

Bandhas

Bandhas are controlled movements of certain parts of the body, creating seals or bondages that have the effect of preventing dissipation of prana or energy, directing it to the right area of the body.

The word 'bandha' means bondage, joining together or catching hold of. There are three main bandhas – Jalandhara, in the throat region, Uddiyana in the abdominal area, and Mula bandha in the pelvic floor area. To understand how the bandhas work however, it is first necessary to have an understanding of Prana, the vital energy or life force, and how it flows in the body.

Prana exists inside and outside of our bodies. It exists infinitely, everywhere, but relating to our bodies, it is our vitality, or that which keeps us alive. The more prana we have inside our bodies, the healthier we feel; the less prana, the more unwell we feel. Prana is linked to our consciousness, our thoughts. If we have negative thoughts or emotions, this can inhibit the flow of prana. Prana enters the body through the breath on inhalation, and has a downward movement, travelling through channels known as nadis, of which there are over 72,000. Prana that leaves the body is known as apana and has an upward movement. It is the energy used to eliminate any rubbish or stale energy within the body. The less rubbish in the body, the more room there is for prana to enter. If there are blockages, the apana can get stuck and can collect rubbish there, leaving one feeling slow and heavy.

In Pranayama, certain exercises are used to rid the body of any blockages, allowing the apana to exit and the prana to enter and move around the body freely. On an inhalation, the prana is moved downward towards apana, and when the breath is held here, the prana is also held. On exhalation, the apana is moved towards the prana. The longer the exhalation the more apana and rubbish from the body is gotten rid of. Although prana moves freely on its own, the bandhas assist pranayama by preventing the dissipation of prana, allowing it to move more freely around the body. Bandhas help to intensify the cleansing process of pranayama.

Jalandhara Bandha

Jalandhara bandha is the first bandha to learn and is easiest to master. 'Jala' means 'net' or 'mesh', and involves contracting the neck muscles and lowering the chin.

Due to the extension of the spine, the circulation of blood is increased, thereby increasing the efficiency of the spinal cord. Flow of blood and prana is also regulated to the heart, the glands in the neck and head, and to the brain, which in turn leaves one with a sense of calm.

Uddiyana Bandha

Uddiyana means 'flying up'. This refers to the 'great bird' prana being forced to fly up through the Sushumna nadi or the main nervous channel, by specific lifting of the abdominal area and of the diaphragm.

Uddiyana bandha tones the abdominal organs, increases the gastric fire and eliminates toxins in the digestive tract. Blood supply to the abdominal organs is improved. Secretion of digestive juices is

improved. Prana is forced up through the Sushumna nadi which is situated in the spine. This is the awakening of the Kundalini energy.

Mula Bandha

'Mul' means 'root' or 'base'. This bandha is the root lock, and involves the contraction of the perineum muscle located between the anus and the genitals.

The muscles contracted in this bandha receive extra blood supply and thereby improve their efficiency. The Kundalini energy, which is said to reside in this area is awakened and moved upwards.

References

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