

Asanas Mudras and Bandhas

**Awakening
Ecstatic Kundalini**

Yogani

From The AYP Enlightenment Series

Asanas
Mudras and Bandhas
—
Awakening Ecstatic Kundalini

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“You surely know that your body is a temple
where the Holy Spirit lives. The Spirit is in you
and is a gift from God.”

Corinthians 6:19

Introduction

Like much we may encounter as we travel along our chosen spiritual path, this small volume on *Asanas, Mudras and Bandhas* presents a paradox.

In contrast to the huge, nearly exclusive emphasis on yoga asanas (postures) seen around the world today, we intentionally go lightly on them here, instead presenting a compact and efficient asana routine as preparation for sitting practices, including spinal breathing pranayama and deep meditation.

Once a balanced relationship between asanas and sitting practices is established, we move into instructions for advanced mudras and bandhas (inner physical maneuvers), which are woven into the tapestry of our daily practice routine like golden threads.

Then we cover the awakening and management of our inner ecstatic energy – *Kundalini* – and its ultimate consequences. Ecstatic awakening and its steady expansion outward through our nervous system to full divine expression is, after all, what asanas, mudras and bandhas are for.

In short, this book puts a wide range of yoga practices into perspective, moving decidedly away from the *magic bullet* single solution syndrome, and offering a clear, balanced road map for those who seek to achieve the ultimate aims of yoga. In this, asanas, mudras and bandhas have an important role to play.

The Advanced Yoga Practices Enlightenment Series is an endeavor to present the most effective methods of spiritual practice in a series of easy-to-read books that anyone can use to gain practical results immediately and over the long term. For

centuries, many of these powerful practices have been shrouded in secrecy, mainly in an effort to preserve them. Now we find ourselves in the *information age*, and able to preserve knowledge for present and future generations like never before. The question remains: “How far can we go in effectively transmitting spiritual methods in writing?”

Since its beginnings in 2003, the writings of *Advanced Yoga Practices* have been an experiment to see just how much can be conveyed, with much more detail included on practices than in the spiritual writings of the past. Can books provide us the specific means necessary to tread the path to enlightenment, or do we have to surrender at the feet of a *guru* to find our salvation? Well, clearly we must surrender to something, even if it is to our own innate potential to live a freer and happier life. If we are able to do that, and maintain regular practice, then books like this one can come alive and instruct us in the ways of human spiritual transformation. If the reader is ready and the book is worthy, amazing things can happen.

While one person’s name is given as the author of this book, it is actually a distillation of the efforts of thousands of practitioners over thousands of years. This is one person’s attempt to simplify and make practical the spiritual methods that many have demonstrated throughout history. All who have gone before have my deepest gratitude, as do the many I am privileged to be in touch with in the present who continue to practice with dedication and good results.

I hope you will find this book to be a useful resource as you travel along your chosen path.

Practice wisely, and enjoy!

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Chapter 1 – The Body - Door to the Infinite

From childhood most of us are taught that we need an intermediary to find a connection to that magical *something more* in life that, down through the ages, has been referred to as *God* or *Truth*. Our priests, ministers, mullahs, gurus and rabbis promise that if we behave rightly, we will receive the everlasting rewards that have been promised. And that is *It*, the thing we vaguely conceive of as our salvation. Whatever *It* is, we often feel we are leagues away as we trip our way through the ups and downs of everyday life.

But then, once in a while, quite miraculously, we might take a long slow stretch, relax our mind, or be resting in complete stillness, and, suddenly, something vast opens up inside us – a continuum of inner peace and happiness that is as endless as it is timeless. And then, just as suddenly, we are back in the fray of life again. Where did it go, that unfathomable happiness that came from within us and then disappeared again? How can we get it back, and make it a full time experience?

When we have had such an experience (and nearly everyone has), we have been shown *the door*, so to speak. And the door is none other than us. More specifically, the door is found in the inner workings of the human nervous system. That is this nervous system, the very one we are sitting in right now. So, no matter what intermediary we have been using for guidance, in the end, it is the inner functioning of our own body that will lead us home to the *promised land*. Our body is the door to the infinite.

There is nothing new in the idea that the *kingdom of heaven* is within us. It has been around for

thousands of years. But there has been so much confusion about it, you know. Throughout history, whole civilizations have risen, and fallen again, surrounded by this confusion about the true nature of humanity, first on the way up, and then on the way back down again. Will the confusion ever end?

In the meantime, over the centuries, small groups of people have been carefully collecting knowledge about the human machine – tinkering, experimenting and learning through trial and error, finding out ways to open the inner door, finding out how to open it permanently. Mostly, these people, who we tend to call saints and sages (they don't care what we call them), have labored in secret, hiding out in remote places doing their work. Once in a while a few step forward into the public eye. When the confusion gets thick enough, they do. They share their knowledge, and are often treated badly for it. It has been a repeating cycle over the centuries. But change is in the air...

With the rise of information storage systems over hundreds of years, knowledge of all kinds has become much more accessible to millions of people around the world, including spiritual knowledge. What used to be transmitted orally from generation to generation became available in writings on stone and parchment. Then printed in books, which gave rise to an explosion of knowledge during the last millennium, and especially over the last few centuries. And now information is stored electronically on computers and beamed around the world instantly via the internet. The staying power of knowledge has greatly increased, and this is leading steadily to better application of all kinds of knowledge, including knowledge about how to

maximize the inner capabilities of the human nervous system – opening our door to the infinite.

Yoga – Ancient and Ever-New

One of the oldest systems of knowledge designed for unfolding human spiritual potential is called *Yoga*, which means, “union” or “to join.” That is union of the inner and outer qualities of life – opening the door of the human body and its inner circuitry, the nervous system, to its full latent potential. Yoga is not a religious system, though it can be and sometimes is combined with religion, mainly because people need a framework of belief to wrap around human spiritual experiences. The spiritual experiences cultivated by yoga practices are self-evident, with or without an attending belief system, in the same way spontaneous experiences of inner expansion are self-evident. The difference between spontaneous experiences and those cultivated by yoga is that the latter are systematic and lasting. This is what we would like, yes?

Everywhere around the world, yoga is thought to be primarily a system of physical postures and exercises for improving our health and well-being. That it is. Yet, yoga is much more than that. In fact, in the overall scheme of yoga, as described in the ancient *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, physical postures represent one of the eight limbs of yoga. Only one of eight. The other limbs are concerned with conduct, breathing practices, introversion of sensory perception, and powerful mental techniques that bring our divine inner qualities out into everyday living.

In this book we are covering the physical side of yoga in a way that can be linked up and integrated

with the full capabilities of a broad-based system of yoga practices.

No one aspect of yoga stands alone, though there is a great temptation to believe that this is so. If we look around the world today, there are millions who are practicing yoga postures with great dedication. Likewise, there are those who are practicing breathing techniques with fervor, and others who are doing the same with meditation. In all cases, people are finding positive results that bring some peace and happiness into daily living. That is why people do the practices, sometimes going to great lengths to get the most out of a single aspect of practice.

But, in approaching it through a single class of practices, we are not likely to find the full unfoldment that yoga promises to deliver. That is because yoga is not a single-pronged strategy for opening the door of the human nervous system to the great potential we all have for peace, energy, creativity and divine unfoldment from within. Yoga is a multi-pronged system. For full success, all the aspects of yoga must be applied in a logical sequence, gradually built up and integrated over time.

Where does yoga come from in the first place? It comes from within us – from the underlying principles of spiritual transformation that are contained in each of us. So, yoga is not a system coming from outside us that we are reliant upon to open us to our greater possibilities. Yoga is a system that reflects our own inner capabilities – it is a mirror of who we are inside and how we naturally evolve to higher stages of functioning. This is the great difference between yoga and intermediary approaches to spiritual development. Yoga is a path that involves cultivating self-sufficiency on our spiritual path from

the beginning, no matter which practices we happen to start with. Of course, there is a system of structured knowledge and logical orders of implementation according to particular teachings. Education is available to aid the journey. In that spirit, we will offer many suggestions here while delving into the physical practices of yoga.

Yoga is as relevant and new today as it was 5,000 years ago. Why? Because the human nervous system has not changed, and higher experience is as accessible now as it was then. Perhaps more so now, because knowledge of the methods for accelerating the process of human spiritual transformation has evolved steadily over the centuries, and in modern times has achieved a level of integration and efficiency that has not been seen before. What was complicated and difficult in the past has become straight forward and relatively easy. All it takes is a desire, consistent practice of tried and true methods, and the results will be readily apparent.

Asanas, Mudras & Bandhas to Join Body & Spirit

There are layers that constitute our physical and non-physical existence, and the methods of yoga are geared toward activating the principles of evolution operating at each layer – on each level of functioning within us. On the physical level, there is much we can do.

As implied by the title of this book, there is a logical division between physical practices:

Asanas – Postures, positions and seats we gently cultivate to improve the overall spiritual conductivity of our nervous system, especially the central spinal nerve.

Mudras – Physical, sometimes dynamic, positions focused on particular areas of the body that *seal* or channel the flow of neurobiological energies within us.

Bandhas – Physical, usually static, positions focused on particular areas of the body that *block* the flow of neurobiological energies within us, resulting in increased energy flow in the opposite direction.

Of these three, asanas are the best known by far. In fact, yoga postures have become an important part of the vast worldwide physical fitness industry. Yoga classes are available everywhere, and people are joining them in droves for the well-recognized relaxation and health benefits. The word “yoga” has become synonymous with physical postures in modern society, which is a narrow view, of course. Nevertheless, the popularity of yoga postures is a good thing. Once practitioners get a taste of the benefits that come from yoga postures, it is natural to look to the broader scope of yoga methods that are available, ultimately leading many to deep meditation, pranayama (breathing techniques), mudras, bandhas, and other practices comprising the multi-limbed tree of yoga. Ultimately, asanas are found to be an excellent limbering up that aids other yoga practices in taking the practitioner deep into the subtle strata of the nervous system, through the door to the infinite realm of pure bliss consciousness – our own eternal inner silence. This journey, taken each day, can produce profound effects in our daily living.

Mudras and bandhas, while classified as separate practices, have much similarity and overlap. These are physical maneuvers we can undertake, in

conjunction with breathing practices and other methods, which influence the inner functioning of our nervous system. Mudras and bandhas are more inward in both performance and appearance, and tend to disappear entirely as visible practices in later stages of yoga where the natural manipulations of ecstatic energy in the nervous system become very subtle and automatic. In other words, mudras and bandhas are a gentle training of natural physical processes *within* the human body. Once these processes take over, the mudras and bandhas, while still performed in gross physical form in the practice routine, will also arise within the body with the advent of what we call *ecstatic conductivity*, or the awakening of *Kundalini*. In Christian terms it is the arrival of the *Holy Spirit*. However we may name the rise of spiritual ecstasy in the human body, and the vast creative power that comes with it, we will find the mudras and bandhas to be in the midst of it. Indeed, they are the natural outcome of an evolving nervous system, as are all the practices of yoga. We are only helping the process of evolution along by learning to encourage these inherent capabilities within us.

Just as there are overlaps between mudras and bandhas in both name and function, there are also overlaps between asanas, mudras and bandhas. This will become clear in the following chapters, where some of the overlaps will be pointed out. It is all one process of human spiritual transformation. The only reason it is divided up into categories of practice is so we can get our arms around it and engage in the practical application of effective techniques that will hasten our evolution. This is the genius of yoga.

Asanas, mudras and bandhas are primary means by which body and spirit are joined.

Going Beyond Relaxation

While most of us can use some relief from the stresses and strains of daily life, there is so much more we are capable of experiencing, if we choose to. The methods of yoga can bring some immediate relief for sure. It is one of the practical benefits of doing yoga practices. This sort of practicality can be taken much further. If we decide to travel the path of a broader application of practices, yoga can aid us in reaching far beyond what we might have imagined the quality of our life could be.

There is so much talk about *enlightenment* these days. Everyone wants to be enlightened. What on earth is it? There are so many definitions, both philosophical and experiential. We prefer the experiential. Why sit around talking about enlightenment when we can actually do something that will give an experience of it? And what is that?

To be happy. Not just happy for the moment, or for a while, but for all time – in sickness and in health until death do us part, as they say.

What do we mean by *happy*? Well, for starters, to be at peace with things as they are, no matter how they are. This does not mean passive or indifferent, like not sweeping the dirty sidewalk because we are happy with it just the way it is. We can be happy with the dirty sidewalk, we can be happy sweeping it, we can be happy with it when it is clean, and we can be happy with it when it is dirty again, and so on.

We can be active in the world, no longer traveling the cycle from misery to happiness and back to misery again, which has been the common experience

of people for so many centuries. For certain, the ups and downs of life will always be there, but we will suffer much less as our inner functioning and perception evolve toward a more enlightened view.

We can be happy and act for the sake of acting, because the acting itself becomes a joy. But before we can do this, we must establish the connection with our inner nature, which is stillness and stirring ecstasy. It requires the application of a range of yoga techniques, some covered in this book, and others elsewhere in the AYP family of books. In pursuing the path of yoga, we will begin to witness the world like a movie, as separate from our sense of self. In that condition of *silent witness*, our awareness and desires will begin to inhabit the movie of the world in an increasing flow of love coming from inside, and in a flow of intentions and actions born from that divine quality being unleashed within us.

Yoga practices are for cultivating this condition in us – to open our inner door to the infinite that resides within. As the door is opened over time, we become imbued with unshakable inner silence, ecstatic bliss, and outpouring divine love. It is unending happiness, creativity, strength, and the ability to act harmoniously in every situation. This is not a guarantee of ultimate perfection, only a direction we can take that leads us toward more happiness in our daily living. If there is such a thing as enlightenment, then this is *It*.

Now let's take a look at the practical methods of asanas, mudras and bandhas in relation to an overall routine of yoga practices, and see how these can help us move along our path toward more happiness in daily living.

Chapter 2 – Asanas

There is something of a paradox here. The teaching and practice of asanas (yoga postures) is a huge worldwide phenomenon. It has moved over into the mainstream of the physical fitness industry, with numerous kinds of aerobic and extreme yoga regimens now available. This is big business!

Yet, in the overall scheme of traditional yoga, asanas are only one limb out of eight, with meditation, pranayama and the other limbs having equal or greater weight. Not to mention the important tri-limbed practice of samyama, which expands the influence of inner silence in all aspects of life.

Why the difference between the basic truths of full scope yoga practice and what we see going on in the world? Some say it is "market driven." We are a culture that craves physical health above all things. It is understandable. We all want our health and well-being, the more the better.

But learning to systematically do less can be much more, you know. That is the secret of yoga. In the AYP approach to yoga practices we use asanas primarily as a limbering, a stretching of the nervous system to warm up for spinal breathing pranayama, deep meditation and other *sitting practices*.

Postures - An Important Limb of Yoga

Asanas, or physical postures, are important in any approach to yoga, no matter where we have started – with pranayama, with meditation, with devotional activity, or even with studies of the philosophical side of yoga. Of course, these days, many people start with asanas, so it is very often not a case of adding asana practice, but adding the rest of yoga! Either

way, we will be wise to consider the full range of practices available from the ancient wisdom of yoga in order to achieve the best results. This does not mean adding more and more yoga postures and time duration until the time we are doing postures each day runs into hours, squeezing everything else out. It is a much more refined, balanced and efficient process of yoga we are seeking.

What we will find is that if we develop a range of both postures and sitting practices step-by-step in a well-integrated way, then each part can be kept to a reasonable time with *increased effectiveness* of the overall routine. With that, we can accomplish more with less, and still have plenty of time to go out into our daily activities and enjoy the benefits. That is the payoff for any kind of yoga practice, yes? Enhancement in the quality of our life, as we choose to live it.

The approach suggested in this book is two short sets of asanas each day, morning and evening, followed by our sitting practices, which include spinal breathing pranayama, deep meditation, samyama, mudras and bandhas (covered in the next chapter), and other techniques.

The fact that yoga postures have caught on with the public cannot be denied. Much good comes from it. It doesn't matter which limb of yoga caught on first. All the limbs of yoga are connected. If we do asanas, we will be drawn to pranayama and meditation eventually. If we do meditation, we will be drawn to asanas eventually. That is how it goes. Our nervous system knows a good thing when it sees it. Wake up the nervous system a little and it wants more. All of the limbs of yoga are expressions of the

natural ways that our nervous system opens to divine experience.

Our nervous system determines the practices, not the other way around. Practices come to us when we need them. It is amazing how this happens. It is the power of our desire for evolution that brings knowledge to us. When this desire is sustained, it is called *bhakti*. In time, all of the practices come together automatically. We just have to give a nudge here and there. That is the power of *bhakti*.

We live in a world where human experience is based mainly on physicality. Our senses are yet to be drawn inward to the point where inner experiences will become as real (or more real) than experiences in the external world. So we are always looking for a physical solution. Yoga asanas begin to take us from physicality to more subtle experiences of divine energy in the nervous system. This is why asanas are so relaxing. It is their main draw. People do asanas for relaxation, for some inner peace. Yoga asanas are very good for that. They are also very good for preparing the body and mind for pranayama and meditation. This is the way we will look at asanas here – as a preparation in our daily routine for pranayama and meditation.

There are exceptions to the “relaxing” mode of asanas. Nowadays, you can go take a class in power yoga, aerobic yoga, and get a good workout. That is okay. It is not suggested for right before pranayama and meditation though. We are going the other way when we go into sitting practices, to less activity in the nervous system, not more. So we do our aerobic activities after our yoga routine, not right before it.

The physical conditioning aspect of life is not ignored here – it is very important, especially for

those whose ecstatic energies have been awakened. For a yoga-friendly routine of muscle toning calisthenics and aerobic (cardiovascular) development, see the appendix at the end of the book.

Asanas in the traditional sense are for quieting the nervous system. But more than that. They are designed to facilitate the flow of *prana* (life force) in the body, particularly in the *sushumna*, which is the central spinal nerve. So you can see that asanas are a natural preparation for pranayama, particularly spinal breathing pranayama.

Asanas are part of a broader system of primarily physical yoga called *hatha yoga*. In hatha yoga, there are also the mudras and bandhas, which are targeted approaches to moving prana in the body. There is an Indian scripture called the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* that covers both asanas and mudras and bandhas. Many of the physical yoga practices in use today can be found in this ancient book. The practices can be found in other systems as well, such as in *kundalini yoga* and in *tantra yoga*. Many systems of yoga utilize asanas, mudras and bandhas. There is a lot of overlap. Everyone wants to lay claim to a good thing.

It all comes down to what works, and each system of yoga is seeking to achieve best results in its own way. That is the mission of AYP also, except it is open to the general public, rather than reserved for a few selected practitioners.

Hatha yoga means “joining of the sun and the moon” – joining the masculine and feminine energies within us. We run into this theme in every tradition, because it is an essential characteristic of an evolving human nervous system. In India it is also known as the joining of the metaphorical Kundalini-Shakti and Shiva within us. Kundalini-Shakti is the ecstatic

aspect of our inner functioning, awakened by asanas, mudras, bandhas and pranayama, while Shiva represents the emergence of blissful inner silence within us, awakened in deep meditation and samyama. The Taoists represent this duality with Yin and Yang. The Christians call them the Holy Spirit and God the Father. And so on...

No matter what tradition we find ourselves in, the operation of the nervous system will be the same as it evolves to higher stages of functioning. Only the names may be different.

As they say, "A rose is still a rose by any other name."

There is some overlap between asanas and the mudras and bandhas. Some yoga practices keep the name *asana*; others might carry the name *mudra* or *bandha*. Whatever we call them, they are physical practices facilitating the movement of prana and blissful inner silence within us. So, when you see *yoga mudra* and *maha mudra* in the asana list, and *siddhasana* in the mudra and bandha list, do not be surprised. Such overlaps are not uncommon. The most important thing is that we are applying these methods in the most effective manner in relation to the sequence and duration of our practices.

Asana Starter Kit

There are many ways to learn how to do asanas (classes, videos, books), and many styles out there to choose from. Here in this book, we will make it very easy. We are going to introduce fourteen simple postures to do before our sitting practices. *Simple* is a good place to start, yes? We will call it our *Asana Starter Kit*.

No doubt there will be some who want more.

Further Reading and Support

Yogani is an American spiritual scientist who, for forty years, has been integrating ancient techniques from around the world which cultivate human spiritual transformation. The approach is non-sectarian, and open to all. His books include:

Advanced Yoga Practices – Easy Lessons for Ecstatic Living (Two Volumes)

Two large user-friendly textbooks providing over 400 detailed lessons on the AYP integrated system of practices.

The Secrets of Wilder – A Novel

The story of young Americans discovering and utilizing actual secret practices leading to human spiritual transformation.

The AYP Enlightenment Series

Easy-to-read instruction books on yoga practices, including:

- *Deep Meditation – Pathway to Personal Freedom*
- *Spinal Breathing Pranayama – Journey to Inner Space*
- *Tantra – Discovering the Power of Pre-Orgasmic Sex*
- *Asanas, Mudras and Bandhas – Awakening Ecstatic Kundalini*
- *Samyama – Cultivating Stillness in Action, Siddhis and Miracles*
- *Diet, Shatkarmas and Amaroli – Yogic Nutrition and Cleansing for Health and Spirit*
- *Self-Inquiry – Dawn of the Witness and the End of Suffering*
- *Bhakti and Karma Yoga – The Science of Devotion and Liberation Through Action*
- *Eight Limbs of Yoga – The Structure and Pacing of Self-Directed Spiritual Practice*
- *Retreats – Fast Track to Freedom – A Guide for Leaders and Practitioners*
- *Liberation – The Fruition of Yoga*

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