

TRANSFORMATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS



India! Midsummer, blazing sun, oven-like heat! The pressure in the sky is beckoning the monsoon rains to bring relief. The afternoons are long and quiet. Only the Papeha* bird's mournful cry calling its mate can be heard. The British living in India during colonial times named it the brain-fever bird for its shrill cry, as persistent as the ticking of a clock. Passing a summer in India, one learns how to keep the mind cool when the body is too hot.

The Indian summer heat is not truly the cause of fire in the mind. Thoughts are generated from a dynamic force, an effulgent field of consciousness. From the spark of consciousness thoughts arise and so, in essence, fire IS the mind. Anger, jealousy, worry, fear, the general rounding of indecision and doubt, all throw kerosene on mental flames to scorch and burn, whereas inspiration, wisdom, revelation, and compassion evolve as a result of an evolved mind.

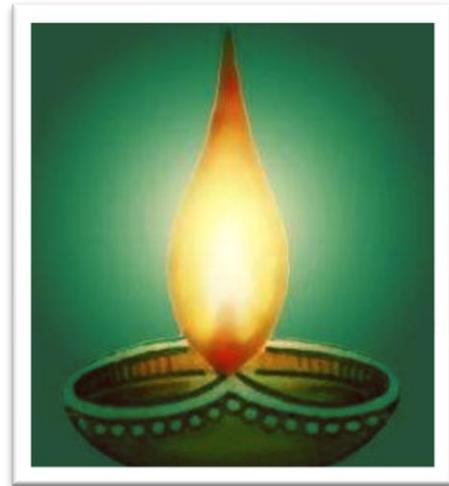
The indestructible fire of consciousness cannot be extinguished. The fire of thinking is to be directed to realise its luminous potential. Thinking is the brilliant manifestation of our own Self, without which we would not experience life at all. When the thought-flame is directed upwards it illuminates, when directed downwards it destroys.

The Fire of Transformation from Individual to Universal

Meditation is a powerful tool for transformation of the cause/effect-oriented consciousness to the illumined state of mind. In meditation, observing the changing thoughts, it is realised that the observer remains unchanging. Observation in this way expands the sense of Self from the limited individual

consciousness to the unlimited consciousness, the truth of one's own universal existence.

The observer of the mind is the light of knowledge, whose power guides the consciousness to rise upwards to be expanded. When the perspective of the observer is strengthened, one walks wisely through life, knowing that otherwise one will be led by the mind into the fire of the insatiable senses. When thoughts are only absorbed in earthly issues, such as money, security, and sensuality, then one lives with a sense of smallness, the life of insecurity.



The transformative fire of the observer is the inspiration for the human consciousness to rise to a higher perspective from that individual, self-centred consciousness, which projects its prejudices, hatreds and sense of dissatisfaction onto the world. Then the enlightened mind encompasses all and is nourished with the vision that all thoughts generate from one spark, all hearts beat from one spark, and that without that spark of life, no thoughts, no emotions, and no actions are possible.

It is certainly not the aim of the yogi to put out the fire, for the fire is the brilliance of the universal mind. When the mind is channelled, it is a power that faces life's challenges, adversity, and insecurities. Just as one learns how to best navigate through the Indian summer heat, yogis have passed on breathing practices to direct the mental-fire so that it illumines and does not burn.

The Fire Within

Since Vedic times, yogis have identified concentrated energy centres in various positions in the body. Each centre has a predominance of one of the five natural elements – earth, water, fire, air and space. The solar plexus (the *manipur chakra*) is the fire centre in the body. The two grosser elements, earth and water, lie below the solar plexus and the two finer elements, air and space, are positioned above. At this pivotal point is the fire of transformation, integrating our physical body as one with our subtle Self.



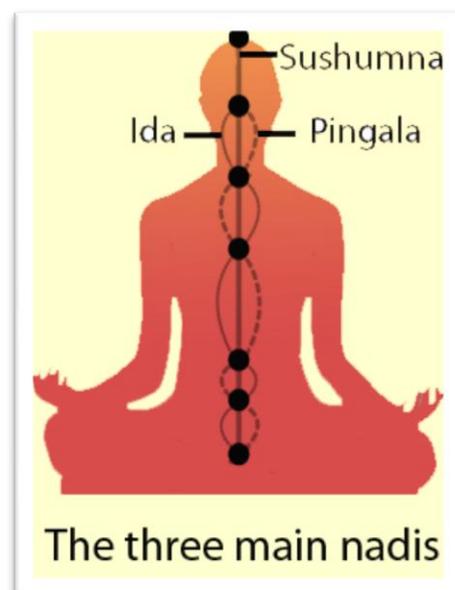
At the *manipur chakra* the body's energy and the balance of temperature are regulated. The solar plexus is also the energetic centre for digestive fire. Digestion is at the heart of health and wellbeing. A weak digestion is not only the cause of disease in the body but it also contributes to a restless, dissatisfied, petty and complaining mind.

The Science of Hatha Yoga

In Yogic science, the right side of our body is symbolised by the sun and the Sanskrit syllable is *ha*. The left side is symbolised by the moon and the Sanskrit syllable is *tha*. When the nervous system is over-stimulated by sensory input and under pressure with the demands of day-to-day life, it becomes discordant. The purpose of *asana* (yoga postures) and *pranayam* (breathing practices) is to integrate and harmonise *ha* and *tha* = *hatha*, as in *hatha yoga*.

Pranayam is the science of the breath that balances the elements of which the body is constituted. *Pranayam* balances the fire energy both in the body and the mind. Yogic science recognises a network of subtle nerve channels in the body, called *nadi* (meaning flow or vibration). These *nadi* flow throughout the body with the life-force called *pran*. The *nadis* that run along the right side of the body (*pingala nadi*) are heating by nature, while the left side (*ida nadi*) are cooling. The *pingala nadi* is activated through the breath in the right nostril, and its energy is warming. *Ida nadi* is activated through the breath in the left nostril, and its energy is cooling.

When the inner thermometer becomes imbalanced, a recommended *pranayam* is the single nostril breath (*chandra bhayd* -The cooling breath). When the body is too hot and restless, or the mind is fruitlessly ruminating with a sense of problem that draws your energy into a negative channel, block your right



The three main nadis

nostril, inhale only through your left nostril and exhale out your right nostril, thereby pacifying the fire element and calming the nervous system. In this way, the breath transforms the inner fire to burn as steadily and brilliantly as a candle flame on a perfectly still, Indian summer night.

Pranayam Techniques to Transform the Fire Energy

1. *Chandra Bhayd* -The Cooling, Soothing Breath

Chandra bhayd means moon piercing. This *pranayam* activates, balances and brings healing awareness to *Ida Naadi*, the cooling channel. *Chandra bhayd* balances the fire energy in the body, cools and calms the nervous system, reduces blood pressure and heat in the digestion. (Caution: go gently with this *pranayam* if you have low blood pressure.)

Technique:

1. Sit comfortably in any position.
2. Close your right nostril with your right thumb.
3. Inhale gently and slowly in your left nostril.
4. Hold your breath for a moment (a gentle *Kumbhak*) at your third eye point while you close your left nostril with your fourth and fifth fingers.
5. Exhale long and slow from your right nostril.
6. Block your right nostril.
7. Again inhale gently and slowly in your left nostril and now you are in the second round of *chandra bhayd*. I recommend building up to twenty rounds.

Alternatively, when the body is too cold, or the mind is uninspired and you feel disconnected from yourself and from others, by blocking your left nostril the fire is kindled.

***Suriya Bhayd* -The Vitalising Breath**

Suriya bhayd means sun piercing. *Suriya bhayd pranayam* activates, balances and brings healing awareness to *pingala naadi* the warming channel. It stimulates sluggish digestion and enhances general vitality. (Caution: go gently with this *pranayam* if you have high blood pressure.)

Technique:

1. Sit comfortably in any position.
2. Close your left nostril with your fourth and fifth fingers.
3. Inhale gently and slowly in your right nostril.

4. Hold your breath for a moment (a gentle *Kumbhak*) at your third eye point while you close your right nostril with your thumb.
5. Exhale long and slow from your left nostril.
6. Block your left nostril.
7. Again inhale gently and slowly in your right nostril and now you are in the second round of *chandra bhayd*. I recommend building up to twenty rounds.

2. *Sheetali* – The Cooling Breath

Another cooling breath is *sheetali pranayam*, which literally means to cool down.

Technique:

1. Sit comfortably in any position.
2. Project your tongue out and roll your tongue to make a tube-like shape. Inhale, long and slow, feeling the air cooled as it passes over your tongue.
3. Close your mouth, hold your breath for a moment while you tuck your chin in to extend the small vertebrae in your neck, and exhale very slowly and consciously through both nostrils in *Ujjai* breath.
4. Release your neck and again project your tongue out, roll your tongue and inhale. I recommend building up to eight-ten rounds.

Tongue rolling is the result of genetic inheritance. If you do not have the gene to make this shape with your tongue then you can do *sheetkari pranayam*.

3. *Sheetkari Pranayama* – The Hissing Breath

Those who cannot do *sheetali pranayam* can easily practice *sheetkari* and get the same benefits. In *Sheetkari*, the tongue is not rolled into a tube, instead it is rolled back and up to touch the upper palate. The teeth are then joined and the lips are kept apart.

Technique:

1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Roll your tongue back and upwards so that the lower part of your tongue touches your upper palate.
3. Join your teeth together and part your lips to expose your teeth.
4. Inhale slowly, which will make a slight hissing sound.
5. Then, close your mouth and hold your breath for a moment while you tuck your chin in to extend the small vertebrae in your neck, and exhale very slowly and consciously through both nostrils in *Ujjai* breath.

6. Release your neck and again roll your tongue back, expose your teeth and gently inhale. I recommend building up to eight-ten rounds.

* The *Papeha* bird is the Himalayan Barbet.