

# THE PRACTICE OF THE UNSTRUCK WORD: REALISM

## BEING REALISTIC

Taking responsibility for breath and coming to grips with cause and effect in the boggling interrelatedness of all things is a solid starting point. Negative vibes produce unwanted ramifications. No mystery there. It would be wise to proceed as though we're all together, from now on, interminably, in one form or another, without escape or conclusion, in a quality of communion cumulatively created by our choices.

Which is to say, self-centric satisfactions and seeking happiness at the expense of others, are not realistic — not as realistic as, say, a clear conscience being released into the familiarity of all lifeforms and the boundless bliss that spontaneously sustains us, unbeknownst or knowingly.

Suffering is a consequence of missing and disused information. We suffer unequally. Facing, with frightening uncertainty, our preventable self-destruction, places us at the crux of our particular *Kali-Yuga*, a dissolute dark age of our own making. Whose making? In total interconnectedness and relational causation, who's awakening? In a morbid age, we're unentitled to happiness even if we earn it, and those who've entitled themselves at the expense of others have a currency they can never spend.

As a fleeting form of energy, if you're counting on dying your way out of this crisis, turning into nothing, bear in mind that energy isn't destroyed but re-disseminated ("re-consequated" comes to mind, which is definitely not a word ... then, what would it be, if not an energy form?)

How to delimit prosody, separate it from the totality of its repercussions, in order to make it a "subject," or, on the other hand, to expand the spirit of inquiry to its breaking point to *not* do so, to instead set it free of parameters?

Even if someone wanted to be uncreated, to roll it all back as though nothing ever happened, who'd wish the same for humankind as a whole? A crazed despot with his finger on the button who wants to take everybody with him into oblivion?

How did we ever get this way? Which way? I don't know anything about anyone else, except that everyone prefers to be happy, with few exceptions, and with respect to the weaker, addictive, tendency of attachment to conditions that cause suffering.

How are we each hard at work within involuntary biocide? What's the cause of the cause? Why can't we stop, though we see?

It's not really possible to approach a sound-gnosis practice without a realistic world view. It requires too much quieting down and acknowledgment of the cause of all distraction, disturbance and distraction to allow one to fool oneself or turn away. A realistic world view is illumination of the nature of reality as perfectly responsive to openness, to positive intention and sustained beneficial action, in one's introspection and socially, as one of the ones.

It's not realistic to separate studying with the mind from study of the mind. It's not realistic to divide a subject from self and subjectivity. Identity formation from identity fixation, materialist from critical introspective sciences, individualist from altruistic motivation ... further delusional, life-threatening divides in *Kali-Yuga* (with such divides serving as its very attributes.)

Or, *understating* the stakes, is perhaps the underlying problem. Bliss is the method ... if shared, if one is not absolutely blanked or blissed out in a private capsule with only God on board. Liberating love is inconceivably abundant, immediate and omnipersonal. Such reality is undergoing constant doubt, reformulation, disproof and renewal (as it must), bending over backwards to acculturate to each one of us. It's eminently subject to experiment and direct experience and *theoria*. It begs our critical intelligence, our I-inquiry (*atma-vichar*) to have any credence at all.

God also, at some point, just showed up, bemused ... and anxiously awaits our findings in order to know what to do next.

## WORKING BASIS

Thus the place to begin the practice of hearing-before-the-beginning is in your *experience*, by setting up conducive conditions. Practically speaking, hearing unmanifest sound is a process of resorption, like listening all the way to the last remaining resonance of a bell that has been rung, and beyond; hearing to the end of sound, to the end of the energy of sound, and to the end of energy itself if such a possibility could exist ... to the beginningless, which is also the point of the beginning of sound, the "glimmering" of sound, and the concomitant re-emerging of phenomena.

The before-the-beginning that can be soundlessly heard plays a constitutive role in phenomena. Cosmogony makes a sound (inaptly named a "bang".) Pristine consciousness first reflecting on itself produced a tremor; an un-pulsed pulsation, nothing palpable. If at any point in your absorptive practice you find yourself conscious of nothing other than consciousness witnessing itself, resting or nesting in itself, you're at the beginning ... at the beginning of the sounding forth of the objective world, the tremulous display of solids that are to consciousness what dreams are waking up.

Initially, "meditation" is often a process of consciousness encountering more and more of its contents. With the gradual cessation of content there is simply recognition (*pratyabhijna*), a non-wavering state known as *nirvikalpa*, free of thought-formulation.

It gets to be blissful. Little by little. All at once.

A further premise in this particular *anāhata* practice is the timelessness of prosody and its omnipotent phonemes. Prosody played a formative role in cosmogenesis and was, moreover, constitutive of the prior, initial condition that brought the cosmos about — *before the beginning*.

The open question is: if prosody was constitutive of the initial conditions of creation, would it not then have been necessarily self-arising, constitutive of itself, when there was no beforehand or *when?*

Is this — creation — not all happening in the present, as the present, as well — the world coming into being, connected to yet-to-be stirring in the timeless?

Consider an idea you may never have. Consider the inconceivable as, nonetheless, existing as such, with the potential to come forth, provided the split in the dimensionless happens and consorts start to cleave.

Objective reality is spoken forth, from the absolutely tacit to coarsest speech.

This is anything but abstract ... no more abstract than being filled with wonder and having a heart. In the Vedas, the space of the heart is consistently denoted as the place of listening. The unstruck is a trembling in the heart, sourced there, both immanently and transcendently. From the *Rigveda* (10.129.04): "*Sages having meditated in their heart (hriday) have discovered by their wisdom the correlation of existence and nonexistence.*"

The phenomenal is the ineffable. That's concrete.

Following breath, sound and energy to their cessations and beyond is, at once, a practical matter of becoming familiar with the process of dying, with the knowing how to transition as the wisdom of being fully alive. Is there such a state as "beyond experience" if it can't be experienced? We can bring ourselves to the precipice of posing such pointless questions, to see if we can fly, to chart a phenomenology of extraordinary states.

Skepticism strengthens. It's a reliable, even indispensable, guide. If in absolute doubt, know that even the lesser benefits of tuning to interior soteriological sounds — like health, longevity, serenity — are considerable.

The unstruck may have been the original introspection into — to the end of — silence. What is abundantly clear: for the *r̥ṣis*, saints, sages and *sādhakas* who've maintained the tradition, *anahata-dhvani* has been a purely experiential practice — not notional, esoteric, theoretical or theological. The steps are taken toward the real, until there are no further steps to take, with the steps taken ultimately falling away. Although grace is requisite, the steps are anything but gratuitous. Just as creation itself was a matter of divine and poetic discipline, the daily *sādhanā* — the tapas, the sacrifices — of unstruck practitioners has always been resolutely rigorous. No

*tapas*, no tuning to the vital resonance that sustains us and the prosody that provides our interrelations.

The accounts prescribing the unstruck are quite unequivocal; the method, the quality of the experience, what is heard along way and the ultimate outcome are well-charted. It's doubtless. This is why I'd say, at the outset: be at ease, ease into it, strain nothing. Approach the unstruck openly, without anticipation, neither wanting nor not-wanting to hear a particular pitch or type of sound. Listen to whichever sound arises, *like never before*. The cues are within.

## UNSTRUCK BLISS WITHOUT THE CHAFING OF CONTENT

South Asian interior-sound practices from different eras specify with remarkable consistency a succession of sounds through which the unstruck manifests. The progression is towards greater and greater subtlety, absorption and omniscience until the sounds themselves cease. What then? Good question. Unstruck practice is a matter of interiorly following sound — in the subtlest sense possible — to the end of sound, the end of the energy of sound, and then to the end of energy itself. Why in the world would anyone want to do this ... to become free of phenomenal experience; to become undistinct as against the pressures of self-esteem to distinguish oneself; to opt for content-free bliss (*ananda*) over mere contentment? One can only know for oneself, find out for oneself — of this I'm certain. We each find our own terms for freedom, for the flowering of mystery within us, whether theophanic, formless or irreferential.

Admittedly, for a prosodist, "unstruck" is an agreeable term for *god-perspective*. In traditional and scholarly accounts, the unstruck goal is given variously as *samadhi*, consciousness-as-such, Nada-Brahman, beyond I-Brahman, *videha-mukti*, innermost *ātaman*, consciousness without content, *turiya-turiya*, non-representational reflexivity, Brahma-Pranava, emptiness, non-propositional awareness, or deity merger. What could possibly be the word for what it is, for the full-bodied presencing of its *avatāra*, the word that is the actuality of the referred? What to name it so that it is what it is?

The *Nādabindu-Upaniṣad*, perhaps the earliest text to concentrate on sacrosanct sound, enumerates the succession of sonic phenomena that accompanies *anahata-nada* meditation. To paraphrase:

"Sitting stably in *siddhasana*\* pose adopting the Vaishnavi-Mudra (eyes open without blinking while focused within), one should always hear the internal sound (*nāda*) in the right ear. This sound, when constantly practiced will drown every external sound (*dhvani*.) After overcoming all objective obstacles by overcoming all internal obstacles, one enters the *turiya* state within 15 days. At first one hears various, loud sounds. Gradually the sounds are heard with greater and greater subtlety. At first the sounds will be like those produced by the ocean (*jaladhi*), clouds (*jimūta*), the kettle-drum (*bherī*) and a waterfall (*nirjhara*). Later, in the middle stage, the sounds will be like those produced by a tabor (*mardala*), a big bell (*ghantā*) and a military drum

(*kāhala*). Finally, the sounds will be like a tinkling bell (*kinkinī*), bamboo flute (*vamśa*), harp (*vīnā*) and bees (*bhramara*). When louder sounds such as the kettle-drum are heard, one should distinguish only the sounds that are increasingly subtle. The mind should stay concentrated on these shifts from gross to subtle and subtle to gross and become absorbed in any one of them, indifferent to all else, becoming one with the sound as milk with water, merging with the space of consciousness. Meditating on *nāda* alone, freed from concepts and conditions, one becomes the sound that is unstruck. The mind exists so long as there is sound, but with sound's cessation there is the state called *Unmani* (beyond the dreamless sleep state, no mind, that which underlies all states), the form of the internal sound that is Brahma-Om."

*\*(Siddhāsana is a cross-legged asana with (more typically) the left heel against the perineum and the right foot tucked between the left calf and thigh. This position also acts as body-wide seal, setting up a closed-circuitry for one's internal energy.)*

Fifteen hundred years later, these instructions reappear, almost verbatim, in the *Hatha-Yoga Pradipikā* (4,81). (The *Pradipikā* also works with subtle physiology, placing the arising of the sounds at specific centers along the central channel, as the corresponding *prana* pierces the 3 knots (*granthi*) to open the *suśumna*.)

The *Hamsa Upanisad* modifies somewhat the self-arising sound sequence as follows: *cini*, *cini-cini*, bell, conch-blast, harp, cymbal, flute, kettle-drum, tabor, and thunder-cloud (*megha*). In general, the sequences are understood as preliminary sounds leading to the pure, primordial, seed vibration from which all things stream. The *Hamsa Upanisad* also mentions that the whole unstruck practice can be a matter of hearing the last sound (thunder) alone.

The *Kaulajñāna-Nirnaya* (ascribed to Matsyendranāth) reduces the sequence to 5 sounds: "When the *jīva* is dissolved, one hears the inner sounds, such as that of a kettle-drum, conch, *mrdanga*, *vīnā* or flute. One should always mediate on this, which is the highest state of all. One becomes imperishable..." (14.85-86). The *Śiva-Samhitā* (5.27) also lists only 5 sounds, though with almost no overlap: "The first sound is like the hum of the honey-intoxicated bee, next that of a flute, then of a harp; after this...one hears the sounds of ringing bells; then sounds like the roar of thunder."

The *Gherand-Samhitā* (5.79-82) expands the sequence to 12 sounds: "The first will be like that of crickets (*jhiñ*), then that of a flute (*vamsī*), then that of thunder, then that of a drum (*jharjhara*), then that of a bee, then that of bells, then those of gongs of bell metal, trumpets (*turī*), kettle-drums, *mrdanga* (double-ended drum), military drums (*anaka*), and *dundubhi* (a kind of kettle-drum...Thus various sounds are cognized by daily practice of *kumbhaka* (breath retention.) Last of all is heard the *anāhata* sound rising from the heart; of this sound there is resonance, in that resonance there is a light. In that light the mind should be immersed."

The sounds from the above *anāhata* sequences are *analogous* to what is heard, drawing on familiar sounds from the representational world. Think of them as suggestive, as *instillations*. There are natural references like cicadas and bees and thunder, but most of the sounds refer to musical instruments, implying that musical instrumentation is a reflection of what yogis hear internally. As musicologist Guy Beck has said: "A serious study of the Indian musical instruments and how they correspond to the sounds heard in deep *Nāda-Yoga* meditation is a

desideratum (From his book *Sonic Theology*, to which I'm indebted for a number of the above textual references.)

## SEALING THE SEVEN GATES AND KUMBHAKA HYPOXIA

The *Śiva Samhitā* (5.22-26) recommends a more intensive *pratyahara* mudra than the abovementioned *Vaisnavi Mudra*: "Let the practitioners (gently) close the ears with their thumbs, the eyes with index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers, and with the remaining four fingers let them press together the upper and lower lips (elbows in line with shoulders). The Yogi, by having thus firmly confined the air... gradually... begins to hear the unstruck sounds (*nādas*)." This is a description of the *Shanmukhi Mudra*. This mudra is used integrally with the *kumbhaka* (breath-retention) practices often prescribed for inner sound discernment (see below.) While the in-breath is retained, and at after the expulsion of the outbreath, the middle fingers of the *Shanmukhi Mudra* gently close the nostrils, completing the sensory seal.

The *Vijnānabhairava* (7th c. CE), one of 5 primary tantras of Trika Philosophy also recommends the *Shanmukhi Mudra* (verse 36): By stopping the openings (of the senses) with the weapon (*astra*) in the form of the hands, by which are blocked the eyes (and other openings in the face) and thus by breaking open (the knot in the center of the eye-brows) the bindu is perceived which (on the development of one-pointedness) gradually disappears (in the space of consciousness, *cidākāśa*.) Then (in the center point of the space consciousness, the yogi is established in the highest state (*paramā sthiti*h.))

From the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradīpikā* (4.64–67): "I will now describe the practice of *Anāhata-Nāda* (*nāadopāsana*) as propounded by Gorakhnāth. Of these, the hearing of the *Anāhata-Nāda* is the only one, the chief, in my opinion....The Yogi should hear the sound inside his right ear, with collected mind. The ears, the eyes, the nose, and the mouth should be closed, and then the clear sound is heard in the passage of the *Suṣumnā* which has been cleansed of all its impurities."

The correlated practices of *pratyahara* and *kumbhaka* — sensory withdrawal and breath abstinence — are the prime means for fine-tuning interior sound receptivity. It's in between on and off, intake and outbreath, in the *turiya* state, beyond the serene state of deep breathing, that *anāhata* can optimally be heard. "Let the Yogi practice *Pûraka* (inhalation) and *Kumbhaka*, closing the ears by the hands... Thus various sounds are cognised by daily practice of this *Kumbhaka*. Last of all is heard the *Anāhata* sound rising from the heart; of this sound there is a resonance, in that resonance there is a Light. In that Light the mind should be immersed." (*Gheranda-Samhitā* 78-82.)

From the *Yoga-Śikhopanisad* (127-128) "After giving up the *Recaka* (exhalation) and the *Puraka*, one should take one's firm stand by holding the breath. Various kinds of sounds are produced."

The *Yoga Tattva Upaniṣad* (142) describes the effect of *kumbhaka* as a lamp inside a pot that does not flicker because no breeze can reach it.

The *Gorakṣaśataka*, a root Hathayoga text, speaks not of breath 'control' but breath *conquest* and freedom from existence (*bhavamukti*). "He is without doubt liberated whose breath goes neither in nor out, neither in the left nostril nor the right and neither up nor down." The *Gorakṣaśataka's* extreme *kumbhaka* instruction is interwoven with activation the Goddess Sarasvati (*sarasvatīcālana*), who is correlated with both the central *suśumna* channel and *kundalini*. This has special relevance for prosody as Sarasvati is defined as "she who contains sound." And behind Sarasvati is 'Vak,' the mother of all in the *Vedas*. (In effect, the impulse to speak is goddess-stirred kundalini, from the bottom chakra up. In this sense, each word that arises in us is revelatory, regardless of the signification it bears.)

Breath retention after inhalation is called *antara-kumbhaka*; breath retention after exhalation is called *bhaya-kumbhaka*. The *Gorakṣaśataka* (in the above paragraph) is describing the 3rd type of breath retention, *kevela-kumbhaka*. *Kevela-kumbhaka* is complete retention. The Atharvavedic *Śāṅḍilya Upaniṣad* describes *kevela kumbhaka* as breath-retention that is not "coupled" with exhalation or inhalation. It is "alone". It lists the ability to hear inner sounds distinctly as one of the benefits of absolute retention, along with becoming serene, clear-eyed and free of all diseases. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (2:73-74) states that for yogis who have attained *kevela-kumbhaka* "nothing in the three worlds is difficult for them to attain." In the *Shiva Samhita* (3:59) yogis who are able to perform complete retention for three hours "become so light that they are able to balance on their thumbs."

The 13th century *Dattātreyaयोगśāstra* (the first Hatha-Yoga manual) states that "yoga is the reward of being born," and distinguishes *kevala kumbhaka* as the most advanced technique of breath-control, allowing practitioners to hold their breath for as long as they wish and granting extraordinary powers, such as clairaudience, traveling long distances in an instant and the ability to become infinitesimal. (Teachers and writers beware: the *Dattātreyaयोगśāstra* also insists on shunning those who attain their ends through words alone ... listed alongside other obstacles like wasting one's life digging for buried treasure.)

Stilling the breath stills the mind. Stopping the breath stops the mind. Yet, complete retention is something more. It's not 'breath' that is being held but *prana*. *Prana* is being held and activated within the central *suśumna* channel by separating it from the explicit signaling of inhalation and exhalation. *Prana* is its own resource and refreshment. *Kevela* is absorption to the point of the practitioner not even being aware that breathing has stopped ... completely absorbed in the process of interior breathing, in an object of devotion, in the trip taken. Poisons (*kleshas*) can't survive in the *kevela* atmosphere. *Kevela-kumbhaka* is known to treat a wide variety of diseases (if not all) ... but, again, health and personal powers are the sideshow, liberating love the goal.

The *kevela* state and unstruck *inhearing* are direct correlates.

The scientific term for *kumbhaka* is *intermittent hypoxia* (oxygen deficiency). *Kumbhaka* is positive hypoxia. Breath-holding and the so-called *diving reflex* work in the same way, producing similar effects. As demonstrated through the diving reflex: upon facial contact with

cold water the human heart slows down. (Seals can go from 125 beats per minute to as low as 10 when diving.) Positive hypoxia leads to various adaptive responses and multifold benefits, beginning with a shift to parasympathetic dominance and vagal activation. Respiration is optimized by preferentially distributing stored oxygen to the vital organs, particularly the heart and brain. Slowing the breath slows the heart. If breath rate is decreased, tidal volume must be increased to maintain respiratory homeostasis, inducing deeper breaths, greater oxygen absorption into the bloodstream as air is retained longer within the lungs, and as less oxygen is needed in a state of semi-dormancy. As heart rate cycles with breathing, cardiorespiratory sync sets in. Hemoglobin levels increase, Nitric Oxide Synthase is induced, inflammatory responses are lowered, risk of stroke or heart attack can decrease by dilating blood vessels, bone density may increase, immunity strengthen, depression disappear, and so on.

With or without *kumbhaka*, breathing is not breathing per se. Breathing is an astonishment; a sacrifice, or *sacrament*, if you prefer. In-breath brings the *infinite* into *individual*, exhalation is offering up one's whole being. In-breath is consumed in the fire of exhalation, oblation after oblation.

In Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* there are 8 stages or *limbs*. *Pratyahara* is the fifth limb, the fulcrum between the exterior/bodily-oriented disciplines (ethical conduct, postures and breathing methods) and the interior-oriented *samyama* (the simultaneous 3-fold practice of concentration (*dhāranā*), devotional meditation (*dhyāna*) and *samādhi* (absorption, union). *Pratyahara* is the gateway from sense perceptions to interior recognitions. In that breathing is an interchange with the environment, stopping the breath is inherently a *pratyahara* practice. *Kevala kumbhaka* is a changeover from exterior to interior breathing — not a full stoppage of breath, but fullness of breathing in its own right. Jaideva Singh's *Vijnābhairava* (verse 27) explicitly states that *kevala* is the non-difference between *prāna* and *apāna* (inhalation and exhalation) at which point energy (*śakti*) is known as "ceased" (*śāntā*). This *kevala* state can also be arrived at the-other-way-around, through the cessation of all thought-constructs.

So you see, ultimately, absorption in the increasing subtlety of interior sound is a complete *pratyahara* in itself. "When one fixes full attention on this sound, being free from fear, there is absorption (*layla*) ... When the mind of the Yogi is exceedingly engaged in this sound the Yogi forgets all external things and is absorbed in this sound (*nāda*)." (*Siva-Samhitā*, 5.27.) And as the sound ceases (*nādānta*), the breath is also absorbed, at once a *kevala kumbhaka* practice. The *Upaniśads* call this state of absorption *turiya*. *Turiya* is the fourth state, beyond and between wakefulness (differentiated objectivity), dreaming (exclusive subjectivity) and dreamless sleep. Kashmir Śaivism adds a fifth state, *turyatita*: *Aham*, eternal omniscience, being in bliss. Various *Upaniśads* redouble the term as *turiya-turiya*. Abhinavagupta adds yet another state, *anuttara*. The climaxing of the word for reality as both apotheosis and underlying basis as plain as the nose on our faces, will never cease.

It's not the end of the sounding that is the pulsating light of consciousness, but the *absorption* in the ending.

## AIR THAT IS AWARE: BEING RESPONSIBLE FOR BREATHING

*"All that exists in the three worlds rests in the control of prana. As a mother protects her children, O prana, protect us and give us splendor and wisdom." — Prashna Upanishad 2.13*

Is it a full breath if it doesn't reach each alveolus? Is it a full breath if the oxygen is not cared for, followed through the hemoglobin, followed through to its perfusion into every cell in the body, to the final phase of respiration, the end of the electron transport chain in the mitochondrial matrix where that same atmospheric oxygen molecule bonds with an electron and proton to form water, liberating free energy for the generation of ATP, our intracellular energy currency. Thus we breathe because oxygen is electronegative, with this tiniest, last minute part to play in the transformation of energy necessary for fueling the organic. We breathe because the series of inconceivably intricate biomolecular rearrangements involved in life-giving gas interchange with our environment is glorious.

And then of course there is exhalation — allowing us to relax, speak, sing, yawn, cool our brains, perceive flavors and return the favor of replenishment to our photosynthetic friends.

In order to breathe fully, B.K.S. Iyengar recommends breathing only through the nose. "The nose is for breathing, the mouth is for eating." This assures a slower, deeper, warmer rate of physiological respiration — not gasping, or gulping down and blowing out our precious air, or barely breathing.

Sea turtles can stay underwater for up to seven hours. Tangled in a fishing net, struggling to get free, stressed, they die in a matter of minutes.

Respiratory rate is commensurate with lifespan. Giant land tortoises take 3 or 4 breaths per minute and live as long as 250 years. From the yogic perspective, each person is given an allotment of breaths equaling their longevity. 15 breaths per minute is quite average ... 2 seconds to inhale, 2 seconds to exhale, one day equaling 21,600 breaths. Considering the entire volume of the lungs, this rate is rather rapid. It can only represent shallow, upper-chest breathing (and perhaps equally shallow speaking.) By simply shifting to 4-second inhalations and exhalations, cutting the daily rate in half to 10,800 cycles, for each day lived a person would gain 1/2 day! For every second of *kumbhaka* one second is added to lifespan.

Patanjali said the purpose of *pranayama* is not the improvement of breathing but the gradual *cessation* of breathing.

For prosody as well, *pranayama* is a means to an end, with health and longevity as integral by-products. In particular, *pranayama* is a stable support for attunement to subtle, self-arising, interior sounds. If I were to teach a creative writing course, along with required reading I'd require the practice of lowering one's respiratory rate to 6 breaths per minute. Without the benefit of this parasympathetic shift, how can one hear anything at all, either internally or externally ...

much less that which one deeply needs to hear and say to be guided through causation without wasting precious time. When relaxed, receptivity heightens. Spontaneity replaces one's impulsivity.

This is why the *r̥sis* referred to speaking as *seeing*, and to the words one is speaking as *hearing*, or "speaking the breath."

In terms of definitions, the word *prana* can't be reduced to *breath*, and *pranayama* can't be reduced to methods of physiological ventilation or even bodywide cellular respiration. Accordingly, air isn't merely a mixture of gasses. Although *prana* involves breathing in air, *prana* can also be understood as omnipresent energy, or the energy of consciousness itself (*devatma śakti*) that manifests as the creativity we call "creation." It's not a homogeneous, lifeless power source like electricity, but an animating awareness that interacts consequentially with each individualized form. We breathe creation.

In broad strokes, holistically, in terms of the "*yama*" (the code of conduct; one's vows, if you will) of *pranayama*, unless the interaction between our vital bodies and *prana* is spiritually or altruistically directed, life plays itself out either by indulging in or being subjugated by power and pleasure.

There are five *pranas*, also called *vayus* or winds. *Prana vayu*, is a force that moves forward and inward, governing the **intake** of air, food and sensory and mental impression and our drives. *Apana vayu*, is a downward-moving force of **elimination** ... of excrement, fluids, exhaled carbon dioxide, as well as the elimination of the *kleshas* and *samskaras*, the poisons and scars of negative sensory, emotional and mental experience; an all-inclusive immunological system. *Udana vayu* is an upward-moving force governing growth and qualitative **transformations** of our vital being. It's the positive energy of standing, speaking, being focused, determined and wholehearted as we evolve. *Samana vayu* is a balancing force that moves from the periphery to the navel (pranic center), governing **digestion** of food, absorption of oxygen and the integration and significance of our experiences. *Vyana vayu* is an outward-moving force, from navel to periphery, aiding **circulation** on all levels; nutrients, fluids, gases, emotions, thoughts and *prana* itself.

Again, is it a full breath if all the *pranas* are not felt, integrally, as vibratory influences keeping us well and bringing our lives to fruition with each breath?

*Pranayama* is most often referred to as *breath control*. Again, "*yama*" is far more complex than restraint of a bioprocess or forbearance under unease. The first "limb" of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* is in fact called "*Yamas*." The *Yamas* are a list of ethical codes for living in the world ... disciplines, perhaps, but more on the order of commitments or *vows* (as mentioned above). In this regard, *pranayama* can be defined as *taking responsibility for breathing*, knowing that it's impossible (dysfunctional) to isolate any one *vayu* from all the others. Although *prana vayu's* physiological breathing is the body's primary pranic activity from which the other *vayus* arise, by taking a breath we're also taking responsibility for our total intake, digestion, circulation, elimination and transformation of substances, sensations, emotions and mental states. We become aware through the awareness of air, our awareness of *its* intelligence. Vibrationally, the

tone of the mind (*chitta spanda*) follows the tone of the *prana* (*prana spanda*). And any breakdown in the interconnectivity of the *vayus* can produce "subtle" repercussions such as depression, imbalance, insatiability, fear, disconnection, distractedness, conceit, cynicism, and so on.

Breathe once per minute, live 1500 years! A functioning, blissful hibernation.

Lama Tsultrim Allione's preferred, insightful definition of *prana* is the "motility factor." I've been preferring, simply, "life" itself: *prana* as the difference or defining factor, whether there is life or not.

Deeper yet: *prana* is not only air that is aware, but a process of breathing in benevolence — the unique preciousness of the conditions for life. *Prana* as the Arabic *rūh al-qudus*, the spirit of holiness — a divine communication with the imparting of life. Breathing, then, is the sacrifice of sacred, integral air taken in by our senses which are then ignited by our awareness of the air that is aware of the sacrifice.

It is a full breath if it is this.

## THE SPACE OF THE HEART (*HRDAY ĀKĀŚA*)

Why did God need a place to hide? So our hearts could exist.

The heart is the area in which the heart happens to be.

The heart is for seeing what is otherwise unseen, for touching what is otherwise out of reach, for hearing uncreated sound, for tasting the sublime (where the Vedic entheogen, *soma*, takes effect), for savoring, discerning, conceiving the inconceivable, seating the emotions, seeding the love that shines on the seed; sun and its shining, thoracic cave conscious without content, upwelling of light — with earth and sky as one wave of upending light, using the heart as event.

There's no difference between symbol and the anatomical. They share synonymy with wonder ... another of the heart's vital axial functions. A symbol is simply the supreme reality of that which it symbolizes.

"I" is there (in the heart.) It has only ever been *I* — the terms, that with which we brace, set out, overcome, cross over is *I*. Why is there the heart? Why is the heart there? So one can be there, where *I* changes over to "Am," the last we'll ever see of *I*. Place your *I* there. Not your self, not your soul. Not *jīva*, not identity, not ego, not nous, not particle smashed into its final component: they will not stand with you when all is lost, when *I* will bring you to its end, to see what ends and what doesn't. Only *I* is trained to follow the scents of realizable, inconceivable joy.

Where external and internal fuse behind, beyond the sternum. Cause without any effects. Cause without any effects *yet*. Whole and part upheld by one diaphragm. Coherence, in itself. Heart.

The unpulsing pulsation (*sphuratta*) of the source of the cosmos and the beating heart are an entrainment, a match made in the heaven they themselves made. The heaven they are making. The pulsations that are thought. Stilled thought the most profound.

The *jivanmukta* Ramana Maharshi said the "I" was located in the heart's right atrium, one finger-width from the body's midline. The I is coextensive with the *hrdaya*, the omni-faceted Sanskrit word for "heart." Both brain and heart are meanings of *hrdaya*. So, the heart is not necessarily location-dependent. In Ayurveda, both blood circulation and brain function are included under *hrdaya*, the place of consciousness. Thought is Creator, prior to thought.

The visualization is simple. There's a sun radiating through the ribcage.

One way to breakdown *hrdaya* into its roots: *hri* "to give," *da* "to take," and *yam* "balance." Just as the physiological heart gives and takes with perfect balance in our microcosmic bodies, our interactions are harmonized through the heart's prayer, as the cosmos is held together by its own subtle trembling.

"*Hridaya*" is not "*anāhata*." Is the *anāhata cakra* that is within the *hrdaya* named as such because the unstruck sound is found there? This seemingly contradictory coincidence is a fascinating story in itself. Why locate unbeaten sound in the place of the beating heart? Is the beating of our hearts self-arising? The pace-keeping sinoatrial node is indeed located in Maharshi's right atrium, one finger-width from our axis. Or perhaps the *cakra* name came first, and the *nāda* heard there is named *anāhata* because that is where it's heard, without "unstruck" necessarily being an attribute of the sound. I wonder. In any event, the scriptures, sutras, treatises and tantras all point to a perfect confluence of elements, beyond our comprehension, gifting us a beating unbeating heart.

Although there are a scattered accounts of the unstruck manifesting elsewhere (in the right inner ear, the *brahmarandhra*, in every pore in the body, all along the *sūsumna*) it is dependably immanent in the *hrdaya*.

"Of the sound produced in the *anāhata* of the heart, there is the reverberation (*nāda, dhvani*) of that sound: there is the radiance ( *jyoti*) penetrating the interior of that radiance."  
(*Mandalabrāhmaṇa Upanisad*, 5. 4-5.)

From the *Yogacudamani-Upanisad* (115): "When the vital air (*prāna*) has reached the *ākāśa* of the heart, a great sound is produced, as of bells and other musical instruments."

"Of the sound, *Anāhata*; what is the echo of that sound; the radiance that is in the interior of that echo; the mind that is in the interior of that radiance; when the mind meets with dissolution..." *Yoga-Śikhopanisad* (4-21.)

"There is none who sounds it voluntarily, nor can anyone prevent its being sounded. The deity abiding in the heart of living creatures sounds it himself." (*Svacchandatantra*: 7,50.)

"He whose mind together with the other senses is merged in the interior space of the heart, who has entered mentally into the center of the two bowls of the heart-lotus, who has excluded everything else from consciousness acquires the highest fortune, O beautiful one."  
(*Vijnanabhairava*, v 49.)

Indic intricacy culminates in the compressed theoretical and ritualistic formulations found in the writings of Abhinavagupta. From his *Tantraloka* (6, 217): "There is one phoneme (*varna*) in the form of sound vibration (*nāda*) in which lie all the phonemes latently in an undivided form. As it is ceaseless, it is called *anāhata* i.e. unstruck, natural, spontaneous, uncaused. As all the phonemes originate from this *nāda*, therefore, it is called *varna* proleptically."

"*Hrdaya*, the resting place of all, is mantra, which, in its essence, is nothing but free-consciousness, which also is simply the power of the self-manifesting word (*para vak*)."  
(Abhinavagupta, *Isvara-Pratyabhijna Vimarsini*.)

"It is the heart whose nature is a vibration which constitutes the supreme method for achieving the highest non-duality which consists of a universal grace. For the nature of the self-referential character of the consciousness which composes the awakening in the heart is that it is an astonishment brought about by the total fullness of consciousness." (Ksemaraja, cited from *The Triadic Heart of Siva*, Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega, pg. 123.)

Typically, the Vedic hymns are *deva-krta* "made by the gods," and *apauruṣeyā* "unauthored." The abodes of the gods are the hymns. In particular, it is the goddess Vac who reveals herself to the *ṛṣis*, making them *ṛṣis*. The revelations of the *ṛṣis* are also known as ... *ṛṣis*. These divine impulses, visions (*dhi*, *dhiti*) and inspirations (*manisa*) were received in the *hrdaya*. The *ṛṣis*' role was to arduously construct (of course, within the *hrdaya*) these tacit, supernatural cognitions into intelligible, vocalizable verses. Recitation of the hymns is thus a process of returning them to their owners, from heart to heart within *hrdaya*.

"My ears range wide to hear and wide my eyes to see, wide this Light that is set in the heart; wide walks my mind and I set my thought afar; something there is that I shall speak; something that now I shall think." (*Rigveda* 6.9.6, translator Sri Aurobindo.)

As cited at the opening of this section: "Sages having meditated in their *hrdaya* have discovered by their wisdom the connection of the *sat* with the *asat*." (*Rigveda* 10.129.4.) The elementary, axial, harmonizing, liberating power of the heart is succinctly stated in this verse. The interdependence of *sat* and *asat* "existence/nonexistence," the bond between being and nonbeing (*sató bāndhum ásati*) is, in a way, the whole story, our whole story, told in the space of the heart, right within us.

It must be noted, as well, that the west is not entirely bereft of contemplative hearing-heart/eye-of-the-heart practices. There is the *Sacratissimum Cor Iesu* (Most Sacred Heart of Jesus). There is the Orthodox practice of *nepsis*, i.e., inner attentiveness in the heart, guarding of

the heart (in fact the primary text of the Eastern Church is titled *Φιλοκαλία τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπτικῶν*, *Philokalia of the Neptic Saints*. And the hesychastic *noetic prayer of the heart*; *theoria*, i.e., the "oro" or viewing of *Theos* through contemplation; metanoia; the mind-in-heart of *nous*; and good old fashion western *askesis* and *anachoresis* — all viable venerations while being veritable forms of *pratyhara*.

Quieting into the heart is the starting point. Nothing can happen outside of the space of the heart. The profundity of the embodied practice of the space of the heart is endless, dimensionless. What is prosody's part in this practice (having claimed that poets and poetry precede the existent) if not unstruck receptivity? Opening, entering, abounding in the space of the heart primes the practice of pristine consciousness' slightest impulse.

(More apropos bodily, phonic, behavioral practices will follow. For now, with *antara-kumbhaka* breathe deeply, directly into your *hrdaya*, and you're there! That's plenty.)