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**Winter Awakening  
Companion Booklet**

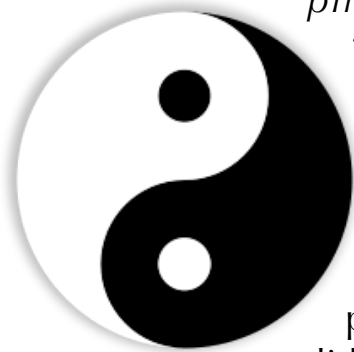
# Winter:

## A *Yin* Awakening

Aligning your body with the natural cycles of the environment in order to give ourselves the best chance of maintaining good health is to me just common sense, with specific processes / systems in the body relating more closely to the same processes of the environmental's seasons. One's life cycle (birth, childhood, teenage, adulthood, middle age, retired, elderly & death) and even one 24 hour day follows this same natural seasonal cycle. Winter, for example, reflects environmental 'death' and the darkest hours of the night just before dawn, a time that paves the way for change and new beginnings - every day as the sun rises or every year at the beginning of Spring. Aligning the body with the environment will therefore naturally promote an overall sense of wellbeing, feeling centred, settled and in the right place at the right time - instead of always feeling 'out of time' or 'out of place' - helping our own body help itself.

Winter is time of maximum *yin* with the Winter Solstice (or Midwinter) being the longest night of the year. In *Traditional Chinese Medicine* (TCM) this is the season relating to the energetics of the *kidneys (yin)* & *bladder (yang)*. To understand how, even at a time of maximum *yin* there remains a necessary presence of *yang* we need to understand the Taoist concepts of *yin* & *yang* which we can most simplistically define as two sides of the same coin.

On the one side you have the dark, slow moving, heavy, cold, passive, parasympathetic, *ida, tamas, luna, feminine yin* and on the other the light (both in terms of luminosity and weight), fast moving, warm, active, sympathetic, *pingala, ragas, solar, masculine yang*. Please note:



'feminine' (*yin*) and 'masculine' (*yang*) are NOT the same as 'female' and 'male'. A balance is required, as represented in the holistic *yin / yang* symbol the *taijitu* (reflecting the yogic state of *sattva*) demonstrating that even extreme *yin* contains a small amount of *yang* (white dot) & vice versa and also that *yin* and *yang* are not actually opposite, but perhaps better described as relative terms represented on a sliding scale rather than two sides of the same coin. *Hatha Yoga*

(*ha / sun*), (*tha / moon*) and it's network of *nadi-s* (energy lines), the three main being the left, lunar, *Shanti*, mother earth, reality, physical health, *ida (yin* or

*tamas*), the right, solar, *Shiva*, spiritual health, masculine, *pingala* (*yang* or *rajas*) and the central *sushumna* (*sattva*) *nadi* is very much concerned with this relative relationship between masculine & feminine and the merging of them into balance.

Expanding our knowledge of this *yin* & *yang* spectrum even further, as a holistic practise, Yoga, particularly the branch of *Jnana* Yoga (the Yoga of knowledge, thinking or mental awareness) can be seen as being very 'masculine', *yang* or 'left brained' - one could spend their whole life reading, studying, contemplating & analysing the various Yoga texts - whilst at the same time one could say that thinking and drawing our thoughts inward is extremely *yin* and is, actually, a great pastime in which to align ourselves with the strong *yin* energy of these coldest months of Winter. However, whilst the *action* of any practise is essentially *yang*, Yoga also has a large component of the opposing experiential, intuitive, 'feminine', *yin* or 'right brained' - particularly whilst cultivating the sensitive introspection generally required for the *Bhakti* (devotional or emotional awareness), *Karma* (physical awareness) or *Hatha* (movement & breathing awareness) Yoga branches.

Remember, Yoga in India was traditionally only practised by men (see image below of the 'Father Of Modern Yoga' Krishnamacharya teaching a group young males in the Mysore Palace) so really most of the particularly active, dynamic 'masculine' / *yang* styles currently being widely practised here in the West were essentially derived from a discipline tailor made for younger males in their twenties and much less appropriate for older 'white' males & females not in their twenties. That is certainly not to say that the latter are therefore unable



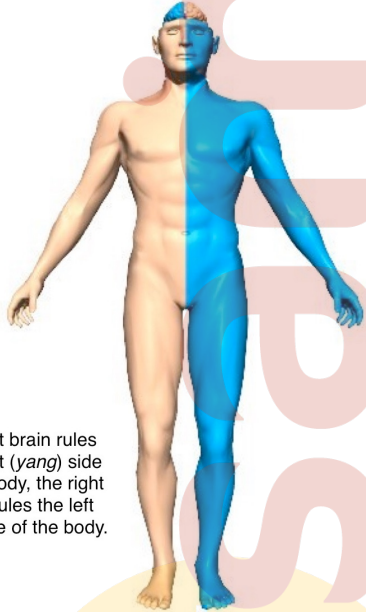
to practise in this style but it does suggest that, keeping this developmental history in mind, we can perhaps pull back slightly and increase the sense of *yin* softness, slowness, sensitivity, stability & structure of our practise in order to ensure that we can continue practising in a healthy and injury-free body, particularly as we age. Focusing on a long-term plan or the 'bigger picture' is in itself a more *yin* approach, as apposed to the right here, right now tendency of more 'masculine', *yang* thinking. I can't tell you how many people I've met, talked to, or heard of that have injured themselves 'because of Yoga' and it seems only then does the idea of this *yin* / *yang* philosophy - aligning with the

Buddhist concept of the 'Middle Path or Way' - seem to eventually sink in. The dynamic styles of Yoga are not necessarily in themselves to blame but more often in the way they are now taught and / or practised that is the inherent problem.

Many practitioners, of both sexes, are now obsessed with handstands and balances - Facebook and Instagram are full of them - all of the 'showing off' type postures. Unfortunately they do look more exciting in a photo :-/. Those Yoga practitioners dominated by the 'masculine', *yang* energy previously described are very much goal driven and motivated by results so, if this is you, gradually introducing yourself to the huge storehouse of philosophy behind the movements, the physical posturing (*āsana*) representing just one limb (*aṅga*) - a relatively small portion - of the full eight (*aṣṭ*) limbs of *Patanjali's Ashtanga* (*aṣṭāṅga*) Yoga. The traditional way of learning Yoga in India was very much student - teacher mentorship and it seems to me that this method ensures that the student is then given the information only when they are ready, and not before, as well as perhaps counterbalancing the 'masculine' or ego (*ahaṁkāra*) dominated tendency of needing to know everything all at once, immediately and right now!

Are you a 'starter' or a 'finisher'? Starters are more right brained, imaginative & creative but never seem to get anything done. Finishers are left brained, rational, logical and practical but often lack the interest, inspiration, creative vision or sensitivity to get projects started. Most of us are some combination of the two. By asking the opposing sides of the body to move in different ways, yoga helps us to balance out these right (yin, ida, lunar, feminine\*) and left (yang, pingala, solar, masculine\*) hemispheres (bilateral integration) to make us good at both starting and finishing .

\* Feminine, not female; masculine, not male. I know many male 'starters' and female 'finishers' so these energetic concepts have little to do with the sex of the subject.



The left brain rules the right (*yang*) side of the body, the right brain rules the left (*yin*) side of the body.

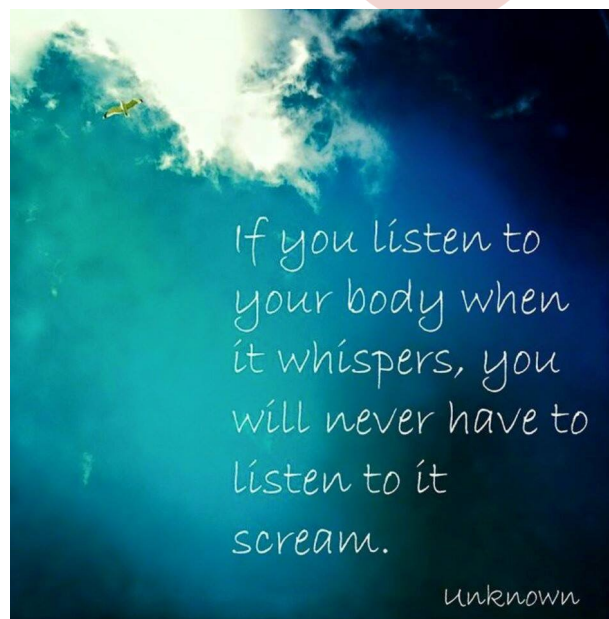
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This potential ego domination means that those 'masculine / *yang*' practitioners are potentially more challenged in receiving instruction, feeling vulnerable or not good enough / able to do Yoga 'right', 'correctly' or 'perfectly'. As the ego is a constant challenge for all human beings, imagine how challenging it is for

someone for whom this dominates their thoughts, speech and behaviour feels when they find themselves learning discipline when're the more 'advanced' postures are as appealing as the Holy Grail, in the process, one can become so focused on the perceived 'goal' that they become blind to the simple journey of the practise.

Remember, in Yoga practise does not make perfect, practise makes practise. If you are able to focus in this way you will, ironically, end up achieving so much more and well beyond what you ever thought was initially possible.

The masculine / *yang* (left hemisphere dominated) brain is more factual, rational, logical whilst the feminine / *yin* (right hemisphere dominated) brain is more intuitive, imaginative & creative. Expanding this idea of diagonals in the body and moving opposite limbs (e.g. left arm with the right leg) together promotes Cross Patterning, stimulating a communication between these two brain hemispheres / sides of the body. Balancing out the body in this way, whether it be left (*yin*) v/s right (*yang*), lower (*yin*) v/s upper (*yang*) or front (*yin*) v/s back (*yang*) we still need to be mindful of the whole, working holistically with this idea of balance in mind, taking the time to patiently restore equilibrium whilst slowing down enough to enhance our ability to listen closely to what the body is telling us in any given moment. In this way, twists / laterals / diagonals / lefts / rights are very important in *ha-tha* Yoga for balancing out potential brain hemisphere domination and preventing the inevitably resulting unilateral (one-sided) damage / deterioration that typically occurs within the physical body as one ages (e.g. osteoarthritis, stroke, Parkinson's etc.).



Today, many Yoga practitioners are more interested in the fitness aspects of Yoga but I think they can also be brought around to the 'less is more' approach - often using even the more active / *yang* forms of Yoga as a way to ultimately relax and 'stretch\*' and perhaps compliment the other physical activity they may also be doing like sport or gym work. 'Yin Yoga' and it's focus on completely dis-engaging all activity in the body whilst in the mode of stretch\* also raises some concerns, feeling to me like a 'one foot in, one foot out' approach - a personalised mix of a 'both feet in' or 'both feet out' being preferable. After having already raised possible concerns for an entirely *yang*

approach, perhaps we should also be just as careful when pursuing one that is entirely *yin*. Again, it may be good for some, at certain times, with some particular positions being perhaps more appropriate than others. A 'both feet out' or 'truly' *yin* approach to me is Restorative Yoga, extremely beneficial for relaxing & letting go both in terms of (re-)aligning with the energetics of the season, for example the extreme or maximum *yin* of Winter, as well as with those same reflected energies present within our own body, at any given time.

\*These days I generally try to avoid using the word 'stretch' because the sensations experienced in individual bodies are so different and may, for some, feel nothing like a stretch. The article [Yoga Is Not Stretching](#) written by J. Brown based in Brooklyn, New York illustrates this point in more detail and also contains the interesting quote "As crazy as it may sound, we all have full ranges of motion in our bodies when we are under anesthesia."

If this last statement is indeed true, 'flexibility' can now, more than ever, be seen as largely mind over matter. Becoming flexible is all about ALLOWING rather than FORCING. You WILL NOT become more flexible by forcing and that's where most 'tight' people give up almost before they've even started. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people (both male and female) say "I'm too inflexible to do Yoga." A great quote I once read said that this is like saying "I'm too dirty to take a bath." In both cases you aren't so so don't let that stop you.

Coordinating the breath with the movement; breathing in AND out through the nose (to elongate the time it takes to inhale and exhale) and focusing particularly on the exhalation and its reflection of letting go, allowing, releasing as you transfer that same philosophy to the physical body. Like anything, it just takes a bit of practise and commitment. Focusing more on the longer term / bigger picture (feminine / *yin* thinking) rather than immediate, short term gains (masculine / *yang* thinking) and before you know it BAM, you're more flexible.

Remember that being tight is good as it reflects strength, and that flexibility will come gradually and over time. You may not be flexible but you can become more flexible. In many ways being tight is an 'asset' in Yoga - your body is clearly telling you when enough is enough. It's the (hyper) flexible practitioners (often young females) who are more prone to injury as they can easily 'over-stretch' and hang dangerously into their joints and more vulnerable ligaments & tendons - the biggest concern for those practising Yin Yoga where it's the tight muscles that will generally protect you.

## Winter Practises

Yoga differs from other forms of exercise where the breath follows or tries to keep up with the movement. In Yoga it's the opposite - the movement should follow the breath. It may initially seem that we are trying to breath more but actually it is the ultimate goal to breath less, and more efficiently by engaging the whole lung capacity & body rather than just the mouth / nose & upper chest. I've heard it said that when we are born we are given a certain number of breaths, so learning to breath l-o-n-g and s-l-o-w, never gulping for air or huffing and puffing, means that we will live a long and healthy life. It is also my experience that reducing the thoughts, evening out the emotions and promoting an overall sense of wellbeing is possible from just a few moments of conscious, slow, mindful breathing. In terms of yogic breathing practises (*prāṇāyāma*), I have also found that an underlying engagement of *ujjayi prāṇāyāma* (victorious breath) as I move through my practise is a great way to help achieve this as well as keeping the mind more focused on what I am actually doing.

In terms of breathing for Winter, for the purposes of balancing the 'masculine' (*yang*) with the environmentally strong 'feminine' (*yin*), *nadi sodhana prāṇāyāma* (alternate nostril breathing) springs immediately to mind, but you could also use a strongly *yang prāṇāyāma* such as *bhastrika* (bellows breath) in order to counterbalance the 'feminine' (*yin*) energy of Winter or, to a lesser extent *kapala bhati* (shining skull) or even a *viloma pranayama* on the exhalation for a more *yin*, less *yang* effect on the body and mind.

### Patanjali Sūtra II.46 *sthira sukham āsanam*

You can also use this *yin / yang* approach in your physical (*āsana*) practise.



Forward bends are *yin / relaxing* and match the 'feminine' energy of Winter whilst backbends are *yang / stimulating*, match the 'masculine' and therefore provide a perfect counterbalance during these coldest months of the year. Remember that BOTH are important and ideally required in equal measure, one being more of a focus in order to bring it into balance with the other. *Patañjali's sthira sukham āsanam* - remaining steady & comfortable within each position & movement - is another principle that can be used to ensure a sensible approach to the physical movements

and practises during the coldest months of Winter.

Standing postures that utilise the strength & flexibility of the legs & lower body - reflections of the pelvic floor and *kidney* energetics - are great focus for Winter. As a flowing sequence or even when more simply broken down into it's individual components, *surya namaskar* (sun salutation) is a great way to warm up and get the body moving. Warming the body from the inside out is a much healthier and more long lasting way to stay warm during these coldest months.

Squats are helpful to open up the hips & pelvic floor, activate the legs and improve blood flow to the reproductive system. Combining them with lunges like *anjaneyasana* (crescent moon) & / or *virabhadrasana* (warrior) I & II, *skandasana* (side lunges), *prasarita padottanasana* (wide leg forward bend), and combining with balancing postures such as *padangustha padma utkatasana* (half lotus toe balance / half chair pose), *garudasana* (eagle pose), & standing (or reclined / *supta*) *padangustha* I-III (hand to toe sequence) with strap.

As previously stated, twists / laterals / lefts / rights are very important in *ha-tha* Yoga for balancing out potential brain hemisphere domination and so postures as simple as *urdhva hastasana* (arms up over the head) or, from this position *ardha chandrasana* (half moon pose) help to open up the sides of the body, ribcage and lungs can be used to start along with simple twists as in *prasarita padottanasana* (wide leg forward bend), (*parivrtta*) *utkatasana* (revolved chair pose) or (*parivrtta*) *sukhasana* (revolved easy pose with height under the buttocks).

*Virasana* (hero's pose) whilst being 'seated' on a block provides firm pressure against the pelvic floor along with protection that prevents over-extension of the knees will is a great way to connect with *mooladhara chakra* and practise *moolabandha*, one of the three *bandha's* used to contain and direct blood flow & energy within the body, particularly good for engaging the lower body and Winter's *kidney* energy. *Pran* (life) *mudra* (gesture) and *bija* (seed) *mantra* (sound) LAM compliment this practise well.



Inversions help to 'burn off the dross' by re-orientating the directional flow of *jathara agni* (digestive fire), which always burns 'upwards', in an inverted position to now clear the impurities (*apana*) collected in the pelvic floor / lower abdomen, also draining stale & stagnant fluid from the lower extremities, returning them into primary circulation and preparing the areas of the lower body to be replenished with fresh blood again once an upright position is





(gradually) re-established. In this regard, a passive version of *viparita karani* (legs up the wall) could be perfect to quieten the mind and nourish the upper extremities along with the equally passive, nourishing (*yin*) postures of *adho mukha virasana* (downward facing hero's pose) or *balasana* (child's pose), aligning with the maximum *yin* of Winter. When thinking of a way to begin counterbalancing

Winter's *yin*, the slightly more active (*yang*) but still relatively less ambitious postures such as *adho mukha svanasana* (down dog) & *sasankasana* (hare posture) could also do the trick. More exciting, challenging or active inversions such as (*ardha*) *sarvangasana* (shoulder stand), or inversions combined with arm balances beginning with something like *bakasana* (crane posture) or handstands (up against the wall), ensuring that you don't drop into the 'masculine' competitive or 'show-off' mode and remain practising mindfully, slowly, carefully, and in conjunction with the breath.



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# Mūlādhāra: The Base Chakra

Muladhara (also spelt *Mooladhara*), 'foundation', 'base' or 'root' *chakra* is located at the base of the torso, in the pelvic plexus between the genitals and the anus. In yogic physiology it is connected to the Earth Element, the nose (it's sense organ or *jñanendriya*) and the sense of smell, and it's 'work organ' (or *karmendriya*), the anus and the action of defecation. It's basic desire is the primal, instinctive urge for survival, safety and security - concerned with obtaining the most basic needs of food and shelter. In this modern age we could also add money or financial security to this list. It's shadow emotion, or obstacle, is fear, and is therefore connected to the energetics of the kidneys, more specifically the adrenal (endocrine) glands.

Simplistically, *mooladhara chakra* is the seat of the latent *kundalini*, symbol for fertile earth, ageless wisdom and potential for elevated consciousness. In his book *Journey Into Consciousness* [1990], Charles Breaux states that in tantric (Yoga) legend "we find the valuable vital energy being held captive by the unconscious instincts in the first chakra... a tantric yogi must release *kundalini*, so she may ascend through the *chakra*-s and reveal all her treasures of consciousness" (p. 45). Also referred to is the 'egg of Brahma' - in *Hinduism*, *Brahma* being the god of creation. It is stated that *mooladhara chakra* is located at the centre of this 'world egg', "a symbol for the original wholeness from which all life is derived" (p. 37). Unaroused, the *kundalini* remains latent or dormant in it's resting place until activated, "rising up through the psyche, she unveils herself in each of the chakras to reveal higher and higher levels of consciousness" (p. 13).



In other texts, a similarly described 'egg-shaped' centre of nerves called the *kanda* occupies an area situated slightly ABOVE *mooladhara chakra*. From the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (translation by Brian Dana Akers); III:107 "Kundalini, sleeping above *kanda*, liberates yogis and binds the ignorant. He who knows her, knows Yoga" and, in III:113, "The *kanda* is said to be twelve fingers above the anus, four fingers wide, soft, white and folded like a cloth". In *The Book of Chakras & Subtle Bodies* [2014] by Stephen Sturgess, he states "The *kanda* is the junction where the *nadi* that passes through the spinal column is connected to the *muladhara chakra* at the base of the spine" (p.57).

*Prana* (energy) flows through the estimated 72,000 *nadi*-s (energy channels) throughout the body, the main three being the *ida* (left, luna, feminine, *yin*), *pingala* (right, solar, masculine, *yang*) and the central *sushumna nadi*. In his fantastic book *The Heart of Yoga*, T.K.V. Desikachar states that the flow of *prana* normally remains only in the *ida & pingala nadi*-s, with the free flow of *prana* in the *sushumna nadi* not normally possible "because something blocks the passage. This block is symbolised by the coiled snake, the *kundalini*. It is said that when the fire in the body, *agni*, has killed the snake, the *kundalini* unrolls and the passage is open to the flow *prana*" (p.138).

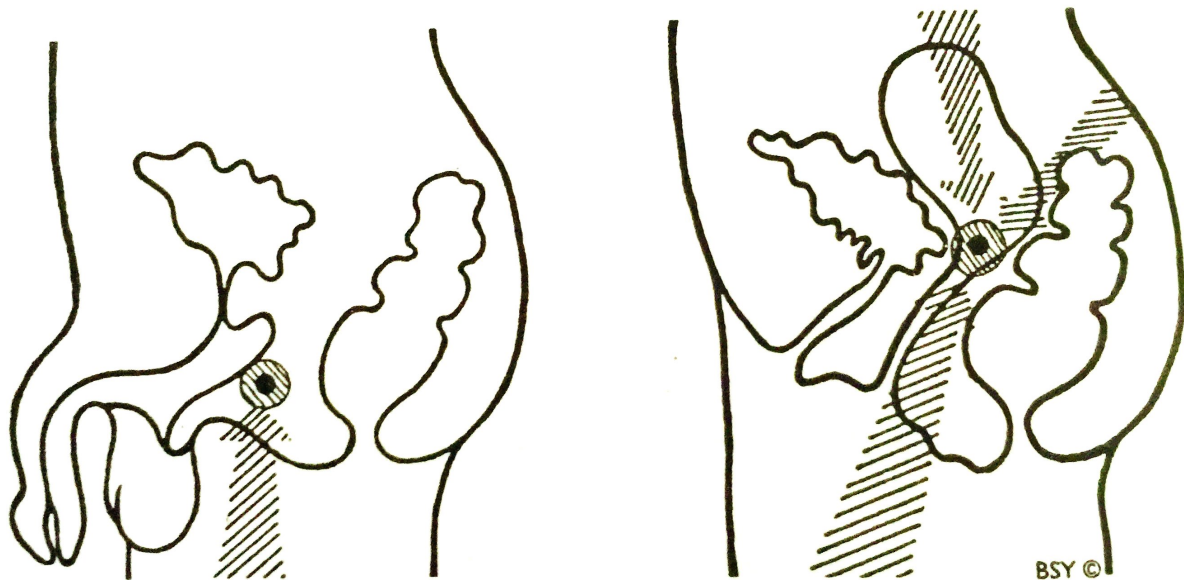
Engaging the area of the perineum, the site of *mooladhara chakra*, brings awareness to and strengthens or activates this energetic centre. In *Hatha Yoga* we can do this through a practise called *moolabandha*.

"(9:61) Press the premium with the heel. Contract the anus. Draw the *apana* upward. This is called *Mulabandha*. (9:62) One makes the *apana*, which goes downward, go upward by contracting forcefully. Yogis call that *Mulabandha*. (9:66) The gastric flames shoot higher when the *apana* ascends and strikes the sphere of fire. (9:67) Then the gastric fire and the *apana* join the *prana*, which is naturally hot, and the body's fire is stoked. (9:68) Due to this heat the sleeping *kundalini* is awakened, hissing and straightening like a snake struck by a stick."

*Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, translation by Brian Dana Akers.

In Swami Satyananda Saraswati's *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha* (2008, p. 76), *moolabandha* (also spelt *mulabandha*) is described as a "perineum contraction" but, as explained in the diagram and based on obvious structural differences, the exact location or focus of this practise is slightly different for males and females. Similarly, it is recommended that this *bandha* be practised in a cross-legged position, males sitting in *siddhasana* (accomplished pose for men) with the inner heel ideally pressing up into the perineum, and females in *siddha yoni asana* (accomplished pose for women) which is similarly described

except that the inner heel is pressing comfortably against the opposite 'groin' (rather than up against the perineum). In describing *moolabandha* itself however, it goes on to describe this pressure being applied by the inner heel to "the perineal / vaginal region (and) contracting this region by pulling up on the muscles of the pelvic floor and then relaxing them".



As a preparation to *moolabandha*, males may also practice *vajroli* (vs. *sahajoli* for females) *mudra* involving a gentle contraction of the urethra, and *ashwini mudra* which involves a contraction & release of the anal sphincter / buttocks. *Moolabandha* then is neither of these but somewhere in between and the skill in the practise comes from gentle repetition of all these more specific, subtle movements that can be achieved within this general area.

*Moolabandha* is similarly described, with slight variation, in both the *Shiva & Gheranda Samhita* as well as "in several of the *Upanishads*" (*Moola Bandha: The Master Key [2009]* by Swami Buddhananda, p. 12). He also states that "When *moola bandha* is performed, pelvic stimulation activates parasympathetic fibres emerging from the pelvic spinal chord" (p. 3). He highlights the importance of a gradual, patiently evolving discernment between the specific actions possible in this area and, interestingly with regards to the potentially differing practise of male & female students, states that "Embryonically the penis and vagina are formed from the same structure while still in the foetus.... Thus, despite the different formation of sexual organs, the basic muscle structure is the same for male and female and the vagina occupies

approximately the same area as the root of the penis” (p. 19). Making an important distinction with *ashwini mudra*, he explains that “*moola bandha* is performed by relaxing the anus (sphincter muscles) and contracting only the perineal body... In the female it is also placed on the perineum, pressed against the outer vagina” (p.15).

In a 2012 workshop with Simon Borg-Olivier we were told something along the lines that the area of focus for *moolabandha* is in many cases already tight and tense enough in the western body and that we don't therefore need to then add further tension by contracting the area over and over, rather preferring to use the breath, the muscles of the abdomen and the active utilisation of the legs in order to engage the pelvic floor / *moolabandha*, the latter through 'as-if' actions (isometric contraction) that occur as you attempt to either draw the feet / legs closer together or spread the feet / legs further apart on the mat, with out actually moving them at all. In his *Applied Anatomy & Physiology of Yoga* (2001, p. 204) (with Bianca Machliss) he defines the traditionally taught *moolabandha* as '*ha-moolabandha*' essentially as an activation of the *muscles of forced abdominal exhalation* (MFAE) - the circumferential muscles of the lower trunk that are used to squeeze the last droplets of air out of the lungs at the end of a deep exhalation - causing “the lower abdomen (inferior to the navel), the lumbar spine and the perineum move inward towards each other and the waist narrows” (p. 205). I am personally still very much working my way through the practical application of this information, and the obviously much more detailed information his book and classes provide, but I thought it was worth mentioning within the context of the subject being presented here.

In Harish Johari's book *Chakras* [1987] states that “Meditation on the tip of the nose induces the beginning of awareness, freedom from disease, lightness, inspiration, vitality, vigour, stamina, security, an understanding of inner purity, and softness in the voice and in the inner melody” (p. 52). This position of the eyes, looking downward and inward towards the tip of the nose drawing connection between *agochari mudra* (or *nāsāgre dr̥ṣṭi*), “promotes concentration, calms the nervous system, and stimulates the root chakra” (*Mudras* [2000] by Gertrude Hirschi, p. 168).

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# Winter:

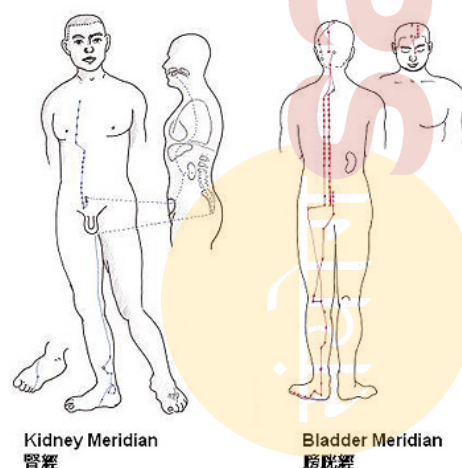
## Strengthening the Silence Within

Aligning our body with the natural cycles of the environment in order to give ourselves the best chance of maintaining good health seems like common sense, linking a seasonal cycle of the five-phase system in *Traditional Chinese Medicine* (TCM) with specific internal processes & systems within the physical body, as a product of the external environment, with the season of **Winter** relating to the *Water Element* and the energy of the *kidneys* (*yin*) & *bladder* (*yang*). Reflecting on the pathways that these two meridian (energy) lines pave through



the body, we can begin our enquiry with a better focus on those practises and movements that provide the greatest benefit this particular system. In essence, the *kidney meridians* run up from the soles of the feet, through the insides of the legs and front of the body whilst the *bladder meridians* run from the bridge of the nose, up the forehead and over the skull, down the entire back of the body all the way down to the outside edges of the feet & little toes.

The seasons follow the same circular rhythm as our life cycle (birth, childhood, teenage, adulthood, middle age, retired, elderly & death). Winter, therefore, can be a potentially difficult time as it reflects environmental 'death' and the darkest hours of the night just before dawn - but it is for this reason a great time to turn inward and reflect on the light within.



For this reason, aligning the body with the environment will naturally promote an overall sense of wellbeing; feeling centred, settled and in the right place at the right time - instead of always feeling 'out of time' or 'out of place' - helping our own body to help itself.

More specifically, Winter is a time for hibernation and creature comforts, for doing less, staying indoors and nourishing the body, spirit and most importantly at this time, the mind. This means that Winter is a perfect time to focus on self-study or self-reflection (*svādhyāya*, the fourth of *Patañjali's* five *niyama* or personal ethics), in addition of course to any physical movements and practises that may help to balance out and strengthen our *Water Element* and *kidney* energy such as *prāṇāyāma* (breathing) that engages the diaphragm and improves our ability to draw the breath deep into the body or the focussing on *mūlādhāra chakra* / pelvic floor and the lower limbs, feet, ankles, knees, hips, tailbone, sacrum, buttocks and lower back whilst practising our *Yoga āsana* (postures).

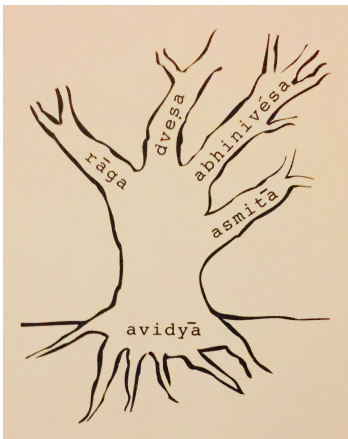
By focusing and 'purifying' the mind through self-reflection and self-study we can enjoy not only a beneficial corresponding effect on the emotions and physical body but also we are then able to better tap into the deeper benefits of a more holistic Yoga practise and start to reap the benefits of a quieter & less cluttered thinking process of improved clarity. Within each of us lies our own inner space which is normally filled with - or obscured by - the many thoughts that enter and run through our consciousness on a daily basis. Utilising the environmental energetics present within each season to help us better select which practises are most beneficial for our overall wellbeing can help us to clear away many of those thoughts, or at least begin to reduce their frequency - and allow ourselves not only a glimpse at this inner space but, with regular, dedicated practice, a strengthening of the silence within.

"We begin to see the world from a deeper place within ourselves - a place that is not undone by the daily ups and downs of life. We become more centered. Even as life in and around us goes on much as it did before, we are somehow different. The stresses and strains of life begin to lose their grip on us. Besides the obvious mental and physical health benefits, this rise of inner silence is very liberating and frees us to express ourselves in ways that might not have been possible before." Yogini in *Deep Meditation: Pathway To Personal Freedom* (p. 20).

# Abhiniveśa:

## The Fifth Klesha

Life is short and whilst this might seem more than little morbid to the western mind, eastern philosophies prefer to confront this inevitability head-on, using this knowledge (*vidya*) to live life in full appreciation of every single moment. Belief in some form afterlife, heaven or rebirth through reincarnation for example, does somewhat soften the blow.



Outlined in chapter two of his *Yoga Sutra's*, *Patanjali* describes the five *klesha's* as afflictions “which disturb the equilibrium of consciousness” (B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* [1993], p. 111) and “prevent us from recognizing things as they really are (T.K.V Desikachar in *The Heart of Yoga* [1995], p. 3). They are *avidya* (ignorance), *asmita* (ego focus), *raga* (our ‘likes’ or attachments to pleasure), *dvesa* (our ‘dislikes’ or aversions to pain), and last but certainly not least, *abhinivesah* (fear of death or a ‘clinging to life’).

Fear of death is the fear that underlies all fears, even though this death can also be referring to the death of the individual or small (ego) self. *Abhinivesah* can also be described as a fear of being different from the tribe or of changing our regular, comfortable, regular habits. In *Light on The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali* [1993], B.K.S. Iyengar defines *abhinivesah* as “The desire to live forever and to preserve one’s individual self.” He also adds that “Freedom from such attachment to life is very difficult for even a wise, erudite and scholarly person achieve. If *avidya* is the mother of afflictions, *abhinivesah* is its offspring” (p. 23-24).

There’s nothing scarier than dying. This underlying or ultimate fear of death can also be experienced to a lesser degree in daily life where most things that scare us instinctively tap straight back into the (merely perceived or actually experienced) danger that the situation is highlighting. We generally already know what we are afraid of - think (even mild) ‘phobia’s’ like fear of heights, fear of spiders, fear of enclosed spaces etc, etc. “We feel uncertain. We have



doubts about our position in life. We are afraid that people will judge us negatively. We do not want to grow old" (*Heart of Yoga* p. 11).

In *Traditional Chinese Medicine* (TCM), fear is the shadow emotion relating to



the *kidneys* (*yin*) & *bladder* (*yang*) of the Water Element. In yogic physiology however, the Kidneys (and Adrenal [endocrine] Glands) are related to the Earth Element and *mooladhara* (root) *chakra* and our ability to feel safe, steady, grounded and connected to the physical world. Our basic concern in this centre is the desire for security, with 'fear of death', the ultimate underlying fear, being "the basic psychological block of the first chakra... A fearful person may strike out blindly and senselessly, like a cornered animal, due to what is felt to be a loss of basic

security."(*Chakras* [1987] by Harish Johari, p. 51-52).

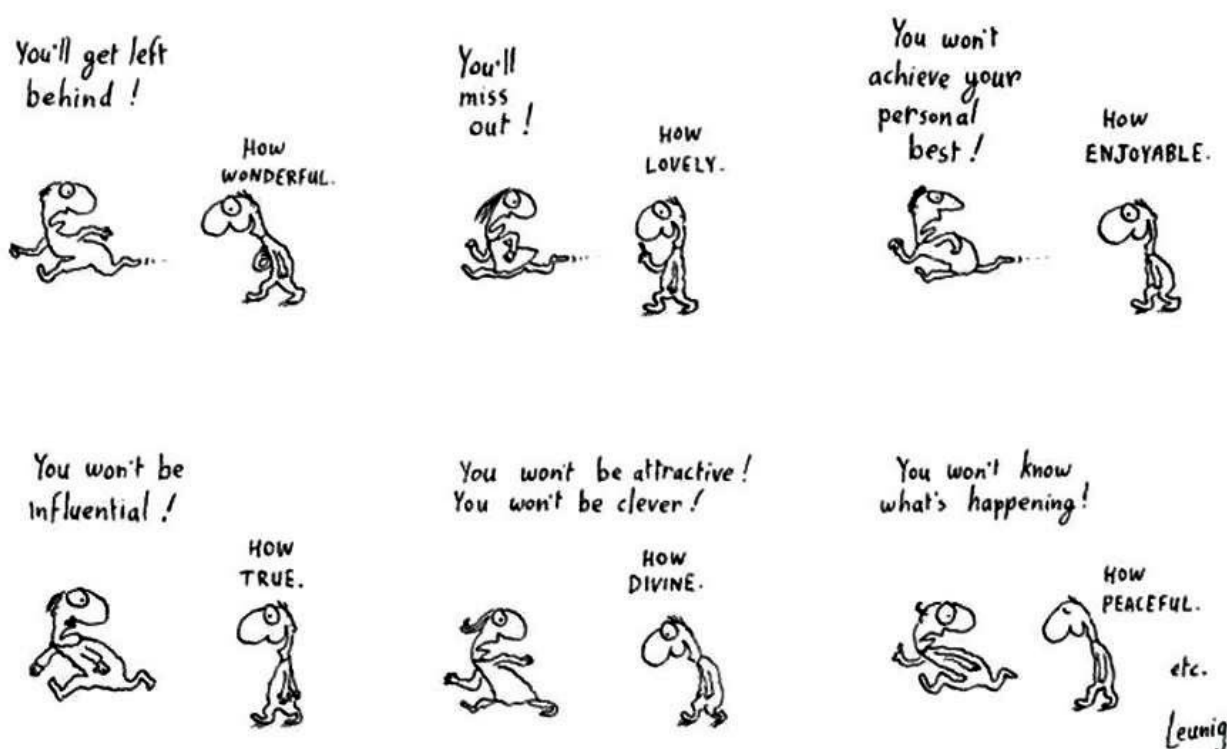
Fear, therefore, can be experienced in many ways and is both an indication of and a drain upon the energetic (and ultimately physiological) function of the Kidneys and Adrenal Glands. In TCM, we born with certain amount of pre-natal *jing* (vital essence), gifted to us from our parents at the moment of conception, stored in the Kidneys, enhanced only by how we live, what we eat and how we breathe (post-natal *jing*). As we age, our bodies change as do our thoughts, feelings & emotions - all connected within one holistic system, each one reflecting the other. Staying healthy in mind, body AND spirit as we age is the best way to live a long, healthy and happy life.

## The Stages Of Life

The *Vedas* (translated as 'the knowledge') are the oldest written scriptures in *Hinduism*. Whilst Yoga is a philosophy not a religion, it does often draw heavily on (India's) *Hinduism*. India's *Vedic* tradition clearly specifies four *ashrama*, or life stages; *Brahmacharya* ('bachelor student' from birth until about 20 years of age), *Grihastha* ('married householder' ages 20 - 50), *Vanaprastha* ('retiring into a forest' ages 50 - 75), and *Sannyasa* ('renunciated ascetic' >75).

Whilst it could initially seem like this system might be simply trying to force people of a certain age into what society might deem 'age appropriate'

behaviours and are therefore bound to be way too restricting and inappropriate for the modern age in which we now live, particularly in the western world's 'anything's possible' culture, I would ask you to take a second look. Instead of digging against the imperfect, successful, and some might say more 'ego' based pursuits of younger life this system encourages, neigh recommends, that you allow yourself to begin the process of slowing down, taking a back seat as you (inevitably) age, and thereby doing so gracefully. Like Yoga itself, this ancient system may no longer be practiced by all to the letter in 'modern' India - but a simple observation of the way most Indian's I've met (traditionally) travel the path of life and treat the elder members of their family suggests that at least the essence is still very much an important underlying part of their modern culture.



I feel that this very much reflects a naturally occurring 'evolution', a *Taoist* 'seasonal' approach to life and, whilst I myself am now approaching the end of the *Grihastha* stage - but not 'married' - I can still identify very much with the idea of being a 'householder', the stability and responsibility that comes with it, as I move up towards the next, third stage of *Vanaprastha*.

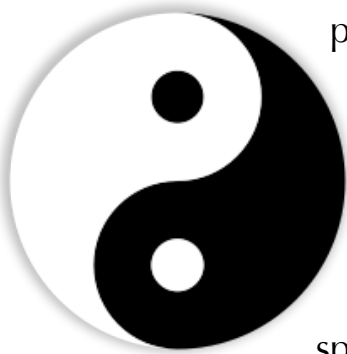
An interesting essay on this four stage process can be found on [esamskriti.com](http://esamskriti.com).

In TCM, the season of Winter relates to a human being's (and all living creatures) journey through old age to dying and the fourth *ashrama* of *Sannyasa* ('renunciated ascetic' >75). Generally when we speak of death we need not refer to actual death but also to the end of an era, a stage or phase, and in this

way is seen, in eastern philosophy, as a wonderfully positive time to let go, become still, reflect, hibernate in preparation for the new and exciting months of Spring which are just around the corner. And so too in the physical act of dying and death which is perfectly natural and happened to everyone that has ever lived. For those not used to contemplating such themes, it does seem morbid but the eastern philosophies prefer to say it out loud, deal with it as a reality and, as a result, make every moment of life worth consciously living. Belief in some form of afterlife, heaven or reincarnation for example, does make contemplating this topic a little less daunting. Let us reflect for a moment on the process of ageing, as an analogy for the season of Winter.

## The Ageing Process

As we age, those areas that we injured when we were younger, those niggles that always seemed more prevalent when we were tired or stressed, become worse, more prevalent or exacerbated. Unless we start doing something about it in order to make them as manageable and as least distracting as possible. Reflecting on the Taoist concept of *yin & yang* - a holistic model reflecting a sliding scale between two potential extremes - it often seems like those that experience the most extreme physical deterioration are those who have either done nothing physical for their whole life, or those that have engaged in strong physical activity like adrenaline stimulating activities (like skiing or running) or professional, competitive sports, both very 'masculine' or *yang* in their nature. Have you ever noticed how aged someone who has spent a life being extremely physically active looks? Just take a moment to reflect on that. The Buddhist approach of 'the middle way' and practising a little bit more regularly, as always, appears to be the best way to proceed.



As we age, members of both sexes are more inclined to be open to spirituality and more spiritual disciplines as well as turning towards more sensible movements of the body in response to problems / pain / discomfort arising from the natural ageing process or from overuse or injury and so, older practitioners might therefore find themselves more open to the subtle practises & movements as well as the philosophy and esoteric sides of Yoga than those younger practitioners in their twenties and thirties. Ah, the benefit of hindsight.

Please contact me at [chris@samyoga.com](mailto:chris@samyoga.com) for an electronic copy of this document in order to gain access to the links contained to the referenced material, signified by the underlined text.



## Australian Bush Flower Essences

*Australian Bush Flower Essences* help to give clarity to one's life as well as the courage, strength and commitment to follow and pursue one's goals and dreams. They help to develop a higher level of intuition, self esteem, spirituality, creativity and joy. The more the essences are used, the more one is likely to experience greater awareness and happiness in one's life. Then everyone benefits....the individual, society and the planet.

The effect of these essences is similar to that of meditation in that they enable the person to access the wisdom of their Higher Self. This releases negative beliefs held in the subconscious mind and allows the positive virtues of the Higher Self - love, joy, faith, courage etc. to flood their being. When this happens the negative beliefs and thoughts are dissolved, balance is restored and true healing occurs.

Flower Remedies are not new. The Australian Aboriginals have always used flowers to heal the emotions, as did the Ancient Egyptians. There has also been a very long tradition of use of Flower Essences in India, Asia and South America and they were also very popular in Europe in the Middle Ages. Hildegard von Bingen (12th century) and Paracelsus (15th century) both wrote about how they collected dew from flowering plants to treat health imbalances.

This healing method was rediscovered by Dr. Edward Bach sixty years ago through the use of English flowering plants. Today our society and its needs are totally different to that of sixty years ago. There has been a great need for remedies that would help people deal with the issues of the 21st century - sexuality, communication skills and spirituality to name but a few. The answer to this need has come from the Australian plants, developed and researched by Naturopath, Ian White a fifth generation Australian herbalist.

Australia has the world's oldest and highest number of flowering plants exhibiting tremendous beauty and strength. Also Australia is relatively

unpolluted and metaphysically has a very wise, old energy. At this time there is a tremendous new vitality in this country. This, combined with the inherent power of the land, is why the *Australian Bush Flower Essences* are unique.

Text extracted from the Australian Bush Flower Essences website [www.ausflowers.com.au](http://www.ausflowers.com.au)

**“Faith is the bird that feels the light  
when the dawn is still dark.”**

Rabindranath Tagore

As part of the *Strengthening the Silence Within for the Winter Solstice* **YOGA Immersion** you have received an *Australian Bush Flower Essence* blend which will enhance the effects of today's practise and help prolong and amplify the effects into the days, weeks & months ahead.

Please read the following instructions carefully to ensure you get the best out of your event tailored *Australian Bush Flower Essence* blend. Taken as prescribed, the bottle should be finished in about 2 weeks. **I am able to recycle the empty bottle so, if possible, hold onto it and return it to me next time we meet.**

You take 7 drops under the tongue, ideally before you brush your teeth, held for 10 seconds before swallowing, preferably at or around the same times, morning & night. If you get out of the rhythm simply take 7 drops when you remember and then return to the rhythm again the next morning / evening. Try not to leave the bottle near any electrical device, like an alarm clock or mobile phone, which may interfere with the subtle vibrational energies contained within the bottle.

The blend you have received has been created based on the themes of today's immersion. We all have a wide range of different energies or 'archetypes' within us at different times in our lives and it is only a matter of accepting and dealing with what comes up for us for true healing to take place. Any individual essence that doesn't resonate with your particular internal energies will simply not work and for this reason **blends are most effective when more specifically tailored to the needs of your individual circumstances.** If

you need further clarification as to why a particular essence has been included or would like to continue with a more personally tailored variant, please just ask.

The *Strengthening the Silence Within for the Winter Solstice* YOGA Immersion blend you received will help you to align with Winter's strong *yin* themes of consolidation, introversion, silence, stillness & hibernation, building on the 'de-cluttering' and letting go of Autumn, in order to better settle in to and reflect upon the body, mind and emotions. It contains:

**Alpine Mint Bush** - revives mental and emotional exhaustion.

**Angelsword** - clears the connection to your Higher Self, repairs aura / releases trapped energies.

**Boab** - clears negative family (hereditary) & karmic thought patterns & attitudes, clears cranio-sacral imbalances.

**Bush Fuchsia** - for trusting intuition, reconnecting the brain's hemisphere's of the brain and negating electromagnetic dullness.

**Bush Iris** - clears base (*mooladhara*), throat (*vishuddha*) *chakra*-s, pineal gland & lymphatics.

**Crowea** - strengthening, calming & centring. Aligns subtle and physical bodies.

**Lichen** - allows one to be aware of the light.

**Macrocarpa** - aligns with the adrenal (endocrine) glands and boosts energy, enthusiasm, vitality, endurance & inner strength.

**Red Lily** - balances & grounds spiritual practise, connects to the crown (*sahasrara*) *chakra*.

**Sundew** - conscious, grounded, focused and embeds one to the physical body.

**Waratah** - enhances survival skills and promotes courage and strength.

Any changes you experience may range from dramatic to extremely subtle so the closer you monitor yourself, including your dreams, thoughts & emotions during the following two weeks and beyond, the more likely you'll notice any subtle changes occurring. Keeping a journal is a good way to facilitate this process. Listening to your body during this time, allowing it to adapt to these subtle emotional changes will also move you in the right direction.

**The more you consciously participate in your healing, the more effective it will be.**

Sometimes changes are more apparent in retrospect so whilst it may seem like nothing is happening at the time, you are actually able to notice shifts only (some time) after you have completed the course of treatment. Seeds planted within us by taking the flower essences may take months to germinate. If, for example, you experience your whole life has turned around in six months

time, think back, revisit this article and consider the role of the blend you are taking right now.

**Be prepared for any of these eventualities.**

One course of drops may be enough but sometimes a consecutive series of same, similar or completely different blends are required. The progress of your 'treatment' with these essences is totally up to you; on how, when and what you are ready to deal with. As human beings we are complex and multi-faceted. As one layer is healed another may present itself for treatment. If you would like to continue your treatment with these drops please let me know, along with any changes or new issues that have arisen during the treatment period. I would also welcome any feedback you may have relating to your experience with the drops.

**Bush Flower consultations & essence blends are available through Samyoga.**

**Consultations may be stand alone or incorporated into a longer Shiatsu Acupressure, Reflexology or Combination Therapy bodywork session.**

**Personalised Essence Blend Dropper Bottle (15ml, 2 weeks supply) \$20**

**“Seek always  
for the answer within  
Be not influenced  
by those around you,  
by their thoughts  
or their words.”**  
*Eileen Caddy in God Spoke to Me*

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