# MODULE 6: ENERGY ANATOMY

**LESSON 4: IDA PINGALA AND PRACTICE OF SHIVAGAMA**

In Module 6 we explore a way to describe and frame the nature of "the life force" that moves within us from the inside out, the currents through which it moves through our bodies and how to access this "life force" with the breath.

In Lesson One, we explored this concept of prana in depth and the primary current of Kundalini energy or primal life force that moves through the spine. Now we extend our understanding as we look further to the two additional currents of energy that also originate at the base of the spine. These two currents move up to the brain, balancing the left and right sides of the brain and thus the feminine and masculine aspects of self.

The right channel is called Pingala. It originates from the base of the spine and moves up to the right nostril. Pingala is connected to the sun and masculine energy and activates the left side of the brain which is the more logical side. Thus, when there is more flow of energy through this channel, we feel more energized, active, and warm; and would be more prone to anger outbursts.

The left channel known as Ida - and is connected to lunar energy. It has the same origin as Pingala at the base of the spine and moves up through the body to meet the left nostril, activating the right brain and the feminine, creative, reflective and cooling aspects of our nature.

Nature has its own flowing rhythms and cycles, day and night, the lunar cycle and the seasonal cycles. As natural beings our physiological processes are also ruled by many rhythms and cycles. Think of all the rhythms that make up our physiology - our heartbeat for one is driven by our autonomic nervous system. It quickens in times of excitement, stress and activity. It naturally slows down when we’re relaxed and at ease. The natural rhythm of the breath also flows with the inhalation and exhalation.

The flow of cerebrospinal fluid through the spine is also connected to the flow of the breath. Think of the sleep wake cycle or the circadian rhythm tied in to the rising and setting of the sun and the menstrual cycle which is connected to the 28-day lunar cycle. Our physiology also adapts with the changing of the seasons.

What is even more fascinating is the shorter 2-hour biorhythm which creates a shift between the left and right hemispheres of the brain, so we are constantly moving between being more creative and more linear every two hours!

Like the breath, this 2-hour shifting bio rhythm is both automatic and conscious. It seems that this automatic shifting is triggered by the change in nostril dominance. A dominance that can be affected by bringing conscious awareness and focus to this pattern. You will notice that at any given time, one nostril will feel more open than the other, which means that one side the brain is more dominant.

In general, when the left nostril is more open, the right brain would probably be more active, and you may be more open to creative ideas and feel more emotionally vulnerable. The whole system seems cooler and quieter.

When the right nostril is more open, the left hemisphere is dominant – which means thinking is more logical and strategic and the metabolic rate is higher. There is predominance of fire or solar energy in the body. It would be a good time for strenuous work, writing, debating etc.

At certain times the breath flows through both nostrils equally. This is when the pendulum is in the middle and your consciousness is most integrated. It’s when we tend to retreat deep within even if it’s for a few seconds. It would be a good time to check in on your inner state, to take a few long conscious breaths or to practice breath suspension. Many people unconsciously reach for a cigarette, coffee, sweet or other stimulant drug at this time. There are hypnotists who have been known to step in and choose this moment to induce a trance.

The practice of Swara yoga or Shivagama explores the nasal breath pattern in amazing depth and detail and gives very explicit information on how the flow of the breath reconfigures energy patterns within it so that certain activities can be coordinated with it and vice versa, they activate left and right nostril breathing to match and support certain activities. They advise us to change our nostril dominance at the first sign of physical, emotional, or psychological imbalance.

For example, to fight a fever, they would block the dominant nostril with a cotton ball until the body temperature returns to normal. To recover from hard work, they would advise lying on your right side and breathing through your left nostril. To clear an uncomfortable emotional state, they would suggest blocking the dominant nostril and breathing through the congested nostril for 10-15 minutes. If you are a feeling hungry, check which nostril feels closed. If the right nostril is closed, you are probably not hungry and in fact, you are probably thirsty! When you are truly hungry, the right nostril should be fully open, the digestive fire should be strong, and you are able to digest your meal far better.

# Techniques

These are various techniques that can be used to open up the opposite nostril:

* Lie on your side with the closed nostril up: after some time, it should open.
* Sit with the arm of the open side over the back of a chair, or with the arm and chest pressed against it. The pressure in the area of the armpit of the open side will tend to open the opposite nostril.
* Stimulate the inside of the closed nostril with a tissue or neti pot.
* Concentrate on the sensation of air against the inside of the closed nostril. Accentuating awareness will bring that side more into play.
* Create thought characteristics of the opposite side. Eg think of the hot sun, and masculine energy to bring the right breath into dominance and cool water and the moon for the left.

# Practical applications:

These are Kriya Yoga techniques taught by Yogi Bhajan

* When you feel tired, sit up with a straight spine, and block your left nostril with the thumb of your left hand, keeping your other fingers pointing straight up like antennae. Take 26 long deep and complete breaths through the right nostril. Then inhale and relax.
* When you are feeling anxious or nervous, sit with a straight spine and block the right nostril with the thumb of the right hand. Take 26 long deep and complete breaths through the left nostril. Then inhale and relax.
* To deal with an “out of control “mind or runaway thinking, sit straight, close off your right nostril with your right thumb and inhale deeply through your left nostril. Exhale completely through your mouth. Do this for 6 minutes to quiet your mind.
* To overcome compulsive eating or for assistance during fasting, sit with spine straight, block the right nostril with the right thumb. Breathe in a long deep slow inhale through the left nostril. Hold the breath for as long as feels comfortable. Then exhale through the left nostril and hold the breath out for as long as you held it in. Do this for 31 minutes.

# EXERCISE

Alternate Nostril Breathing:

This basic Pranayama exercise involves using the thumb and ring finger of your right hand to alternatively block your right and left nostril. Most people like to rest their index finger and middle finger in forehead between the eyebrows. (Over the ‘third eye’)

Notice that you put the exhale first, which means you first empty your lungs and all the channels before drawing in a new breath.

Block your right nostril with your right thumb finger, then exhale and inhale one breath

through the left nostril.

Switch

Block the left nostril with your right ring finger, exhale and inhale through your right nostril. Switch

Block the right nostril with the thumb, exhale and inhale through the left nostril.

Switch

Practice alternate nostril breathing in this way for 10 minutes.

You can breathe according to any regular rhythm or pace that you find comfortable. Make your exhales and inhales as long or short, or as fast or slow as you like.

Two traditional pranayama rhythms or counts are:

Exhale 4, hold 2, inhale 4, hold 2, exhale 4, hold 2, inhale 4, hold 2 etc.

Exhale 4, hold 4, inhale 4, hold 4, exhale 4, hold 4, inhale 4, hold 4, etc.