

Shankhprakashalana -

The intestinal wash - a cleanse from top to bottom!

'Shanka' means conch and 'prakshalana' means cleaning out. The ancient Yogis visualised their digestive system as a conch, a long spiral tunnel through which food travelled. To clean out the whole digestive system from mouth to anus, they invented/discovered a wonderful self administered method of salt water cleansing.

These practices should only be done under the supervision of an experience practitioner

There are two versions of Shankaparakshalana:

Short (or Laghoo) Shankaparakshalana and

Full (or Poorna) Shankaparakshalana.

1 - The Short Version (Laghoo Shankaparakshalana)

In the morning, before eating or drinking anything, a quantity of warm salted water is made up (we are not giving the recipe here). Two cups of the mixed water are quickly drunk down and then 5 special yoga postures and exercises are performed 8 times each. After that, 2 more cups of the salted water are quickly drunk and the 5 exercises are again repeated. The water and exercises are then repeated once more.

Usually, by the time 6 glasses have been drunk a strong bowel movement should be felt and one goes to the toilet. If the urge to empty the bowels does not occur before or soon after the first 6 cups of water, 3 sets of postures and waiting on the toilet for a few minutes, another round or 2 of the water and exercises can be done to build up the pressure to evacuate.

All the water which has been drunk does not come out in one sitting but usually in the course of the next few hours so one shouldn't go too far away from the bathroom on that morning!

After all the water is passed, the intestines and bowels will be clear of all matter and the stomach and small intestines empty of water.

At least half an hour is left after completing the exercises before eating anything. There are no special dietary restrictions for the short course intestinal wash.

2 - The Full Version - (Poorna Shankaparakshalana)

Whereas with the short version (Laghoo Shankaparakshalana) outlined above, one only drinks about 6 - 8 (maximum 10) cups of the water, but in the full version one keeps drinking and exercising, drinking and exercising, drinking and exercising, until the water coming out your anus is as clean as the water going in. Then you know that you really are clean inside! The time taken and the amount of water needed to get fully clean depends totally on the individual. It may take anywhere from 20 - 50 cups, some 2 - 4 hours to completely flush the system.

Important

Whereas the short version (Laghoo) may be done at home any time unassisted (following being personally instructed the first few times of course), full (or Poorna) Shankaparakshalana must only be done under guidance in a particular situation such as an ashram. It's not the sort of practice ever to be done at home on one's own. Don't even think about it. Don't even recommend anyone else try it, even though you may think it may do them the world of good. It must be done in a retreat situation under complete and proper guidance. The rules of the full Poorna Shankaparakshalana are extensive and detailed. There is a valid reason, for each rule and they must be carried out without fail. If you disregard even one rule, you may experience harmful or disagreeable consequences, which is a great pity, for this technique can give so many benefits.

Precautions

People with ulcers, high blood pressure or other serious medical conditions should not practice either form of Shankaparakshalana except under guidance.

Benefits

The benefits of both short and long Shankaparakshalana are many. Shankaparakshalana purifies the whole body not just the gastro-intestinal tract. There is no medicine or method (apart from a prolonged fast) that can clean the small and large intestines so thoroughly as this practice. Saline irrigation removes partial and blocked matter in the gastro-intestinal tract and reestablishes natural and regular bowel function. It is therefore highly recommended for those with chronic constipation, gas, acidity, indigestion and other digestive ailments. It is beneficial for the kidneys and urinary systems,

preventing infection and kidney stones. Whereas the long version can help initiate elimination of many ailments in a short time, performed alone, Laghoo takes longer to achieve the same result.

Many diseases are directly or indirectly caused by accumulation of toxic waste matter in the intestines. This practice expels all impurities from the digestive tract and thereby helps to purify the blood system. This can result in a noticeable improvement in general health as well as helping to remove specific ailments. In particular, it has been found useful for the treatment of diabetes, hyperacidity, constipation, dysentery and many other ailments connected with impure blood such as bad complexion and excessive occurrence of boils and pimples. It can assist in removal of: excess stomach gases, chronic flatulence, pre-menstrual cramps, irregular menstruation, asthma, excess digestive and respiratory mucus, gall stones and kidney stones can be removed and prevented.

Healthy people can also do the practice, for they can improve their health, making them feel lighter, more cheerful and exhilarated with life. Furthermore, it will help to make their minds sharper. This is also a very important practice for those people who intend to perform intensive yogic techniques for higher awareness. Shankaprakshalana, by purifying the body, helps greatly to make the mind and body more receptive to higher vibrations.

The 5 Specific Yoga Asanas for Shankaprakshalana

The special postures and exercises are not described here in detail as they are taught in a retreat situation to those deemed ready for the cleansing practices. They involve some spinal and abdominal stretching, bending, twisting and massaging postures. They are not hard to do and people of any age can perform Shankaprakshalana without too much preparation.

The particular postures have been chosen to help open the different valves (or sphincters) in the alimentary canal to allow the water to flow through in a reduced time. The sphincters are at different points in the GIT and act as gates to separate one stage of the digestive process from another and to prevent back flow of different digestive substances.

Due to muscular tensions, emotional tensions to mental tensions, our bodies can become blocked along the food passage. At each stage of our digestive system, tension can build up. Some people tend to accumulate their tensions primarily in the stomach region and therefore the pyloric valve may be the most troublesome. Some people may have a blockage at the ileocecal valve. Others at the colon or anus. At the anus there are two sphincters, an inner and an outer, and this is why so many people today are constipated and have so much trouble with this particular orifice. Normally these sphincters (except the very last one) are controlled involuntarily by the body's own timing and control systems. But what happens after many years of neglect and bodily abuse, is that they lose their natural function and the system starts to block up.

The salty water going through along with the postures performed, alternatively relax and stimulate these valves and their corresponding nervous control systems, giving you more voluntary control and returning the involuntary activities back to normal.

The physical postures, along with all the breathing in and out being done in the 3 - 4 hours it may take to finish the technique, massages those valves and all the internal organs. Originally in the 1960's, when Swami Satyananda Saraswati started teaching the practice, he indicated that 16 - 25 cups was sufficient to get clean, and this may have been the case for relatively healthy, young vegetarian Swamis living in the Indian Ashram situation. But it is this author's experience, having taught this technique for many years to not-so-healthy, not-so-vegetarian westerners, that 30 cups of water would usually be the average minimum. Repeating the technique annually, or biannually, will reduce the time and water needed to become clean.

Time and Frequency

Under prescribed therapeutic purposes Laghoo may be done daily. For general well being, once or twice a week is sufficient. Once learned, Laghoo may be done at home unassisted on a regular basis. Once familiar with the practice, Laghoo Shankaprakshalana should only take about 20 minutes to drink the 6 - 8 cups, do all the exercises and to get the water to start moving out.

The full Shankaprakshalana should only ever be done a maximum of twice a year. Traditionally it's only done at the change of the seasons. One time being the end of summer to give the body gets a new mucus lining for winter, and the second time at the end of winter, to strip off the mucus lining, making oneself light and clear for summer. It's a very strong practice and a very effective practice. If performed with the right attitude and in the right situation it is no way dangerous or harsh on the body. It's like stripping down a whole motor car, flushing it through and cleaning every little part with a toothbrush and blowing out the small valves and the orifices, putting it back together, resting for a while to let things settle, and then afterwards driving very carefully whilst 'running in'. But you wouldn't want to do that too often, otherwise the engine just becomes worn from over servicing AND... all that must be done under the guidance of a fully qualified mechanic!

Problems Encountered

Sometimes on the first few attempts, the flow of the water may become blocked along the way at your points of tension and may not feel like coming out by the 6th cup. On such occasions, it is better to continue on, drinking a few more cups and doing the exercises until enough pressure has built up for you to 'burst forth'. Sometimes a good brisk walk after the 8th cup will relax things to get a movement.

The paragraphs following refer only to the Full Poorna Shankaprakshalana version. They are transcripts from talks given to a group of yoga students present at a cleansing retreat and are therefore highly context specific. They are shared here for the benefit of yoga students and teachers who may be interested in the deeper nature of the more advanced cleansing practices, particularly Shankaprakshalana.

The Physical Marathon

Due to the amount of exercising being done during the full Shankaprakshalana, some people may tend to tire after a while. The teacher guiding the session has to be able to help people through their low periods to find a 'second wind'. Also the teacher has to have the final say during the session regarding many variables which may need to be adjusted and eventually as to when people finish off. If they see you getting a bit spaced out and walking off to the river instead of the toilet, they will bring you back to reality! Or someone may be getting high blood pressure so they'll be stopped. They may need to stop people from getting neurotic about getting clean.

By drinking 20, 30, 40 cups of salt water, this is completely stripping clean the G.I.T (gastro intestinal tract). The G.I.T. is lined with mucus to help protect it from internal toxins and food by-products, and to trap unwanted germs and things from being absorbed into the body. Normally, in a healthy person, most of the wastes are eliminated daily by the natural processes of the bowel but low grade food, sedentary lifestyle or gradual organic breakdown can cause malfunction of the digestive system causing a lessening of normal eliminatory cleansing.

The walls of the intestines are convoluted or concertined in shape, and within these small pockets, it is possible that small particles of undigested food and rubbish brought into the body can become lodged, perhaps for years. During Shankaprakshalana these pockets are completely cleaned out and it has been known for people to pass deeply buried particles like seeds or husks even after 25 cups! If the pockets and lining of the G.I.T are cleaned properly on a day to day or weekly basis by the combination of good food and good exercise, then the accumulations upon the intestinal walls become like an old rusting metal pipe, where the rust and scale builds up on the inside of the pipeline, gradually reducing the diameter, which reduces the flow, which increases the build up, which reduces the flow ... etc. ... etc. etc. It can take quite some exercising and drinking to soften and dislodge this lifetime build up of junk.

In the beginning, after 4 - 6 cups, semi-solid matter is passed, then after 8 -10 cups it starts to become quite liquid. This is the first phase. Most people power into this first part and have no problems once they get going.

After this phase, a strong yellow liquid will continue to be passed for quite some time, and it's during this time that the real cleansing and stripping of the mucus lining within the system begins. There is also bile and other stale digestive substances being cleansed from the ducts feeding from the liver, gall bladder and pancreas.

Sometime within the second phase, depending on one's stamina, mental attitude and internal condition, is when many people begin to tire and want to give up. All they are passing is yellow liquid and they think they'll never get clean. It's like 'hitting the wall' in a marathon race, but if you can push through it, and keep going just a bit more, the cleansing really begins to go deeper than just the G.I.T. Due to a process of osmosis through the intestinal walls the blood begins to become purified and the major organs of the body start to give up their chronic toxins. This happens because, normally the walls of the intestines absorb the nutrients into the blood stream from the food. But in Shankaprakshalana, with the salty water passing through the bowels, the direction of nutrient flow is reversed, thereby drawing toxins from the blood into the bowels and out via the anus. This is truly the most wonderful trick that Shankaprakshalana plays upon the body.

At this stage the liquid becomes a pale yellow, and will continue like that for quite some time until eventually becoming clearer and clearer. At that stage you know you're really clean. Once the liquid being passed becomes as clear as the liquid going in, that's the end of the practice. Continuing on past that stage would serve no purpose.

The time it takes to get fully clean, and the time which one can continue for, depends on many things, such as. physical fitness, emotional stability, number of times one has done the practice, internal blockages, remnant infections, drug deposits (legal and illegal) etc. The symptoms of constipation and impure blood like, bad breath, pimples, scanty or irregular periods, mental overload, repressed anger, depression, hormonal imbalances, anemia, hepatitis, chronic infections, migraines, etc., mean that the body has not been cleansing in the past. Such people may not get clean the first time they do Shankaprakshalana before their stamina runs out and the teacher stops them. It may take several cleansing attempts to get completely clean. But is important to realise that there are no failures. If after even 40 cups the liquid is still yellow and everyone else is finished, it doesn't matter. You have done your best given your situation. Just realising how

much junk one has consumed and accumulated inside, and resolving to eat and live better from hereafter, is a worthwhile goal to work towards in the next year.

Finishing Off

On a Shankaprakshalana retreat, people finish at different times, depending on their speed or working and their stamina, and how clean they can get before tiredness takes over.

After the practice is finished, that is either when you are running clear, or when the teacher and you have decided you've done enough, Kunjal Kriya is performed once, maybe twice depending on how well it is done and then Jala Neti is done once or maybe twice. This concludes the physical cleansing practices and one can be sure the body is pretty clean from top to bottom.

Yoga Nidra - Yogic Deep Relaxation

Then one must do a 45 minute Yoga Nidra or deep relaxation session. You must relax deeply after all those exercises and drinking and give the body a complete rest, but must not to sleep for at least 3 hours after finishing Shankaprakshalana. If a person sleeps soon afterwards, they can go into laziness and depression for a day or 2, and this is definitely not the idea. During that Yoga Nidra, the teacher will time each person, and discharge them after 45 minutes to go to the kitchen. They will also make sure they do not sleep. That 45 minutes is one of the best rests the body will ever have. It's completely and totally and utterly empty. Completely at peace within itself. It doesn't have the slightest work to do internally except the absolute basics of blood and breath work.

The Special Meal

After the 45 minute deep relaxation one must eat a special meal prepared specially for the body in its empty and pure state. This meal must be taken within 1 hour of completing the cleansing. The meal is boiled rice with dhal (that is yellow split peas) and ghee. Nothing else. No salt, no spices, no vegies. It's called Kicheree. Kicheree is known by the yogis to be the most basic staple for the human body. It includes only the simplest and most easily assimilated vegetable proteins and the most necessary carbohydrates. The ghee is put in to reline the G.I.T. with a thin fatty coating to protect the newly cleaned internal linings of the body from stomach acids and to help the first few meals to move all the way down into the bowel. It's just like baby food, and that's what the body needs when it's starting from nothing again. One has to eat as much of this as you can stuff in. The digestive system has to be packed right up full. If you only eat a little bit, the stomach will shrink and this is not desirable.

In concept, Shankaprakshalana is an expansive practice. It's meant to release restrictions of body and mind and expand the capacity for life force and consciousness. During the exercising and drinking, one completely empties out, opens up any blockages, expands ones inner capacity and rejuvenates the internal food factory, so it is important not to let the intestines shrink down in size afterwards.

After Shankaprakshalana, in the following weeks, the appetite generally increases, and so too does efficient assimilation of that food. As well, expression of that energy should increase. That's what many people come to the cleansing retreats for. They want to get out of depression, they want to get out of constipation, they want more energy, they want higher inspiration. These are just some of the benefits of Shankaprakshalana.

The kicheree of rice, dhal and ghee, has been boiled up for hours and is used like packing to fill up the intestines. One must keep eating it until really full. One must eat as much as they possibly you can. Two, three bowls of it. Really pack the digestive system. You may not feel like eating at all, and you may not feel like being full up and bloated, but you must - just this once! Then at dinner time one has another bowl, or couple of bowls with some steamed vegies added for a bit of taste. These first few meals of kicheree are the easiest stuff to digest and it helps the body to rebuild its internal substances like the enzymes, bowel flora, electrolytes, bacteria, anti bodies, etc. What it also helps to do is to reprogramme the previously 'twisted' taste buds. If you were a sugar addict or a salt addict or had a rotten sense of smell or taste before Shankaprakshalana, you will be amazed at how your lifelong preferences may have changed in just one day! But it is just not one day in which this practice works. It is only the beginning. It just cleans the slate for you to begin again and 'turn over a new page' in the dietary novel of your life. Shankaprakshalana the practice doesn't do it all for you. It definitely helps start afresh, but then you must take that new approach and apply your own self discipline within daily life.

Rest after the Practice

Having eaten the special food to fill up the stomach, one rests for the afternoon. However, it is important that you don't sleep for at least three hours. You should rest without doing any physical or mental activity. After this time has elapsed, one may sleep if necessary. But don't sleep too long. Another meal of the kicheree must be eaten for dinner and some time later the student can sleep for the whole night.

The Mind and the Mental Cleansing

And here we come to the strangest part of the practice. It is important to understand that Shankaparakshalana is not just a physical practice. It's not just a physical clean out. It's very much a mental and an emotional cleansing technique. But one can't really know exactly what that might involve until they actually do it. It doesn't mean people should start having great cathartic emotional experiences all over the place, that's not the idea. One must try and keep them self together, but occasionally if people have a little bit of trouble or they get a bit teary then the teacher just has to keep the spirits up. Many women have commented that it's a lot like having a baby! The stages one goes through like: hope and expectation of the unknown, fear of difficulties which may arise, fluctuating feelings between positivity and negativity, barriers of pain, past blockages resurfacing, going beyond one's present limitations to discover a greater life force, and eventually a birth of something new and fresh.

The nature of the mind, our thoughts, feelings and the all the process of the body are interrelated. The non-physical elements of Shankaparakshalana are just as important as the physical ones. It is important and relevant to examine the way in which the mind and the feelings play their tricks; the way in which the resistances and the blockages form; and how all these things can be understood, released and transcended. One must always remember that Yoga is not just a physical practice. Its a total practice. It is holistic, spiritual, integrated, and self-transformational. Shankaparakshalana is the same. It is not just water and exercises, bowels and feces. Like all other yoga methods it is complete and holistic. It aims to purify body as well as mind, the heart as well as the spirit. This purification doesn't just last the few days of the retreat. The benefits of it go on for months and years. Twelve months later one can look back and remember the first day after it, and then reflect on the first month after it, and then the 6 months after. You can definitely look back and see the changes in your self and your life. These changes can be attributed to the changes of perception that come about with the practice of Shankaparakshalana. In the final assessment, that's what really changes the most during all the drinking and exercising. What really changes is one's perception or awareness. Perception about yourself, perception about others, perception about the world, perceptions about life. But the great gains made in one retreat, or in one week, or in one month can surreptitiously slip away. In 12 months you may notice that some of those psychological and physical gremlins from the back of the mind have snuck back into your life. This is inevitable. And what this shows us is, that we do need to continually keep our new found awareness up front. Daily, weekly, monthly, yearly reminders are necessary to 'polish up' and keep internally clean. This is the true purpose of the daily Integral Yoga sadhana. Sadhanas (practices) such as Yoga Nidra, Asanas, Pranayama, Antar Mouna, Mantra Japa, all these practices are just like little daily Shankaparakshalanas.

During Shankaparakshalana, one's whole life seems to come before the eyes, and everything is seen in a totally different and new way. And this is often the trigger for intense healing. Physical and mental healing. The salt water's not healing - it's not the medicine. The exercises aren't healing - they're just moving the muscles and the organs. It's really the mind, which is starting to see things in a new light, which starts the healing. It's the release of concepts and blockages, not just blockages of energy, but the blockages in consciousness - blockages of spiritual vision. The false perceptions of consciousness create the blockages in the energy flow which in turn have created the illnesses and the diseases of mind and body which we have. According to yoga , it's these patterns of consciousness and blockages of energy which create all the suffering and pain, unhappiness and ill health on this planet. So Shankaparakshalana should be used as a 2 - 4 hour meditation practice. Because it is so long, and because it penetrates so deeply, and because there is no escape once started, it is particularly effective in changing awareness. It should be treated as an opportunity to look deeply into oneself and to move the mind in ways that go beyond the little barriers that may present themselves during the time of the technique.

In yogic philosophy there is a beautiful concept which is the philosophy of Samskaras. The Sanskrit word 'Samskaras' would translate most accurately as 'archetypes or thought forms'. These are like little seeds in which the mind stores it's impressions, it's thoughts and feelings. Samskaras are also called Karmas or Vasanas, meaning little entities of action that live within us. Karma means action. Thoughts are actions too. Only very subtle, but none the less, they are actions of the mind. Vasanas means modifications of the mind. Some are dormant like seeds ungerminated, which have not yet even begun to function. Some are just starting to sprout and function through the processes of thought and action, and some are fully functioning. They are the ones that we are living out now, here today, the ones which are currently motivating us on a conscious level in our present daily life. All past memories are Samskaras, all present actions are Samskaras, all future possibilities are Samskaras. So what people call the future, is really just dormant Samskaras which are brewing away now, but which have not yet manifested outwardly. But still they are there, waiting for stimulation and awakening. Sometimes it is possible to have a flash of them. One may think - "Oh I'll probably be doing that in a few years". That thought or desire or realisation is just something within which needs expressing, and sooner or later that Samskara or desire comes into being. So people think they've seen the future but all that is really be seen is the "something" inside them at the present which is not yet manifest in form. The yogis have always said that the past, the present and the future are all present now - some of which is manifest, and some of which is not.

So this concept of Samskaras states that we have stored away within us, all the events of our past which are creating our

present and our future. Now the way to have a better present and a better future, is to see the nature of the mind and how the interaction between Samskaras causes thoughts, feelings and actions for the future. There is no need for past life therapy, hypnosis, rebirthing or Freudian Regression Therapy to get happy today and to reframe ones life for tomorrow. None of these things are really necessary. That's not what Shankaparakshalana is about either - delving into the past and stirring up all the past 'stuff'.

Yoga in general, and the cleansing practices in particular, are about reframing or realising the true nature of the self now and taking that into the future. It's all about just dealing with the present, so that when the past comes up forget about it, just get on with drinking the water and doing the asanas and going to the toilet. When the future comes up just forget about that too, just keep on drinking the water It's that simple.

During Shankaparakshalana, and indeed throughout ones life at anytime, when the mind and the feelings and the body start to play their games, they start to interrupt ones equilibrium, ones meditative actions and ones spiritual processes. At these times and at all times, one must have the ability to be the witness, to identify with a part of the mind which says - "Ah, that's just a Samskara, that's just one of my internal impressions bubbling to the surface. I don't need to stop and dwell on it." The worst thing you can do is to get caught up, or pay energy to that surfacing impression. If it is fed it will grow and it will become a deeper neurosis.

The whole concept of meditation is to come to understand the nature of the mind - not to conquer the mind by way of force or empty the mind of substance. One must begin to see how all the fears, phobias, sufferings, problems, head trips, doubts and frustrations, and the illnesses that we have are purely and utterly the products of our mind sets. They are a product of our own individual thought processes, of concepts, of belief systems, that is - the way we think things are. During Shankaparakshalana one is really shown that its not the way they think it is. Whatever Samskaras surface for each person only God knows. Everyone has a range of Samskaras arising during every yoga practice, but how they handle them, that is the greatest challenge.

After Shankaparakshalana one comes out the other side feeling - "Wow, not only did I get through that Samskara and that one and that one but now I know how to get through the next one and the next one and the next one". The process is eternally the same, only the substance may be different. It's like driving. It doesn't matter which town you're driving through, the scenery is different but the driving is the same. The road rules are the same, the car is the same, it's just variations in steering and braking and clutching and accelerating. You are the driver, not the car. You must concentrate on driving as best you can. You can't afford to become caught up in being the tourist or you may crash or get a speeding ticket. Therefore, in the same way, don't get caught up in the scenery of your daily life. The answer to relief of your conflicts and sufferings is to try to be in Chidakasha (the inner space of witnessing) during Shankaparakshalana. Be watching the mind, watching the thoughts, watching the feelings, watching the actions of the body, but remember, you are the witness, not the doer. You are the driver, not the car. You are better in control of the mind by detachedly witnessing it than by being involved with its random wanderings.

The process of drinking the water is just a trigger, just any yoga technique, like pranayama, yoga nidra, like mantra, like meditation - like going for a bush walk, like having a meal, a cup of tea. These are just methods to allow one to see what the mind is made of and how it works. This is by far the greatest benefit of Shankaparakshalana, the realisations that occur. But they are not just intellectual realisations. It's a total body experience. They are total mental and emotional and physical realisations. They have to be, because that's what you are feeling during the practice. But there should also be transcendental experiences. Experiences which are above and beyond your present experience. One may not even realise what some of them are until sometime afterwards, as some of these transformations occur on many different levels.

Yoga and Meditation work on many different levels. During Shankaparakshalana it's important that one has a resolve or an aim, just like the Sankalpa we use in Yoga Nidra. And one must keep remembering this resolve. People don't decide to do Shankaparakshalana because they want to give themselves a hard time. (Well..... maybe a few do!) They choose to do Shankaparakshalana because at some level they are interested in self awareness, self transcendence, growth, change, healing and meditation. This resolve one makes before Shankaparakshalana, and which you will need to remind yourself of many times during it and even after it is your own answer to the question: "Why am I doing this"? During the practice when you feel like giving up, or feel like escaping, or feel like suppressing, it will be very helpful to remember it. Shankaparakshalana is an opportunity to deepen your process of resolve, any resolve. This is something you will begin to realise, just how strong you can be, how damn committed to something you can be when you set your mind to a positive goal. And believe me, for some time after Shankaparakshalana, one feels that nothing in the world will ever stop them again.

So Shankaparakshalana is simple, really. It's simple in concept, it's simple in execution. The only thing that makes it hard is the head trips, is the mind sets, resistance, doubts, fluctuations of aim and goal and purpose. It really isn't that hard. If one can understand that the unconscious mind is vast - it is enormous. Of the total of the mind - we use on average they say, only 10%, that is we are only 10% conscious. So what about the other 90%? It's laying dormant. From the animal

instincts, the deeper things that we can't understand, the millions of things which we don't know, the past impressions, all sorts of stuff in the back of the mind; nobody expects you to clear all that in one session or in one year. It's a very big process. It's bigger than just one Shankaparakshalana retreat itself, but if one can learn through Shankaparakshalana or learn through other yoga practices - the method, the process, the way, the framework of handling oneself, then that lesson will last forever.

Shankaparakshalana does not show anything other than the whole of the self. The lower, grubby self and the higher, more pure self. It's a very quick, powerful and effective way of doing that. On the purely physical level, full Shankaparakshalana, is the equivalent of a 40 day fast. Just think about that. 40 days. 6 weeks. A month and a half. If one just lived on pure water and just moped around in a bush cabin for 40 days - one would go through exactly the same things, but it would take forty days and nights. (Of course it is a bit hard to accurately quantify and equate these things, but biologically and scripturally, 40 days is considered the maximum time the body and mind can cleanse themselves before going into a completely destructive spiral). During a fast, one can get nausea, pimples, they might pass deeply embedded bowel matter, rashes, headaches, diarrhea, constipated, mental problems, and a bit of insanity too. Everything would have to come up in 40 days. How can one imagine what a 40 day fast would be like?

In Shankaparakshalana, all those potentials rise and are witnessed in just 3 or 4 hours, so its quite condensed. And the thing that really saves you all the pain, is the state of mind in which you do it. The practice itself is not hard - it's the state of mind, which can carry you through with minor hassles or can sink you into difficulties. And that state of mind is the real training - that's what one really gains on a mental level. This skill is learnt forever, it will penetrate so deeply it will never be forgotten.

During and after Shankaparakshalana there will be changes. Changes in oneself. The world has not changed, but for the individual who has spent the day doing Shankaparakshalana their perceptions about themselves and those around them, and the life and society around them will have changed. I give you full warning that when you leave the retreat and go back to your houses and your family, they will think another being has returned, and you will think other strange beings are living in your house!!!

Shankaparakshalana and yoga practices are all about change and one must just trust in the age old practices and trust in themselves that these changes of perception are for the better. They are all for the evolution of consciousness.

After the Retreat

Most importantly, after Shankaparakshalana, one must strictly follow the restricted diet for a minimum of the first 7 days. If you cannot abide by these food restrictions, then you must not do Shankaparakshalana. The diet in itself is not particularly strict, but your adherence to it, and your own self discipline, need to be strict or you will just create a recipe for personal damage. It is just cutting out a few non-essential foods for the first seven days. After the complete cleansing the body has had, it is natural not to fill it up again with heavy, hard to digest foods. Many people who already eat a healthy diet in their life, will not find too many difficulties with these food guidelines. But perhaps those who have not cleaned up their eating act, will now need to reassess their shopping, cooking and eating habits.

Due to the new and sensitive nature of the digestive system, it must be carefully looked after for the first week. There are certain foods which must not be consumed until the body has regenerated all its necessary substances. Failure to observe these guidelines may cause any symptom from a headache to a fever, or a stomach ache or diarrhea. As well, there are certain foods which you may find you will never want to eat again, and some which you may now feel like taking up. In short there is a reappraisal of what is really necessary and beneficial from the body's point of view.

The Restricted First Week

The first week after the practice is very important, not only from a safety and health point of view, but also from the new direction perspective. There is a list of allowances and restrictions which is not included here. It should be kept in your kitchen and referred to before every meal you eat in the following week. If you are eating out, you should be extremely careful to inquire about the substances included within your food order. Be careful and wise not to get carried away with the festivities and overdo it. As well as certain foods to eat and not eat, there are other special restrictions and guidelines for the first week concerning lifestyle patterns which are not included here.

Communication with the Teacher

After Shankaparakshalana, it is essential that one keeps in contact with the yoga teacher who guided the practice. This is important because there is no-one else on this planet who understands both the technique, the by products, the side effects, as well as who saw your own performance during that retreat. If, for any reason, you need guidance about your physical health, mental health or spiritual health after the cleansing retreat, that is the person most likely to understand where you are at and what you are going through. It is also important not to seek health advice or council from anyone other than that yoga teacher. It is not that the practice of Shankaparakshalana needs to be a big secret, it's that it is a time

honoured and potent yoga practice, and so, if any situations arise coming from it, they must be appreciated and managed from within the yoga framework. One should not seek advice from friends, health magazines, naturopaths, doctors, even other yoga teachers who haven't fully experienced the practice itself. They are bound to have a different perspective and not one based on knowledge of the technique and your particular performance during it.

This is a true story where one of the students who had just done a Shankaprasnalana retreat went into village health food shop a few days later to get some herbal tea. The health food shop owner said: "You look really great, what have been doing this last week?"

The student replied: "I went and did a yoga cleansing retreat".

"Oh yeah, what does that involve?" asked the shop owner.

"Well, we drank all this salt water and pushed it out our bowels for 4 hours ... etc. etc. " as the proud student went on to explain the process to all who were in the shop!

Then the health food manager gets on the phone and rings his friend in Queensland, some expert vitamin-specialist-naturopath to tell him all about this woman standing in his shop who had done this amazing and unbelievable thing.

The specialist said: "What! You can't do that. You shouldn't strip off the mucus lining of the digestive system. You could catch pneumonia, and besides your electrolytes will all be imbalanced because of consuming all that salt." The shop owner then went on to lambaste the student about the terribly stupid thing she had done.

And this poor yoga student is saying: "Hang on, hang on. But you just said I looked really good."

"No! My friend says you need these vitamin pills to get back to normal again."

The poor student was a bit freaked out at their panic and rang the teacher to discuss this conflict. There was nothing wrong with her. She was healthy and happy and progressing along nicely. But the damage was done. The reputation of yoga as something weird and dangerous swept throughout that town in just 7 days.

And all that was because the student said, "I went and did this yoga practice and pushed salt water through me for 4 hours". The man in the health food shop and his friend the naturopath didn't know the first thing about Shankaprasnalana. For this reason, it is important to protect oneself against others people's ignorance and interference in this practice. They weren't present, they didn't do it, they don't know about yoga cleansing, and they therefore don't have a clue what they are talking about in this context. So the moral of the story is - Don't involve other people who have no understanding or need to know, in your post-Shankaprasnalana period. Even your family and closest friends, you may tell them a few of the things that went on, but I definitely suggest you do not attempt to relive your deepest, most personal experiences during Shankaprasnalana. You may find that they are at least, unbelieving, or at most, disgusted, frightened and turned off the idea of Yoga cleansing forever!!!

Altered Consciousness After Shankaprasnalana

One thing to be forewarned about, which may occur in the post-Shankaprasnalana period, are the altered states of consciousness which may arise. After Shankaprasnalana, one can feel quite normal, but once students leave the seclusion and quiet of the retreat or ashram situation, they must go back out into the world. The process of Shankaprasnalana is a very condensed, awakening practice, yet out there in the world not much has changed in those couple of days. So one's perception has changed and everything seems different but in fact it is your self awareness that is different. Yoga works differently upon certain types of people, and sometimes its results are very subtle and sometimes they are very radical. Sometimes change happens so slowly, so surreptitiously, so beautifully, that often one doesn't realise they have changed much until they bump into someone who hasn't seen them for a while and they say, "Wow, what's happened to you? You seem so different". Alternatively, great quantum leaps can occur when you least expect them, and in those instances, you certainly know that things have changed. So does everyone else around you! Often when one returns to day to day life after Shankaprasnalana, they feel like they've been to the moon and back.

The need to express oneself where previously this was not done may also arise. It is not the yogic philosophy to suppress things. No-one expects yoga students to be perfect, nor always in control, but it is better that they express rather than suppress. Of course it is best if they can witness in a detached way, but this is not always possible nor appropriate. Whether it's holiness or unholiness, it's all right. It's all coming from within us and it needs expressing. So, after Shankaprasnalana one might feel like expressing a few things that haven't been expressed before in life.

Through the practices of Yoga one begins to find oneself, and each person must be truthful to them self and that which they believe is their higher self. No compromise. You may or may not know what is meant by the term higher self. But if

and when you get a glimpse of that, then you will always want to hold onto and aspire towards that. Many things in ourselves and in our lives get in the way of true and pure expression of this higher self and this can be very frustrating. The truth of the self should never be buried nor suppressed, and to live that is often very hard. On return from Shankaprakshalana, one must just try their best to manage their life and balance their expression between the resolve of higher spiritual nature and what the rest of the world would like us to be.

From the yogi's point of view, many things in the world, our society, our religions, our media, politics, and lots more is topsy turvy. Much of it is in fact a complete inversion of the truth. Sadly, we must accept that most things in the world do not run according to the spiritual laws, to the nature of human truth. As one begins to wake up to the new realities, and as one develops and awakens more true, spiritual, human compassion, it is easy to get depressed about it. There can come a tendency to want to change the world, to shake everyone and say "Wake up, wake up, can't you see the truth, I've got the truth". Well don't be a zealot like that. If one knows something is truthful, live that truth, work for that truth and others can take it or leave it.

To achieve anything of any value in life, it requires dedication over a period of time. Depending upon the height of your goal and your efforts towards it, eventually your dreams and visions can be attained. One must keep their eyes always fixed on the goal, with resolve. Please don't forget it. Please reinforce it everyday. That's the purpose of Sankalpa in Yoga Nidra. But also Shankaprakshalana can give an aspirant more than just a little Sankalpa. It can give one a life time Sankalpa, a lifetime direction. When one touches in oneself that which is very, very deep there is a realisation that it's always been there. It's not something the salt water put there; but the salt water brings it out. Once this truth has been touched and known, please don't let it become clouded again, don't bury it, hide it or suppress it. And certainly don't let anyone else do that to it.

Looking After the New

If one can touch the human spirit for even just a brief moment, then they're not asleep any more. You can doze off for a short time, you can pretend to hide, but once revealed and known, that spirit of your self cannot be forgotten. It can't be un-known. To develop and feed this new spiritual entity, just like feeding a newborn baby, one must constantly remind them self of their spiritual being. That's what all the yoga tools are for - to discover, develop and express this spiritual nature of our personality. Everyday, when doing sadhana; Be reminded of the inner shakti or energy when doing Pranayama. Be reminded of the heart space when doing So-Ham. Be reminded of your Mantra or your symbol when chanting or visualising at the eyebrow centre. Be reminded of a clean, healthy body and a lofty, inspired mind. To keep this feeling alive, to keep the spirit charged, one must remind themselves daily of the spirit of Shankaprakshalana.

That special awareness, the awakened state of consciousness will continue to be cultivated by sadhana, by doing the practices. It is ones spiritual duty to protect that new found awareness which may come through yoga sadhana. Like a small plant, sometimes it needs to be protected from the elements of the surrounding environment. Sometimes it needs to be staked it so that it doesn't blow over. Sometimes it needs to be fertilised, sometimes it needs to be pruned it, sometimes it needs to be weeded.

Swamiji talks a lot about spiritual weeding. Cleaning out the cupboards. The mental cupboard, the emotional cupboard, the bowel cupboard. Cleaning out the cupboards is a constant job for the yogi. Getting rid of old junk, just like all that stuff in the garage, you've been storing and meaning to take to the tip. Sometimes it is called renunciation. Whether it be renouncing old possessions, renouncing old friends, renouncing old head trips and mind sets. Who needs them? They're old stuff, you know. They're part of our past, or childhood school days, or whatever, but not relevant now. Perhaps they are holding you back from growing up. It may seem ruthless or cold, but that will always need to be tempered with the softness, warmth, compassion, devotion and service that an aspirant must try to express in their life. If friends or family aren't supportive of ones new found spiritual direction, then leave them behind, or at least distance yourself from them.

At some stage in your spiritual evolution old things must be let go of. You have to practice with the little irrelevant things first, so that when the big losses occur, they don't bowl you over with shock. To attend to your new spiritual directions in life, some old baggage, both personal and impersonal, must be jettisoned. So nurture that tiny pearl of spiritual truth within yourself and don't try to shine the light of your own truth to people who are blind to the light. Keep it for those who want to see the light.

The True Goal and Purpose of Yoga

In the ancient yoga sutras of the great sage Patanjali, the primary definition and description of Yoga is: "Yoga chitta vritti nirodha" which means: "Yoga is the stopping (or blocking) of the patterns of consciousness". Many people understand that to mean that Yoga is stillness of the mind or inner peace. Either way, all the techniques and practice of Yoga that we do is to go beyond the fluctuations of the mind. Yoga or Union is to identify with that which doesn't change, or come and go. The state of Yoga is something which is not really created, not sustained and not destroyed. The realisation of Yoga is a realisation of a state of consciousness which always exists.

So the state of yoga is what we aspire to. The practices of yoga are what we do every day to move towards that supreme goal. Shankaprakshalana is one of the most important ways to purify mind and body to allow the consciousness to fly higher into meditation and beyond. The Yogi aims to live and to be consolidated in that ultimate state of meditation, not just in a cave in isolation, but within everyday life. We may not succeed all day, every day, but that's always our aim. Many times we watch the world around us just caught up in the three states; laziness, passion and equilibrium. But there is a fourth state beyond those three which is a transcendental state. The practices of yoga exist to assist us in that search for the fourth state. During the course of one's life, one may have brief flashes and sometimes extended periods of this transcendental state. It may come spontaneously or it may be created by application. That's the aim of the yogi or the conscious meditator to help accelerate the evolution of individual and planetary consciousness, No matter what you call it: Inner Peace, Supreme Knowledge, God, Allah, Omnipotence, Self Realisation, Nirvana, Buddhahness - it's all just one and the same - transcendentalism of the 3 fluctuating states of consciousness. All aspirants in all the spiritual cultures strive towards this goal.

FAQ's on shankaprakshalana cleansing

Q. I think that long salt water cleansing technique sounds completely dangerous and irresponsible. Has medical science heard about this and shown it to be safe?

A. This is a very common and perfectly normal response about something which most modern people would consider as quite radical. There are a number of issues which need to be explained about such a technique. Firstly, your rational concerns about its safety need to be separated from your own irrational fears and medical ignorance.

Firstly, it does sound dangerous on first impression since the only reference point most people would have is to drinking sea water, which we have all been told will make us very sick even in small quantities or will kill us in excess. But, the first thing which makes Shankaprakshalana different and safer is that the water drunk is "normal saline" - that is the same saltiness as the human blood stream which is only one quarter as salty as the sea. Drinking and drinking and drinking lots of fresh water would either bloat the body or cause excessive urination. However Shankaprakshalana does not cause this to happen either, because when the "normal saline" water is drunk, it does not get absorbed from the stomach or go into the kidneys and bladder. It just passes through the stomach into the small intestines, travels through the large intestines and out the rectum just as it went in - along with the addition of any bowel wastes collected along the way. If the mixture is made correctly and the exercises performed correctly, you don't get thirsty or feel bloated. You can drink normal saline without any detriment or any advantage since the body does not respond to that passing through which is the same as itself. Doing the exercises simply opens the alimentary valves to pass the water through in the minimum time. The exercises massage the digestive tract and all the internal organs so as to loosen them up and give up their toxic build up. I hope that takes away some of the misunderstanding and fear.

Secondly, medical science may not know of this particular method for achieving bowel cleanliness but they do in fact use a similar process prior to certain operations where bowel cleanliness is imperative. In a hospital situation, the patient is given a saline drip into the mouth and special drugs to relax all the alimentary valves. This is continued until the excreted liquid is clean. Sounds similar doesn't it? But our method is done willfully and in much less time with no drugs. The principal is the same, the physiology is the same but pre-operative cancer patients are in no fitness to do 2 hours of exercises! Were the medicos to investigate the yoga method I am sure they would find absolutely no physiological reason to conclude it is dangerous. They may have the same surprise and some shock at the yogic methodology but their training would lead them to understand the bodily chemistry of Shankaprakshalana is perfectly safe.

But it is not just the water, the salt and the bowels in question here. It is the mind, the feelings and the social attitudes which shock people much more. Your distrust and disgust is perfectly understandable considering the average person's ignorance of their bodily functions and their innate fear of stirring up the passions and repressed emotional matter of the psyche. A little bit of medical knowledge can easily take away one's medical doubts about the technique, but only by personally confronting and gradually working through the psychological fears can they eventually be resolved and that question be answered to your own satisfaction.

Q. When stripping all the material from inside the bowels during Shankaprakshalana, what about the good types of bacteria, the bowel flora that we need in there?

A. It comes back soon enough, only it comes back from the body's own remanufacturing system. The body can remake that which is necessary for its internal environment from scratch. And that's what is really magic about Shankaprakshalana. It is going back to square one. It takes the body right back to a baby's state, complete purity and neutrality. Pure homeostasis. Homeostasis means stabilisation and a state of initial balance. The foods which are eaten directly after Shankaprakshalana, are the most important type of building blocks to start the body regenerating what was stripped out, and it also helps to reset the correct mechanisms of digestive function. Also, the sorts of food that one is allowed to eat and not allowed to eat in the first week are restricted so that the body has the best possible chance to

rebuild its primary functions in the right way, even better than they were before the practice. The first meal in your new diet starts with simple proteins and carbohydrates to rebuild those cells which the body will need to replenish first. You ask about the bacteria. Where have they come from in the first place? They were made in the bowel. They didn't come in from the food. True, some digestive substances we do need to import with our food, but after the big cleanse out of Shankaprakshalana it's not necessary to start with the external or complex things. One begins with the most basic foods and the basic internally made substances. The adult body has the capacity to regenerate what it needs to start afresh. Even the sick body can be stimulated to a better state than before the cleansing practice. So don't worry, in time, and as you gradually reintroduce the more exotic foods back into your diet all the necessary digestive components will be present as and when they are needed.

Q. Why do some people react emotionally during fasting and Shankaprakshalana?

A. A combination of three things - altered perception, greater self awareness, and repressed feelings which surface. All yoga practices change ones awareness and have this effect to differing degrees. Whether it's an elementary technique like 'Shavasana' (the Corpse Pose) or something more difficult like Sirshasana (the Headstand Pose) or something quite challenging, as Shankaprakshalana can be. For example, a student may think it is ridiculously simple to lay flat on the floor in Corpse Pose. They may think they are a pretty calm and relaxed person until 3 minutes, 10 minutes, 30 minutes of total physical stillness passes and then they start to get itchy, edgy, distracted, bored, angry, drowsy, etc. etc. Only by narrowing their field of self awareness to that simple yoga posture of stillness can that person realise just how nervy and distracted and easily bored they really are, and if they are of an unstable temperament, then their mind and feelings will go off on all kinds of tangents, just because of the simple posture of Shavasana. Yoga practice is a mirror. A mirror for whatever you have, whatever you are. It all comes to the surface due to the increased self awareness. That same effect is intensified many fold during Shankaprakshalana, as a person drinks maybe 20 - 50 cups of warm salty water!

It's quite funny really, watching your own mind and feelings whilst you perform the big salt water tea party - as we call it. People begin to get angry with themselves for having eaten so badly all their lives. They get angry with themselves for coming on the cleansing retreat instead of going to the beach that weekend and putting themselves through this great salt water marathon. Then they may get angry at the instructor for being, what they perceive to be, a mean, sadistic bastard! They get sad at the lack of self discipline they have exerted throughout their lives, sad at how old they feel after just 2 hours of hard work. They start to bargain with themselves and the instructors and even with God! They swear they'll never eat another Mars Bar again, just to stop, just to go and have a bite on an apple, just to lie down for a few minutes. They say "I don't really care if I get clean, any more". They promise never, ever, ever to sin again! It's not delirium, it's the mind just cleansing.

Why does the mind do it? It's just the nature of the animal. Inside us, is all our stuff. Our emotional stuff, all our mental impressions, beliefs, prejudices, our self love and our self hate, our love and hate for others - everything of an emotional nature is stored in both the mind and the body structure. All our experiences, good and bad are stored in the memory banks of experience. And if there's self resentment, or resentment for others, it'll come out when drinking the water. But some people don't see that resentment for what it is, that is their own inner conflicts, so they begin to resent the teacher or those around them. But the teacher is transcendent of all the emotional stuff going on around. It is his or her job to just keep people going with the practice so that their toxins, both physical and mental, come up and are literally passed out. Throughout Shankaprakshalana there are moments of intense self doubt, one has lows and highs. In four hours or whatever time it takes, one's whole digestive life passes before them! But it needn't be a big deal and a big catharsis for all to see and feel. Just keep it to yourself and keep going with a cool head. And that's the same lesson for life.

Q. With full Shankaprakshalana, once the water starts to run through, do you still need to keep doing the exercises all the time?

A. Yes. You usually need to keep reminding the bowel sphincters to stay open. Some people, usually the more skinny people, find they don't need to do much exercise to keep the bowels open. They just drink and start some asanas, and then they need to run.....! Others, who may be more tense or blocked, may need to go through the set of asanas continually to relax internally. They may get a temporary blockage and feel a bit bloated for a while and then it will clear. They must just keep exercising until this happens. It all depends a lot on personal make up and also experience with the technique. It depends on how much muscular tension there is in the body, how much constipation, how much build up of waste. If and when the mind and body are nicely receptive and relaxed, the sphincters may stay open with the minimum of exercising. Then you know you are just like a empty channel.

Hari Om Tat Sat