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## 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 traditions of hatha and tantric 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](http://CIHS.edu)

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### **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 intelligence that determines 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.

## 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 in the medulla oblongata, at the base of the brain.

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

4th. **Anahata**, the fourth chakra. The flower of anahata is the center of your chest. The root of anahata is near the **fifth thoracic vertebra**.

3rd. **Manipura**, the third chakra. The flower of manipura is your upper abdomen, between your navel and your sternum. The root of manipura is near the **second lumbar vertebra**, just below your ribs.

2nd. **Svadhithana**, the second chakra. The flower of svadhithana is your lower abdomen, between your navel and pubic bone. The root of svadhithana is near the **second sacral vertebra**.

1st. **Muladhara**, the first chakra. The flower of muladhara is the floor of your pelvis. The root of muladhara is within the **coccyx**, your ‘tailbone.’

**More on Ajna, the sixth chakra.** Dr. Motoyama wrote that the root of ajna chakra is the area of the hypothalamus, in the center of the brain. Paramahansa Yogananda wrote that the root is in the medulla oblongata, at the base of the brain. Other traditions make no mention of a ‘root,’ but they place the Shiva Granthi in the medulla oblongata (see page 8). The creator of the Nei Jing Tu, places both the root of ajna chakra and the Shiva Granthi in the medulla oblongata (see pages 36, 37).

In this essay I will presume that the **Shiva Granthi is the root of ajna chakra**. And it is in the medulla oblongata, at the base of the brain.

These distinctions have no real consequence for most yoginis, but I feel obliged to mention them.

### 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.

**The energies of the three bodies transmute into each other.** For example: inspiring thoughts in the causal dimension give rise to strong emotions of the astral dimension. And these strong emotions influence physical energies such as muscle tension, nervous tension, heart beat, blood pressure, etc.

This transmutation of energies also occurs in the opposite direction. For example: physical exhaustion gives rise to astral emotions of frustration or resentment. And these emotions give rise to depressed thoughts and pessimism.

**The transmutation of energies takes place within the chakras.** The energy cultivation practices in taoism and yoga take advantage of these transmutations. It is very difficult control our emotions and thoughts, but if we focus on controlling the Prana flowing in the physical dimension, then this energy will be converted by the chakras into the energies of the astral and causal dimensions. Repetitively doing this gradually gives us conscious control over our emotions and thoughts.

### 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.

### **Nectar Prana Purified of Desire**

In yogic theory, the energy of all our **uncompleted desires** and the **karmic debts** created by our selfish actions are stored in our chakras as **Seeds of Karma**. 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 Prana that has been purified of the desires that pulled it apart when our consciousness descended into our bodies.

### **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.'

### 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 between the four different layers 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 the next inner layer 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 Nectar into the Vajra Nadi, the second layer of Sushumna.

**The Vishnu Granthi** is in or just above the heart chakra. It restricts the flow of Nectar into the Chitrini Nadi, the third layer of Sushumna.

**The Shiva Granthi** is in the medulla oblongata, at the base of the brain, between the fifth and sixth chakras. It restricts the flow of Nectar into the Brahma Nadi, the central core of Sushumna.

**Note:** It is possible that the Shiva Granthi restricts the flow of Nectar into the Chitrini Nadi and Vishnu Granthi restricts the flow of Nectar into the Brahma Nadi. This distinction has no real consequence for most practicing yoginis, but I feel obliged to mention this possibility.

**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.



### Awakening the Chakras

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. This process is called '**Awakening the Chakras**,' and it occurs in stages.

**Physical Dimension.** 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 Dimension.** When the pranas circulating through Sushumna Nadi are fused into **Nectar**, they will burst the Brahma Granthi and flow into the **Vajra Nadi**. The yogini will become aware of astral phenomena, and how these phenomena influence the physical world.

**Higher Astral Dimension.** When the pranas circulating through Vajra Nadi fuse into **Nectar**, they will burst the Vishnu Granthi and 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 Dimension.** When the pranas circulating through Chitrini Nadi fuse into **Nectar**, they will burst the Shiva Granthi and 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.

**Note:** I remind the reader that it is possible that the Shiva Granthi restricts the flow of Nectar into the higher astral dimension, and the Vishnu Granthi restricts the flow of Nectar into the causal dimension (see note on page 8).

## Meditation

**Meditation.** Meditation is focusing your attention, your shiva-prana, into a chakra. As your meditation deepens, your focus becomes stronger and shiva-prana begins to accumulate. This magnetically draws more shakti-prana into the chakra, which results in more inner phenomena becoming active.

**Three Granthis. Three Dantian.** Dantian is a Chinese term that is usually translated as 'Field of Elixir.' To stay consistent, I refer to dantian as 'Fields of Nectar.' There are three dantian: lower, middle, and upper. They are important areas of focus in taoist traditions of energy cultivation and meditation.

Dantian can be imagined as '**Spheres of Awareness**' that are centered in the areas that correspond with the three granthis. These spheres of awareness usually include two or three chakras of the tantric/yoga tradition. In my book 'A Yogi's Guide to Chakra Meditation,' I included techniques that focus on each of the seven chakras. But in this essay I am focusing on how bandhas and mudras can help open the three granthis. The concept of 'spheres of awareness' is useful for this purpose.

Paramahansa Yogananda, a highly influential Indian yogi who helped bring yoga to the western world, wrote that the first, fourth, and sixth chakras might be thought of as 'resting places' or 'oases' in the long journey of spiritual development. These three chakras correspond with the three granthis/dantian.

When a granthi opens and the Nectar flows into a deeper layer of Sushumna a yogini is going to spend years working with the karmic seeds in each of the chakras at this new level of experience. Only after she has achieved some purification at this new level of awareness will she be able to open the next granthi and repeat this purification at a deeper level.

**What's in a name?** The names of the meditation techniques are names I have created. They are names of convenience, not tradition. I did this hoping to avoid confusion with how the techniques are presented in different traditions.

### **Following the Ox** Meditation on the Lower Dantian

The first and second chakras are intimately linked. The outer layer of Sushumna starts in the first chakra. The next inner layer, Vajra Nadi, starts in the second chakra. The door between these two layers, the Brahma Granthi, lies between the two chakras.

**The 'Ox'** is the muscular wall of your lower abdomen, between your navel and pubic bone. The purpose of 'Following the Ox' is to open the Brahma Granthi. This is a milestone event in the life of a yogini. She will begin to experience astral phenomena. But the granthi will not open until the first two chakras are more active and brought under conscious control. To become more conscious of this area taoist schools of meditation focus on the lower abdomen, the flower of the second chakra. And so do many of the buddhist schools of China, Korea, and Japan. Indian yoga/tantra schools of meditation usually focus on the first chakra, whether that be the floor of the pelvis or the coccyx.

**Physical Focus.** The Lower Dantian is centered in your lower abdomen, just above your pubic bone. This sphere of awareness includes the roots and flowers of the first and second chakras, and the Brahma Granthi which lies between them. Begin with a focus on that part of your abdominal wall that is just above your pubic bone. But allow your awareness to follow the Prana wherever it manifests within the Lower Dantian.

**Technique.** Sit calmly and passively observe how natural, uncontrolled breathing affects the Lower Dantian. Make no attempt to control your breath, just focus on the changes in tension and distention created by each inhalation and exhalation.

**Phenomena.** The perception of physical movement will eventually ripen into an awareness of Prana moving and gathering within your lower abdomen, sacrum, or coccyx. If the Prana in your first and second 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.

### Quiet Heart

#### Meditation on the Middle Dantian

**The Heart and Pratyahara.** One of the most profound teachings of yoga is the interrelationship between breathing, the mind, and the heart. If a yogini focuses on any one these three, then the other two also come under her control. As she becomes able to influence the Prana moving through her heart, a yogini becomes able to enter a more complete state of '**Pratyahara**.' Pratyahara is the ability to consciously withdraw Prana from the sensory nerves.

During our waking state Prana is flowing outwards from the chakras into the sensory organs of touch, taste, sight, smell, and hearing. But each night, when we desire to sleep, Prana is unconsciously withdrawn into the spine. If this 'unconscious pratyahara' does not happen, we cannot 'fall asleep.'

The pratyahara that occurs before sleep is an unconscious process, but if we learn to consciously constrain Prana from flowing outwards into the senses, then we will not fall asleep when the physical senses go quiet. We will become consciously aware of the astral and causal dimensions of existence that we previously only dimly perceived as dreams.

**Physical Focus.** The Middle Dantian is centered just above your heart. This sphere of awareness includes the roots and the flowers of the heart and throat chakras, and the Vishnu Granthi just above the heart. Some taoist schools also include the root and flower of the third chakra. Begin with a focus on your heart. But allow your awareness to follow the Prana wherever it manifests within the Middle Dantian.

**Technique.** Sit calmly and passively observe how natural, uncontrolled breathing affects the Middle Dantian. Make no attempt to control your breath.

As you become calm, you will begin to hear and feel your heart beating.

Notice how your passive inhalations and exhalations temporarily obscure your perception of your heartbeat, but during the breathless pause after exhalation your heartbeat is clearly perceptible. 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 and quieting your mind.

### **Gazing at the Moon**

#### Meditation on the Upper Dantian

**Physical Focus.** The Upper Dantian is centered in the center of your brain. This sphere of awareness includes the roots and flowers of your sixth and seventh chakras. Remember, this essay assumes that the root of the sixth chakra is the Shiva Granthi. Allow your awareness to follow the Prana wherever it manifests within this sphere.

**Shambhavi Mudra.** 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. Your eyeballs will rebound upwards and slightly inwards. Maintain this internal focus while keeping your eyelids at least partially closed so that no external light is perceptible. This is '**Shambhavi Mudra.**'

Focusing on the tip of your nose before closing your eyes and rolling them upward is just a useful training technique. Once you are comfortable with shambhavi mudra, you may skip the preliminary step of gazing at the tip of your nose.

**Technique.** Hold your eyes in shambhavi mudra and passively observe how natural, uncontrolled inhalation and exhalation affects the Upper Dantian.

**Phenomena.** The first levels of perception will be an awareness of pressure in the Third Eye or the Shiva Granthi, or of movement between the two. As you become calm, you will become aware that the Third Eye subtly 'brightens and dims' with each breath.

**Seeing Astral Lights.** Chakras radiate astral colors. As your meditation deepens you will see these colors reflected in your Third Eye, the flower of the sixth chakra. If this happens, let go of your focus on the breath and focus on what you see.

**Hearing Nada Sounds.** The flow of Prana 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 radiate from the Shiva Granthi at the base of your brain, or from 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.

Let go of your focus on breath and 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.

### More on OM

Patanjali, the great codifier of yoga philosophy, gives special praise to the practice of meditating on OM. All the other techniques of meditation and pranayama might be divided into three categories:

1. Techniques that quiet the mind enough to hear the nada sounds.
2. Techniques that focus on the chakras, slowly purifying them and altering which nada sound comes forward in meditation, culminating in OM.
3. Techniques that take us to the source of OM. Paramahansa Yogananda wrote that at first the yogini hears the OM sound within her, then all around her, and eventually her consciousness is drawn out of her body and she becomes one with OM everywhere.

### Following the Rebound

#### The Fourth Meditation

After practicing a specific technique of pranayama or meditation it is important to sit quietly and observe what spontaneously arises into your awareness. I call this period of open awareness '**Following the Rebound.**'

The most common experience is a feeling of peace or calm that is not localized in a specific chakra. Sometimes the sense of having a body, or the weight of the body fades away. As our practice deepens we begin to experience sensations of Prana flowing within Sushumna or a chakra, or perceive astral light, or color, or hear nada sounds.

But, meditation and pranayama increase the flow of Prana into the chakras. This awakens the '**Seeds of Karma**' stored in them. When we are focused on the willful, imaginative techniques of pranayama or meditation, these seeds are suppressed. But when we come to the end of our practice, and we relax our focused efforts, then these seeds manifest as physical restlessness, desires, emotions, memories, and thoughts.

Dr. Motoyama made the analogy of Seeds of Karma being like air-filled beach balls being held underwater. When our conscious mind is actively involved with some other task, the beach balls are held down under the surface of the water, in our unconscious mind. But after the practice of meditation or pranayama, the conscious mind is calm and relaxed and alert. This is when the beach balls 'shoot upward,' breaking onto the surface of our conscious awareness.

Seeds of karma keep us identified with our bodies and block our perceptions of the subtle realms. They lure us away from introspection and draw us outward into the world of the senses to pursue unfinished worldly desires. It is necessary to purify these seeds before the chakras will awaken into consciously controlled organs of inner perception.

### Seeds of Karma

Dealing with the karmic seeds that arise after pranayama or during meditation is an integral part of spiritual development. Here are five strategies for dealing with them:

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 or needless worry about what might happen. These can be dismissed simply by saying to yourself, 'I will deal with this later.'
3. **Neutralize them.** Resentment, or jealousy, or clashes of personality plague us all. Such emotions are primitive and powerful. They can sometimes be neutralized by cultivating the opposite quality. For example, annoyance or resentment of someone can be neutralized by cultivating the opposite emotional qualities of compassion and kindness toward them.
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 illuminating. It would be impossible to list all the beneficial thoughts and memories that might arise, but they include calm insights about your present problems, 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 peace and wisdom from them. They will eventually fade, and then you should lovingly set them aside and resume your focus of meditation.

### **Surrender to Something Greater than Yourself**

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. Emancipation is the realization that you are Purusha: consciousness not limited to a body. The return to Purusha consciousness can only be achieved by surrendering to something greater than yourself. For Dr. Motoyama, 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. She is unlikely to succeed in releasing all her personal desires and beliefs, or her attachment to her body unless she can surrender to something whose love and wisdom is greater than her own.

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.



## Pranayama

‘Ayama’ means ‘**control**’ in Sanskrit. **Pranayama** means ‘**the control of Prana**.’ Pranayama is using breathing techniques to draw more Prana into the chakras.

**Three Phases 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 in your body is learning to control the rhythm of inhalation, retention, and exhalation.

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 4-2-4 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. A rhythm that is comfortable for one form of pranayama might not be comfortable when practicing a different form of pranayama.

**Four Phases of Breathing.** Some traditions of pranayama include the pause after exhalation as part of their breathing rhythm. For example: they might inhale for 4 seconds - hold for 4 seconds - exhale for 4 seconds - pause for 4 seconds. This would be an example of a 4-4-4-4 breathing rhythm.

## 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 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.

### **Variations of Pranayama Techniques**

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. I believe this is because there are always some personal variations in the way people experience the flow of Prana.

I also believe that as we progress the Prana flows differently because the channels through which it flows are purified and deeper channels are opened.

This means it is unlikely that any description I present is perfectly suited for everyone. Therefore, if some detail in the description of how to breathe, or how to guide the movement of Prana is not effective, then I suggest you test whatever modifications occur to you.

For example, some students find it laborious to try to feel Prana moving all the way up from their coccyx and into their brain while inhaling. For them, it is more effective to just feel Prana moving up into their brain without trying to feel or imagine its entire pathway.

**What's in a name?** The names of the pranayama techniques are my own. They are names of convenience, not tradition. I did this hoping to avoid confusion with how the techniques are presented in different traditions.

### **Bandhas and Mudras** Aids to Pranayama Practice

**Bandhas and mudras** are subtle muscular contractions that stimulate the flow of 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. They will be described in detail as each pranayama technique is introduced.

1. **Mulabandha.** Contracting mulabandha means closing your anus and pulling the floor of your pelvis upward. This creates **tension around your coccyx**, and stimulates shakti-prana.
2. **Vajroli Mudra.** Vajroli mudra is tensing the muscles of your lower abdomen, the muscles between your navel and your pubic bone. This creates pressure against your sacrum, which helps **raise shakti-prana upward through your sacrum**.
3. **Uddiyana Bandha.** Uddiyana means 'flying upward.' Pulling uddiyana bandha is tensing the muscular wall of your upper abdomen and then sucking it inward and upward. This stimulates your solar plexus of nerves and creates **pressure against your lower thoracic spine**. This pressure helps raise shakti-prana up into the higher chakras.
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. A detailed description of this mudra is included in the 'Gazing at the Moon' meditation on page 13.
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 also helps to open the Vishnu and Shiva Granthis.

### Pushing the Plow

#### First Pranayama for the Lower Dantian

**Pushing the Plow.** 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.**

#### Breathing Pattern

1. Slowly **Push the Plow** to create a long, slow inhalation. This active inhalation creates **abdominal distention.**
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.**

#### Prana Movement

1. While inhaling, draw shiva-prana down into your lower abdomen.
2. During breath retention, fuse the shiva-prana with the shakti-prana which is abundant in the Lower Dantian.
3. While exhaling, guide the Prana/Nectar up sushumna and into your Third Eye.

#### Suggested Routine

1. Follow the Ox meditation for ten minutes.
2. Push the Plow 14 times and then Follow the Rebound for several minutes.

### **Mulabandha**

#### **Second Pranayama for the Lower Dantian**

Contracting mulabandha is contracting your anus and pulling the floor of your pelvis upward. This area is the flower of muladhara chakra. This creates **tension around your coccyx**, the root of muladhara chakra. This tension stimulates the shakti-prana.

When you contract mulabandha, it raises the floor of your pelvis and creates tension in your lower abdomen. These actions push your abdominal organs upward, which forces a little air out of your lungs. This is an **active exhalation**.

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

#### **Breathing Pattern**

1. Actively exhale by contracting mulabandha.
2. Passively inhale by relaxing mulabandha. This usually takes 2 or 3 seconds.
3. Hold your breath with your glottis open for as long as comfortable.
4. Actively exhale to begin the next breathing cycle.

#### **Prana Movement**

3. While holding your breath, guide shiva-prana down into your coccyx and fusing with shakti-prana, which is abundant in the Lower Dantian.
4. While exhaling, guide the Prana/Nectar upward into your Third Eye.

#### **Suggested Routine**

1. Follow the Ox meditation for ten minutes.
2. Practice mulabandha breathing 14 times and then Follow the Rebound for several minutes.

### **Turning the Lower Wheel**

#### Third Pranayama for the Lower Dantian

This pranayama combines the techniques of Pushing the Plow, mulabandha, and vajroli mudra. **Vajroli mudra** is a contraction of the muscles of your lower abdomen, with a focus on the area just above your pubic bone.

#### **Breathing Pattern**

1. Slowly exhale while gradually contracting mulabandha.
2. Release mulabandha and passively inhale. This takes about 2 seconds.
3. As the passive inhalation comes to an end, begin to actively inhale by Pushing the Plow. The passive and active phases of inhalation should blend into one, smooth inhalation. The total time for inhalation usually takes 4—5 seconds.
4. While Pushing the Plow gradually tense the area just above your pubic bone. This creates resistance to the distension of Pushing the Plow. And this resistance creates pressure against your sacrum.
5. When your inhalation is complete, relax vajroli mudra and hold your breath with your glottis open.

#### **Prana Movements**

While inhaling, the Push of the Plow draws shiva-prana down into your lower abdomen, and the pressure created by vajroli mudra draws shakti-prana up into your lower abdomen.

While holding your breath, imagine your shiva-prana and shakti-prana fusing within your Lower Dantian.

While exhaling, guide the Prana/Nectar up sushumna and into your Third Eye.

#### **Suggested Routine**

1. Follow the Ox meditation for ten minutes.
2. Turn the Lower Wheel 14 times and then Follow the Rebound for several minutes.

**Note:** I frequently use a **variation of vajroli mudra**. While inhaling, instead of tensing the area above your pubic bone, you try ‘pull’ or ‘suck’ this area inward and upward. It is not a large movement, but it creates resistance to the Push of the Plow and this creates pressure against the sacrum.

When I use vajroli in this way the Prana movements are the same as described above except when exhaling. While exhaling, I guide the Prana/Nectar down into the first chakra rather than up into the Third Eye.

### **Khechari Mudra and Ujjayi** Pranayama for the Middle Dantian

**Khechari mudra.** Khechari mudra is pressing your tongue against your hard or soft palate. Khechari mudra most directly affects the heart and throat chakras, but it can also be included with **almost any form of pranayama** because it enhances your ability to control the length of inhalation and exhalation, and to move Prana.

The two basic variations of khechari mudra are pressing your tongue upward against your hard palate or pulling it backward against your 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 the position and tension of your tongue gives you more control over modifying the tensions in your trachea. These tensions **create resistance** to the flow of air during inhalation and exhalation. And this resistance stimulates the **movement of Prana**.

**Ujjayi.** Ujjayi refers to where you focus the resistance to inhalation and exhalation. With some practice you can learn to focus the resistance almost anywhere along the path of air intake. It can vary from your nostrils, to your hard palate or behind your soft palate or your larynx or your chest or your heart. Where you choose to focus the ujjayi depends on the form of pranayama you are practicing.

**Ujjayi Sound.** Tension in the trachea creates resistance to the flow of air during inhalation and exhalation. This can create a sound called 'ujjayi.' Ujjayi means 'victory' in Sanskrit. This sound will vary depending on where you focus the resistance to inhalation and exhalation. The sound itself is not important. What is important is finding the quality of tension and resistance that most effectively moves your Prana.

In my experience, creating an ujjayi sound is useful in the beginning. Trying to keep the quality of the sound smooth and even is a useful way to learn to control your breathing. But over time the ujjayi sound becomes inaudible.

**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.

### **Turning the Middle Wheel**

#### Pranayama for the Middle Dantian

‘Breath control is essential for awakening the heart ... and throat chakras...’  
Dr. Hiroshi Mototama.

#### **Breathing Pattern**

Hold your tongue in khechari mudra and breathe with a quiet ujjayi. Focus on long, smooth inhalations and exhalations.

1. Inhale as slowly as comfortable, 8 seconds or longer if you can.
2. Hold your breath with your glottis open for a few seconds.
3. Exhale as slowly as comfortable, 8 seconds or longer if you can.

#### **Prana Movements**

While inhaling, imagine that a thin stream of cool shiva-prana is being drawn downward through Brahman’s Gate and into your heart.

While holding your breath, guide shakti-prana up from your first chakra and into your heart.

While exhaling, guide the Prana/Nectar formed in your heart up and out through Brahman’s Gate.

#### **Suggested Routine**

1. Quiet Heart meditation for ten minutes.
2. Turn the Middle Wheel 14 times and then Follow the Rebound for several minutes.



### **Turning the Great Wheel**

#### The Fundamental Pranayama

Some variation of this pranayama is fundamental to most schools Chinese taoism and Indian tantra/yoga. It circulates Prana through all of the chakras and dantian. Tantrics will usually move the Prana up and down Sushumna. Taoists will usually raise the Prana up the 'Du' channel in the back of the body, and down the 'Ren' channel in the front of the body.

Dr. Motoyama sometimes suggested a circular flow of Prana in the reverse direction: raise Prana/Nectar up the front of the body during inhalation and then down through the spine during exhalation. I use this reverse pattern in the variation described below.

**Uddiyana bandha.** Uddiyana bandha is 'pulling or sucking' your upper abdomen inward and upward. When uddiyana bandha is used to resist the Push of the Plow it creates pressure against your lower thoracic vertebrae. This stimulates the third chakra and helps to draw shakti-prana upward.

#### **Breathing Pattern**

Hold your tongue in khechari mudra and breathe with a quiet or silent ujjayi.

1. Exhale and contract mulabandha.
2. Release mulabandha and inhale by Pushing the Plow. Resist the Push of the Plow by **gradually pulling uddiyana bandha**.
3. Relax uddiyana bandha, and roll your eyes upward into shambhavi mudra. Hold your breath with your glottis open for as long as comfortable.

#### **Prana Movements**

1. While inhaling, draw shakti-prana up the Ren channel in the front of your body and into your Third Eye.
2. While holding your breath, hold the Prana/Nectar in your Third Eye for a few seconds. Then guide the Prana/Nectar back over the top of your brain and down into the Shiva Granthi at the base of your brain and hold for a few more seconds.
3. While exhaling, guide the Prana/Nectar down Sushumna and into your coccyx.

#### **Suggested Routine**

1. Gazing at the Moon meditation for ten minutes.
2. Turn the Great Wheel 14 times and then Follow the Rebound for several minutes.

### **Sushumna Purification** Opening Brahman's Gate

This pranayama circulates Prana through all of Sushumna and it helps to open Brahman's Gate on the top of your head. It can be practiced before or after meditation. If you practice before meditation, it is easier to draw your consciousness into Sushumna, beyond the reach of physical distractions. If you practice after meditation, it helps remove any mental tension or energy stagnation that might have developed during meditation.

#### **Breathing Pattern**

Hold your tongue in khechari mudra and breathe with a quiet or silent ujjayi. Focus on long, smooth inhalations and exhalations.

1. Inhale as slowly as comfortable, 8 seconds or longer if you can.
2. Hold your breath with your glottis open for several seconds.
3. Exhale as slowly as comfortable, 8 seconds or longer if you can.

#### **Prana Movements**

While inhaling, draw shakti-prana up Sushumna and out through Brahman's Gate.

While holding your breath, feel the shakti-prana expanding and fusing with the shiva-prana that permeates the space all around you.

While exhaling, guide the Prana/Nectar back down into your coccyx.

#### **Suggested Routine**

Sushumna Purification 14 times before or after any pranayama or meditation technique. Then Follow the Rebound for several minutes.

**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](http://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](http://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 2025, 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 chakra: **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 chakra: **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 chakra: **Smiling Monk** is in the flower of **vishuddhi**, the fifth chakra, the throat. The root of vishuddhi is near the **seventh cervical vertebra**.

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

3rd chakra: **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 chakra: **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 chakra: **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 represented by the circling **Tai Ji symbols** near the Plowing Man.

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

**Brahma Nectar** is represented 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** restricts the flow of Prana into the second layer of Sushumna. It is in the sacrum, between the first and second chakras. It is represented by the **Lower Bridge** which spans the river of Sushumna near the base of the spine.

**The Vishnu Granthi** restricts the flow of Prana into the third layer of Sushumna. It is in or just above the heart chakra. It is represented by the **Middle Bridge** which spans the river of Sushumna opposite the heart.

**The Shiva Granthi** restricts the flow of Prana into the fourth layer of Sushumna. It is in the medulla oblongata, the brain stem. It is represented by the **Upper Bridge** which spans the river of Sushumna near the Sun, near the base of the skull.

**Note:** I remind the reader that it is possible that the Shiva Granthi restricts the flow of Nectar into the third layer and the Vishnu Granthi restricts the flow of Nectar into the fourth layer (see page 8).

**The Plowing Man:**  
the symbol of  
**Abdominal Breathing**

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

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

**The Plow** is 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 your lower abdomen. Your lower abdomen distends with every inhalation, and it returns to its neutral position with every exhalation.

**The Ox:**  
the symbol of  
**Vajroli Mudra**

**‘The Ox’** is the muscular wall of your lower abdomen, the flower of svadhisthana, the second chakra.

Vajroli Mudra is tensing or pulling your lower abdominal muscles, the muscles between your navel and your pubic bone. This creates a stimulating pressure against your sacrum, symbolized by the **Second Cauldron of Fire**, just above the First Cauldron of Fire, just beneath the Circling Tai Ji symbols.



**Water Girl and Water Boy:**  
the symbols of  
**Mulabandha**

**Water Girl and Water Boy** are in the floor of the pelvis, the flower of muladhara, the first chakra. Near them, at the base of the spine, is a tower: the Brahma Granthi.

**Water Girl** is a symbol for the '**Ren**' channel of acupuncture theory. Its main branch flows up the front of the torso. **Water Boy** is a symbol for 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.

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

**Weaving Girl:**  
the symbol of  
**Uddiyana Bandha**

**Weaving Girl** is sitting in the upper abdomen, the flower of manipura, the third chakra. Her **spinning wheel** is the navel, the source of all the meridian channels of the body. Pulling uddiyana bandha is tensing the muscular wall of your upper abdomen and then drawing it inward and upward. When you do this, it creates a subtle lifting of your rib cage. Both of these movements are symbolized by the **Ribbon of Silk** flowing inward from her spinning wheel and then upward in front of the spine, disappearing into the throat, which is the top of the rib cage.

Uddiyana bandha creates pressure against your lower thoracic vertebrae, the root of your third chakra. This pressure helps draw shakti-prana upward. This stimulating pressure is symbolized by the **Fire within Sushumna**, just above the circling Tai Ji symbols.

**Herding Boy:**  
the symbol of  
**Pratyahara**

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. **This is pratyahara.**

**Herding Boy** is in the center of the chest, the flower of the heart chakra. Near the heart and within Sushumna is a tower: the Vishnu Granthi.

Herding Boy 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 symbol of Purusha. It is the eternal, unchanging axis of the ever-changing world.

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.

Herding Boy is surrounded 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**. This 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.

**The Spiral Path** is composed of stepping stones. I believe these are symbolic of the heart beat. As Herding Boy approaches the center of the spiral, the number of stones in each ring becomes fewer and fewer. This is symbolic of the heartbeat slowing down.

**Smiling Monk:**  
the symbol of  
**Khechari Mudra**

**Smiling Monk** is pictured on the same level as the trachea, the flower of vishuddhi, the fifth chakra. He 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 within the Moon, the symbol of the Third Eye.

Smiling Monk stands with his back to us, his head tilted so far backward that his face appears **upside down**. This is a symbol for drawing the tongue up and back. Both arms are **thrust upward**, symbolizing that he is lifting the Rainbow of Shakti-prana upward. The uplifted arms and tilted head could also symbolize the elation of experiencing the downward trickle of Nectar symbolized by the small waterfall at the back of the throat (see page 7).

**Sitting Sage:**  
the symbol of  
**Shambhavi Mudra**

**Sitting Sage** is all levels of spiritual insight. Of all the human figures in the Nei Jing Tu he is the only that is not moving. He is sitting still in a classic meditation posture. Underneath his feet is a sphere. It is the **Moon**, the Third Eye, the flower of ajna, the sixth chakra. Above the Twelve Story Pagoda and Under the Lake of Nectar is another sphere. It is the **Sun**, the root of the sixth chakra. Next to the Sun is a tower: the Shiva Granthi at the base of the brain (see page 5).

### Symbols of 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 techniques of meditation or pranayama is trickier business. The artist certainly intended there should be a practical implementation of the theoretical ideas, and taoists practice meditation and pranayama techniques which they call 'Nei-Gong,' but we can only guess which variations of these techniques the artist intended.

In spite of these uncertainties, I am going to be bold and suggest that the images within the Nei Jing Tu symbolize at least three techniques of meditation.

1. **The Plowing Man.** The Plowing Man stands in the flower of the second chakra. The Plow is the diaphragm. The Ox is the muscular wall of the lower abdomen. All of these together might represent a meditation similar to **'Following the Ox.'**
2. **Herding Boy.** Herding Boy stands in the flower of the heart chakra. He is surrounded by a ring of breath. He holds the Pole Star of mental stillness. And he walks the Spiral Path of the heartbeat. All of these together might represent a meditation similar to **'Quiet Heart Meditation.'**
3. **Sitting Sage.** Sitting Sage is in the flower of the sixth chakra. He is the only human figure in the Nei Jing Tu that is not moving. He is sitting still in a classic meditation posture. Underneath his feet is a sphere. It is the Moon, the Third Eye, the flower of the sixth chakra. Above the Twelve Story Pagoda and Under the Lake of Nectar is another sphere. It is the Sun, the root of the sixth chakra. next to the Sun is a tower: the Shiva Granthi. All of these together might represent a meditation similar to **'Gazing at the Moon.'**

### **Symbols of Pranayama**

I conclude by proposing the following images represent pranayama techniques similar to those described in this essay.

1. **The Circling Tai Ji Tu.** I have previously suggested that the Circling Tai Ji symbols near the Plowing Man symbolize the Vajra Nectar, but they might also represent a pranayama similar to '**Turning the Lower Wheel.**'

The Circling Tai Ji form a closed loop in the lower abdomen. This circle is sitting just above the two Cauldrons of Fire that represent mulabandha and vajroli mudra. And the circle is tandem to the Plowing Man, who is Pushing the Plow into the lower abdomen. These images combine to suggest 'Turning the Lower Wheel.'

2. **Ring of Breath.** Herding Boy is standing in the heart chakra surrounded by a Ring of Breath that comes down from the trachea: the Twelve Story Pagoda. He is holding the Pole Star in his cupped hands. He is not reaching up to the Pole Star, he has brought it down into his heart and is looking at it. All of this suggests a pranayama similar to '**Turning the Middle Wheel.**'

3. **The Rainbows of Prana.** I have previously suggested that the Rainbows of Prana in the front of the skull symbolize the Chitrini Nectar, but they might also represent a pranayama similar to '**Turning the Great Wheel.**'

4. **The Celestial Light.** I have previously suggested that the Celestial Light streaming upward out of the **Pyramid** on the top of the skull symbolizes the Brahma Nectar, but it might also represent a pranayama similar to '**Sushumna Purification.**'