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Editorial

In the world where unpredictability seems to dominate the global politics and determinate everyday lives of individuals, communities, and the whole nations, predictability appears to be the sign of hope for the "good", fully human life.

Spirituality Studies stands firmly in the service of this hope in its various aspects. However, the question arises: How to make out of all those unpredictable events in individual and social life a story which gives sense?

In the 2017 Fall edition of Spirituality Studies Lubomir Martin Ondrasek shares his search for unitive moments carrying in themselves deeper reason and discusses how to put them together into spiritual autobiography. In a similar way, Mark Graceffo tracks the lifemotives of his own life experience in his autobiographical essay.

Both Mukund V. Bhole and Gejza M. Timčák in their studies point to the predictability moments within the wide range of psychological, psycho-physiological and spiritual processes and experiences related to yoga practice in its traditional form, while Rebecca Papa-Adams transfers the idea into a modern context related to yoga training and education.

Consequently, Sandó Kaisen reminds us of the very essence of predictability from the Zen Buddhist point of view – the still point in the middle and, at the same time, beyond all unpredictability.

Let me wish you, dear reader, to find an inspiration in your understanding of this dynamics of unpredictability and predictability on the pages of 2017 Fall edition of the Spirituality Studies Journal.



Cordially
Martin Dojčár

Spiritual Autobiography: A Vehicle for Religious and Ethical Transformation

Received September 30, 2017

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Key words

Autoethnography, spiritual
autobiography, narrative
writing, transformational
leadership, Harvey Cox

The purpose of this essay is to discuss spiritual autobiography in the context of the western Christian tradition as a legitimate form of religious discourse and appropriate mode of theological and ethical reflection that seeks to inform, form, and transform readers, who as a result of this process commit to the transformational task of Christianity in the world. Writing autoethnographies in general and faithful, effective spiritual autobiographies in particular is not as simple a task as may appear to those unfamiliar with the subject. This essay will introduce several important thinkers who work in the field of theology and life writing, thus providing helpful information for a deeper exploration of the issue. Appropriately for this topic, the author will share a portion of his personal story to illustrate the transformative power of the Christian narrative, maintaining that spiritual autobiography has the potential to be an important tool of transformational leadership and vehicle for religious and ethical transformation.

1 Spiritual Autobiography as a Legitimate Form of Religious Discourse

At a time when the narrative approach in theology was not as widely accepted as a form of theological discourse and most academic theologians were reluctant to share their spiritual experiences or even use personal references in their work, the renowned Harvard theologian Harvey Cox started his book *The Seduction of the Spirit* (1973) as follows: "All human beings have an innate need to tell and hear stories and to have a story to live by. Religion, whatever else it has done, has provided one of the main ways of meeting this abiding need. (...) Recently neglected, testimony deserves reinstatement as a primary mode of religious discourse" (Cox 1973, 3). Cox then unapologetically devotes the first part of his book, "Testimony," to reflecting on his own life. Ten years later, Cox's book-length autobiography was published under the title *Just as I am* (Cox 1983).

In recent years, there seems to have been an increasing number of Christian theologians who are willing to share their personal narratives. Derek R. Nelson, Joshua M. Moritz, and Ted Peters edited the book *Theologians in Their Own Words* (2013), which is a collection of twenty-three autobiographical essays by Christian theological thinkers – eighteen men and five women – representing diverse theological backgrounds (i.e. Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Protestant, Evangelical). Some of these include Marilyn McCord Adams, Harvey Cox, Ernst Käsemann, Martin E. Marty, Alister McGrath, Wolfhart Pannenberg, John Polkinghorne, and Kathryn Tanner. Derek Nelson in the book's introduction briefly examines "objections to autobiography" and "possibilities for autobiography," concluding that "despite these objections [James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Martha Nussbaum, Johann von Hofmann], we see value in narrating one's life..." (Nelson 2013, 9).

Heather Walton underscores this new trend in her book *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection*, in which she writes: "One of the most interesting developments in recent theological thinking has been the extraordinary significance accorded to 'narrative' by conservative, radical and liberal theologians alike. This narrative turn, no doubt born of a postmodern skepticism towards abstract, propositional truth claims, is of particular importance for pastoral theologians and practitioners" (Walton 2014, 164). Walton's excellent volume builds on her earlier important work on theological reflection (Graham, Walton, and Ward 2005; 2007). She focuses on three literary approaches to reflective theological writing: autoethnography, journaling, and life writing. Each is defined, explained, and



About the author

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illustrated, enabling the reader to identify the commonalities and variations between them.

Walton reminds us something that may not be obvious at first glance and is especially relevant for those considering writing their own spiritual autobiography: *"The challenge to write experiences as a means of articulating faith or values is a daunting one"* (Walton 2014, xii). At the same time, she provides careful and helpful guidance to those who may want to embark on the process of reflective theological writing. Those with an interest in life writing through a theological lens should familiarize themselves with Walton's work.

2 Transformative Power of Spiritual Autobiography: Personal Experience

From the moment I converted from atheism to Christianity at the age of 18, I never doubted that spiritual autobiography could be an important means for transforming the heart and mind. At the beginning of my spiritual journey was the personal testimony of the former leader of the Brooklyn's notorious Mau Maus gang, Nicky Cruz. The book and international bestseller *Run Baby Run* found me thanks to my close friend, and the rest is history. Until then, I was not an avid reader; I disliked books and do not remember having read more than three voluntarily. When I was in elementary school, my mother read my textbooks aloud and asked me what I remembered. My adversarial relationship to books was one of the main reasons it took me an extra year to graduate from high school; at the time of my conversion, I ranked at the very bottom of my high school class.

But I could not put Cruz's book down and after reading it asked my Christian friend to get me a Bible. Within a few days – I think exactly three – I read the entire New Testament, accepted the Gospel message, started attending my friend's church, and soon afterwards experienced the call to Christian ministry. In short, reading the stories of Cruz and those by and about Jesus became a transformational experience for me. Harvey Cox wrote about these two kinds of stories in his book, *When Jesus Came to Harvard* (2004), which again has a strong autobiographical element as it is based on his fifteen years teaching one of the most popular courses in Harvard's history: "Jesus and Moral Life." Cox told the stories by and about Jesus to his students and several thousand came to hear them, enrolling in his classes.

For about fifteen years, I belonged to a Pentecostal church, eventually becoming an ordained minister with the Assemblies of God. During those years I heard hundreds of personal testimonies and shared my own in private and public settings. Pentecostals are eager to share their experiences of God, which is one reason for its explosive global growth in the 20th century. Grant Wacker underscores the importance of "testimony" in early Pentecostalism and links this spiritual practice to ethics: *"Like countless other Christians before them, early pentecostals assumed that their personal faith stories bore normative implications for others. Consequently, they devoted much of the time in their worship services – maybe a third of the total – to public testimonies about their spiritual journeys"* (Wacker 2001, 58). Even a century after the powerful Pentecostal revival erupted on Azusa Street in Los Angeles and spread to all four corners of the world, testimony plays an important role in Pentecostal theology and practice.

These experiences undoubtedly contributed to my desire to write my own spiritual autobiography, with the initial narrow view of it becoming a vehicle of personal conversion. I have contemplated this idea for over two decades, but other than occasional personal references in my op-eds and other writings that were mostly unrelated to spirituality or theology and a scholarly paper I delivered at a conference on Pentecostalism and later had published (Ondrášek 2013, 95–112), I have not written about my life. Regardless of the reasons that delayed this project, I am grateful that I did not write that story yet. Stories can both positively transform and misinform or mislead – spiritually or otherwise. To embark on such a project, one must be prepared intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

The idea to share my life story with others in writing – family, friends, and anyone willing to read it – never left me, together with the hope that God could use my account to bring about religious and ethical transformation. I have shared a portion of my testimony numerous times, seen its positive fruit, and was encouraged by others to put it in writing. I experienced a deep sense of assurance that this is in fact what God is calling me to do after discussing the issue with my academic adviser, Harvey Cox, in his Harvard Divinity School office in 2005. Since then, the question never was "if" but "when." I consider myself fortunate and blessed as well as a part of God's providence that in January 2017, I was able to take a course from professor Claire Wolfeich at Boston University, who has been supportive and provided me with early guidance for this project.

3 Transformative Power of Spiritual Autobiography: Scholarly Observations

There seems to be little doubt that narrative writing can be an effective tool for influencing human thought and action. R. Ruard Ganzevoort, who is one of the leading proponents of narrative approaches in practical theology, cites the great medieval theologian St. Bonaventure, who in his *Breviloquium* ("Brief Discourse") recognized that *"the mind is more moved by examples than by argumentation, by promises more than by reasoning, by piety more than by definitions"* (Ganzevoort 2012, 215). Ganzevoort, after explaining "the narrative turn" (influenced by Ricoeur's work on narrative identity), discusses narrative approaches and their application to practical theology. In his informative chapter, he introduces the six dimensions of a narrative model – structure, perspective, tone, role assignment, relational positioning, and justification for an audience – before concluding with a critical evaluation of the aforementioned narrative methods. One of the alleged weaknesses of these approaches is uncritical acceptance of human subjectivity and ignorance of the normativity question – something that everyone involved in autobiographical writing needs to keep in mind.

Similarly, Harvey Cox, writing more than seven centuries after St. Bonaventure and referring to the work of American Jewish philosopher Edith Wyschogrod, remarked, *"for all their importance, neither ethical principles nor moral theories actually 'motivate' anyone. What motivates people are stories, narratives, accounts of situations in which choices must be made and stands taken"* (Cox 2004, 25). Due to space constraints, we cannot explore here why human beings seem to be wired this way, but the fact that they are is critically important for leadership studies in general and transformational ministry in particular. As a public theologian with the ambition of becoming a transformational leader, my goal is to motivate people to action, helping them become agents of positive change in society. I view a well-written spiritual autobiography as an important vehicle towards transformational leadership.

Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, practical theologians at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, also recognize that "stories are mighty," underscoring their transformative power. The authors elucidate, adding an important new element to our conversation: *"Stories are mighty, however, not only because we shape our lives through them but also because they have the power to unsettle the lives we have comfortably shaped by them. In the sense, the narrative mode itself subverts our settled social*

realities. Our self-interpretation is not the last word, because our stories are not just our stories. When we weave together the human and the divine, we are attentive to another story that is not completely our own, a narrative that has the power to transform" (Anderson and Foley 1997, 7). The most important chapter of the book for our purposes is Chapter 1, "The Power of Storytelling," which underscores the transformative capacity of narrative.

There are a number of studies and myriad examples showing the impact of spiritual autobiographies on readers. It would probably take a lifetime for a scholar to examine the widespread effects and transformational influence of St. Augustine's famous *Confessions*. Teresa of Ávila poignantly describes her experience reading this work: *"When I began to read the 'Confessions,' I thought I saw myself there described, and began to recommend myself greatly to this glorious Saint. When I came to his conversion, and read how he heard that voice in the garden, it seemed to me nothing less than that our Lord had uttered it for me. I felt so in my heart, I remained for some time lost in tears, in great inward affliction and distress"* (quoted by Janet K. Ruffing 2011, 54). It is true that people can be moved but not changed, but it seems equally true that they cannot be changed without first being moved. One of the big questions, of course, is why some people are never moved by reading a spiritual autobiography and others are never changed, or, put it in positive terms, what criteria spiritual autobiography should meet to increase its probability of becoming a vehicle of transformation.

4 Concluding Remarks

In this essay, I am not arguing that spiritual autobiography is the only or best strategic tool for religious and ethical transformation. I simply assert that it is a legitimate and effective form of religious discourse and for some the most appropriate mode of theological reflection that seeks to inform, form, and transform the reader, who as a result of this process commits to the ethical task of Christianity in the world and contributes to the creation of a "good society," which for me is the aim of transformational ministry. Whether a spiritual biography becomes a vehicle for personal transformation seems to depend mainly on the content of the narrative ("what?") and the way it gets communicated ("how?"). To achieve success in both areas, resulting in *faithful* and *effective* spiritual autobiography, one must not only attend to the practical theological and ethical tasks and integrate them within one's story, but also learn the art and science of autobiographical writing (Walton 2014, Ruffing 2011, Phifer 2002,

Leigh 2000), which includes paying close attention to the "ethics of life writing" (Eakin, ed. 2004).

In addition to the listed resources, one can learn about writing a spiritual autobiography through a careful reading of excellent autobiographies. It is difficult to select the list of the "best" Christian autobiographies, but mine would include St. Augustine, Teresa of Ávila, John Bunyan, Thérèse of Lisieux, Corrie ten Boom, C. S. Lewis, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Nicky Cruz, and Billy Graham. Although quality of effort should never be judged purely by utilitarian considerations, the kind of spiritual fruit produced matters (Matthew 7:20). Ultimately, only God can transform the human heart, but God most often does so through Spirit-filled people who respond with alacrity to God's call.

Lastly, I want to mention one deeply personal reason – again related to transformation – that I feel drawn to writing my personal story and why I would ask others to consider doing the same. Anyone who delves into the field of life writing in general and spiritual autobiography in particular will quickly become aware of the manifold benefits such writing has for authors. Classical Greek philosophers already talked about the importance of "knowing thyself," and a number of Christian theologians pointed to the link between self-knowledge and knowledge of God. Aware of this connection, Heather Walton writes: *"Because of the close ties between our sense of who we are and our grasp of who God is, life writing has become a key resource in vocational exploration and formation, the development of spiritual awareness, theological research and pastoral care. In all these fields it delivers powerful results"* (Walton 2014, 91).

John-Raphael Staudte, who defines autobiography as *"a dialogue of the self with itself in the present about the past for the sake of self-understanding,"* adds along a similar vein to Walton, *"writing and reflecting on one's autobiography enhances spiritual growth and can be therapeutic, freeing people from outlived roles and self-imposed images"* (Staudte 2005, 249). I am at a point in my life in which I can sense and rationally justify the need to "stop and remember" as well as sharpen my spiritual vision, so I can see God's purpose for my life more clearly in the near and distant future. Transformative leadership requires transformed leaders, and my underlying assumption is that writing my spiritual autobiography will be a transformative experience for me, which will bring me closer to God, the source of all positive transformation.

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Working with Vāyus, Prāna and Prānāyāma in Yoga

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Key words

Prāna, vāyu, prānāyāma, self-perception

The paper deals with the practical implementation of the terms *prāna* and *vāyu* in teaching yoga. Different yoga schools and traditions use various terms such as *vāyu*, *vāta*, *prāna*, *pavana*, *samīrana*, *anila*, *māruta*, *śvasana*, *prabhañjana* while highlighting the importance of the subject of *prānāyāma* and for describing the related techniques and their effects. The paper gives the different meanings and understanding of terms *vāyu*, *prāna* and *prānāyāma*. The author deals also with the psycho-physiological mechanisms related with the doctrines of *vāyu* and *prāna* in relation to *prānāyāma*.

1 Introduction

The computer sciences refer to *Basic Input-Output System* (BIOS). The bio-medical sciences refer to *Sensory-Motor activity* and *networking* in the nervous system. There is reference to the terms *vāyus*, *prāna* and *prānāyāma* in traditional texts on Hatha and Tantra yoga.

For a novice and the beginner in yoga, activity of *vāyus* could be understood as neuro-muscular activity and/or psycho-neuro-muscular actions involving motor nerves and motor areas in the brain and the spinal cord. Stimulation of various receptors (exteroceptors/tele-receptors, internal receptors, visceral receptors, vestibular receptors) giving rise to sensations leading to knowledge of different kind could be understood as the activity of *prāna*. The concept of *prānāyāma* could be viewed as increasing the depth, intensity, quality and subtlety of the knowledge and the database related to the Self in relation to the spiritual (*adhyātmika*) yoga [1].

In modern sense of the term, the science, philosophy and practical aspects of traditional yoga education programs are based on subjectively experienced knowledge about the existence and survival of the human being and the life as a whole in different environmental conditions. Those who got this knowledge tried to communicate it to those who didn't have the same or similar kind of knowledge. Being based on the internally aroused sensations, in the initial stages, the teachers and students encounter lot of difficulties in communicating their subjective feelings and knowledge to each-other clearly and effectively in the objective framework of the modern education systems.

Different yoga schools and traditions use various terms such as *vāyu*, *vāta*, *prāna*, *pavana*, *samīrana*, *anila*, *māruta*, *maruta*, *śvasana*, *prabhāñjana* while highlighting the importance of the subject of *prānāyāma* and for describing the related techniques and their effects. Moreover, these terms are used indiscriminately, as synonyms (Gharote and Devnath 2005) and many times in an obscure language. The terms *vāyu*, *prāna* and *prānāyāma* are used with different meanings and understandings in different yoga traditions and in the same tradition with reference to context as has been presented in *Yoga Kosha* [2]. Relevant and important matter has been summarized below.



About the author

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Different meanings and understanding of the term *vāyu* (*Yoga Kosha* 1991, *Gorakshasatakam* 1974, *Hathapradipika* 1985):

- a) Breath (*svāsa-prasvāsa*) – the air (wind) breathed in and out during breathing;
- b) *Prāna* – energy moving to and fro inside the body and which could be taken to any part of the body including the head and held there for shorter or longer time;
- c) Autonomic reflex activities involved in sustaining life (*vāyavāh dashadah*, plural);
- d) States of consciousness (*chitta-avasthā*) arising out of actions, activities and behavior patterns;
- e) Functions of five sensory and five motor organs (*jnānendriyās* and *karmendriyās*);
- f) Constituent material substance of the Nature (Universe) and the Individual (*vāyu* as *mahābhuta*);
- g) Area of the body (from naval to nose) under the influence of *vāyu* (*vāyusthāna*);
- h) Nourishment reaching all parts of the body/being (oxygen or something else?);
- i) Muscular action (contraction–relaxation);
- j) Constitution of individual (*vāta prakruti*), humor (*vāta dosha*) and behavioral tendency (*rajo guna*);
- k) *Vāta dosha* in *Āyurveda*.

Different meanings and understanding of the term *prāna* (*Yoga Kosha* 1991, *Yoga Sutra* 2007, *Gheranda Sanhita* 1978, *Gorakshasatakam* 1974, *Hathapradipika* 1985):

- a) Respiration;
- b) Breath or vital air that moves on continuously throughout the body;
- c) One of the five *vāyus* (other four being *apāna*, *samāna*, *udāna* and *vyāna*);
- d) Autonomic reflex functions involved in preserving life;
- e) Functions of the *jiva* (living being), *jivana*;
- f) Nerve currents, motor impulses;
- g) Something (nerve impulses related with the activity of the vertebral muscles) rising up the back;
- h) One of the ten *vāyus* supposed to be residing below the *kanda* (bulb).

Different meanings and understanding of the term *prānāyāma* (*Yoga Kosha* 1991, *Yoga Sutra* 2007, *Gheranda Sanhita* 1978, *Gorakshasatakam* 1974, *Hathapradipika* 1985, *Bhagavad Gita* 2014):

- a) Pause in breathing;
- b) Whole process of inspiration–expiration and suspension of breath in different ways;
- c) Practice that leads to supreme realization;
- d) Alternate nostril breathing using thumb to close one nostril and the ring and little fingers to close the other nostril and to use these three fingers to close both the nostrils;
- e) Inhalation (*puraka*), exhalation (*rechaka*) and suspension of breath (*kumbhaka*) during the of yoga;
- f) Contemplation on different aspects of goddess Gayatri – “a” during *rechaka*, “u” during *kumbhaka*, and “ma” or goddess Saraswati during *puraka*;
- g) Raising *apāna*, mixing it with *prāna* and carrying the blend to the head;
- h) Simultaneous cessation of *prānagati* and *apānagati*;
- i) Balanced state of *prāna* and *apāna*;
- j) Steadiness of vital air.

In the absence of proper exposure and understanding, it is quite possible that anyone will get confused and disoriented after reading these descriptions and people will run away from the practices based on these concepts. Realizing the need to present such an important subject in simplified language, an attempt has been made to present some of the above-mentioned terms in modern medical language with the intention of using them in a practical class for the novice and the beginners in yoga.

2 Simple Basic Physiological, Psycho-physiological and Physio-psychological Mechanisms

Since infancy, most of our psycho-motor learning and education takes place through three types of gross body movements, which are not related with breathing in a direct way: (1) loco-motor, e.g. movements of arms, legs, and vertebral column; (2) balancing, e.g. standing on one leg or toes, top-sy-turvy positions, rail-walking, etc.; (3) movement against the force of gravity, e.g. lifting the leg/arm, high jump, etc.

These movements can be seen and observed by other persons [3]. The performer can see them in a mirror as is done

by body builders, dancers, actors, weight lifters, etc. In yogic language, *indriya-prāna* is used to get the knowledge. If desired and required, they can be photographed and video filmed for records, validation, verification and comparison. The performer can also subjectively feel these movements from inside the body without using the sense organs and get experiential knowledge which is totally different from the objective knowledge. Directly, these movements are not related with breathing. However, breathing can get influenced by them, if performed till exhaustion by working beyond capacity. Yoga competitions as a sport activity are based on the evaluation of these movements by the judges. Yoga demonstrations also utilize these body movements. However, working with breath during *prānāyāma* assumes different characteristics. It is held in high esteem in traditional yoga.

Soon after birth, we start to breathe. Natural breathing is spontaneous and involuntary. It involves (1) expanding or opening type of body movements related with the phase of inhalation or breathing-in (*svāsa*), and (2) retracting or closing type of body movements related with exhalation (*prāsvāsa*).

The new born baby does not remain conscious of these body movements related with breathing nor other kinds of body movements nor the movement of air (breath) during its breathing. It can be easily ascertained by an intelligent baby sitter observing the baby. The medical world knows that the pressure changes taking place in the abdominal cavity due to the movement of the thoracic diaphragm are manifested as the movements of the abdominal wall observed during natural-spontaneous-involuntary breathing in resting condition. However, unlearned people are not aware of this fact. They feel and strongly believe that the air movement is responsible for the abdominal movements during breathing. This wrong belief/conviction requires to be corrected before proceeding on the path of *prānāyāma*.

Crying of a new born baby involving breathing and most of its physical movements are involuntary and reflex in nature. We slowly learn to control, modify and use breath and breathing in different ways with or without awareness ("mindfulness"). We do not receive systematic training and education about the "mechanics of breathing" and how to work with it in an intelligent way, even though we do learn to speak, to sing and to modify and control spontaneous activities such as crying, laughing, shouting, screaming, sneezing, hiccup, coughing, etc.

Commonly conducted training and educational programs involving breath and breathing by non-medical people

give importance to "gaseous exchange" (O_2 - CO_2 exchange) along with various volumes, capacities, reserves, ventilation, breath-holding time and ability to inhale and exhale as completely and as quickly as possible in the shortest possible time. Modern yoga literature, teaching and research are no exception to this approach. Even the modern yoga teachers do not seem to be working with the "mechanics of breathing" in yoga classes while working with *prānāyāma*.

3 Working with Vāyus, Prāna and Prānāyāma in Yoga

For practical training purposes *vāyus* could be understood as the neuro-muscular activities which are mostly involuntary in nature and/or psycho-neuro-muscular actions which are mostly voluntary in nature. Acquiring knowledge because of the sensory activity could be understood as *prāna* for training and education in yoga.

The three types of body movements not related with breathing and the two related with breathing are looked upon as five major or primary *vāyus* (neuro-muscular movements) in yoga. They are employed in daily life to carry out different actions and activities to earn livelihood and sustain life. Other types of (gross or subtle) movements are reflex in nature and they become evident when the systems come into action to overcome disturbances in our state of being, such as sneezing, yawning, belching, hiccup, coughing, etc. They are called as *five minor* or *subsidiary* or *secondary vāyus* in yoga. The working of these *vāyus* (motor activities) giving rise to knowledge (*jnāna*) through the sensory activity could be understood as *prāna* in yoga training.

The knowledge acquired through the functioning of the sensory organs (tele-receptors or exteroceptors) and/or by way of feed-back from the skeletal muscles, joints, ligaments (kinesthetic perception) is also termed as *prāna* in yoga. It can get related with objects, events, phenomenon, etc. in the external world outside the body (*bāhya ākāśha*). We also get knowledge from inside the body (internal world or *antarākāśha*) because of the functioning of the internal organs (visceral activity giving rise to visceral awareness) and the state of the skeletal muscles (proprioceptive awareness).

In yoga, breathing is recognized as the only (?) vital activity which can be easily sensed, monitored and modified by a conscious person. In traditional yoga, the training and education in relation to *prānāyāma* involves working with the "mechanics of breathing" rather than "gaseous exchange". It is connected with the doctrine of *prānic body* (*prānāyāma kośa*)

described in various Upanishads and with the doctrines of *nādishuddhi*, *kumbhaka*, *lotuses*, *chakras* and *arousal of kundalini* in Hatha and Tantra yoga.

We are expected to get the knowledge about the "mechanics of breathing" and the "flow of breath" (in-breath and out-breath) through "its touch inside the body" (*antah sparsha*), the pathway (channel or *nādi* or *mārg*) followed by the flow of breath and the speed of its movement (*gati*). The whole practice constitutes getting knowledge leading to the understanding about the working of the *vāyus* (neuro-muscular activity) with the help internal sensory activity (*prāna*) and to increase the depth and subtlety of this knowledge and understanding (*prānāyāma*) through regular practice (*abhyāsa*; see Vimuktananda 1977). It ultimately results in guiding the practitioner to "self-realization" because air as breath has no form, smell, touch and the spontaneous natural breathing is involuntary in nature. The tactile knowledge is obtained from inside the body whose nerve supply is different from the nerve supply of the skin.

4 Psycho-physiological Mechanisms Related with the Doctrines of Vāyu and Prāna in Relation to Prānāyāma

As mentioned above, gross or major body movements (neuro-muscular or psycho-neuro-muscular) have been postulated as *vāyus* [4] and the knowledge of these movements developed through the sensory activities has been postulated as *prāna* in relation to the practice of *prānāyāma*. Hatha and Tantra yoga texts also mention *minor* or *subsidiary vāyus* [5], but not *prānas* [6]. The *minor vāyus* can be understood as reflex actions as a result of disturbances in the body functions. As mentioned above, there is no unanimity in respect of psycho-physiological functions ascribed to these *vāyus* and *prānas* in different schools and books on yoga and Āyurveda and as maintained by different experts.

Modern writings on these topics can be questioned from the practical and experiential objectives to be achieved according to the traditional teachings in yoga. Therefore, slightly different view point has been advanced here for the consideration of those who would like to learn yoga by doing and experiencing.

Five main vāyus (verb) – different "processes":

1. **Prāna vāyu** – physical, physiological and/or psycho-physiological movements involved in "taking-in" or receiving material things such as solids (food), liquids (water) and air/wind (breath), etc., and/or thoughts and feelings, etc.;
2. **Apāna vāyu** – physical, physiological and/or psycho-physiological movements involved in "giving-away" or "bringing-out" or elimination of material things such as solids (stools), liquids (urine, sweat, tears) and air/wind (breath), etc., and/or thoughts and feelings, etc.;
3. **Vyāna vāyu** – physical, physiological and/or psycho-physiological movements involved in transporting material things, thoughts, feelings, etc.;
4. **Samāna vāyu** – physical, physiological and/or psycho-physiological movements involved in maintaining balance and equilibrium;
5. **Udāna vāyu** – physical, physiological and/or psycho-physiological movements involved in upward direction against the force of gravity.

Five prānas (noun) – different "states of consciousness / awareness":

1. **Prāna** and **prānic activity** – neural and/or musculo-neural activity giving rise to the feeling, knowledge and a state of awareness/consciousness of receiving or getting something. In short, "awareness of addition" for the Self;
2. **Apāna** and **apānic activity** – neural and/or musculo-neural activity giving rise to the feeling, knowledge and a state of awareness/consciousness related with giving away, elimination, forgetting, etc. In short, "awareness of deletion" for the Self;
3. **Vyāna** and **vyāna activity** – neural and/or musculo-neural activity giving rise to the feeling, knowledge and a state of awareness/consciousness of linear movement or circulation. In short, "awareness of linear movement" for the Self;
4. **Samāna** and **samāna activity** – neural and/or musculo-neural activity giving rise to the feeling, knowledge and a state of awareness/consciousness related with balance and equilibrium. In short, "awareness of balance (*Samādhi?*)" for the Self;
5. **Udāna** and **udāna activity** – neural and/or musculo-neural activity giving rise to the feeling, knowledge and a state of awareness/consciousness related with upward movement (physical plane) and/or journey (mental plane). In short, "awareness of upliftment (*ujjāyi, uddiyāna, utthāna*)" for the Self.

5 Conclusions

Traditional yoga education puts emphasis on getting knowledge (working of *prānas*) of the actions and activities (working of *vāyus*) during the yoga practices. Practices should not be mechanical in nature. Upanishads (Nikhilananda 1963) mention the sequence as *kriyā-jnāna-upāsana*, i.e. activities (*kriyās-vāyus*) should give rise to knowledge (*jnāna-prāna*) and working with that knowledge (*upāsana-prānāyāma*) should

lead to habit formation reflecting in behavior patterns (being and becoming). Bhagavad Gita mentions *karma-jnāna-bhakti*, i.e. actions (*karma-vāyus*) should give rise to knowledge (*jnāna-prānas*) and working with that knowledge (*bhakti-prānāyāma*) should lead to devotion or commitment in life (being and becoming).

Notes

Those readers who will try to practice according to the guidelines given in the text, are requested to send their experiential observations to the author of the article and/or the editor of Spirituality Studies.

- [1] The nature of the knowledge gained and understanding developed in "material yoga" (*bhautika yoga*) and "transcendental yoga" (*pāramārthika yoga*) is of a different kind.
- [2] *Yoga Kosa* refers to *prāna* on pp. 223–224, to *prānāyāma* on pp. 225–226, to *vāyu* on pp. 290–293.
- [3] These movements are used in playing games, sports, swimming, body building exercises, dancing, and daily actions and activities for procuring food and drinks, working with office/factory/household machines, instruments and apparatuses involve along with the activity of sense organs. It is possible to carry on with these movements while continuing breathing (controlled or uncontrolled) and/or during breath-holding.
- [4] *Five major vāyus* are *prāna vāyu*, *apāna vāyu*, *vyāna vāyu*, *samāna vāyu*, and *udāna vāyu*.
- [5] *Five minor vāyus* are *naga*, *kūrma*, *krukala*, *devadutta*, and *dhananjaya vāyu*.
- [6] However, the text, *Shatapatha Brahman*, mentions that the activity of five sensory and five motor organs (*indriyas*) could be experienced in terms of five *prānas*.

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Śrī Chakra Sādhanā

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Key words

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Śrī Vidyā is an ancient concept that has both individual and universal aspect. In fact, it is both a process and a name of Lalitā, one of the Ten Mahāvidyās. The understanding of Śrī chakra is a part of Śrī Vidyā. The model of the created universe inherent in the Śrī chakra provides also a way for sādhanā. The paper attempts to present a do-able sādhanā which, even though does not touch on pujas, gives a powerful possibility to walk on the Inner path towards the discovery of samhāra – absorption into the Source of everything.

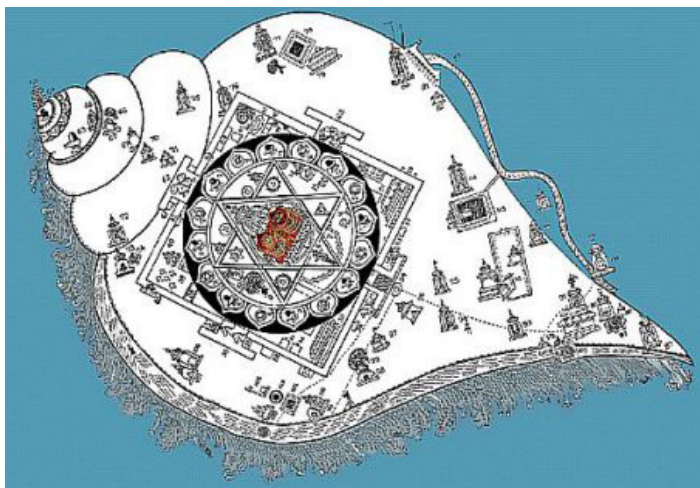


Fig. 1.
Śrī chakra as a basis for Vastu Shastra temple design (Sreenivasa Rao 2017).

The Śrī chakra has been in the center of interest also of mathematicians, who tried to unravel the hidden message in its geometry (Kulaichev 1984). There findings, though are more of academic interest, even if they make the design of the Śrī chakra more exact.

The Indian spirituality is much centered around offerings (*pūja*) and coming "behind" the outer manifestation through addressing the Patrons or Deities related to their various aspects and levels (Ramachandra Rao 2008, Ravi 2013). This is a devotional approach, which for Europeans who do not have the same cultural and spiritual background, is difficult to practice authentically. The interpretative explanation of the Śrī chakra, however has a great number of aspects which offer an excellent *sādhana* that is not dependent on *pūjas*.

The Śrī chakra and the related *sādhana* is governed by Śrī Lalitā – who is called also *Rāja-rājeśvarī* or *Tripura Sundarī* as well as by other names and attributes (Narayana Menon 2011) –, is one of the Ten Mahāvīdyās, representatives of the non-conformist aspects of the Divine Feminine.

It was in the Swami Rama where the thought about transforming the Śrī chakra system of *sādhana* into a set of practices suitable for western practitioners matured. The presented *sādhana* structure uses elements that appear in the traditional system of Śrī chakra interpretation, but is projected into a *sādhana* frame that take into consideration modern trends in yoga.

2 The Śrī Chakra Sādhana

The construction of the Śrī chakra is such that it includes nine levels. These levels represent certain aspects of creation, both on the individual level as well as on the universal level. The nine levels have their names, Patrons and Guardians, mantras and associated parts of the human *kośas*. Fig. 3 shows a 2D version of the Śrī chakra and Fig. 4, shows the 3D version of Śrī chakra.

The Śrī chakra is composed of a square base surrounded by three "lines of protection" and with four gates, then it contains three circles, two lotus flowers – one with sixteen petals and one with eight petals. Then the triangular composition comes. There are nine triangles positioned in such a way that they form four levels of triangular "spikes", plus a central triangle and a dot in the center. The dot (which is above the level, where the *sahasrāra* is present) symbolizes the undifferentiated Śiva and Śakti (*Tripura Sundarī, Lalitā, Kāmakalā, Parā Bhattārikā, Mahā Kāmeśvarī, Śrī Vidyā*). Of the whole theory of the Śrī only the basics are discussed in order to enable the understanding of the *sādhana* (practical part) and its implications.

The Śrī chakra represents the Centre of the manifested universe in which we live. Technically, it does not deal with the energies and emanations that lead to the creation described in the *Saundariya Lahiri* (Subrahmanya and Ayyangar 1977), but deals with the processes linked to the life that is created through the burden of *avidyā* (improper understanding of the essence of life) and that is placed into the perceptible universe.

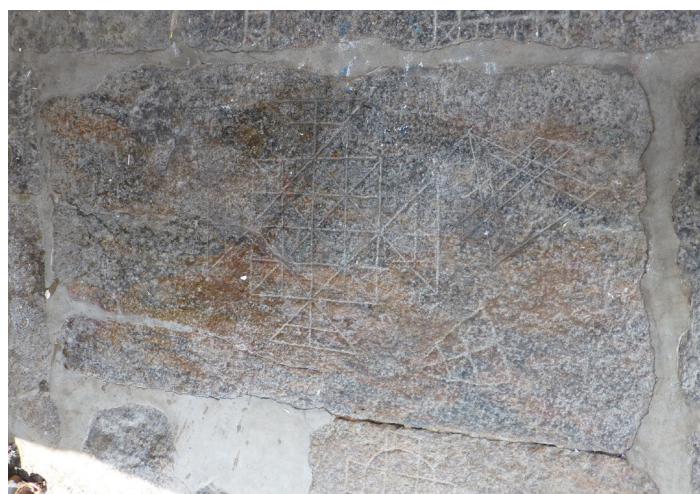


Fig. 2. Śrī Vidyā related drawings cut into floor slabs in the Arunachala Temple in Tiruvannamalai. Visitors will rarely pay attention to them.

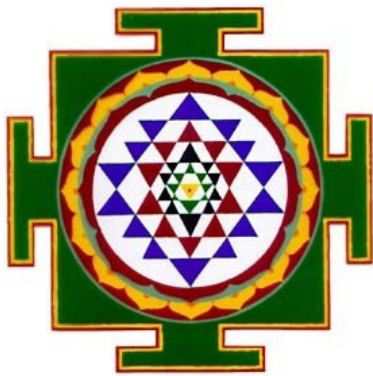
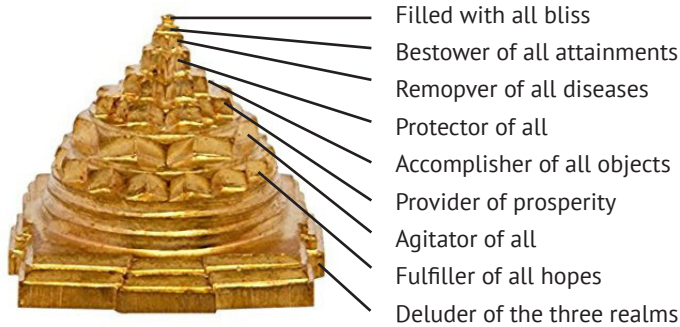


Fig. 3. A colored version of 2D Śrī chakra. It is built of a square base, two lotus flowers, five downward pointing, four upward pointing triangles and a dot. The colors are added only for clarity.



- Filled with all bliss
- Bestower of all attainments
- Remover of all diseases
- Protector of all
- Accomplisher of all objects
- Provider of prosperity
- Agitator of all
- Fulfiller of all hopes
- Deluder of the three realms

Fig. 4. The nine levels and their names of the Śrī chakra shown on a 3D Śrī chakra model (Devshoppe 2017).



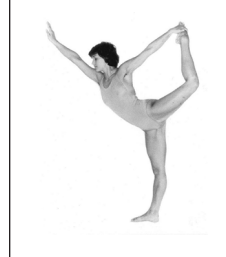
The various elements and sub-elements of the Śrī chakra levels, possess a number of Guardian principles. The Guardian principles or simply Guardians can be understood in two ways: either as a spiritual entity inducing certain moods into the sādhanā's (or anyone's) mind, or as a continuum which has the possibility to induce its information content into the mind of anyone. Thus, the sādhanā learns how to avoid their negative aspects. On the lower level the Guardians have mainly a protective function – they guard off those sādhanās, who are not yet qualified for the sādhanā. Thus, the first part of the sādhanā is related to either "off-line" reflection (*viparita paramarsha*) on the day and reviewing how far could one discover the projections of the Guardians or "on-line" awareness of the processes in the mind and preventing identification with the moods induced by the Guardians. To aid this process, the Śrī chakra sādhanā contains also a series of āsanās, where during upkeeping the āsana, one's mind does the *viparita paramarsha* – trying to remember events related to a given mood or mental state projected by the selected Guardians [1] and other practices.

First, the protection of the practitioner (*sādhaka*) is considered, where he is supposed to have siddhis in order to protect him/herself. This is not very realistic, but everyone can have "virtual siddhis". This e.g. means that everyone knows situations, when one would like to be bigger – in order to match a life situation. Still, during the actual process, it may not be possible, due to lack of energy, but at home, when remembering the situation one may imagine that he/she grows to a size that enables to cope with the given situation. This may encourage one to work harder towards a better energy level.

Below, a set of Guardian principles which govern certain mental states are given. Here only their scope of influence is enumerated:

1. Passionate longing, violent anger, insatiable avarice, dazed fascination for the world, obstinacy, tormenting jealousy, "sinful" disturbances of mind, benign inspiration towards merit;
2. Dark looking appearance (gloominess), indignation, fierce mentality, thoughtlessness, intoxication, enviousness, capacity to absorb;
3. Further, Guardian influence may cause the impulse to agitate all; chase all, fascinate all, subjugate all, driving all mad, goading all, moving around in thin air (to become ungrounded), sprouting everything (making things happen), then one may have the need of the power of great Source of everything and desire to rule all.

It can be seen, that it is a demanding task to cope with them. In order to keep the attention on the above mentioned *viparita paramarsha*, a series of āsanās are to be learned and used for the *viparita paramarsha*. Three of the set of āsanās are given in Tab. 1. During upkeeping the āsana one is reflecting on the appropriate Guardian induced mood or mental process with the emphasis on whether it occurred in the past period and whether it left an imprint in our mind, with a projected effect on our present state of mind and future intentions. If yes, then the appropriate mantra given below (Sedláček and Timčák 2017) is being used in such a way that it "dissolves" the traces left behind by the selected life event. Then the sādhanā can come out of the āsana. Then a short period of relaxation comes, and one either continues with the same Guardian induced mood or mental process related to another life event, or can proceed to the next Guardian induced mood or mental process. As this process may take more than 20 minutes, one has to decide, how many āsanās and reflections would one do each day. When the mind is able to ward off the improper reactions on-line process, āsanās are no longer needed.

Ability to desire – "materialize things"	Question of staying with the feeling of indignation	Ability to become light
<i>Trikonāsana</i>	<i>Ardha Chandrāsana</i>	<i>Hamsāsana</i>
		
<i>siddhi</i>	<i>Ruru</i>	<i>siddhi</i>
am ám sauh	am ám sauh	am ám sauh

Tab. 1. The āsana part of the Śrī chakra sādhanā. The first line represents the selected Guardian induced mood or mental process, the second the āsana name, the third the image of the āsana, the fourth the Guardian or principle, and the fifth the mantra of the given level ("enclosure"). There are 55 āsanās for this practice (Photographs Timčák et al. 2003).

It has to be noted, that it is important to see how we reacted to some Guardian induced mood or mental process. This is because even in case of *benign inspiration towards merit*, what matters is, whether we do it naturally, or we feel "great", as someone who is a bit better than those, who did not do a good deed. If such tendency is discovered, then one has to learn to dissociate from such impulses through using the appropriate mantra.

After the āsana, comes the second part, which is meditative. One can visualize oneself as if placing oneself on the basic square of the Śrī chakra shown in Fig. 4 and align oneself with the center of the Śrī chakra. This is a classical projection that indicates our intention to merge into our Source, or into the "Universal Mother". This is in tune with the Indian Vedic tradition of identification with the Principle which will be aimed at in the subsequent meditation.

In the sādhanā, mantras have an important role. As shown by Alper (2012), mantras may not be effective right from its first use. But by every use, one will get to a point, when they suddenly open their energies to us and allow the Realization to happen. In the Laksmi Tantra (39:35) it is said: "*The meditated repetition of a mantra is for achieving success in every endeavour.*"

Mantras are a key element of this training and so it is important to say that they represent a vocal, vibrational and rhythmic code of internal experience discovered usually by ancient

yogis. They may be as short as a syllable or long as a verse. Their correct recitation evokes the same experience the code of which they are. In the Śrī chakra sādhanā usually only *bīja* ("seed") *mantras* are used and they differ for every level.

Before starting Śrī chakra sādhanā, it is beneficial to practice the Śrī Vidya Gayatri for the period of several weeks to prepare the mind for the sādhanā (Sedláček 2015).

*Aim Tripuradevi vidmahe
Klīm Kameshvarī cha dhīmahi
Sauh tanno klīnā prachodayat.*

The *bīja mantras* do not have translation, and convey the respective energies of the Śrī (Śakti) in an undiluted form. It is important though that their recitation follows the ancient tradition. Therefore, they were worked into a recorded rendition (Sedláček and Timčák 2017). At this resource, a detailed guide for the sādhanā is also given.

To have an overview of the areas covered by the Śrī chakra sādhanā, the basic data on the nine levels are listed below.

The first level: "Deluder of the three realms" (*Trailokyamohana*)

Chakra: there is no chakra associated to this level.
Key mantra: *Om Am ám sauh.*

For the relevant part of the Śrī chakra see Fig. 5. The three realms mentioned in the name of this level are perceived as the underworld, material world and spiritual world. The relevant part of the Śrī chakra represents a square with four gates surrounded by lines. They represent the three groups of Guardian principles already given above.

The second level: "Fulfiller of all hopes" (*Sarvāśāparipūraka*)

Chakra: Mūlādhāra.
Key mantra: *Aim klīm sauh.*

This level is symbolized by a lotus flower of sixteen petals. Below the lotus there are three circles. These three circles are protecting symbols. This level is associated with the concept of chakras. The chakras are energy and information distribution centers.

There are also sixteen associated guardian principles here. These Guardians are considered "hidden" (they seem to be a part of us and of our life processes) and are testing one by:

ordinary life they are to be expressed through our life and if used properly, we can see their impact.

Gāndhārī is one of the *nādīs* said to be behind the *idā nādī*, terminating near the left eye, regulating the function of sight. The eye is the means how we monitor and in a way control processes that happen around us.

Hastijihvā is located in front of the *idā nādī*, terminating near the right eye, regulating the function of sight, seeing. The world as we see it is a delusion as the version of outer world presented through the sight is produced by our mental software and does not really correspond to the reality.

Yasashvini nādī (before *pingala*, between *gāndhārī* and *sarasvatī*) ends in the left ear and starts at the left big toe. The impulse to arrest/restrict may them from the reactions to heard information.

Pūsā nādī is situated behind *pingala*, terminating at the right ear. Its function is hearing. The ability to delight all may come from the skill to translate that what was heard to a constructive and positive form.

Alambushā connects the mouth and *kanda* (its functions are given in the text above).

Kuhū is one of the *nādīs* that is located in front of the *su-sumnā*. Its function is to evacuate. Thus, "chaser of all" means also that there may be in us a drive to express excessively.

Śānkhinī terminates at the genital organs and is situated between *gāndhārī* and *sarasvatī*. It carries the essence of food. Thus it may express also the will to charm ("madden") the opposite gender.

Sarasvatī nādī which is behind the *susumnā*, terminates at the tongue, controlling speech and keeping the abdominal organs free from disease. Accomplishing of all objects could be related to speech and health.

Payasvinī is one of the *nādīs* starting at right ear that terminates at the right big toe. Releasing all could mean the ability to relax from reactions to information that was heard.

Visvodarā nādī has a function related to absorption of food. Its position is between *hastijihvā* and *kuhū*. It is linked with the functions of stomach. If the digestion is in a good shape, then we tend to have a nice, attractive complexion.

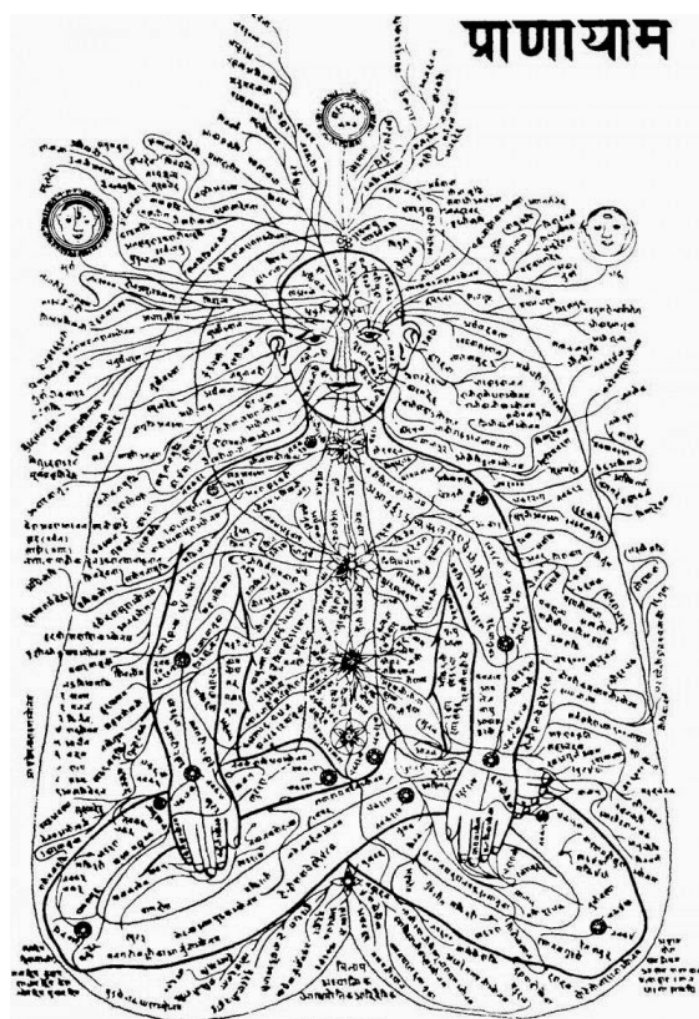


Fig. 6. The system of *nādīs* that infiltrate the *annamaya kośa* from *prānāyāma kośa* and secure the flow of vital energy (*prāna*) and information needed for proper function of the human system.

The course of *nādīs* is described in various ancient scriptures like the *Shandilya Upanishad*, *Chhandogya Upanishad*, *Goraksha Shatakam*, etc. (Frowley et al. 2003, Dzsohari 1993, Motoyama 2016). Motoyama did extensive research to discover, whether the Chinese meridians and the *nādīs* have common functional pattern, but the results were not sufficient to verify this hypothesis.

The Guardian principles – *nādīs* – are associated with the *kośas* – functional systems merged one into another as defined by the yogic "anatomy". They are the *annamaya* (physical body), *prānāyāma* (energy management system, where the *nādīs* take the energy and information), *manomaya* (discursive mind), *vigyananamaya* (higher mind responsible for decisions), *ānandamaya* (the basic feeling of joy and transcendental happiness).

The ninth level: "Filled with all bliss" (*Sarvānanda-maya*)

Chakra: There is no chakra associated with this level.

Key mantra: *Hrīm ka e ī la hrīm ha sa ka ha la hrīm sa ka la hrīm* (*Sodaśī mantra*).

The ninth or innermost enclosure is the *bindu*, a dot, and a minute triangle with edges almost falling into each other. The principle of Śrī resides here, united with the Absolute consciousness. Traditionally it is called *Śiva-Śakti-eka-rupini*.

Here the principle of consciousness – Śiva and Śrī (Śakti) are united, and are undifferentiated.

From the above it can be clear that the Śrī chakra sādhanā works with all the major parts of the human system of physical, mental and spiritual level. Therefore, the sādhanā as such needs patience and perseverance. When the practitioner reaches the higher levels ("enclosures"), the systemic support needed for success is increasing – as it can be seen from the names of the levels.

3 Conclusions

The described Śrī chakra sādhanā is a very effective way, how to look at the *yamas* and *niyamas* (not only as given by Patāñjali, but also in other yoga texts) from a different perspective. The practices work with all the five systemic parts of humans – the *kośas*. The mantras give the power needed for leading a dharmic life on physical, mental and spiritual level. It also helps to practice awareness, as well as detachment from unsuitable mental impulses. Finally, it helps to be con-

structive – to seek the best solution for any life situation. The āsanās help to maintain health and simultaneously to master the *vāsanās*. The practice is a full-fledged sādhanā that – if the time is ripe – can lead the practitioner up to the ninth level. It can also facilitate an experiential understanding of the universal aspects of Śrī Vidyā in a way that is suitable for the Western mind.

Note

- [1] These mental processes have a number of models and explanations, but for the purpose of Śrī chakra sādhanā, the above cited is being considered. The type and frequency of occurrence of Guardian induced moods or mental states depend on karma and within it on personality, *vāsanās*, etc. Under karma the set of situations, tendencies and actions are considered that one is experiencing in his life.

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Metanoia Meets Magis at the Feet of the Guru

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Key words

Metanoia, magis, bhakti,
guru, interspirituality

In the yogic tradition, it is common for disciples to sit at the feet of their guru, receiving the teachings from a long lineage of wisdom. Jesus' disciples did the same, as did the followers of early Christian hermits. In his autobiographical essay, the author reflects how devotees turn towards the Divine at the feet of the guru, and receive an invitation to open the heart and dive deeper into the flow of life.



About the author

Bhaktan Mark Graceffo (1960) is an academic librarian at Saint Peters University, the Jesuit University of New Jersey, where he also teaches religion as an adjunct lecturer. Bhaktan is a disciple of Sri Guruji Reverend Jaganath Carrera (founder of the Yoga Life Society) and learning the path of bhakti, the yoga of devotion. His email contact is mgraceffo@saintpeters.edu.

I bring the palms of my hands together, fingers pointing up in prayer position. As I step towards him, he smiles. I drop to my knees, lean forward, and bring my forehead and hands to his feet. *"Thank you, Lord Jesus,"* I say silently, *"for being here in the form of the guru."* This humble act of devotion at the feet of my guru, (called *pada puja* in the ancient language of Sanskrit) serves as a metanoia moment for me.

Metanoia is a Greek word that often gets translated as "repentance". But a deeper, more contemporary understanding might define it as "a turning around" or "turning to face a new direction". Thus, metanoia is to consciously turn towards God, to orient one's life to the will of the Divine. For Christians we can say that metanoia means trying to live in alignment with the Christ Light. Placing myself at my guru's feet serves to turn and realign me with this Light. It is a place where I resolve to "put on the mind of Christ" and to follow him with a bit more heart.

In Hinduism, there is a long standing tradition of touching the feet of someone who is respected and looked up to. Children will touch the feet of their elders as a sign of reverence. Gurus will similarly have their feet touched by devotees. This act on the part of a devotee recognizes the wisdom embodied in the guru, their service to humankind, and the guru's commitment to the personal growth and transformation of his or her followers. One touches the guru's feet to show respect, reverence, love, and gratitude for all that the guru models and teaches.

The word *guru* means "remover of ignorance", and thus it is to the guru that a disciple turns to remember who they are beyond all names, titles, achievements, and status. Helping us to see clearer by removing the darkness of our ignorance, the guru reveals our True Nature – a soul created in the very image of God. All faith traditions, including Roman Catholicism, have some form of the guru-disciple relationship, where it is acknowledged that turning to someone with ample spiritual experience is necessary if one is to advance in the spiritual life. Being a disciple in some ways is like being an apprentice – a violinist, a surgeon, a plumber – working with a master to learn a craft. The guru teaches the craft and art of self-transformation. Although in Catholic circles we tend not to use the language of "guru-disciple", or even "self-transformation" such a relationship has a long history in the Christian experience.

Early Christian hermits, known as the "Desert Fathers" (and "Mothers") who inhabited the deserts of Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, beginning in the third century, served as spiritual fathers and mothers to those who journeyed to their desert dwellings seeking spiritual guidance. "Abba" (*Father*) or "Amma" (*Mother*), "Give me a word", these pilgrims would plead, and the desert gurus would offer a word or phrase for them to ponder over a period of time. Along with a "word", the Abbots and Ammas sought to promote the transformation of their disciples by teaching them the spiritual discipline and practices that would remove the darkness of their ignorance, and thus advance the realization of their True Self. These early hermits and ascetics served as role models for

Saint Benedict of Nursia, who in the sixth century, wrote in his *Rule* for monks, that an abbot was to be considered as holding the place of Christ in the monastery by his fellow monks. Benedictine monks, still to this day, place their spiritual life in the hands of the abbot. It is the abbot who guides them in their spiritual journey, discerning how best to remove the ignorance that keeps the monk from Self-realization. In other words, the abbot, like the desert fathers and mothers of his wisdom lineage, serves as guru.

Over time, surrendering to the feet of my guru has become an important spiritual practice of mine. In fact, *guru-bhakti* – devotion and submission to the guru – has brought me closer to Lord Jesus, my satguru, or principal guru, the guru of all gurus. In this act of surrender, I receive a glimpse of what a radical change of heart feels like. My heart softens at my guru's feet, it opens and expands and becomes more spacious. To surrender like this, to nudge the ego into bowing to something greater than itself, helps me understand viscerally, the "purity of heart" that Jesus spoke of in his Sermon on the Mount. At the guru's feet I turn towards God.

Surrendering at the guru's feet also helps me to intuitively understand the idea of "magis", the Latin for "more", that is weaved throughout the spirituality of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. To live with a spirit of magis, is to live with zeal, with a burning desire to "*know, love, and serve God more*", always thirsting for a deeper intimacy. Both metanoia and magis are moments pregnant with promise and possibility, moments that call for us to discern new ways to be courageously and

creatively engaged with the world, to be fully present to life in all its manifestations. At the guru's feet, metanoia and magis merge and all seems attainable. Thoughts are purified, doubts fade, and selfish desires disappear. The heart swells and the yearning to be more, to embrace more, overwhelms. I imagine this is how Jesus' disciples felt when they sat at his feet.

In the guru's company, my thoughts often turn to the stories in the Gospels, and how Jesus' disciples and followers would often be at his feet. I envision Mary of Bethany anointing Jesus' feet with expensive oils, and then drying them so tenderly with her hair (John 12:3). I think of Mary Magdalene at Jesus' tomb, when after realizing that the person she thought was the gardener was really Jesus, drops to the ground and cups his feet in her hands, "Rabboni (Master)" she sighs (Matthew 28:9). I imagine all the time Jesus' disciples sat at his feet listening to him teach and tell stories, asking questions, relaxing, enjoying his company. I think too of the Last Supper and the way in which Jesus bowed to and venerated each of his disciples by washing their feet, encouraging them to do the same, to live for others, to be more.

Having been in a guru-disciple relationship for a number of years now, I no longer feel any hesitation to bend down and take hold of the feet of my guru, who is affectionately called *Guruji* by his initiates and students (in Indian culture, "ji" is a suffix attached to a name to convey respect and affection). But as much as I love Guruji, it is not really him that I bow to. What we call "the guru" really has no body or mind. The

guru resides in each of us. It is our Highest Self, our Inner Light, the Kingdom of God within (Luke 17:21). Thus the guru in physical form is only reflecting back to the disciple that which is inside the disciple as well. The guru just helps one to see, to remember that the Divine Nature so easily seen in the guru, dwells just as fully in us. Didn't Jesus tell us this, that his Spirit will abide in us? Isn't this the gift he left us? (John 14:17).

Touching the feet of the guru is about humility and learning to surrender. I surrender to the guru in order to surrender elsewhere in life. The guru helps me cultivate a propensity to put others before myself, to consider even the smallest of daily actions as being an offering to God and neighbor. And with every offering I surrender a little more of the selfish desires that separate me from God and all that God created. At the guru's feet something deep within my heart is awakened. It is a grace filled moment where the ego withers a bit, my noblest intentions become palpable, and a greater, more complete turning towards God seems imaginable. When metanoia meets magis both God and guru delight, pleased by our desire for transcendence, as they patiently wait for the magis to be given expression.

On Zazen: Sopot Talk

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Key words

Zazen, Zen Buddhism,
spiritual practice

In the passage from his upcoming book *Pure Vision*, Sandó Kaisen discusses the nature of Zazen in a classical metaphoric way of the Japanese Sótó Zen tradition.



About the author

Sandó Kaisen (1952) is one of the main representatives of Soto Zen Buddhism in Europe. He has been publicly active since 1990 through his books, lectures, as well as TV and radio appearances.

Dear friends,

You who have been walking for such a long time on the Way, you should just know this: "No love or hate" or "No good or bad" or also "Do not take sides for or against".

These words have been pronounced by many masters in the past and they will continue to be pronounced as long as there are men and women on the earth. The duality and the strength of attachment at each end of this duality are the cause of many ills and conflicts. If ignorance of our own Nature is cause of suffering, the duality identified to the individual is an even greater one.

This morning, like every other morning, we have fed a great number of seagulls who were paying us a visit right into the room. The hotel was situated on the beach, which facilitated the communion with these huge animals sea mews and seagulls are. The life of these animals of the sea is not that complicated, however they can be very aggressive towards their fellow beings. One thing however is characteristic with animals of a same race: they can fight with each other, but unlike man, they do not kill each other. Among the seagulls, some did not fight but waited patiently for their turn. The stronger ones helped themselves first and only gave their place away, once well-stuffed.

Men do the same. The stronger ones help themselves first. In this sense, man has not evolved very much. With animals, there exists a hierarchy based on the dominant force and the goal is to be respected by the weaker ones. With men, domination also exerts itself through force by sowing the seeds of fear. If these are well watered, fear increases.

Therefore the question is: should one be strong or weak? Does the fact of not imposing oneself, of not fighting back, of knowing how to share, of being patient and refusing aggression really a weakness? What is the right state of mind for the responsible man?

We all possess the answer inside ourselves.

During Zazen, our posture plays a fundamental role, not only because it is awakening or because it procures equanimity of soul and peace. But because we must draw our real character. Not our characteristics, which might be to be bad-tempered or fly off the handle... Or which can take on many other aspects, but the Character of the sky and the earth.

First of all, one should be deeply rooted on the ground whether sitting, standing, or walking. Well-anchored in the soil, feet deeply rooted. That also is to be firmly established in the Way.

Next, elevate oneself firmly towards the sky by delicately pushing the top of the skull upwards. This way you can feel

the great Presence and not let yourself be swept away into the spheres of conceptual or emotional thinking.

When one maintains this attitude of dignity and real nobility, the spirit then takes on the noble frame. And if you think with the noble body, who is thinking? It is the Spirit who thinks.

Ancient texts tell us we should breathe with our heels and move around from the hips while deriving our energy from the low-belly (*hara*), at the level of a point situated about two widths of the thumb bellow the navel.

We must clearly understand that the body influences the mind and the mind, the body. When the spirit controls the body, then the spirit, becoming the body, will be under the control of the body. By experiencing this, one can discover a unity: vacuity-phenomena. Moreover, both being controlled, it becomes impossible to be submerged by negative passions or illusory feelings, impossible to become the victim of the errings of the dream in the dream. By remaining intimate with the body-spirit, one quite naturally becomes united in our fundamental Nature. Residing in it, one no longer commits wrongful acts and one destroys all the sins accumulated since times without beginning.

The firmness of our posture strengthens the spirit, which, liberated from passions and perturbing emotions, becomes

gentle and tender. Because of the Presence, clear lucidity shines of itself.

And so this oneness becomes "character of the sky and of the earth".

If you are too earthy, you become proud, conceited, haughty or aggressive. Too close to the sky will make you dreamy, pensive, crooked, indecisive, calculating and weak. By achieving the disappearance of these two opposites, you will then react directly from your deep Nature, serene, even and spontaneous.

To be really strong means to be deeply rooted in the Spirit which is yours.

The profound Spirit is like the depths of the ocean. It is imperturbable before the waves and any other exterior phenomenon. But most people are like the waves and live under the influence of their own characteristics and those of others. They are unstable in their decisions, victims of their memory's ghosts or else follow the crowds of other ghosts, even if those are in the wrong.

Once this attitude of body-spirit is adopted, it is not sufficient. We must now reflect on interdependency and the impermanence of the world. Because it is not enough to don the armour of the Law without clearly understanding its significance. However, this reflection is not of the intellec-

tual order. It is more a "reflection" in the pure sense of the word. Because, since we are entirely made of the eternal and unique Spirit, the notions of an individual, permanent soul and of total extinction are without foundation.

We must possess the Eye of the wisdom of the Buddha. It is the Eye which perceives the truth-unity of all things. One must know that the least sound, the least vision, are only the Eye of the wisdom of Buddha, the Absolute. The essential substance of the Absolute is a perfect whole, with nothing superfluous, nothing lacking, nothing wanting.

As for phenomena, they don't appear independently, but rest on the environment. They are all interdependent. The same applies to our consciousness. Then, all is impermanent and impermanency cannot grasp the Absolute. Since the Absolute is not a state of being, it is impossible for us to understand it. If one understands that all sentient beings are already with the Absolute, it is then unnecessary to search for it.

Neural Training through Handstand – A Guide

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Key words

Yoga, adho mukha vrksāsana,
handstand practice

The paper gives some of the health benefits of the handstand (adho mukha vrksāsana) and informs on one of the ways how handstand can be safely learned in order to bring its full benefits.

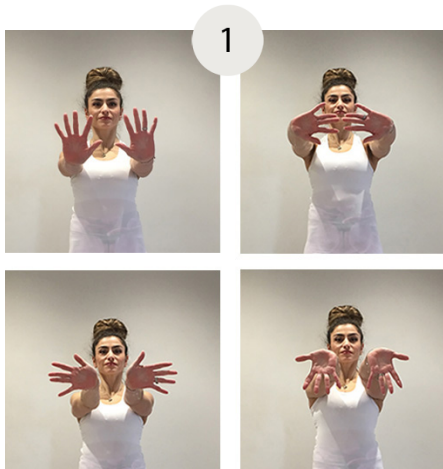
I. Warming and Preparing the Body

1 Wrist Strengtheners

Arms at shoulder height. Extend the hands at the wrists, repeat 5 breaths in each (Fig. 1).

- Fingers pointing up towards the ceiling
- Fingertips touching
- Fingers turning outwards
- Fingers turning down to the floor
- Repeat the above with arms overhead

Repeat with arms behind.



2 Shoulder Stretches and Strengtheners with a Block

Squeeze the block with the base of the insides of the knuckles, concentrate on pulling the upper arms back and the shoulder blades back and down (Fig. 2). On the breath slowly taking the arms towards the ceiling. Spend a little time here. A phrase I use with my students... "shaking is good". Then repeat with the block behind and yes squeeze!



3 Shoulder Stretches with a Belt

Hold the belt roughly a little wider than shoulder width: Straight arms reach up to the ceiling; right upper arm to ear; draw left arm back and down. Repeat to the other side stretching the muscles of the chest, then moving the arms back in space, hovering at a place of intensity (Fig. 3).



4 Spinal Mobilization in Cat and Wrist Strengthening

From neutral cat (hands under the shoulders, knees under the hips, feet in line with the knees) draw the body weight back and lift the heels of the hands and then begin to move forwards and back on the breath. Plant the heels of hands down lightly (Fig. 4).

Extension and flexion of the spine in Cat/Cow on the breath: Inhale rotate the pelvis away take the movement through the spine, chin gaze up.

Exhale tuck the tail bone under, chin to the chest. Repeat 3 times.

Side stretch: On the breath keep the feet the knees still draw the right hip and the right shoulder together, making a banana shape with the body. Strengthening the side waist. Repeat 3 times on both sides.

Spinal rotation: Take the right hand to the center of the pose, on the breath lead with the left elbow towards the ceiling then float the left hand up. Exhale lower down. Repeat 3 times on both sides.





Mission

Spirituality Studies welcomes original contributions from various academic fields reflecting the phenomenon of spirituality in its multiple forms as well as cultural and religious contexts.

At the same time, the journal provides a forum for sharing personal spiritual experience of spiritual practitioners of various backgrounds elaborated in a form of a scholarly article, essay or poetry. By combining both academic and experiential aspects of spirituality Spirituality Studies aims at providing an original and exceptional multidisciplinary and multidimensional platform for constructive dialogue between a variety of viewpoints, approaches, and methodologies in the study of spirituality.

Spirituality Studies covers a wide range of theoretical and practical (living spirituality) issues relating to spirituality, including an encounter among various spiritual traditions on personal, interpersonal and social level. Particular emphasis is put on the processes of spiritual or personal transformation as given in various forms of mysticism (Christian, Muslim, etc.) and traditions of yoga across the global cultural and religious spectrum (e.g., Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, new religious movements, etc.).

The third area of the journal is devoted to didactics of somato-psycho-spiritual practices such as hathayoga. By publishing teaching and methodical materials that reflect practical experience of educators at the grassroots level, Spirituality Studies facilitates education related to spirituality and fosters the awareness of the importance of spirituality for personal, interpersonal as well as social well-being.

The journal is published by The Society for Spirituality Studies in partnership with the Dialogue Interreligieux Monastique/Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (DIMMID) and European Union of Yoga twice a year (May 1, November 1) in English for an international readership. It is housed on the spirituality-studies.org website.



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