WELLNESS YOGA INSTITUTE

Yoga: Asana, Pranayama, Shatkarma, Mudra and Bandha – A Complete Guide

A Complete Educational Guide to Traditional Hatha Yoga Practices

Asana • Pranayama • Shatkarma • Mudra • Bandha

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1. Introduction to Yoga

Yoga is an ancient Indian system of holistic development that aims to harmonize the body, breath, mind and inner awareness. The Sanskrit word "Yoga" is derived from the root "Yuj", meaning to join or unite.
Yoga is not limited to physical postures or exercise. It includes a wide range of practices designed to develop physical stability, mental balance, self-awareness and disciplined living.
According to the traditional Hatha Yoga approach, important practices include:

- **Asana**: Physical postures that develop steadiness, comfort and body awareness.
- **Pranayama**: Yogic breathing practices that help regulate and develop awareness of the breath.
- **Shatkarma**: Six groups of traditional cleansing practices.
- **Mudra**: Specific gestures and positions used in yogic practices.
- **Bandha**: Muscular and internal locks used to regulate and direct the flow of pranic energy.
- **Meditation**: Practices that develop concentration, awareness and mental tranquillity.

These practices are traditionally used in a systematic sequence, with appropriate preparation and guidance.

2. Understanding Yogasana

2.1 What Is Yogasana?

The Sanskrit expression "Sthiram Sukham Asanam" describes an asana as a posture that is steady and comfortable. Yogasanas are specific body positions practised with awareness of physical movement, breathing and mental concentration. Their purpose is not simply to stretch the body or develop muscular strength. They also encourage relaxation, coordination, balance and body awareness.
Regular and appropriate practice may help improve flexibility, mobility, posture, muscular coordination and general physical well-being.

2.2 Yogasana and the Body-Mind Connection

The body and mind are closely connected. Physical tension may influence mental comfort, while emotional stress may contribute to muscular tightness and changes in breathing patterns.
Yogasana combines gentle physical movement, controlled attention and breathing awareness. This combination may help practitioners become more aware of their bodies and develop a relaxed approach to movement.

2.3 Main Principles of Yogasana Practice

- Practise slowly and with awareness.
- Coordinate movement with natural breathing.
- Avoid unnecessary muscular tension.
- Never force a posture or continue through pain.
- Maintain a comfortable and steady position.
- Practise both sides of the body where applicable.
- Rest whenever tiredness or discomfort develops.
- Finish the practice with an appropriate relaxation posture.

3. Classification of Yogasana

In the book Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha, yogasanas are organised into three broad levels.

3.1 Beginners Group

The beginners group introduces basic movements and prepares the body for more demanding practices.

Important groups include:

- Pawanmuktasana Series
- Relaxation Asanas
- Meditation Asanas
- Vajrasana Group
- Standing Asanas
- Surya Namaskara
- Chandra Namaskara

Pawanmuktasana is particularly useful as a preparatory series. It includes gentle movements of the joints and different parts of the body.

3.2 Intermediate Group

The intermediate group includes practices requiring greater flexibility, balance, coordination and concentration.

Examples include:

- Padmasana Group
- Backward Bending Asanas
- Forward Bending Asanas
- Spinal Twisting Asanas
- Inverted Asanas
- Balancing Asanas

These practices should be introduced gradually after developing sufficient familiarity with basic postures.

3.3 Advanced Group

Advanced asanas require a high degree of physical control, flexibility, balance and concentration.

They should not be attempted simply by following written instructions or pictures. Proper preparation and guidance from a competent yoga teacher are important.

4. Important Yogasanas: Procedure and Benefits

Yogasanas can be organised according to body position and movement. The following examples introduce some commonly practised postures.

4.1 Tadasana – Mountain Pose

Procedure:

1. Stand upright with the feet together or slightly apart.
2. Keep the spine straight and arms relaxed beside the body.
3 Slowly raise both arms overhead.
4. Interlock the fingers and turn the palms upward, if comfortable.
5. Gently raise the heels and balance on the balls of the feet.
6. Maintain the position without straining.
7. Slowly lower the heels and bring the arms down.

Potential Benefits:

- Develops awareness of standing posture.

- Encourages balance and coordination.
- Gently stretches the arms and upper body.
- Helps improve postural awareness.

4.2 Bhujangasana – Cobra Pose
Procedure:

1. Lie on the abdomen with the legs extended.
2. Place the palms on the floor beside the chest.
3. Keep the elbows close to the body.
4. Slowly raise the head and chest using the back muscles, with gentle support from the hands.
5. Keep the lower abdomen and pelvis comfortably grounded.
6. Hold briefly without compressing the lower back.
7. Slowly return to the starting position.

Potential Benefits:

- Develops awareness of spinal extension.
- Gently strengthens the back muscles.
- Stretches the front of the torso.
- Encourages improved postural control.

4.3 Paschimottanasana – Seated Forward Bend
Procedure:

1. Sit with both legs extended in front.
2. Keep the spine upright and toes pointing upward.
3. Inhale and gently raise the arms.
4. Exhale and bend forward from the hips.
5. Hold the legs or feet wherever comfortable.
6. Avoid pulling forcefully or rounding the back excessively.
7. Slowly return to the upright position.

Potential Benefits:

- Stretches the back of the legs and the back.
- Encourages flexibility of the hips and spine.
- Develops awareness of breathing and body movement.

4.4 Ardha Matsyendrasana – Half Spinal Twist
Procedure:

1. Sit with both legs extended.
2. Bend one knee and place the foot outside the opposite thigh.
3. Keep the other leg in a comfortable position.
4. Place one hand behind the body for support.
5. Gently rotate the trunk towards the bent knee.
6. Maintain a comfortable upright spine.
7. Return slowly and repeat on the opposite side.

Potential Benefits:

- Develops spinal mobility.

- Encourages trunk flexibility.
- Improves awareness of posture and movement.

4.5 Balasana – Child's Pose
Procedure:

1. Kneel on the floor.
2. Bring the big toes together and allow the knees to remain comfortably apart.
3. Slowly bend forward from the hips.
4. Rest the forehead on the floor or a cushion.
5. Keep the arms extended forward or relaxed beside the body.
6. Breathe naturally and remain comfortable.
7. Slowly return to the sitting position.

Potential Benefits:

- Encourages relaxation.
- Gently stretches the back and hips.
- Provides a comfortable resting position during practice.

4.6 Sarvangasana – Shoulder Stand Pose
Sarvangasana is a traditional inverted yoga posture in which the body is supported by the shoulders, upper back and arms, while the legs are raised vertically. It is an intermediate-level asana and requires proper preparation, balance and control.
Procedure:

1. Lie flat on your back on a folded blanket, keeping the head and spine aligned.
2. Keep both legs straight and together, with the arms beside the body and palms facing downward.
3. Relax the body and gently contract the abdominal muscles.
4. Using the support of the arms, slowly raise both legs towards the vertical position.
5. Press the arms and hands against the floor and gradually lift the buttocks and spine.
6. Bend the elbows and place the hands behind the ribcage to support the back. Keep the elbows approximately shoulder-width apart.
7.Gradually bring the trunk towards a vertical position, with the legs straight and together.
8. Maintain the posture only for a comfortable duration, without straining the neck or breathing.
9. To return, slowly bring the legs towards the head, release the hands and carefully lower the spine and buttocks to the floor.
10. Lower the legs gently and relax in Savasana.

Potential Benefits:
- Develops body awareness and postural control.
- Strengthens the supporting muscles of the shoulders and upper back.
- Encourages balance and coordination.
- Provides an inverted posture experience as part of a structured yoga practice.
- The traditional text describes effects on the nervous system and neck muscles.

Precautions and Contraindications:
Sarvangasana places considerable pressure on the neck and requires careful technique. It should not be attempted without appropriate instruction and preparation.

Avoid this posture if you have high blood pressure, heart disease, neck or spinal problems, slipped disc, vertigo, glaucoma or significant eye conditions, or other medical conditions that make inverted postures unsuitable. It is also unsuitable during pregnancy unless specifically assessed and guided by a qualified professional.

Never turn the head while holding the posture. Stop immediately if you experience pain, dizziness, breathing difficulty or discomfort.
Counterpose: According to the book, Tadasana should be practised after Sarvangasana.

4.7 Savasana – Corpse PoseProcedure:

1. Lie flat on the back.
2. Keep the legs slightly apart and allow the feet to fall naturally outward.
3. Place the arms beside the body, with palms facing upward.
4. Close the eyes gently.
5. Relax the muscles of the face, shoulders, abdomen and legs.
6. Observe natural breathing without trying to control it.
7. Remain relaxed for several minutes. **Potential Benefits:** ●Encourages physical relaxation. ●Develops awareness of natural breathing. ●Provides rest after asana practice. ●May support mental calmness. **Important**: The choice of asana should depend on the practitioner's age, physical ability, experience and health condition. Not every posture is suitable for every individual.

5. Pranayama – Meaning, Principles and Techniques

5.1 What is Pranayama?
Pranayama is an important practice of yoga that involves the regulation and awareness of breathing. The Sanskrit word Pranayama is derived from two words: “Prana”, meaning vital energy or life force, and “Ayama”, meaning expansion or regulation.

Pranayama practices involve conscious breathing techniques that help develop awareness of the breath, improve breathing control and promote physical and mental relaxation.

Unlike ordinary breathing, which generally occurs automatically, pranayama involves deliberate and systematic breathing practices performed with awareness and proper technique.

5.2 General Principles of Pranayama Practice
The following guidelines are important for safe and effective pranayama practice:

1. Choose a Quiet Place: Practise in a clean, quiet and well-ventilated environment.
2. Practise on an Empty Stomach: Pranayama is generally practised before meals or at least 3–4 hours after eating.
3. Maintain a Comfortable Posture: Sit comfortably with the head, neck and spine aligned.
4. Breathe Through the Nose: In most pranayama practices, breathing is performed through the nostrils unless the specific technique instructs otherwise.
5. Avoid Forceful Breathing: Breathing should be comfortable and controlled. Never strain or force the breath.
6. Practise Regularly: Choose a suitable time and place and maintain a regular routine.
7. Learn Advanced Techniques Properly: Practices involving forceful breathing or breath retention should be learnt under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

5.3 Best Time to Practise Pranayama

Early morning is generally considered a suitable time for pranayama. It may also be practised in the evening, provided the stomach is sufficiently empty and the surroundings are comfortable.

Beginners should start with simple breathing-awareness practices and gradually progress according to their ability and guidance.

5.4 Important Pranayama Techniques

5.4.1 Kapalbhati Pranayama (Frontal Brain Cleansing Breath)

Kapalbhati is a traditional yogic breathing practice in which exhalation is active and forceful, while inhalation takes place naturally and passively. The Sanskrit word “Kapal” means forehead or skull, and “Bhati” means light, brightness or clarity.

Method of Practice:

1. Sit in a comfortable meditation posture with the head, neck and spine straight.
2. Place both hands on the knees in Chin Mudra or Jnana Mudra.
3. Close the eyes and relax the body.
4. Exhale actively through both nostrils by contracting the abdominal muscles.
5. Allow inhalation to happen naturally as the abdominal muscles relax.
6. Continue with gentle, rhythmic abdominal movements without forcing the breath.
7. Beginners should learn the correct technique from a qualified yoga teacher and avoid increasing speed or repetitions independently.

Potential Benefits:

- Develops awareness and control of abdominal breathing.
- Traditionally used as a cleansing practice in Hatha Yoga.
- May help practitioners feel more alert and energised.
- Encourages focused attention on the breathing process.

Precautions and Contraindications:

Kapalbhati should be performed on an empty stomach. Stop immediately if dizziness, pain or unusual discomfort occurs. The reference text advises people with heart disease, high blood pressure, vertigo, epilepsy, stroke, hernia or gastric ulcer not to practise it. It is not recommended during pregnancy. Individual medical and professional guidance is important.

5.4.2 Anulom Vilom (Nadi Shodhana Pranayama)

Nadi Shodhana is also known as alternate nostril breathing. The Sanskrit term “Nadi Shodhana” means purification of the energy channels in traditional yogic terminology.

This practice involves breathing alternately through the left and right nostrils in a slow, smooth and controlled manner. It is traditionally practised to develop breath awareness, balance and mental calmness.

Method of Practice – Basic Stage:

1. Sit comfortably in a meditation posture with the spine upright.
2. Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
3. Place the left hand on the left knee.
4. Use the right hand in Nasagra Mudra to control the nostrils.
5. Gently close the right nostril with the right thumb.
6. Inhale and exhale slowly through the left nostril.
7. After completing the left-side breathing, close the left nostril with the ring finger and release the right nostril.
8. Inhale and exhale gently through the right nostril.
9. Continue with alternate nostril breathing, maintaining a comfortable and natural rhythm.

Potential Benefits:

- Develops awareness of the breathing process.
- Encourages slow, smooth and rhythmic breathing.
- May promote relaxation and mental calmness.
- Traditionally used to prepare the mind for meditation.
- May support concentration and focused attention.

Precautions:

- Do not force or strain the breath.
- Both nostrils should be reasonably clear.
- Avoid the practice during a cold, flu or fever.
- Beginners should start with simple alternate nostril breathing without breath retention.
- Advanced breathing ratios and breath retention should only be learnt under a competent teacher.

5.4.3 Bhastrika Pranayama (Bellows Breath)

The Sanskrit word “Bhastrika” means bellows. In this practice, inhalation and exhalation are both active and forceful, resembling the movement of a blacksmith’s bellows.

Bhastrika is a dynamic pranayama technique that requires proper breathing coordination and physical awareness. It is more vigorous than ordinary slow breathing.

Method of Practice – Preparatory Stage:

1. Sit in a comfortable meditation posture with the spine straight.
2. Place the hands on the knees in Chin Mudra or Jnana Mudra.
3. Close the eyes and relax the body.
4. Inhale through the nose with a controlled, active movement.
5. Exhale through the nose with a similarly active movement.
6. Coordinate the movement of the abdomen with inhalation and exhalation.
7. Maintain a smooth and rhythmic pattern without excessive force.
8. Stop and rest if there is any discomfort, breathlessness or dizziness.

Potential Benefits:

- Develops awareness of active breathing movements.
- Involves rhythmic movement of the diaphragm and abdominal region.
- Traditionally used as a warming and energising pranayama.
- May help prepare experienced practitioners for meditation.

Precautions and Contraindications:

Bhastrika is a vigorous practice and should not be attempted without proper instruction. The reference text advises against it for people with high blood pressure, heart disease, hernia, gastric ulcer, stroke, epilepsy, retinal problems, glaucoma or vertigo.

Older adults and people with asthma, chronic bronchitis or other lung conditions should seek individual guidance from a competent teacher and healthcare professional before considering this practice. Avoid forceful breathing and breath retention without expert supervision.

5.4.4 Bhramari Pranayama (Humming Bee Breath)

The Sanskrit word “Bhramari” means bee. This pranayama is named after the soft humming sound produced during exhalation, which resembles the buzzing of a bee.

Bhramari is a gentle breathing practice that combines slow inhalation with controlled humming during exhalation. It is traditionally used to encourage relaxation and inward awareness.

Method of Practice:

1. Sit comfortably in a meditation posture with the spine upright.
2. Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
3. Keep the lips gently closed and the teeth slightly separated.
4. Raise both hands and gently close the ears using the index or middle fingers. Do not insert the fingers deeply into the ears.
5. Inhale slowly and comfortably through the nose.
6. Exhale gradually while producing a soft, steady humming sound.
7. Keep the humming smooth and continuous throughout exhalation.
8. At the end of exhalation, relax and repeat without straining.

Potential Benefits:

- May help promote relaxation and reduce feelings of mental tension.
- Encourages inward awareness and concentration.
- The gentle humming vibration may create a soothing experience.
- Traditionally used as a preparatory practice for meditation.

Precautions:

- Do not practise while lying down.
- People with severe ear infections should avoid this practice.
- Do not force the humming sound or hold the breath.
- People with heart disease should avoid breath retention and practise only the simple breathing form if cleared to do so.

Important Note for All Pranayama Practices

Pranayama should be practised with awareness, patience and without strain. Beginners should first develop familiarity with natural and abdominal breathing. Forceful breathing techniques, prolonged breath retention and advanced variations require personal instruction from a competent yoga teacher.

People with existing health conditions, during pregnancy, or recovering from illness should obtain appropriate medical advice and individual guidance before starting these practices.

5.5 Benefits of Pranayama

Regular and appropriate pranayama practice may support physical relaxation, breathing awareness and mental well-being. It is an important part of traditional yoga and helps practitioners develop a deeper connection between the breath and the mind.

1. Improves Breathing Awareness

Pranayama develops awareness of inhalation and exhalation. It helps practitioners observe their natural breathing pattern and gradually develop better control over breathing.

2. Promotes Mental Relaxation

Slow and controlled breathing practices may help calm the mind, reduce feelings of tension and promote relaxation.

3. Supports Concentration

Focusing on the breathing process encourages attention and mindfulness. Regular practice may help improve concentration during daily activities and meditation.

4. Encourages Emotional Balance

Pranayama provides an opportunity to pause, observe the breath and develop awareness of emotional responses. It may support emotional relaxation and self-awareness.

5. Develops Respiratory Coordination

Different pranayama techniques involve controlled movements of the diaphragm and respiratory muscles. Regular, appropriate practice helps develop awareness and coordination of breathing movements.

6. Prepares the Mind for Meditation

Pranayama is traditionally practised before meditation. Slow, rhythmic breathing may help settle the mind and prepare the practitioner for deeper concentration.

7. Supports General Well-being

When practised regularly and correctly, pranayama may become a useful part of a healthy lifestyle, alongside balanced nutrition, physical activity, adequate sleep and relaxation.

Important: Pranayama is a wellness practice, not a substitute for medical diagnosis or treatment. The techniques should be selected according to individual ability and health status. Forceful breathing and breath retention require proper instruction and supervision.

6. Shatkarma – The Six Yogic Cleansing Practices

6.1 Introduction to Shatkarma

Shatkarma, also known as Shatkriya, refers to six traditional yogic cleansing practices described in Hatha Yoga. The Sanskrit word “Shat” means six, while “Karma” refers to actions or practices.

These techniques are traditionally used to cleanse and prepare the body for further yogic practices, particularly pranayama and meditation.

According to the traditional Hatha Yoga system, Shatkarma consists of six major cleansing practices:

1. **Neti:** Nasal cleansing practices.
2. **Dhauti:** Various internal cleansing practices.
3. **Nauli:** Abdominal churning or abdominal muscle control.
4. **Basti:** Traditional yogic intestinal cleansing practice.
5. **Kapalbhati:** Frontal brain cleansing breath.
6. **Trataka:** Steady gazing at a fixed point or object.

Each practice has its own method, purpose and precautions. Some techniques are simple in concept, while others are advanced and require personal instruction.

Important Safety Note: Shatkarma practices should not be attempted casually or learned from written instructions alone. Certain techniques may carry health risks if performed incorrectly. Advanced practices such as Dhauti, Nauli and Basti must be learned only under the direct supervision of a competent and experienced yoga teacher. People with existing health conditions should seek appropriate medical advice before attempting any cleansing practice.

6.2 Neti – Yogic Nasal Cleansing

Neti is one of the six traditional Shatkarma practices of Hatha Yoga. It is primarily concerned with cleansing the nasal passages. The practice is traditionally used to remove accumulated mucus and impurities from the nasal passages and to support comfortable nasal breathing.

There are two important forms of Neti:

1. Jala Neti – Nasal cleansing with water.
2. Sutra Neti – Nasal cleansing with a specially prepared thread or soft catheter.

6.2.1 Jala Neti (Nasal Cleansing with Water)

Jala Neti is a traditional yogic cleansing practice in which lukewarm saline water is passed gently through one nostril and allowed to flow out through the other nostril using a special vessel called a Neti Pot or Neti Lota.

Equipment Required:

- A clean Neti Pot or Neti Lota.
- Pure, safe water.
- Appropriate non-iodized salt.
- A clean place for performing the practice.

Traditional Preparation:

According to the reference text, the water should be pure and approximately body temperature. Salt is added in the proportion described in the book: one teaspoon per half litre of water. The salt should be thoroughly dissolved.

Basic Method of Practice:

1. Fill the clean Neti Pot with the prepared saline water.
2. Stand comfortably with the feet apart and lean slightly forward.
3. Tilt the head gently to one side.
4. Keep the mouth open and breathe through the mouth.
5. Place the nozzle gently against the upper nostril without forcing it.
6. Allow the water to flow naturally through the nasal passage and out through the other nostril.
7. Repeat on the opposite side.
8. Allow the remaining water to drain and gently clear the nostrils.
9. The nasal passages must be dried properly after the practice.

Potential Benefits:

- Helps remove mucus and accumulated particles from the nasal passages.
- May support comfortable nasal airflow.
- Develops awareness of nasal breathing.
- Traditionally used as a preparatory cleansing practice before asana and pranayama.

Precautions and Contraindications:

- Use only microbiologically safe water and clean equipment.
- Never use force to push water through the nostrils.
- Dry the nasal passages properly after the practice.
- Avoid Neti when the nose is completely blocked due to severe cold, flu or sinusitis.

- People with recurrent nosebleeds or ear infections should seek professional advice before practising.
- If water does not flow easily, stop and seek guidance rather than forcing it.
- Prolonged or unnecessary practice is not recommended.

6.2.2 Sutra Neti (Nasal Cleansing with Thread)

Sutra Neti is a traditional and advanced form of nasal cleansing. It involves passing a specially prepared soft cotton thread (sutra) or an appropriate soft rubber catheter through the nasal passage under expert supervision.

Unlike Jala Neti, which uses saline water, Sutra Neti involves direct contact with the delicate inner surface of the nasal passage.

Purpose of the Practice:

Traditionally, Sutra Neti is used to cleanse the nasal passage and develop awareness of the nasal pathway. It is considered more advanced than Jala Neti.

Important Precautions:

- Sutra Neti must not be attempted by beginners without direct, personal instruction from a highly competent yoga teacher.
- The nasal passage is delicate; forceful insertion may cause injury or bleeding.
- The equipment must be appropriately prepared and hygienic.
- People with chronic nosebleeds, nasal ulcers, nasal polyps or significant structural abnormalities should avoid attempting it unless specifically assessed by a qualified professional.
- Stop immediately if pain, bleeding or significant discomfort occurs.
- It is preferable to become familiar with Jala Neti before considering Sutra Neti, under proper guidance.

Difference Between Jala Neti and Sutra Neti

Conclusion

Neti is an important traditional Shatkarma practice. Jala Neti and Sutra Neti have different methods and levels of complexity. Proper hygiene, safe preparation, correct technique and competent supervision are essential. These practices should not replace medical evaluation or treatment for persistent nasal or sinus problems.

6.3 Dhauti – Yogic Internal Cleansing Practices

Dhauti is one of the six traditional Shatkarma practices of Hatha Yoga. It refers to a group of yogic cleansing techniques traditionally associated with the digestive tract and other internal areas of the body.

According to the traditional yoga system, Dhauti practices are intended to cleanse and prepare the body for further yogic practices.

6.3.1 Classification of Dhauti

Dhauti is traditionally divided into three main groups:

1. **Antar Dhauti:** Internal cleansing practices.
2. **Sirsha Dhauti:** Head cleansing practices.
3. **Hrid Dhauti:** Thoracic or chest-area cleansing practices.

The reference book describes several techniques under these groups.

6.3.2 Important Dhauti Practices

1. Shankhaprakshalana (Varisara Dhauti)

Shankhaprakshalana is a traditional yogic intestinal cleansing practice. It involves a specialised sequence of saline-water intake and selected dynamic yoga postures.

The practice is traditionally described as a method of cleansing the intestinal tract.

2. Laghoo Shankhaprakshalana

Laghoo Shankhaprakshalana is a shorter variation of the traditional intestinal cleansing practice. It is also associated with saline water and a sequence of specific yoga movements.

Both forms require careful preparation and direct guidance from a competent yoga teacher.

3. Agnisar Kriya (Vahnisara Dhauti)

Agnisar Kriya is a traditional yogic abdominal practice involving repeated movements of the abdominal wall.

It is associated with the concept of activating the digestive fire (Agni) in traditional yoga.

4. Kunjal Kriya (Vaman Dhauti)

Kunjal Kriya is a traditional stomach-cleansing practice involving water. It is also known as Vaman Dhauti.

This is an advanced cleansing technique and should never be attempted without direct instruction and assessment by an experienced teacher.

5. Vatsara Dhauti

Vatsara Dhauti is traditionally described as a cleansing practice involving air within the intestinal tract.

It is an advanced technique and requires specialised instruction.

6.3.3 Purpose of Dhauti in Traditional Yoga

In traditional Hatha Yoga, Dhauti practices are intended to prepare the body for higher yogic practices. They are associated with internal cleansing and the traditional concept of physical purification.

These practices are not ordinary daily hygiene routines and should not be considered substitutes for medical treatment of digestive disorders.

6.3.4 Safety Precautions

Dhauti practices can involve specialised techniques affecting the digestive tract. Incorrect practice may cause injury, dehydration, electrolyte imbalance or other complications.

- Never attempt advanced Dhauti practices by following written instructions or online videos alone.
- Shankhaprakshalana, Kunjal and Vatsara Dhauti require direct guidance from a competent and experienced yoga teacher.
- People with digestive disorders, ulcers, heart or kidney conditions, high blood pressure or other medical problems should seek medical advice before considering these practices.
- Do not perform these techniques during pregnancy unless specifically advised by an appropriate healthcare professional.
- Stop immediately if pain, vomiting, dizziness, weakness or unusual symptoms occur.

Important Note: The traditional text specifically emphasises that Shatkarma techniques should be learned personally from a competent teacher according to individual needs and limitations. The descriptions in this article are educational and are not practical instructions for performing these advanced cleansing procedures.

6.4 Nauli – Yogic Abdominal Churning

Nauli is one of the six traditional Shatkarma practices of Hatha Yoga. It is an advanced yogic abdominal cleansing technique involving the isolation and controlled movement of the rectus abdominis muscles.

The Sanskrit word “Nauli” is associated with the abdominal muscles and their rolling movement. It is also known as Lauliki Karma.

In traditional yoga, Nauli is practised to massage and stimulate the abdominal region.

6.4.1 Types of Nauli

According to the traditional Hatha Yoga system, Nauli is divided into four stages:

1. Madhyama Nauli (Central Abdominal Contraction)

Madhyama Nauli involves isolating the central abdominal muscles, creating a visible vertical muscular formation along the middle of the abdomen.

It is considered the foundational stage of Nauli practice.

2. Vama Nauli (Left-Side Isolation)

Vama Nauli involves isolating the left side of the rectus abdominis muscles.

3. Dakshina Nauli (Right-Side Isolation)

Dakshina Nauli involves isolating the right side of the rectus abdominis muscles.

4. Abdominal Churning (Nauli Rotation)

In the advanced stage, the abdominal muscles are moved from side to side in a controlled rolling motion. This movement is traditionally called abdominal churning.

The central, left and right stages must be mastered before attempting the rotational movement.

6.4.2 Preparatory Practices

The reference text recommends mastering the following practices before attempting Nauli:

- Agnisar Kriya
- Uddiyana Bandha

Madhyama Nauli should be mastered before progressing to Vama and Dakshina Nauli. The advanced abdominal rotation should only be attempted after the earlier stages have been perfected.

6.4.3 Traditional Method and Practice Requirements

Nauli involves coordinated abdominal muscle isolation, abdominal contraction and breath control. The traditional technique also involves external breath retention (Bahir Kumbhaka) and specific yogic locks.

Because of its advanced nature, a detailed self-practice procedure is not recommended for beginners. It must be learned personally under the supervision of a competent and experienced yoga teacher.

Traditional Practice Conditions:

- The stomach should be completely empty.
- The reference book recommends practising at least 5–6 hours after meals.
- Early morning before food or drink is traditionally considered the best time.
- The practice should be gradual and never forced.

6.4.4 Potential Benefits in Traditional Yoga

The reference text describes the following traditional benefits of Nauli:

- Massages and tones the abdominal region.
- Involves the abdominal muscles and associated organs.
- Traditionally believed to stimulate digestive activity and appetite.
- Supports awareness and control of abdominal muscles.
- Traditionally associated with Manipura Chakra and the concept of digestive fire (Agni).

These are traditional yogic descriptions and should not be interpreted as proven treatments for digestive or hormonal disorders.

6.4.5 Precautions and Contraindications

Nauli is an advanced practice and should only be performed under competent personal guidance.

According to the reference text, Nauli should not be attempted by people with:

- Heart disease or high blood pressure.
- Hernia.
- Abdominal pain.
- Gallstones.
- Acute peptic ulcer.
- Constipation.
- Recent surgery, especially abdominal surgery.
- Pregnancy.

Stop immediately if abdominal pain or unusual discomfort occurs.

Important Note: Nauli is not suitable for everyone. Beginners should not attempt abdominal churning by following online videos or written instructions. Proper preparation, individual assessment and expert supervision are essential.

6.5 Basti – Yogic Intestinal Cleansing

Basti is one of the six traditional Shatkarma practices of Hatha Yoga. It is traditionally described as a yogic cleansing technique associated with washing and toning the large intestine.

In classical Hatha Yoga, Basti is considered an advanced cleansing practice. It is different from ordinary asana or pranayama and requires specialised knowledge.

6.5.1 Types of Basti

The reference text describes the following practices:

1. Jala Basti (Yogic Cleansing with Water)

Jala Basti is the traditional water-based form of Basti. Classical descriptions involve drawing water into the lower intestinal tract and subsequently expelling it.

Traditionally, this practice is associated with cleansing the colon and removing accumulated waste.

2. Sthala Basti (Dry Yogic Basti)

Sthala Basti is traditionally described as a dry variation that does not use water. It involves specific abdominal and pelvic-floor control practices.

The reference text associates this technique with the traditional yogic concept of removing gas and wind from the intestinal tract.

3. Moola Shodhana (Anal Cleansing)

Moola Shodhana is a traditional cleansing practice associated with the anal region. The Sanskrit word “Moola” means root or base, while “Shodhana” means purification.

It is also referred to as Moola Dhauti or Ganesha Kriya in traditional yoga texts.

This practice is distinct from Jala Basti and Sthala Basti, although it is discussed in the same section of the reference book.

6.5.2 Traditional Purpose of Basti

In Hatha Yoga, Basti is traditionally associated with:

- Cleansing of the large intestine.

- Traditional yogic management of intestinal waste and gas.
- Preparation of the body for certain advanced pranayama practices.
- The traditional concept of abdominal purification.

These descriptions represent traditional yogic teachings and should not be interpreted as established medical benefits or treatments for constipation, digestive disorders or intestinal disease.

6.5.3 Precautions and Safety

Basti is an advanced cleansing practice involving the lower intestinal tract. Incorrect or unsupervised practice may cause injury, infection, irritation, dehydration or other complications.

- Do not attempt Jala Basti or Sthala Basti by following written instructions or online videos.
- These techniques require direct personal instruction from a competent and experienced yoga teacher.
- Avoid self-administered rectal insertion or the use of improvised equipment.
- People with intestinal disease, rectal bleeding, haemorrhoids, anal fissures, abdominal pain or recent abdominal surgery should not attempt these practices without medical assessment.
- Pregnant individuals should avoid these practices.
- Stop immediately if pain, bleeding, dizziness or unusual discomfort occurs.

Important Note: Basti is not a substitute for medically recommended bowel care or treatment. Anyone experiencing persistent constipation, abdominal pain or changes in bowel habits should consult a qualified healthcare professional.

6.5.4 Conclusion

Basti is an important but advanced component of the traditional Shatkarma system. Jala Basti, Sthala Basti and Moola Shodhana have different traditional methods and purposes. They should be studied as part of classical yoga education, with proper attention to individual suitability, hygiene and safety.

6.6 Kapalbhati – Yogic Cleansing Practice

Kapalbhati is one of the six traditional Shatkarma practices of Hatha Yoga. The Sanskrit word “Kapal” means skull or forehead, while “Bhati” means light, brightness or clarity.

In traditional yoga, Kapalbhati is described as a cleansing practice associated with the respiratory passages and the frontal region of the head.

According to *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*, Kapalbhati consists of three main techniques:

1. Vatkrama Kapalbhati
2. Vyutkrama Kapalbhati
3. Sheetkrama Kapalbhati

6.6.1 Vatkrama Kapalbhati (Air Cleansing)

Vatkrama Kapalbhati is the air-based cleansing technique. It is the same basic practice described as Kapalbhati Pranayama.

Traditional Technique:

- Sit comfortably in a meditation posture.
- Keep the head and spine straight.
- Relax the whole body.
- The practice involves active, forceful exhalation through the nostrils using abdominal contraction.
- Inhalation occurs passively as the abdominal muscles relax.

The reference text describes this technique as a method of cleansing the respiratory passages.

Potential Traditional Benefits:

- Develops awareness of abdominal breathing.
- Traditionally associated with cleansing the respiratory passages.
- May help develop alertness and concentration.

Precautions:

Practise only on an empty stomach and under appropriate guidance. People with heart disease, high blood pressure, vertigo, epilepsy, stroke, hernia or gastric ulcer should avoid this practice. It is not recommended during pregnancy.

6.6.2 Vyutkrama Kapalbhati (Sinus Cleansing)

Vyutkrama Kapalbhati is a traditional nasal cleansing technique involving saline water. It is associated with cleansing the nasal passages and sinuses.

The reference text describes the use of warm saline water and nasal cleansing through a specialised technique.

Traditional Purpose:

- Cleansing of the nasal passages.
- Removal of accumulated mucus from the sinuses.
- Relaxation of facial muscles and nerves.

Precautions:

- The practitioner should first become proficient in Jala Neti.
- Only microbiologically safe water should be used.
- People who experience frequent nasal bleeding should not practise this technique.
- It should not be attempted without direct instruction from a competent yoga teacher.

6.6.3 Sheetkrama Kapalbhati (Mucus Cleansing)

Sheetkrama Kapalbhati is another traditional saline-water cleansing technique described in Hatha Yoga.

It is associated with the removal of mucus from the nasal passages and is considered an advanced cleansing practice.

Traditional Purpose:

- Cleansing of the nasal passages.
- Traditional removal of accumulated mucus.
- Relaxation of facial muscles and nerves.

Precautions:

- Jala Neti should be mastered before considering this practice.
- Use only microbiologically safe water and properly prepared saline solution.
- Avoid this technique if you experience frequent nosebleeds.
- It should be learned only under the direct supervision of a competent teacher.

6.6.4 Difference Between the Three Techniques

6.6.5 General Safety Guidelines

Kapalbhati practices are not suitable for everyone. The different techniques have different levels of complexity and safety requirements.

- Do not force the breath or nasal passages.

- Avoid practising on a full stomach.
- Stop if pain, dizziness, bleeding or unusual discomfort occurs.
- People with relevant medical conditions should seek medical advice before considering these practices.
- Vyutkrama and Sheetkrama should only be considered after proper training in Jala Neti.
- Advanced cleansing techniques should never be learned from written instructions alone.

Important Note: The traditional cleansing descriptions of Kapalbhati are part of Hatha Yoga. They should not be considered medical treatments for sinusitis, respiratory disorders or other diseases.

6.7 Trataka – Yogic Concentration and Gazing Practice

Meaning of Trataka

Trataka is a traditional yogic cleansing practice that involves gazing steadily at a fixed point or object. The word *Trataka* means “to look” or “to gaze”.

It is the sixth and final practice of Shatkarma. Trataka is traditionally used to develop concentration, mental steadiness and focused awareness. It also acts as a bridge between physical yogic practices and meditation.

Types of Trataka

Trataka can be practised using different objects of concentration. Two commonly described approaches are:

1. **External Gazing (Bahya Trataka):** Steady gazing at an external object, such as a candle flame or a black dot.
2. **Internal Gazing (Antar Trataka):** Closing the eyes and observing the after-image of the object in the space in front of the closed eyes.

Candle Flame Trataka – General Method

1. Place a candle on a stable surface so that the flame is approximately at eye level while sitting.
2. Keep the candle about an arm’s length away.
3. Ensure that the flame remains steady and is protected from moving air.
4. Sit comfortably with the head and spine erect.
5. Close the eyes briefly and relax the facial muscles and the whole body.
6. Gently open the eyes and gaze steadily at the flame without forcing the eyes to remain open.
7. When the eyes become tired or begin to water, gently close them.
8. Observe the after-image of the flame with the eyes closed.
9. When the image fades, gently open the eyes and repeat the external and internal gazing process.
10. Finish by resting the eyes. The traditional text describes Palming as the concluding relaxation practice.

Important: Never strain the eyes or force yourself not to blink. Stop if discomfort occurs.

Time and Duration

- Dawn or dusk, preferably on an empty stomach, is traditionally considered suitable.
- Beginners should gaze for only 1–2 minutes before closing the eyes.
- For general practice, the book describes 5–10 minutes as sufficient.
- Longer practice should only be undertaken under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

Benefits of Trataka

Traditional yoga texts describe the following potential benefits:

- Develops concentration and mental steadiness.
- Helps train focused attention.

- May support relaxation and relief from mental tension.
- Traditionally associated with improved memory and willpower.
- Used as a preparatory practice for meditation.

These are traditional yogic descriptions, not a guarantee of medical or eyesight improvement. Trataka should not be considered a treatment for eye diseases or vision defects.

Precautions and Contraindications

- Avoid straining or staring at the flame for too long.
- People with glaucoma should not practise Trataka.
- People with epilepsy should avoid candle-flame Trataka.
- For eyestrain, astigmatism or early cataract symptoms, the book recommends using a black dot instead of a candle flame, with steady background lighting.
- People with significant eye conditions should consult an eye specialist before attempting the practice.
- Never practise gazing directly at the sun.
- If the practice causes mental disturbance or discomfort, stop and seek guidance from a competent teacher.

Conclusion

Trataka is the final practice of Shatkarma. Through steady and relaxed gazing, it aims to cultivate one-pointed attention and prepare the mind for meditation. It should always be practised gently, without eye strain, and with appropriate precautions.

7. Mudra – Meaning, Types and Practices

7.1 Introduction to Mudra

The Sanskrit word **Mudra** is commonly translated as a gesture or attitude. In yoga, Mudras are specific physical gestures, positions or attitudes practised to develop awareness, concentration and a deeper connection between the body and mind.

A Mudra may involve a simple hand position or a more complex practice combining physical posture (Asana), breathing techniques (Pranayama), energy locks (Bandha) and visualization.

Traditional yogic texts describe Mudras as practices that influence the flow of Prana (vital energy) and help develop internal awareness. They are also associated with practices of meditation, Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses) and Dharana (concentration).

Unlike simple hand gestures, some Mudras are advanced yogic practices that require careful preparation and direct guidance from a competent yoga teacher.

7.2 Five Groups of Yoga Mudras

According to *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, Yoga Mudras can be classified into approximately five groups.

1. Hasta Mudra – Hand Gestures

These Mudras involve specific positions of the fingers and hands. They are commonly used during meditation and breathing practices.

Examples:

- Jnana Mudra
- Chin Mudra
- Yoni Mudra

- Bhairava Mudra
- Hridaya Mudra

2. Mana Mudra – Head Gestures

These practices involve the sensory organs of the head, including the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and lips. Many are associated with concentration and meditation.

Examples:

- Shambhavi Mudra
- Nasikagra Drishti
- Khechari Mudra
- Kaki Mudra
- Bhujangini Mudra
- Bhoochari Mudra
- Akashi Mudra
- Shanmukhi Mudra
- Unmani Mudra

3. Kaya Mudra – Postural Gestures

These Mudras involve physical postures combined with breathing and concentration.

Examples:

- Vipareeta Karani Mudra
- Pashinee Mudra
- Prana Mudra
- Yoga Mudra
- Manduki Mudra
- Tadagi Mudra

4. Bandha Mudra – Lock Gestures

These practices combine Mudra and Bandha techniques. They are traditionally used in advanced Hatha Yoga practices.

Examples:

- Maha Mudra
- Maha Bheda Mudra
- Maha Vedha Mudra

5. Adhara Mudra – Perineal Gestures

These practices are associated with the lower energy centres and are traditionally described as techniques for redirecting Prana.

Examples:

- Ashwini Mudra
- Vajroli Mudra
- Sahajoli Mudra

7.3 General Guidelines for Mudra Practice

- Practise in a quiet and comfortable environment.
- Maintain a relaxed and steady posture.
- Avoid unnecessary tension in the hands, fingers, face and body.
- Coordinate the practice with natural, comfortable breathing unless a specific technique is taught by a qualified instructor.
- Begin with simple practices and develop awareness gradually.
- Advanced Mudras should only be learned under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.
- People with specific health conditions should seek individual professional advice before practising advanced techniques.

Conclusion

Mudras form an important part of traditional Hatha Yoga. They range from simple hand gestures to advanced practices involving the whole body. Their traditional purpose is to develop awareness, concentration and the regulation of Prana, preparing the practitioner for deeper stages of meditation.

7.4 Important Mudras – Procedure and Benefits

Yoga Mudras include a variety of hand gestures, head gestures and postural practices. Each Mudra has a specific position and traditional purpose.

Some Mudras are simple and suitable for introductory practice, while others are advanced techniques requiring proper preparation and expert supervision.

The following sections describe selected important Mudras, their traditional methods and potential benefits.

7.4.1 Jnana Mudra – Gesture of Knowledge

Meaning

The Sanskrit word *Jnana* means knowledge or wisdom. Jnana Mudra is traditionally known as the Gesture of Knowledge or Gesture of Intuitive Wisdom.

It is one of the commonly used Hasta (hand) Mudras in meditation. The gesture symbolically represents the relationship between individual consciousness and supreme consciousness.

Procedure

1. Sit in a comfortable meditation posture, keeping the head, neck and spine upright.
2. Relax both shoulders, arms and hands.
3. Fold the index finger of each hand so that it touches the inner root of the corresponding thumb.
4. Keep the remaining three fingers extended, relaxed and slightly separated.
5. Place both hands on the knees with the palms facing downward.
6. Relax the fingers without applying unnecessary pressure.
7. Close the eyes gently and maintain a comfortable, natural breathing pattern.
8. Remain in this position during meditation for a comfortable duration.

Traditional Symbolism

In the traditional yogic explanation:

- The thumb represents supreme consciousness.
- The index finger represents individual consciousness.

- The middle, ring and little fingers represent the three Gunas: Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas.

The joining of the index finger and thumb symbolises the unity of individual and supreme consciousness.

Benefits of Jnana Mudra

Traditional yoga texts describe the following effects:

- Supports a meditative state of mind.
- Encourages inward awareness and concentration.
- Helps develop a steady and relaxed meditation posture.
- Symbolically represents the unity of individual and universal consciousness.
- May help the practitioner establish a familiar mental cue for meditation through regular practice.

Practice Notes

- Jnana Mudra is commonly adopted during meditation.
- Keep the hands and arms relaxed.
- Avoid unnecessary pressure between the fingers.
- The effect of this Mudra is traditionally described as subtle and develops through regular, attentive practice.

7.4.2 Chin Mudra – Gesture of Consciousness

Meaning

The Sanskrit word *Chin* is derived from *Chit* or *Chitta*, meaning consciousness. Therefore, Chin Mudra is traditionally known as the Gesture of Consciousness.

It is a Hasta (hand) Mudra commonly used during meditation and pranayama. It is performed in a similar way to Jnana Mudra, but with the palms facing upward.

Procedure

1. Sit in a comfortable meditation posture, keeping the head, neck and spine upright.
2. Relax the shoulders, arms and hands.
3. Fold the index finger of each hand so that it touches the inner root of the corresponding thumb.
4. Keep the remaining three fingers extended, relaxed and slightly separated.
5. Place the hands on the knees with the palms facing upward.
6. Allow the backs of the hands to rest comfortably on the knees.
7. Relax the fingers and arms without applying unnecessary pressure.
8. Close the eyes gently and maintain natural, comfortable breathing.
9. Continue the practice during meditation for a comfortable duration.

Traditional Symbolism

According to traditional yogic philosophy:

- The thumb represents supreme consciousness.
- The index finger represents individual consciousness.
- The middle, ring and little fingers represent the three Gunas: Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas.

The joining of the thumb and index finger symbolises the unity of individual consciousness with supreme consciousness.

Benefits of Chin Mudra

Traditional yoga texts describe the following effects:

- Supports meditation and inward awareness.
- Encourages concentration and mental steadiness.
- The upward-facing palms are traditionally associated with a feeling of openness, lightness and receptivity.
- Helps establish a familiar hand position for meditation.
- May support a relaxed and comfortable meditation posture.

These are traditional yogic descriptions and should not be interpreted as guaranteed medical effects.

Difference Between Jnana Mudra and Chin Mudra

Practice Notes

- Chin Mudra may be adopted during meditation unless another hand position is specifically recommended.
- Keep the shoulders and hands relaxed.
- Avoid forcing the fingers into position.
- Practise with natural breathing and without strain.

7.4.3 Yoni Mudra – Attitude of the Womb or Source

Meaning of Yoni Mudra

The Sanskrit word *Yoni* means “womb” or “source”. Yoni Mudra is a traditional yogic hand gesture that symbolically represents the womb or the source of creation. It is associated with inward awareness, stability, and the conservation of pranic energy.

In traditional yogic understanding, this mudra is practised to encourage mental steadiness, concentration, and a deeper meditative experience.

Procedure: How to Practise Yoni Mudra

1. Sit in a comfortable meditation posture, keeping the head, neck, and spine straight.
2. Bring both palms together in front of the body, with the fingers and thumbs pointing away from you.
3. Keep the pads of both index fingers touching each other.
4. Turn the middle, ring, and little fingers inward so that the backs of these fingers touch.
5. Interlock the middle, ring, and little fingers of both hands.
6. Bring both thumbs towards the body.
7. Join the pads of the thumbs together to form the base of a shape resembling a womb.
8. Hold the mudra comfortably in front of the body without creating tension in the hands or shoulders.
9. Close the eyes gently and maintain natural, comfortable breathing.
10. Remain in this position for a comfortable period while maintaining awareness and concentration.

Traditional Benefits of Yoni Mudra

According to traditional yogic teachings, Yoni Mudra is associated with the following benefits:

- **Supports Meditation:** May help develop stability of the body and mind during meditation.
- **Improves Concentration:** Traditionally practised to encourage deeper concentration and awareness.
- **Promotes Relaxation:** May support a sense of internal physical relaxation.
- **Pranic Awareness:** In yogic philosophy, the interlocking of the fingers is believed to create a connection between the energy pathways of both hands.
- **Inward Awareness:** Traditionally believed to redirect awareness and pranic energy inward.

- **Chest Awareness:** The natural outward position of the elbows may encourage an open and relaxed chest posture.

These benefits are described within traditional yogic philosophy and should not be considered scientifically established medical effects or a treatment for any disease.

Variation of Yoni Mudra

A variation is also described in the traditional text:

- The middle, ring, and little fingers may be interlocked without turning them inward.
- The thumbs may be crossed in front of the extended index fingers, or extended with their pads touching towards the body.

Practice Guidelines

- Practise in a comfortable and stable meditation posture.
- Keep the hands, fingers, shoulders, and face relaxed.
- Do not force the fingers into position if there is discomfort.
- Maintain natural breathing.
- Beginners should start with a short, comfortable duration.
- If you experience pain or numbness in the hands, release the mudra and relax.

Conclusion

Yoni Mudra is a symbolic hand gesture representing the womb or source of creation. As a traditional Hasta Mudra, it can be incorporated into meditation practice to encourage inward awareness, concentration, and mental steadiness.

7.4.4 Bhairava Mudra – Attitude of Stillness

Meaning of Bhairava Mudra

Bhairava Mudra is a traditional yogic hand gesture commonly used during meditation and certain pranayama practices.

The word *Bhairava* is traditionally associated with a fierce or powerful aspect. In yoga, this mudra represents the union of the individual consciousness with supreme consciousness. It is also associated with the symbolic balance of Ida and Pingala Nadis.

Procedure: How to Practise Bhairava Mudra

1. Sit in a comfortable meditation posture, keeping the head, neck, and spine straight.
2. Relax the shoulders and allow the body to remain steady.
3. Place the left hand in your lap with the palm facing upward.
4. Gently place the right hand on top of the left hand, with both palms facing upward.
5. Allow both hands to rest comfortably in the lap.
6. Close the eyes gently.
7. Relax the whole body and remain still.
8. Maintain natural, comfortable breathing.
9. Continue the practice for a comfortable period while keeping the mind calm and attentive.

Variation: Bhairavi Mudra

A variation of Bhairava Mudra is known as **Bhairavi Mudra**.

- In Bhairava Mudra, the right hand rests on top of the left hand.
- In Bhairavi Mudra, the left hand rests on top of the right hand.

- In both variations, the palms face upward and the hands rest in the lap.

According to the traditional text, Bhairavi is regarded as the female counterpart of Bhairava.

Traditional Significance of Bhairava Mudra

In traditional yogic philosophy:

- The two hands symbolically represent Ida and Pingala Nadis.
- Their placement together represents the union of individual consciousness with supreme consciousness.
- The mudra is associated with balance, stillness, and meditative awareness.

Traditional Uses of Bhairava Mudra

According to *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*:

- Bhairava Mudra is used in the practice of Prana Mudra.
- It may also be used during pranayama.
- It is commonly adopted during meditation.

This hand gesture provides a simple and comfortable position for keeping the hands relaxed during meditative practices.

Practice Guidelines

- Choose a comfortable sitting posture.
- Keep the spine upright without stiffness.
- Rest the hands gently in the lap.
- Avoid creating pressure between the hands.
- Keep the shoulders and arms relaxed.
- Maintain natural breathing.
- If you experience discomfort in the shoulders, wrists, or hands, adjust your posture.

Conclusion

Bhairava Mudra is a simple yet meaningful Hasta Mudra used in traditional yoga practice. Its hand position symbolically represents the union of Ida and Pingala Nadis and individual consciousness with supreme consciousness. It can be incorporated into meditation and selected pranayama practices to support a steady and comfortable meditative posture.

7.4.5 Hridaya Mudra – Heart Gesture

Meaning of Hridaya Mudra

The Sanskrit word *Hridaya* means “heart”. Hridaya Mudra is a traditional yogic hand gesture associated with the heart area and emotional awareness.

In traditional yogic philosophy, this mudra is believed to redirect the flow of prana from the hands towards the heart area. It is also associated with Anahata Chakra, the heart centre.

Procedure: How to Practise Hridaya Mudra

1. Sit in any comfortable meditation posture, keeping the head, neck, and spine straight.
2. Relax the shoulders, arms, and hands.
3. Fold the index fingers of both hands and place their tips at the roots of the thumbs, as in Jnana or Chin Mudra.
4. Bring the tips of the middle fingers towards the tips of the thumbs.
5. Similarly, bring the tips of the ring fingers towards the tips of the thumbs.

6 Keep the little fingers straight and relaxed.

7 Place both hands on the knees with the palms facing upward.

8 Close the eyes gently.

9 Relax the whole body and remain still.

10 Maintain natural, comfortable breathing.

Duration of Practice

According to the traditional text, Hridaya Mudra may be practised for up to 30 minutes.

Beginners should start with a shorter, comfortable duration and gradually increase it if the posture remains comfortable.

Awareness During Practice

The traditional text suggests two areas of awareness:

- **Physical Awareness:** Observe the natural movement of the breath in the chest area.
- **Spiritual Awareness:** Maintain awareness of Anahata Chakra, traditionally known as the heart centre.

Traditional Benefits of Hridaya Mudra

According to traditional yogic teachings, Hridaya Mudra is associated with the following benefits:

- **Heart-Centred Awareness:** Encourages awareness of the chest and heart area.
- **Emotional Awareness:** Traditionally practised during emotional conflict or periods of emotional distress.
- **Inner Relaxation:** May support a sense of calmness and relaxation during meditation.
- **Pranic Awareness:** In yogic philosophy, the finger arrangement is believed to redirect pranic energy towards the heart area.
- **Meditative Practice:** Provides a structured hand position for developing inward awareness and concentration.

These are traditional yogic interpretations. Hridaya Mudra has not been established as a treatment for heart disease, chest pain, high blood pressure, or any other medical condition. It must never replace prescribed medical care.

Practice Guidelines

- Practise in a comfortable sitting posture.
- Keep the spine upright and the shoulders relaxed.
- Place the fingertips gently; do not press them forcefully.
- Keep the little fingers straight without stiffness.
- Maintain natural breathing throughout the practice.
- Release the hand position if you experience pain, numbness, or discomfort.
- If you have a heart condition or unexplained chest discomfort, seek medical advice rather than relying on a mudra.

Conclusion

Hridaya Mudra is a traditional Hasta Mudra known as the Heart Gesture. Its distinctive finger arrangement and focus on the chest area make it a meaningful practice within meditation and yogic awareness. It is traditionally associated with Anahata Chakra, emotional awareness, and inward relaxation.

7.4.6 Shambhavi Mudra – Eyebrow Centre Gazing

Meaning of Shambhavi Mudra

Shambhavi Mudra is a traditional yogic practice involving focused gazing towards the centre of the eyebrows.

It is also known as *Bhrumadhya Drishti*, where:

- **Bhru** means eyebrow.
- **Madhya** means centre.
- **Drishti** means gazing or focused vision.

In traditional yoga, this practice is associated with Ajna Chakra, commonly known as the third-eye centre. It is used to develop concentration, inward awareness, and meditative stability.

Procedure: How to Practise Shambhavi Mudra

1. Sit in a comfortable meditation posture, keeping the head, neck, and spine upright.
2. Place both hands on the knees in Jnana Mudra or Chin Mudra.
3. Close the eyes gently and relax the whole body.
4. Relax the facial muscles, including the forehead, around the eyes, and the muscles behind the eyes.
5. Slowly open the eyes and look straight ahead at a fixed point.
6. Keep the head and body completely still.
7. Gradually direct the gaze upward and inward towards the centre of the eyebrows.
8. Avoid moving the head while shifting the gaze.
9. Maintain the gaze only for a few seconds initially.
10. At the slightest feeling of eye strain or discomfort, release the gaze immediately.
11. Close the eyes and allow them to relax.
12. Observe the stillness in the dark space in front of the closed eyes.

Breathing During Practice

The traditional text describes coordinating the breath with the eye movement after the practitioner has become familiar with the basic gaze:

- Inhale slowly while raising the gaze.
- The traditional technique includes internal breath retention while maintaining the upward gaze.
- Exhale slowly while lowering the gaze.

Breath retention should not be attempted by beginners without direct guidance from a qualified yoga teacher. For general introductory practice, maintain natural breathing instead.

Duration of Practice

The traditional text recommends:

- Start with 5 rounds.
- Gradually increase to 10 rounds over a period of months.

The gaze should never be maintained through strain. Beginners should keep the practice brief and prioritise eye comfort.

Awareness During Practice

- **Physical Awareness:** Observe sensations around the eyes and consciously relax them between rounds.
- **Spiritual Awareness:** Maintain traditional awareness of Ajna Chakra, the eyebrow centre.

Traditional Benefits of Shambhavi Mudra

According to traditional yogic teachings, Shambhavi Mudra is associated with:

- **Concentration:** Helps develop focused attention.
- **Mental Stability:** Traditionally practised to encourage steadiness of mind.

- **Meditative Awareness:** Supports inward attention and preparation for meditation.
- **Mental Calmness:** Traditionally associated with reducing mental agitation and emotional tension.
- **Ajna Chakra Awareness:** Used in traditional yoga to develop awareness of the eyebrow centre.

These benefits describe traditional yogic perspectives and should not be interpreted as proven medical or eye-treatment effects.

Precautions and Contraindications

Shambhavi Mudra requires particular care because it involves eye movements and focused gazing.

- Never force the eyes upward.
- Release the gaze immediately if you experience eye strain, pain, headache, or discomfort.
- Do not hold the final gaze for a prolonged period.
- People with glaucoma should not practise this mudra.
- People with diabetic retinopathy, recent cataract surgery, lens implants, or other eye operations should not practise it without guidance from an appropriate eye-care professional and a competent yoga teacher.
- Advanced internal Shambhavi Mudra should be learnt under the guidance of a competent teacher.

Advanced Practice: Internal Shambhavi Mudra

After mastering the basic open-eye practice, the traditional text describes an advanced variation performed with the eyes closed.

In this practice, the practitioner maintains an inward gaze directed towards the eyebrow centre, even though the eyes remain closed.

This is considered a more advanced meditative technique because awareness becomes more internalised. It should only be learnt under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

Conclusion

Shambhavi Mudra is an important traditional yogic practice of eyebrow-centre gazing. By combining controlled eye movement with focused awareness, it is used as a preparation for meditation and the development of concentration.

Because the eyes are sensitive, the practice must always be gentle, brief, and free from strain.

7.4.7 Nasikagra Drishti – Nose-Tip Gazing

Meaning of Nasikagra Drishti

Nasikagra Drishti is a traditional yogic gazing practice in which the eyes are gently focused on the tip of the nose.

The Sanskrit word *Nasika* means nose, *Agra* means tip, and *Drishti* means gazing or focused vision. Therefore, Nasikagra Drishti means “nose-tip gazing”. This practice is also known as **Agochari Mudra**, which refers to moving beyond ordinary sensory awareness.

In traditional yoga, this practice is associated with inward awareness, concentration and Mooladhara Chakra.

Procedure of Nasikagra Drishti

Preparatory Practice (for beginners)

If focusing directly on the nose tip feels difficult, the following preparation may help:

1. Sit comfortably with your head and spine straight.
2. Extend one arm in front of your face.
3. Raise your index finger and focus both eyes on its fingertip.
4. Slowly bring the finger towards the tip of your nose while keeping your gaze fixed on it.
5. When the finger reaches the nose, gently transfer your focus to the nose tip.

6 Slowly move the hand away and relax your eyes.

Main Practice

1 Sit in a comfortable meditation posture, keeping your head, neck and spine upright.

2 Rest your hands on your knees in Jnana Mudra or Chin Mudra.

3 Close your eyes and relax your whole body.

4 Gently open your eyes and focus both eyes on the tip of your nose.

5 Avoid straining or forcing the eyes.

6 When the gaze is correctly focused, you may notice a V-shaped appearance of light just above the nose tip. Gently concentrate on its apex if it is naturally visible.

7 Maintain your attention without creating tension in the eyes or forehead.

8 After a few seconds, gently close your eyes and allow them to relax.

9 Repeat the practice comfortably.

Duration: Gradually practise for a few seconds at a time. The book describes continuing the practice for up to 5 minutes. Do not force yourself to reach this duration.

Breathing: Maintain normal, natural breathing throughout the practice.

Awareness During Practice

- **Physical Awareness:** Notice the sensations around the eye muscles and consciously relax the eyes between rounds.
- **Spiritual Awareness:** In traditional yoga, awareness is directed towards Mooladhara Chakra.

Best Time to Practise

Nasikagra Drishti may be practised at different times of the day. Traditionally, early morning or late at night before sleep is considered suitable.

Potential Benefits of Nasikagra Drishti

According to traditional yogic teaching, this practice may:

1 Encourage concentration and focused attention.

2 Support introspection and inward awareness.

3 Help cultivate mental calmness and steadiness.

4 Prepare the mind for meditation.

5 Encourage awareness of the present moment.

These are traditional meditative benefits and should not be considered proven medical effects or a treatment for any health condition.

Precautions and Contraindications

- Never strain, force or hold the eyes in an uncomfortable position.
- Stop immediately if you experience eye pain, headache, blurred vision or discomfort.
- People with glaucoma should avoid this practice.
- People with diabetic retinopathy, recent cataract surgery, lens implants or other eye operations should not practise it without guidance from an appropriate eye-care professional and a competent yoga teacher.
- The reference book advises people experiencing depression to avoid this practice.
- Beginners should start with very short periods and seek guidance if they are unsure whether the practice is suitable for them.

Traditional Yogic Significance

In traditional yogic philosophy, the nose tip is symbolically associated with **Mooladhara Chakra**, while the eyebrow centre is associated with **Ajna Chakra**.

Nasikagra Drishti directs the gaze towards the nose tip and is traditionally associated with Mooladhara Chakra. Shambhavi Mudra, discussed in the previous section, directs the gaze towards the eyebrow centre and is associated with Ajna Chakra.

Both practices are traditionally used to cultivate concentration and meditative awareness.

Conclusion

Nasikagra Drishti is a traditional yogic gazing practice that uses gentle visual concentration to encourage inward awareness and meditation. It should always be performed without eye strain and with due attention to individual eye health..

7.4.8 Khechari Mudra – Tongue Lock

Meaning of Khechari Mudra

Khechari Mudra is a traditional yogic practice in which the tongue is gently folded upward and backward towards the upper palate.

The Sanskrit word *Khechari* comes from two roots: *Khe*, meaning sky, and *Charya*, meaning movement or activity. In traditional yoga, this mudra is associated with inner awareness, mental stillness and Vishuddhi Chakra.

Procedure of Khechari Mudra

1. Sit in a comfortable meditation posture, keeping your head, neck and spine straight.
2. Rest your hands on your knees in Jnana Mudra or Chin Mudra.
3. Relax your whole body and gently close your eyes.
4. Slowly fold your tongue upward and backward so that its lower surface rests against the upper palate.
5. Move the tongue tip backward only as far as is comfortable.
6. Do not force, stretch or strain the tongue.
7. Maintain the position briefly while breathing naturally and comfortably.
8. When the tongue feels tired or uncomfortable, release it and allow it to relax.

Important: The traditional book also describes combining Khechari Mudra with Ujjayi Pranayama. Such combined practices should be learned from a competent yoga teacher. Beginners should not attempt breath control or prolonged practice on their own.

Duration

The reference book describes a practice duration of 5–10 minutes. However, beginners should start with a very short and comfortable period and increase it only under appropriate guidance. There is no need to hold the tongue position for a long time.

Awareness During Practice

- **Physical Awareness:** Observe the gentle stretch of the tongue and its light contact with the upper palate.
- **Spiritual Awareness:** In traditional yoga, awareness is directed towards Vishuddhi Chakra, located in the throat region.

Potential Benefits of Khechari Mudra

According to traditional yogic teachings, Khechari Mudra is associated with:

1. Developing inner awareness and mental stillness.
2. Supporting concentration during meditation.

3. Encouraging a calm and relaxed state of mind.
4. Increasing awareness of the tongue and upper palate.
5. Traditional practices involving prana and Vishuddhi Chakra.

Traditional texts also describe associations with saliva secretion and reduced sensations of hunger and thirst. These claims should not be interpreted as established medical benefits or as treatment for any disease.

Precautions and Contraindications

- Never force the tongue backward or apply excessive pressure.
- Do not attempt to cut, stretch or surgically alter the frenulum beneath the tongue.
- Avoid this practice if you have tongue ulcers, mouth sores, infections or other active oral problems.
- Stop if you experience pain, bleeding, irritation or unusual discomfort.
- If a bitter or unusual secretion occurs, discontinue the practice and seek appropriate professional advice.
- Advanced forms and combinations with Ujjayi Pranayama should only be learned under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

Advanced Practice – Important Safety Note

Some traditional descriptions mention an advanced form involving alteration of the tissue beneath the tongue to extend its movement. This method is not recommended for general practice and must not be attempted through self-treatment or cutting.

Conclusion

Khechari Mudra is a traditional yogic tongue-lock practice associated with meditation, inner awareness and Vishuddhi Chakra. It should be practised gently, without force, and with proper guidance when progressing beyond the basic position.

7.4.9 Kaki Mudra – The Crow's Beak

Meaning of Kaki Mudra

Kaki Mudra is a traditional yogic practice in which the lips are shaped like the beak of a crow to inhale air through the mouth.

The Sanskrit word *Kaki* means "crow". This mudra is named after the shape of the lips during inhalation, which resembles a crow's beak.

Kaki Mudra combines controlled breathing with Nasikagra Drishti (nose-tip gazing). In traditional yoga, it is considered a cooling practice that may help calm the body and mind.

Procedure of Kaki Mudra

1. Sit in a comfortable meditation posture, keeping your head and spine straight.
2. Rest your hands on your knees in Jnana Mudra or Chin Mudra.
3. Close your eyes and relax your whole body for a few moments.
4. Gently open your eyes and focus both eyes on the tip of your nose (Nasikagra Drishti).
5. Keep your tongue relaxed.
6. Purse your lips gently, forming a small opening like a crow's beak.
7. Slowly and smoothly inhale through the pursed lips.
8. At the end of inhalation, close your lips.
9. Slowly exhale through the nose.
10. Repeat the process comfortably without forcing the breath.

Duration: The reference book describes practising for 3–5 minutes. Beginners should start with a shorter comfortable duration.

Breathing: Inhale gently through the pursed lips and exhale slowly through the nose.

Awareness During Practice

- **Physical Awareness:** Observe the flow and sound of the breath and maintain gentle awareness of the nose tip.
- **Mental Awareness:** Keep the mind calm and focused throughout the practice.

Best Time to Practise

Traditionally, Kaki Mudra may be practised at different times of the day, preferably early in the morning or late at night.

The book describes this as a cooling practice and mentions its use after heating pranayama practices. It should not be practised in cold weather.

Potential Benefits of Kaki Mudra

According to traditional yogic teaching, Kaki Mudra may:

1. Encourage a cooling sensation in the body and mind.
2. Support relaxation and mental calmness.
3. Help develop concentration through Nasikagra Drishti.
4. Encourage awareness of breathing.
5. Support a relaxed and focused meditative state.

The traditional text also associates this practice with stimulation of digestive secretions. This should not be interpreted as a proven treatment for digestive disorders.

Precautions and Contraindications

- Do not practise in polluted or dusty surroundings because inhalation takes place through the mouth, bypassing the normal filtering function of the nose.
- Avoid practising in excessively cold weather.
- Do not strain the eyes while maintaining Nasikagra Drishti.
- If the eyes become tired, close them and allow them to relax.
- The reference book advises people with depression, glaucoma, low blood pressure or chronic constipation to avoid this practice.
- People with diabetic retinopathy, recent cataract surgery, lens implants or other eye operations should seek appropriate professional guidance before considering this practice.
- Stop if you experience dizziness, breathlessness, eye discomfort or any unusual symptoms.

Traditional Yogic Significance

Kaki Mudra belongs to the Mana (head mudra) group, which includes practices involving the eyes, nose, tongue and lips.

It is closely related to Nasikagra Drishti and is also considered similar to certain cooling pranayama practices, such as Sheetali and Sheetkari.

Conclusion

Kaki Mudra is a traditional yogic cooling practice that combines gentle mouth inhalation, nasal exhalation and nose-tip gazing. It should be practised in a clean environment, without eye strain or forceful breathing, and with attention to individual health conditions.

7.4.10 Bhujangini Mudra – Cobra Respiration

Meaning of Bhujangini Mudra

Bhujangini Mudra is a traditional yogic practice also known as “Cobra Respiration”.

The Sanskrit word *Bhujangini* is associated with a serpent or cobra. This practice is described in traditional yoga as a technique involving the deliberate intake of air through the mouth into the stomach.

It belongs to the **Mana (head mudra)** group, which includes practices involving the eyes, nose, tongue and lips.

Traditional Method of Bhujangini Mudra

According to *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*, the traditional practice involves the following elements:

1. Sitting in a comfortable meditation posture.
2. Relaxing the whole body, particularly the abdominal region.
3. Gently positioning the chin forward and slightly upward.
4. Drawing air through the mouth in a series of swallowing-like gulps, directing it towards the stomach rather than the lungs.
5. Allowing the abdominal region to expand.
6. Releasing the swallowed air through belching.

Important Safety Note: This is not ordinary breathing. It involves deliberately swallowing air into the stomach and should not be attempted as a self-practice based only on written instructions. Learn about this technique from a competent and experienced yoga teacher before considering it.

Duration and Traditional Sequence

The reference book mentions 3–5 rounds for general purposes.

It also describes this practice as suitable for certain traditional cleansing sequences, particularly after Shankhaprakshalana.

These references describe traditional yogic practice and should not be interpreted as a recommendation for unsupervised home practice.

Traditional Yogic Benefits

The reference text traditionally associates Bhujangini Mudra with:

1. Toning the abdominal region.
2. Releasing accumulated or stagnant wind from the stomach.
3. Supporting traditional yogic approaches to abdominal discomfort.
4. A cleansing-related role in certain yogic practices.

These traditional claims are not established medical treatments. Bhujangini Mudra should not be used to diagnose or treat digestive disorders.

Difference Between Bhujangini Mudra and Vatsara Dhauti

Both practices involve swallowing air into the stomach, but the traditional texts distinguish them by how the air is released.

Precautions and Safety Considerations

- Do not attempt to swallow large amounts of air or force abdominal expansion.
- Do not practise without competent, direct instruction.
- Stop if you experience abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, breathing difficulty or unusual discomfort.
- Do not use this practice as a substitute for medical evaluation or treatment of digestive symptoms.

- Anyone with an existing digestive or abdominal health problem should seek medical advice before considering this unusual practice.

Conclusion

Bhujangini Mudra is a traditional yogic technique involving the swallowing of air into the stomach and its subsequent release through belching. It is distinct from ordinary pranayama and requires particular care.

For general readers and beginners, understanding its traditional purpose and safety considerations is more important than attempting the technique independently.

7.4.11 Bhoochari Mudra – Gazing into Nothingness

Meaning of Bhoochari Mudra

Bhoochari Mudra is a traditional yogic gazing practice in which the practitioner first focuses on the tip of the little finger and then continues to gaze into the empty space where the finger was previously positioned.

The word “Bhoochari” is associated with the practice of directing awareness towards space or nothingness. It is traditionally used to develop concentration, mental stillness and inward awareness.

Procedure of Bhoochari Mudra

1. Sit in any comfortable meditative posture, keeping the head, neck and spine straight.
2. Place your hands on your knees in Chin Mudra or Jnana Mudra.
3. Close your eyes and relax your whole body.
4. Slowly open your eyes and raise your right hand in front of your face.
5. Keep your elbow pointing sideways and hold your hand horizontally, with the palm facing down and fingers together.
6. Place the side of your thumb gently against the upper lip.
7. Focus your eyes on the tip of your little finger.
8. Maintain your attention on the fingertip for a short period without unnecessary eye movement.
9. Slowly lower your hand while continuing to gaze at the same point in space where the little finger was positioned.
10. Maintain awareness of the empty space and observe your thoughts without becoming involved in them.
11. If your concentration fades, raise your hand again and refocus on the little fingertip.
12. Lower the hand and continue gazing into the empty space.

Duration: The book recommends practising for approximately 5–10 minutes. Beginners should start with a shorter, comfortable duration and increase gradually without straining the eyes.

Awareness During Practice

- **Physical Awareness:** Observe the feeling of relaxation, stillness and steadiness.
- **Spiritual Awareness:** Traditionally, awareness is directed towards Ajna Chakra (the eyebrow-centre energy centre).

Benefits of Bhoochari Mudra

According to traditional yogic teachings, Bhoochari Mudra may help to:

- Develop concentration and mental steadiness.
- Encourage inward awareness and introspection.
- Promote a calm and relaxed state of mind.
- Support preparation for meditation.
- Encourage awareness of thoughts without reacting to them.

- Traditionally, it is associated with Ajna Chakra and meditative states.

These are traditional yogic benefits and should not be considered proven medical effects or a treatment for stress, anger or any health condition.

Precautions and Contraindications

- Avoid forcing the gaze or holding the eyes open if discomfort develops.
- Stop the practice if you experience eye strain, pain, headache or blurred vision.
- People with glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy should not practise this mudra without appropriate professional advice and guidance from a competent yoga teacher.
- Anyone who has recently undergone cataract surgery, received a lens implant or had another eye operation should seek guidance from their eye-care professional before attempting the practice.
- Practise in a quiet place, preferably facing a blank wall or an open space, to minimise visual distractions.

Best Time and Practice Environment

Bhoochari Mudra may be practised as a preparation for meditation or as a meditation technique in its own right. Choose a comfortable meditative posture and a quiet environment. A blank wall, open sky or still body of water can provide a distraction-free visual background.

Conclusion

Bhoochari Mudra is a traditional yogic practice that uses external gazing as a means of developing relaxed concentration and inward awareness. With a gentle approach and proper guidance, it may be incorporated into a meditation routine.

7.4.12 Akashi Mudra – Awareness of Inner Space

Meaning of Akashi Mudra

Akashi Mudra is an advanced yogic practice traditionally associated with awareness of inner space. The Sanskrit word “Akasha” refers to space or ether.

This practice combines several traditional yogic techniques, including Khechari Mudra, Ujjayi Pranayama and Shambhavi Mudra. Its purpose is to develop inward awareness, mental stillness and deeper concentration.

Procedure of Akashi Mudra

Important: Akashi Mudra should only be learned and practised under the direct guidance of a competent and experienced yoga teacher. The following description is an educational overview, not a self-practice guide.

According to the traditional method described in *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*:

1. The practitioner sits in a comfortable meditative posture.
2. The eyes are closed and the whole body is relaxed for a few minutes.
3. Khechari Mudra is adopted by folding the tongue gently back towards the palate.
4. Ujjayi Pranayama and Shambhavi Mudra are incorporated.
5. The head is gradually tilted backwards to approximately 45 degrees.
6. The arms are straightened, the elbows are locked and the hands press against the knees.
7. Slow and deep Ujjayi breathing is maintained in the final position, only for as long as is comfortable.
8. To finish, the elbows are bent and Khechari and Shambhavi Mudras are released.
9. The head is brought back to the upright position.
10. Normal breathing is resumed, and awareness is directed towards inner space.

Duration

The traditional text recommends beginning with one round and gradually increasing to a maximum of five rounds.

The final position should be maintained only for a comfortable duration. Any increase in practice time must be gradual and guided by an experienced teacher.

Awareness During Practice

- **Physical Awareness:** Observe relaxation and the sensations associated with the posture and breathing.
- **Spiritual Awareness:** Traditionally, awareness is directed towards Ajna Chakra (the eyebrow-centre energy centre).

Traditional Benefits of Akashi Mudra

According to traditional yogic teachings, this practice:

- Encourages calmness and tranquillity.
- Develops inward awareness and concentration.
- Supports control over the senses.
- May help prepare the mind for meditation.
- Is traditionally associated with deeper meditative awareness and higher states of consciousness.

The book describes Akashi Mudra as a combination of practices involving Ujjayi, Khechari, Shambhavi and breath retention. These traditional descriptions should not be interpreted as scientifically established medical benefits.

Precautions and Contraindications

Akashi Mudra is an advanced practice and requires special care.

- It must be practised slowly under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.
- Practitioners should be familiar with Ujjayi Pranayama, Khechari Mudra and Shambhavi Mudra before attempting it.
- Stop immediately if faintness or dizziness occurs.
- Do not force the backward bending of the head or strain the neck.
- Avoid adding breath retention independently.
- According to the traditional text, people with high blood pressure, vertigo, brain disorders or epilepsy should not practise this mudra.
- Anyone with a relevant medical condition should seek appropriate medical advice before considering this advanced practice.

Important Practice Note

The traditional text recommends that practitioners become completely familiar with Ujjayi Pranayama, Khechari Mudra and Shambhavi Mudra before commencing Akashi Mudra.

The combination of these techniques requires experience, patience and proper supervision. It is not recommended as a beginner-level yoga practice.

Conclusion

Akashi Mudra is an advanced traditional yogic practice that combines breathing, tongue positioning, focused awareness and a specific head position. Its central theme is the development of awareness of inner space and meditative stillness.

It should be approached with proper preparation and competent guidance rather than attempted independently from written instructions.

7.4.13 Shanmukhi Mudra – Closing the Seven Gates

Meaning of Shanmukhi Mudra

Shanmukhi Mudra is a traditional yogic practice designed to withdraw awareness from external sensory distractions and redirect it inward.

The Sanskrit word “Shanmukhi” is formed from two words:

- **Shat:** Six
- **Mukhi:** Gates or faces

The practice involves gently closing the external sensory openings: two eyes, two ears, nostrils and mouth. This encourages a state of inward awareness known in yoga as **Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses)**.

Shanmukhi Mudra is also known by other traditional names, including Baddha Yoni Asana, Devi Mudra and Parangmukhi Mudra.

Procedure of Shanmukhi Mudra

Starting Position

1. Sit in Siddhasana or Siddha Yoni Asana, if comfortable. Otherwise, choose a comfortable meditation posture.
2. Keep the head and spine straight.
3. Close the eyes and rest the hands on the knees.
4. Relax the whole body.

Hand Position and Practice

1. Slowly raise both arms in front of the face, keeping the elbows pointing sideways.
2. Place the thumbs gently over the ears.
3. Place the index fingers gently over the closed eyelids.
4. Position the middle fingers beside the nostrils.
5. Place the ring fingers above the upper lip and the little fingers below the lower lip.
6. Release the pressure of the middle fingers to open the nostrils.
7. Inhale slowly and deeply using comfortable full yogic breathing.
8. At the end of inhalation, gently close the nostrils with the middle fingers.
9. The traditional technique includes internal breath retention. This should only be attempted under qualified guidance and must never be forced.
10. Release the nostrils and exhale slowly.
11. This completes one round.

To finish, lower the hands to the knees, keep the eyes closed briefly and gradually become aware of external sounds and the physical body.

Duration

The book recommends beginning with approximately 5 minutes and gradually increasing the duration over several months, potentially up to 30 minutes.

Beginners should not attempt prolonged practice or breath retention independently. Duration should be appropriate to individual capacity and guided by a competent teacher.

Awareness During Practice

- **Physical Awareness:** Focus on coordinating the hand position with the breathing process.

- **Spiritual Awareness:** Traditional concentration points include Bindu, Ajna Chakra or Anahata Chakra.
- **Mental Awareness:** Observe inner sensations and sounds without forcing or expecting any particular experience.

Benefits of Shanmukhi Mudra

According to traditional yogic teachings, Shanmukhi Mudra may:

- Encourage inward awareness and sensory withdrawal.
- Support the practice of Pratyahara.
- Help prepare the mind for meditation.
- Encourage mental quietness and concentration.
- Traditionally, the warmth and contact of the hands are described as relaxing the facial nerves and muscles.
- Support Nada Yoga practices, in which attention is directed towards inner sound.

These are traditional yogic descriptions and should not be interpreted as proven medical effects or treatment for any health condition.

Precautions and Contraindications

- Do not press the fingers forcefully against the eyes, ears or nostrils.
- Avoid applying pressure to the eyeballs.
- Keep the face, shoulders and arms relaxed.
- Never force breath retention or hold the breath until discomfort develops.
- Stop if you experience dizziness, breathlessness, pain or unusual discomfort.
- People suffering from depression should avoid this practice, as stated in the reference text.
- People with eye, ear or respiratory conditions should seek appropriate professional advice before attempting the practice.
- Advanced variations involving prolonged breath retention should only be learned under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

Best Time to Practise

The traditional text recommends practising Shanmukhi Mudra early in the morning or late at night, when the surroundings are quiet and external distractions are minimal.

Shanmukhi Mudra and Nada Yoga

Shanmukhi Mudra is also used in Nada Yoga, a traditional yogic approach involving awareness of sound.

During the practice, attention may be directed towards sounds perceived internally. Some practitioners may notice sounds, while others may not. The practice should remain relaxed, without trying to force or imagine sounds.

The traditional text also mentions its use in enhancing visualisation in practices such as Swara Yoga, Tattwa Shuddhi and Kriya Yoga.

Conclusion

Shanmukhi Mudra is a traditional yogic technique for turning awareness inward by reducing attention to external sensory distractions. It is associated with Pratyahara, concentration and preparation for meditation.

Practise it gently, without pressure on the sensory organs or forced breath retention. Advanced forms should always be learned under competent guidance.

7.4.14 Unmani Mudra – The Attitude of Mindlessness

Meaning of Unmani Mudra

Unmani Mudra is a traditional yogic meditation practice associated with a state of thoughtlessness and inner awareness.

The Sanskrit word “Unmani” literally means “no mind” or “not thinking”. It refers to a meditative state in which awareness moves beyond the continuous flow of ordinary thoughts, mental analysis and distractions.

The practice involves coordinating breathing, awareness and the gradual closing of the eyes while directing attention inward.

Procedure of Unmani Mudra

Starting Position

1. Sit in any comfortable meditative posture.
2. Keep the head, neck and spine upright.
3. Relax the shoulders, face and entire body.
4. Allow the hands to rest comfortably on the knees.

Practice

1. Gently open the eyes fully without creating tension.
2. Inhale slowly and deeply.
3. The traditional technique includes internal breath retention. This should only be learned under competent supervision and must never be forced.
4. Direct awareness towards Bindu (Hindu), the traditional focal point at the back of the head.
5. As you exhale slowly, allow awareness to descend through the spinal chakras in the following sequence: wp:list wp:list-item Ajna Chakra /wp:list-item wp:list-item Vishuddhi Chakra /wp:list-item wp:list-item Anahata Chakra /wp:list-item wp:list-item Manipura Chakra /wp:list-item wp:list-item Swadhisthana Chakra /wp:list-item wp:list-item Mooladhara Chakra /wp:list-item /wp:list
6. Gradually allow the eyes to close as awareness descends.
7. By the time awareness reaches Mooladhara Chakra, the eyes should be fully closed.
8. Even while the eyes remain open during the initial part of the practice, the awareness is directed inward.
9. Avoid excessive effort. Allow the process to develop naturally.
10. Inhale again and begin the next round.

Duration

The traditional text recommends practising Unmani Mudra for approximately 5–10 minutes.

Beginners should learn the technique under a competent yoga teacher. Breath retention should not be attempted independently.

Awareness During Practice

Physical Awareness:

- Observe the natural coordination of breathing and eye movement.
- Maintain a relaxed facial expression.
- Avoid unnecessary tension in the eyes and forehead.

Spiritual Awareness:

- Traditionally, awareness moves from Bindu (Hindu) through Ajna, Vishuddhi, Anahata, Manipura, Swadhisthana and Mooladhara Chakras.

Traditional Benefits of Unmani Mudra

According to traditional yogic teachings, Unmani Mudra:

- Encourages a meditative state.
- May help calm mental agitation.
- Develops inward awareness.
- Encourages observation of thoughts without becoming attached to them.
- Traditionally, it is associated with the state of Unmani Avastha, or thoughtlessness.

The reference text specifically describes this practice as calming stress and agitation and inducing a meditative state. These traditional claims should not be considered a proven medical treatment for stress, anxiety or any mental health condition.

Precautions and Contraindications

- Do not force the eyes to remain open or closed.
- Avoid straining the breathing process.
- Never force internal breath retention.
- Stop if dizziness, discomfort, eye strain or breathlessness occurs.
- People who have recently undergone eye surgery, or who have glaucoma or diabetic retinopathy, should not practise Unmani Mudra without guidance from an appropriate eye-care professional and a competent yoga teacher.
- People with relevant medical conditions should seek professional advice before attempting this practice.

Conclusion

Unmani Mudra is a traditional yogic meditation technique that combines breathing, gradual eye closure and inward awareness.

Its central purpose is to cultivate a state of mental quietness in which awareness is less disturbed by ordinary thoughts and external distractions. It should be approached gently, with proper preparation and qualified guidance.

7.4.15 Vipareeta Karani Mudra – Inverted Psychic Attitude

Meaning and Introduction

Vipareeta Karani Mudra is an advanced yogic practice that combines an inverted physical posture with controlled breathing and chakra awareness.

The Sanskrit word *Vipareeta* means “inverted”, while *Karani* means “one who does”. In this practice, the body is placed in an inverted position while awareness is directed towards two important energy centres described in traditional yoga: Manipura Chakra and Vishuddhi Chakra.

Unlike the simple restorative Legs-up-the-Wall pose, Vipareeta Karani Mudra involves a more demanding inversion and specific breathing awareness. It should not be confused with a beginner-level relaxation posture.

Procedure of Vipareeta Karani Mudra

Important: This is an advanced practice. The following description is for educational understanding, not a recommendation to attempt it independently.

1. Assume Vipareeta Karani Asana under the guidance of a qualified yoga teacher.
2. In the traditional starting position, the legs are brought over the head so that the eyes face towards the feet.
3. Close the eyes and relax the body.
4. Direct awareness towards Manipura Chakra, traditionally located in the spinal region behind the navel.

5. The traditional method uses slow, deep Ujjayi breathing while awareness moves from Manipura Chakra towards Vishuddhi Chakra during inhalation.
6. During exhalation, awareness remains at Vishuddhi Chakra. At the end of exhalation, awareness returns to Manipura Chakra.
7. The process is repeated without forcing the breath or creating discomfort.

The breathing pattern and chakra-awareness technique should only be learned through direct supervision from an experienced yoga teacher.

Duration

According to the traditional instructions in *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*:

- The initial practice is limited to up to 7 rounds, or less if discomfort occurs.
- The number of rounds may gradually increase towards 21 over several months, under proper guidance.
- If pressure develops in the head, the practice should be stopped immediately.

The duration and breathing pattern should never be forced.

Awareness

Physical Awareness:

- Awareness of the inverted body position.
- Awareness of the movement of breath during inhalation and exhalation.

Traditional Spiritual Awareness:

- Manipura Chakra.
- Vishuddhi Chakra.
- The movement of awareness between these two centres.

Time and Sequence of Practice

The book recommends:

- Practising at a consistent time, preferably early morning.
- Performing it towards the end of the daily yoga practice and before meditation.
- Avoiding the practice after vigorous physical exercise.
- Maintaining at least three hours between a meal and the practice.
- Following the practice with an appropriate counterpose, such as Matsyasana, Bhujangasana or Ushtrasana, under teacher guidance.

Traditional Benefits of Viparеeta Karani Mudra

Traditional yoga literature attributes several effects to this practice:

1. **Chakra Awareness:** Develops awareness of Manipura and Vishuddhi Chakras.
2. **Pranic Balance:** Traditionally described as helping balance the flow of Prana through Ida and Pingala Nadis.
3. **Inward Awareness:** The inverted position and focused breathing are traditionally associated with deeper internal awareness.
4. **Meditative Preparation:** May serve as a preparation for meditation when practised appropriately.

The source text also describes an effect on thyroid activity. However, this traditional claim should not be interpreted as established medical evidence or as a treatment for thyroid disorders. This practice must not replace medical diagnosis or treatment.

Contraindications and Precautions

Vipareeta Karani Mudra is not suitable for everyone. The source book advises against this practice for people with:

- High blood pressure.
- Heart disease.
- Enlarged thyroid.
- Poor general physical health.

The book also refers to “excessive toxins in the body”; this is traditional terminology and should not be treated as a modern medical diagnosis.

Because this practice involves an inversion, additional precautions associated with inverted postures must be considered. People with neck or spinal problems, glaucoma or retinal disorders, a history of stroke, or pregnancy should avoid attempting it unless an appropriate medical professional and qualified yoga therapist have assessed its suitability.

Never practise this Mudra independently if you are inexperienced. Stop immediately if you experience head pressure, dizziness, pain, breathing difficulty or unusual discomfort.

Conclusion

Vipareeta Karani Mudra is an advanced Kaya Mudra that combines an inverted posture, Ujjayi breathing and traditional chakra awareness. It represents the integration of physical posture and mental concentration in Hatha Yoga.

Because of its demanding nature, it should be approached gradually and practised only under the direct guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

7.4.16 Pashinee Mudra – Folded Psychic Attitude

Meaning and Introduction

Pashinee Mudra is an advanced Kaya Mudra (postural mudra) in Hatha Yoga. It is performed by folding the body into a compact position from Halasana (Plough Pose).

The Sanskrit word *Pasha* means “noose” or “bond”, while *Pashinee* refers to being bound or folded in a noose-like position.

This practice combines a deep physical fold with relaxation, slow breathing and internal awareness. Traditionally, it is associated with sensory withdrawal (Pratyahara) and mental tranquillity.

Procedure of Pashinee Mudra

Starting Position: Halasana (Plough Pose)

1. First assume Halasana under the supervision of a qualified yoga teacher.
2. Separate the feet by approximately half a metre.
3. Slowly bend both knees and bring the thighs towards the chest.
4. Continue folding until the knees approach the ears and the shoulders, according to the traditional posture described in the source text.
5. Wrap the arms around the back of the legs.
6. Relax the body and gently close the eyes.
7. Breathe slowly and deeply without straining.
8. Maintain the position only for as long as it remains comfortable.
9. Slowly release the arms and return to Halasana.
10. Carefully lower the legs and relax in Shavasana.

Important: This is not a beginner's posture. Do not pull the legs forcefully towards the head or apply pressure to the neck. The posture should never be attempted without adequate preparation and direct supervision.

Duration

According to *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*, the position may be maintained for as long as it remains comfortable.

There is no fixed duration specified in the book. The practitioner should never force the posture or remain in it through pain or discomfort.

Awareness

Physical Awareness:

- Awareness of the stretch around the neck.
- Awareness of relaxation throughout the body.

Traditional Spiritual Awareness:

- Mooladhara Chakra, or
- Vishuddhi Chakra.

The practitioner may focus on either of these centres according to the traditional instructions.

Sequence of Practice

Pashinee Mudra should be followed by a backward-bending asana.

After carefully releasing the posture, the practitioner should return to a comfortable position before attempting the next practice.

Traditional Benefits of Pashinee Mudra

Traditional yoga literature describes the following benefits:

1. **Nervous System Relaxation:** Traditionally associated with balance and tranquillity of the nervous system.
2. **Pratyahara:** Helps develop the practice of sensory withdrawal by directing awareness inward.
3. **Spinal and Back Stretch:** Provides a stretch to the spine and back muscles.
4. **Spinal Nerve Stimulation:** The traditional text describes stimulation of the spinal nerves.
5. **Abdominal Massage:** The folded position creates pressure around the abdominal region and is traditionally described as massaging the abdominal organs.

These are traditional descriptions of the practice and should not be interpreted as proven medical effects or as treatment for any disease.

Contraindications and Precautions

Pashinee Mudra is an advanced inverted posture and is not suitable for everyone.

According to the source text:

- The contraindications of Sarvangasana and Halasana also apply.
- People suffering from any spinal condition should avoid this practice.
- General precautions for inverted postures must be followed.

Additional care is important because the posture involves substantial neck and spinal flexion.

Avoid attempting this practice if you have neck pain, cervical spine problems, spinal disorders, or any condition that makes inverted postures unsafe. People with high blood pressure, heart disease, glaucoma, retinal disorders or pregnancy should seek appropriate medical assessment before considering such an inversion.

Never force the knees towards the ears, put pressure on the head or neck, or continue if pain, dizziness, numbness or breathing difficulty occurs.

Conclusion

Pashinee Mudra is an advanced folded psychic attitude that combines a compact inverted posture with slow breathing and internal awareness. In traditional Hatha Yoga, it is associated with Pratyahara, relaxation and the development of deeper meditative awareness.

Because of its demanding nature and the involvement of the neck and spine, it should only be practised by suitably prepared individuals under the direct guidance of an experienced yoga teacher.

7.4.17 Tadagi Mudra – Barrelled Abdomen Technique

Meaning and Introduction

Tadagi Mudra is a traditional Kaya Mudra (postural mudra) described in Hatha Yoga.

The Sanskrit word *Tadagi* literally means “water pot”. The name refers to the rounded, pot-like shape of the abdomen when it is fully expanded during the practice.

This technique combines a forward-leaning seated position with abdominal expansion, controlled breathing and awareness of Manipura Chakra.

Procedure of Tadagi Mudra

1. Sit on the floor with both legs stretched straight in front of the body.
2. Keep the feet slightly apart and maintain the legs straight throughout the practice.
3. Place both hands on the knees, keeping the head and spine straight.
4. Close the eyes and relax the whole body, especially the abdominal muscles.
5. Slowly lean forward and hold the big toes with the thumbs, index fingers and middle fingers.
6. Keep the head facing forward.
7. Inhale slowly and deeply, allowing the abdominal muscles to expand fully.
8. Retain the inhaled breath for a comfortable period without straining.
9. Exhale slowly and deeply while relaxing the abdomen.
10. Continue holding the toes during the breathing process.
11. Repeat the breathing cycle up to 10 times.
12. Release the toes and return to the starting position. This completes one round.

Important Practice Note: If holding the toes becomes uncomfortable, release the grip between breaths. Never force the forward bend or hold the breath beyond a comfortable limit.

Duration

According to *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*:

- Repeat the breathing process up to 10 times in one round.
- Practise 3–5 rounds.

The breath retention described in the traditional method should never involve strain. Beginners should learn the technique under qualified supervision and may need an appropriately modified approach.

Awareness

Physical Awareness:

- Focus on the abdominal region.

- Observe the expansion and relaxation of the abdomen during breathing.

Traditional Spiritual Awareness:

- Manipura Chakra, traditionally associated with the abdominal region and the centre of energy distribution.

Traditional Benefits of Tadagi Mudra

Traditional yoga literature describes several effects of this practice:

1. **Diaphragmatic Relaxation:** Traditionally described as helping release tension around the diaphragm.
2. **Pelvic Floor Awareness:** The practice is associated with stretching and relaxing the pelvic floor region.
3. **Abdominal Organ Stimulation:** The abdominal expansion and forward bend are traditionally described as toning the abdominal organs.
4. **Local Circulation:** The source text describes stimulation of blood circulation in the abdominal and pelvic regions.
5. **Manipura Chakra Awareness:** Develops awareness of the traditional energy centre known as Manipura Chakra.
6. **Pranic Awareness:** Traditionally associated with increasing awareness of Prana throughout the body.

These are traditional descriptions and should not be interpreted as proven medical outcomes or as treatment for abdominal, digestive or pelvic disorders.

Contraindications and Precautions

According to the source book, Tadagi Mudra should be avoided by:

- Pregnant women.
- People suffering from hernia.
- People suffering from prolapse.

Additional precautions:

- Do not force the forward bend.
- Avoid straining during breath retention.
- Release the toe grip if discomfort develops.
- Stop immediately if dizziness, pain, breathlessness or unusual abdominal pressure occurs.
- People with significant abdominal or pelvic health conditions should seek professional advice before attempting the practice.

Conclusion

Tadagi Mudra is a traditional abdominal-focused Kaya Mudra that combines forward bending, abdominal expansion and breath awareness. Its distinctive feature is the rounded, water-pot-like appearance of the expanded abdomen.

In traditional Hatha Yoga, the practice is associated with Manipura Chakra, abdominal awareness and the flow of Prana.

It should be practised carefully, without force, and with appropriate guidance—particularly when the traditional method includes breath retention.

7.4.18 Prana Mudra – Invocation of Energy

Meaning and Introduction

Prana Mudra, described in this section of Hatha Yoga, is a traditional practice designed to develop awareness of Prana (vital energy) and its movement through the body's energy centres.

The word *Prana* refers to vital energy or life force, while *Mudra* means gesture or attitude.

This practice combines:

- A comfortable meditative posture.
- Bhairava Mudra (hand position).
- Moola Bandha (root lock).
- Coordinated breathing.
- Gradual movement of the hands.
- Awareness of the Chakras.

In traditional yogic philosophy, Prana is visualized as moving upward from Mooladhara Chakra towards Sahasrara Chakra during inhalation and descending during exhalation.

Procedure of Prana Mudra

Starting Position

1. Sit in a comfortable meditation posture, preferably Padmasana or Siddhasana/Siddha Yoni Asana.
2. Place the hands in Bhairava Mudra in the lap.
3. Close the eyes and relax the whole body, particularly the abdomen, arms and hands.

Stage 1 – Awareness at Mooladhara Chakra

- Exhale deeply, gently contracting the abdominal muscles.
- At the end of exhalation, the traditional method applies Moola Bandha.
- Direct awareness towards Mooladhara Chakra, located in the perineal region.
- The source describes external breath retention for a comfortable period.

Stage 2 – Movement towards Manipura Chakra

- Release Moola Bandha.
- Slowly inhale, allowing the abdomen to expand.
- Raise both open hands towards the level of the navel.
- Keep the palms facing the body and the fingers pointing towards each other without touching.
- Traditionally, awareness follows Prana from Mooladhara to Manipura Chakra.

Stage 3 – Movement towards Anahata Chakra

- Continue inhaling and expand the chest.
- Raise the hands to the front of the sternum, at the centre of the chest.
- Visualize Prana moving upwards from Manipura to Anahata Chakra.

Stage 4 – Movement towards Vishuddhi Chakra

- Continue the inhalation.
- Slightly raise the shoulders and move the hands towards the front of the throat.
- Direct awareness towards Vishuddhi Chakra.

Stage 5 – Expansion of Awareness towards Sahasrara

- The traditional method retains the inhaled breath while the arms gradually spread out to the sides.
- The hands reach approximately ear level, with the arms extended but not rigid and the palms facing upwards.
- Visualize Prana spreading through Ajna, Bindu and Sahasrara Chakras.
- Concentrate on Sahasrara Chakra and visualize an aura of pure light radiating from the head.
- Traditionally, this stage is associated with radiating peace towards all beings.

Returning to the Starting Position

- During exhalation, slowly reverse the movement of the hands through Stages 4, 3, 2 and 1.
- Visualize awareness and Prana descending through the Chakras towards Mooladhara.
- At the end of exhalation, the traditional method applies Moola Bandha again.
- Release the practice, relax the whole body and resume normal breathing.

Important Safety Note: This is an advanced practice involving breath retention and Moola Bandha. The stages above describe the traditional method for educational purposes. Do not attempt breath retention or Bandha independently. Learn the complete technique under the direct supervision of a qualified and experienced yoga teacher. Never strain the lungs or force the breath.

Breathing Pattern

The traditional method coordinates inhalation, internal retention, exhalation and external retention with the movement of the hands and awareness.

The book advises gradually increasing the duration of inhalation, retention and exhalation without straining.

When the practice has been mastered, the practitioner may traditionally visualize the breath as a stream of white light ascending and descending through Sushumna Nadi.

Awareness

Physical Awareness:

- Coordination between breathing and hand movements.
- Relaxation of the abdomen, arms and shoulders.
- Smooth movement of the hands during inhalation and exhalation.

Traditional Spiritual Awareness:

The awareness moves progressively through the following centres:

1. Mooladhara Chakra
2. Manipura Chakra
3. Anahata Chakra
4. Vishuddhi Chakra
5. Ajna Chakra
6. Bindu
7. Sahasrara Chakra

During exhalation, awareness returns from the upper centres towards Mooladhara Chakra.

Time and Sequence of Practice

According to the source text:

- Prana Mudra is best practised after Asana and Pranayama and before meditation.
- It may also be performed at other times.
- The traditionally recommended time is sunrise, facing the sun.

Traditional Benefits of Prana Mudra

Traditional yoga literature attributes the following effects to this practice:

1. **Pranic Awareness:** Develops awareness of Prana Shakti, or vital energy.

2. **Chakra Awareness:** Develops awareness of the Chakras and Nadis.
3. **Energy Visualization:** Encourages visualization of the subtle flow of Prana throughout the body.
4. **Peace and Equanimity:** Traditionally associated with an inner attitude of peace and balance.
5. **Meditative Preparation:** The coordinated breathing, hand movements and concentration may help prepare the mind for meditation.

These descriptions belong to traditional yogic philosophy and should not be interpreted as scientifically established medical effects.

Contraindications and Precautions

The cited section does not provide a separate list of specific contraindications for Prana Mudra. However, the technique includes breath retention and Moola Bandha, which require careful instruction.

- Do not practise breath retention without qualified supervision.
- Avoid straining the lungs or holding the breath beyond a comfortable limit.
- People with heart or respiratory conditions, uncontrolled high blood pressure, or other significant health concerns should obtain medical advice before considering this advanced practice.
- Stop immediately if dizziness, chest discomfort, breathlessness or unusual discomfort occurs.

Conclusion

Prana Mudra is a traditional yogic practice that integrates breathing, hand movements, Moola Bandha and awareness of the Chakras.

Its distinctive feature is the gradual upward and downward movement of awareness, symbolically representing the flow of Prana from Mooladhara to Sahasrara and back.

In traditional Hatha Yoga, it is also known as **Shanti Mudra – The Peace Mudra**, reflecting its association with inner peace and equanimity.

7.4.19 Yoga Mudra – Attitude of Psychic Union

Introduction

Yoga Mudra is a traditional yogic practice that combines a forward-bending posture with controlled breathing and internal awareness. The Sanskrit word *Yoga* refers to union, while *Mudra* means a gesture or attitude.

According to the traditional yogic understanding, this practice symbolically represents the union of individual consciousness with supreme consciousness, or the integration of outer and inner awareness.

Yoga Mudra is performed in a meditative sitting posture and involves awareness of **Mooladhara Chakra** and **Ajna Chakra**.

Procedure (Traditional Method)

1. Sit in Padmasana (Lotus Pose), keeping the spine upright.
2. Hold one wrist behind the back with the opposite hand.
3. Close the eyes and relax the entire body.
4. Bring your awareness to Mooladhara Chakra. A gentle Moola Bandha may also be performed by experienced practitioners.
5. Inhale slowly and imagine the breath moving upward from Mooladhara towards Ajna Chakra.
6. Retain the breath briefly and concentrate on Ajna Chakra, without straining.
7. Slowly exhale while bending forward from the hips. Coordinate the movement with the breath so that the forehead approaches the floor as the exhalation finishes.

8 Traditionally, awareness is guided downward from Ajna to Mooladhara Chakra during the forward bend.

9 Pause briefly after exhalation, without forcing breath retention, and bring awareness to Mooladhara.

10 Inhale slowly while raising the trunk back to the upright position. Guide awareness upward from Mooladhara to Ajna.

11 Remain upright briefly with awareness at Ajna, then exhale slowly and return awareness down the spine towards Mooladhara.

The movements should remain smooth, harmonious and coordinated with breathing.

Important: Beginners may take a few normal breaths between rounds. The original text describes breath retention, but this should not be attempted forcefully or without appropriate instruction.

Duration

- Practise 3–10 rounds, according to individual capacity and guidance.
- Breathing should be slow and comfortable, without the slightest strain.
- Beginners should start with fewer rounds.
- People who cannot comfortably sit in Padmasana may practise from Sukhasana or Vajrasana, as described in the traditional text, with suitable modifications.

Awareness

Physical Awareness:

- Synchronization of body movement with breathing.
- Gentle stretching of the back during the forward bend.

Spiritual Awareness:

- Mooladhara Chakra.
- Ajna Chakra.
- The traditional upward and downward movement of awareness along the spine.

Benefits of Yoga Mudra

According to traditional yogic literature, Yoga Mudra may:

- Massage the abdominal organs through the forward-bending movement.
- Stretch the back muscles.
- Encourage relaxation and prepare the mind for meditation.
- Support inward awareness and concentration.
- Traditionally, help cultivate tranquillity and reduce feelings of anger and tension.

These are traditional descriptions of the practice, not guarantees of medical or psychological outcomes.

Precautions and Contraindications

The traditional source advises people with the following conditions to avoid this practice:

- Sciatica.
- High blood pressure.
- Pelvic inflammatory disease.
- Any serious abdominal ailment.

Additional precautions:

- Avoid forcing the forehead towards the floor.

- Do not force breath retention or Moola Bandha.
- People with knee, hip or spinal problems should seek professional guidance before attempting the posture.
- Stop immediately if pain, dizziness, breathing difficulty or unusual discomfort occurs.
- Practise under the guidance of a qualified yoga teacher, particularly when learning the breathing and bandha components.

Sequence

The traditional text suggests that Yoga Mudra may be followed by a gentle backward-bending asana, such as **Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)** or **Ushtrasana (Camel Pose)**, according to individual ability.

Conclusion

Yoga Mudra is a traditional practice that integrates posture, breathing and internal awareness. Its central theme is the harmonious connection between body, breath and mind. Practised appropriately and without strain, it can serve as a preparatory practice for meditation and deeper self-awareness.

7.4.20 Manduki Mudra – Gesture of the Frog

Introduction

Manduki Mudra is a traditional yogic practice performed in Bhadrasana (the Auspicious Pose), combined with Nasikagra Drishti (nose-tip gazing).

The Sanskrit word *Manduki* means “frog”. The practice is named after the frog-like appearance of the sitting posture.

In traditional yoga, Manduki Mudra is associated with Mooladhara Chakra and the inward withdrawal of the senses. It is considered an advanced variation of Nasikagra Drishti.

Procedure

1. Sit in Bhadrasana. If possible, gently adjust the feet so that the toes point outward, without forcing the ankles or knees.
2. Allow the buttocks to rest on the floor. A folded blanket may be placed underneath the buttocks if needed, as described in the traditional method.
3. Place both hands on the knees.
4. Keep the head and spine upright.
5. Close the eyes and relax the whole body. This is the starting position known as Manduki Asana.
6. Slowly open the eyes and practise Nasikagra Drishti by focusing both eyes on the tip of the nose.
7. When the eyes become tired, gently close them for a few seconds and allow them to relax.
8. Resume nose-tip gazing when comfortable.

The practice should be gentle. Never force the position of the legs or strain the eyes.

Duration

- The traditional text describes a practice duration of approximately 5 minutes.
- Beginners should start with a shorter comfortable period.
- Relax the eyes whenever tiredness or strain develops.

Breathing

Breathing should remain slow, natural and rhythmic throughout the practice.

Awareness

Physical Awareness:

- Focus on the tip of the nose.
- Notice and relax the eye muscles between periods of gazing.
- Maintain a comfortable and steady sitting posture.

Spiritual Awareness:

- Mooladhara Chakra, according to traditional yogic understanding.

Benefits of Manduki Mudra

According to traditional yogic literature, Manduki Mudra:

- Acts as a counterpose for cross-legged meditative postures.
- Is traditionally associated with activation of Mooladhara Chakra.
- Helps calm fluctuations and disturbances of the mind.
- Is traditionally believed to balance Ida and Pingala Nadis.
- May serve as a preparatory practice for meditation.

These benefits describe traditional yogic concepts and should not be interpreted as proven medical effects or treatment for any disease.

Precautions and Contraindications

The traditional source gives the following precautions:

- People with glaucoma should not practise this Mudra.
- People with diabetic retinopathy, or those who have recently undergone cataract surgery, lens implantation or other eye operations, should not practise Nasikagra Drishti without guidance from a competent teacher.
- Manduki Asana should not be attempted unless the ankles, knees and hips are sufficiently flexible.

Additional safety guidelines:

- Do not force the feet outward or press the knees towards the floor.
- Avoid the posture if it causes pain in the ankles, knees, hips or lower back.
- Use a comfortable sitting modification if the traditional posture is not accessible.
- Stop nose-tip gazing if you experience eye strain, headache or discomfort.

Practice Environment

The traditional text recommends practising in mild light so that the tip of the nose can be seen clearly.

Choose a quiet and comfortable place where you can maintain the posture without disturbance.

Conclusion

Manduki Mudra combines a traditional meditative sitting posture with nose-tip gazing. Its central focus is the development of inward awareness and concentration. When practised within one's physical limits and with appropriate guidance, it can form part of a traditional yoga meditation routine.

7.4.21 Maha Mudra – The Great Psychic Attitude

Introduction

Maha Mudra is an advanced yogic practice that combines a seated forward-bending posture with specific breathing techniques, internal awareness and traditional yogic locks.

The Sanskrit word *Maha* means “great”, while *Mudra* refers to a psychic gesture or attitude. Maha Mudra is traditionally regarded as an important Hatha Yoga practice that connects physical posture, breath and subtle energy awareness.

This practice combines four important techniques:

- Khechari Mudra – Tongue Lock
- Shambhavi Mudra – Eyebrow Centre Gazing
- Moola Bandha – Root Lock
- Kumbhaka – Breath Retention

Base Position: Utthanpadasana

1. Sit on the floor with both legs extended in front.
2. Bend the left knee and place the left heel against the perineal region, traditionally associated with Mooladhara Chakra.
3. Keep the right leg extended.
4. Place both hands on the right knee.
5. Adjust the posture to maintain comfort and an upright spine.
6. Gently bend forward only as far as comfortable, holding the right big toe with both hands if possible.
7. Return to the upright position.

The traditional base position is known as Utthanpadasana.

Traditional Practice of Maha Mudra

The following is an educational overview of the traditional sequence, not a self-practice guide.

1. Sit in Utthanpadasana with the right leg extended and the back straight.
2. Relax the body and establish Khechari Mudra.
3. Inhale deeply.
4. Exhale and bend forward, holding the right big toe with both hands.
5. Keep the head and back aligned.
6. Slowly inhale while gently tilting the head slightly backward.
7. Establish Shambhavi Mudra, followed by Moola Bandha.
8. The traditional method then includes internal breath retention (Antar Kumbhaka).
9. During this phase, awareness moves successively through three chakras: wp:list wp:list-item Ajna Chakra – Eyebrow Centre /wp:list-item wp:list-item Vishuddhi Chakra – Throat Centre /wp:list-item wp:list-item Mooladhara Chakra – Perineal Region /wp:list-item /wp:list
10. Release Shambhavi Mudra and Moola Bandha before slowly exhaling and returning to the upright position.

The traditional text describes a gradual progression of breathing duration. Breath retention must never be forced.

Breathing

Maha Mudra involves coordinated inhalation, exhalation and internal breath retention.

According to the traditional text:

- One round is equivalent to two complete breaths.
- The duration of breathing should be increased gradually.
- The practitioner must avoid straining.

Because this practice involves Kumbhaka and Bandha, it should only be learned under the direct supervision of a competent yoga teacher.

Duration

The traditional text recommends:

- Three rounds with the left leg folded.
- Three rounds with the right leg folded.
- Three rounds with both legs extended.

These are traditional practice instructions, not a recommendation for beginners to attempt independently.

Awareness

Physical Awareness:

- Coordination of posture and breathing.
- Awareness of the perineal, throat and eyebrow regions.
- Smooth transition between the movements.

Spiritual Awareness:

- Ajna Chakra.
- Vishuddhi Chakra.
- Mooladhara Chakra.
- Traditional awareness of the flow of Prana through the body's subtle energy system.

Time and Sequence of Practice

According to the traditional text:

- Best practised early in the morning.
- The stomach should be completely empty.
- Ideally performed after Asana and Pranayama and before meditation.

Traditional Benefits of Maha Mudra

According to traditional yogic literature, Maha Mudra:

- Combines the traditional effects of Shambhavi Mudra, Khechari Mudra, Moola Bandha and Kumbhaka.
- Is believed to stimulate the subtle energy pathway connecting Mooladhara and Ajna Chakra.
- Develops internal awareness and concentration.
- Is traditionally associated with the awakening and movement of Prana.
- May prepare the practitioner for deeper meditative experiences.

These descriptions belong to traditional yogic philosophy and should not be interpreted as scientifically established medical benefits or treatment for disease.

Precautions and Contraindications

Maha Mudra is an advanced practice and is not suitable for everyone.

According to the traditional source, people with the following conditions should avoid this practice:

- High blood pressure.
- Heart-related complaints.

- Glaucoma.
- Active menstruation.
- Pregnancy.

The book also advises that people with diabetic retinopathy, recent cataract surgery, lens implantation or other eye operations should not practise without guidance from a competent teacher.

Additional precautions:

- Do not attempt Maha Mudra without first becoming proficient in Khechari Mudra, Shambhavi Mudra, Moola Bandha and Kumbhaka.
- Avoid forceful breath retention or muscular contraction.
- Do not practise in hot summer conditions; the traditional text notes that this practice generates heat.
- Do not attempt the practice without qualified supervision.
- Stop if dizziness, pain, breathing difficulty or unusual discomfort occurs.

Conclusion

Maha Mudra is a traditional advanced Hatha Yoga practice that integrates posture, breathing, Bandha and meditative awareness. Its distinctive feature is the coordinated awareness of Ajna, Vishuddhi and Mooladhara Chakras.

Due to its complexity and the involvement of breath retention and internal locks, it should be approached gradually under the guidance of an experienced and competent yoga teacher.

7.4.22 Maha Bheda Mudra – The Great Separating Attitude

Introduction

Maha Bheda Mudra is an advanced traditional Hatha Yoga practice involving a forward-bending posture, external breath retention (Bahir Kumbhaka), and the combined application of three important yogic locks:

- Jalandhara Bandha – Throat Lock
- Uddiyana Bandha – Abdominal Lock
- Moola Bandha – Root Lock

The Sanskrit word *Maha* means “great”, while *Bheda* means “separating”, “piercing” or “passing through”.

In traditional yogic philosophy, this practice is associated with the movement and regulation of Prana through the subtle energy centres of the body.

Base Position: Utthanpadasana

Maha Bheda Mudra begins from the same basic seated position described for Maha Mudra.

1. Sit on the floor with both legs extended.
2. Bend the left knee and place the left heel against the perineal region, traditionally associated with Mooladhara Chakra.
3. Keep the right leg extended.
4. Maintain an upright spine.
5. Adjust the position to remain comfortable.

Traditional Practice of Maha Bheda Mudra

The following is an educational description of the traditional sequence, not a self-practice guide.

1. Assume Utthanpadasana as described above.
2. Keep the back straight and relax the body.

3 Take a deep inhalation.

4 While exhaling, bend forward and hold the right big toe with both hands.

5 Retain the breath outside (Bahir Kumbhaka).

6 The traditional method then applies the three Bandhas together: wp:list wp:list-item Jalandhara Bandha /wp:list-item wp:list-item Uddiyana Bandha /wp:list-item wp:list-item Moola Bandha /wp:list-item /wp:list

7 Move awareness successively through the following three Chakra centres: wp:list wp:list-item Vishuddhi Chakra – Throat Centre /wp:list-item wp:list-item Manipura Chakra – Abdominal Centre /wp:list-item wp:list-item Mooladhara Chakra – Perineal Centre /wp:list-item /wp:list

8 Traditionally, awareness rests briefly at each centre before moving smoothly to the next.

9 Release Moola Bandha, Uddiyana Bandha and Jalandhara Bandha in the appropriate sequence.

10 Raise the head and inhale while returning to the upright position.

11 Exhale and relax.

This completes one round.

Breathing

Maha Bheda Mudra involves external breath retention (Bahir Kumbhaka).

According to the traditional text:

- One round is equivalent to two complete breaths.
- The duration of breathing should be increased gradually.
- Breath retention must not involve strain.

Safety note: External breath retention combined with three Bandhas is an advanced technique. The sequence should only be learned under the direct supervision of a competent yoga teacher.

Duration

The traditional text recommends:

- Three rounds with the left leg folded.
- Three rounds with the right leg folded.
- Three rounds with both legs extended.

These are traditional instructions for suitably trained practitioners, not a beginner's routine.

Awareness

Physical Awareness:

- Perineal region.
- Abdominal region.
- Throat region.
- Coordination of breathing with the three Bandhas.

Spiritual Awareness:

- Vishuddhi Chakra.
- Manipura Chakra.
- Mooladhara Chakra.

Time and Sequence of Practice

According to the traditional text:

- Practise in the early morning.
- The stomach should be completely empty.
- Perform after Asana and Pranayama and before meditation.

Traditional Benefits of Maha Bheda Mudra

According to traditional yogic literature, Maha Bheda Mudra:

- Has a significant influence on the traditional concept of Pranic energy.
- Is associated with Mooladhara, Manipura and Vishuddhi Chakras.
- Is traditionally used to develop concentration and prepare the mind for meditation.
- Complements and follows Maha Mudra in the traditional Hatha Yoga sequence.

These are traditional yogic descriptions, not scientifically established medical effects or claims that the practice cures disease.

Precautions and Contraindications

Maha Bheda Mudra is an advanced practice. The traditional source advises avoiding it in the following conditions:

- High blood pressure.
- Heart-related complaints.
- Cervical spondylosis.
- High intracranial pressure.
- Vertigo.
- Colitis.
- Stomach or intestinal ulcers.
- Diaphragmatic hernia.
- Other abdominal problems.
- Active menstruation.
- Pregnancy.

The text also states that the precautions and contraindications associated with Kumbhaka, Moola Bandha, Uddiyana Bandha and Jalandhara Bandha apply to this practice.

Additional safety guidelines:

- Do not attempt this practice without first becoming familiar with Jalandhara, Uddiyana and Moola Bandhas and Bahir Kumbhaka.
- Never force external breath retention.
- Avoid excessive muscular contraction.
- The traditional text notes that this practice generates considerable body heat and advises avoiding it during hot summer conditions.
- Practise only under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.
- Stop immediately if dizziness, pain, breathlessness or unusual discomfort occurs.

Relationship Between Maha Mudra and Maha Bheda Mudra

Conclusion

Maha Bheda Mudra is a highly advanced Hatha Yoga practice that combines external breath retention, three Bandhas and focused awareness of specific Chakra centres.

It represents an integrated approach to posture, breath and internal concentration in traditional yogic practice. Due to its complexity and physiological demands, it should only be undertaken by appropriately prepared practitioners under qualified supervision.

7.4.23 Maha Vedha Mudra – The Great Piercing Attitude

Meaning and Introduction

Maha Vedha Mudra is an advanced yogic practice described in traditional Hatha Yoga. The Sanskrit word *Maha* means “great”, while *Vedha* means “piercing” or “penetrating”.

According to traditional yogic philosophy, this practice is intended to influence **Mooladhara Chakra**, where Kundalini energy is traditionally believed to reside. Its purpose is described as awakening this energy and directing it upward.

Maha Vedha Mudra is considered a powerful practice and should only be learned under the direct guidance of a competent and experienced yoga teacher.

Procedure of Maha Vedha Mudra

The traditional practice described in *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* involves the following sequence:

1. Sit in Padmasana (Lotus Pose), keeping the body relaxed and the eyes gently closed.
2. Place both palms on the floor beside the thighs, with the fingers pointing forward. Alternatively, make fists with the knuckles facing downward.
3. Keep the arms straight but relaxed.
4. Inhale slowly and deeply, then retain the breath inside.
5. Support the body's weight through the hands and straighten the arms to raise the body.
6. While maintaining the traditional practice position, gently bring the buttocks down towards the floor three times. Keep awareness at the perineum.
7. Ensure that the buttocks and the backs of the thighs touch the floor simultaneously, while maintaining a straight spine.
8. Gently lower the body completely and exhale.

This completes one round. Allow breathing to return to normal before repeating.

Traditional practice duration: The book recommends three rounds.

Breathing: Inhale deeply in the starting position. Internal breath retention is maintained during the raising and lowering movements. Exhale only after the body has been lowered.

Awareness During Practice

- **Physical awareness:** Awareness of breath retention and the gentle movement of the buttocks.
- **Spiritual awareness:** Concentration on Mooladhara Chakra, according to traditional yogic philosophy.

Precautions and Safety Guidelines

Maha Vedha Mudra involves physical impact on the pelvic and buttock region, together with internal breath retention. Therefore, it is an advanced practice and is not suitable for independent experimentation.

Important precautions include:

- The movement must be extremely gentle.

- A thick, supportive mat should be used.
- The tailbone (coccyx) must not strike the floor directly.
- The buttocks and backs of the thighs should contact the floor together to distribute the impact.
- Never force breath retention or continue through discomfort.
- The practice should only be attempted under the direct supervision of a competent yoga teacher.

Contraindications

According to the reference book, this practice should be avoided by people with:

- Inflammatory diseases, infections or other complaints in or around the pelvic region.
- Heart problems.
- High blood pressure.
- Sciatica.
- Weak or injured knees.

It should not be practised during active menstruation or pregnancy.

Anyone with other significant medical or musculoskeletal conditions should seek appropriate professional advice before considering this practice.

Traditional Benefits of Maha Vedha Mudra

Traditional yogic texts describe Maha Vedha Mudra as a powerful practice for:

- Turning the awareness inward.
- Developing concentration and meditative awareness.
- Awakening psychic faculties, according to traditional yogic philosophy.
- Influencing Mooladhara Chakra and the traditionally described Kundalini energy.

These are traditional yogic descriptions and should not be interpreted as scientifically established medical benefits or as treatment for any disease.

Practice Without Padmasana

The reference book mentions that practitioners who have not mastered Padmasana may perform a modified version with both legs outstretched. However, this variation is described as less effective in the traditional text. It should also be learned under qualified supervision.

Place of Maha Vedha Mudra in Yoga Practice

Maha Vedha Mudra belongs to the advanced practices of Hatha Yoga. The book describes it as a preparatory practice for Tadan Kriya in Kriya Yoga.

Because it combines breath retention with a specific physical movement, proper preparation, supervision and attention to safety are essential.

Conclusion

Maha Vedha Mudra is an advanced traditional yogic practice associated with inward awareness and Mooladhara Chakra. Its physical demands and breath-retention component require careful preparation and expert guidance. It should never be treated as a routine beginner-level mudra.

7.4.24 Ashwini Mudra – The Horse Gesture

Meaning and Introduction

Ashwini Mudra is a traditional yogic practice involving the rhythmic contraction and relaxation of the anal sphincter muscles.

The Sanskrit word *Ashwini* means “horse”. The practice is named after the characteristic movement of a horse's anal sphincter immediately after bowel evacuation.

In traditional Hatha Yoga, Ashwini Mudra is associated with Mooladhara Chakra and the regulation of Pranic energy. It is classified as an Adhara Mudra.

The reference book describes two techniques:

1. Rapid Contraction
2. Contraction with Antar Kumbhaka (Internal Breath Retention)

Technique 1: Rapid Contraction

Starting Position:

- Sit in any comfortable meditative posture.
- Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
- Become aware of the natural breathing process.
- Gradually bring your awareness to the anal region.

Practice:

1. Gently contract the anal sphincter muscles for a few seconds without straining.
2. Relax the muscles completely.
3. Repeat the contraction and relaxation smoothly and rhythmically.
4. Perform approximately 10–20 contractions.
5. As control develops, the contractions may gradually become faster, without creating tension.

Important: Keep the movement confined to the anal sphincter muscles. Avoid unnecessary contraction of the abdomen, buttocks or other pelvic muscles.

Technique 2: Contraction with Antar Kumbhaka

This is a more advanced variation involving internal breath retention.

The traditional method described in the reference book is:

1. Sit in a comfortable meditative posture.
2. Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
3. Inhale slowly and deeply while contracting the anal sphincter muscles.
4. Retain the breath inside while maintaining the contraction, without strain.
5. Exhale while releasing the contraction and relaxing the anal region.

Traditional duration: The book recommends 5–10 rounds.

This variation should only be learned under qualified supervision. Breath retention should never be forced or prolonged beyond one's comfortable capacity.

Awareness During Practice

- **Physical awareness:** Focus on the contraction and relaxation of the anal sphincter muscles.

- **Spiritual awareness:** Focus on Mooladhara Chakra, according to traditional yogic philosophy.

Contraindications and Precautions

The reference book specifically advises that people with high blood pressure or heart disease should not practise the variation involving Antar Kumbhaka.

Additional safety considerations:

- Avoid forceful contractions or excessive muscular tension.
- Do not practise through pain or discomfort.
- People with anal fissures, haemorrhoids, rectal bleeding, recent anorectal surgery or active pelvic-region problems should seek medical advice before attempting the practice.
- Anyone with significant pelvic-floor or bowel-related problems should consult an appropriate healthcare professional.

The book's specific contraindication relates to the breath-retention technique; the additional precautions above are general safety guidance.

Traditional Benefits of Ashwini Mudra

According to traditional yogic descriptions, Ashwini Mudra is believed to:

- Strengthen the anal sphincter muscles.
- Develop awareness and control of the anal region.
- Support the traditional concept of conserving and redirecting Pranic energy upward.
- Encourage inward awareness and preparation for meditation.

The traditional description of Pranic energy should not be interpreted as a scientifically established physiological mechanism. Ashwini Mudra is not a substitute for medical treatment of bowel, pelvic-floor or anorectal disorders.

Difference Between the Two Techniques

Conclusion

Ashwini Mudra is a traditional Hatha Yoga practice that develops awareness and voluntary control of the anal sphincter muscles. Its two techniques range from simple rhythmic contractions to an advanced variation involving internal breath retention.

Beginners should understand the basic technique first and avoid breath retention unless properly guided by a competent yoga teacher.

7.4.25 Vajroli Mudra / Sahajoli Mudra – The Thunderbolt / Spontaneous Psychic Attitude

Meaning and Introduction

Vajroli Mudra and Sahajoli Mudra are traditional yogic practices described in Hatha Yoga.

The reference book presents Vajroli Mudra as the practice traditionally associated with men and Sahajoli Mudra as the corresponding practice associated with women.

The Sanskrit word *Vajra* means “thunderbolt”, “lightning” or “mighty one”. In traditional yogic terminology, Vajra is also the name of a nadi associated with the genito-urinary system and sexual energy.

The word *Sahajoli* is derived from *Sahaj*, meaning “spontaneous”. The book describes it as the spontaneous psychic attitude.

These practices are traditionally associated with awareness of the urethral region and Swadhisthana Chakra.

Starting Position

According to the reference book:

1. Sit in Siddhasana or Siddha Yoni Asana, or any comfortable meditative posture.
2. Keep the head and spine upright without stiffness.
3. Place the hands on the knees in Chin Mudra or Jnana Mudra.
4. Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
5. Bring awareness gently to the urethral region.

Traditional Practice Description

The book describes the following sequence:

1. Inhale while gently drawing the urethral region upward.
2. The traditional description compares this muscular action to holding back an intense urge to urinate.
3. In men, the text describes a slight upward movement of the testes; in women, it describes a slight upward movement of the labia.
4. Keep the contraction confined to the intended region rather than creating a generalized pelvic-floor contraction.
5. Maintain the contraction only for a comfortable duration, beginning with a few seconds.
6. Exhale, release the contraction and relax completely.

Important: This is an advanced and anatomically specific practice. The description above is an educational account of the traditional text, not an instruction to practise independently. Do not attempt to interrupt the normal flow of urine as an exercise or repeatedly test the contraction during urination.

Duration

The reference book recommends:

- Begin with 3 contractions.
- Gradually increase the number up to 10, according to individual capacity.
- The contraction should be held only for a comfortable duration.

No fixed breath-retention time is prescribed in this section.

Awareness During Practice

- **Physical awareness:** Identifying the specific point of contraction while avoiding generalized contraction of the pelvic-floor muscles.
- **Spiritual awareness:** Concentration on Swadhisthana Chakra, according to traditional yogic philosophy.

Contraindications and Precautions

The reference book specifically advises people suffering from **urethritis** not to practise Vajroli/Sahajoli Mudra because the practice may increase irritation and pain.

Additional safety considerations:

- Do not practise through pain, burning, irritation or discomfort.
- People with urinary infections, unexplained urinary symptoms, pelvic pain or recent urological or gynaecological surgery should seek medical advice before considering this practice.
- Avoid excessive muscular contraction or prolonged holding.
- Learn the practice from a suitably qualified yoga teacher who understands pelvic-floor anatomy.

Traditional Benefits of Vajroli / Sahajoli Mudra

According to traditional yogic descriptions, these practices are believed to:

- Regulate and tone the uro-genital system.
- Develop awareness and control of the specific muscular region.
- Help address psycho-sexual conflicts and unwanted sexual thoughts, as described in the traditional text.
- Conserve and redirect Pranic energy according to yogic philosophy.
- Support deeper meditative awareness.

These statements represent traditional yogic descriptions and should not be interpreted as established medical outcomes. Vajroli and Sahajoli Mudra are not treatments for urinary disorders, sexual dysfunction or reproductive-health conditions.

Difference Between Vajroli Mudra and Sahajoli Mudra

Conclusion

Vajroli Mudra and Sahajoli Mudra are specialized traditional practices involving awareness and control of the urethral region. Their subtle muscular action requires proper anatomical understanding and careful guidance.

They should be approached with respect, privacy and appropriate professional supervision. They are not ordinary beginner-level hand gestures and should never be confused with general pelvic-floor exercises.

8. Bandha – Meaning and Importance

8.1 Introduction to Bandha

What is Bandha?

The Sanskrit word **Bandha** means “to hold”, “tighten” or “lock”. In traditional yoga, Bandhas are specialized yogic techniques involving controlled muscular contractions and physical locks.

Bandhas are traditionally used to regulate and direct the flow of **Prana (vital energy)** within the body. According to yogic philosophy, their purpose is to contain Pranic energy in specific regions and redirect its flow towards **Sushumna Nadi**, supporting spiritual awakening and higher states of awareness.

Traditionally, Bandhas were classified as part of Mudra practices and were transmitted from teacher to student. Classical texts such as the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* discuss Mudras and Bandhas together. However, Bandhas are also recognized as an important group of yogic practices in their own right.

Importance of Bandha in Yoga

Bandhas have an important place in traditional Hatha Yoga. They are incorporated into certain Mudra and Pranayama techniques to develop control over the body, breath and subtle energy.

According to traditional yogic philosophy, the importance of Bandhas includes:

- **Regulation of Prana:** They are intended to control and redirect Pranic energy.
- **Concentration:** They help develop focused awareness during yogic practices.
- **Preparation for Meditation:** They are traditionally used as supporting techniques for deeper meditation.
- **Spiritual Awareness:** They are associated with the awakening of psychic faculties and the movement of Kundalini energy.
- **Integration with Other Practices:** They can be incorporated into advanced Mudra and Pranayama techniques after individual mastery.

These descriptions belong to the traditional yogic framework and should not be interpreted as scientifically established mechanisms of energy flow.

Types of Bandha

According to *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*, there are four main Bandhas:

1. **Jalandhara Bandha – The Throat Lock** wp:list wp:list-item Associated with the throat region. /wp:list-item wp:list-item Traditionally linked with Vishuddhi Chakra and Rudra Granthi. /wp:list-item /wp:list
2. **Moola Bandha – The Root Lock** wp:list wp:list-item Associated with the perineal and pelvic-floor region. /wp:list-item wp:list-item Traditionally linked with Mooladhara Chakra and Brahma Granthi. /wp:list-item /wp:list
3. **Uddiyana Bandha – The Abdominal Lock** wp:list wp:list-item Associated with the abdominal region. /wp:list-item wp:list-item Traditionally linked with Manipura Chakra and Vishnu Granthi. /wp:list-item /wp:list
4. **Maha Bandha – The Great Lock** wp:list wp:list-item A combined practice involving Jalandhara, Uddiyana and Moola Bandhas. /wp:list-item wp:list-item It brings the three individual locks together in a specific sequence. /wp:list-item /wp:list

Bandhas and the Three Granthis

In traditional yogic philosophy, **Granthis** are described as psychic knots that obstruct the free movement of Prana through Sushumna Nadi.

The three Granthis are associated with the three principal Bandhas:

According to traditional yoga, working with these Bandhas is intended to help overcome the limitations represented by the three Granthis and support the upward movement of Kundalini.

General Guidelines for Bandha Practice

Bandhas require proper preparation, body awareness and control over breathing.

Important guidelines include:

- Learn each Bandha separately before combining them.
- Develop familiarity with the correct muscular action.
- Avoid excessive contraction or unnecessary physical tension.
- Breath retention (Kumbhaka) should never be forced.
- Do not combine Bandhas with Pranayama without appropriate guidance.
- Observe the contraindications of each individual Bandha.
- Advanced combinations such as Maha Bandha should only be attempted after mastering the individual practices under a competent yoga teacher.

Conclusion

Bandhas are an important component of traditional Hatha Yoga. Through specific muscular locks and controlled awareness, they are intended to regulate Pranic energy and prepare the practitioner for advanced Mudra, Pranayama and meditation practices.

The four principal Bandhas—Jalandhara, Moola, Uddiyana and Maha—each have a distinct role in the traditional yogic system. Understanding their meaning, purpose and precautions is essential before learning their individual techniques.

8.2 Jalandhara Bandha – The Throat Lock

Meaning and Introduction

Jalandhara Bandha is traditionally known as the **Throat Lock**. It is one of the three principal yogic bandhas and involves a controlled position of the head and neck.

In traditional yogic philosophy, Jalandhara Bandha is associated with **Vishuddhi Chakra**, located in the throat region. It is believed to regulate the flow of Prana through the network of subtle energy channels (Nadis) in the neck.

The word *Jalan* is traditionally interpreted as “net” and *Dhara* as “stream” or “flow”. Thus, Jalandhara Bandha is understood as a lock that controls the flow of energy in the throat region.

Technique of Jalandhara Bandha

Traditional Method (Full Form)

1. Sit in Padmasana, Siddhasana or Siddha Yoni Asana, keeping the head and spine upright.
2. Place both palms on the knees and relax the whole body.
3. Close the eyes and become aware of the natural breathing process.
4. The traditional technique involves inhaling slowly and deeply, followed by internal breath retention (Antar Kumbhaka).
5. During retention, bend the head forward and bring the chin towards the chest.
6. In the full form, straighten the arms and gently press the hands against the knees. The shoulders move slightly upward and forward.
7. Maintain the position only for a few seconds initially, without strain.
8. To release, relax the shoulders, bend the arms, release the chin lock and slowly bring the head upright.
9. Exhale only after releasing the lock and returning the head to its normal position.

Important: The above is a traditional description of an advanced technique, not a recommendation for beginners to practise breath retention independently.

Variation of Jalandhara Bandha

A simpler and subtler variation is traditionally used in Kriya Yoga and in association with Pranayama.

In this variation, the practitioner gently bends the head forward so that the chin approaches the neck. It does not involve the strong arm and shoulder lock of the full form.

The variation should also be learned under appropriate guidance.

Breathing Pattern

Jalandhara Bandha is traditionally practised during:

- Antar Kumbhaka – internal breath retention.
- Bahir Kumbhaka – external breath retention.

Breath retention should never be forced. Beginners should not attempt prolonged Kumbhaka or combine this practice with other Bandhas without direct instruction from a competent yoga teacher.

Duration and Repetition

According to the traditional method described in the reference text:

- Begin with a very short, comfortable hold.
- The duration may be gradually increased only under proper guidance.
- The practice may be repeated up to five times.
- Allow breathing to return to normal between repetitions.

There is no need to compete for longer breath retention.

Awareness During Practice

Physical Awareness:

- The throat pit and neck region.
- Sensations associated with breath retention.

Traditional Spiritual Awareness:

- Vishuddhi Chakra, the energy centre associated with the throat.

Sequence of Practice

Jalandhara Bandha is traditionally practised in association with Mudra, other Bandhas and Pranayama.

When practised independently, the reference text places it after Asana and Pranayama and before meditation. However, combinations involving breath retention require prior mastery of the individual practices and competent supervision.

Potential Traditional Benefits

Traditional yoga literature attributes the following effects to Jalandhara Bandha:

1. It may encourage mental relaxation and inward awareness.
2. It is traditionally associated with reducing mental agitation, anger and restlessness.
3. It may support concentration and preparation for meditation.
4. The throat lock is traditionally associated with Vishuddhi Chakra.
5. Classical yoga texts describe an influence on the carotid sinus region and the regulation of breathing and circulation.

These are traditional descriptions and should not be interpreted as established medical benefits. Jalandhara Bandha is not a treatment for thyroid disorders, hypertension, anxiety or cardiovascular disease.

Contraindications and Safety Precautions

According to the reference text, Jalandhara Bandha should not be practised by people with:

- Cervical spondylosis.
- High intracranial pressure.
- Vertigo.
- High blood pressure.
- Heart disease.

Additional safety precautions:

- Do not force the chin against the chest.
- Avoid excessive pressure on the neck.
- Never strain or compete to hold the breath longer.
- Stop immediately if dizziness, vertigo, discomfort or a feeling of suffocation occurs.
- Do not attempt the full technique or breath-retention variations without a competent yoga teacher.
- People with neck problems or relevant medical conditions should seek professional advice before attempting the practice.

Important Practice Note: In the traditional full technique, the chin lock and arm lock must be released and the head returned to the upright position before breathing in or out. If a feeling of suffocation occurs, end the practice and rest rather than attempting to continue.

Conclusion

Jalandhara Bandha is an important traditional yogic practice involving the throat and neck region. It plays a role in classical Hatha Yoga and is often associated with Pranayama, Mudra and meditation.

Because the full technique involves neck positioning and breath retention, it should be approached gradually and learned from a qualified yoga teacher. Safety, comfort and individual physical capacity must always come first.

8.3 Moola Bandha – The Root Lock

Meaning and Introduction

Moola Bandha is traditionally known as the **Root Lock**. The Sanskrit word *Moola* means root, source, origin or foundation. In yogic philosophy, it refers to the root of the spine and the region associated with Mooladhara Chakra.

Moola Bandha involves the controlled contraction of specific pelvic floor muscles. In traditional Hatha Yoga, it is practised to develop awareness of the root region and regulate the flow of Prana.

It is one of the three principal Bandhas and is traditionally associated with **Brahma Granthi**, the first psychic knot.

Technique of Moola Bandha

The reference text describes two techniques.

Technique 1: Moola Bandha – Perineum Contraction

Stage 1: Rhythmic Contraction and Relaxation

1. Sit in a comfortable meditative posture, preferably Siddhasana or Siddha Yoni Asana.
2. Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
3. Become aware of the natural breathing process.
4. Bring attention to the perineal region.
5. Gently contract the pelvic floor muscles by drawing them upward.
6. Relax the muscles completely.
7. Continue contracting and relaxing rhythmically and evenly.
8. Breathe normally throughout the practice.

Stage 2: Sustained Contraction

1. Continue breathing normally. Do not hold the breath.
2. Slowly contract the specific pelvic floor muscles and maintain the contraction comfortably.
3. Focus on the physical sensation of the contraction.
4. Keep the remaining body relaxed.
5. Gradually develop awareness of the specific muscles associated with the Mooladhara region.
6. Slowly release the contraction and allow the muscles to relax completely.

The book describes repeating this practice up to 10 times, with complete relaxation between contractions.

Technique 2: Moola Bandha with Internal Breath Retention and Jalandhara Bandha

This is an advanced technique.

The traditional method combines Moola Bandha with internal breath retention (Antar Kumbhaka) and Jalandhara Bandha.

The sequence described in the reference text is:

1. Sit comfortably and relax the whole body.
2. Inhale deeply and retain the breath inside.
3. Apply Jalandhara Bandha.
4. Perform Moola Bandha.
5. Maintain the contraction without strain.
6. Release Moola Bandha first.

7. Release Jalandhara Bandha and bring the head upright.
8. Exhale gently.

The book describes up to 10 repetitions. This combined technique should only be learned and practised under the direct guidance of a competent yoga teacher. It is not suitable for independent experimentation with breath retention.

Breathing Pattern

For Technique 1, natural breathing is maintained throughout the practice. Breath retention is not required.

Technique 2 involves internal breath retention and Jalandhara Bandha. The book also mentions that the practice may be performed with external breath retention, but such advanced variations require expert supervision.

Duration and Repetition

According to the reference text:

- Rhythmic contraction and relaxation may be repeated up to 10 times.
- Sustained contraction should be released slowly and evenly.
- The advanced combined technique may be practised up to 10 times under competent supervision.

The duration should always remain comfortable. Avoid excessive contraction or prolonged breath retention.

Awareness During Practice

Physical Awareness:

- The specific point of pelvic floor contraction.
- The sensation of drawing the muscles upward and releasing them.

Traditional Spiritual Awareness:

- Mooladhara Chakra, associated with the root region.

Sequence of Practice

Moola Bandha is traditionally practised in association with Mudras, other Bandhas and Pranayama.

When practised independently, the reference text recommends performing it after Asanas and Pranayama and before meditation.

The individual Bandhas should first be learned separately before they are combined.

Potential Traditional Benefits

Traditional yoga literature attributes several effects to Moola Bandha:

1. It is traditionally believed to stimulate awareness of the pelvic region.
2. The practice is described as toning the uro-genital and excretory systems.
3. It is traditionally associated with the regulation and conservation of Pranic energy.
4. It is used as a preparatory practice for meditation and spiritual development.
5. Classical yoga texts associate it with the awakening of Mooladhara Chakra and the control or redirection of sexual energy.

These are traditional yogic descriptions, not established medical outcomes. Moola Bandha should not be considered a treatment for depression, urinary disorders, sexual dysfunction or other medical conditions.

Contraindications and Safety Precautions

The reference text states that Moola Bandha should only be practised under the guidance of a competent teacher. It also specifically advises against practising during menstruation.

Additional practical precautions:

- Do not contract the pelvic floor muscles forcefully.
- Avoid holding the breath during the basic technique.
- Do not confuse Moola Bandha with a general tightening of the entire pelvic floor.
- Stop if pain, discomfort or unusual pelvic pressure occurs.
- Anyone with pelvic floor dysfunction, recent pelvic surgery or an active urogenital condition should seek appropriate professional advice before attempting the practice.
- Do not attempt the advanced technique involving breath retention and Jalandhara Bandha without direct supervision.

Important Practice Note: Moola Bandha and Pelvic Floor Muscles

The reference text emphasizes that Moola Bandha involves specific muscles of the pelvic floor rather than contraction of the entire perineal region.

It describes the area of contraction differently in male and female anatomy. Developing awareness of the precise point of contraction may take time.

The book also mentions Ashwini Mudra and Vajroli Mudra as preparatory practices for developing awareness of the relevant muscles.

Moola Bandha should therefore not be treated as identical to ordinary pelvic floor exercises.

Conclusion

Moola Bandha is an important traditional practice in Hatha Yoga. It develops awareness and control of specific pelvic floor muscles and is associated with Mooladhara Chakra and the traditional concept of Pranic energy.

Beginners should first understand the basic contraction and relaxation technique with normal breathing. Advanced variations involving breath retention and other Bandhas must be learned under qualified supervision.

Practise with awareness, patience and without strain.

8.4 Uddiyana Bandha – The Abdominal Lock

Meaning and Introduction

Uddiyana Bandha is traditionally known as the **Abdominal Lock** or **Stomach Lift**. It is one of the three principal Bandhas in Hatha Yoga.

The Sanskrit word *Uddiyana* means “to rise up” or “to fly upward”. The practice is named after the upward movement of the diaphragm towards the chest when the abdominal lock is applied.

In traditional yogic philosophy, Uddiyana Bandha is associated with **Manipura Chakra**, located in the abdominal region. It is believed to help direct Prana upward through Sushumna Nadi.

Uddiyana Bandha is an advanced practice involving abdominal contraction after complete exhalation and external breath retention (Bahir Kumbhaka).

Preparatory Practice: Standing Abdominal Contraction

The reference text describes a standing preparatory technique before the main seated practice.

Traditional Method:

1. Stand upright with the feet approximately half a metre apart.
2. Inhale deeply through the nostrils.
3. Bend forward from the waist and exhale completely through the mouth.
4. Hold the breath outside.

5. Keep the spine approximately horizontal and bend the knees slightly.
6. Place both palms on the thighs, just above the knees, keeping the arms straight.
7. Bend the head forward without pressing the chin against the chest.
8. Perform a false inhalation by expanding the chest while keeping the glottis closed, without actually drawing air into the lungs.
9. Straighten the knees. This movement draws the abdomen inward and upward towards the spine.
10. Maintain the abdominal lock only for a comfortable duration without strain.
11. Release the abdominal lock and relax the chest.
12. Raise the head and torso to the upright position.
13. Slightly release the respiratory lock, then inhale slowly through the nose.
14. Wait until breathing returns to normal before beginning another round.

This preparatory technique should be learned under the guidance of a competent teacher.

Technique of Uddiyana Bandha – Seated Method

Traditional Method:

1. Sit in Siddhasana, Siddha Yoni Asana or Padmasana, keeping the spine erect.
2. Place both palms flat on the knees.
3. Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
4. Inhale deeply through the nostrils.
5. Exhale completely.
6. Retain the breath outside (Bahir Kumbhaka).
7. Lean forward and press the palms against the knees.
8. Straighten the elbows and raise the shoulders slightly.
9. Apply Jalandhara Bandha by bringing the chin towards the chest.
10. Draw the abdominal muscles inward and upward towards the spine.
11. Maintain the abdominal lock and external breath retention only for a comfortable duration.
12. Release the abdominal lock first.
13. Bend the elbows and lower the shoulders.
14. Raise the head and then slowly inhale.
15. Remain seated until breathing returns to normal.

Important: This is an advanced traditional technique. The steps above describe the method in the reference text and are not intended as a self-practice guide for beginners.

Breathing Pattern

Uddiyana Bandha is performed with **external breath retention only (Bahir Kumbhaka)**.

The sequence is:

- Inhale deeply.
- Exhale completely.
- Retain the breath outside.
- Apply the abdominal lock.

- Release the lock before inhaling again.

Never force the lungs to remain empty or attempt to prolong breath retention beyond a comfortable limit.

Duration and Repetition

According to the reference text:

- Begin with 3 rounds.
- Gradually increase the number of rounds as the body becomes accustomed to the practice.
- Experienced practitioners may gradually progress towards 10 rounds over a period of months.

Breathing must return to normal between rounds. Progress should be gradual and supervised.

Awareness During Practice

Physical Awareness:

- The abdominal region.
- The movement of the abdomen and the breathing process.

Traditional Spiritual Awareness:

- Manipura Chakra, the energy centre associated with the abdominal region.

Sequence of Practice

The reference text notes that Uddiyana Bandha may be easier when preceded by an inverted Asana.

Traditionally, it is practised in association with Mudras, other Bandhas and Pranayama.

When practised independently, the recommended sequence is after Asanas and Pranayama and before meditation.

The practitioner should first develop proficiency in:

- External breath retention (Bahir Kumbhaka).
- Jalandhara Bandha.
- Moola Bandha.

Only then should Uddiyana Bandha be attempted under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

Potential Traditional Benefits

Traditional yoga literature attributes the following effects to Uddiyana Bandha:

1. It is traditionally believed to stimulate the abdominal region and digestive fire.
2. Classical descriptions associate it with the functions of the pancreas and liver.
3. It is traditionally described as massaging and toning the abdominal organs.
4. It is associated with the solar plexus and Manipura Chakra.
5. Traditional yogic philosophy describes it as influencing the movement of Prana, Apana and Samana.
6. It is used as a preparatory practice for advanced yogic techniques such as Nauli.

These descriptions reflect traditional yogic concepts and should not be interpreted as proven medical effects. Uddiyana Bandha is not a treatment for digestive, pancreatic, liver, hormonal or metabolic disorders.

Contraindications and Safety Precautions

According to the reference text, Uddiyana Bandha should not be practised by people suffering from:

- Colitis.
- Stomach or intestinal ulcers.

- Diaphragmatic hernia.
- Major abdominal problems.
- High blood pressure.
- Heart disease.
- Glaucoma.
- Raised intracranial pressure.

The practice should also be avoided during pregnancy.

Additional Safety Precautions:

- Uddiyana Bandha is an advanced technique and must be learned under a competent yoga teacher.
- Practise only on a completely empty stomach, with the bowels emptied.
- Do not force abdominal suction or breath retention.
- Avoid practising immediately after meals.
- Stop if dizziness, pain, breathlessness or unusual discomfort occurs.
- Do not combine it with other Bandhas or Pranayama techniques without proper training.

Important Practice Note

The reference text recommends practising Uddiyana Bandha on an empty stomach, with the bowels emptied. It also identifies **Agnisara Kriya** as an excellent preparatory practice.

The diaphragm moves upward during the abdominal lock, which explains the traditional name “Stomach Lift”.

Conclusion

Uddiyana Bandha is an important advanced practice in Hatha Yoga. It involves an upward and inward movement of the abdominal region after complete exhalation and external breath retention.

It is traditionally associated with Manipura Chakra and the regulation of Pranic energy.

Because it involves breath retention and a strong abdominal lock, it should only be practised after appropriate preparation and under qualified supervision. Individual health conditions and physical capacity must always be considered.

8.5 Maha Bandha – The Great Lock

Meaning and Introduction

Maha Bandha is traditionally known as **The Great Lock**. The Sanskrit word *Maha* means “great”, while *Bandha* means “lock”, “hold” or “contraction”.

Maha Bandha is an advanced Hatha Yoga practice that combines the three principal Bandhas:

1. **Jalandhara Bandha** – The Throat Lock.
2. **Uddiyana Bandha** – The Abdominal Lock.
3. **Moola Bandha** – The Root Lock.

These three locks are applied successively during external breath retention (Bahir Kumbhaka).

In traditional yogic philosophy, Maha Bandha is associated with the three major energy centres:

- Mooladhara Chakra – Root region.
- Manipura Chakra – Abdominal region.
- Vishuddhi Chakra – Throat region.

It is traditionally practised to regulate and redirect Pranic energy and prepare the mind for deeper meditation.

Technique of Maha Bandha

Traditional Method

1. Sit in Siddhasana, Siddha Yoni Asana or Padmasana.
2. Place both hands on the knees.
3. Keep the spine erect and the head straight.
4. Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
5. Inhale slowly and deeply through the nose.
6. Exhale completely.
7. Retain the breath outside (Bahir Kumbhaka).
8. Apply Jalandhara Bandha first.
9. Apply Uddiyana Bandha next.
10. Apply Moola Bandha last.
11. Maintain all three Bandhas and external breath retention for a comfortable duration without strain.
12. Release the Bandhas in the reverse order: wp:list wp:list-item Release Moola Bandha first. /wp:list-item wp:list-item Release Uddiyana Bandha next. /wp:list-item wp:list-item Release Jalandhara Bandha last. /wp:list-item /wp:list
13. When the head is upright, inhale slowly.
14. Keep the eyes closed, relax the body and allow breathing to return to normal before beginning another round.

Important: This is an advanced traditional technique involving three simultaneous locks and external breath retention. It should not be attempted by beginners or without direct guidance from a competent yoga teacher.

Order of Applying and Releasing the Three Bandhas

The order is an essential feature of Maha Bandha.

The three Bandhas are applied in one order and released in the reverse order, as described in the reference text.

Breathing Pattern

Maha Bandha is traditionally practised with **external breath retention (Bahir Kumbhaka)**.

The sequence is:

- Inhale deeply.
- Exhale completely.
- Retain the breath outside.
- Apply Jalandhara, Uddiyana and Moola Bandhas successively.
- Release Moola, Uddiyana and Jalandhara Bandhas in reverse order.
- Inhale slowly after the head has returned to the upright position.

Breath retention must never be forced. The practitioner should release the locks before discomfort or breathlessness develops.

Duration and Repetition

According to the reference text:

- Practise only after mastering the three individual Bandhas.
- Once proficiency is attained, increase the practice gradually by one round.

- Progress towards a maximum of nine rounds as described in the book.
- Allow breathing to return to normal between rounds.

The number of rounds should never take priority over safe and comfortable practice.

Awareness During Practice

Physical Awareness:

- Perineal region.
- Abdominal region.
- Throat region.

The practitioner traditionally develops awareness of each region for a few seconds.

Traditional Spiritual Awareness:

- Mooladhara Chakra.
- Manipura Chakra.
- Vishuddhi Chakra.

Awareness is directed successively towards these three energy centres.

Sequence of Practice

Maha Bandha is traditionally practised in association with Pranayama and Mudra.

When practised independently, the reference text recommends performing it after Asanas and Pranayama and before meditation.

Essential Preparation:

Before attempting Maha Bandha, the practitioner must have mastered all three individual practices:

1. Jalandhara Bandha.
2. Uddiyana Bandha.
3. Moola Bandha.

The practitioner should also be proficient in external breath retention (Bahir Kumbhaka).

The book also mentions that Maha Bandha may be performed from Utthanpadasana, but this is an alternative advanced variation.

Potential Traditional Benefits

Traditional yoga literature attributes the following effects to Maha Bandha:

1. It is traditionally believed to combine the effects of Jalandhara, Uddiyana and Moola Bandhas.
2. It is associated with inward awareness and preparation for meditation.
3. It is traditionally described as influencing Pranic energy in the major Chakras.
4. Classical yogic philosophy describes the union of Prana, Apana and Samana in Manipura Chakra.
5. It is traditionally associated with deeper meditative awareness and spiritual development.

The reference text also makes claims about endocrine regulation and rejuvenation. These should be understood as traditional yogic descriptions, not scientifically established medical outcomes.

Maha Bandha is not a treatment for hormonal disorders, ageing, cardiovascular disease or any other medical condition.

Contraindications and Safety Precautions

According to the reference text, Maha Bandha should be avoided by people suffering from:

- High blood pressure.
- Low blood pressure.
- Heart conditions.
- History of stroke.
- Hernia.
- Stomach or intestinal ulcers.
- Recovery from any visceral or internal abdominal illness.

Pregnant women should also avoid this practice.

Additional Safety Precautions:

- Never attempt Maha Bandha before mastering the three individual Bandhas.
- Do not force external breath retention.
- Avoid excessive contraction of the throat, abdomen or pelvic floor.
- Release the Bandhas immediately if dizziness, chest discomfort, pain or breathlessness occurs.
- Do not practise without direct guidance from a competent yoga teacher.
- People with relevant medical conditions should obtain appropriate professional advice before considering this practice.

Conclusion

Maha Bandha represents the combined practice of the three principal Hatha Yoga locks: Jalandhara, Uddiyana and Moola Bandha.

It is considered an advanced practice because it requires coordination of the throat, abdominal and pelvic floor regions along with external breath retention.

In traditional yoga, Maha Bandha is associated with the regulation of Pranic energy and preparation for meditation.

It should only be attempted after mastering the individual Bandhas under qualified supervision. Safety, gradual progression and awareness are essential.

9. Uddiyana Bandha: Detailed Procedure, Benefits and Precautions

9.1 Introduction to Uddiyana Bandha

Uddiyana Bandha is an advanced yogic abdominal lock in which the abdominal wall is drawn inward and upward after complete exhalation while the breath is held outside.

The Sanskrit word *Uddiyana* means “to rise up” or “to fly upward.” The practice is traditionally called the abdominal lock or stomach lift because the diaphragm moves upward towards the chest during the technique.

In traditional Hatha Yoga, Uddiyana Bandha is associated with Manipura Chakra and is believed to influence the movement of Prana within the body.

It is an advanced practice and should be learned under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

9.2 Preparatory Practice: Standing Abdominal Contraction

The standing abdominal contraction is a preparatory method described for learning the basic abdominal lift.

Procedure:

1. Stand upright with the feet approximately half a metre apart.
2. Inhale deeply through the nostrils.
3. Bend forward from the waist and exhale completely through the mouth.
4. Hold the breath outside after emptying the lungs.
5. Keep the spine approximately horizontal and bend the knees slightly.
6. Place both palms on the thighs, just above the knees, with the arms straight.
7. Bend the head forward without pressing the chin against the chest.
8. Make a simulated inhalation by expanding the chest while keeping the glottis closed. Do not actually draw air into the lungs.
9. Straighten the knees gently. This movement helps draw the abdomen inward and upward towards the spine.
10. Maintain the abdominal lock only for a comfortable duration without straining.
11. Release the abdominal contraction and relax the chest.
12. Raise the head and torso to return to an upright position.
13. Release the remaining respiratory lock gently and inhale slowly through the nose.
14. Wait until normal breathing returns before beginning another round.

This preparatory practice should not be attempted forcefully or without proper instruction.

9.3 Main Practice: Seated Uddiyana Bandha

The traditional seated practice is performed in a meditative posture such as Siddhasana, Siddha Yoni Asana or Padmasana.

Procedure:

1. Sit in a comfortable meditative posture with the spine erect.
2. Place the palms flat on the knees.
3. Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
4. Inhale deeply through the nostrils.
5. Exhale fully and hold the breath outside.
6. Lean forward slightly and press the palms down on the knees.
7. Straighten the elbows and raise the shoulders.
8. Perform Jalandhara Bandha by bringing the chin towards the chest.
9. Draw the abdominal muscles inward and upward towards the spine.
10. Maintain the abdominal lock only for a comfortable duration without straining.
11. Release the abdominal contraction first.
12. Bend the elbows and lower the shoulders.
13. Raise the head and slowly inhale.
14. Remain seated until the breathing returns to normal.

Important: The above sequence is an educational description of the traditional technique, not a recommendation for unsupervised practice. The breath is held outside during Uddiyana Bandha.

9.4 Breathing Pattern and Duration

Uddiyana Bandha is traditionally performed with external breath retention, known as *Bahir Kumbhaka*.

- The lungs are emptied before the abdominal lock is applied.
- The breath is held outside during the practice.
- Breathing should return to normal between rounds.
- The book recommends beginning with 3 rounds and gradually increasing to a maximum of 10 rounds over several months as proficiency develops.

Breath retention must never be forced. The duration should not be increased independently or by competing with others.

9.5 Awareness During Practice

The traditional practice emphasizes two forms of awareness:

Physical Awareness

- Movement and contraction of the abdominal region.
- The breathing process.
- The upward movement of the diaphragm.

Spiritual Awareness

- Manipura Chakra, traditionally associated with the navel region.

In yogic philosophy, Uddiyana Bandha is believed to influence the movement of Prana, Apana and Samana Vayu and support the upward movement of energy through Sushumna Nadi. These are traditional yogic concepts rather than established anatomical mechanisms.

9.6 Potential Benefits of Uddiyana Bandha

Traditional yoga texts describe several potential benefits of this practice:

1. **Abdominal Awareness:** Develops awareness and control of the abdominal muscles.
2. **Abdominal Organ Stimulation:** Traditionally believed to massage and tone the abdominal region.
3. **Digestive Function:** Traditional descriptions associate the practice with stimulation of digestive activity.
4. **Manipura Chakra:** Considered an important practice for developing awareness of Manipura Chakra.
5. **Pranic Awareness:** Traditionally believed to influence the movement and distribution of Prana.
6. **Meditative Preparation:** May help experienced practitioners develop inward awareness and concentration.

These benefits are described within traditional yogic philosophy. They should not be interpreted as clinically proven effects or as treatment for digestive, pancreatic, liver, hormonal or psychological disorders. Uddiyana Bandha is not a substitute for medical care.

9.7 Precautions and Contraindications

Uddiyana Bandha is an advanced technique involving complete exhalation, external breath retention and abdominal contraction.

According to the traditional text, the practice should be avoided by people with:

- Colitis.

- Stomach or intestinal ulcers.
- Diaphragmatic hernia.
- Major abdominal problems.
- High blood pressure.
- Heart disease.
- Glaucoma.
- Raised intracranial pressure.
- Pregnancy.

Additional practical precautions:

- Practise only under the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.
- Learn external breath retention, Jalandhara Bandha and Moola Bandha before attempting this practice.
- Never practise immediately after eating.
- Avoid the practice if the abdomen or bowels are not empty.
- Do not force the abdominal contraction or hold the breath beyond comfort.
- Stop immediately if dizziness, pain, chest discomfort or unusual breathlessness occurs.
- People with other significant medical conditions or a history of abdominal surgery should seek appropriate medical advice before considering the practice.

9.8 Best Time and Sequence of Practice

The traditional text recommends:

- Practising on an empty stomach.
- Ensuring that the bowels are empty.
- Performing the practice after Asanas and Pranayama and before meditation when practised independently.
- Combining it with Mudra, Bandha and Pranayama practices only after adequate proficiency has been developed.

The book also notes that Agnisara Kriya is an excellent preparatory practice. However, it should itself be learned correctly before being used as preparation.

9.9 Conclusion

Uddiyana Bandha is an important advanced technique in Hatha Yoga. It combines abdominal control, external breath retention and focused awareness.

Although traditional yoga literature describes various physical and spiritual benefits, the practice requires careful preparation and proper supervision. Beginners should first develop a sound foundation in basic yoga practices and learn the necessary preparatory techniques from a qualified teacher.

Practise with awareness, patience and respect for your body's limitations.

10. General Guidelines and Safety Precautions for Yoga Practice

Yoga is a systematic discipline that involves physical postures, breathing techniques, cleansing practices, gestures, energy locks and meditation. To receive the potential benefits of yoga and minimize the risk of injury, every practitioner should follow appropriate guidelines and safety precautions.

Yoga should be practised according to individual capacity, age, physical condition and level of experience. Regularity, moderation, awareness and correct technique are more important than attempting difficult postures or advanced practices.

10.1 Choose the Right Time for Practice

The traditional yoga texts recommend early morning as a favourable time for yoga practice because the body and mind are generally fresh.

- Early morning, preferably before breakfast, is a suitable time for regular practice.
- The period around sunset may also be favourable.
- Practise at a regular time and, if possible, in the same place every day.
- Avoid rushing through the practices.
- Allow sufficient time for relaxation after completing the session.

Consistency and gradual progress are more important than practising for long durations.

10.2 Practise on an Empty Stomach

Yoga asanas and most pranayama practices should be performed on an empty stomach.

- Practise in the morning before eating, whenever possible.
- Alternatively, allow approximately 3–4 hours after a meal before practising.
- Empty the bladder and bowels before starting the session, if possible.
- Avoid heavy meals immediately before yoga practice.
- Advanced abdominal practices such as Nauli and Uddiyana Bandha require an empty stomach and should only be performed under proper guidance.

Practising with a full stomach may cause discomfort and interfere with comfortable breathing and movement.

10.3 Select a Suitable Place

The practice environment should be clean, quiet, comfortable and well ventilated.

Important considerations include:

- Choose a calm and clean room with sufficient space.
- Ensure adequate ventilation without strong drafts.
- Avoid dusty, smoky or polluted environments.
- Avoid practising in strong wind or extreme cold.
- Do not practise near furniture or objects that may cause injury during balancing or inverted postures.
- Avoid direct sunlight during intense practice, except for gentle early morning conditions where appropriate.

A peaceful environment helps maintain concentration and body awareness.

10.4 Wear Comfortable Clothing

Clothing should allow free movement of the body.

- Wear loose, light and comfortable clothes.
- Prefer breathable fabrics.
- Remove watches, jewellery and other accessories that may restrict movement.
- Remove spectacles when safe and practical, especially if they interfere with postures.

- Use a suitable yoga mat or firm folded blanket for support.

Avoid very soft or unstable surfaces that do not provide adequate support to the spine and body.

10.5 Maintain Proper Breathing

Breathing is an essential part of yoga practice.

- Breathe naturally and comfortably during basic asanas.
- Unless a particular technique instructs otherwise, breathe through the nose.
- Avoid unnecessary breath-holding.
- Do not force inhalation or exhalation.
- Keep the face, jaw and shoulders relaxed.
- During pranayama, follow the specific breathing instructions of the technique.
- Advanced breath retention (Kumbhaka) should only be learned under the guidance of a competent teacher.

If breathing becomes uncomfortable, stop the practice and return to normal breathing.

10.6 Follow the Correct Sequence of Practice

A well-organized yoga session generally includes preparation, physical practice, breathing, relaxation and meditation.

A possible sequence is:

1. Initial relaxation and preparation.
2. Loosening and warm-up exercises.
3. Yogasanas according to individual ability.
4. Relaxation in a comfortable posture.
5. Suitable pranayama practices.
6. Meditation or concentration practices.
7. Final relaxation.

Advanced Mudras and Bandhas should be included only when the practitioner has developed sufficient proficiency in their preparatory techniques.

Shatkarma practices are specialized cleansing techniques and should not be treated as routine exercises for everyone.

10.7 Practise According to Individual Ability

Every person has different levels of flexibility, strength, balance and endurance.

- Beginners should start with simple practices.
- Increase the duration and intensity gradually.
- Never force the body into a posture.
- Avoid comparing your flexibility or performance with others.
- Use suitable modifications when necessary.
- Stop if a posture produces sharp pain, dizziness or unusual discomfort.

Yoga is not a competition. Comfortable, controlled and attentive practice should always be the priority.

10.8 Learn Advanced Practices Under a Competent Teacher

Certain yogic practices require technical knowledge and careful supervision.

These include:

- Advanced Pranayama and Kumbhaka.
- Shatkarma practices such as Dhauti, Basti and Nauli.
- Advanced Mudras such as Khechari and Akashi Mudra.
- Bandhas such as Jalandhara, Moola and Uddiyana Bandha.
- Inverted postures and other advanced asanas.

Incorrect performance may cause physical discomfort or injury. These techniques should be learned progressively under a competent and experienced yoga teacher rather than solely from books, videos or online instructions.

10.9 Health Conditions and Special Precautions

People with specific health conditions should seek appropriate medical advice and individualized yoga guidance before starting or modifying a practice.

Special attention is required in the following situations:

- Heart disease or uncontrolled blood pressure.
- Glaucoma, retinal disorders or recent eye surgery.
- Spinal disorders, cervical problems or severe back pain.
- Hernia, abdominal ulcers or recent abdominal surgery.
- Vertigo, epilepsy or a history of stroke.
- Pregnancy and the postnatal period.
- Acute illness, fever or significant physical weakness.

Not every yoga practice is suitable for every individual. The contraindications of each asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha and cleansing technique must be considered separately.

10.10 Avoid Yoga During Acute Illness

Intensive yoga and pranayama should generally be avoided during acute illness.

The traditional text advises against pranayama during illness. Gentle breath awareness or comfortable abdominal breathing while lying in Shavasana may be considered when appropriate, but only if it does not worsen symptoms.

Avoid strenuous practice during fever, acute infection, severe weakness or significant physical discomfort. Resume regular practice gradually after recovery.

10.11 Do Not Force or Overpractice

Excessive practice does not necessarily produce better results.

- Do not hold difficult postures beyond your comfortable capacity.
- Avoid excessive stretching or sudden movements.
- Do not force breath retention.
- Do not perform rapid or forceful breathing without proper training.
- Allow adequate rest between demanding practices.
- Stop immediately if you experience chest pain, faintness, severe dizziness, unusual breathlessness or sharp pain. Seek medical assessment when symptoms are significant or persistent.

The principle of moderation is central to safe yoga practice.

10.12 Bathing and Personal Hygiene

Maintaining personal hygiene supports a comfortable practice environment.

- A bath or shower before practice may be taken when convenient.
- If a bath is not possible, wash the hands, face and feet.
- Wear clean practice clothes.
- Keep the yoga mat and practice area clean.
- The traditional text recommends waiting at least 30 minutes after pranayama before taking a bath, allowing the body temperature to normalize.

10.13 Regularity, Patience and Self-Awareness

Regular practice helps develop familiarity with yoga techniques.

- Practise consistently rather than irregularly for long durations.
- Begin with manageable sessions.
- Increase practice gradually over time.
- Observe the body's response during and after each session.
- Include adequate relaxation.
- Maintain patience and avoid unrealistic expectations.

The purpose of yoga is not simply to perform difficult postures, but to develop awareness, balance, discipline and a healthier way of living.

10.14 Conclusion

Yoga is a valuable discipline when practised with proper understanding, awareness and moderation. Following the correct techniques, respecting individual limitations and learning advanced practices under competent supervision are essential for safe participation.

A safe yoga practice should never involve force, competition or unnecessary risk.

Practise regularly. Progress gradually. Listen to your body. Make safety an essential part of your yoga journey.

11. Conclusion: Yoga – A Holistic Path to Health, Awareness and Well-being

Yoga is much more than a collection of physical exercises. It is a holistic discipline that brings together the body, breath and mind through systematic practices and self-awareness.

As discussed throughout this guide, the different branches of traditional Hatha Yoga offer a structured approach to personal development.

Yogasana helps develop physical awareness, flexibility, balance and stability. Regular and appropriate practice can support mobility, posture and physical well-being.

Pranayama focuses on the regulation and awareness of breathing. Practised correctly, it can support relaxation, concentration and a greater understanding of the relationship between breath and mind.

Shatkarma consists of six traditional yogic cleansing practices: Neti, Dhauti, Nauli, Basti, Kapalbhati and Trataka. These are specialized techniques, and several require careful preparation and direct guidance from a competent

teacher.

Mudra represents physical and mental gestures or attitudes traditionally used to deepen concentration, inward awareness and meditative experience.

Bandha refers to specific yogic locks involving controlled muscular engagement. Jalandhara, Moola and Uddiyana Bandha, together with Maha Bandha, occupy an important place in advanced Hatha Yoga practices.

These practices are interconnected, but they are not all suitable for every individual or every level of experience. Beginners should establish a foundation with simple and comfortable techniques before progressing to advanced practices.

The traditional concepts of Prana, Nadis and Chakras provide an important philosophical framework for understanding Hatha Yoga. At the same time, traditional descriptions of benefits should be distinguished from scientifically established medical outcomes.

Safe practice requires correct technique, regularity, moderation and respect for individual physical limitations. People with health conditions should seek appropriate medical advice and individualized guidance before beginning advanced practices.

Ultimately, the purpose of yoga is not to achieve difficult postures or demonstrate physical ability. It is to cultivate balance, discipline, awareness and a harmonious relationship between body and mind.

At **Wellness Yoga Institute**, we encourage a gradual, educational and responsible approach to yoga and wellness, helping individuals develop healthy habits through appropriate yoga practices and lifestyle awareness.

Start with the basics. Practise with awareness. Progress with patience. Make yoga a part of your healthy lifestyle.

Educational Disclaimer

This article is intended for general educational and informational purposes. It presents traditional yogic concepts and practices based primarily on the reference book listed above.Descriptions of traditional benefits, Prana, Nadis and Chakras represent the philosophical framework of yoga and should not automatically be interpreted as scientifically established medical effects.The procedures described in this article are not a substitute for practical instruction from a qualified yoga teacher or advice from a registered healthcare professional. Individuals with medical conditions should seek appropriate professional guidance before attempting yoga practices,

12. References

Primary Reference

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This guide is intended for general educational and informational purposes. Traditional descriptions of Prana, Nadis, Chakras and yogic benefits should not automatically be interpreted as scientifically established medical effects. The practices described are not a substitute for instruction from a qualified yoga teacher or advice from a registered healthcare professional. Individuals with medical conditions should seek appropriate professional guidance before attempting yoga practices, particularly advanced techniques.