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- *Bandha* practice is to vital force what creating a dam is to hydro-electric power. In the same way that damming up a river makes it possible to capture and then utilize hydroelectric energy, *bandha* allows you capture diverse and dispersed forces and unite them for any one of an array of purposes.
- Each one of the three main bandhas serves a unique purpose:
  - *jalandhara bandha* serves a similar purpose as the wall of the dam; it is the essential component for containment—without the wall, it would be impossible to capture and build potential force, *prana*
  - *uddiyana bandha* is like the turbines that churn and generate the potential of the collected force
  - *mula bandha* ensures that the entire structure remains stable and that there are no leaks
- This is why *jalandhara bandha* is primary; before you can generate energy you need to create the containment wall. Teach *jalandhara bandha* first.
- As it relates to the practice of *mula bandha*, three distinct muscle groups are relevant:
  - urogenital muscles, which you contract to restrain urination
  - anal sphincter muscles, which you contract to restrain defecation



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- perineal muscles, which are situated at the midpoint between the previous two muscle groups; these muscles are the focus of *mula bandha*
- We focus more specifically on the anterior wall of the perineal floor when practicing *mula bandha*
- To refine the practice, lessen the intensity of squeezing or closing and instead focus on lifting/elevating the musculature.
  - the image that captures this intention is one of a cone, rising, something like a pyramid—one that draws the muscles from a wide base upward toward an apex point
  - the practice is an elevation, rather than clamping down
  - this allows you to fulfill the intent of mobilizing and either increasing the accumulation of *prana* at the pelvic floor or stimulating its ascent—converting *apana* to *udana*
- Many students—beginner as well as advanced—have a tendency to overthink and overdo *mula bandha*. They put far too much effort into it and as a result it becomes increasingly less efficacious.
- Bear in mind, both as you practice it and whenever you teach it, that each time you exhale, *mula bandha* engages spontaneously.
  - in order to exhale, abdominal diaphragm must rise, at the same time while exerting no effort the pelvic diaphragm elevates as well
  - understanding this allows you to find the grace of *mula bandha*—effortless and organic



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- Build this awareness in your students first, then once they are familiar with it as such, they can intensify the practice by intensifying the action at the pelvic floor and even more so, by intensifying *uddiyana bandha*, which links to and heightens the action of *mula bandha*.
- The practice of engaging *mula bandha* (on exhale) and releasing (on inhale) increases *apana* as well as the overall energy around the pelvis.
  - this is helpful for grounding, embodiment, survival orientation, worldliness and elimination as well as improving the function of eliminative and reproductive organs
  - holding *mula bandha* during inhalation reduces *apana*, increasing *udana* and to some extent, *samana*
- As previously discussed, poses to access *mula bandha* include chair, down dog, warrior I as well as the *vimalasana* variation of *shalabhasana*.
- As prized as *mula bandha* is, it is not for everyone, nor should it be done all the time.
- Given the parameters and the effects of the practice previously described, consider the following when determining how much you (or your students) will benefit from applying it during inhale—and thus converting *apana* to *udana*. Measure the quality of your:
  - sleep
  - elimination
  - effectiveness in the world
  - the degree to which you have the grounding and stability you need to be the most effective





## Treta Bandha Meditation Practice: Notes and Hints

- During the practice you will isolate each of the three bandhas during inhalation; on pause after exhale you will engage all three bandhas—*treta* (or *maha*) *bandha*.
- You progress through each of the locks on inhalation, alternating with an application of *treta bandha* on the suspension after each exhalation.
  - the one exception to the process is that while isolating *uddiyana bandha* (on the second inhale retention) you do not fully engage it; the full abdominal lift should only be done during suspension
  - instead, while you hold after inhale your approach will be more mental than physical—stay alert to a churning in the abdominal region, with minimal lift and compression of the area

## Silver Thread Meditation

- The Silver Thread Meditation is based on a traditional rendering of *sushumna nadi*, the "sacred stream." You know from previous teachings that this channel is the central focus of *kundalini* yoga.
- This channel is the core of tantric *hatha* practice, since it is the basis for transitioning awareness from the finite to the Infinite, the mundane to the Sacred.
- From a spiritual perspective, awakening of *sushumna nadi* is the final outcome of practice—all physical as well as subtle techniques are intended to lead you to enter its sublime domain.



- However, keep in mind that it is not an end in itself. The Silver Thread Meditation is a *kriya*, a practice intended to set the stage for meditation and the highest realization.

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- *Prana vidya* is the science of the human body's relationship to life-force. This vast and comprehensive field of study informs most, if not all, tantric practice.
- A key facet of these teachings involves the study of (and the practices related to) the chakras.
- The tantric *hatha* and meditative practices that focus on the chakras play a key role in the tradition's approach to speeding up the process of personal evolution.
- To understand the source of the chakras in the body you need to understand the process by which the earth was created.
- The earth was born at the time of the "The Big Bang."
  - the universe, as we know it, started with a small singularity
  - an initial fiery blast that created a cloud of dust, gases and energetic forces and friction
  - debris from the blast eventually became the material body we call earth
  - during the time the earth was jettisoned away from the initial explosion, it was catapulted through space
  - it was exposed to many different energetic forces: gravitational, radiation and even friction
- Ultimately our planet settled into its position in our solar system, however the energies and forces that it was exposed to in its journey away from the explosion remain imprinted onto the earth as energetic lines or pathways.





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- The complexity of these pathways create a map of various energetic crossing points, called *tirtha*.
  - our globe is mapped by these pathways and crossing points
  - when two or more lines cross, it creates vortices, supercharged points where there is a high density of *prana*, life force
- *Marma* means junction, joint, sensitive or secret; in the body they are the Ayurvedic version of what we know as acupressure or acupuncture points. *Chakra* is defined as “wheel, cluster or disk.” Both refer to a kind of energetic nexus.
  - the tradition is very clear that there is correlation between these *tirtha* or crossing points on the planet and the locations of the holy sites found throughout the world as recognized by various cultures, religions, and spiritual traditions
  - people of different traditions go to these “holy sites” like Assisi, Jerusalem, Varanasi, Mt. Fuji, Machu Picchu, etc., seeking out the forces that are concentrated there.
- Of these *tirtha*, some of which are *marma* points (there are 108) and some are *chakras* (the number of which is widely debated).
  - the crossing of two lines creates a *marma* point, whereas the crossing of three lines creates a *chakra*
- Next, it is important to understand that the *samskara* (impression, legacy or imprint) on the earth abides in everything that is part of the planet.



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- in other words, the same number of these crossing points are in everything, every drop of water, every cell—they are in you and I
- each of these sites have a presence, intelligence, power and energy, that is absolutely intrinsic to the place itself, independent of the particular customs that have been performed there
- Yogis turn inward to their inner altar, journeying to the internal crossing points, in the same way that pilgrims visit holy sites.
  - as you “visit” a *chakra*, you nurture it with your awareness
  - your consciousness is your *chakra*'s food
  - as a result of the *chakra* being fed, it awakens
  - its potential force and intelligence now become increasingly accessible and can be potentially fully known
  - this is how the yogi practices inner worship; you are unfolding the “stuff” of the *chakra*, which is where matter, mental and energetic worlds meet
  - at the core of the *chakra* is also consciousness itself, singularity, the living power of spirit or *kundalini shakti*
- Meditating on a *chakra* is an inner pilgrimage, in which you access the unique aspects of divine potential that reside at each of these *tirthas*.
  - the basis for these practices is to collect your energy and then train your mind to venture through these sacred sites





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- Prerequisites for working with the chakras include:
  - a strong foundation of ease, stability coupled with *pratyahara*
  - with that as an effective base, consider a *krama* of twists, extensions and/or inversions, to seamlessly guide students into a *savasana* that leads into the chakras
- If upon doing more profound work with the chakras say, a dedicated practice of *laya yoga* (i.e. *Bhuta Shuddhi*), it consistently causes fear or anxiety it is best to:
  - back off the practices and instead work with your breath—consider pure breathing
  - consider purifying the nadis by using *nadi shodhana*
  - simple meditation on the breath (with *So Hum*)

### Why You Breathe the Way You Breathe

- The way you breath reflects the way you think. The question is, why are the particular thoughts you think so intertwined with the way you breathe?
- For the answer, consider those times in life when you are breathing the most intensely: either when you are fighting for your life or during certain stages of sexual relations.
- Why should survival and sex invoke a fairly similar breath pattern?
- On the other hand, when you are relaxed or in a deep state ease or meditation your breath becomes extremely calm and shallow. Why?



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- The reason you breathe the way you breathe is because your breath is directly related to the specific *chakra* that is required at any given time, depending on what you are thinking or doing.
  - during survival mode you need to fuel your root *chakra*
  - sex relaxations (in general) dominate in the second *chakra*
  - intellect is related to third *chakra*
  - emoting, kindness and love relates primarily to the fourth *chakra*
  - higher applications of focus are dependent on the fifth *chakra*
  - six and seventh chakras allow you to look beyond the material world
- Depending upon what you need, what type of energy and capacity you need at any given moment, your breath responds accordingly, in order to activate the corresponding *chakra*.
- Furthermore, when *prana* enters your body, you inhale and when *prana* moves out of your body, you exhale.
  - note that the movement of *prana* initiates the breath and although it can be reversed consciously—where we shape the breath to shape *prana*—the normative phenomena of the breath is that energy moves first; the breath follows
- The further *prana* has to move to reach the relevant *chakra* related to what you are thinking and doing, the deeper your breath will be.

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- if you need to fuel a lower *chakra*, your breath will need to be deeper
- as the dominant *chakra* shifts, the breath will change to accommodate the shift
- It is also helpful to recall the teaching from the *Secrets of the Sutras* training on inner space and external space, which is measured in *angula* (finger-width).
  - the more forceful your airflow is as it moves out of your nostrils and away from the body, the more externalized your attention, thus stimulating your lower chakras
- Tantric practitioners experimented with angulas and discovered the ideal number of angulas, depending on the activity in which they were engaged.
  - *pranayama* is ideal when it is between 4-12 lengths
  - meditation should be somewhere between 1 and 4, since meditation is ideally a more refined and subtle state of awareness
  - in the process, you activate your higher chakras
  - the quieter your mind, the quieter the breath will necessarily be

## **Prana Shuddhi Stage II**

- Practicing a combination of physical alternate nostril breathing and a *kriya* that focuses on the two pathways of *ida* and *pingala*, is a powerful and deepening methodology that allows you to balance the two channels and access *sushumna*.





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- *prana shuddhi* stage II can be done manually with alternate nostril breathing, or using mental alternate nostril breathing
- the practice expands the inner work *prana shuddhi* stage I, which involves watching the breath rise and fall through the nostrils
- The practice entails seeing, sensing or feeling the following:
  - on inhale through the left nostril—see the path of the breath rise through the left nostril into the left brain and then down the left side of the spine (one or two fingers widths) all the way to the base of the spine/root *chakra*
  - after it reaches *muladhara* breathe out the right nostril; see, sense or feel it rise up along the right side of the spine to the right brain and out the right nostril
  - repeat the pattern on the other side
  - on inhale through the right nostril—see, sense or feel the path of the breath rise through the right nostril into the right brain and then down one or two fingers width to the right side of the spine all the way to the base or root *chakra*
  - after it reaches *muladhara* breathe out the left nostril; see, sense or feel it rise up along the left side of the spine to the left brain and out the left nostril
  - combining the *kriya* with alternate nostril breathing enlivens and deepens its energetic and overall effect of the practice



## More Thoughts on *Sattwa*

- Without increasing *sattwa guna*, spiritual advancement cannot continue to evolve. However, in your efforts to become more refined and spiritual, it is important that you do not become attached or cling to your spiritual achievements.
  - to do this is to become confined by *sattwa*, in which it becomes just another entanglement of ego
- The teachings on the sub-gunas help to inform you of how to increase *sattwa* while staying mindful of the possible pitfalls along the path.
- As previously discussed, in the earlier stages of practice a predominantly rajasic class can have positive effects; in fact, the more rajasic a practice, the more it accelerates growth and change—at least initially.
  - the downside of ever-increasing amounts of *rajas* is that *rajas* can't stay *rajas* forever; *rajas* will eventually lead toward being stuck (*tamas*) or, if you are deliberate, skillful and have the benefit of a highly qualified teacher, there is a good chance that you will keep moving toward greater clarity and freedom (*sattwa*)
  - thus, the more you progress, the *rajas* that you generate through your practice must increasingly include *sattwa*
- A rajasic *sattwa* practice constantly lifts you the practitioner to new plateaus—diminishing the possibility of becoming stuck in your accomplishments



or stagnation and misapprehension. This type of approach leads toward ever more subtle and profound insight and understanding.

- Practical signs of rajasic *sattwa* include awareness of:
  - the light of *sattwa* in the heart
  - the transformative force in the navel center
  - continued insights into your own limitations and the path beyond them
  - humility
  - increasing sensitivity to the non-dual, the world beyond "name and form"
  - seeing the good in all things and all things in the good
  - the capacity to learn your lessons more quickly
  - freedom from the obstacles to yoga
  - you are increasingly and consistently grounded in ease, freedom and non-attachment

### Review of the Subtle Doshas

- As you'll recall (from the *Vinyasa Krama* training) the term *dosha* means defect, or "that which has a tendency to go out of balance.
- A core strategy of Ayurveda, regarding maintaining health and wellbeing, is to stay mindful of your doshas and, more specifically, to consistently reduce your *dosha*(s) that is constitutionally the most dominant as well as your *dosha* that is most symptomatic. This is accomplished through lifestyle, diet and attention to thought and emotion.





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- Each of the three doshas has a subtle essence, yet unlike *dosha* these three essences are inherently positive. Thus, the strategy regarding the subtle essences, is not to reduce them, but rather to increase them while ensuring that no one of them dominates the other two.
- The three subtle essences are:
  - *prana*—the subtle essence of *vata*
  - *tejas*—the subtle essence of *pitta*
  - *ojas*—the subtle essence of *kapha*
- *Prana* (prime vital force)
  - master guiding energy
  - the subtle energy of air and movement
  - guiding intelligence
  - provides coordination
  - shapes breath, senses, mind
  - governs adaptability
  - creativity
  - enthusiasm
  - awakening higher consciousness
- Increase *prana* through: *pranayama*, *asana*, chanting, time in nature and passive meditation on space.
- *Tejas* (the subtle fire of transformation)
  - radiant vital force
  - responsible for assimilation of impressions and thought



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- key to perception, determination, courage
  - magnetism, charisma
  - fearlessness
  - insight, decisiveness
- Increase *tejas* through: *tapas*, *mantra*, silence and observing your speech, *jnana yoga* (the yoga of insight), meditation on light—other helpful modalities: *uddiyana bandha*, *bandha mudra*, *pranayama*, fasting, or anything that builds *tapas*.
  - *Ojas* (prime vigor)
    - the vital reserve
    - basis for endurance, immunity, nourishing, grounding
    - vehicle/container for both *prana* and *tejas*
    - provides stamina, confidence, patience, steadiness, peace, grounding and higher perception
  - Increase *ojas* through: diet, medicinal herbs, sensory control, *brahmacharya*, *bhakti*, *yoga nidra*.