

PRANA: Introduction

The aim of all yogic and other spiritual practices is to release the great cosmic power or kundalini Shakti which lies coiled three and a half times in mooladhara chakra. The process of awakening this force, or prana, is described in the scriptures as, “The flight of a bird rising from earth to heaven, tied to a golden thread”. The earth is mooladhara chakra, heaven is ajna chakra, the bird is mahaprana and the golden thread is Sushumna nadi which runs through the centre of the spinal column. By manipulating, storing and expanding the prana within the body it is possible to awaken the sleeping prana Shakti. This is the fundamental purpose of the yogic sciences of pranayama (expanding the dimensions of prana) and prana vidya (knowledge of prana).

Kundalini Shakti (Macro-Cosmic energy)

Prana is both macrocosmic and microcosmic and is the substratum of all life. Mahaprana (the great prana) is the cosmic, universal, all-encompassing energy out of which we draw substance through the breathing process. According to the Paramahansa Satyananda, “You cannot conceive macrocosmic prana; I cannot speak about it, and you would not be able to understand even if I could.” The various pranas in the body are at once a part of this mahaprana and also separate from it.

The cosmic manifestation of prana or mahaprana in the individual body is represented by kundalini. The entire cosmic experience from creation to dissolution is embedded within the folds of kundalini, hence it is known as atma Shakti or universal energy. In all living beings the divine consciousness is first converted into prana or energy and, as kundalini is the reservoir for this magnificent amount of prana, it is also known as prana shakti.

The word *kundalini* is derived from the term *kunda* which means a ‘pit’ or ‘cavity’. Kundalini is the energy inherent within the matter of mooladhara chakra, the dormant centre lying in the perineum in males and in the cervix in females. When the full potential of this energy is released it travels up through the central nervous system, in the physical body, or sushumna nadi, in the pranic body.

Generally, however, prana Shakti is only partially released from mooladhara chakra through the connecting channels of ida and pingala nadis. Ida and pingala are only capable of conducting a low voltage of energy; they vitalize the mind and body but not to its full potential. Only the full force of kundalini Shakti (prana shakti) can awaken all the conscious and vital functions.

Prana Shakti (Micro-Cosmic energy)

Prana Shakti also manifests as six main centres of chakras (storehouses of prana) which are located along the spinal column or sushumna. The lowest chakra in the energy circuit is mooladhara. The next chakra, swadhisthana, is two fingers width above mooladhara and corresponds to the sacral plexus. Above this is Manipura, behind the navel, which corresponds to the solar plexus. In the spinal column, in the region of the heart, lies Anahata chakra which is connected to the cardiac plexus. In the middle of the neck is Vishuddhi chakra which corresponds to the cervical plexus. At the top of the spinal cord, at the medulla oblongata, is ajna chakra which is connected to the pineal gland in the physical body.

In order to control the functions of the body, prana Shakti also manifests in the major prana vayus: prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana. In the Upanishads prana vayu is also called the 'in breath'. *Vyana* is the 'all-pervasive breath'. *Prana* is inhalation; *apana* exhalation; *samana*, the time between the two; and *udana*, the extension of samana. Each vayu is interdependent and interconnected.

Necessity of prana

Of the five vayus the two most influential are prana and apana. Prana is the inward moving force which is said to create a field moving upwards from the navel to the throat. Apana is the outward moving force which is said to create a field moving downwards from the navel to anus. Both prana and apana move spontaneously in the body but can be controlled through tantric and yogic practices. The Upanishads say a method has to be employed to reverse the direction of the opposite moving forces of prana and apana so that they unite with samana in the navel centre. The result of these forces coming together is the awakening of kundalini.

Multi-dimensional energy

Prana, or the tangible manifestation of the higher self, flows through various energy pathways or matrices within the pranic body. The three most important paths of pranic energy are known as *ida nadi*, *pingala nadi* and *sushumna nadi*. They are located along the length of the spinal cord. Ida and pingala nadis coil around sushumna in three dimensions like a spiral staircase. A complete knowledge of these nadis helps in understanding the inherent multi-dimensional energy of us that is prana.

Ida and pingala are flows of charged ions capable of exerting an influence upon the flow of prana. Ida nadi is a negatively charged flow of prana and pingala is a positively charged flow of prana. Consequently, discharges occurring between them are likely to influence all the dimensions of our consciousness of one who meditates upon them. In fact, it is believed by some scientists that the psychic centres, or chakras, in the pranic body are nothing more than areas of immense radiation caused by localized accumulations of pranic energy emitting various sub-atomic or 'elementary' particles. Prana has been described as a type of complex multi-dimensional energy consisting of a combination of electrical, magnetic, electromagnetic, photonic, ocular, thermal and mental energies. The five principle sub-divisions of prana, which exist in the different parts of the body, have varying densities of ionic fields. They may be visualized as swirling clouds of differing colours and hues. The pranic clouds are free to expand or contract with or without the influence of any external factors. The different colours of the pranic or bioplasmic clouds are due to the emission of photons when electrons change their energy levels from higher to lower frequencies.

QUALITY	IDA	PINGALA
○ Breath	left nostril	rights nostril
○ Temperature	cold	hot
○ Sex	female	male
○ Activity	mental	physical
○ Energy	negative	positive
○ Planet	moon	sun
○ Tao	yin	yang