

Intro to the Subtle Body– *Prana, Kundalini, and Nadis* Moving from the outer world to our inner world

I. Introduction:

Last time we discussed what is called the cybernetic network of circuitry. This network involves our minds, with all their thoughts and emotions, and how our minds are able to connect.

So far, we've learned that our minds can resonate with others, making us capable of sharing emotions such as joy and wonder.¹ We also discussed how we transmit our thoughts and emotional states to each other over what is sometimes called a “neural bridge.”²

It is over these neural bridges that we either foster greater connection or cause separation. It is over these bridges that we create meaningful relationships and express our life purpose.

In yoga philosophy, the name for the current of energy that constitutes our thoughts and emotions, carries them over neural bridges and, in fact, is the neural bridge, is *Prana*. *Prana* is the life force of our world (also *Chi*, *Qi*, or *Ki*). In yoga we think of Supreme Consciousness, the Divine energy that exists in everything, moving between each of us and through us, as *Prana*.

Tonight we start our exploration of this vital force.

II. *Prana*.

We probably think of *Prana* as the breath, and that is true. It is the air we breathe to keep us alive.³ It is our “vital force.”⁴ *Prana* is the life of all things.⁵ It is the energy permeating the universe at every level: physical, mental, intellectual, sexual, spiritual, and cosmic. This includes energies such as heat, light, gravity, magnetism and electricity.⁶

¹ See posted outline in this course: “What is Success?” Dorigan, William (2016). www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

² See posted outline in this course: “How we Connect – Whether We Know It or Not.” Dorigan, William (2016). www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

³ Bryant, Dr. Edwin (2009). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, New York, NY: North Point Press, at 571.

⁴ Chidvilasananda, Swami (Gurumayi)(1997). *Enthusiam*. South Fallsburg, NY: SYDA Foundation, at 62.

⁵ Mahony, Dr. William (1998). *The Artful Universe*. Albany, NY: SYDA Foundation, at at 179, quoting *Taittiriya Upanishad* 2.3.1

⁶ Iyengar, B.K.S. (2011 ed). *Light on Pranayama*. New York, NY: Shocken Books, at 12.

Prana is the sap in the trees, the rays of sunlight, and the nourishment in water.⁷

Prana is the energy within all beings, such as power, vitality, and our spirit. It is the energy of creation. *Kundalini Shakti*, the inner creative power that transforms us, comes from awakened *Prana*.⁸

Prana is the energy and matter of the clouds, the winds, the earth, and all other forms of the material world, *Prakriti*. It is also the energy of *Purusha*; the Divine energy discussed by Patanjali and identified in the *Tattvas*, as well as our individual soul. It is our soul and it is the soul of your neighbor and every stranger you meet⁹

If we recall our discussion of the cybernetic network of circuitry, the energy flowing through us and between us, we're talking about *Prana*.¹⁰ When we think of the neural bridges transmitting our thoughts and feelings from our mind out into the world, the energy of this transmittal is *Prana*.

Prana is the connecting energy between the body and the mind. It is the “means” by which the mind permeates the body.¹¹

To maximize our potential for experiencing positive emotions, engaging in meaningful activities, and developing nurturing relationships, we need to understand this life force. It is the vehicle by which we convey all our thoughts, words, and actions. It is the energy by which we create our world.

A. Following are some examples of how *Prana* exists within us.

1. Our thoughts are *Prana*. As such, it is the energy that can create, protect, and destroy our relationships and opportunities for deeper, richer connection in the world.¹²
 - a. This brings to mind the advice of counting to ten when we feel we are about to say or do something in response to a stressful event. When we count to ten, we are actually allowing our life force an opportunity to

⁷ Kempton, Sally (2011). *Meditation for the Love of It*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True, Inc., at 199–203.

⁸ Shantananda, Swami (2003). *The Splendor of Recognition*. South Fallsburg, NY: SYDA Foundation, at 308–317.

⁹ *Light on Pranayama*, at 12; *See generally, Meditation for the Love of It*, at 199–203.

¹⁰ See posted outline in this course: “How we Connect – Whether We Know It or Not.” Dorigan, William (2016). www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

¹¹ Wallis, Dr. Christopher (2012). *Tantra Illuminated*. The Woodlands, TX: Anusara Press, at 97.

¹² *Light on Pranayama*, at 12.

calm, making it less likely that we will be controlled by the chattering thoughts within us that make up our patterns of thought and, ultimately, behavior.

- b. Yoga practices, such as meditation, mindful *Asana* practice, *Mantra*, *Yantra* study, meditation, and work with the *Tattvas* and the *Rasas*, are examples of how we can help our mind develop the capacity to slow down and avoid precipitous choices.
 - c. These practices, as well as other practices taught by behavioral specialists, help us build our emotional resilience. So, too does time spent reading uplifting work that fills us with thoughts (memories) that encourage positivity.¹³
 - d. Common to these practices is that they help us develop the ability to discriminate, refining our thoughts and emotions, and tracing them back to their source, and isolating their root causes.¹⁴
2. While we cannot control every thought that arises, we can control whether we ruminate and act upon negative thoughts or, conversely, shake them off and wave them goodbye. We can reject negative thoughts, saying “no thank you,” and, on occasion, even transmute them into something positive.¹⁵
- a. The more we fill ourselves with positive experiences, the memories of those experiences can eventually overwhelm negative thoughts in pure volume, making it more likely that in times of stress a positive memory will arise. All of these thoughts and memories are *Prana*.¹⁶
 - b. By choosing to focus on positive emotions, as for example, through meditating on such emotions, we create an environment in our mind that isn't receptive to negative emotions and thoughts.¹⁷

¹³ See posted outline in this course: “What is Success?” Dorigan, William (2016).
www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

¹⁴ See posted outline in this course: “*The Rasas*.” Dorigan, William (2016).
www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

¹⁵ See posted outline in this course: “*The Rasas*.” Dorigan, William (2016).
www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

¹⁶ See posted outline in this course: “How we Connect – Whether We Know It or Not.” Dorigan, William (2016).
www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html (see discussion and cited references).

¹⁷ See posted outline in this course: “How we Connect – Whether We Know It or Not.” Dorigan, William (2016).
www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html (see discussion and cited references).

- c. Meditation is a great way for us to use *Prana* as it flows through us as both breath and thought. Meditation allows us to recognize and unravel associations our mind has made over the years. This allows us to create new, helpful neural connections that positively influence us.¹⁸
- B. *Prana* flows through us primarily as the breath, via oxygen, the air element. It moves through five layers, or *Koshas*: 1) *Annamaya Kosha*, the outer body, the skin; known as the food body; 2) *Pranamaya Kosha*, the breath or *pranic* body; 3) *Manomaya Kosha*, the rationale, linear mind, where our sensory processing occurs; 4) *Vijnanamaya Kosha*, the wisdom mind; and 5) *Anandamya Kosha*, the deeper, Spiritual part of our mind, the place where our soul, *Purusha*, resides.¹⁹ We discuss the *Koshas* in an upcoming talk.
- C. There five different subcategories of *Prana*, known as *Prana-vayus*, which perform the primary functions of the body:²⁰
1. *Prana*. *Prana* moves in the thoracic region and controls breathing.
 2. *Apana*. *Apana* moves in the lower abdomen and controls the elimination of urine, feces, and semen.
 3. *Udana*. *Udana* works through the throat and controls vocal chords and the intake of air and food.
 4. *Samana*. *Samana* fuels the gastric fires, aiding in digestion and maintaining the functioning of the abdominal organs.
 5. *Vyana*. *Vyana* moves throughout the entire body, distributing energy from food and breath through the arteries, veins, and nerves.
- D. Consider the following illustration of how *Prana* as breath works in the body: *Prana* operates “like the working of a machine” in that *Prana* as breath brings in fuel (air) to the body, *Samana* converts the fuel into energy, *Vyana* circulates that energy to the various “work sites” in the body, *Apana*, releases waste products, and *Udana* determines what positive value this process creates.²¹

¹⁸ Freeman, Richard (2010). *The Mirror of Yoga*. Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc., at 31.

¹⁹ See, generally; *Light on Pranayama*, at 8–9.

²⁰ *Light on Pranayama*, at 12–13. See also, *Splendor of Recognition*, at 153.

²¹ American Institute of Vedic Studies (2014). Blog: *Secrets of the Five Pranas*, located at www.vedanet.com/2012/06/secrets-of-the-five-pranas/; retrieved on January 25, 2014. The American Institute of Vedic Studies (www.vedanet.com) is a web-based educational center focusing on Ayurveda, Yoga-Vedanta, Vedic Astrology, and their interconnections. It was founded by Veacharya David Frawley (Santa Fe, New Mexico) to further his work on the Vedas.

E. There are five further subcategories or divisions of *Prana*, known as *Upapranas* or *Upavayus*:

1. *Naga* helps relieve pressure in the abdomen through belching.
2. *Kurma* controls movement of the eyelids to protect them from foreign objects. It also controls the iris to allow for adjustment to light.
3. *Krkara* prevents matter from coming up through the nose or down the throat by causing sneezing or coughing.
4. *Devadatta* causes yawning and induces sleep.
5. *Dhanarhjaya* produces phlegm and helps nourish the body.²²

III. *Prana-Sakti* and *Kundalini*.

Prana, as life force, is useful to us as more than the breath. It is the energy that can connect us to God, to each other, and to ourselves. It is the energy that creates the ultimate life of well-being.

In his book *The Splendor of Recognition*, Swami Shantananda of the Siddha Yoga tradition discusses the movement of *Prana* as *Prana-Sakti* (or *Shakti*), the name that collectively describes the five functions of *Prana* we just discussed: *Prana*, *Apana*, *Udana*, *Samana*, and *Vyana*.²³

He also discusses *Prana* as *Kundalini*. When Consciousness chooses to conceal its true nature through *Maya*, the energy that actually creates the material world is called *Prana-Shakti*.²⁴ This energy creates what is called our subtle body, including *Nadis*, which we will discuss in a few minutes. Having created us, this *Prana-Shakti* then resides in our lower region in a dormant state. It exists as the transformative power of Supreme Consciousness. This energy, depicted as a coiled serpent, is ready to be activated by our spiritual work.²⁵

Kundalini, when activated, is the power that fulfills our promise as human beings by removing the ignorance that prevents us from remembering our own Divine spirit; our true nature.²⁶

²² *Light on Pranayama*, at 13.

²³ *Splendor of Recognition*, at 153.

²⁴ *Splendor of Recognition*, at 309.

²⁵ See, generally, *Splendor of Recognition*, at 309–310.

²⁶ *Splendor of Recognition*, at 214–215.

The energy of *Kundalini* is also known as *Agni* (fire), representing a Divine power that purifies as it rises upward like a fire.²⁷ It has been referred to as the organizational intelligence of Supreme Consciousness in embodied form.²⁸

It isn't my purpose here to discuss *Kundalini* in any depth, only to introduce you to this energy. There are practices, including meditation and *Pranayama*, which can awaken *Kundalini*.

A. Swami Shantananda discusses *Kundalini* within the context of a study of Sutra 17 of the *Pratyabhijna-hridayam*, a sacred Kashmir Shaivite text written by Kshemaraja in the eleventh century. Kshemaraja was a disciple of Abhinavagupta, a great Indian philosopher and mystic. Sutra 17 reads: *Madhya-vikasac cidananda labhah* – The bliss of Consciousness is attained through expansion of the center.²⁹

1. The word “*Madhya*” means “center” and represents the ultimate spiritual center for all of us, the place where we connect with Supreme Consciousness.³⁰ In my book, *Finding the Midline*, the “Midline” is this very *Madhya*, or center, the place where “Spirit beckons us to cast aside the fears and insecurities holding us back in order to more fully engage in the gift of our life.”³¹
2. This sutra suggests how we can attain a life of well-being by expanding our awareness of the Divine in each moment.³² When we find the “center,” the Midlines of life, and engage them, we become awakened to the opportunities to experience more positive emotion, engaging activities, meaning, and nurturing relationships. This is how we maximize our spiritual and life potential, the ultimate result of a fully awakened *Kundalini*.³³

B. Swami Shantananda explains that *Kundalini* means “the coiled one,” and lays at the base of our spine, a serpent at rest.³⁴

²⁷ *Light on Pranayama*, at 36.

²⁸ *Tantra Illuminated*, at 315.

²⁹ *Splendor of Recognition*, at 307–308.

³⁰ *Splendor of Recognition*, at 308.

³¹ Dorigan, William (2013). *Finding the Midline*. Winter Park, CO: LuHen Publications, LLC., at 17.

³² *Splendor of Recognition*, at 308.

³³ Dyczkowski, Dr. Mark (1987). *The Doctrine of Vibration*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, at 9.

³⁴ *Splendor of Recognition*, at 310.

1. When *Kundalini* is awakened, it moves up through the body, removing blocks that prevent us from seeing our true essence, including the gifts of our particular strengths. It lifts the cloud that prevents us from seeing our connection to others and the potential of each moment, the Midline. It removes the ignorance or confusion that prevents our being able to see opportunities to serve something bigger than ourselves, for meaningful engagement in the world. It does this just as a light removes darkness.³⁵
2. This awakening begins at the bottom of our main energetic channel, the *Susumna Nadi*, and then expands throughout the body, including up through the center as it moves, if unimpeded, through energetic vortexes called *Chakras*. We discuss the *Chakras* in a later talk. *Kundalini*, as this energy of transformation, awakens us as it moves upward from the root *Chakra*, *Muladhara*, through the crown *Chakra*, *Sahasrara*.³⁶ Levels of awakening will occur at each *Chakra*, or energetic center, depending on the person.
3. This awakened, transformative energy expands out through the body from the center through conduits called *Nadis*, filling us as it expands with this life force.³⁷ We progressively become more awake, more connected to Consciousness by means of this process.
4. *Kundalini* transforms by burning away impurities such as the tendencies to make inappropriate choices based on desire, anger, greed, pride, and envy. Our intellect, our capacity to make choices that bring us into a life well lived, is enhanced.³⁸ If we think back to our discussions about building our emotional resilience and refining our emotions down to their essence, *Chakra* work is yet another great practice for accomplishing these objectives.
5. Sally Kempton describes the work of *Kundalini* in meditation as melting, sweeping, dusting, chiseling, and scrubbing away the old memories (*Samskaras*) that play a role in our stress. She says that *Kundalini* will root out all these thoughts and remove them from our system.³⁹ By doing this work we free ourselves to recognize and enjoy positive emotions, recognize opportunities for meaningful accomplishments, and refining our ability to partner in nurturing relationships.

IV. *Nadis – Susumna, Ida, and Pingala.*

³⁵ *Splendor of Recognition*, at 311.

³⁶ *Splendor of Recognition*, at 314–315.

³⁷ *Splendor of Recognition*, at 310–313.

³⁸ See, generally, *Light on Pranayama*, at 36–37.

³⁹ *Meditation for the Love of It*, at 216–217.

Let's talk a bit more about the *Nadis*, the conduits for *Prana* within us. *Nadis* are tubes or channels that carry, in addition to *Prana*, air, water, blood, nutrients, and other substances throughout the body. Our arteries, veins, capillaries, and other vessels are *Nadis*. We also have *Nadis* in our subtle body, which carry the energy of Consciousness flowing through us.⁴⁰

- A. *Nadis* have different names based on their particular function. They originate either from what is called the *Kandasthana*, located slightly below the navel, or from the heart. There may be as many as 350,000 *Nadis*.⁴¹
- B. The three most significant are *Susumna*, *Ida*, and *Pingala*.
 1. *Susumna* runs through the center of the spine and terminates at the crown of the head at *Sahasrara Chakra*. It is the pathway for illuminative transformation. It is called the *Nadi* of fire, with fire providing the light for creation and change, the illumination for attaining *Sattva Guna*.⁴²
 2. *Ida Nadi* runs to the left of the *Susumna*, from the left nostril to the crown of the head, then back down the base of the spine. It carries cooling or *Tamasic Guna* energy. It is the energy of the moon and is also called *Chandra Nadi*.⁴³
 3. *Pingala Nadi* runs to the right of the *Susumna*, from the right nostril to the crown of the head, then back down the base of the spine. It carries heating or *Rajasic Guna* energy. It is the energy of the sun and so is also called *Surya Nadi*.⁴⁴
 4. *Ida* and *Pingala* are shown to wrap around the *Susumna* at each *Chakra*, connecting at the Sixth *Chakra*, *Ajna*, our command center, located in the forehead, our "third eye."⁴⁵
- C. Citing Carl Jung's work with symbolism, author Anodea Judith discusses how *Chakra* work correlates with these *Nadis*. She charts the course of our spiritual shift from the veil of duality to the vision of unity and connection. Thus, at the seventh

⁴⁰ *Light on Pranayama*, at 32.

⁴¹ *Light on Pranayama*, at 32.

⁴² *Light on Pranayama*, at 33-34; for a discussion of the *Gunas*, please refer to posted outline in this course: "Tattvas in the Material Word." Dorigan, William (2016). www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

⁴³ *Light on Pranayama*, at 33, 270.

⁴⁴ *Light on Pranayama*, at 33, 277.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Judith, Anodea (2004 ed.). *Eastern Body Western Mind*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, at 338; 359.

Chakra, Sahasrara, we have developed awareness of a larger picture, something bigger than us. Our worldview becomes transcendent.

Dr. Judith discusses how *Yantra* meditation, focusing on symbols, helps us to learn how to shift our perspective from that of contradictions and “either-or” choices to a larger vision of connection.⁴⁶

V. Conclusion.

We’ve discussed some key tools for practice, specifically the *Tattvas* and the *Rasas*. Both help us sharpen our discriminatory skills so we are better able to respond to life’s opportunities unhampered by self-defeating patterns of thought and behavior.

We now have an overview of how these patterns of thought (and, ultimately, behavior driven by thought) arise in the brain and how it is possible to reprogram those patterns. We’ve seen how patterns of thought and behavior operate in our interactions with each other. With our discussion of *Prana*, we have begun to look more deeply at our spiritual structure, that part of the cybernetic network of circuitry existing within us.

We now move more deeply into our internal structure, our network, to a discussion of the layers of the subtle body and their role in our patterns of thought and behavior.

⁴⁶ *Eastern Body Western Mind*, at 358–360.