

Pralaya is the passive phase when all manifestations are dormant; it is a period of cosmic dissolution or turning away (entropy), from the outer phase of the creative process. Periods of deep rest are essential for all of us, as it allows us to release some of the tensions that are inimical (that is hostile), to harmonious living. A little stress can be conducive to our well being and give tone and vibrancy to life; whereas, stress in excess, can cause strain and distort the very fabric of our being. Yoga is the art of achieving peaceful inter-function at every level from the ground up, and unfortunately, many are only familiar with the dynamic and physical aspects, that have become the bread and butter of modern yoga.

It is important that the yoga teacher learns the art of deep relaxation, including a session of around 15 minute's duration at the end of a class. This is not easy in cold halls with hard wood block floors, and will likely require some warm clothing, or covering. To be successful a teacher needs to be relaxed within, or at least have committed the feeling of being relaxed to memory, so that they can successfully guide, both the class and themselves.

Pralaya (maximum entropy), is a philosophical concept, and is analogous to a vast ocean, with the sea representing a limitless ocean of Sentient Power, in which Shiva as pure consciousness has destroyed all illusion. Truth is the formal aspect of reality, and during pralaya; there is a 'letting go' and 'letting God', with Truth being re-absorbed back into the heart of God.

'Letting go', does not mean the loss of everything we know and love; but rather entering a phase of re-absorption, and becoming one with total reality. The better we are able to relax, the more likely it is that our lives and relationships will fall into perspective, and many are the techniques that can help us achieve this. The best being those most familiar to the teacher as feeling and understanding is carried by the words we use.

Visualisation can be a useful aid in helping take a step from the stressful present, into the healing stillness of deep relaxation. For example; a Zen Garden will often embody the peace and tranquillity experienced during meditation, and help form a unique heartfelt Mandala, that will never be lost.

Mandala's can be simple or complex, such as a simple white gate which can provide a link or portal to a higher dimension. To help guide yourself and others; create your own Zen Garden, by letting your feelings, crystallise into a perfect Mandala. The form and structure of your Garden must have perfect symmetry, any water or lake will represent a peaceful heart and mind. If there are golden carp in the waters, these will represent your governing concepts or eternal truths that lie close to your heart. If you include the lotus or the rose, they can be seen as spiralling upward, each a beautiful expression of each chakra. This image as it becomes subliminal, will always be there to influence future incarnations, Nothing is ever lost and once established will be a subtle influence throughout this life and into the next.



(Please note, this image is courtesy of Bizarrocomics.com)

The Quiet Mind Enjoying the refreshing stillness of a quiet mind, promotes health, and puts the world back into perspective. The Mind of the senses often distorts reality, with the emotional content of things past, distorting the present. The well known aphorism of Patanjali, tell us that Yoga is controlling the activities of the mind (chitta). This is easier said than done; as most of us are entertained by the endless flow of thoughts that pass through the mind. There can be nothing more refreshing, than practising the art of stilling the Mind and becoming fully conscious in the present moment. This is particularly relevant when experiencing tension or stress, as switching off the mind stuff, is not unlike turning a key that turns of the flow of nervous energy throughout the body.

We have all experienced those moments of being pre-occupied and lost in thought. This is where a simple training program, of learning to "Let Go and Let God", can help change your life. Start by learning to stay 'Stop'; during those tangled up moments when caught up by mind stuff, and then as if waking from a troubled sleep, become aware of your surroundings and become completely still; so that little by little, we regain possession of ourselves.

These still moments provide the opportunity to regain a sense of perspective, and experience a refreshing inner stillness that helps internal organs normalise function. Most important, if practised several times daily, it strengthens the control that we have over our thought processes. Purity of heart is to will one thing; but how many of us think and act without some hidden agenda, or make decisions without any sense of commitment. It is during quiet moments that we can become aware of ourselves at the physical, emotional and mental and spiritual levels and realign ourselves to that which in our hearts we know to be true.

'Quiet breath – quiet mind – remember the breath'

Jnana Yoga is not the accumulation of knowledge for its own sake, but the development of understanding, and comprehension of the knowledge gained. A computer can store vast amounts of data but is not the mind or consciousness that interprets it. A donkey can be loaded down with numerous books, yet still remain a donkey. Knowledge is the level of knowing which we understand things, and this can vary from person to person. A Jnana Yogi, works as best they can, to transform their store of everyday knowledge into a body of wisdom.

Wisdom is the total formal content of the soul and informs us at many levels, through our feelings, our dreams, and store of mental impressions. We are considered wise when we have sound judgement and can make the best use of knowledge. The Yogi recognises two levels of thought; the *manomayakosha* or lower mind, the mental sheath, associated with the five senses; and the *vijnanamakosha* or higher mind, which is the enlightened or conscious mind.

The lower mind, equips us for life on earth, and is often without ethical or moral consideration; as to how our actions affect each other. The lower mind activity is often the subject of many T.V programs, like Fake Britain. The higher mind, if we have one, prepares us for the life of the spirit and looks inward toward the light of consciousness for guidance.

Jnana Mudra as adopted by yogis during meditation reminds them of their highest aims; the thumb symbolising the highest level of Will; that is the level of which consciousness initiates action; the Index finger representing Intelligence or Consciousness. The way we think, and feel, affects our sense of well-being. There is a powerful relationship between the ways we think and feel; as thoughts we are not happy with, we tend to keep hidden, and this can lead to psychosomatic disorders.

Feelings and emotion not only disturb the nervous system but also affect the chemistry of the blood, hence the study of bio-chemistry and the all too familiar drug prescriptions, for dealing with ill health and emotional problems.

Jnana is the supraconscious wisdom that crystallises and patterns creation. To glimpse this level of reality is the highest aim of Jnana Yoga, and the start of a developmental process that leads toward an eternal body of light. To assist this process, spend a little time daily to become still; then feel for the level from which thoughts arise in the mind. Only keep those thoughts which are true and which you are happy to carry with you, from this life to the next.

Kriya Yoga is the name given to the actions that purify and strengthen the body, both physically and psychologically, in preparation for the experience of the transmutative life force experienced during meditation and yoga practice. It is called the path of the good son, and referred to by Paramhansa Yogananda, as the Yoga of the householder.

Kriya refers specifically to the last three '*nyamas*' as duties for everyday life, namely '*Tapas*' Austerity, '*Swadhyaya*' Self-Study, '*Ishwara-pranidhana*' Attentiveness to God. It is the Yoga most suitable for the western practitioner, and was revived by Lahiri Mahasaya who lived 1828-1895, and who was unusual among Indian holy men, in that he had a job, was a family man with children.

Any form of action or kriya, is not a blind re-action to an external situation, but an act of will for the greater good. It can take many forms from politeness to others, a moderate diet, control of the mind and regular yoga practice. Any form of self discipline awakens us to the established inertias that resist change; strengthens our central will, and helps us grow in self understanding. The householder does not live in isolation and has others to consider. They do not live in isolation from the world, such as in a cave on a mountain top. They live in the hurly burly of daily life, which provides the difficulties needed for development.

Patanjali defines Yoga as controlling the activities of the mind; which is quite a difficult thing to do when the senses are pulling us, first in one direction and then the other. To withdraw the mind from movement, and enter the stillness that transcends mental activity, is not abandoning ship, but rather placing oneself in a position of command. To awaken the wisdom mind, is to awaken the intuitive response from our vast storehouse of spiritual knowledge, and to which our thoughts are but the stepping stones.

Feeling is the key to unlocking the intuitive response, after first stilling the mind. A mind that is locked into one thought chasing another is confused by a variety of impulses, and feelings that obscures the clarity that lies within.

The wisdom mind arises from inner clarity, and the love that transcends all differences. The techniques of yoga are there to bridge the gap between the lower mind and the all comprehending mind of the Divine, sometimes referred to as the mind of the heart.

Kriyas are actions that purify at every level from the physical to the spiritual. They are pure uncomplicated acts of will that focus heart and mind on that which is essential. Whether asana or pranayama the aim is to make the link between the underlying space (stillness), from which has arisen all movement.

Asana is held against an undifferentiated background of stillness; pranayama is an expression of life force that breathes life into all living things, or remains poised between breaths in moments of realization. It is from moments of stillness that we touch the reality that lies within, and grow in Self understanding. Kriya yoga is not different from Christian yoga as it does not serve self interest but aspires to a level of action as expressed by the words 'Thy Will Be Done'

The householder, beset by the problems of daily life, through study, prayer or repetition of sacred mantra, refines and purifies his actions. Any form of self-discipline sets the pattern for the future; physical exercise will help to promote health. *Actions that are consciously initiated (kriya)*, transform the spiritual body, so that the psyche or soul, not unlike the transformation of the caterpillar to butterfly, awakens the Self (*atman*), to much wider and freer dimensions of reality.

The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.

William James

***I slept and dreamt that life was joy.
I awoke and saw that life was service.
I acted and behold, service was joy.***

Rabindranath Tagore

***If we simply take a step and see what happens, our world opens a little bit.
Then we can take another step. Every step enlarges our view;
everything we do shows us something.***

Cheri Huber

You May Know Me

You may know me.

I am your constant companion.

I am your greatest helper; and I am your heaviest burden.
I will push you onward or drag you down to failure.

I am at your command.

Half of the tasks you do might as well be turned over to me.

I'm able to do them quickly.

I'm able to do them the same every time if that's what you want.

I am easily managed. All you've got to do is be firm with me.

Show me exactly how you want it done and after a few lessons
I'll do it automatically the rest of your life.

I am the servant of all great men and women, of course;
and I am servant to all the failures as well.

I've made all the great individuals who have ever been great.

And I've made all the failures that have ever failed.

But I work with all the precision of a marvellous computer.
I work with the intelligence of the human being.

Be easy on me and I will destroy you.

Be firm with me and I'll put the whole world at your feet.

What am I?

I am A Habit!

(Submitted by Barbara Tomkinson)