

THE TEACHINGS OF BUSHUNDA: THE FIVE CONCENTRATION SEALS
(pancha dharana mudra)
By Richard Rosen

Introduction

Because they can fly, birds are able to travel to the heavenly realms and converse with the gods, and so they have knowledge that is largely hidden from earth-bound humans. Of all the birds, the Crow (vayasa) is reputed to know the three greatest secrets. First, he knows the secret of longevity and so is called "long-lived" (chira jiva, from chira "existing from ancient times"). Next, because he's long-lived, he was present at the Creation of the world, and so he knows the secret of our origin. And finally, because he's also traveled to the underworld, he knows the secret of death.

In India certain people study the flight and cawing of Crow in order to predict the future, which is called the "science of the crow" (vayasa vidya). These crow-scientists have to be careful though: Crow knows he's being watched and listened to, and doesn't much like being spied on, so he sometimes flies erratically or makes nonsense noises just to throw the scientists off.

Bushunda and the Night of Brahma

One such crow is named Bushunda, who's actually a human that's assumed a crow's form and identity. He lives on the northern slope of Mount Meru, the holy mountain located at the exact center of the universe, it's estimated elevation 84,000 yojanas, or about 350,000 miles. His nest is on a branch of the Kalpa Tree (kalpa taru), also known as the Wishing Tree. Once upon a time many eons ago, the Wishing Tree grew on earth. Nobody then had any property or possessions, or did any hard work for that matter, because whenever someone wanted something, anything, all she had to do was find the Wishing Tree—easy enough, since it has gold and silver leaves and jewels for flowers—and wish for what she wanted. Unfortunately, as people became more ambitious and acquisitive, the Tree was taken away and planted on Meru, where now only the gods and their closest allies have access to it. Now kalpa literally means "rule" or "law," but it also names a period of time, estimated at four billion, three hundred and twenty million human years. This may seem like an eternity to us, but to Brahma, the creator, it's only one "day" and "night" in his life. It's estimated that Brahma's life span is 36,000 kalpas, which works out to 100 divine years. It's claimed—though it's not clear how anyone knows this—that we're now living in Brahma's fiftieth year. Anyway, every night, just before he goes to bed, Brahma destroys the universe, an event known as the Dissolution or Re-absorption (pralaya),

then he re-creates it after breakfast the next morning.

As you might have already guessed, Bushunda isn't your ordinary black bird. It's reported that he's achieved supreme peace and wisdom and lives in a perpetual state of samadhi. He's one of the very few chira jivas, which means—believe it or not—that he's lived through several kalpas! Because of this he's also what's called a "knower of three times" (trikala jnani), because he knows everything there is to know about the past, present, and future. How has he accomplished all this? Well, through the practice of pranayama, or as he says, by always contemplating the natural and effortless movement of the life-force. Bushunda he spends his days mostly resting happily in his nest, luxuriating in the bliss of his own true self. He only leaves his nest when Brahma's night arrives. While everything and everyone in existence is being wiped out, he survives because he knows an esoteric pranayama practice called the Five Concentration Seals (pancha dharana mudra). Each seal is dedicated to one of the traditional elements (bhuta)—Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Ether or Space—that make up the world. So, for example, when the dozen sons of the First Goddess, called Unbounded (aditi), scorch the earth with their burning rays, Bhushunda protects himself by bathing in the Water Concentration Seal. When hurricane winds uproot even the mountains and blow them away like dust, Bhushunda is steady as a rock in the Earth Concentration Seal. When the universal flood submerges everything, Bhushunda floats lightly on the surface of the water with the Air Concentration Seal. And when Brahma finally closes his eyes and the world winks out, Bhushunda falls into dreamless sleep at the foot of the god's bed. In the morning, Brahma awakes and begins fashioning the universe anew. Bhushunda too stirs, stretches, and yawns, and using only his amazing will power, re-creates his nest on the branch of the Kalpa Tree on Mount Meru. Then he returns home until it's time to leave again when the next Brahma night falls, in four billion, three hundred and twenty million years.

Adapted from Swami Sivananda, *The Science of Pranayama*, 106-107, and Swami Venkatesananda (translator), *The Concise Yoga Vashishtha*, 279-280

The Five Concentration Seals (pancha dharana mudra)

From the Akasha emanated the air; from air came the fire; from fire—water; and from water came earth. Shiva Samhita 1.71

By practicing the [five] dharanas, everything on earth is possible. The yogi can come and go from the heavenly realms in his mortal body; he can move as fast as the mind and has the power of traveling through space. Gheranda Samhita 3.57-58

When the fivefold perception of Yoga, arising from (concentrating the mind

on) earth, water, light, air and ether, have appeared to the Yogin, then he has become possessed of a body made of the fire of Yoga, and he will not be touched by disease, old age or death. Shvetasvatara Upanishad 2.12

The five concentrations upon the elements [respectively have the power of] stopping, inundating, burning, destabilizing, and dessicating. ... The Yogin who is intelligent [in the use of these techniques] is released from all suffering. Goraksha Paddhati 2.59-60 (translation by Georg Feuerstein)

Introduction

When we think of “seals” (mudra), what usually comes to mind are the various bodily positions (e.g., inverting the body), pressings (e.g., with the tongue against the palate), and contractions (e.g., of the belly), or a multitude of hand gestures (called hasta mudra). But in traditional Hatha Yoga there are also concentration or awareness seals, five in number, which consist of fixing both consciousness and breath, in turn, in five ascending body regions or energy centers (chakra).

Originally these practices were kept secret, but now the cat’s out of the bag and we can learn them for ourselves, if not to survive the next pralaya, then at least to improve our chances of making it through the next week. The outline of the teaching is found in the third chapter of Gheranda’s Collection (Gheranda Samhita, and hereafter abbreviated GS), a late-seventeenth century Hatha Yoga manual. We can fill in the technical details from other sources, both traditional and modern.

Each energy center is marked with a particular geometric symbol and color, which together represent a corresponding traditional element, each of which is a “crystalization” of various frequencies of subtle vital energy (prana). For example, the lowest center is marked with a yellow square, which represents the Earth element, the densest of the five. Along with symbols and colors, each center also has a particular “seed” syllable (bija) or mantra, and a presiding (male) deity (deva).

So as we concentrate on and breathe into each center, we’re supposed to visualize its symbol, color and deity, while (preferably) silently repeating the syllable.

It’s possible then to work with these centers in two ways. We can, first, create and experience different states or qualities of consciousness, just as Bushunda did to protect himself during the last pralaya. So for example, if the apocalyptic hurricane huffs and puffs at your door—maybe in the form of some unsettling news—and threatens to blow you down, you might work with

the Earth center to establish solidity in the face of uncertainty. This is practice 1 below, which we'll call Bushunda's Practice.

Second, we can perform the practice as a way to "dissolve" the elements, just as Brahma dissolves the world at the end of each kalpa. This helps us (ideally) to transcend the inherent limitations of the elements and so release our authentic self. This is practice 2 below, which we'll call Brahma's Practice.

The traditional elements are listed below in their order of density, beginning with the densest (Earth), and ending with the most subtle (Ether or Space). I own several translations of Gheranda, and they don't all locate the energy centers in the same areas of the body, so I've included two possible sequences for your practice. You might want to try both of them to test their effects, to see if one suits you better than the other, or if both serve a need.

The pictorial representation of each presiding deity is quite complicated and highly symbolic, so all I'll give you here is his name (along with, just to be fair, his traditional female counterpart). If you want a fuller account of the deities' appearances and symbolism to enhance your visualization, consult:

Alain Danilou, *The Gods of India (Inner Traditions, 1985)*

Swami Sivananda Radha, *Kundalini Yoga for the West (Shambhala, 1981)*

John Woodroffe, *The Serpent Power (Dover, 1974).*

The Attributes, Mantra, and Location of the Centers

1. Earth Concentration Seal (parthivi dharana mudra) (GS 3.59)

- Color: Yellow (as orpiment, a mineral)
- Symbol: Square (earth = strength, firmness, solidity, cohesion)
The square symbolizes "permanence, security, balance, the rational organization of space, correct proportion, limitation, moral rectitude and good faith (the "square deal")" (J. Tresidder, ed., *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*, 449).
- Seed syllable: Lam (la, a name of Indra)
A bija-mantra is the pranic force concentrated to a point ... (Shyam Sundar Goswami, *Layayoga*, 320)
- Presiding deities: Brahma/Dakini (or Savitri)
- Body region: Heart or sacrum center (Root-Foundation Wheel)
- Benefits: Brings about "steadiness and conquers death."



2. Water Concentration Seal (ambhasi dharana mudra) (GS 3.60)

- Color: White (as a jasmine flower, or the moon or a conch)
- Symbol: Half-moon (water = contraction)
- Seed syllable: Vam (va, a name of Varuna, means "ocean, water")
- Presiding deities: Vishnu (from vish, "to pervade")/Rakini
- Body region: Throat or center between pubis and navel (Own-Base Wheel)
- Benefits: Removes "unbearable suffering and sins." It's also noted that the Yogi who masters this seal "never meets death even in frightful deepest water."



The Moon, as the presiding deity of the watery element, rules over the tides of the sea. The sphere of the Moon is the reservoir of rain water. ... The subtle beings, coming from the heavenly worlds, have to cross the sphere of the moon, and they come down to earth with rain water. ... Being the place whence the wandering souls come to earth, the moon is considered the dwelling place of the migrating souls ... (Alain Danielou, *The Gods of India*, 99).

The crescent moon is an image of a "cup holding the elixir of immortality" (J. Tresidder, ed., *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*, 127).

3. Fire Concentration Seal (agneyi dharana mudra) (GS 3.61)

- Color: Blazing red (it resembles a Indragopa insect, whose crushed and dried body is used to make red dye)
- Symbol: (Inverted) Triangle (fire = heat, light, expansion)
- Seed syllable: Ram (ra, "fire, heat")
- Presiding deities: Rudra ("crying, howling, roaring, dreadful, horrible")/Lakini
- Body region: Palate or navel center (Jeweled City Wheel)
- Benefits: Removes the "deep fear of death." It's also noted that should the Yogi be "thrown into a blazing fire, this mudra would keep him alive, without fear of death."



4. Air Concentration Seal (vayavi dharana mudra) (GS 3.62)

- Color: Black (it resembles a mass of lampblack, which is used as unguent for the eyes), sometimes grey-blue or smokey because surrounded by vapor
- Symbol: Circle (1), or a hexagon made of six dots (2) or a pair of locked triangles (3) (air = movement)
The interlocking triangles symbolize "union in duality" (J. Tresidder, ed., *The Complete Dictionary of Symbols*, 237).
- Seed syllable: Yam
- Presiding deities: Ishvara (or Isha, "lord")/Kakini
- Body region: Between the eyebrows or heart center (Unstruck [Sound] Wheel)
- Benefits: Brings about the "ability to move through space." It's also noted that this seal "conquers old age and death," and that the Yogi who masters it "need not fear death from any aerial accidents."



(1)



(2)

5. Space (or Ether) Concentration Seal (akashi dharana mudra) (GS 3.63)
- Color: Colorless or clear like water (1); also said to be smoky violet in color (2)
 - Symbol: None or a circle (1 and 2) (ether = space)
 - Seed syllable: Ham (ha, name of a form of Shiva, also: "cipher; meditation, auspiciousness, sky, heaven; blood, dying, fear; knowledge; moon; war; pride; cause, motive")
Presiding deities: Sada-shiva (or Ardha narishvara), who's androgynous: its right half is male, its left half is female, the goddess Uma (also called Parvati and Durga)/Shakini
The goddess was born with the name Aparna. She and her two sisters performed great austerities. Her mother Mena was worried about her daughter, and begged her "u ma," which means "Oh [child], don't [practice austerities]."
 - Body region: Crown (brahma randhra, "brahma aperture") or throat center (Pure Wheel)
 - Benefits: Breaks down the "doorway to liberation." It's also noted that the Yogi who practices this seal is untouched by "old age and death."



(1)



(2)

Practice 1: Bushunda's Practice

PRELIMINARY

Sit in any comfortable Yoga seat. You might want to start by physically looking at the colored geometric shape or shapes that you'll be visualizing during practice. For example, if you'll be working with the first center, spend a few minutes gazing at the yellow square.

PRACTICE

Then close your eyes and run your awareness through your entire body, just to get a feel for your "inner space." After a minute or so, concentrate your awareness in the first (lowest) center, whether the sacrum or heart. Technically, Gheranda says to "fix" the breath in this center, by which he no doubt means retain the breath there (kumbhaka). I think it's probably best to just simply imagine that you're breathing into and out of the center. Visualize the yellow square with its accompanying feelings of heaviness and solidity, and repeat silently to yourself (or whisper) the seed lam. Depending on available time and your inclination, you can work with just one center for your entire practice, or climb the ladder of centers from lowest to highest.

According to Gheranda, each concentration is supposed to last for 2 hours (= 5 ghatikas), but that seems a bit extreme, unless you've got 10 hours to spare. I would think about 2 to 5 minutes at each center would be more than sufficient to help you deal with your next personal pralaya.

As with all of these traditional practices, Gheranda strongly recommends that we keep these concentrations secret, else by revealing them they'll be rendered powerless; so after reading about them here, please be sure not to tell anyone else.

Practice 2: Brahma's Practice

PRACTICE

Follow the directions for practice 1 up to the point where you repeat the seed mantra for the lowest center. Then raise your awareness to the Water center and, while you visualize its attributes and repeat its mantra, imagine dissolving the solidity of Earth into the fluidity of Water. Continue in this fashion: Water then dissolves in Fire, Fire in

Air, and Air in Ether, and finally Ether is dissolves in the self. Finally, as one text instructs (Maha Nirvana Tantra 5. 105), repeat the mantra so'ham, which means "I am It (or He or She)"; in other words, I (aham) or this individual self (atman) is the same as It (sah), the cosmic self (brahman).

PRACTICE ARTICLE

TWILIGHT CELEBRATION: sandhya vandana

vandana = "worship, praise, celebrate, salute"

ELEMENTS of worship at the junctions of time (sandhyopasana)

1. PRELIMINARY (morning)
 - a. Dedicate the work of the coming day to Self
 - b. Make intention (sankalpa) to do right (say: I know what's right and yet won't do it, I know what's wrong and yet won't give it up)
2. PROTECTION from self-ignorance, three movements:
 - a. Clap-trio (tala traya): Clap three times with the fingers of right hand on the left palm, raising hands slightly higher after each clap.
 - b. Quarter-binding (dig bandha): Snap the right fingers (chotika, "snapping") 10 times, once each for each of the eight directions, and above and below.
 - c. Fire-wall (agni prakara): Erect a protective "fire screen" around the body: draw three imaginary circles with right index finger.
3. INVITATION (avahana, "invocation")
 - a. avahana mudra = palms together, thumbs turned toward roots of ring fingers
 - b. Mantra = I am She/He (sa'ham/so'ham)
Jiva-nyasa = meditate on yellow square > divya drishti > hand on heart (soham = I am she/he) > infuse life of devi (devatamaya)
welcoming svagata
namaskara obeisance
4. CASTING (nyasa, "placing, fixing, depositing; mental appropriation or assignment of various parts of the body to tutelary deities" [ishta-devata] or teacher [guru, rishi]). Nyasa "effects the proper

distribution of the shaktis of the human frame in their proper positions so as to avoid the production of discord and distraction in worship." Nyasa is "necessary for the production of the desired state of mind and of chitta-shuddhi. ... Transformation of thought is transformation of being" (Arthur Avalon, Tantra of the Great Liberation, cxi).

The body dedicated to god, who is deposited into and then dwells in every part. Just as temple is consecrated before it become sacred place, so the body (the true temple) is dedicated before god is invoked. The body is suffused with divine power.

Practitioner imagines he's acquired a new divine body; terminates in action called "spreading" (the thought of the) divinity all over body (brahman = all-spreading immense); pervaded by divinity affirmed by gesture, affirms own divinity, unity with deva

what a man thinks he becomes chand up

physical effects = restful state of mind in meditation; stimulate nerve centers;

Two stages:

- a. Hand Casting (kara nyasa): install the deity in the fingers to sanctify the hands:
 - Finger Mantra
 - Thumb (angushtha) OM
 - Index (tarjana, "threatening finger") Being
 - Middle (madhyama) Awareness
 - Ring (anamika) One
 - Little (kanishtha, "smallest") Self
 - Palms (karatala) and back of hands (prishtha) Happy
- b. Limb Casting (anga nyasa): consecrate six "limbs":
 - Place Mantra
 - Crown OM
 - Forehead Being (sat)
 - Throat Awareness (chit)
 - Heart One (eka)
 - Navel Self (atma)
 - Spread out Happy (shiva)

5. PRANAYAMA: repeat three times minimum

- a. Inhale through R nostril > retain breath > exhale through L nostril

- b. Inhale through L nostril > retain breath > exhale through R nostril
- c. Inhale through R nostril > retain breath > exhale through L nostril

6. MEDITATION (dhyana): meditate on lotus of heart

7. FAREWELL (visarjana)