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Forward

This essay describes 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 yogic traditions of India. But the final chapter is an interpretation of an image from the Chinese taoist tradition: The Nei Jing Tu. The Nei Jing tu presents, in symbolic form, most of the theories and techniques explored in this essay.

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

Ch-ch-ch-changes

Suzee and I had the opportunity to use this essay as a manual for a course at the D'Alijo retreat center near Porto, Portugal in October of 2022. The feedback from participants has led us to make some changes.

We have eliminated some of the suggested pranayama techniques. And we have renamed some others. Referring to them as 'wheels' was confusing for some students.

In our interpretation of the Nei Jing Tu, we now propose that Water Girl and Water Boy together represent the first chakra, and Plowing Man represents the second chakra.

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Shiva-prana and Shakti-prana flow down Sushumna

In yogic 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.

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 into the torso.

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 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**.

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.

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.

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.

Three Nectars

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**.' To become 'immortal,' a yogini must 'drink Nectar.'

The creation of Nectar does not create something new. It is the re-unification of the shiva-prana and shakti-prana that had 'pulled apart' as the yogini's consciousness descended into her three bodies.

Nectar is fused and refined in three stages, each one more subtle. The analogy is similar to 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 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 'flow of Nectar' is experienced as uplifting and rejuvenating.

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.**' .

These granthis are traditionally described as **restrictions to the flow of prana within sushumna.** I believe **they are restrictions between the different layers of sushumna.** To put it another way: they are restrictions to the flow prana between the three bodies.

The Brahma Granthi is near the second sacral vertebra. It restricts the opening to vajra nadi, the second layer of sushumna. It is opened by the Vajra Nectar.

The Vishnu Granthi is near the second lumbar vertebra. It restricts the opening to chitrini nadi, the third layer of sushumna. It is opened by the Chitrini Nectar.

The Shiva Granthi is near to where the spinal cord exits at the base of the skull. It restricts the opening to brahma nadi, the innermost layer of sushumna. It is opened by the Brahma Nectar.

Note: It can be confusing that the opening to the second layer of sushumna is restricted by the Brahma Granthi but the deepest layer of sushumna is called Brahma nadi. But these are the names passed down to us.

Levels of Awareness

Modern theories of the brain tell us that if the optical center of the brain is stimulated, we will see lights. If the auditory center of our brain is stimulated, we will hear sounds. These correlations between physical stimulus and subjective experience are a form of the shakti-prana/shiva-prana relationship.

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 **Vajra Nectar** is formed, it will flow into the **vajra nadi**, and the yogini will become aware of astral phenomena, and how these phenomena influence the physical world.

Higher Astral Body. When the **Chitrini Nectar** is formed, it will flow into the **chitrini nadi**, and 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 **Brahma Nectar** is formed, it will flow into the **brahma nadi**, and 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.

Outlining levels of awareness is useful, but can be misleading. Spiritual development is not a 'plumbing problem.' Each time a yogini opens a granthi and Nectar flows into a deeper layer of sushumna, she 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 confront her karmic debts, dissolve her selfish attachments, and grow in unconditional love. This is the inner struggle outlined in all spiritual traditions. For more on this aspect of spiritual practice, read the section 'Seeds of Karma,' page 14.

Pranayama and Meditation Complementary Practices

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. Pranayama and meditation are complementary approaches to this goal.

Pranayama emphasizes increasing the flow of shakti-prana into a chakra. The flow of shakti-prana is innately calming and enjoyable. This will absorb the attention of the yogini, which increases the flow of shiva-prana into that chakra.

Meditation emphasizes focusing the yogini's attention onto one chakra, to the exclusion of all else. This increases the flow of shiva-prana into that chakra. This increase in shiva-prana will magnetically arouse a greater flow of shakti-prana into that chakra.

The First Meditation Following the Ox

The Ox represents 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 **tension** in your lower abdomen.

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 pranas become 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 meditation.

A similar but more significant phenomena is feeling prana rise up sushumna. Yogic texts have detailed many different ways shakti-prana 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.

The Second Meditation Quiet Heart

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.

The Third Meditation Shambhavi Mudra

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.**'

Try to become absorbed into any **shimmering lights** that you see.

The Fourth Meditation The Rebound

The Rebound is the period of time immediately following your pranayama practices. 'Becoming absorbed into the Rebound' means focusing on the phenomena that arise during this period.

One might expect these phenomena to be associated with the chakras involved in the pranayama practice, but this is not always the case. What arises during the Rebound is dependent on a yogini's karma. The karmic seeds that are already active in a yogini's life might have more influence on her Rebound experience than her pranayama practice.

For example, if you focus on your lower abdomen when practicing pranayama, you might expect the Rebound to be a feeling of heat or pressure in your lower abdomen, or a movement of shakti-prana up your spine. But the Rebound phenomena might be a strong feeling in your heart, or entrancing astral lights in your Third Eye. Or, you might become absorbed into an immense feeling of peace that is not localized in any one particular chakra.

Nada Meditation

One of the most auspicious phenomena that can arise during the Rebound are sounds that come from within you. These sounds are called '**nada**' in Sanskrit. The flow of prana within the chakras creates these sounds. Becoming absorbed into nada has been considered a preeminent method of spiritual practice for thousands of years. Entire scriptures, called 'Upanishads,' have been written about it.

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.

Technique

Become absorbed into any form of nada that arises from within you. In the beginning you might hear the nada in just one ear, but with time you will hear the nada in both ears. The sound will seem centered in the back of your head, or fill your head. Try to become absorbed into whatever nada sounds 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.

Seeds of Karma

When we practice pranayama, we hope to awaken the chakras at an astral or causal level. If we are successful, during the Rebound we will experience astral and causal phenomena that will lead us to higher states of consciousness. But the increased flow of prana also awakens the seeds of karma stored in the chakras. These seeds manifest as physical restlessness, as 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 before we will be able to experience astral and causal phenomena.

Here are five strategies for dealing with Seeds of Karma:

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 our 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.

Bandhas and Mudras

Bandhas and mudras are muscular contractions that help move shiva-prana and shakti-prana. Bandha means 'lock or contraction' in Sanskrit. Mudra means 'gesture' in Sanskrit. They are used in conjunction with pranayama techniques. I will explain how they are used when describing the various 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, as if you were going to 'take a punch.' This creates **pressure against your sacrum**, and this pressure helps raise shakti-prana.

3. **Uddiyana Bandha.** 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. **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 12.

5. **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. It is described in great detail in the next two pages.

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. And, it assists the movement of prana.

All of the pranayamas will be more comfortable and effective if you use khechari mudra when practicing them.

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. When your tongue is pressed against your hard or soft palate, you can easily modify the tensions in your trachea and palate. These tensions create resistance to the flow of air, and stimulate the **movement of prana.**

You can vary the focus of resistance from high in your palate to deep in your chest, depending on your tongue position and tracheal tension. The two basic variations of tongue position are the hard palate and the soft palate.

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

You briefly draw your tongue back and press it against your soft palate every time you say words like 'hung' or 'lung.'

When you use khechari mudra to resist the flow of air, it creates a soft sound. This sound is called '**ujjayi.**' Ujjayi means 'victory' in Sanskrit. A yogini can vary the ujjayi sound from soft to inaudible. Every change in tongue position and tracheal tension is reflected in changes of the ujjayi sound. The sound itself is not important. What is important is finding the quality of resistance that most efficiently moves your prana.

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 the 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.

Variations of Khechari Mudra

Quiet Heart meditation, page 12, is the perfect time to explore the effects of khechari mudra variations.

In each of the following experiments, focus on how your tongue position and tension change the natural, unforced inhalations and exhalations.

1. Practice Quiet Heart meditation for two minutes, without khechari mudra. Relax your tongue and jaw so there is no contact between your tongue and palate.
2. Now, gently touch your tongue to your hard palate for two minutes.
3. Now, press your tongue more firmly against your hard palate for two minutes.
4. Now, draw your tongue back so it gently touches your soft palate for two minutes.
5. Now, press your tongue upwards against your soft palate a little more firmly for two minutes.

When pressing your tongue upward, it is not necessary maintain a constant pressure. You can briefly relax the pressure after each exhale if you wish, but always maintain contact between your tongue and palate.

It is not necessary to repeat these experiments on a regular basis, but during the first few months of your practice you should try it a few times. This will help you find those variations of khechari mudra that are most effective in each of the pranayama practices.

Note: A variation of khechari mudra that is most effective for one form of pranayama might not be most effective when practicing a different form of pranayama.

Breathing Rhythms for Pranayama

The goal of a hatha yogini is to fuse her shiva-prana and shakti-prana to create Nectar. The yogic name for this process is '**pranayama.**'

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

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.

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

Filling Your Lungs

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 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.

Pushing the Plow The Foundation of Deep Breathing

The Plow is your diaphragm. **Pushing the Plow** is deep, abdominal breathing, sometimes called 'breathing into your belly.'

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

Hold your tongue in khechari mudra. This will help you breathe with long, smooth inhalations and exhalations.

1. Begin with a long, slow inhalation. This is **Pushing the Plow**. This creates **abdominal distention** and an **active inhalation**.
2. 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 exercise **fourteen times**.

Five-Step Breathing

Five-Step Breathing draws your awareness, your shiva-prana into your first and second chakras. It blends the muscular contractions of **mulabandha** and **Pushing the Plow**.

Mulabandha

When you contract mulabandha, you pull the floor of your pelvis upward, which pushes your abdominal organs upward. This pushes your diaphragm upward, which forces a little 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 a little air into your lungs. This is a **passive inhalation**.

Breathing Pattern

Hold your tongue in khechari mudra. This will help you breathe with long, smooth inhalations and exhalations.

1. **Actively exhale** by contracting mulabandha.
2. **Passively inhale** by relaxing mulabandha.
3. **Actively inhale** by Pushing the Plow. This will create abdominal distention.
4. **Hold your breath**, and maintain your Push on the Plow.
5. **Passively exhale** by relaxing your Push on the Plow.

Repeat this exercise **fourteen times**.

Note: When you are new to this practice, you might want to pause briefly between each step. But once you are familiar with the muscular efforts that create each step, you should blend them together into smooth inhalations and smooth exhalations.

Brahma Granthi Pranayama

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

Breathing Pattern

The breathing pattern is the same as Five-Step Breathing, but **vajroli mudra is gradually tensed** while you are holding your breath.

Hold your tongue in khechari mudra. This will help you breathe with long, smooth inhalations and exhalations.

1. Actively exhale by contracting mulabandha.
2. Passively inhale by relaxing mulabandha.
3. Actively inhale by Pushing the Plow.
4. Hold your breath for as long as comfortable. **Gradually tense vajroli mudra.** This creates pressure in your sacrum.
5. Relax vajroli mudra and passively exhale by slowly relaxing your Push on the Plow.

Prana Movements

While inhaling, imagine drawing shiva-prana down sushumna and into your second chakra.

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

While exhaling, imagine this Nectar ascending sushumna.

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

Vishnu Granthi Pranayama

This pranayama helps awaken the heart chakra, and open the **Vishnu Granthi**.

Try to make your inhalations and exhalations as long and smooth as possible, but do not strain. You want to be able to comfortably sustain your rhythm of inhaling and exhaling for several minutes.

Breathing Pattern

Hold your tongue in khechari mudra. This will help you breathe with long, smooth inhalations and exhalations.

1. Inhale slowly.
2. Hold your breath for a comfortable length of time.
3. Slowly exhale.

Prana Movements

1. While inhaling, draw shiva-prana down through Brahman's Gate and into your heart chakra.
2. While holding your breath, imagine your shakti-prana ascending from your coccyx and fusing with the shiva-prana in your heart chakra.
3. 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 helps awaken the sixth and seventh chakras, and open the **Shiva Granthi**.

Uddiyana Bandha

Pulling uddiyana bandha means pulling the muscular wall of your upper abdomen inward and upward. This creates pressure against your lower thoracic vertebrae.

When you resist the Push of the Plow by pulling 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

The breathing pattern is the same as Five-Step Breathing, but gradually pull uddiyana bandha as you inhale.

Hold your tongue in khechari mudra. This will help you breathe with long, smooth inhalations and exhalations.

1. Actively exhale by contracting mulabandha.
2. Passively inhale by relaxing mulabandha.
3. Actively inhale by Pushing the Plow. **Resist the abdominal distention this creates by gradually pulling uddiyana bandha inward and upward.**
4. Relax uddiyana bandha, but hold your breath for as long as comfortable.
5. Passively exhale by relaxing your Push on the Plow.

Prana Movements

3. During the active phase of inhalation, draw shakti-prana up sushumna and into the Shiva Granthi, where the spine becomes the brain.
4. While holding your breath, imagine shiva-prana and shakti-prana fusing into Nectar and flowing up to Brahman's Gate and then down into your Third Eye.
5. While exhaling, imagine the Nectar flowing down sushumna and into your coccyx as you gradually contract mulabandha.

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

Chapter 3: Pranayama

Pranayama Routine

There are two challenges to incorporating these techniques into your practice. The first is learning the techniques. I hope the instructions given in this essay are adequate.

The second challenge is determining which techniques to practice on any given day. There are numerous ways to proceed. 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 schedule.

Week One

Follow the Ox Meditation p.11	Five minutes.
Brahma Granthi Pranayama p.21	Fourteen times.
Rebound Meditation p.13	Five or ten minutes.

Week Two

Quiet Heart Meditation p.12	Five minutes.
Vishnu Granthi Pranayama p.22	Fourteen times.
Rebound Meditation p.13	Five or ten minutes.

Week Three

Shambhavi Mudra p.12	Five minutes.
Shiva Granthi Pranayama p.23	Fourteen times.
Rebound Meditation p.13	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 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 the following correlations are 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. 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 **svadhisthana**, the second chakra, the lower abdomen. The root of svadhisthana 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.

Waterfall 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 'flow of Nectar' is experienced as uplifting and rejuvenating. This is represented by the small waterfall descending from the Lake of Nectar into the **Pool of Nectar** at the back of the throat.

Symbols of the Three Granthis

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

The Brahma Granthi, which guards the opening to 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 guards the opening to the third layer of sushumna, is symbolized by the **Middle Bridge** which spans the river of sushumna opposite the heart.

The Shiva Granthi, which guards the opening to the fourth layer of sushumna, is symbolized by the **Upper Bridge** spans the river of sushumna near the Sun.

Symbols of Bandhas and Mudras

Water Girl and Water Boy are 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**.

Water Girl symbolizes the ren channel of acupuncture theory. It flows up the front of the torso. Water Boy symbolizes the du channel of acupuncture theory. It flows up the back of the torso. Both of these channels originate in the perineum.

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 Plowing Man is Pranayama. He represents the **conscious** control of the rhythm of inhalation, exhalation, and breath retention.

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.’

The Ox is Vajroli Mudra. **The Ox** is the muscular wall of your lower abdomen, the flower of **svadhithana**, the second chakra.

When you **passively observe** the changes of **pressure** and **tension** in your lower abdomen, you are **‘Following the Ox.’**

When you **actively tense** your lower abdomen, you are **‘Holding the Ox.’** This is vajroli mudra. Holding the Ox creates pressure against your sacrum, symbolized by the **Second Cauldron of Fire**.

Weaving Girl is Uddiyana Bandha. Weaving Girl is the muscular wall of your upper abdomen, the flower of manipura, the third chakra.

Uddiyana means ‘flying upward.’ Uddiyana bandha is performed by drawing 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. Her spinning wheel is the navel, the source of all the meridian channels of the body.

Uddiyana bandha creates pressure against your lower thoracic spine, symbolized by the **Fire within Sushumna**, just opposite Weaving Girl.

Smiling Monk is Khechari Mudra. Smiling Monk is the muscles of your tongue and trachea, the flower of vishuddhi, the fifth chakra.

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 on a shelf of rock that symbolizes the lower jaw. He stands with his back to us, his head tilted so far backward that his face appears **upside down**, symbolizing 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.

Sitting Sage is Shambhavi Mudra. The 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**.

Herding Boy is Quiet Heart Meditation

The interpretation 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 Quiet Heart Meditation.

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.

Note: We know Herding Boy is holding 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.