



I would like to thank

Stephanie Hii,
for her re-creation of the Nei Jing Tu,

Joe Barnett,
for his editing of the many versions of this manuscript,

Murielle Burellier
Michelle Finch
Anat Geiger
Suzee Grilley
Dick Mendels
Ehud Neuhaus
Kathy Paez
Jo Phee
Sebastian Pucelle
Marcel van de Vis Heil,

for their help in the development of the techniques described in this essay.

Forward*

This essay describes the theory of the chakras and their importance when trying to raise our consciousness to the higher levels of spiritual reality that lie behind this physical world. It outlines the use of breathing techniques and subtle muscular contractions called bandhas and mudras. Breathing, bandhas, and mudras, when used together, help a yogini, a practitioner of yoga, learn to control the life-force in her body, which is called Prana.

All of the theories and techniques in this essay are derived from the Indian tradition of hatha yoga. But the final chapter is an interpretation of an image from the Chinese taoist tradition: The Nei Jing Tu.

I have leaned heavily on three texts by my teacher, Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama:

Theories of the Chakras. Published 1981. ISBN 0-8356-0551-5

Toward a Superconsciousness. Published 1990. ISBN 0-89581-914-7

Awakening the Chakras and Emancipation. Published 2003. ISBN 4-87960-708-8

Dr. Motoyama's texts are most readily available from the website of the California Institute for Human Science: CIHS.edu

*This version of this essay was completed during the month of **November 2023**. I have amended my description of the Granthis on page 9. And I have reordered and simplified the instructions on pranayama, starting on page 16.

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Chapter 1: Basic Theory

Shiva-prana and Shakti-prana flow down Sushumna

In yoga theory, the human body is formed and maintained by a life-force called Prana, with a capital 'P.' Prana is best translated as 'intelligent energy.' Prana is a blend of two mutually interacting powers: **shiva-prana and shakti-prana**. Shiva-prana is the guiding intelligence. Shakti-prana is the animating power.

When a human egg is fertilized, Prana enters into it. Shakti-prana manifests itself as the power to multiply the original egg cell into trillions of new cells. Shiva-prana is the intelligence that guides the growth of these cells. Shiva-prana determines which cells become muscles, and which cells become bones, which cells become liver, and which cells become skin. Shiva-prana is the guiding blueprint of the form the body will take. Shakti-prana is the power that creates the biological tissues that bring this plan to life.

A reservoir of Prana is in the brain. And a river of this Prana is continually flowing from the brain, down the spinal cord. This river of Prana is called '**Sushumna**' in Sanskrit. As infants, this Prana grew the body. As adults, this Prana heals and maintains the body.

The reservoir of Prana in the top of the brain is considered a '**chakra**.' A chakra is a center of consciousness and energy, a center of shiva-prana and shakti-prana. As Prana flows down Sushumna, it passes through six other chakras. In each chakra, Prana's two aspects of shiva-prana and shakti-prana '**pull-apart**,' their separate functions become more distinct. In the chakras closer to the brain, **shiva-prana dominates**. When we try to think, plan, or understand something, we activate our upper chakras, especially the two in our brain.

The further down the spine Prana flows, the more **shakti-prana dominates**. The two lowest chakras are the source of instinctive, unconscious power and desire. Because the origins of our instincts, impulses, reflexes, and desires are opaque to our consciousness, shakti-prana is said to be 'sleeping' in the first chakra, at the base of the spine.

It is important to remember that there is **never a complete separation** between shiva-prana and shakti-prana. There is only a relative dominance of one over the other. The goal of the yogini is to reunite them and reverse their flow back up Sushumna to their origin.

Chapter 1: Basic Theory

Seven Chakras

The 'pulling apart' of shiva-prana and shakti-prana occurs in the chakras. **The chakras are centers of consciousness and energy that convert the life-force as it flows down Sushumna.** Dr. Motoyama taught that each of the seven chakras has a **root and a flower.** The roots of the chakras are in Sushumna, within the brain and spine. The flowers of the chakras spread outward toward the periphery of the torso or skull.

The location of the chakras are listed below. They are traditionally numbered from the coccyx to the top of the brain.

7th. **Sahasrara**, the seventh chakra. The flower of Sahasrara is '**Brahman's Gate,**' a soft spot in a newborn baby's skull that hardens a few months after birth. The root of Sahasrara is the top of the brain.

6th. **Ajna**, the sixth chakra. The flower of Ajna is the '**Third Eye.**' The root of Ajna is near to where the brain meets the spinal cord. Some yoginis subjectively feel the root of the sixth chakra near the 'back of the head.' Others feel it as 'the center of the brain.'

5th. **Vishuddhi**, the fifth chakra. The flower of Vishuddhi is the throat. The root of Vishuddhi is near the **seventh cervical vertebra.**

4th. **Anahata**, the fourth chakra. The flower of Anahata is the heart. The root of Anahata is near the **fifth thoracic vertebra.**

3rd. **Manipura**, the third chakra. The flower of Manipura is the upper abdomen. The root of Manipura is near the **second lumbar vertebra.**

2nd. **Svadhithana**, the second chakra. The flower of Svadhithana is the lower abdomen. The root of Svadhithana is near the **second sacral vertebra.**

1st. **Muladhara**, the first chakra. The flower of Muladhara is the floor of the pelvis. The root of Muladhara is within the **coccyx.**

Chapter 1: Basic Theory

Three Bodies

In yoga theory, the human being is a composite of three bodies: the causal, the astral, and the physical.

The **causal body** consists of the ideas and beliefs that form our personality. It is formed first.

The **astral body** consists of the emotions and desires that motivated our birth in this particular time and place. It is formed second.

The **physical body** is the vehicle through which we sense and react to our physical world. It is formed last.

Chakras are the links between these three bodies. The three bodies are knit together through the chakras.

Purusha

All three bodies are created things. All created things perish. This means our physical, astral, and causal bodies will all perish. But the true nature of a human being is immortal: it is beyond the three bodies. This state of 'unembodied' existence is called '**Purusha**' in Sanskrit. Its nature is said to be of three eternal qualities: Existence-Consciousness-Bliss, 'Sat-Chit-Ananda' in Sanskrit.

Chapter 1: Basic Theory

Reversing the Downward and Outward Flow

In yogic theory, the energy of all our **uncompleted desires** and the **karmic debts** created by our selfish actions are stored as seeds in our chakras. After we die, we live for a time in the causal or astral worlds. Eventually the shakti-prana of our unfinished karma or our unsatisfied desires reawakens. This activated shakti-prana draws our shiva-prana down into a fertilized human egg, where the two pranas will grow a new body. This new body will be the vehicle through which we will try to satisfy our awakening desires or fulfill our karmic debts.

This cycle repeats over and over until we have exhausted our desires and resolved our karmic debts in the physical dimension. Then, there will be a similar cycle of incarnations between the causal and astral worlds.

When a yogini tires of the perpetual pursuit of 'worldly pleasures,' she will begin to yearn for 'home.' She will yearn to live again as Purusha, the state of Existence-Consciousness-Bliss beyond the constrictions of the three bodies.

To do this, she must **fuse her shiva-prana with her shakti-prana**. Then, she will be able to **reverse** the flow of both pranas and **raise her consciousness** upwards into the spiritual realms from which she has descended. She will then shake off the painful delusion of death and once again live as an 'immortal.'

The energy formed by the fusion of shiva-prana and shakti-prana is called 'Amrit,' which means '**Nectar**.' Nectar is 'reborn' Prana. It is the re-unification of the shiva-prana and shakti-prana that had 'pulled apart' as the yogini's consciousness descended through the chakras.

Three Forms of Nectar

Nectar is fused and refined in three stages, each one more subtle. The analogy is the three forms of water: solid, liquid, and vapor.

1st. When the shiva-prana and shakti-prana circulating through the spine fuse together, they form the '**Vajra Nectar**.'

2nd. When the shiva-prana and shakti-prana of the Vajra Nectar are further refined, they fuse and become the '**Chitrini Nectar**.'

3rd. When the shiva-prana and shakti-prana of the Chitrini Nectar are further refined, they fuse to form the '**Brahma Nectar**.'

Flow of Nectar. Every time a yogini successfully creates one of the three Nectars, it rises upwards into the brain. Not all of this Nectar can be absorbed, so some of it trickles back down onto the soft palate. This downward flow of Nectar is experienced as uplifting and rejuvenating. To become 'immortal,' a yogini must 'drink Nectar.'

Chapter 1: Basic Theory

Four Layers of Sushumna

Sushumna, the central river of Prana, has four layers. These layers are nested inside each other like four Russian dolls. Each of these layers is a '**nadi**.' Nadi means 'tube' or 'channel' in Sanskrit.

The first, outermost layer of Sushumna is called '**Sushumna Nadi**.' Sushumna nadi stretches from the coccyx, the first chakra, to the top of the head.

The second layer of Sushumna is called '**Vajra Nadi**.' Vajra Nadi stretches from the second sacral vertebra, the second chakra, to the top of the head.

The third layer of Sushumna is called '**Chitrini Nadi**.' Chitrini Nadi stretches from the second lumbar vertebra, the third chakra, to the top of the head.

The fourth layer, the innermost core of Sushumna, is called '**Brahma Nadi**.'

Three Granthis

Bridges between Layers

Granthi means 'knot' in Sanskrit. There are three granthis. They are traditionally described as restrictions to the flow of Prana within Sushumna. I believe they restrict the flow of Prana in different levels of Sushumna.

When an adequate amount of Nectar is circulating through one layer of Sushumna, one of these knots will 'burst open.' This allows the Nectar to flow into a deeper level of Sushumna, and the yogini will be drawn into a deeper level of astral or causal awareness.

The Brahma Granthi is in the sacrum, between the first and second chakras. It restricts the flow of Prana in the Vajra Nadi.

The Vishnu Granthi is near the heart, between the fourth and fifth chakras. I believe it restricts the flow of Prana in the Chitrini and Brahma Nadis. So it must be opened by two Nectars.

The Shiva Granthi is in the medulla oblongata, where the spinal cord joins the brain, near the root of the sixth chakra. I believe it restricts the flow of Prana in the Vajra, Chitrini, and Brahma Nadis. So it must be opened by three Nectars.

Note: It can be confusing that the first granthi is called Brahma Granthi but the deepest layer of Sushumna is called Brahma Nadi. But these are the names passed down to us.

Chapter 1: Basic Theory

Levels of Awareness

Each time shakti-prana and shiva-prana fuse into a Nectar, this Nectar flows into a deeper layer of Sushumna. When this happens, the yogini will subjectively **experience new levels of awareness.**

Physical Body. When a yogini first begins her spiritual practices, she is influencing the shiva-prana and shakti-prana of the physical dimension. These pranas circulate in the outermost layer of Sushumna, **Sushumna Nadi**. The circulation of these pranas creates a sense of physical well-being and mental calm.

Lower Astral Body. When the pranas circulating through Sushumna Nadi are fused into **Vajra Nectar**, it will flow into the **Vajra Nadi**. The yogini will become aware of astral phenomena, and how these phenomena influence the physical world.

Higher Astral Body. When the pranas circulating through Vajra Nadi fuse into **Chitrini Nectar**, it will flow into the **Chitrini Nadi**. The yogini's understanding will extend beyond her personal karma. She will be able to understand the karma of others, and the karma of groups of people such as families, tribes, and nations.

Causal Body. When the pranas circulating through Chitrini Nadi fuse into **Brahma Nectar**, it will flow into the **Brahma Nadi**. The yogini's understanding will extend beyond her personal karma and group karma. Her understanding will expand to include the laws of creation.

Purusha. Circulating the Brahma Nectar within Brahma Nadi will eventually dissolve all karmic attachment to the three bodies. The yogini's sense of self, residing in her heart, will realize it is Purusha, independent of all bodies.

Phases of Chakra Meditation

Early phases of chakra meditation

Meditation means many things to many people, so I want to be more precise about what I mean by chakra meditation. It is my understanding that chakra meditation progresses in overlapping phases of experience. The first three phases are sensorial in nature:

1. **The Inner Sense of Touch.** Focusing the mind on a chakra means feeling Prana as heat, movement, or pressure in your spine or torso.
2. **The Inner Sense of Sight.** Chakras radiate astral lights. As your meditation deepens you will see these lights reflected in your Third Eye, the flower of the sixth chakra.
3. **The Inner Sense of Sound.** The flow of Prana within the chakras creates astral sounds called '**Nada.**' As your meditation deepens, you will hear these sounds. In the beginning you might hear these nada in just one ear, but with time the sound will seem to emanate from a spot near the back of your head, or the center of your brain.

The nada of the first chakra is said to be like a buzzing bee; the second chakra is like a flute; the third is like a harp; the fourth is like a large bell; the fifth is like ocean waves; and the sixth and seventh are the harmonious combination of all these sounds as OM. Of course, these descriptions are approximate.

Try to become absorbed into whatever nada sound you hear. Try to follow it to its source. If you are deeply absorbed, you might hear several sounds at once. If this happens, focus on the dominant sound until the next 'background' sound comes forward.

Chakra Purification and Chakra Awakening

Later phases chakra meditation

Feeling Prana, seeing lights, and hearing nada sounds are soothing and calming experiences, but it is our hope that these phenomena will gradually deepen into perceptions of the astral or causal dimensions of our existence. This phase of development is called '**Chakra Awakening.**' But before the chakras awaken as organs of higher perceptions, the yogini will go through phases of '**Chakra Purification.**'

Meditation and pranayama increase the flow of Prana into the chakras. This awakens the **seeds of karma** stored in them. These seeds manifest as physical restlessness, desires, emotions, memories, and thoughts. These manifestations keep us identified with our bodies and block our perceptions of the subtle realms. We must patiently and maturely deal with these karmic seeds. This is called '**Chakra Purification.**' Chakra Purification and Chakra Awakening alternate in various phases of dominance. This process lasts years and years.

Chakra Purification

Here are five strategies for dealing with Seeds of Karma that arise during meditation:

1. **Observe them.** Just observe them, without judging them or trying to change them. It can be shocking or morbidly fascinating to observe the thoughts, memories, and emotions that arise. But learning to observe them, without becoming elated or depressed, slowly develops the objectivity needed to deal with them effectively. Their energy will slowly dissipate, and then you will be able to proceed to one of the next four strategies.
2. **Dismiss them.** The lowest level of distracting concerns that arise during meditation are our everyday preoccupations of work and family. Frequently, these concerns are trivial and can be dismissed simply by saying to yourself, 'I will deal with this later.'
3. **Neutralize them.** Thoughts and memories that are not trivial can sometimes be neutralized by cultivating the opposite quality. For example, annoyance or resentment can be neutralized by cultivating the opposite emotional qualities of compassion and kindness.
4. **Retrace them.** If the thoughts and memories that arise are strongly emotional or deeply meaningful, it is useful to hold them in your mind and trace them back to their origin. When did it start? Why did you get involved? What did you originally expect to gain from this relationship or ambition? This practice is revealing of your own patterns of behavior. And it can lead to the insights necessary to resolve this karma.
5. **Absorb them.** Not every thought or memory that arises during meditation is undesirable. Some of them are calming and strengthening. It would be impossible to list all the beneficial thoughts and memories that might arise, but they include calm insights into your own behavior, pleasant memories of kindness, or an inner reconciliation with those who have passed beyond this world. You should allow yourself to become absorbed into them and absorb strength from them. They will eventually fade, and then you should lovingly set them aside and resume your focus of meditation.

More than Awakening the Chakras

My teacher, Dr. Motoyama wrote a book entitled 'Awakening the Chakras and Emancipation.' This book outlines the various experiences a yogini will encounter as her consciousness expands into the astral and causal dimensions of existence. But he emphasized that awakening the chakras is only a 'necessary but not sufficient prerequisite' for achieving emancipation: realization of Purusha.

Even though I have described the awakening of the chakras as 'The final phase of chakra meditation,' it is not the final phase of spiritual development. Dr. Motoyama wrote that the return to Purusha consciousness can only be achieved by surrendering to something greater than yourself. For him, this meant surrendering to God. He defined God as Love.

Spiritual development cannot be reduced to an energetic 'plumbing problem.' Each time a granthi opens and Nectar flows into a deeper layer of Sushumna, a yogini uncovers more subtle layers of karma, not just her own karma but the karmic laws that govern the creation of plants, animals, people, nations, worlds, and, ultimately, the universe. To enter these subtle dimensions, a yogini must consciously confront her karmic debts, dissolve her selfish attachments, let go of her limited beliefs, and grow in unconditional love. This is the inner struggle outlined in all spiritual traditions. It is the struggle that I sketched only briefly in the previous section on chakra purification.

Dr. Motoyama understood that modern people have difficulties and doubts about religious faith. He understood that the majority of people who take up chakra meditation are more interested in the improved physical health, emotional calmness, and mental clarity that chakra meditation develops. He believed these are valid reasons for taking up the practice. This is why he wrote books addressed to the general public.

But to those who saw Dr. Motoyama as their spiritual teacher, he also stressed the need for faith. He advised his students to end each session of meditation by surrendering to God. And he calmly assured those who doubted their ability to cultivate such faith that it would naturally develop as their consciousness expanded into the astral and causal dimensions of existence.

Chapter 2: Meditation

Following the Ox The First Meditation

The Ox is a symbol for the muscular wall of your lower abdomen. Your lower abdomen distends slightly with each inhalation, and returns to its resting, neutral position with each exhalation.

'**Following the Ox**' is sitting quietly and passively observing the changes of **pressure** and **distention** in your lower abdomen. The perception of pressure will eventually ripen into an awareness of Prana.

Technique

Sit calmly and passively observe how natural, uncontrolled breathing affects the pressure in your lower abdomen, the flower of your second chakra. Make no attempt to alter your breath, just focus on the sensations created by each inhalation and exhalation.

If the Prana in the lower chakras becomes more active, **your lower abdomen will become 'tense' or 'full' without any effort.** Dr. Motoyama said this kind of spontaneous lower abdominal tension is the objective, outward sign of the depth of your practice.

A similar but more significant phenomena is feeling Prana rise up Sushumna. Yogic texts have detailed many different ways Prana or Nectar can move within Sushumna, such as crawling along your spine like ants, or hopping like a frog from one chakra to the next, or undulating along your spine like a serpent. If you experience Prana spontaneously moving within Sushumna, become absorbed into it. Otherwise, stay absorbed into your lower abdomen.

Quiet Heart The Second Meditation

When the breath becomes still, the mind becomes still. When the mind becomes still, the heart becomes still. If the heart becomes still, the yogini will be able to withdraw into her spine, where the noise of the senses cannot reach her.

Technique

Sit calmly and passively observe how natural, uncontrolled breathing affects the Prana of your heart chakra. Make no attempt to alter your breath. Focus on the subtle increase of tension in your heart just before each inhalation, and the relaxation of this tension with each exhalation.

After each exhalation there is an effortless, breathless calm. **The yogini seeks to extend this peaceful, breathless state.** This cannot be done by **suppressing** the natural urge to breathe. It can only be done by **transcending** the need to breathe, by relaxing your heart.

Chapter 2: Meditation

Shambhavi Mudra The Third Meditation

Chakras radiate astral lights, which can be seen reflected in your Third Eye, the flower of your sixth chakra. The Third Eye is imagined as a little behind and above the upper end of the bridge of your nose.

Technique

Gently close your eyes. Now, open them just enough to focus your gaze on the tip of your nose. For most people, this creates a gentle strain. Hold this gaze for a few seconds.

Now, relax the muscles of your eyes. They will rebound upwards. Keep your eyelids at least partially closed so that no external light is perceptible. Focus on your Third Eye. This is '**Shambhavi Mudra.**'

Pressure. The first sensations a yogini usually experiences is a gentle pressure at the Third Eye.

Lights. The light of the chakras are reflected in the Third Eye. Try to become absorbed into any **shimmering lights** you see.

Sounds. Closely related to seeing lights in the flower of the sixth chakra is hearing nada sounds coming from the root of the sixth chakra. Some yoginis first develop the ability to see lights. Other yoginis first develop the ability to hear nada sounds. Ultimately, both phenomena will be experienced.

The Rebound The Fourth Meditation

The Rebound is that phase of practice when you become absorbed into the inner phenomena that spontaneously arise.

The most common experience is being drawn into the sensation of Prana flowing within Sushumna or the experience of light and sound in your head. But it also includes feelings of peace or calm that are not localized in a specific chakra. Sometimes the sense of having a body, or the weight of the body fades away. Other examples are the arising of memories, thoughts and emotions. These experiences are a part of chakra purification process described on page 11.

Pranayama

The goal of a hatha yogini is to fuse her shiva-prana and shakti-prana into nectar. This nectar will then flow into a deeper layer of sushumna, and her consciousness will rise to the astral, causal, or Purusha level. There are two complementary paths to fusing shiva-prana and shakti-prana: **Meditation and Pranayama.**

Meditation is focusing your attention, your shiva-prana into a chakra. As shiva-prana accumulates, it magnetically draws more shakti-prana into the chakra.

Pranayama is using your breathing to draw more shakti-prana into a chakra. As shakti-prana accumulates, it magnetically draws more shiva-prana into the chakra.

Prana means 'energy' in Sanskrit. Yama means 'control.' **Pranayama** means 'the control of energy.'

What's in a Name? There are dozens of forms of pranayama techniques. And each school of thought or lineage of instruction has their unique twist on each of them. To avoid confusion, I have avoided using traditional names for the pranayama techniques described in this essay.

Pushing the Plow
The Basics of Breathing

Pranayama techniques are frequently referred to as ‘**breathing exercises.**’ This is because the first step in learning to control the movement of Prana is learning to control the rhythm of inhalation, retention, and exhalation.

The Plow is your diaphragm. **Pushing the Plow** is deep, abdominal breathing, sometimes called ‘breathing into your belly.’ It is the foundation for the three pranayamas presented in this essay.

Your torso is divided by your diaphragm. Your heart and lungs are above your diaphragm. Your abdominal organs are below your diaphragm.

When you inhale, the muscle fibers of your diaphragm contract and pull the center of your diaphragm downward. This downward movement stretches your lungs and pulls air into them. **This is an active inhalation.**

The downward movement of your diaphragm also compresses your abdominal organs, causing them to bulge outwards and **distend your abdominal wall.**

When you exhale, the muscle fibers of your diaphragm relax, and your stretched lungs elastically pull your diaphragm back upward to its resting position. This pushes air out of your lungs. **This is a passive exhalation.**

The upward movement of your diaphragm also releases the compression on your abdominal organs, and your distended **abdominal wall returns to its resting, neutral position.**

Technique

1. Begin with a long, slow inhalation. This is **Pushing the Plow.** This creates **abdominal distention** and an **active inhalation.**
2. When your abdomen is fully distended, hold your breath for several seconds, but **do not close your throat,** your glottis. As long as you **maintain a gentle Push on the Plow,** you will **maintain abdominal pressure and distention.**
3. When you are ready, gradually relax your Push on the Plow, allowing your distended abdomen to slowly return to its **neutral, resting position.** This creates a **passive exhalation.**

Repeat this breathing exercise **fourteen times.**

I suggest fourteen repetitions because it is important to find a rhythm that you can maintain without strain. Fourteen repetitions will take you at least five minutes to complete. This is an adequate amount of time for you to determine if you are breathing at a sustainable rhythm.

Breathing Rhythms

When practicing pranayama, maintaining a steady rhythm of inhalation-retention-exhalation is important, but everyone's effective breathing rhythm is unique. This is why I do not specify how many seconds a yogini should inhale, or hold her breath, or exhale. But as a general guide, I suggest the following:

Inhale for about 4 seconds.
Hold your breath for about 8 seconds.
Exhale for about 4 seconds.

This 4-8-4 rhythm is just a suggestion. My colleagues report that rhythms as diverse as 4-16-4 or 8-4-8 or 8-8-8 work well for them.

In the beginning, you might want to count, but it is not necessary. What is important is to find a comfortable, steady rhythm of breathing, a rhythm that you can sustain for several minutes.

Note: Some schools of pranayama include the 'pause after exhalation' as the fourth phase of breathing. My teacher, Dr. Motoyama sometimes suggested a 4-4-4-4 rhythm for some pranayama techniques.

Note: A rhythm that is comfortable for one form of pranayama might not be comfortable when practicing a different form of pranayama.

Filling Your Lungs and Holding Your Breath

It is almost always unconsciously assumed that 'the bigger your breath, the better your pranayama.' But in my experience, this is not true. Trying to 'fill your lungs completely' creates an unnecessary strain, and obscures your perception of the movement of Prana.

It is hard to quantify how much of your lung capacity you should use when practicing pranayama. But if you find yourself straining, or feel more sensation in your lungs than in your chakras, try reducing the volume of your inhalation.

The same advice applies to holding your breath. It is hard to quantify how long you should hold your breath, but if you find yourself becoming preoccupied with the physical pressure in your head or chest, reduce the length of your breath retention.

Bandhas and Mudras

Bandhas and mudras are subtle muscular contractions that stimulate the flow of shiva-prana and shakti-prana. They are used in coordination with pranayama.

Bandha means 'lock or contraction' in Sanskrit. Mudra means 'gesture.' They are described in brief below. I will explain how they are used when describing the pranayama techniques.

1. **Mulabandha.** Contracting mulabandha means closing your anus and pulling the floor of your pelvis upward. This creates **tension around your coccyx**, and this tension helps raise shakti-prana.

2. **Vajroli Mudra.** Tensing vajroli mudra means making your lower abdomen firm, especially the area just above your pubic bone. This creates **pressure against your sacrum**, and this pressure helps raise shakti-prana.

3. **Uddiyana Bandha.** Uddiyana means 'flying upward.' Pulling uddiyana bandha means pulling the muscular wall of your upper abdomen inward and upward. This creates **pressure against your lower thoracic spine**. This pressure helps raise shakti-prana.

4. **Khechari Mudra.** Holding your tongue against the roof of your mouth is called 'khechari mudra.' Khechari mudra makes it easier to **breathe with long, smooth inhalations and exhalations**.

5. **Shambhavi Mudra.** Rolling your eyes upward and slightly inward is shambhavi mudra. It helps **focus your awareness into your Third Eye** and draw shakti-prana upward. It was described in the Shambhavi Mudra Meditation, page 15.

Mulabandha

Mulabandha can be used in many different ways. Using it to create an active exhalation helps to draw Prana into the first and second chakras during the passive inhalation.

Contracting mulabandha means closing your anus and pulling the floor of your pelvis upward. This pushes your abdominal organs upward, which push your diaphragm upward, which forces air out of your lungs. This is an **active exhalation**.

When you relax mulabandha, the floor of your pelvis descends, which allows your abdominal organs to descend. This allows your diaphragm to descend, which pulls air into your lungs. This is a **passive inhalation**.

Technique

1. **Actively exhale** by contracting mulabandha.
2. **Passively inhale** by relaxing mulabandha.
3. **Hold your breath** for several seconds.

Repeat this exercise several times to learn how mulabandha affects your breathing.

Vajroli Mudra

Tensing your lower abdomen is called **vajroli mudra**. This creates pressure against your sacrum, which stimulates shakti-prana. Focus the muscular tension on the area just above your pubic bone.

If you tense vajroli mudra during breath retention it will force some air out of your lungs unless you simultaneously increase your Push the Plow. This is more difficult to describe than to perform. Just remember to keep your glottis open during breath retention, but do not exhale when tensing vajroli mudra.

Brahma Granthi Pranayama

This pranayama helps awaken the first and second chakras, and open the Brahma Granthi.

Breathing Pattern

1. Actively exhale by contracting mulabandha.
2. Passively inhale by relaxing mulabandha.
3. Hold your breath with your glottis open, gradually tensing vajroli mudra.
4. Relax vajroli mudra and slowly exhale.

Prana Movements

While inhaling, imagine shiva-prana descending into your lower abdomen and sacrum.

While holding your breath, imagine shakti-prana rising up from your coccyx and fusing with the shiva-prana.

While exhaling, imagine this Nectar ascending Sushumna.

Practice this pranayama **fourteen times**, then become absorbed into the Rebound.

Khechari Mudra

Khechari mudra helps to open the Vishnu Granthi. But it can be included with almost any form of pranayama because it enhances the ability to control the inhalation and exhalation.

Tongue to Palate

Holding your tongue against the roof of your mouth is called khechari mudra. The two basic variations of tongue position are on the **hard palate** and the **soft palate**.

You briefly press your tongue upward against your hard palate every time you say words like 'lunch' or 'hunch.'

You briefly draw your tongue backward against your soft palate every time you say words like 'lung' or 'hung.'

Tension in the Trachea

Your trachea is commonly called your 'windpipe.' The upper part of your trachea is your larynx, your 'voice box.' The root of your tongue is anchored to the cartilage that covers the opening to your larynx.

Modifying how aggressively or gently you press your tongue against your palate will modify the tensions in your trachea. These tensions **create resistance** to the flow of air during inhalation and exhalation. This resistance stimulates the **movement of Prana**.

The position of your tongue also modifies the tension in your trachea. I habitually press my tongue against my hard palate when guiding Prana downward. And I press my tongue against my soft palate when guiding Prana upward. But your experience might be different.

Ujjayi

Resisting the flow of air during inhalation and exhalation can create a sound called '**ujjayi**.' Ujjayi means 'victory' in Sanskrit. This sound can vary from soft to inaudible depending on the placement of your tongue and the tension in your trachea. The sound itself is not important. What is important is finding the quality of tension and resistance that most effectively moves your Prana and comfortably extends your inhalation and exhalation.

Note: Some hatha yoga texts describe a more aggressive form of khechari mudra. They advise the yogini to use her fingers to push the tip of her tongue so far backward that it slips up above her soft palate. If the pliability of your frenulum and soft palate allow you to do this, then I encourage you to experiment with it.

Some texts even recommend gradually cutting the frenulum under your tongue to be able to do this. I think this is excessive and unnecessary.

Vishnu Granthi Pranayama

This pranayama helps awaken the fourth and fifth chakras, and open the Vishnu Granthi.

Breathing Pattern

Hold your tongue in khechari mudra.

1. Slowly exhale.
2. Slowly inhale.
3. Hold your breath with your glottis open for a comfortable length of time.

Prana Movements

While inhaling, draw shiva-prana down through Brahman's Gate and into your heart chakra.

While holding your breath, imagine your shakti-prana ascending from your coccyx and fusing with the shiva-prana in your heart chakra.

While exhaling, let the Nectar in your heart flow up and out through Brahman's Gate.

Practice this pranayama **fourteen times**, then become absorbed into the Rebound.

Shiva Granthi Pranayama

This pranayama is a foundational technique for many yogic and tantric traditions. It circulates shiva-prana and shakti-prana through all of the chakras and helps open the Shiva Granthi.

Uddiyana Bandha

Pulling uddiyana bandha means drawing the muscular wall of your upper abdomen inward and upward. This creates pressure against your lower thoracic vertebrae. This assists the power of the third chakra to draw shakti-prana upward into the head.

When you pull uddiyana bandha, there is a subtle expansion or lift of the lower part of your ribcage. Some yoginis describe this feeling as ‘breathing with my back,’ or ‘breathing with my kidneys.’

Breathing Pattern

1. Slowly exhale.
2. Slowly inhale. Simultaneously and **gradually pull uddiyana bandha inward and upward.**
3. Relax uddiyana bandha, but hold your breath with your glottis open for as long as comfortable.

Prana Movements

While inhaling, draw shakti-prana up Sushumna and into the Shiva Granthi, near the root of the sixth chakra.

While holding your breath, imagine shiva-prana and shakti-prana fusing into Nectar and flowing upward and forward into your Third Eye.

While exhaling, imagine the Nectar flowing down Sushumna and into your coccyx.

Practice this pranayama **fourteen times**, then become absorbed into the Rebound.

Note: You might find it useful to gradually contract mulabandha as the Nectar descends into your coccyx.

A Final Word on Bandhas and Mudras

Bandhas and mudras are useful if they help us feel Prana when practicing pranayama, but they are not essential. Brahma Granthi, Vishnu Granthi, and Shiva Granthi pranayamas can be practiced without using the suggested bandhas or mudras: just breathe by Pushing the Plow and guide the movements of Prana as directed.

I have presented mulabandha being used during exhalation, uddiyana bandha being used during inhalation, vajroli mudra being used during breath retention, and khechari mudra being used with both inhalation and exhalation.

But any of the bandhas or mudras can be used during inhalation or exhalation or breath retention. Different traditions of yoga use them in different phases of the breathing cycle. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to explore all the possible variations, but I encourage you to explore them on your own. And if you find them useful, use them.

Suggested Routines

There are two challenges to incorporating these techniques into your practice. The first is adapting the techniques to your unique psychology and physiology.

The second challenge is determining which techniques to practice on any given day. I suggest you go through the following three-week cycle several times. When you are comfortable with the techniques and familiar with how they affect you, you will be confident in determining your own daily practice.

Week One

Following the Ox	Five minutes.
Brahma Granthi Pranayama	Fourteen times.
Rebound Meditation	Five or ten minutes.

Week Two

Quiet Heart Meditation	Five minutes.
Vishnu Granthi Pranayama	Fourteen times.
Rebound Meditation	Five or ten minutes.

Week Three

Shambhavi Mudra	Five minutes.
Shiva Granthi Pranayama	Fourteen times.
Rebound Meditation	Five or ten minutes.

Chapter 4: The Nei Jing Tu

The Nei Jing Tu

A Taoist Representation of Chakras, Bandhas, and Mudras

This final chapter is an interpretation of a famous taoist image called the Nei Jing Tu. I believe the Nei Jing Tu presents, in symbolic form, most of the theories and techniques explored in this essay.

I first became aware of the Nei Jing Tu through a book by my teacher Dr. Hiroshi Motoyama: 'Awakening the Chakras and Emancipation,' available from www.CIHS.edu. On page 139 is a picture of the Nei Jing Tu, accompanied by a brief interpretation of its images.

The only other source I have consulted is a study by David Teh-Yu Wang, available from www.jstor.org/stable/20169078.

My interpretation of the Nei Jing Tu is not a continuation of Dr. Motoyama's or Wang's studies, it is my naive interpretation of the images. Most of the names I use for the images and techniques are my own. They are names of convenience, not tradition.

It is possible the wonderful correlations between yogic ideas and the images of the Nei Jing Tu exist only in my imagination. If that is the case, then my interpretation of them is just a coincidental, but beautiful 'memory palace' of the theory and techniques of chakras, bandhas, and mudras.

Brief History of the Nei Jing Tu

The Nei Jing Tu is a symbolic landscape of the mystical energy system of the human body. It is a guide for spiritual practitioners who hope to raise their consciousness by transforming the energies circulating within their brain and spine. In the Chinese taoist tradition, this transformation is considered an 'Inner Alchemy.' In the Indian yogic tradition, it is called 'Awakening the Chakras.'

The original Nei Jing Tu was a painted scroll hanging in a taoist temple in China. A visiting taoist monk named Liu Chengyin was so impressed that he had a wood block carved in its likeness. With this block he created ink prints that were circulated. This was in the year 1886.

As of the year 2022, there are many versions of the Nei Jing Tu on the internet. I personally own three variants. The basic layout is consistent, but the details vary. Images that are lakes in one version are boulders in another and non-existent in others. A human figure is bald and shirtless in one version, fully dressed and wearing a hat in another. There are many discrepancies of this kind.

We do not know which of these versions is closest to the original because the original painted scroll has not been documented by anyone else, and the carved block that had been used to make ink copies is lost. Even the monastery in which the scroll was discovered cannot be identified.

Many modern versions of the Nei Jing Tu are printed in black and white to imitate an old-fashioned ink print. Others are in full color. Any colored versions of the Nei Jing Tu have been created by modern artisans who improvised their choice of colors.

The bottom line is this: any interpretation of the Nei Jing Tu must rely on the broad, general design. The fine details vary from one modern version to the next.

The Meaning of 'Nei Jing Tu'

The Chinese word 'nei' means 'inner.' The Chinese word 'jing' means 'warp' or 'weave.' The Chinese word 'tu' means 'chart' or 'diagram.' Modern translations of the title 'Nei Jing Tu' include 'Diagram of the Internal Texture of Man,' 'Chart of Inner Passageways,' 'Diagram of Internal Pathways,' and 'Chart of the Inner Warp.'

A fabric is woven of the 'warp and the weft.' The warp threads are stretched taught on a loom and the weft threads are woven through them. Many different lengths and colors of weft threads are used in a weaving, depending on the pattern the weaver is trying to create. But the warp threads are the unchanging, stable matrix.

This is the perfect analogy for the yogic and taoist theories of the human form. The food a person consumes is transformed into bones, brains, muscles, and other tissues. These tissues are the weft threads that make the human body visible.

The weft threads are constantly being used up and replaced. It is the warp threads that maintain the shape and functional integrity of the body. These warp threads are the invisible energy channels that permeate every tissue and cell. They are called 'jing luo' in Chinese, the 'channels' of acupuncture. They are called 'nadis' in Sanskrit, which means 'tubes' or 'channels.'

Yogic and taoist practitioners seek to expand their consciousness by 'cultivating' or 'purifying' the energies that circulate within their bodies. To be effective, some understanding of these energies, their circulation, and their functions is necessary. The Nei Jing Tu is a symbolic representation of these 'technical' details.

Symbols of the Chakras

The Nei Jing Tu is an image of a mountain chain that resembles the **human skull, jaw, and vertebral column**. Within the top half of the skull there is a **Lake of Nectar**. This is a reservoir of Prana. A river flows out from this lake and cascades downward, inside the vertebral mountains, and eventually flows out through the coccyx into the sea. This river is **Sushumna**.

Purusha is symbolized by the '**Softly Glowing Pearl**' that floats above the mountains of the skull, free of the body. In some taoist traditions, the unmoving Pole Star is the uncreated source of all created things. It is the true 'home' of Purusha. So it would also be viable to interpret the Softly Glowing Pearl as the **Pole Star**.

7th. **The Pyramid** on the top of the head represents **Brahman's Gate**. It is the top opening of Sushumna and is the flower of **Sahasrara**, the seventh chakra. The root of Sahasrara is the **Lake of Nectar**, in the top half of the skull.

6th. **Sitting Sage** is seated on a grassy plateau that borders the Lake of Nectar. Underneath the feet of the Sitting Sage is a sphere. It is the **Moon**, the Third Eye. Under the Lake of Nectar is another sphere. It is the **Sun**. The Sun and the Moon are the root and the flower of **Ajna**, the sixth chakra.

5th. **Smiling Monk** is in the flower of **Vishuddhi**, the fifth chakra, the throat. The root of Vishuddhi is near the **seventh cervical vertebra**.

4th. **Herding Boy** is in the flower of **Anahata**, the fourth chakra, the heart. The root of Anahata is near the **fifth thoracic vertebra**.

3rd. **Weaving Girl** is in the flower of **Manipura**, the third chakra, the upper abdomen. The root of Manipura is near the **second lumbar vertebra**.

2nd. **Plowing Man** is in the flower of **Svadhithana**, the second chakra, the lower abdomen. The root of Svadhithana is near the **second sacral vertebra**.

1st. **Water Girl** and **Water Boy** are in the flower of **Muladhara**, the first chakra, the floor of the pelvis. The root of Muladhara is within the **coccyx**.

Symbols of the Three Nectars

There is no direct symbolism for the four layers of Sushumna, or for the three bodies. But they could be inferred by the fact that there are symbols for the three Nectars and the three granthis.

Vajra Nectar is symbolized by the circling **Tai Ji symbols** near the Plowing Man.

Chitrini Nectar is symbolized by the upward and downward curving **Rainbows** in front of the skull.

Brahma Nectar is symbolized by the **Celestial Light** streaming out of the Pyramid on the top of the skull.

Pool of Nectar. Every time a yogini successfully creates one of the three nectars, it rises upwards into the **Lake of Nectar** in the brain. Not all of this nectar can be absorbed, so some of it trickles back down onto the soft palate. This is represented by the **small waterfall** descending from the Lake of Nectar into the **Pool of Nectar** at the back of the throat. This downward trickle of Nectar is experienced as uplifting and rejuvenating. To become 'immortal,' a yogini must 'drink Nectar.'

Symbols of the Three Granthis

The three granthis are represented as **Bridges** with towers built upon them.

The Brahma Granthi, which restricts the flow of Prana into the second layer of Sushumna, is symbolized by the **Lower Bridge** which spans the river of Sushumna near the base of the spine.

The Vishnu Granthi, which restricts the flow of Prana in the third layer of Sushumna, is symbolized by the **Middle Bridge** which spans the river of Sushumna opposite the heart.

The Shiva Granthi, which restricts the flow of Prana in the fourth layer of Sushumna, is symbolized by the **Upper Bridge** which spans the river of Sushumna near the Sun, near the base of the skull.

Water Girl and Water Boy Symbolize Mulabandha

When you contract your anus and pull your pelvic floor upward, you create tension around your coccyx, symbolized by the **First Cauldron of Fire**, just above the Lower Bridge.

Water Girl symbolizes the 'ren channel' of acupuncture theory. Its main branch flows up the front of the torso. **Water Boy** symbolizes the 'du channel' of acupuncture theory. Its main branch flows up the back of the torso. Both of these channels originate in the perineum, which is pulled upward when mulabandha is contracted.

Water Girl and Water Boy are facing each other as they tread on large wheels that raise water from canals and pour it onto irrigated fields. Turning these wheels is symbolic for reversing the outward flow of Prana back up the central channel of Sushumna.

The Ox Symbolizes Vajroli Mudra

The Plowing Man is composed of three interrelated symbols: the Man, the Plow, and the Ox.

The Man pushing the plow is **pranayama**, the **conscious control** of inhalation, breath retention, and exhalation.

The Plow represents the **abdominal pressure** created by the **downward movement of the diaphragm**.

'**Pushing the Plow**' is deep, abdominal breathing, sometimes called 'breathing into your belly.' It is described on page 17.

The Ox is the muscular wall of your lower abdomen. Your lower abdomen distends with every inhalation, and it returns to its neutral position with every exhalation.

'**Following the Ox**' is **passively observing** the changing **pressure** and **distention** of your lower abdomen. This is the technique of meditation described on page 14.

'**Holding the Ox**' is **Vajroli Mudra**: tensing your lower abdomen. This creates pressure against your sacrum, symbolized by the **Second Cauldron of Fire**, just below the circling Tai Ji symbols. It is described on page 20.

Weaving Girl Symbolizes Uddiyana Bandha

Weaving Girl is sitting in the upper abdomen. Her **spinning wheel** is the navel, the source of all the meridian channels of the body. Pulling uddiyana bandha is drawing the muscular wall of your upper abdomen inward and upward. This is symbolized by the **Ribbon of Silk** flowing inward from her spinning wheel and then upward in front of the spine, disappearing into the throat.

Uddiyana bandha creates pressure against your lower thoracic vertebrae. This helps draw shakti-prana upward. This is symbolized by the **Fire within Sushumna**, just above the circling Tai Ji symbols. It is part of the Shiva Granthi Pranayama described on page 24.

Smiling Monk Symbolizes Khechari Mudra

Smiling Monk stands on a shelf of rock that symbolizes the lower jaw.

A **Foot Bridge** spans the **Pool of Nectar**. It represents the tongue.

A **Rainbow of shakti-prana** curves upward from the tongue.

A **Rainbow of shiva-prana** curves downward from the mountains of the skull.

Khechari mudra connects these two rainbows

Smiling Monk stands with his back to us, his head tilted so far backward that his face appears **upside down**. This symbolizes drawing the tongue up and back. Both arms are **thrust upward**, symbolizing that he is lifting the Rainbows of shiva-prana and shakti-prana upward. The uplifted arms and tilted head could also symbolize the elation of successfully forming Nectar and experiencing its flow.

Sitting Sage Symbolizes Shambhavi Mudra

Sitting Sage is seated on a grassy plateau that borders the Lake of Nectar. He symbolizes all levels of spiritual insight. Underneath the feet of the Sitting Sage is a sphere. It is the **Moon**, the Third Eye, the flower of the sixth chakra.

Under the Lake of Nectar is another sphere. It is the **Sun**, the root of the sixth chakra.

Chakras radiate astral lights, which can be seen reflected in the Moon, your Third Eye. In yogic tradition, focusing on the Third Eye is **shambhavi mudra**. It is the technique of meditation described on page 15.

**Walking the Spiral Path
Symbolizes Quiet Heart Meditation**

Interpreting the images of the Nei Jing Tu as symbolic of chakras, bandhas, and mudras is, in my opinion, very plausible. Interpreting its images as symbolic of specific pranayama techniques is trickier business. The artist certainly intended there should be a practical implementation of the theoretical ideas, and taoists practice pranayama techniques, which they call 'Nei-Gong,' but we can only guess which variations of these techniques the artist intended. The exception is Herding Boy: he seems an obvious symbol of the Quiet Heart Meditation described on page 14.

Herding Boy is in the center of the chest, the flower of the heart chakra. He is **Holding the Pole Star**. Holding the Pole Star is a symbol for stilling the mind.

The Pole Star is the only star in the sky that does not appear to move. All the other stars seem to circle around the Pole Star. The Pole Star is the home of Purusha. It is the eternal, unchanging axis of the ever-changing world.

Herding Boy is encircled by a **Ring of Breath** coming down through the **Twelve Story Pagoda**, the trachea. The Ring expands and contracts with each breath.

Herding Boy is **Walking the Spiral Path**. Walking the Spiral Path is a symbol for quieting the breath. The Ring of Breath becomes smaller and smaller as Herding Boy approaches the still point at the center of the spiral.

When the breath becomes still, the mind becomes still. When the mind becomes still, the heart becomes still.

Note: We know Herding Boy is holding the Pole Star because of the presence of the Great Bear (Big Dipper) constellation. But the Great Bear constellation is drawn as a mirror image of the actual constellation in the sky. I believe this is a deliberate symbol of how the stillness of the Pole Star is reflected in the calm center of the heart. Taoism is full of these macrocosmic/microcosmic correlations.