



# Vital Airs and the Flow of Cognition

In 1985, Shrii Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar (1922-1990) began an extraordinary series of discourses that would eventually fill a total of 26 volumes over the next five years. He named the series *Shabda Cayaniká*, which translates into English as “A Collection of Words”. Each discourse dwells on certain root words and different meanings associated with them.

Shrii Sarkar dedicated these volumes as follows: “I offer my respectful salutations to the sacred memory of those who have illumined the path of human progress through literature, culture, intellect and erudition. Following in their footsteps, Shrii Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar.”

*Shabda Cayaniká* carries us into vast landscapes of human knowledge—history, geography, medicine, science, art, philosophy, religion, etc. In the process the author adds an indelible imprint of his unique intellect, enriching our experience with new ideas.

The following presents two words, *apána* and *acetana*, from discourses 2 and 3 of the first volume of *Shabda Cayaniká*. These lines provide a glimpse of the light of knowledge and erudition permeating the volumes of *Shabda Cayaniká*.



Shrii Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar, 1979

## Apána

*A* (NEGATION) + *Pa* + *LUṬ* = *apána*.<sup>1</sup> The etymological meaning of *apána* is “that which does not help in increasing fluidity”. According to the yogic scriptures, *apána* is one of the five internal *váyu*s, vital forces. There are ten different

<sup>1</sup>In Sanskrit, by adding prefixes and suffixes, a wide variety of ideas can be expressed. Twenty prefixes (*upasargas*) often used in Sam'skrta are: *a'*, *anu*, *ati*, *apa*, *ava*, *abhi*, *adhi*, *apa*, *api*, *dur*, *pra*, *pari*, *para'*, *prati*, *su*, *sam*, *ut*, *upa*, *upa*, *vi*.

internal and external váyus. The internal váyus are *prána*, *apána*, *samána*, *udána*, and *vyána*.

1) **Prána:** The *prána váyu* is situated in the area from the navel to the throat. It helps with the respiratory functions and the circulation of vital energy.

2) **Apána:** This *váyu* functions in the area from the navel down. It helps in the excretion of urine and stool.

3) **Samána:** *Samána váyu* is situated at the navel region and maintains equilibrium between the *prána* and *apána váyus*.

4) **Udána:** The *udána váyu* is situated in the throat. It helps in vocalization and expression of thought. If someone uses very emotional language [in Bengali] we say *tini udátta kaníthe dhván jánalen*, “he issued a clarion call”.

5) **Vyána:** The *vyána váyu* functions throughout the body. It helps in the circulation of vital fluids and blood, and in the perception and non-perception of experience.

The five external váyus are:

1) **Nága:** It resides in the joints. This *nága váyu* helps with jumping and extending the body.

2) **Kúrma:** It is found in the different glands of the body. *Kúrma váyu* helps with the action of contraction. The way a turtle contracts by withdrawing its limbs into its body is called *kúrmabháva*. Since this *váyu* helps in effecting *kúrmabháva*, it is called *kúrma váyu*. One should keep in mind that *kúrmabháva* and *kúrmanádii* are not the same thing. *Kúrmanádii* is a point in the throat at the bottom-most portion of the periphery of Vishuddha cakra. If mental equipoise is brought about in the *kúrmanádii* then the body’s vibrations can be temporarily stopped. (According to yogis, bulls have the capacity to fix their mind in the *kúrmanádii*, thereby achieving a state where they can go without moving for a long time. To see them, it would appear as if they were not a living being but a statue chiselled out of stone.)

3) **Krkara:** *Krkara váyu* is scattered throughout the body. It expresses itself in the increase or decrease of air pressure. *Krkara váyu* helps in yawning and stretching. Ordinarily, yawning happens right before falling asleep, and stretching, right after waking up. In the spoken languages of north India, yawning is called *jemná* and stretching is called *ámde lená* – in Bengali we say *ádmorá bháungá*.

4) **Devadatta:** The *devadatta váyu* bases its action on the increased or decreased pressure of

food and water in the stomach. *Devadatta váyu* rouses thirst and hunger.

5) **Dhanainjaya:** As a result of internal or external labour, the body feels the need for sleep. The feeling of sleep or drowsiness comes from this *dhanainjaya váyu* which pervades the body, and so the living being drowns or falls asleep.

## Navel breathing

Due to illness, old age or an unexpected injury, the region inhabited by *prána váyu* degenerates and the *prána váyu* can no longer maintain its natural functional capacity and flow. In this unnatural condition it strikes against the *samána váyu* causing the *samána váyu* to lose its equilibrium. As a result, the navelly-situated *samána váyu* and the upper body *prána váyu* quit their respective areas and merge; the two then create pressure on *apána váyu*. In this condition the *udána váyu* loses its normal ability to function under the united pressure of *prána*, *samána* and *apána*. This condition we call “navel breathing”. As a result of the *udána váyu* losing its normal functioning, a rattling sound is produced in the throat. This is an indication of imminent natural death.

At the time of leaving the body, the four united váyus – *prána*, *apána*, *samána* and *udána* – join with the *vyána váyu*, which is present throughout the body. These five vital forces, having become one, leave the body and join the aerial factor or merge in *Maháprána* [Cosmic Life]. At the time that the *prána váyu* leaves the body, four of the five external váyus, namely *nága*, *devadatta*, *kúrma*, and *krkara*, join with the *prána váyu* and leave the body together with it. Only the *dhanainjaya váyu* remains in the body.

Sleep and drowsiness is the work of *dhanainjaya váyu*. The body being in a state of permanent repose, *dhanainjaya váyu* remains. After cremation, or when the dead body completely decomposes in the grave, *dhanainjaya* enters the *mahábhúta* [five fundamental factors] and merges into the aerial factor.

## Práñáyama

The collective name of the five internal váyus and five external váyus is the five *práñas* or the ten *práñas* [respectively]. The process by which we try to bring the vital forces under control is

*One's all-round existence becomes successful when one is able to saturate one's conscious mind with the riches of the subconscious mind, and the subconscious mind with the treasures of the unconscious mind.*



called *prāñáyāma* in the yogic scriptures. *Prāñán yamayatyēśa prāñáyāmah*. Of course, there is another explication of *prāñáyāma*: *Tasmin sati shvāsaprashwāsayorgativicchedah prāñáyāmah*. Its meaning also ends up being essentially the same, that is, the special effort whereby the normal flow of inhalation and respiration is altered and a temporary cessation of respiration is introduced by special means, is called *prāñáyāma*.

### Accidental death

It sometimes happens that due to sudden accident or the attack of a deadly disease, the body is so disturbed that its vital force becomes paralysed. This can happen with cholera (*visúćiká* in Sanskrit), pox (*máriḡuṡiká* in Sanskrit), snakebite, death by poisoning, and death by hanging.

Suddenly, there is an accidental death, but the body is not broken into pieces. Since the vital energy is paralysed, there is no opportunity for navel breathing or only very little. When the vital energy has been paralysed, it seems apparently as if death has occurred while actually it has not – that comes a little later. During this condition, if the respiration can be reestablished by an artificial process, the vital energy wakes up and becomes active or can do so.

As long as the vital energy is paralysed, there will be no sign of decay in the body. In olden days, whenever a person's vital energy became paralysed for one of these reasons, the people, rather than cremating or interring the so-called dead body, used to attach it to a raft and float it in water. In the open environment or atmosphere of the river, the vital energy, in some cases, used to become fully active again. Thus, in those days, especially in cases of cholera, pox or snakebite, the people used to float the dead patient in water

out of a spirit of welfare. In such cases, where the vital energy is paralysed, there is absolutely no chance of it returning if the body is cremated. If the body is interred underground it becomes even more grievous because that vital energy may reawaken for some time in the grave. After a short struggle the person falls again into eternal sleep in the darkness of the tomb. Thus, after these types of death it is better not to burn or bury the deceased until they have been examined by a competent physician.

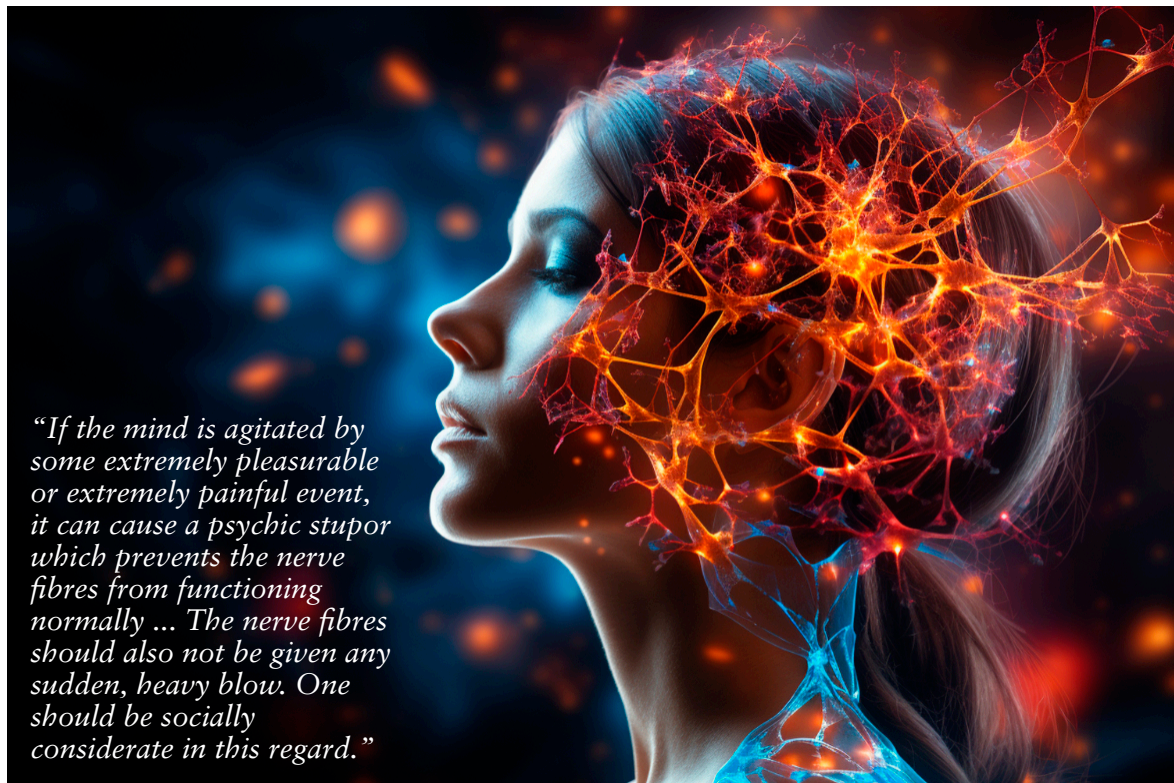
Source: *‘Aṡka to Akśa’*, Shabda Cayaniká Part 1.

## Acetana

*Cit + lyūt = cetana*. By adding the negation *a* it becomes *acetana*. The verbal root *cit* means “to perceive”, “to discriminate”, “to cogitate”, “to contemplate”. (By adding the suffix *ḡta* after the verbal root *cit* we get the word *citta*). The word *cetana* is used in different senses. It means “one who has awakened”, “who is alive”, “who has developed intellect”, “who is spiritually awakened”, “who is discriminating”, “whose power of judgement is developed”, and so forth. Although the word *cetana* has many meanings, normally we use it in three ways. Needless to say, we also use *acetana* primarily in three ways.

### Nerves

If, for any reason, in the world of physicality, the nerve fibres are injured and due to this the nerve cells lose their normal ability to function, then that temporary loss of function we refer to in colloquial Bengali as *ajñána haye yaoyá* [becoming unconscious] or *jñána háráno* [becoming senseless] for which the word *acetana* is also



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used. In many cases the nerve cells, rather than the nerve fibres, receive a blow. If the mind is agitated by some extremely pleasurable or extremely painful event, it can cause a psychic stupor which prevents the nerve fibres from functioning normally. As a result, the person becomes senseless. For this reason, one should not break any very painful or very pleasurable news to a person suddenly. It should be done slowly, step by step. The nerve fibres should also not be given any sudden, heavy blow. One should be socially considerate in this regard.

If an unmarried daughter suffers humiliation from relatives and neighbours over a long period of time, then the pressure of that mental suffering can one day affect her nerve cells and render her senseless or take the form of a disease. This is commonly called hysteria. If the cause of suffering is removed then the disease also disappears. In those societies where the remarriage of widows is forbidden hysteria is common for this very reason. In colloquial Bengali we call this *phit haowá* [fainting].

One should keep in mind that spirit possession and fainting are not the same thing. In possession a person mumbles incoherently. In this case he or she does not or cannot control his

or her mental pabula and expresses his or her mind without any awareness of time, place or person. Hysteria is different.

Anyway this hysteria is a form of *acetanata* [senselessness]. Epilepsy is also transmitted from the psychic level, that is, from the nerve cells to the nerve fibres. But this disease first occurs in the nerve fibres and then agitates the nerve cells. After this, it remains imprinted in the nerve cells as a psychic disease and expresses itself in a particular place and time. These are the different kinds of senselessness that we observe or find in the mundane world.

Epilepsy arises when a person comes in sudden contact with some thing or some event completely outside the realm of his or her experience. Through proper counseling, attacks of this disease can be checked and through psychic treatment along with the use of small amounts of medicine the disease can be treated. Anyhow, in all the above cases we use the word acetana.

### **Levels of consciousness**

In the psychic world we use the word acetana in yet another way. Though from the spiritual



standpoint it is not absolutely true, still we commonly divide the mind into three layers of which one is the acetana [unconscious] mind. Its scope is extremely vast but it functions entirely within that vast periphery. The second layer is the *avacetana* [subconscious] mind whose scope is comparatively much smaller but which functions partly within those boundaries and partly outside them. The third layer is the *cetana* [conscious] mind whose scope is extremely limited but which functions primarily outside those boundaries with the help of the ten sensory and motor organs. In those extremely few cases where it functions within its boundaries, its action consists of contemplation born of experience.

Ten sensory and motor organs and the faculty of contemplation – this is its domain. For this reason, many people are of the opinion that there are eleven *indriyas* [bodily organs]. In social life and in individual life, for one's sake or for other's, that person's life becomes exalted and sublime who is able to enrich his or her conscious mind's creations with the wealth of the subconscious mind, and one's all-round existence becomes successful when one is able to saturate one's conscious mind with the riches of the subconscious mind, and the subconscious mind with the treasures of the unconscious mind. Within this is hidden the supreme spiritual inspiration of one's existence and the complete fulfilment of desire.

From the spiritual point of view, the essence of the all-imaginative ectoplasm is known as the Cognitive Faculty or the Cognitive Entity, regardless whether it is expressed or unexpressed. That essence or flow of the individual movement is the causal matrix of its arising. Within the crude manifestation of this consciousness in the unit inheres the fundamental substantiation of its existence – the establishment of the sense of doership – and in its ultimate transformation it becomes the faculty of discrimination.

This Cognitive Faculty which lies in the seed of expression remains associated with all manifest entities during every step of the process of manifestation, and it remains as the witness of all entities whether they are expressed or unexpressed. When it remains associated with each individual entity separately it is known as *Pratyagátmá* and when it remains associated with them collectively as the Cognitive Entity, it is known as *Paracetanya*. When the knowership of the Cognitive Faculty remains associated with

matter, that is to say, when it remains associated in such a way that there is no realisation of existence, nor the capacity for doership or active experience, then that state of matter we call acetana; everything else is cetana.

The manifestation of consciousness (*cetanatá*) is greatest where the sense of existence is most pronounced. For this reason human beings are considered the most developed beings. But is there anything more to the human being... does this exhaust his potential? No. The sweetness of this sense of existence is hidden in the glory of its expansion. It is their existential greatness and its unhindered radiation that makes human beings great. Thus, in another sense, when we say "conscious entity" we mean human being.

In the waking, dream and deep-sleep states, spiritual consciousness permeates the microcosm but in the living being it happens mostly in the waking state, very little in the dream state, and virtually not at all in deep sleep. But the wonder of it is that the same being that considers the waking state the final, supreme truth also considers the dream state as the final and supreme truth as long as he or she is dreaming. Deep sleep is the state of the experience of nothingness. Thus, despite the impossibility of calling this supreme or final, after waking from this deep sleep one falls into the error of thinking of this recent experience of absence as supreme and final. Actually, the dream state is a combination of subtle experiences collected from the mental world and vibrations collected from the waking state. Those vibrations which are gathered from the crude world oscillate constantly between truth and untruth, but those which come from the mental world are sometimes relative and sometimes non-relative truth. There is little opportunity for vibrational movement in the conviction of absence realized in deep sleep but we cannot reject this as non-existence. Anyhow, all this happens in the flow of consciousness, sometimes in a very natural, and sometimes in an unnatural rhythmic flow. This was consciousness or its negative, unconsciousness.

*Source: "Acala to Atha" Shabda Cayaniká Part 1. Ananda Marga Publications.*