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- This practice is an example of working with *agni*. In this particular one, we utilize *maha mudra*, the culminating technique of the *hatha* yoga tradition. You'll work with both inhale and exhale retention. Note how we apply *asana*, *bandha* and breath retention to create a powerful internal focus.
 - *maha mudra* is not a forward fold; it is a spinal extension, designed to create space in the lower back and to dissolve stagnation in the lower three chakras
 - sustain *mula bandha* and *jalandhara bandha* throughout *maha mudra*—through every inhale, exhale and during retentions (*khumbaka*)
 - on inhale, the breath moves deeper into *jalandhara bandha*, the spine grows taller, then hold inhale
 - exhale and then hold out the breath and during that pause, apply *treta bandha*—adding *uddiyana bandha* to the other two locks that you are retaining throughout
 - in *treta bandha*, the two lower bandhas lift energy up and *jalandhara bandha* creates a wall to contain that energy
- Throughout the practice, return to the sense of calm, consistently evoking the lunar qualities that allow you to remain stable and rest in the Witness.



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The Seven Components For Awakening *Kundalini*

- Two possible scenarios describe the phenomena of “*kundalini* awakening.” My first teacher, Kavi Yogiraj Mani Finger described them this way:
 - a pot falling off a shelf, cracking open and its contents flooding out
 - a flower, opening petal by petal through successive realizations
- The first of these is the one most often discussed, leaving many with the impression that this is the only kind of *kundalini* awakening.
 - this type of *kundalini* awakening is unexpected, overwhelming, sudden and even violent; the effects are beyond your control and often you are unable to pick up all the pieces; in other words, overwhelmed by the experience, it is all but impossible to integrate into your life
- The latter experience, like a flower unfolding, is gradual.
 - as a result, you increasingly discover more capacity and self-knowledge unfolding step-by-step
 - you become a greater force for good—wisdom and compassion
 - this provides a sustainable path to express the full force of *kundalini* in your life
 - life becomes more joyful and sacred, more full of beauty and possibility



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- If you could choose between the two kinds of awakening, it is strongly suggested you opt for the latter.
- To increase the likelihood of this gradual, step-by-step type of unfoldment, and to help you achieve the highest of all goals, ParaYoga takes a systematic approach, applying seven principles that cumulatively lead to a gradual awakening of *kundalini*.
- This approach addresses all dimensions of life—your relationship to your world, body, mind, psyche and soul.
 - remember, as important as it is to be able access Sacred and Divine power, according to *tantra* it is just as vital to assimilate and express those experiences into your life
- The following are the Seven Components of Awakening *Kundalini*:
 1. Continuity (*santati*)
 2. Clear Seeing (*viveka*)
 3. Energy Collection (*prana dharana*)
 4. Sacred Stream (*sushumna*)
 5. Divine Fire (*rudrani*)
 6. Non-Dualism (*advaita*)
 7. Reverence (*bhakti*)
- This comprehensive and integrated approach is undertaken with the understanding that there is a right place and right time for any one or all of these seven components to be employed.
 - some of these should not be undertaken prior to feeling or being ready (e.g. one may need to postpone the steps of Non-Dualism or Reverence until after you have experienced enough of the benefits from the other steps with which you feel more comfortable)



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- At first glance, each of one these seven components appears to be thematic, however it should be noted that each has at least one practice, that through its application, leads to embodiment of that particular component.

The Holistic Approach: Continuity (*Santati*)

- Yoga has a half-life. Have you noticed?
- Initially—whether in life or as a result of practice—you taste some version of sublime experience, for example:
 - in *savasana* or *yoga nidra* you completely lose yourself and you enter into transcendent awareness
 - in the depths of meditation, “being” and “becoming” are one; there is nothing other than Oneness
 - in life, you glimpse a similar kind of ecstasy, where you are reminded of just how blessed you are to be alive
- Yet, without fail, none of these experiences last.
- The question is, “Why?”
- Why does the peace, power, capacity and positivity of practice fade? Is it simply because life is always changing and full of uncertainty/disappointment, or do these types of experiences dissipate because of something about you?
- Life or you, which one is it?
- This is the critical question at the heart of *tantra* and tantric practice. It invites us to ponder:
 - “how can I sustain these experiences?”
 - “how can I establish a continuity of thriving?”
- *Tantra* begins to answer these questions by first

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suggesting that the lack of continuity you experience is less about life and more about the way you “see” life.

- According to *tantra*, life is a gift; you are part of an infinite and sacred fabric that touches everything.
 - yes, even in the midst of loss, confusion and heartache, life is a sacred gift; life itself is sacred and you are blessed
 - whenever you see it as such, exalted experience spontaneously unfolds
- In other words, when you fail to see clearly, you will not experience joy, reverence or freedom.
 - instead, in the midst of this separation, you are not experiencing the true nature of things, you are experiencing your projections and false understanding
- The practice of increasing Continuity, requires reweaving the fabric of your deepest beliefs and perceptions. You accomplish this by reflecting on your relationship to tantra's worldview.
- Transforming your worldview is not as simple as it sounds. A simple shift in attitude will not get you there. The practice requires deep contemplative work.
- Thus, Continuity is a two-step process: step 1 is to enter into the state of yoga—timeless being, wherein you are no longer identified with transitory phenomena; you have separated the Seer from the seen, *purusha* from *prakriti*.
- This first step is yoga—the state of self-luminous wisdom. Once there, established in timeless peace, wisdom and compassion, you rest, identified with that which is permanent and ever-present.
 - become established in the Seer—innate deep peace and the infinite field of intelligence—in order to prepare the ground to make meaningful adjustments in your worldview

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- this step allows you to abide in the critical vantage point, without which there is no access to the sublime vision of the highest Truth—the Upanishads tell us, “only by a still mind can it be known”
- Step 2 is to heal the deep fabric of your consciousness by recalibrating the way you perceive yourself and the world; our approach to this process will entail contemplation on the tantric vision, outlined by the 8th century enlightened master, Adi Shankara and the teachings of tantric tradition, *Sri Vidya*.
 - this approach is laid out in the “*Dharma Suktam* Contemplative Practice”
 - to experience more Continuity, and thereby sustain your highest state of being, you align your worldview with Reality, adjusting the beliefs, prejudices and expectations you project onto your world and everything in it

The Holistic Approach: Clear Seeing (*Viveka*)

- What if you could perceive things exactly as they are?
 - you would have complete understanding
 - you would be fully aware of your capacities as well as your challenges
 - the book of life would no longer hold any secrets
- The ancient teachings tell us that this kind of perfect clarity (*viveka*) is the culmination of practice and furthermore, that *viveka* (spiritual discrimination) is “the sole purpose of life” (The Bhagavad Gita).
- *Viveka* is defined as “discernment, true knowledge, right judgment, wisdom.”

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- as such, it is considered to be a *siddhi* (power of perfection or intelligence)
- in other words, perfect discernment unlocks the power of perfection
- The process of removing all that obstructs perfect clarity is a two-fold process entailing two distinct achievements:
 - psychological clarity
 - psychic clarity
- The first, psychological clarity, requires you to engage the process of full self-understanding, in particular when examining the sources of your pain and suffering.
 - “you will go much further in your life by looking into your darkness, than by looking into your light”
(Pandit Rajmani Tigunait)
 - investigate the causes of your underlying patterns, those that do not serve you and are the source of pain and suffering
 - your patterns now become a source of self-reflection and ever-increasing clarity
 - on this path, you do not dismiss your mind, you decipher its contents until it no longer harbors any more mysteries
 - you know yourself so well that you are able to release the parts of your mind that are non-constructive and embrace the parts of your mind that are constructive
 - the domain of modern psychology attempts to approach this understanding, however, from the viewpoint of the yoga tradition, it is not a complete practice—to reach full understanding, ParaYoga uses an approach synthesized by Yogarupa, called *vichara*—a systematic process leading to absolute clarity and freedom from past impressions and patterning

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- the practice of *vichara* and the principles it is based on will be introduced in The Secrets of the Sutras Training
- *Tantra* provides extraordinary insights and supportive technologies to address the second part of Clear Seeing—purification of the psyche.
 - the psyche is where the soul meets the unconscious
 - here, practices center around the chakras, the seat of where the deepest aspects of the unconscious are stored
 - to these ends, *tantra* posits the science of *laya yoga* (the yoga of dissolution) to “dissolve” our deepest patterns and unconsciousness
 - the main ParaYoga practices that lead to Clear Seeing on the level of the psyche are *bhuta shuddhi* and *chidhakasha*

The Holistic Approach: Energy Collection (*Prana Dharana*)

- “Tantra is the science of energy management” (Kavi Yogiraj Mani Finger).
- Those few words sum up the fundamental strategy that pervades all schools and paths of *tantra*.
- Concentrating *prana* is the foundation for making a practice effective, whatever you are aiming to accomplish.
 - the more you can collect and intensify *prana*, the more you are able to impact your practice—whether that practice has an internal or external focus, is a spiritually-oriented practice or a materially-orientated practice
- *Prana dharana* (collecting or concentrating life force) is the technique that awakens the essential qualities and inherent potential of the practice.

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- Once you are established in *prana dharana*, esoteric concepts like the chakras, *kundalini*, the deeper mysteries of the subtle body, the inherent power of *mantra* and *kriya* are revealed.
- *Prana dharana* is the key practice that reveals the hidden power of the teachings, making it possible to progress from belief/aspiration/imagination to revelation.
 - *prana dharana* allows you to enter the actual experience of the teachings and to leave behind the images, ideas and distortions you have come to accept as fact (either through your imagination or from yoga literature or the inherent limitation of spiritual texts' ability to convey concepts that are beyond the mind's comprehension)
 - e.g. when you truly experience a *chakra*, it is a radically different experience from the one generated by trying to imagine it or project what you may have seen or learned about it
- The third eye/mid-brain is the seat of *prana dharana*. This is where you collect and stabilize *prana*.

The Holistic Approach: The Sacred Stream (*Sushumna*)

- If you are going to see and know the Truth, you are going to need to see things differently.
- To do this, the yogi accesses the central channel. As previously discussed, *prana* must flow through *sushumna* if you are to awaken to the Universal.
- The method to access *sushumna* that is referred to time and time again is *nadi shodana* ("channel purification" or alternate nostril breathing).

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- creating a balance between left and right breath flow and thus harmonizing right and left hemispheres of the brain, is the key to opening the central channel
- it is recommended that you practice some version of *nadi shodana* (physical or mental or a combination of both) on a daily basis
- constant practice results in purification of the channels, leading to the central channel activation and gradual *kundalini* awakening

The Holistic Approach: Divine Fire (*Rudrani*)

- The power of Spirit is dormant in almost all of us, at least to some degree. In its dormant state it is referred to as *kundalini shakti*.
- The most significant obstacle to you not being awake to the full force and intelligence of Spirit—and to your embodiment of Divine will, knowledge and action—is the sum of your delusion, darkness and inertia; in other words, the weight and density of your lower three chakras overshadows the light of Spirit.
- As outlined earlier, in the context of fire oriented-practice, the methodology to reduce these obstacles is to build life-force at the navel center.
 - through consistent practice, the qualities of the three lower centers is subsumed by the fire of *rudrani*
 - the result is transformation of *kundalini* from its dormant state to *prana shakti* (its awakened state)
 - preparing to build the fire and building the fire (e.g. moon and solar practices) are vital processes, moving you to empowerment, healing and transformation, and to setting the stage for systematic *kundalini* awakening

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The Holistic Approach: Non-Dualism (*Advaita*)

- Once awakened, you are no longer separate from your Source; the many becomes the One; the seeker and the sought, the lover and the beloved are no longer separate.
- The essence of these principles comes alive in the tradition of *Advaita Vedanta*.
- The summit of these teachings are described as *maha vakya* ("the great statements"), found in the Upanishads.
- The aim of these statements is to lead the student to the highest of states of realization, in which individual self dissolves and merges inseparably with the Absolute.
- Starting with the first two, which are perhaps the most essential of all, the following are some of the most treasured *maha vakya*. Keep in mind that these are not meditative mantras in the traditional sense; they are "contemplative mantras."
 - *Aham Brahma Asmi*: "I Am Brahman," the heart of *advaita*; the mantra's source is the Yajurveda
 - *Tat Tvam Asi*: "That Thou Art," the core teaching of the teacher instructing the student, from the Sama Veda
 - *Ayam Atma Brahma*: "This Self is Brahman," expresses the intuitive experience of the aspirant, from the Mandukya Upanishad
 - *Prajnanam Brahma*, "Consciousness is Brahman," derived from the Rigveda
- *Vedanta* stresses that prior to working with the *maha vakya*, it is necessary to first cultivate six-fold "spiritual wealth."
 - these are: self-restraint, patient self-control, transcendence of attachment to pleasure, lack of inner conflict and burning passion for liberation

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- but, none of these are as important as “the profound study of philosophy under the guidance of a competent teacher” —Pandit Rajmani Tigunait, The Power of Mantra and the Mystery of Initiation

The Holistic Approach: Love (*Bhakti*)

- *Bhakti* (love/reverence) is the final thread weaving through the tapestry of awakening.
- *Bhakti* is about cultivating a relationship of gratitude and love for that which is beyond the reach of your mind.
 - “you have come from somewhere...when your life is over, you will return to this same place and while you are alive, you are sustained by this all but completely hidden Source” (Yogarupa)
- Given the fact that practically all of us have associations/impressions (helpful or unhelpful, positive or negative), regarding our relationship with our Source, developing intimacy with it must be an organic process:
 - some are able to approach *bhakti* as if they had been doing it their entire life—with trust as well as a natural and deep love for it
 - some, scarred by religious upbringing or other negative associations to God or the practice of self-surrender, are more skeptical, fearful or resistant to the idea of surrendering to Creator or Source, let alone attempting to become intimate with it
- Thus, *bhakti* must be approached according to your own nature and experiences, and be allowed to evolve over time.

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- Suggestions for growing and embodying *bhakti*:
 - regular practice (*asana*, *pranayama*, *yoga nidra* and meditation) will lead to greater sense of reverence and trust in the unknown
 - through consistent *prana dharana* and attention to cultivating *sushumna*, sensitivity will dawn and you will find yourself touching the sacred
 - stay open; allow your experiences in yoga to collect and, in time, to shape your version of love and reverence for the Infinite
 - in light of what your new experiences are providing, be prepared and open to releasing old ideas and beliefs
 - acknowledge how and in what ways your practice has and is changing you
 - inquire into the wisdom of silence and what it tells you about the realms that are beyond mind
 - be grateful; be humble
 - *mantra*... spaciousness in the heart, leading to the silent, unfolding *mantra* is the abode of Divinity and there it remains, ever-present
 - when you practice *bhakti*, your love for it can never be completely expressed; oftentimes there can be a feeling of being inadequate in the face of it, of not being able to fully express your gratitude to your Creator
 - don't feel as though you are doing it wrong; *bhakti* is a relationship that, at its height, can be overwhelming
- If for no other reason, *bhakti* is vital because it is a critical safeguard, quieting ego, channeling and tempering the power that so much of *tantra* is focused upon developing.

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