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### Introduction to Forward Bend Practice and 3rd Eye Kriya Meditation

Refer to Appendix: page 106 “Asanas To Know”

- Intention of forward bends is not limited to increasing flexibility.
- Dynamic movement in forward bends strengthen and stabilize the back body.
- Third-eye center is the yogic “command center.” This is an access point, where you are able to over-ride thought, allowing you to experience calm and expanded self-awareness.
- Remember: No eyestrain. Feel into this center, without forcing the eyes to stare upward. Stay relaxed.



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### Different Approaches to *Asana*, Different Effects

- *Asana* can be approached in two ways:
  - dynamic—moving in and out of the same posture
  - static—staying or holding the posture
- The benefits of dynamic movement in *asana*:
  - builds strength and/or flexibility as you move in and out of the pose
  - deepens your connection to the breath, triggering a desired response in the nervous system and making the body more adaptable
  - prepares you for a deepening in the static stay in the pose
  - Increased awareness of habitual movement patterns
  - the development of more ideal patterns
  - reveals pathologies in your breath patterns
- The benefits of the static approach in *asana*:
  - purification (neurological, psychological and even psychic transformation)
  - as breathing is refined during longer stays, deeper layers of the spinal musculature is transformed
  - the basis for the deep transformative work, longer holds provide access to the place where body and mind meet



## The Aim of Asana Practice: It May Not Be What You Think

- *Sadhana* means practice. There are two kinds of practice:
- *Sarvanga sadhana* (from the roots “sarva,” meaning all, comprehensive, complete and “anga,” meaning limb):
  - a complete/holistic approach to practice that in an integrated way addresses the practitioner, positively affecting all aspects: mind, body, breath and soul—the totality of you.
- *Anga banga sadhana* (meaning “less than whole, incomplete”):
  - a practice can be pleasurable and comfortable, but may not help you grow and evolve. In fact, a practice that is pleasurable may actually entrench you more deeply in your existing patterns, beliefs and prejudices.
- Give your students enough of what they want, so you can then give/teach them what they need.
- The quality of your (or your student's) life is the best gauge for assessing the quality of your practice.
- Your experience of life and your relationship to the three aims listed below serves as a basis for reflecting on the quality of your practice—whether or not it is truly effective:
  - The three critical aims that asana practice should be helping you achieve:
    1. structural and mental stability; according to *Patanjali*, mastery of *asana* leads to steadiness, the ability to remain calm/centered in the midst of uncertainty, turbulence and change.



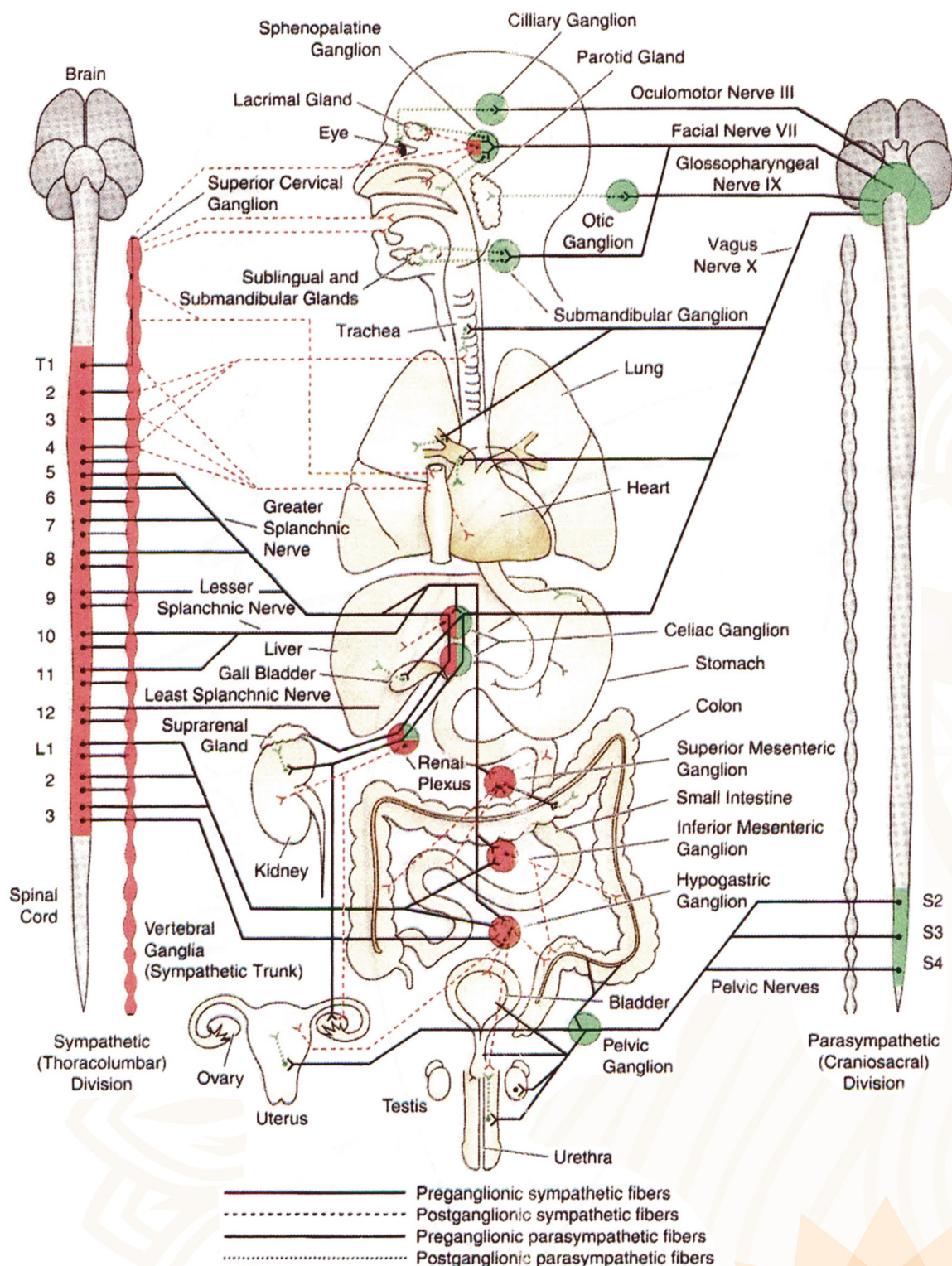
2. physiological immunity, the ability to avoid the contagion of other people's negativity, doubt and suffering—to be in the world, but not of it.
3. emotional health: to be able to consistently return to joy, enthusiasm, inspiration and gratitude. Right relationship with yourself and others.

## Introduction to the Nervous System

- Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) is usually defined as the part of the nervous system that is involuntary, not consciously directed, such as breathing, heartbeat and digestive processes.
- Three parts of the ANS include: sympathetic (most primitive), parasympathetic (evolved later), social engagement (final stage of development in human evolution).
- Sympathetic nervous system triggers “fight or flight” responses such as:
  - faster respiration, accelerated heart rate, pupil dilation, paler skin tone, increased sweating, cold skin, decreased digestion and peristaltic action
  - mobilization behaviors, including anxiety, anger and fear.
- Parasympathetic nervous system triggers “rest and digest” responses such as:
  - slower, deeper breathing, slower heart rate and pulse
  - decreased blood pressure, pupil constriction
  - warm, usually dry skin, increased digestion and peristaltic action
  - demobilizing behaviors: indecisiveness, seclusion, depression



# The Autonomic Nervous System



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- Social nervous system is responsible for empathy and primarily non-verbal communication such as:
  - eye and voice contact, capacity for empathy and social interaction
  - spontaneous feelings in social contact
  - involuntary motor actions of the face, mouth, throat
  - facial warmth, sensations
  - interpersonal responses and awareness, involuntary physical responses to contact with, or memories of, significant people and events
- Over-activity of the sympathetic nervous system can lead to many pathologies, including: insomnia, anxiety, weaker elimination and the inability to manage stress.
  - by making it more challenging to get still or have a meaningful meditative experience, it can play a role in impeding growth in yoga
- Higher mental and social functioning is required to practice and teach yoga.
- The few *asanas* that stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system:
  - hip openers
  - forward bends (some)
  - *halasana* (plow pose), shoulder stand and some inversions
  - twists with a strong hip opening component
- *Asanas* that engage the sympathetic nervous system:
  - back bends
  - laterals





- arm balances
- most standing postures (save forward bends)
- While *asana* can stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, it cannot do so as effectively as the breath.

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### Introduction to 4-Part Supine Complete Breath

- The breath is the most immediate way to affect your autonomic nervous system.
- Correct placement on the blanket ensures maximum freedom for the diaphragm, facilitating complete-diaphragmatic breathing.
- The folded edge of the blanket should be more or less in line with the navel. However, one or two inches—too high or too low on the blanket—will make a significant difference in the effectiveness of the practice.
- To find the correct placement, initially situate yourself too low and attempt one or two complete breaths. Then position yourself too high on the blanket and take one or two breaths.
- In both cases you can observe that your breath is restricted.
- The balance of these two extremes will free physical constraints, allowing for full breathing.
- Your chin and forehead should be in line, parallel to the breastbone.
- Stage I
  - simply watch the abdomen rise and fall on the involuntary flow of the breath.
  - just watch; avoid trying to shape the breath.
  - notice that as your mind become quiet, your breath becomes more subtle and effortless.
  - continue for 2 - 3 minutes.

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- Stage II
  - very gently apply *ujjayi* breath (emphasize the sound of the breath in the throat), however keep the sound mostly internal as you begin to deepen your breath.
  - breathe slowly and smoothly with the intention to resolve all strain, hesitation or involuntary pauses in the flow.
  - continue for approximately 5 minutes.
- Stage III
  - transition to complete breath; maintain your focus on keeping the breath as quiet and as smooth as possible.
  - be so effortless that, on inhale, you are not “pulling” the breath and on exhale you are not “pushing” the breath.
  - the slower and smoother the breath, the better.
  - stay aware of any areas of resistance, where your breath becomes course or jagged.
  - meet any resistance with more effortlessness.
  - continue for approximately five minutes.
- Stage IV
  - repeat stage I.
  - observe the impact of the practice. Relax deeply.
  - you may experience a moment where there is no desire to breathe in. Rest. Don't force.
  - rest for 2 – 5 minutes or more.





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### Awareness and the Breath

- Breath is both an unconscious and conscious function.
- Conscious control of the breath allows you shift from sympathetic to parasympathetic dominance.
- Your mental and emotional states are reflected in your breath patterns. Thus, by becoming aware of your breath, you gain insight into both and gradually transform unconscious patterning.
- In addition, as you make your breath more calm and balanced, you become more calm and balanced.
- Thus, attention to the breath is a way of becoming more physically and mentally conscious.
- Given that the breath is tangible or material—something that you can see, hear and feel, it can be the ideal means for establishing a meditation practice.

### Energetic Effects of the Breath

**Refer to Appendix:** page 105 "Biodynamic and Energetic Effects of Asana Chart"

- Through inhale, exhale and various approaches to retention of the breath, we can create a variety of energetic effects.
- Inhale is *brahmana*, meaning "to activate, enliven, accelerate." Backbends and laterals helps facilitate inhale and have similar energetic effects.
  - emphasizing the breath into the chest is *brahmana*, activating the SNS.



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- Exhale is *langhana*, meaning “to slow down, to reduce, to lighten.” Forward bends and twists helps facilitate exhale and its energetic effect.
  - emphasizing the breath into the belly increases the *langhana* effect, activating the PSNS.
- Balanced inhale and exhale (or equal breathing) is *samana*, meaning “equal or balanced.”
- Holding after inhale intensifies the effect of inhale: *brahmana*.
- Holding after exhale intensifies the effect of exhale: *langhana*.