

MOVING TOWARD THE CORE, PART 2

By Tanya Roland

Last April I attended a yoga retreat led by JJ Gormley, founder of Sun and Moon Yoga Studio in Moab, Utah. I had somewhat of a revelation regarding what and how JJ is teaching now. The experience had such an impact that I asked JJ if we could do an interview. In May, we sat down at her house in Boston, Virginia and had a conversation. Part One of that interview was published in the last newsletter and covered how JJ is teaching from the chakras. The following is Part Two of that Interview where the focus is on the bandhas or the energetic locks in the body.

WHAT IS A BANDHA?

TR Maybe you can define bandha?

JJ Bandhas are actual physical movements that anybody can do which create an energetic affect on the body and help to balance the body. They bring the body into its vitality and into its integrity. There are only three bandhas and they are located at Chakras 1, 3 and 5.

The bandhas are incorporated in the alignment of the chakras that I teach. And they were the ONLY alignment instruction handed down to us from the ancient yogis.

The bandhas are physical movements that create an energetic affect on the body. They bring the body into integrity by

helping the energies of the body go up and ground down. Without the use of bandhas we could be fatigued by stuck energies not having a way out and the body spending its energy trying to re-balance itself with no real avenue to support that re-balancing.

By practicing the alignment that I teach, you bring the body into balance by moving closer toward the core. The bandhas help us to do that. It's like turbo engines, you just pop it into higher gear. Then you use that energy for your asana practice or your meditation practice, or whatever you'd like because you begin to feel better and have increased energy.

TR It sounds like you're saying that having an awareness of the bandhas and improving your overall chakra (and therefore spinal) alignment can bring better health. It can also benefit you spiritually, emotionally and so on.

JJ Right, as yoga does on its own. But I think as we pay attention to alignment, and the bandhas in particular, you speed the process.

TR And my memory is that in the yoga texts that I've read and looking back into history, the ancients spoke about the

bandhas but I don't remember them talking about this overall alignment.

JJ The only alignment cues the ancient yogis gave us were the bandhas. So the question is do we need all this extraneous alignment of the rotation of the thighs or the arms or which way the baby toe is supposed to move in various poses? Or does it really boil down to these three bandhas?

While I believe it does boil down to these three bandhas, I like to portray the whole picture of each chakra. I can see alignment or things going on at say Chakra 2, 4 or 6 that would effect the alignment at 1, 3 and 5 or the bandha movement.

As we begin to correct the alignment at chakra 2, 4 and/or 6, the bandhas become easier. So for example the alignment at Chakra 1 is the lower bandha, the root bandha, (mula bandha) and as you move up to Chakra 2 that alignment begins the bandha of Chakra 3 the middle bandha, the stomach bandha (uddiyana bandha). Chakra 3 finishes it off. Chakra 4 alignment has to be in place to get the bandha at Chakra 5 the chin bandha (jalandhara bandha).

So I like to teach them in pieces like that because I can see where people are having trouble getting it. For instance, is the trouble for getting Chakra 5

alignment because 4 is not there or is it really just at Chakra 5? Breaking down the alignment at each chakra helps me see more of what's going on.

Then I can associate the issues with a particular chakra. The emotional issues and the psychological issues of Chakra 4 may be the cause of the blockage at Chakra 5.

TR So there's definitely interrelationship between all of them it seems like.

JJ Right. And I think once you've played with this alignment on a longer term basis like I have, it does boil down to just Chakras 1, 3 and 5 and I can scan my own body and check Chakra 1, Chakra 3, Chakra 5 and the others start to fall in line. So I think that's why the ancient yogis only focused on 1, 3 and 5.