to unite with higher centers of divine consciousness in the spine and brain, thus further revivifying both the chakras and bodily plexuses.

According to Yoga philosophy, a Yogi who has attained complete control of prana can bring universes into manifestation, as it is ultimately prana that condenses into creation. Once prana is mastered, all things fall under the control of the Yogi (RY, 36). A mind that is perfectly controlled can dominate all other minds as well (RY, 36).

All knowledge belongs to the Yogi who, through mastery of prana, unites the individualized bodily prana with cosmic prana. Whether adherents to the various religions, cults, spiritual movements, sects, covens, and healing circles are aware of it or not, behind all religious practices is a means to control prana. Most of these methods are very crude and any control of prana stumbled upon is usually done unconsciously and in a highly limited way (RY, 37). The highest and most subtle manifestation of prana is the mind and thought; Raja Yogis perform pranayama as a mental process (BY, 244). However, a gross manifestation of the motion of prana in the human body can be found in the breathing mechanism. Hatha Yogis therefore begin by employing techniques of breath regulation to gain control over the human body's individualized pranic forces (BY, 237).

There are five manifestations of prana, called pancha pranas, in the human body, of which two are important at this point in the discussion (BY, 250). The first is called prana. The seat of prana is in the heart; prana is the uplifting current which both causes inhalation and can be generated by the process of inhalation. Prana travels up the spine. The second form of prana is called apana, or the negative current. The seat of apana is the anus. Apana flows down the spine and both causes and is generated by exhalation. It should be clear from the above remarks that it is the motions of the subtle prana which lie behind the gross manifestations of breathing (BY, 250-2). Through the methods of Hatha Yoga pranayama, great amounts of pranic current are generated. Once a Yogi has gained control of prana, the breathing rate also falls under the control of the Yogi. As the manifestations of prana in the motion of the lungs have been mastered by the Yogi, all other forms of prana in the human body are gradually mastered (BY, 240).

According to Yoga science, afferent and efferent nerve impulses are conducted to and from the brain via the ida and pingala nadis in the spine (BY, 248). The sushumna nadi remains sealed by brahma granthi at the base of the spine. As long as the mind employs the physical nervous system, or ida and pingala, to receive and send messages to the rest of the body, the mind will be bound by body consciousness (RY, 55). The “wireless” system whereby the mind controls the body without using the nervous system is switched on when the sushumna nadi is activated. Through the practice of pranayama, prana, or kundalini, symbolically represented as a sleeping snake coiled up three and one half times at the muladhara chakra, is “awakened,” or drawn in from the senses, and directed into the sushumna (SP, 303). As the prana ascends from chakra to chakra, veil after veil is lifted from the mind and the Yogi experiences divine illumination in the form of Sat-Chit-Ananda, or the realization of Absolute Existence-Cosmic Knowledge and Consciousness-Ever-New Bliss (RY, 58). This is the state of Samadhi.

Yoga philosophy declares that “all worship, consciously or unconsciously, leads to this end” of awakening the dormant, coiled-up, sense-bound prana, and Raja Yoga is the science of religion, the rationale of all worship, all prayers, forms, ceremonies, and miracles (RY, 58). Control of the mind is the direct result of the mastery of prana, but the path is not an easy one. Perseverance in the practice of pranayama under the guidance of a guru is necessary in order to achieve success in Yoga (LY, 29). Neither is there any quick way toward achieving perfection in the practice of pranayama. Control of prana comes but gradually to the persistent practitioner (LY, 43). In fact, it is generally understood among Yogis that the mastery of prana is achieved only after many lifetimes of devoted practice of pranayama (PR, 3).

According to Patanjali, the goal of Yoga pranayama and all the other limbs is ultimately kaivalya, or Transcendental Isolation; the purusha or soul transcends the limitations of the mind and three bodies. The same goal is also admitted in Kaivalya Darsanam sutra III:32: "Abandoning the vain idea of his separate existence, he enters satyaloka, wherein he attains the state of final release or kaivalya, oneness with Spirit" (HS, 84). While the latter part of this translation, namely "oneness with Spirit," is given as a definition of kaivalya and so is of an interpretive nature, Shankara states in his commentaries on the Yoga Sutras that this kaivalya is union with God (CC, 3).

In my view, though western scholars often consider Sankhya philosophy to be atheistic, or at least to sidestep the issue of God's absolute existence, the underlying meaning of such Sankhya sutras as I:92, that "(the existence of) God cannot be proved," I believe, is simply that human beings, normally limited by sensual data, cannot pronounce with any finality the existence of the supra-sensual (AY, 195). Some ancient and modern scholars and Yogis claim that the creator(s) of this universe are none other than Yogis who have not yet attained complete freedom; therefore, there is no need to postulate the existence of a Supreme Being beyond these Yogis residing in the causal universe or beyond (RY, 118). Yoga philosophy agrees on the point that such Yogis exist, but adds that there also is a Lord, a special purusha, above and beyond these souls that is the Eternally Free. In my mind, since Sankhya admits to a state of perfection beyond these Yogis which rule creation, this state can easily be equated to sat, or God.

The Yoga Sutras, the foremost exposition of Yoga philosophy and practice, is divided into four parts: samadhi, sadhana, vibhuti, and kaivalya. While the sutras deal with the practice of Yoga, they also include a great deal of philosophical material. The first chapter addresses the Yogi who has already mastered the state of samadhi (CC, 7). Patanjali defines Yoga, the aspects of the mind, the nature of samadhi, the obstacles inherent in the nature of the mind, and absorption in samadhi. Chapter two comments upon the path, or sadhana, which is the means to attain samadhi. While a great deal of the opening sutras in this section are involved with the subjects of the mental taints which are the root of karma, this chapter outlines the eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga and enters a discussion covering yama, niyama and the perfections (miracles) which result from mastery of the same. Chapter three is called "Vibhuti Pada." This chapter deals with the manifestation of the siddhis, or miraculous powers which the Yogi acquires through the mastery of antaranga Yoga, or the inner limbs of Yoga. These limbs include dharana, dhyana, and samadhi which, when practiced together, are called samyama, or a "restraint" of the senses and pranas resulting in true concentration. The fourth chapter continues the discussion on the perfections, comments on the nature of karma, and concludes with about ten sutras on kaivalya.

Due to limitations in space, it is not possible to elucidate each and every sutra, nor is it really necessary considering that our present subject is pranayama, not Patanjali's Yoga Sutras itself. I shall therefore choose those sutras for discussion which I believe will give a fairly complete picture of the process of pranayama. In sutra I:2, Patanjali gives a definition of Yoga. Patanjali writes, "Yogas chitta-vritti-nirodhah" (SY, 6). After reading all the conflicting translations, I would translate this sutra as, "Yoga (Yogas) is the restraining (nirodhah) of the fluctuation (vritti) of the mind principle (chitta)."

According to Yoga science, vikshepa, or the scattering and tossing of the mind between thoughts, moods, and states of consciousness such as waking and sleeping, occurs as a result of the motion of breath. As breath is a function of prana, once prana is brought under the control of the Yogi through pranayama, the fluctuations of the mind cease (BY, 239). To restrain the mind and raise the consciousness, the sense-bound prana must also be restrained and directed to the brain. Vritti can also refer to the mental states the mind moves to and from (RY, 101). Through pranayama, thoughts stop and the limitations of the mind which keep the soul's consciousness occupied are overcome. Nirodhah is a reference to both the act of restraining and the state of restraint (YS, 27). I believe that this sutra refers to the state of union (Yoga) in samadhi, which therefore presumes this sutra to refer to the state of nirodhah, not the process thereof. This is confirmed by the next sutra which continues the thought. Sutra I:3 reads, "Then the seer is established in its own nature." That is, samadhi is the natural state of human beings.

According to Raja Yoga, the mind does not generate thoughts; the mind is but an instrument of the soul and has no inherent intelligence. In fact, thoughts are not even individually rooted but are universal and roam eternally in the ether (AY, 178). Through the antenna of the medulla oblongata, each individual chooses the thoughts to think which then manifest as whirls (vrittis) in the mind. However, it is the connection between the mind, the organs of sense (indriyas), and the objects of sense (tanmatras) which promote thoughts. Thus, when externals reach the mind, thoughts are sparked which in turn create fluctuations in the mental process (BY, 237). Through pranayama, the mind is disconnected from the senses and the seemingly endless flow of thoughts stop.

Nature is attributed with three qualities or gunas. Similarly, according to Vyasa, the minds of all beings express these gunas in varying degrees (CC, 61). The negative or degenerating guna is tamas. Tamas represents both laziness and sloth and the violent and destructive natures of the mind. Rajas, the neutralizing guna, represents the active nature of the mind. Sattva, the positive attribute of nature, manifests as calmness and wisdom. Tamas opposes both the activity of rajas and the illuminating nature of sattva (LY, 46). The natural state of the mind is sattva, but the indriyas constantly pull the mind outward, placing the attention of the soul-consciousness on the tanmatras. This produces rajasic and tamasic tendencies (RY, 104). Thus, a rajasic/tamasic individual will never be able to free his mind from the tanmatras and in such a mind thoughts of attachment to possessions, greed for power, and dark deeds will always arise. Once the practice of samadhi is attained, Shankara states that the mind is established in its true state of calmness (CC, 62). Further, the soul is then freed from the limitations of the mind and becomes established in its true nature which is beyond the reach of the gunas. This is the state of Yoga.

The "seer" spoken of in sutra I:3 is the purusha or soul. While the thoughts arising from the union of the indriyas with tanmatras are obliterated, the consciousness of the observer is not; consciousness is indestructible. With the calming of the mind through pranayama, the soul is able to distinguish between itself and the mind. According to Vyasa, the soul, the seat of awareness itself, is the detached observer of the mental processes (CC, 64). The mind, however, as something viewed, is itself not an observer but rather, like the indriyas, is an organ of observation employed by purusha (CC, 399).

Manas, mind, is therefore designated in Raja Yoga as a product of prakriti, or the natural cosmos, though it is considered by Yogis to be vasu, all-pervading. Mind, therefore, is always subject to one or more of the three gunas. Though purusha is essentially beyond prakriti, purusha uses manas to experience prakriti. These experiences, not without their price, create samskaras, or tendencies resulting from past impressions, which infest manas. In this way does the soul become chained in successive rebirths to the wheel of samskaras, or the wheel of reincarnation (BY. 344).

Sutra I:33 introduces a number of means by which the mind may be made steady and clear. Sutra I:34 reads, "Or by expulsion and retention of prana" (CC, 147). This sutra is clearly a reference to pranayama, but Patanjali does not reveal any specific technique. Further, the word prana can refer to the senses, as they are pranas, or to manas, as it too is a prana (RY, 129). In order to clear the mind, the Yogi must withdraw prana from the senses, lungs, and heart. While some commentators like Taimni believe that this sutra and the others that follow it are a reference to preliminary techniques at controlling the mind, I think the opposite. This chapter is called "Samadhi" and it is hardly addressing anyone but the advanced student of Yoga who has already mastered the breathless state. The other methods Patanjali gives for calming the mind after sutra I:34 also reflect this high standard. It is the second chapter which starts the reader with the practice of Yoga from the beginning. For the Yogi who has attained samadhi, future entries into that sublime state can be accomplished by a number of means; these are given in I:34 to I:39. Among advanced Yogis, for example, it is customary to enter samadhi by exhaling with a characteristic sigh and effortlessly keeping the breath out (AY, 540).

The next and most important group of sutras dealing with pranayama are sutras 49 through 55 in the second chapter entitled "Sadhana Pada," or the chapter on the means (practice) of Yoga. The Yogi is advised to first master asana, the comfortable meditation position which is conducive to motionlessness, before beginning the practice of pranayama. Once asana and the physical body are under the control of the Yogi, Patanjali writes, "This (asana) having been (achieved), pranayama, which is cessation of inspiration and expiration, (follows)" (SY, 258). As in other sutras of the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali here assumes much information on the part of the reader. He asks that the Yogi practice pranayama but gives little to no instruction in this or in proceeding sutras. Further, he is assuming to define pranayama by the mastery of pranayama or its goal, not by the actual step-by-step practice of its various techniques. However, considering the Yogi has just mastered asana, this must be a reference to Hatha Yoga pranayama, for the Hatha Yogi, as of yet unable to control prana, is bound to pranayama exercises that manipulate the grossest manifestation of the workings of prana in the human body: the breathing process (RY, 179). Only the Raja Yogi can control prana directly through the mind in a semi-breathless state without the necessity of regulating the breath as in ritual breathing exercises.

Taimni, in his commentary on this sutra (II:49), describes the difference between Hatha and Raja Yoga as follows: "In Hatha Yoga manipulation of Pranic currents is utilized for bringing about control of Citta-Vrittis and changes in consciousness. In Raja Yoga, Citta-Vrittis are controlled by consciousness through the will and Prana thus comes under the control of the mind" (SY, 258).

It would be exceedingly difficult for a beginner at Yoga to attempt to control the fluctuations of the mind directly through the mind itself; the unbridled pranic currents are continuously feeding the senses and breathing process, both distracting efforts at concentration. However, once the Yogi has mastered prana to a certain degree through the employment of Hatha Yoga pranayama techniques, direct control of the mind through the mind, which is a control of prana through the mind as the distinctions between the mind and prana dissolve, becomes possible.

Sutra II:50 briefly describes some of the variations in the practice of pranayama introduced in the previous sutra. “(It is in) external, internal or suppressed modification; is regulated by place, time and number, (and becomes progressively) prolonged and subtle” (SY, 264). Unsurprisingly, once praxis is introduced as in this sutra, the commentators disagree sharply on Patanjali's intended meaning. Taimni and Vyasa state that the three types of modification refer to different kinds of breath retention while Feuerstein and Vivekananda maintain that they are simply a reference to inhalation, exhalation, and retention. I would side with the latter group since “external” and “internal” do not refer to types of suppression (retention of breath) but to kinds of modifications of which inhalation and exhalation certainly qualify. All, beside Taimni, agree that “place” refers to the part of the body prana is directed to be confined to; Taimni interprets “place” as the actual geographic location that the Yogi is to practice pranayama. All agree that “time” refers the duration of inhalation and exhalation, or just retention for Vyasa, but Taimni adds that “time” also refers to the time of year that pranayama is practiced. Taimni's exegesis concerning place and time verges on the ridiculous; no other commentary agrees with his. Pranayama is practiced daily, year round, in whatever part of the world the Yogis find themselves. Only Vyasa, in my view, properly comments on the prolonging and withdrawal of breath. Shankara makes mention that the ancient “sages (rsi) could prolong a breath for years” (CC, 276). These variations in pranayama practice will be discussed in detail in the third chapter dealing with the techniques of Hatha and Raja Yoga pranayama.

Sutra II:51 describes the progression from breath-bound Hatha pranayama with its “modifications” to the practice of Raja Yoga pranayama done in a semi-breathless state. Here Taimni translates: “That Pranayama which goes beyond the sphere of internal and external is the fourth (variety)” (SY, 265). As will be explained later, Raja Yoga pranayama does not involve itself with inspiration, expiration, or retention of any kind as do the techniques of Hatha pranayama. “The fourth” level of pranayama practice transcends both ritual breathing exercises and the various kinds of retention that may take place during Hatha pranayama. Taimni mentions that sutra II:51 introduces the real practice of pranayama which the earlier varieties in praxis are only aspiring to (SY, 266). In fact, any attempt at controlling prana through the manipulation of any physical or mental phenomenon must perforce be defined as an indirect, albeit easily approachable, method of controlling prana. True pranayama, as Taimni correctly states, occurs only when the mind awakens to its natural ability to control prana directly. Once prana is fully mastered, the mind becomes re-owned by the pure consciousness, which is the soul.

The commentators also disagree on the next sutra (II:52) which reads, “From that is dissolved the covering of light” (SY, 266). Taimni is sure that this light is none other than the light of the astral body.

Vivekananda maintains that the light is of citta, the mind, the covering being the impurities of rajas and tamas. Shankara and Vyasa are in agreement with Vivekananda, but further add that the destruction of this covering by pranayama is none other than the removal of karma which veils the sattvic nature of the mind. While I would tend to agree with Vyasa, this does seem to contradict his saying that the mind is not self-illuminating (CC, 397). Vyasa therefore points out that it is not the mind itself but knowledge which is luminous; karma veils sattva which is “ever-bright” (CC, 278). Though Taimni is not incorrect in asserting that visions of the astral body arrive through the practice of pranayama, it is a far easier thing to see the light of the astral body than to see the light of jnana, knowledge, with the establishment of the mind in its natural state of sattva.

Sutra II:53 runs as follows: “The mind becomes fit for dharana” (RY, 181). True concentration (dharana) is impossible until the senses have withdrawn as in the state of pratyahara, or disassociation, which is commented upon in sutra II:54. Further, pratyahara cannot be achieved until the Yogi has gained mastery over prana. Taimni states that the practice of pranayama is not absolutely necessary in the attaining of dharana, admitting that other schools of Yoga may reach pratyahara and dharana through different means. However, Taimni errs inasmuch as the conscious control of prana will always be the result of other methods of interiorizing the mind. As such, all systems of internalizing the consciousness are only different techniques of pranayama, some stronger, some weaker, which are designed for different personality types. Pranayama is included by Patanjali in his system of Ashtanga Yoga as it is the quickest, most direct, and most efficacious method of gaining control of prana.

Vivekananda translates sutra II:54 as follows: “Pratyahara, or the drawing in of the organs, is effected by their giving up of their own objects and taking, as it were, the form of the mind-stuff” (RY, 181). Why this sutra on pratyahara follows the sutra on dharana is unclear considering pratyahara to be a requisite for the practice of dharana. However, it might be easily explained as a continuation of the discussion on disassociation through pranayama, sutra II:53 merely being a remark on the result of the covering of the light of sattva being removed. This is probably the case since the third chapter begins with a sutra defining dharana while the last sutra in chapter two, sutra 55, makes further note of the Yogi's mastery of the sense organs through pranayama. A Yogi accomplished in the control of prana can turn on and off any one, several, or all of the sense organs at will. Pranayama further yields pulse control, breath control, an awareness of the cool and warm currents in the spine, and an overall mastery over the transition the unenlightened call death.

True Yogis, having mastered prana, are not moved by the temptations of the senses. However, Vyasa makes it very clear that the experiencing of sense-objects, even without attachment or aversion, is not the real conquering of the senses. Only the ability to entirely cut off sense perception from the mind may be called the “supreme mastery of the senses” referred to in sutra II:55 (CC, 279). Although the practice of pranayama may bring with it the manifestation of siddhis, or Yogic (miraculous) powers, the true goal of pranayama is the liberation of the mind from the tyranny of the senses in the state of pratyahara. Further, once this mastery has been achieved, Vyasa states that Yogis need not look any further for another kind of mastery. Verily, there can be no greater earthly achievement than the control of the mind which leads to infinite spiritual possibilities.

Chapter III: Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga Pranayama

Before a Yogi may aspire to walk the path of Raja Yoga, adeptness is necessary in the practice of Hatha Yoga. Students qualified to practice pranayama are therefore always initiated first in the techniques of Hatha pranayama (BY, 244). In the West, books have been published on pranayama, allowing untrained students to take up the practice of Yogic techniques without due instruction and formal initiation from a true guru. Far worse, many unscrupulous persons have presumed themselves to be qualified, enlightened Yogis and have gathered around themselves rather large followings of “disciples.” Luckily, no books on Raja Yoga pranayama have ever been or even can be published; such techniques of pranayama require a mastery of prana in order for their practice.

In this chapter, I would like to analyze the techniques of both Hatha and Raja Yoga pranayama in depth. I will be writing on the techniques of Raja Yoga pranayama from my own training. Many of the techniques of Hatha pranayama have their counterpart in Raja Yoga. I will endeavor to illustrate how and when the practice of a certain Hatha Yoga technique becomes a Raja Yoga practice. The techniques of Hatha pranayama vary slightly from school to school just as there are certain variations in the practice of asanas (postures). A familiarity with the differences in the practice of a technique are in most cases not vital to an understanding of pranayama. Although I am familiar with the Hatha Yoga techniques through my own personal training in pranayama, I will cite texts to show my agreements and disagreements with other Yogis.

By way of slowly entering upon a discussion of the techniques of pranayama, I would first like to begin with a few Hatha Yoga cleansing exercises, called kriyas, which I feel affect pranic currents (BY, 22). This will also give me the opportunity to introduce some new terms that are used in connection with pranayama. The first technique is called kapalabhati, or “shining skull.” The purpose of its practice is to purify the nasal passages, lungs and the bloodstream. Kapalabhati has many therapeutic applications, the majority of which involve the circulatory and respiratory systems (BY, 38). As the Hatha Yogi advances in initiations and receives higher techniques of pranayama, kapalabhati is often used as a preface to these more powerful exercises. Its practice in relation to the higher technique of bhastrika, for example, involves the removal of carbon waste from venous blood allowing the Yogi to hold the breath for long periods of time.

In the practice of kapalabhati, emphasis in effort is placed on rechaka, or exhalation. That is, rechaka is performed forcefully and quickly through sudden contractions of the abdominal muscles while puraka, inhalation, is done passively (BY, 40). Both rechaka and puraka are done through the nostrils. One exhalation is therefore counted as one kapalabhati. A round of kapalabhati for beginners usually includes twelve expulsions. Beginners are asked to perform three rounds. Through practice, these numbers are increased to one hundred and eight expulsions per round with up to twelve rounds practiced. After one round, the practitioner is asked to perform a full, active puraka and hold the breath as long as it is comfortable to do so. This is called antara kumbhaka, or the retention of breath after full inhalation. Since kapalabhati removes carbon waste from the blood stream, practitioners may find that the breath can be comfortably held for several minutes.

During this beginners' "breathless" state, prana naturally retires to the spine and brain, hence the name "kapalabhati," for the skull shines with the influx of prana. The real breathless state of samadhi, of course, requires no forced effort at breath retention. Like most Yogic practices, kapalabhati must be performed on an empty stomach.

Another important kriya within the framework of pranayama is tratakam, or the gazing exercise. It is called a kriya for it is a method of purifying the mind and calming the nerves, thus aiding in concentration (BY, 34). The three varieties of tratakam are related to the first three states of consciousness the Yogi must master and pass through before attaining infinite consciousness. Normal waking consciousness corresponds to a level gazing of the eyes. Yogis who have mastered this initial technique of tratakam can remain awake indefinitely, not allowing their eyes to droop down into subconsciousness, which is the second technique of tratakam called Nasagra drishti, or nasal gazing; nasagra drishti is performed by gazing at the tip of the nose (BY, 35). Mastery of nasagra drishti yields heightened olfactory perception and the ability to sleep and dream in subconsciousness at will. However, the third gazing technique that is at once a beginner's method of learning concentration and the advanced Raja Yoga method of entering samadhi (breathlessness) at will is bhrumadhya drishti, or upward gazing with a mental focus at the point between the eyebrows (BY, 36). Beginners initiated in Hatha methods of pranayama will use this technique in meditation as it offers a point to concentrate upon, that being the sixth chakra located at the pineal gland. From my own experience as I advanced in the practice of pranayama, the lifting of the gaze with eyes either fully closed or half-closed was all that was necessary to still the breath and mentally direct the pranic currents up the spine, brainward. The lifted gaze correlates to the superconscious state.

No matter which variety is practiced, tratakam, when performed alone, is done with eyes open without blinking. Beginners should work up to practicing this for twelve minutes. Advanced Yogis can keep the eyes open and unblinking indefinitely. Tratakam, performed in conjunction with methods of pranayama or meditation is done with eyes closed. Even with the eyes closed or half-open, the eyelids should not flutter. This mastery of the gaze through the interior control of prana will be addressed further during the discussion on the technique of sambhavi mudra.

The third and final kriya is both a cleansing exercise and a variation of one of the three bandhas (BY, 40). Bandhas are bodily postures which lock specific plexuses, thus controlling the flow of prana by preventing its movement into certain parts of the body. The three kinds of bandhas are mula bandha, uddiyana bandha, and jalandhara bandha (BY, 269). The kriya in question, called nauli, is similar to the technique of uddiyana bandha; both techniques have the same uplifting effect on pranic currents in the spine. Uddiyana means "flying up" (LY, 425). Through both uddiyana and nauli, prana is directed to ascend to the brain through the astral spine by restraining its natural downward flow at the solar plexus. Both exercises are excellent for strengthening the abdomen, relieving constipation, and improving circulation (BY, 42).

To perform nauli, the Yogi must first master uddiyana bandha (BY, 42). Though beginners are usually taught to perform uddiyana in a standing position, uddiyana, like all techniques of pranayama, is done in the sitting position with the back straight.

Some practitioners find it necessary to arch forward slightly while performing uddiyana, but this necessity is overcome with practice. With the hands firmly placed on the thighs, the Yogi performs rechaka forcefully. Bahya kumbhaka, or the suspension of breath after full exhalation, is then applied; this naturally causes the diaphragm to rise. Through apnoea, or the mock intake of breath by puffing out the chest and drawing the navel inward and upward, uddiyana creates a hollow in the abdominal and thoracic cavity. As the prana is forced upward, the Yogi simultaneously performs jalandhara bandha, or the chin lock; jalandhara prevents the prana from flowing upward by locking the cervical plexus (BY, 269). Jalandhara bandha is practiced by resting the chin on the breastbone. Prana is therefore regulated to revolve in the spine and so magnetize and awaken the spinal chakras. The breath should be held out for up to twelve seconds. This makes for the performance of one uddiyana. Uddiyana may be practiced six times in succession.

Once uddiyana is mastered, the Yogi may attempt to perform nauli. While in the position of uddiyana, the practitioner must relax the central abdominal muscles and contract the muscles on either side of them. Through nauli, the abdominal muscles are pushed forward and are brought into a vertical line, leaving the remaining abdominal area pulled toward the back. This central contraction is called madhyama nauli (BY, 44). Though nauli is a cleansing kriya (rite), its manipulation of the movement of prana is of wondrous spiritual benefit.

Mula bandha is literally the base lock, performed primarily at the muladhara chakra and secondarily at the swadhishtana chakra. Mula prevents the flow of prana out to the heart and senses and thus directs prana to return up the spine to the brain. To achieve this end, mula bandha employs a mudra. Literally, mudra means “symbol,” but in the context of pranayama, mudras are techniques which seal prana at certain physiological centers. So, while mula bandha restrains the naturally downward flowing prana, causing it to reverse its sense-binding pattern of motion, the technique also seals the liberated prana at the coccygeal plexus, or muladhara chakra, which is the seat of kundalini sakti (BY, 273). Once muladhara chakra is awakened and the brahma granthi at this center is broken, it will become easier for the Yogi to keep prana in the spine and thus withdraw the mind from the senses.

Mula bandha is accomplished through the tightening of the anal muscles and the contraction of the lower abdomen. This contraction of the perineum and anal sphincter is separately called asvini mudra. Asvini mudra implies the stalling of a horse. Some Yogis believe that this technique is named so because when it is practiced it brings to the mind the image of a horse defecating (LY, 515). I do not think so. The horse in question, I believe, is of the senses, especially the sexual drive and sense of touch. In Tantra Yoga this technique is used in a variety of ways, one of which being the retention of semen or prevention of ejaculation. The semen is thus transmuted into prana which is directed to flow to the brain. Mula bandha is usually practiced with pranayama in conjunction with jalandhara bandha during antara kumbhaka. These techniques, when executed in tandem, unite prana and apana at the muladhara chakra with the intention of awakening the dormant spiritual forces in the human vehicle.

While jalandhara bandha, as mentioned, restrains the upward flowing prana, it also helps to pull prana upward (dhara) by way of jala, a nerve passing through the neck to the brain (jala) (BY, 269). This stimulates the brain creating there a positive pole, attracting to it the prana from the negative pole at the muladhara chakra. The sushumna nadi thus becomes activated by the flow of prana established by pranayama; jalandhara bandha therefore aids in locking this prana in the sushumna.

Perhaps the greatest mudra in Yoga, credited with bringing eternal youth, freedom from hunger, thirst, sleep, and disease is khechari mudra (LY, 119). Khechari means “roaming through ether (space).” The technique is so called because through it citta is liberated and free to enter the point between the eyebrows (kha) and travel through space (kha) just as the tongue is free to move into the throat according to the practice of the technique (SP, 209). The technique, though difficult to practice, is very simple. The tongue is curled back and placed behind the uvula into the nasal cavity. Many individuals cannot reach that far and so cut the frenulum to free the tongue. As a practitioner of the technique, I would argue that those who cannot reach that far with their tongue nor maintain the tongue's position for any substantial length of time should perform kaka (crow) mudra instead (LY, 497). Kaka mudra requires that the tongue only be pressed firmly against the palate.

Through khechari mudra the breath is easily stopped by the advanced Raja Yogi and nada is distinctly heard. This leads to Laya Yoga, absorption, which is also called Bhakti Yoga and Surat Sabda Yoga, for the Yogi (bhakta) is baptized in the holy AUM sound or Sabda Brahma (HS, 90-1). Listening to this nada is thus the true mantra, or mind purifier. Mastery of khechari mudra eventually leads to kevala kumbhaka, or the perfect, effortless retention of breath that requires neither rechaka nor puraka. So while Hatha Yogis practice khechari mudra during kumbhaka or simply as a meditation practice by concentrating on the ajna chakra and mentally chanting AUM, Raja Yogis employ khechari mudra in order to quickly interiorize the consciousness so that they may practice pranayama interiorly or meditate on the various sounds of AUM that are actually heard in the chakras. The practice of kevala pranayama, or the perfected, interior practice of Raja Yoga pranayama, will be discussed at the end of this chapter once the techniques of Hatha pranayama, which necessarily involve rechaka and puraka, have been covered.

Sambhavi mudra, like khechari mudra, also has different ramifications for Hatha and Raja Yogis. Hatha Yogis refer to sambhavi (“birth”) varyingly as sanmukhi (“six mouthed”), parangmukhi (“facing inward”), and yoni (“womb”) (LY, 132). Through this technique the Yogi aids the senses in turning their attention inward to the source (yoni) of Being through the closing of the apertures (“mouths”) in the head. The thumbs are used to close the ears by gently pressing on the tragi. The index fingers are used to put pressure on the outer sides of the eyeballs while the middle fingers are used to close the nostrils. Finally, the annular fingers are placed above the mouth while the pinkies are placed below it to keep the mouth tightly closed. In time, the Yogi will perceive manifestations of AUM as sound (nada) emanating from the medulla oblongata and light (jyoti) blazing in the forehead. I was taught a further unpublished (to my knowledge) Hatha Yoga pranayama technique, called jyoti mudra, which aids the Yogi in seeing the light of the spiritual eye.

Sambhavi mudra flips to a Raja Yoga state of mastery when the Yogi no longer needs the aid of the hands to close the openings in the head through which prana might escape during antara kumbhaka. Prana then circulates in the cerebrum, medulla oblongata, and pineal gland and the eyeballs and eyelids become firmly glued, as it were, into a single unit focused on the spot between the eyebrows (kha). From my own experience, when I have attempted to open my eyes during this state I experienced a terrible burning of my eyes. The Raja variety of sambhava is experienced as a partial pratyahara in a semi-breathless state. Jyoti mudra turns into a Raja Yoga practice when the Yogi can, at will, see the light of the spiritual eye without the aid of puraka and antara kumbhaka which the Hatha variety of jyoti mudra calls for. Raja Yogis then send their consciousness through the pranic star door seen in the center of the forehead.

According to some Hatha Yogis, the complete yoni mudra must be practiced in the meditation posture called siddhasana. In siddhasana, one heel is placed at the perineum and the other above the pubic bone. For either gender, however, this sitting position locks the genitals in position and diverts prana away from the sexual organ. In a way, just sitting still in siddhasana is a simple method of pranayama. Two other asanas that combine with themselves mudras may also be called pranayama. The first is called yoga mudra while the second is named maha mudra. In yoga mudra, the Yogi, in the seated meditation position, performs rechaka while bending forward and then performs bahya kumbhaka with the head touching the floor (or placed in between the knees if the Yogi is sitting in a chair) for up to twelve seconds. Puraka commences as the Yogi returns to the upright sitting position. Yoga mudra may be practiced six times in a row. In maha (great) mudra, puraka is performed before bending forward, the legs being outstretched instead of crossed, and antara kumbhaka is employed for up to twelve seconds. Both of these asana/mudras may employ all three bandhas during kumbhaka. Note that maha mudra is the only technique that employs uddiyana bandha during antara kumbhaka. Yogis are generally warned that if uddiyana is practiced during antara kumbhaka, the eyes will puff out (LY, 437). In their ability to bring prana to the brain and break the granthis in the sushumna, maha mudra is the greater (maha) variety as it puts greater pressure on the higher cerebrospinal plexuses through the agency of antara kumbhaka than does yoga mudra. It must therefore be practiced with greater care.

From birth to death, human life can be viewed as a long succession of breaths. The Yogis measure the length of an individual's life not according to years but by the number inspirations and expirations until the final expiration which is called death (LY, 43). Death, mrt, is of course naught but a change from one vibration of existence to another. According to Yoga philosophy, the Sanskrit words (mantras) vibrationally connected with inhalation and exhalation are hong and sau, respectively. Hong means "I am," and sau means "he." Therefore, with every breath, all human beings are unconsciously repeating the prayer which affirms the true nature of their being: "I am He (Spirit)." This breathing and affirmation process, done unconsciously, is called ajapa mantra (LY, 44). Through pranayama, Yogis are able to correctly discriminate between their real nature as purusha and unreal nature as ahamkara. Also, a hongsau is a swan; Brahma's steed is mythologically depicted as a swan. The divine swan was able to extract milk from a mixture of milk and water, thus depicting the spiritual discrimination that Yogis must acquire through unraveling the mystery of breath if they are to extract divinity, or the state of breathlessness (samadhi), from mortal existence marked by the presence of incessant breathing (AY, 460).

Before Yogis are taught to control the breath through which they may begin to control prana which ultimately leads to breathlessness, students of Yoga are asked to watch the breath from the vantage point of the space between the eyebrows. This technique of meditation is very common and is called vipasana by Buddhist meditators. With the breath left entirely to its own motion, during inhalation the Yogi mentally chants hong and during exhalation the Yogi mentally chants sau. In time, the breath will begin to recede. The gaze being lifted (with closed eyes), the breath is felt to enter and exist through kha. This technique teaches the mind concentration, a measure of which being necessary for the practice of pranayama.

Hatha Yoga divides puraka into three parts: lower abdominal breathing, middle or chest breathing, and upper shoulder breathing (BY, 257). While Hatha pranayama employs all three types of breathing, abdominal breathing being the most important, the majority of people breathe only through the chest and shoulders (BY, 257). Further, most people exhale incompletely, leaving a great deal of carbon dioxide in the lower lungs. Improper habits of breathing lead to a whole host of respiratory and nervous disorders.

When the body is at rest as in sleep, the breathing process is uneven. That is, exhalation is twice the length of inhalation. This unevenness of breath restricts prana to revolve in the ida and pingala nadis, keeping the consciousness bound to the limited plane of matter. The simplest exercise in regulating the breathing is called sama vritti, or square breathing. In sama vritti breathing, rechaka and puraka are of even duration; students are advised to start with six seconds of inhalation and six seconds of exhalation (LY, 453). One inhalation and one exhalation is considered to be one round of breathing in this and all breathing exercises. Twelve rounds of sama vritti are advised to be performed. In time, the length of rechaka and puraka can be gradually increased to sixteen seconds. Antara kumbhaka may then be added at either half the lengths of the evened durations of rechaka and puraka or at their full lengths, depending on the lung capacity of the practitioner. Once antara kumbhaka is fully incorporated, the practitioner may add bahya kumbhaka with the only limitation being that at least one full breath separate the two types of kumbhakas.

Visama vritti, or uneven breathing, mimics the ratio between puraka and rechaka that is found in natural breathing, with the addition of antara kumbhaka double the length of rechaka; antara kumbhaka is therefore quadruple the length of puraka (LY, 454). It is this ratio that is worked for in nadi sodhana, or the cleansing of the astral nerve channels, the next preliminary exercise in pranayama (BY, 265). Nadi sodhana has also been called "alternate nostril" breathing because breathing alternates between the left and right nostrils in this technique. Though the nostrils are not usually evenly opened, the length of rechaka through the right nostril should equal the length of rechaka through the left nostril; the same is also true of puraka through the right and left nostril. Since the eyes are kept closed and focused upward during practice, Yogis use bija mantras (root syllables) to count the length of breath (BY, 261). Closing of the right nostril is accomplished through pressure applied by the right thumb while the left nostril is sealed through pressure applied by the right annular finger. The mouth is kept closed throughout the entire practice of nadi sodhana.

Since ida nadi is connected to the left nostril, meaning the breath in the left nostril is the cool lunar breath, respiration through the left nostril alone is called chandra nadi ida; chandra means “moon.” Respiration through only the right nostril, being connected to the warm solar breath, is called surya (solar) nadi pingala; therefore, for example, inspiration through only the right nostril is called surya nadi pingala puraka. The sequence of one round of breathing in nadi sodhana runs as follows: 1) surya nadi pingala puraka; 2) chandra nadi ida rechaka; 3) chandra nadi ida puraka; and 4) surya nadi pingala rechaka. During antara kumbhaka, the Yogi is to apply mula bandha and jalandhara bandha. Hatha Yoga advises that nadi sodhana be practiced until the nadis are fully cleansed of all obstructions. Only then may the higher techniques of Hatha pranayama, whose purpose is the activation of the sushumna nadi, be safely and effectively practiced. It is therefore imperative that students of Yoga are guided by true spiritual experts who have already mastered every phase of pranayama practice (BY, 260).

There are three techniques of Hatha Yoga pranayama proper that I would like to analyze. The first is called ujjayi, from ud, connoting upliftment, and jaya, meaning victory (LY, 441). In ujjayi pranayama, puraka is done slowly through both nostrils while rechaka is performed steadily chandra nadi ida style; the chest is kept fully expanded (BY, 271). While rechaka and puraka are of equal duration, antara kumbhaka with mula and jalandhara bandhas should be held for only three seconds. Kumbhaka is lengthened over time with practice to any duration that can be held comfortably without undue strain. One round of ujjayi consists of one full puraka, kumbhaka, and rechaka. Students of pranayama are allowed six rounds of ujjayi in the beginning; according to some schools of Yoga, this number can be increased to forty if the student practices only ujjayi and is guided by a guru (BY, 271). From my own experience, this technique can be practiced well near three hundred times a day or more, requiring approximately three hours, though it may take ten or more years to build to that level of intense practice.

The power of ujjayi as a process of pranayama lies in its method of puraka. During puraka, the epiglottis is partially closed, creating a low sibilant sound as the air passes along the roof of the mouth. The correct sound is achieved by a contraction of the muscles surrounding the uvula, causing the uvula to ascend in the throat and the glottis to partly close. If the epiglottis is closed too much the sound will become too sharp and the air will not enter smoothly. Slow deep breathing with the correct sound clearly heard by the practitioner is necessary for success in the practice of ujjayi. While the partially closed epiglottis allows for smooth, regulated breathing, the contraction of the muscles necessary to perform such an action act as a mudra which locks prana at the ajna chakra. Even a little practice of this technique will produce a pleasant throbbing sensation in the region of the pineal gland. The Yogi gains quick control over the lower chakras, the mind, and prana through the magnetization of the ajna chakra.

An alternative style of ujjayi performance is given by a school of Yoga in the south of India (LY, 442). To begin, puraka and rechaka are performed during jalandhara bandha which is maintained throughout the entire exercise, not only during antara kumbhaka. Both puraka and rechaka are done through both nostrils with the glottis partially closed. The same sound is made during puraka as in the first variety of ujjayi while rechaka creates an aspirate sound (LY, 442). Mula bandha is, as before, applied only during antara kumbhaka.

The second Hatha pranayama technique is called surya bhedana for by this exercise prana is made to travel through (bhid) pingala nadi, the nerve channel responsible for conducting solar (surya) energy. Surya nadi pingala puraka is performed slowly and deeply by closing the left nostril with the right annular finger. Antara kumbhaka is then applied with mula and jalandhara bandhas for a comfortable duration. Finally, chandra nadi ida rechaka is done, completing one round of surya bhedana. Both puraka and rechaka are carried out silently. Surya bhedana is one of the best pranayamas for generating heat in the body and bringing prana into the sushumna (BY, 272). It is generally safe to practice and increase the number of rounds performed of both surya bhedana and ujjayi in sets of twelve until a maximum of one hundred and eight rounds in slow succession are accomplished. Of course, the guidance of a true guru is vital.

The third and final technique of Hatha Yoga pranayama is bhastrika. Bhastrika is the bellows of a furnace (LY, 449). In this technique the lungs are used as bellows to extinguish the troublesome breath and thus ignite the prana so as to direct it to the muladhara chakra that it may ascend through the sushumna nadi to the ajna chakra. There are two parts to bhastrika. The first part is dedicated to a purification of the blood stream so that in stage two antara kumbhaka with mula and jalandhara bandhas may be maintained for several minutes. In kapalabhati breathing, rechaka was performed actively through contractions of the abdomen while puraka was done passively. In bhastrika, both rechaka and puraka are active and the whole respiratory system is brought into operation (LY, 267). Therefore, kapalabhati is the perfect exercise to prepare for the more rigorous bhastrika.

The Yogi begins with twelve rounds of forceful inhalations and exhalations before stage two of bhastrika begins; even advanced practitioners of bhastrika usually do not increase this number beyond twenty-four since past this amount the breath often begins to weaken. The last puraka is done slowly and deeply according to the ujjayi method. After an extended antara kumbhaka, surya nadi pingala rechaka follows. The power of bhastrika to awaken the muladhara chakra clearly lies in the prolonged antara kumbhaka afforded by the performance of the blood-purifying preparatory breathing rite. The bandhas must be held very tightly throughout the duration of antara kumbhaka; even the abdomen is tightened and drawn back toward the spine. Bhastrika pranayama is a very strenuous exercise which must be practiced under careful guidance. Those who practice the technique without proper preparation will likely suffer damage to the lungs and the entire breathing apparatus. Even the proper practice of this technique has its dangers. From my own experience I can testify to the incredible pressure that is felt in the head, as if the brain were to explode. The required "rude awakening" needed to rouse the sleeping kundalini is amply supplied through the correct and conscientious performance of bhastrika pranayama.

Raja Yoga pranayama, unlike Hatha Yoga pranayama, involves no puraka, no rechaka, no consciously applied kumbhaka, nor any forceful bhastrika breathing activity at all. Higher pranayama cannot be witnessed by the casual observer for it is accomplished through the mind awakened to its kinship with prana. However, no bhastrika pranayama can compare with the power and spiritual realization generated through the pranayama of the Raja Yogis, which is often referred to as kevala (perfect, whole, complete) pranayama.

In fact, the very purpose of the techniques of Hatha pranayama is to give the Yogi the awareness of the subtle workings of prana so that control of prana may be accomplished directly through the mind. That is, in Hatha Yoga the mind is taught to control the body and the breath within the scope of various techniques in order to begin to control the motions of prana; the mind is therefore not controlling prana directly but indirectly through the medium of the breath and muscles. Once these techniques are mastered, however, the mind acquires the ability to control prana without any intermediary through its heightened perception. Even so, the techniques of Hatha pranayama which control prana through the use of mudras, bandhas, and ritual breathing exercises are by far the most direct methods of pranayama when compared to the methods employed by any other Yoga marga (Yogic path) beside Raja Yoga.

To practice Raja Yoga pranayama, the Yogi must first be able to enter the state of kevala kumbhaka at will; the majority of breath recedes, the eyes are locked in focus on the point between the eyebrows as in sambhavi mudra, the Yogi can hear the various sounds of pranava emanating from the chakras, and the light of the spiritual eye can be seen in the forehead. These experiences vary from Yogi to Yogi, but a few things are universal no matter what the religion, era, or geography the Yogi was born to. First, the breath is quieted without any effort at retention. Second, the eyelids do not flutter with the gaze locked upward. Third, the heart is calm with the pulse rate noticeably lowered. Fourth, the Yogi becomes increasingly aware of the inner world of astral lights and sounds as the sense-energies retire into the spine. The pranic currents and ojas, sacred energies lying dormant in the chakras, may coalesce into visions or sounds according to the Yogis subconscious expectations, but with ascension in consciousness all personal manifestations of divinity slowly dissolve into the Impersonal Infinite.

Through the practice of Hatha pranayama, the Yogi becomes increasingly aware of the cool and warm currents in the astral spine. Prana is the cool lunar current that rises up through the spine and interiorizes the consciousness; apana is the warm solar current which goes down the spine, keeping the mind chained to the breath and senses. In kevala pranayama, the Yogi mentally directs the cool current up the spine and the warm current down the spine. In the various techniques of Hatha Yoga pranayama, this same task is indirectly and inefficiently done through puraka, rechaka, and kumbhaka. When, after the breath naturally settles in kevala kumbhaka after years of practice of Hatha pranayama, the final kriya or purification rite necessary to be performed is the interior practice of mentally revolving prana up and down the cerebrospinal axis. This practice regenerates the spinal centers and the brain, creating a magnetic power which pulls in inconceivable amounts of prana from the cosmic source via the medulla oblongata. Spiritual evolution is therefore exponentially hastened. The senses further retire inward until the consciousness of the Yogi is firmly, and eventually irrevocably, lodged in the sushumna. The higher limbs of Raja Yoga and indeed the increasingly higher states of samadhi, the principle technique of all forms of Yoga, are correlate to greater and greater degrees of mastery of prana (SP, 195).

Until, through the practice of Hatha pranayama, the Yogi can feel and control the movement of the cool and warm currents in the astral spine, practice or instruction in kevala pranayama is impossible.

The Yogi must persevere in the daily practice of Hatha pranayama until the subtle, invisible prana becomes as gross and obvious to the Yogi as the breathing process is to the average person. Then, as the Hatha Yogi regulated the breathing mechanism, breath being the outer manifestation of the unseen and uncontrolled movement of prana in the spine, the Raja Yogi transforms physical breathing into a mental concept and guides the pranic currents in breathlessness. Breathing is done mentally. This is kevala pranayama, the “fourth” kind of pranayama spoken of by Patanjali in sutra II:51 and the greatest method of accelerating the spiritual regeneration and rejuvenation of the cerebrospinal chakras.

Chapter IV: The Larger Picture

Perhaps due to the imaginative nature of the subconscious mind through which the Yogi must pass on the inner journey toward superconsciousness, various distorted conceptions of spirituality, spiritual advancement, and human evolution abound in the minds of students of Yoga. Though clearly human beings who do not interiorize will perforce remain in exterior sense-consciousness, meditators who regularly internalize often spend many years of practice roaming the subconscious plane of restless thoughts, dreams, and imaginative fancies. While these exercises at introversion might be called an internal cleansing process which yield some peace of mind and contentment, they also convey delusions of spiritual grandeur which practitioners of Yoga are all too willing to mentally grasp onto. The result is a sense of accelerated advancement in Yoga without much progress really going on. Sometimes, the only difference between meditators and a non-meditators is that one group has delusively convinced themselves that they have found inner spiritual happiness and the other group is deluded into thinking that happiness can be found in the outer world of the senses, thoughts, and emotions.

Indeed, the term “spiritual advancement” is a misnomer and the concept of human evolution is misleading. In the practice of kevala pranayama, it takes roughly thirty seconds to revolve the pranic current up and down the spine. Normally, one complete revolution of prana from muladhara chakra to ajna chakra and back to muladhara chakra requires one year of healthy contented living. Depending on the karma of the individual, Yogis estimate that it may require up to two or even three million spinal revolutions for a human being to attain cosmic consciousness (AY, 281). Further, in the average human life span of roughly seventy years, perhaps only a few of those years are lived healthily and happily with one's thought and actions in keeping with dharma, or virtue. While the practice of pranayama clearly hastens this process of regenerating the spine and brain, this skill is not within the reach of most meditators, not to mention most human beings. As a result, the soul remains inexorably bound to the seemingly endlessly recurring rounds of birth and death.

Strictly speaking, neither Spirit nor the soul evolve. As a reflection of perfect Spirit, the soul is already flawless in its omnipresence. What evolves from one successive life to the next is the material expressions of spirit. Stones, plants, and animals express Spirit crudely while the siddha, or perfected Yogi, manifests the qualities of Spirit to near perfection. There is only one consciousness and that is Cosmic Consciousness. Even sense-consciousness is Cosmic Consciousness coursing through the senses of the human or lower animal and is thus limited by such instruments of perception. One by one, individuals transcend the slow, retarded evolutionary pace of the human race and convert their sense-bound identity for a cosmic one. It is not their human bodies which evolve in this process but rather the ability for their astral spine and brain to absorb the infinite current of cosmic prana. However, the physical brain, which was once dormant, awakens to its deserved mastery over the body and the soul realizes its “birthright” of mastery over the mind. The Yogi's consciousness is naturally lifted and fully established in the superconscious state of samadhi. It is then that true Yoga begins, as the Yogi, through higher states of samadhi, unites soul superconsciousness with Sat-Chit-Ananda. The Yogi eventually enters satyaloka, the only really Real, and attains kaivalya.

While the soul has three bodies, Kaivalya Darsanam sutra I:14 reads, "Purusha is covered by five koshas" (HS, 35). A kosha is a covering or a sheath. The first kosha is called anandamaya as it is the seat of bliss. Anandamaya kosha is composed of chitta which is bound by the limiting concepts of time and space created by the atoms of creation, themselves a further manifestation of Sabda Brahma, or the Word of God. This is the first kosha as it is the most subtle and the last to be removed. The soul, covered only with anandamaya kosha takes the form of an astral angel, causal being, or god in the creation of darkness. Once purusha finds release from anandamaya kosha, purusha is free to pass through maharloka and enter the creation of light (HS, 37).

The second kosha, called jnanamaya, is the seat of buddhi or the discriminative intelligence; it is composed of the divine magnetic electricities. Purusha, covered by anandamaya and jnanamaya koshas, takes birth as a human being. This kosha is withdrawn when an individual, through interiorization, cultivates omniscience (HS, 37). The third kosha is called manomaya because it is the organ of manas, mind, including the indriyas (sense organs). When this kosha is foremost, purusha appears as an animal in creation. While human beings also have mind and sense, these organs are intended in humans to be under the control of buddhi and not be used to seek enjoyment as they are in animals. When this kosha is withdrawn the animal therefore takes birth as a human being (HS, 37). The fourth kosha is called pranamaya as it is the sheath of life-energy composed of karmendriyas, the organs of action. When pranamaya is predominate purusha appears as vegetation (HS, 36). Finally, the fifth kosha of matter, called annamaya, maintains the physical universe through anna, nourishment. This is the lowest and last stage of creation wherein purusha becomes manifest as the inorganic physical universe of stones, mountains, moons, planets, and stars (HS, 35-6).

From the above it may be understood that Cosmic Consciousness, within the field of duality, seemingly divides itself further and further as creation unfolds until reaching the smallest unit as the consciousness of the atom. Even the atom (anu) is vast when compared to the finer subatomic particle/energies (paramanu) which are, in turn, solar systems in size and relation to the super-fine waves of prana. Beyond all of these manifestations, ever to remain invisible to all but the greatest of Yogis, is the infinite ocean of Cosmic Consciousness. Yoga Vasishtha declares that "Vast worlds lie within the hollows of each atom, multifarious as the mote in a sunbeam" (AY, 362n.).

As the atoms (anu) pull to themselves other atoms through the universal power of attraction of Premabijam Chit, the principle of Omniscient Love, creating stones, then vegetation, then animals, then humans, the separate individualized consciousness expands until, in human beings, it may take the quantum leap back to Cosmic Consciousness. Yoga destroys avidya, the inner individualized ignorance related to the primordial atom, which is maya as it influences the Yogi with external impressions, but unfortunately does not remove all of maya for all members of deluded humanity (HS, 94). Yoga regenerates the cerebrospinal chakras and physical vehicle of the Yogi in preparation for union with the Infinite, but not regenerate all of humanity as a race. Therefore, the evolution and involution of the human race according to the cyclical progression of planetary ages is not greatly influenced by the Yoga practice of a single Yogi.

According to Yoga philosophy, through satisfying the laws of concentration and meditation a Yogi increases the power to assimilate prana and uncovers the consciousness of the soul hidden under the five koshas. However, the laws of evolution for the human race as an entire entity are revealed by astronomical calculations (HS, 7).

According to Sankhya, there are four yugas or ages through which solar systems pass in ascending and descending cycles. These yugas are named kali, dwapara, treta, and satya. Kaivalya Darsanam III:24 reads, "In the dark state of the heart, man harbors misconceptions (about everything). This state is a result of Avidya, Ignorance, and produces a Sudra (a man of the lowest caste). He can grasp only ideas of the physical world. This state of mind is prevalent in Kali Yuga, the Dark Age of a cycle" (HS, 77). When any inhabited planetary system is in kali yuga, souls of a low state of consciousness will naturally be propelled to take rebirth there. Higher souls and Yogis that choose such a locale to take rebirth will often be regarded as prophets, miracle workers, children or messengers of God, and will, more often than not, be misunderstood. 700 B.C.E. saw the beginning of the most recent descending kali yuga. Humankind hit its lowest point of expressing dharma 1,200 years later (500 C.E.) when the ascending kali yuga began (HS, 13). Ascending kali yuga, also lasting 1,200 years, ended in 1700 C.E. One only needs to glance at the pages of history which record the widespread ignorance of both the spiritual and physical sciences during the period which the ancient rishis designated through astronomical calculation as kali yuga.

Kaivalya Darsanam sutra III:28 reads, "Entering Bhuvanloka ("air" or "the world of becoming") man becomes a Dwija or "twice born." He comprehends the second portion of material creation - that of finer, subtler forces. This state of mind is prevalent in Dwapara Yuga" (HS, 81). Dwapara yuga is also called the age of space-annihilation as, through advancements in technology, the limitations of distance are overcome in this age (AY, 194). Ascending Dwapara yuga began in 1700 C.E. and lasts 2,400 years. The advancements in technology since 1700 C.E., which are transcending the space barrier and have made humankind aware of the subtle electric and magnetic forces cannot be disputed. Though our planet is now about 300 years into dwapara yuga, humanity today is still in large the heirs of the ignorance and blindness of the preceding millenniums of kali yuga. Our minds are capable of creating dwapara technology but we use it with kali mentality. Even the higher ages that preceded the last descending kali yuga were not spiritually nor technologically advanced as they were but descending portions of the equinoctial cycle. As our solar system enters dwapara yuga fully, dwija, or "twice born" souls that comprehend bhuvanloka and thus fully comprehend the astral world and astral body will take rebirth on our planet (HS, 81).

It is clear that the yuga of a planet determines the general quality of souls that will take rebirth on it instead of the other way around. After ascending dwapara yuga, our planet will pass through ascending treta and satya yugas. Then, again, the descending portion of the cycle will begin and humankind will fall back into delusion. "Such is the great influence of Time which governs the universe. No man can overcome this influence except him who, blessed with pure love, the heavenly gift of nature, becomes divine; being baptized in the sacred stream Pranava (the holy Aum vibration), he comprehends the Kingdom of God" (HS, 15). Pranayama is a spiritual science that has aided individual members of the human race in every age to bridge the gap of time necessary for human beings to reach infinite consciousness.

It is best to receive diksha, or initiation, into the advanced technique of pranayama at an early age. However, whatever the age that one begins to practice Yoga, a dedication to persevere in daily practice is vital to success. The advantages of beginning young are that the Yogi can establish the habit of regular meditation early on with all the vital energies of the body in full bloom, waiting to be harnessed and converted into a dynamic spiritual force which promotes rapid progress. The disadvantages of youth are restlessness, a greater need for food and sleep, a high pulse rate, and a host of unfulfilled desires which the young harbor that have not yet been satisfied. Starting pranayama practice in the middle years of life can be very difficult because the individual, previously unguided by spiritual injunctions, has most likely already entered into a life full of worldly responsibilities which may include work-related ambitions, family, or even humanitarian ideals. The minds of the elderly tend to move toward thoughts of God as death rapidly approaches. However, spiritual effort is difficult late in life since a great deal of the prana for that lifetime has already been spent on youth and worldly activities. Still, determination at any age can overcome all obstacles.

Yoga advises that pranayama be practiced in the early hours of the morning around 5 a.m., at noontime, again at 5 p.m., and then around midnight (LY, 432). The reason for this is that these hours of the day correspond to the yearly changes of season which often bring often unhealthy changes to the body. Pranayama is a science by which the body acquires the spiritual quality of changelessness, so practice during these hours counteracts the natural aging process of the body. According to the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, devoted practitioners of pranayama may practice up to eighty rounds per sitting (LY, 432). Pranayama must be practiced in the upright meditation position and on an empty stomach. Effort should also be made to empty the bowels and bladder before pranayama practice (LY, 431). Yogis will often prefer garments of silk which are effective in insulating the body's pranic currents and will choose to meditate on wool or animal skin as they are believed to insulate the Yogi from the downward-pulling earth vibrations. Finally, arm props are often used during the practice of such techniques as yoni mudra to keep the arms from tiring.

It is best to practice pranayama in a quiet room designated for meditation only. Although not traditional, one may just as easily practice pranayama while sitting in a chair as on the floor. The back should remain straight with the chest out, shoulders back, and eyes closed and upturned. Pranayama practice should never be strained or tense, though some techniques like bhastrika are performed strenuously. Long hours of practice, though generally not possible in the beginning of one's practice, are best for achieving quick results. However, the most crucial point is that one's practice be guided by a competent guru who has mastered the state of savikalpa samadhi.

Conclusion

One crucial difference between Yoga and other religious paths is that Yoga philosophy assumes that beginners in Yoga will have no higher perception of Sat. True gurus therefore do not ask students to believe blindly in the tenets of Yoga nor in the existence of God as these things must ultimately be left to speculation. If one were already conscious of God's omnipresence and united with It, the science of Yoga would not be necessary. However, mere belief can in no way be equated with such higher knowledge and vision. Yoga merely asks that students exchange such useless mind-bound speculations concerning the existence of the Real, which might end in belief or disbelief, for the actual realization of a Transcendent Divinity through introversion. Other faiths often expect from the outset a belief in God and His son or His messenger or His Word as written in a certain scripture. Unfortunately, prescribing to any belief system cannot remove spiritual ignorance since belief and ignorance are not at all contradictory. Even beliefs confirmed by truth cannot reveal Sat, Absolute Truth. In fact, beliefs can definitely pose as obstacles to spiritual progress as they lend a false sense of satisfaction, and this is assuming the belief to be based on some degree of truth. Blindly followed dogmas can postpone spiritual progress for countless lifetimes.

For true Yogis, nothing can take the place of the practice of the ancient science of pranayama. Swatmarama writes in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, sutras I:65-6, "Perfection in Yoga is not achieved by mere reading of the scriptures. Perfection is not achieved by wearing the apparel (of a Yogin), or by talking about it. Practice alone is the means to success. This is the truth, without doubt" (YS, 25, 59). Neither can the acquisition of any miraculous power or material possession be compared to the power of controlling the mind. Many followers of the various major world religions boast of being saved or of having been promised an eternity in heaven or that an individual millenniums earlier in a distant part of the world has already died for their sins. In brief, these beliefs stand in contrast to the spiritual laws of concentration and meditation through which true realization is achieved.

Admittedly, many of the Yogic miraculous feats have been easily brushed off as definitely impossible, or at least mythological, such as nakshatra mandala, the power to travel to other star systems. However, the various vibhutis, siddhis, and aiswaryas are accepted as a matter of fact by advanced Yogis who have mastered the state of samadhi. Indeed, the different levels of spiritual realization are expressed in the blossoming of the many Yogic powers mentioned in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. Patanjali lists these siddhis in order for students to avoid the temptation of deluding themselves into believing that they have attained certain states of consciousness, not to offer them as goals in and of themselves. Again, a belief in even the possibility of such supernatural Yogic abilities as having been exercised by Yogis in the past is not required nor expected nor even advised. A good Christian, however, is expected to believe in the virgin birth by Mary of Jesus and in his resurrection. These beliefs may seem harmless, but when faced with the task of freeing the soul from lifetimes of delusion, it is clear that such beliefs do not address the issues of karma and reincarnation as they are represented by Yoga philosophy. The world's major religions of today are, according to astronomical calculations, kali yuga faiths which have replaced the true practice of religion in withdrawing the mind from the senses with superstition, blind belief, and dogma, all of which lend toward a false sense of superiority, the suppression of knowledge, and the practice of (often violent) conversion and proselytization.

Pranayama is a universal science which, according to many notable religious authorities, including Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell, can be found in one form or another in the religio-mystical traditions of Taoism, Sufism, Christianity, Buddhism, Judaism and even in the American Indian traditions (IF, 59-65). I personally spent years of research endeavoring to show that the ancient Hebrews practiced psychophysical methods of sense-withdrawal in the established ancient Israel schools of prophecy. However, in whichever tradition techniques of breath and mind control appear, it is clear to me that such practices were never employed by the masses but rather by a select few. In fact, much of the knowledge of the interior life was kept secret during the ages of kali (RY, 17). With the advent of dwapara yuga, people will (and have already) begin to move away from the outdated religious sentiments which, in many ways, still see our planet as the center of the universe, and turn toward more cosmically encompassing spiritual movements.

An interest in pranayama rarely comes to individuals directly. That is, most people find the true practice of Yoga either through the practice of asanas or through an interest in Eastern philosophy or by an awakening to alternate forms of medicine which, coming from the East, carry with them philosophical or spiritual ideals. From my experience as a teacher and monk I have found that even Yoga enthusiasts who go beyond the body and Yogic physical culture still have a very shallow understanding of pranayama, its intended purpose, and its real value. Many schools of meditation assure both critics and their students that through their methods deep meditation is possible. However, the breathless state and union with Sat-Chit-Ananda are the only criterion of progress that Yoga science is interested in. The repeated entry into this state of consciousness, samyama, will produce, according to Patanjali, supernormal faculties without fail. This is the required proof of self-mastery.

Perhaps even more controversial than the claim of Yoga to produce the Buddhas, Christs, Krishnas, and Moseses of the world is that Yoga states that there is a universal goal of creation that applies not only to all human beings but to all life, both the organic and seemingly inorganic. The animals and plants may not have the capacity to attain cosmic awareness, but human beings, by virtue of possessing the potentially omniscient sahasrara chakra, can aspire to such lofty heights. If striving for mind control and attaining divine consciousness is the universal purpose of all created beings, then it follows that it is the duty of all human beings to reach for that goal. Sanatana Dharma points to Yoga as the most efficacious and scientific method of reaching kaivalya. Yoga can be practiced by all who find themselves born in sthula sarira, the human body, not just by a few renunciants and ascetics here and there. No matter the religion one practices, the nearer a soul comes to real salvation, the sooner that soul will be faced with the task of awakening the chakras and freeing the consciousness from the confines of the body. Withdrawing the breath, the chain that ties the consciousness to the body, is the secret of superconsciousness and is most directly accomplished through pranayama. "Verily, there is no merit higher than Yoga, no good higher than Yoga, no subtlety higher than Yoga; there is nothing higher than Yoga" (Yogashikha-Upanishad, I:67).

Glossary

- Ahamkara** Lit. "I-maker," or the delusion that the self, not God, is the doer or creator. Ego principle which creates the delusion of an existence apart from God.
- Ahimsa** Lit. "non-violence." The first and most important of the five yamas.
- Aiswaryas** Eight majestic Yogic powers of a higher order than siddhis.
- Ajapa mantra** The unconscious repetition of the mantra "Hong Sau." With each inhalation, all living creatures repeat the mantra "Hong," meaning "I AM." With each exhalation, all living creatures breathe the mantra "Sau," meaning "HE, [the Omnipresent Spirit]."
- Ajna (chakra)** Lit. "Command." Sixth chakra (plexus) located at the medulla oblongata connected by polarity with the point between the eyebrows (pineal gland). Designated by the holy AUM syllable.
- Akasha** Ether. Element of the Vishuddha (fifth) chakra located at the cervical plexus.
- Anahata chakra** Lit. "Not hit." Fourth chakra situated along the cerebrospinal axis at the dorsal plexus opposite the heart. Seat of air element.
- Ananda** Bliss
- Anandamaya Kosha** The first of five sheaths which cover Purusha, or the soul. This sheath is of the Heart and is the seat of Bliss (ananda).
- Anga** Limb, as in ashtanga or "eight-limbed."
- Anima** One of the eight aiswaryas. The Yogic power to make one's body or anything as small as the Yogi likes, even as an atom.
- Annamaya Kosha** The last of the five sheaths. This covering is of matter which is also anna, or nourishment. This sheath maintains the material world through food.
- Anu** Atom. Also lit. "along with."
- Anuloma Pranayama** A Hatha technique of Pranayama that runs with (anu) the hair (loma), or "with the grain." Puraka (inhalation) is done through both nostrils while rechaka (exhalation) alternates between nostrils.
- Apana** One of the five pranas. Its seat is in the anus; it is responsible for the excretory functions.
- Apana Vayu** The nerve impulse associated with exhalation. The negative, outwardly flowing (i.e. away from the spine and brain) nerve current.
- Aparigraha** One of the five yamas prohibiting covetousness and gift receiving.
- Asana** Third limb of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga. Postures for both meditation and physical culture. Ashtanga Yoga--System of Yoga comprising eight limbs extolled by Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras. Also known as Raja Yoga. Includes yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi.
- Asteya** One of the five yamas. Non-stealing. Atman-Soul or higher Self, or Supreme soul. Also sometimes refers to the lower self connected with the ego.
- AUM** The Pranava. Holy symbol of God. Represents all knowledge and power.
- Avidya** False knowledge, ignorance.
- Bahiranga Sadhana** The external aspects of the Yogic path, comprising of yama, niyama, and asana which keep the practitioner in harmony with fellow human beings and nature.
- Bandha** Physiological locks used during Pranayama to control the flow of prana. Includes mula, uddiyana, and jalandhara bandhas.
- Bhagavad Gita** "Song of the Lord." Holy Hindu scripture (a part of the Mahabharata) which is a discourse between Lord Krishna and the warrior Arjuna on the science of Yoga.
- Bhakta** - A devotee.

Bhakti Yoga	Union (Yoga) with the Infinite through devotion. In Sankhya philosophy Bhakti Yoga implies the baptism of the soul in the holy sound of AUM.
Bhastrika	Lit. “bellows.” An advanced variety of Hatha pranayama.
Bhramari	Also called Bhamari. Lit. “A large black bee.” A technique of Hatha pranayama.
Bhu Loka	According to Sankhya, the lowest of the seven spheres of God (HS, 34). The visible world.
Bhutas	Elements of earth, water, fire, air, and ether. Some Yogis contend that there are seven elements, the last two being super-ether and bliss-ether.
Bhuvarkala	According to Sankhya philosophy, the sphere above the physical plane also called Sunya, the vacuum.. This is this astral plane whose grossest element is light (HS, 34).
Brahma	God in the aspect of creator. From the root brih, meaning “to expand.” One of the Trinity including Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva in their aspects of creator, preserver, and destroyer respectively.
Brahmachari	First of the four Vedas-based phases of life. A celibate student.
Brahma Granthi	One of the three knots that lie along the cerebrospinal axis, blocking the flow of prana. Brahma granthi lies at the muladhara chakra.
Brahman	The Absolute. According to Vedanta, Brahman is the Supreme Being (BY, 297).
Brahma Nadi	The path to the Infinite in the spine. Another term used for the sushumna nerve channel.
Brahmin	A Hindu priest. The highest of the four castes in Indian society.
Buddhi	Discriminative intelligence.
Chakras	Astral “wheels” of light and consciousness located along the cerebrospinal axis corresponding to the various plexuses of the physical body. These chakras are often referred to as lotuses. With the awakening of the Kundalini Sakti, the drooping petals of these lotuses shoot upward toward the brain and confer divine illumination.
Chandra Mandala	Ancient Yogic power of traveling to the moon.
Chandra Nadi Ida	Inhalation through the left nostril.
Chit	Pure Consciousness.
Chitta	Consciousness, sometimes mind. The storehouse for memory. Also comprises reason and ego.
Chitta Vritti	Mental modifications or fluctuations.
Deva(ta)	A god.
Dharana	Concentration. The sixth limb of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga.
Dhyana	Meditation. The seventh limb of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga.
Dwapara Yuga	Planetary age marked by the introduction of space-annihilators and the harnessing of the atom.
Granthis	Knots in the sushumna (astral spine) which prevent the free flow of prana. Includes the Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudra granthis at the muladhara, manipura, and ajna chakras, respectively.
Gunas	The qualities inherent in nature: sattva, rajas, and tamas.
Guru	Lit. “dispeller of darkness.” A spiritual guide, a master.
Hatha	Lit. “Force.” Figuratively representing the union of the energies of the sun (ha) and moon (tha) which occurs when the energies of the pingala and ida currents dissolve into the sushumna. Hatha Yoga is thus union with the Infinite through intense physical discipline.
Hatha Vidya	Knowledge concerning the science of Hatha Yoga, or the forceful psychophysical techniques aimed at controlling the body and mind.
Hatha Yoga	Union with the Infinite through rigorous physical and mental discipline. Also symbolically represents the harmony of solar (“ha”) and lunar (“tha”) energies.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika	Ancient treatise on Hatha Yoga by Swatmarama.
Hong Sau	(Aham Sah)Lit. "I am He." The mantra vibrationally connected with breathing.
Ida	Cool energy channel, conducting lunar energy, associated with the left nostril that runs along the spine intertwining itself with the pingala nerve channel at each of the chakras.
Indriyas	The five sense organs.
Iswara	A name of God. The Supreme Being. The Absolute Self (swa) as Lord of the Universe.
Iswara-pranidhana	Devotion to the Lord.
Jalandhara Bandha	One of the three Bandhas. The chin lock which locks the upward flowing prana in the spine.
Janaloka	Fifth swarga or sphere of God wherein originates the idea of separate existence. It is also called Alakshya because, as it a part of the creation of light, it remains incomprehensible to anyone within the creation of Darkness (HS, 33).
Japa	A prayer or mantra repeated.
Jiva	The individualized soul.
Jivanmukta Sannyasi	A Yogi who attains freedom while still living.
Jnana	Lit. "wisdom, knowledge."
Jnanamaya Kosha	Second of five coverings of the soul composed of Buddhi (Discriminative Intelligence) and knowledge.
Jnana Mudra	Hand gesture wherein the index finger and thumb are joined with the rest of the fingers outstretched. This mudra symbolizes the union of the ego (index finger) and the Supreme Being (thumb) in knowledge (jnana).
Jnana Yoga	Union with the Infinite through knowledge acquired through right inquiry and contemplation.
Kaivalya	Lit. "Isolation." The goal of all life. Union with the Absolute.
Kali Yuga	Astronomically calculated planetary age marked by spiritual degeneration and widespread ignorance.
Kama	Desire, lust.
Kapalabhati	Lit. "Shining skull."Hatha breathing exercise marked by forceful exhalations.
Karana Sarira	Causal body of 35 ideas. Third body of the soul.
Karma	From kri, "to act." Law of cause and effect.
Karma Yoga	Union with the Infinite through actions (both interior and exterior).
Kriya	Hatha Yoga cleansing exercise.
Kriya Yoga	Classical Yoga extolled by Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras which include tapas, swadhyaya, and iswara pranidhana.
Kshatriya	A member of the warrior or ruling caste.
Kumbhaka	Suspension of breath of which there are three varieties. Antara Kumbhaka is the holding of the breath after inhalation. Bahya Kumbhaka is the suspension of breathing after complete exhalation. These are Sahita Kumbhaka, or the intentional holding of the breath. Kevala Kumbhaka is the steady state of the mind in effortless breathlessness.
Kundalini (Sakti)	Lit. "circular." The serpent power which lies dormant at the muladhara chakra.
Kundalini Yoga	Union with the Infinite through the mastery of the kundalini.
Laya Yoga	Union with the Infinite through the absorption (laya) of the mind in AUM.
Maharloka	Fourth sphere of the seven swargas or planes of consciousness. Also called dasamadwara, or the "tenth door," it is the beginning of the creation of darkness and the door to the spiritual world of light (HS, 33).

Mala	Impurities.
Manas	The mind.
Manipura Chakra	Lit. "city of the shining jewel." Ten-petal third chakra situated at the lumbar plexus whose element is fire.
Manomaya Kosha	Third of five soul covering of mind (manas) which includes the sense organs.
Mantra	Potent mystic syllables which can be pronounced or mentally repeated to reap the effects particular to each. In Raja Yoga, once pratyahara has been attained, mantras are not chanted but are heard as emanating from each particular chakra.
Mantra Yoga	Union with the Infinite through liberation of the mind by the constant repetition of universally rooted syllables both vocally and mentally. Closely allied to Japa Yoga.
Maya	Lit. "the measurer." The illusory power of creation which creates division in the Ever-Indivisible and mutation in the Changeless. The creation of darkness.
Moksha	Liberation of the soul from karmically forced rebirth.
Mudra	A seal. A posture or technique used to generate pranic current. Also associated with hand gestures as in sacred dances.
Mula Bandha	One of the three bandhas in Hatha Yoga performed through the contraction of the anus (asvini mudra) and the tightening of the lower abdomen which locks the sacral plexus.
Muladhara Chakra	Lit. "root base." First chakra located at the base of the spine associated with the coccygeal plexus.
Nada	Sound of the pranic current flowing freely through the Nadis, especially of AUM in the Sushumnadwara.
Nadi	Astral nerve channel, of which there are 72,000 in number, that conduct the flow of pranic energy in the astral body.
Nadi Sodhana	Hatha Yoga pranayama technique designed to cleanse the nerve channels (nadis).
Nakshatra Mandala	Yogic power of traveling to other star systems.
Nauli	Cleansing technique (kriya) which employs the abdominal muscles in a churning motion. Also referred to as Lauliki, Nauli in rest has an effect similar to that of uddiyana bandha.
Niyama	Second limb of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga. Refers to five religious observances which are purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, and devotion to God.
Nyaya	One of the six orthodox disciplines of Hindu philosophy.
Ojas	Sacred energies in the astral spine.
OM	See AUM.
Paschima	West. Also the back of the body.
Pingala	Lit. "reddish." Astral nerve channel that runs from the right nostril down the spine, intertwining itself at each chakra with the ida current, which conveys solar energy.
Puraka	Inhalation.
Purva	East. Also the front of the body.
Prakriti	Nature. The fine material of creation whose qualities are tamas, rajas, and sattva.
Prana	Intelligently guided divine energy.
Pranamaya Kosha	Fourth covering of the soul composed of an energy body with its organs of action.
Pranava	The holy AUM syllable that is all-pervading prana.
Pranayama	Lit. "energy control." Fourth limb of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga. Technique of mind control accomplished through the stilling of the breath.
Pratyahara	Fifth limb of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga. A withdrawal of the mind from the senses accomplished through the successful practice of pranayama.

Purusha	Lit. "a person." A term used in Sankhya corresponding the principle of the individualized Self or atman. Also refers to Spirit.
Rajas	One of the three gunas. The activating principle in creation. For example, rajasic food like meat is considered activating or stimulating nourishment.
Raja Yoga	Lit. "royal (path of) Yoga." Union with the Infinite through mind control. The mental control of prana.
Rechaka	Exhalation.
Rundra Granthi	Located at the ajna chakra, one of the three granthis in the spine that blocks the free flow of prana to the brain.
Sadhaka	A spiritual aspirant.
Sadhana	The practice of spiritual injunctions. Also refers to the spiritual path.
Sahasrara Chakra	Seventh and highest chakra located in the brain associated with the cerebral plexus. Seat of infinite consciousness. Also called the thousand-petal lotus of light.
Sakti	Divine power of creation usually expressed in feminine terms.
Samadhi	Lit. "to direct together." Eighth and highest limb of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga. Savikalpa samadhi is union with God with a vestige of a difference between the Yogi and God yet remaining. Nirvikalpa samadhi is, the highest samadhi, is union without difference. There is also prema samadhi, union with Cosmic Love, sundara samadhi, union with Cosmic Beauty, etc. Samadhi is often defined as superconsciousness or even more vaguely as trance, but a Yogi might enter universal or cosmic consciousness, states higher than superconsciousness, and still be said to be in samadhi.
Samana	One of the five types of prana, whose seat is at the manipura chakra, responsible for digestion.
Sambhavi Mudra	- A technique wherein the apertures in the head--the ears, nostrils, eyes, and mouth - are closed, assisting the mind to look within. Also refers to the state of consciousness wherein the eyes are sealed in the position of gazing at the point between the eyebrows.
Samskara	A karmic impression on consciousness.
Samyama	A mastery of Raja Yoga through true concentration which combines dharana, dhyana, and samadhi.
Santosha	Contentment. One of the five niyamas.
Sat	Lit. "Truth, Existence." An aspect of God-consciousness.
Sat-Chit-Ananda	God as "Ever Existing, Ever Conscious, Ever New Bliss." According to Vedanta, the attainment of Sat-Chit-Ananda is the paramartha, the highest goal (HS, 50).
Sattva	One the three gunas connoting purity. Sattvic food includes, among other things, fruits and vegetables.
Satya Loka	The seventh and highest sphere of God which cannot be characterized by anything in either the creation of Darkness or Light. Hence it is called Anama, the nameless.
Satya Yuga	One of the four planetary ages according to Indian astronomical calculations. Age of truth and enlightenment.
Saucha	Purity in body, mind, and action. One of the five niyamas.
Shukshma Sarira	Astral body of humans. One of the three bodies of the human bound soul.
Siddha	Lit. "successful one." A perfected being.
Siddhi	A Yogic perfection or spiritual power. Many siddhis are listed in the third chapter of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras entitled "Vibhuti Pada."

Sitali	Lit. "cooling." Hatha Yoga technique of pranayama wherein the tongue is curled into a tube. This technique is effective in cooling the body. It is also an aid in cleansing the blood stream and relieving thirst.
Sitkari	Lit. "that which causes cold." A variation of Sitali pranayama performed without the tongue curling.
Surya Bheda	Hatha Yoga technique of pranayama used to generate heat in the physical body. Surya Nadi Pingala - Inhalation through the right nostril.
Sushumna	Lit. "Supremely Blessed." Innermost nadi in the spine which runs along the seven chakras of the astral body. The kundalini is taken up through this channel to the brain.
Sutra	An aphorism.
Swadhishtana	Lit. "designated standing place" Second chakra located at the sacral plexus connected with sexual activity. The element of this chakra is water.
Swadhyaya	Self-study. One of the five niyamas. Also refers to the repetition of the sacred pranava.
Swami	Lit. "lord." A monk belonging to the monastic order of the Vedanta discipline.
Swar Loka	Third sphere of God (from the physical plane) is a plane of magnetic and electrical attributes. This is the causal plane of thought also called Mahasunya, the "Great Vacuum" (HS, 34).
Tam	One of the three gunas or qualities inherent in creation. Tamas represents darkness, impurity, the negative quality, inertia, and degeneration. Tamasic nourishment includes rotten foods.
Tanmatra	The objects of sense in their subtle elemental form.
Tapas	Austerities. One of the five niyamas.
Tapoloka	Sixth sphere of God, according to Sankhya, that is the Ever-Undisturbed in its unlimitedness. It is called Agama because it cannot be accessed by even the purusha until it has abandoned the idea of separate existence.
Treta Yuga	One of the four planetary ages marked by the evolution of the mind of humankind. Telepathy and other "time-annihilating" powers are commonly employed.
Tripura	The "triple-energy" located in the ajna chakra of will power, the power of knowledge, and the power of action.
Turiya	Lit. "the fourth." The state of samadhi beyond waking, dreaming sleep, and dreamless sleep.
Udana	One of the five principle manifestations of prana whose seat is in the throat. It is responsible for the intake of air and food.
Uddiyana Bandha	One of the three bandhas (physiological locks) employed in Hatha Yoga to control the flow of prana.
Ujjayi Pranayama	Technique of Hatha Yoga pranayama wherein the epiglottis is partially closed and a particular sound is heard during puraka and rechaka.
Vajrini	Innermost channel in the sushumna.
Vayu	Nerve impulse associated with a particular prana.
Vedanta	The end of the Vedas, or the end of knowledge, comprised of the Upanishads. One of the six disciplines of Hindu philosophy based on the Vedas. These are Sankhya, Yoga, Vedanta, Mimamsa, and Vaisesika, and Nyaya.
Vedas	Divinely heard (sruti) scriptures of India consisting of the Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva Vedas.
Vikshepa	The scattering of the mind and fluctuations in consciousness which prevent one-pointed concentration.
Vishnu Granthi	One of the three knots (granthis) located in the spinal axis which prevent the flow of prana. Vishnu Granthi is located at the manipura chakra.

Vishuddha Chakra	Lit. "clean, clear, pure." Fifth chakra of sixteen petals located at the cervical plexus whose element is ether (akasha).
Vritti	Fluctuations (of the mind). Also the actual states the mind fluctuates to and from.
Vyana	One of the five principle manifestations of prana in the human body. Vyana is responsible for circulation and keeping the body erect. This prana pervades the entire body.
Yama	Self-control. The first limb of Patanjali's Ashtanga Yoga composed of five ethical injunctions. These are non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, and non-covetousness.
Yoga	from "yuj" signifying union. Yoga is union of the individualized soul with the Infinite Spirit. One of the six orthodox systems of Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism), or "Eternal Law."
Yogin/Yogini	A practitioner of Yoga. Also refers to one already united with God.
Yuga	Astronomically calculated planetary age which determines the state of consciousness of the inhabitants of any planetary system. The four yugas are kali, dwapara, treta, and satya.

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