

## B. USING THE VAYUS AS A TOOL FOR CORRECTING ALIGNMENT

In my experience, both in teaching and in my own practice, the inner vayus radically transform these habitual, ingrained postures. For instance, people who have a dominant plucked-up chest are able to soften it when they practice and experience *prana vayu*. Practicing it separately from asanas gives them a totally different experience and understanding of their chest. Sitting in half lotus or *sukhasana* (easy pose), they exhale into the *prana vayu* and realize that their chest and back do not necessarily collapse when they allow the lower front ribs to compress. Rather, when the front lower ribs compress in *prana vayu* as we exhale, the upper chest naturally relaxes and cannot remain plucked up. Then, when we inhale, the lower back widens, creating a more balanced relationship between front and back. Repeating this practice again and again recreates the true form of the chest. This re-posturing, then, comes from exhaling into the area of the front diaphragm – not from thinking how the back or chest should be. Thus there is no resistance and no forgetfulness.

The same is true for those who suffer habitually from the heady position, (the exaggerated forward or upward positioning of the neck). Try as these students may to redefine their neck by widening and elongating it, they cannot maintain the correct posture. When *udana vayu* practice is introduced, however, they experience changes in the positioning of the neck and throat, which feel physically pleasant and can easily be repeated. In *udana vayu* practice they observe the breath in the area of the throat at the front of the body. Concentrating on the throat, they focus on the exhalation, allowing the throat to widen and the lower jaw to move downwards, keeping the mouth closed. They then inhale and relax the jaw, and find that their neck and head return to their natural position.

As for the pelvis-swaying-forward position, *samana vayu*, together with rooting, proves to be a true cure, bringing the pelvis back into alignment and making the lower belly more compact. Rooting the feet into the ground, and exhaling into the area just below the navel, the pelvis moves into place as if by itself.

For those who suffer from scoliosis, working with the vayus and concentrating on the front of the body helps them to find their center and abide in it. This frees them from the confusion they experience due to the extreme asymmetry between their left and right sides. It frees them as well from the futile wish to achieve some sort of evenness between the two sides in order to find a balance. Balance is experienced by finding one's center in the front and abiding there, thus transcending the confusing sensations that emanate from the two different sides.

In teaching this vayu postural work, I have seen very stubborn postural habits change dramatically over a relatively short period. Through the vayus, many long-term students experience the interrelated, three-dimensional aspect of the body very clearly for the first time. Instructions that they have heard for years suddenly become accessible and understood. The front and the back are no longer two; rather, there is one body.

Why should this be? I believe that one reason for the vayus' powerful effect has to do with a softening and re-tuning of the soft tissue that occurs simultaneously with the repositioning of the skeletal structure.

As we balance ourselves on the vertical line, the many muscles that were pulled or contracted by holding the body in an unaligned position can slowly find release. The muscles, ligaments and fascia slowly become more precise in their action and less contracted, as in the body of a young child. Moreover, as we practice, facial tension dissipates. When our face is more relaxed, our body as a whole is less contracted.

**We can call this very precise and effortless alignment experience, which is created through vayu practice, “pranic alignment.” In a state of pranic alignment, the skeletal spine is reinforced by a vertical column of air, which runs alongside it, closer to the belly. It is as if a lighthouse structure, built of airbricks, forms as a result of the inner vayu practice, supporting our spinal column.**

Once we have experienced pranic alignment, we understand the true alignment of the back and can search for it. No longer does a teacher or a mirror have to draw our attention to our misalignment. Rather, we sense the true form of the back, the chest and the whole torso from the inside.