

CHAPTER III

MEDITATIVE POSES

(Note:—Two Drishtis and three Bandhas are a part of the technique of the meditative poses. We begin this chapter with a description of these Drishtis and Bandhas, with a view to enable our readers to follow the technique of the Āsanās without any interruption.)

NASAGRA-DRISHTI OR THE NASAL GAZE

FIXING one's eyes upon the tip of one's nose is called Nāsāgra-Drishṭi in Saṁskṛita. Nāsāgra means the *tip of the nose* and Drishṭi means *gaze*. It is illustrated in Fig. 8. It may be practised as a part of Padmāsana¹ or independent of it. In the accompanying picture, the head is thrown a little backward with a view to make the position of the eyeballs visible.

The Nasal Gaze is a fine exercise for the wandering mind. Its practice, if undertaken with zest and carried over a period of some months continuously, has a perceptibly beneficial effect upon the unsteady mind.

Caution— The Nasal Gaze directly works upon the brain through the optic nerves. Everybody should, therefore, develop this gaze very slowly and cautiously. Persons with weak nerves are warned not to undertake this practice except under expert supervision.

BHRŪMADHYA-DRISHTI OR THE FRONTAL GAZE

Fixing one's eyes between the eyebrows is called Bhrūmadhya-Drishṭi in Saṁskṛita. Bhrūmadhya means the *space between the eyebrows*. This Drishṭi is illustrated in Fig. 9. It may be practised as a part of Siddhāsana¹ or independent of it.

1. Described later on in this chapter.

Like the Nasal Gaze, the Frontal Gaze is a fine exercise for the mind. But the advice and caution given in the case of the former are equally applicable to the case of the latter. Hence they should be carefully borne in mind by the enthusiastic student of Yoga.

UDDIYĀNA-BANDHA OR THE RAISING OF THE DIAPHRAGM

Uddiyāna is an exercise of the diaphragm and the ribs. When expressed in a popular¹ language its technique may be described as follows:

As this Bandha is practised either in sitting or in standing the student poses himself as shown in Figs. 10 and 12 respectively. In these pictures, hands are shown to be resting either on the knees or on the thighs. This position of the hands enables them to be firmly pressed against their support and thus to fix up the muscles of the neck and the shoulders. Having taken this posture the student secures the deepest possible expiration by vigorously contracting the front muscles of the abdomen. The chest also stands contracted. While the breath is held out, the muscles of the neck and the shoulders are fixed up by firmly pressing the hands either against the knees or against the thighs as the case may be. Then a vigorous mock inhalation is attempted by raising the ribs and by not allowing the air to flow into the lungs. Simultaneously the front abdominal muscles are completely relaxed.

The fixing up of the neck and shoulders, the vigorous mock inhalation preceded by the deepest possible exhalation, and the simultaneous relaxation of the contracted front abdominal muscles, these three actions complete the technique of Uddiyāna. Automatically² the diaphragm will rise up and the abdomen will undergo a pronounced depression, producing the concave appearance shown in Figs. 10, 11, and 12. A slight forward bent of the trunk

1. This Bandha has been subjected by us to a very large number of X-ray and other experiments many of which have already appeared in *Yoga-Mimāṃsā*. Hence we are in a position to give a detailed scientific description of its technique. Looking to the popular character of this publication however, we have sketched its technique in the simplest terms possible.
2. The pressure changes in the chest and abdomen which are responsible for this automatic abdominal depression, have been detailed in *Yoga-mimāṃsā* in places too numerous to be quoted here. Zealous students of Yogic physiology may read the *Scientific Sections* of Vols. II and IV of that journal.

will be helpful in securing greater abdominal concavity. This position is required to be maintained throughout the exercise of Uḍḍiyāna.

When the student finds that he can no longer hold his breath out comfortably, he relaxes his neck and shoulders, lets go the ribs and slowly starts inhalation, allowing the abdominal depression to be effaced gradually. When inhalation is completed, one round of the Uḍḍiyāna exercise is finished.

In Saṁskṛita, Uḍḍiyāna means *raising up* and Bandha means *contraction of particular anatomical parts*. This exercise is called Uḍḍiyāna-Bandha because the muscular contractions described above enable the spiritual force¹ to rise up. Anatomically this Bandha may be called Uḍḍiyāna because it raises the diaphragm.

Uḍḍiyāna is a very fine exercise of the abdomen. its therapeutical value against constipation, dyspepsia, liver troubles etc., is very great. Its spiritual worth is greater still.

Caution—People suffering from circulatory or serious abdominal troubles should not take to this exercise on their own responsibility.

JĀLANDHARA-BANDHA OR THE CHIN LOCK

Jālandhara-Bandha requires the chin to be closely pressed against the chest. For doing this the chin is to be tightly set in the jugular notch with the necessary bent of the neck and the head. This has been shown in the pictures of Padmāsana and Siddhāsana given in this book later on. According to some traditions, however, the chin is not set in the jugular notch but pressed against the chest further down about four fingers below it. Figs. 13 and 14 illustrate this.

The Chin-Lock may be practised as a part of Padmāsana and Siddhāsana or independent of them.

This Bandha exercises an upward pull upon the spine and *most probably* upon the spinal cord, and thus works upon the brain. The Yogic tradition traces the name Jālandhara-Bandha to this

1 This force is locked up in the lower region of the abdomen. Uḍḍiyāna is one of the different exercises capable of letting loose this force and making it to travel upward along the spine.

circumstance: The word Jāla referring to the brain and to the nerves passing through the neck, and Dhara denoting the upward pull. Is it possible for the name of the Bandha to be taken from the great Yogin Jalandhara, who was, perhaps, its inventor, or, at any rate, its famous exponent?

MŪLA-BANDHA OR THE ANAL CONTRACTION

Mūla-Bandha is an exercise which *mainly* consists in forcibly contracting the anal sphincters. It also requires the perineum to be closely pressed by the heel, as illustrated in Fig. 17 and as described later on in this chapter in the technique of Siddhāsana.

Māla-Bandha may be practised as a part of Siddhāsana or independent of it.

There are two anal sphincters, one internal and the other external, situated at the end of the rectum. Both the sphincters, are formed by circular muscles, the external one constituting the anus.

Although the anal contraction alone goes to form Mūla-Bandha, in contracting the anus one necessarily contracts the whole pelvic region. Hence virtually Mūla Bandha is an exercise of pelvic contraction.

This Mūla-Bandha is intended to work upon the central and sympathetic nervous systems through the nerve terminals in the anal sphincters. It is called Mūla Bandha because it first concerns itself with the lower ends of the nervous system in the human trunk.

Caution—A mistake in the practice of this Bandha leads to hard constipation and upsets the digestive system. The genitals are also involved in this contraction and a mistake in its execution may result in some trouble in that direction also. Hence students of Yoga are advised to proceed systematically into this practice.

PADMAŚANA OR THE LOTUS POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Padmāsana because it is in imitation of the lotus

that the hands and feet are arranged in this Āsana. Padma, in Saṁskṛita, means a *lotus*. Possibly the two feet placed on the opposite thighs represent the lotus leaves, and the two hands arranged one above the other stand for the blooming lotus. Fig. 16 illustrates the full pose.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The student first takes his seat with his legs fully stretched out. He then bends his right leg in the knee-joint; and folding it upon itself, sets the same in the opposite hip-joint, so as to make the foot lie stretching at the root of the thigh with its sole upturned. (*vide* Fig. 15). The other leg is similarly folded and set in the opposite hip-joint. Both the heels he adjusts in such a way that they almost meet in front of the pubic bones and each of them presses on the abdominal portion adjacent to it. (*vide* Fig. 16). Then on the heels thus brought together, the left hand is spread out with its back touching the heels and its palm upturned. The right hand is placed upon the left in the same manner. The eyes are directed to the nose-tip as described on p. 36; and the Chin-Lock is formed after the manner indicated on p. 38. With the Anal Contraction treated on p. 39, the technique of the Lotus Pose is completed. It is needless to add that except for the neck, the spine is to be maintained erect.

The most important features of Padmāsana are the two Bandhas—Jālandhara and Mūla. As these are to be cautiously practised, it is always desirable, for the student of Yoga, first to pick up the Bandhas and then start with this pose.

Caution— In India many people are desirous of sitting in Padmāsana for their daily prayers. We advise these people to assume the Lotus Pose without the Bandhas, if they have not already picked them up successfully. When practised without Bandhas, this Āsana may be continued for any length of time, provided one can sit in it all the while without any sense of discomfort. The advice and caution given in the notes on the Jālandhara and Mūla Bandhas, also hold good in the case of Padmāsana, if the student is anxious to go through the complete technique of this posture.

CULTURAL ADVANTAGES:

All over the lower extremities, the flexors are greatly contracted and pressed.

This circumstance coupled with the passive condition of all the remaining muscles of the lower extremities maintained for a considerably long time, interferes with the free current of blood circulation. That being the case, the pelvic region gets larger blood supply from the bifurcations of the abdominal aorta.

The larger blood supply mentioned above tones up the coccygeal and sacral nerves.

The same advantages can be claimed for all the meditative poses that follow.

SIDDHASANA OR THE ACCOMPLISHED POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Siddhāsana because it is a favourite pose of the accomplished Yogins. Sidha, in Sanskrit, means an *adept*.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The student first takes his seat with his legs fully stretched out. He then bends his left leg in the knee-joint; and folding it upon itself, sets its heel tightly against the perineum. (*vide* Fig. 17). In order to get the perineum clear for this purpose, he has first to hold up his genitals with the left hand, for the right hand is occupied in setting the heel in its proper place. The sole of the left foot should be closely in touch with the right thigh. No attempt should be made to sit on the heel. This is a wrong procedure, because pressure is to be exerted on the perineum and not on the anus. The adjusted heel should feel the hard touch of the bones on the two sides of the perineum. After the left leg is given its proper position, the genitals should be arranged within the space available between the left thigh and the left calf. This being done the right leg should be folded after the manner of the left, its heel being placed against the pubic bones just above the penis. (*vide* Fig. 18). The right sole should spread along the left thigh, the lower border of the right foot being thrust between the left thigh and the left calf. Care must be taken not to hurt the genitals. Generally they can be accommodated below the right heel. But if they cannot find sufficient space there, the testes may be lodged there and the penis may be made to lie outside the folded legs. Under no

circumstances undesirable pressure should be put upon any of the organs concerned.

The chin is set against the chest, just as in Padmāsana, to form Jālandhara-Bandha. The eyes, this time, do not, however, gaze at the tip of the nose; but are directed between the eyebrows, as described on page 37, securing Bhrūmadhya-Dṛishti for the student. Except for this bent of the neck required to form Jālandhara-Bandha, the spine is to be kept erect.

The hands and fingers may be arranged to form Jnāna-Mudrā¹ as shown in Fig. 18 or the hands may rest on the knees, touching them with their palms.

The pose should be developed gradually avoiding every possibility of uncomfortable pressure. The period of time given to its daily practice should increase slowly.

Note—In some of the vernacular books of Yoga, the pose is said to affect the sexual powers adversely. So far as our experience goes, there is little evidence in support of this view, in the case of healthy persons. It is, however, desirable not to exceed an hour's practice, without special permission of an expert.

This and the preceding Āsana are principally practised for spiritual culture. When rightly advised they are also available for purposes of physical culture and therapeutics.

SVASTIKĀSANA OR THE AUSPICIOUS POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Swastikāsana because it involves crossing of the legs which is looked upon by the Āryans as auspicious. In Saṁskṛita, Svastika means *auspicious*. In classical Saṁskṛita the word Svastika

1. Jnāna-Mudrā or the *Symbol of Knowledge* is practised in the following manner. The palms are fully stretched out and the tip of the index finger, that is, the finger next to the thumb, is made to touch the tip of the thumb of the same hand. In this action, it is the forefinger that is bent to meet the thumb, the latter advancing a little, no doubt, to meet its fellow.

is used even for the *crossing of the hands*. The reason is that the mysterious symbol Svastika is mainly represented by two lines crossing each other at right angles. Hence positions involving the crossing either of hands or of legs are also called Svastika. Fig. 20 which illustrates Svastikāsana, clearly shows how in this Āsanas legs cross each other above the ankles.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The student starts by stretching out his legs on his seat. Then he bends one of his legs, say the right, in the knee, and folds it on the thigh, just as in the case of Siddhāsana. But there is a difference in the ultimate position of the foot in this pose and in Siddhāsana. In the latter pose the heel is set against the perineum, whereas in Svastikāsana it is to be set against the opposite hip-joint, so as to allow the corresponding sole to be in close touch with the opposite thigh. (*vide* Fig. 19). Then without disturbing the position of the heel, the student raises the toes of his right leg with his left hand. Simultaneously he folds his left leg upon the thigh in such a way that the big toe of his right leg may project itself above the calf and the thigh between which it is held, and the left heel may be firmly set against the right hip-joint. The toes of the left foot are inserted between the right calf and the right thigh already folded upon each other, allowing only the big left toe to lie free. (*vide* Fig. 20). Needless to say that in this position the sole of the left foot stretches above the right thigh touching it closely all along. In this pose the legs should be made to cross each other just above the ankles, so that all unpleasant pressure on the bones will be avoided. When the legs are properly adjusted a sort of foot-lock is prepared which one finds very comfortable, and capable of being maintained for a considerable length of time.

The spine is to be kept erect. No attempt is, however, to be made to throw out the chest. Svastikāsana is a meditative pose and as such requires to be maintained for a long time. Any attempt to give an artificial bent to the vertebral column is likely to involve a strain.

The arms may hang loosely from the shoulders and rest on the knees covering them with their palms. Or they may be stretched out a little further so as to allow the wrists to rest on the corresponding knees. In the latter case, the hands are formed into what is called Jnāna-Mudrā in Yoga. Fig. 20 illustrates the full pose.

A third way of arranging the hands is shown in Padmāsana. (*vide* Fig. 16).

Instead of starting with the right leg, the student may start with the left. He might then go through the whole technique, introducing corresponding changes throughout.

The eyes may either be closed as illustrated in Fig. 20 or either the Nasal Gaze or the Frontal Gaze may be practised. (For the two *Drishtis* see respectively Figs. 8 and 9).

SAMĀSANA OR THE SYMMETRICAL POSE

THE NAME:

The pose is called Samāsana because in its performance all the parts of the human body are symmetrically arranged and a perfect balance is maintained. In Sanskrita, Sama means *symmetrical*.

Guptāsana is another name given to this pose. In Sanskrita, Gupta means either *well protected* or *secret*. The pose looks to be called Guptāsana because in executing it, genitals are well protected under the heels of man. Or it may be that the Āsana was practised secretly by a particular school of Yogins and continued to be their secret possession, till it became known to others and hence acquired this name.

THE TECHNIQUE:

The only difference in the technique of this Āsana and the previous one, lies in the arrangement of the heels. In Svastikāsana the right heel is pressed against the opposite groin and also the left. But in Samāsana the right and the left heels are to be set against the pubic bones. This is done as follows. While the right leg is being folded on the corresponding thigh, the student holds the heel in his right hand and the toes in his left. Then he turns the heel upward and the toes downward, and arranges the foot in his front in such a way that the heel presses against the pubic bones, the sole is turned upwards, and the upper surface of the foot touches the ground. (*vide* Fig. 21). Care must be taken at this time to see that the genitals are placed below the heel in such a way that no pressure is exerted on the testes. The

other leg is similarly folded, and the other heel is placed upon the first heel, pressing against the pubic bones. The toes of the other leg are to be inserted between the calf and the thigh of the first leg. (*vide* Fig. 22).

The arrangement of the hands and eyes in this *Asana* admits of as many varieties as in the previous *Asana*. The spine is to be maintained erect and the whole body to be kept in balance.

Note—As in this pose the space below the heels is just sufficient to accommodate genitals of the normal size, persons who are suffering from hydrocele etc., should not attempt this *Asana*.