The Dance of the Seven Veils is an elaboration on the biblical story of the execution of John the Baptist, which refers to Salome dancing before King Herod Antipas. The Mesopotamian goddess Inanna/Ishtar performed the first documented striptease, around 4000 BCE when she descended into the underworld and had to relinquish her jewels and robes at each of the seven gates, until she stands naked in the land of no return.

The journey to the underworld is a theme found in a number of traditions around the world, such as Orpheus’ search for Eurydice, the descent of Jesus into Hades following his crucifixion and then his subsequent resurrection, Dante’s Divine Comedy. The hero or deity often returns with a quest object, a loved one or with knowledge. The ability to enter the realm of the dead while still alive, and to return, is a proof of the classical hero’s exceptional status as more than mortal.

All tell the age-old story of the search for wisdom, the confinement of the soul in the body, and its quest for liberation from illusion and bondage. A fundamental aspect of such descents is the letting go of illusions and outworn patterns of life.

1. Preparation - Shavasana
2. Relaxation - Breath awareness
3. Sankalpa - Resolution
4. Rotation of Awareness - Body scanning
5. Opposites - Feelings and Sensations
6. Chakra
7. Breath
8. Image Visualization
9. Self
10. Sankalpa
11. Returning

Structure
The Fool’s Journey
The twenty two major arcana cards of the Tarot describe a universal human process, which encompasses all the spiritual aspects of being. The Fool and The World, the first and last cards of the series, can be considered as the Alpha and the Omega, the two points between which everything is possible. The Fool is a perpetual beginning and The World an infinite culmination. In many systems the Fool is usually interpreted as the protagonist of a story, and each major arcana card stands for a stage on the path the Fool takes through the mysteries of life and the main human archetypes and experiences that a person must incorporate to realise wholeness.
At the start of the journey, the Fool is newborn, fresh, open and spontaneous, unaware of the hardships he will face as he ventures out to learn the lessons of the world.
The Fool stands somewhat outside the rest of the major arcana, he has a name, but not a number. It is the only card not to be defined numerically, and as such is free to wonder through the other cards till he reaches his goal, the World. In the decks that do assign a number, it is zero. An unusual number as it rests in the exact middle of the number system - poised between the positive and negative. He is strangely empty, as is zero, but imbued with a desire to go forth and learn.
The World (XXI) is the last card of the Major Arcana in the Tarot deck. It represents what is truly desired, the completed journey of The Fool.

“The fool who persists in his folly will become wise.”
William Blake
Koshas
Each stage emphasizes a different sheath or kosha, which include the physical body, the energy body, the bodies of sensation, emotion, thought, imagery and bliss. The journey inwards is complete when we arrive at our destination beyond the koshas, the absolute Self, Atman, the eternal center of consciousness.

1. Annamaya Kosha
This is the sheath of the physical self, named from the fact that it is nourished by food (Anna means food).

2. Pranamaya Kosha
You will then be guided into the experience of your energy body or pranic body through the breath which forms an intimate relationship with the energy body. By placing our focus on the breath we become more aware of subtle energies intertwined with our breath.

3. Manomaya Kosha
The mind (manas) along with the five sensory organs constitute the Manomaya kosha. The mental body feeds on the impressions we offer it. After connecting with the physical and pranic bodies, the next part is this level of mind where intense physical or emotional sensations are recalled and awakened with the pairing of opposites such as heaviness/lightness or joy/anger, etc. We are given the opportunity to experience sensations and feelings without an object, from a state of neutrality.

4. Vijnanamaya Kosha
This part of the practice draws on the profound power of imagery and visualization. Vijnanamaya means composed of vijnana, or intellect, the faculty which discriminates, determines or wills. Here personal and archetypal images emerge that are associated with unconscious forces below the level of the conscious mind.

5. Anandamaya Kosha
Anandamaya, or that which is composed of bliss, is regarded as the innermost of all. The bliss sheath normally has its fullest play during deep sleep. Anandamaya kosha is the most interior of the koshas surrounding the Atman, the eternal center of consciousness. Yet even this is still a covering, a sheath, a lampshade covering the pure light of consciousness.
Chakra
The descriptions of the location, structure, and functions of the chakras are extremely brief in many yoga texts. In general the attitude is that one must learn the location of the chakras through personal experience. The petals of the chakras are described as a garland of letters representing an unfolding of primal sound through the fifty letters of the Sanskrit alphabet.

For each of the chakras there are a large range of images, sounds and melodies which will create activity or stimulation of that region. In their most essential or archetypal form the images are known as yantras (specific geometric shapes) and the sounds are known as mantras.

There are mantras that activate the specific elements associated with the chakras, principally achieved via a number of specialised sounds called bija mantras: lam, vam, ram, yam, ham, aum. This is a process of archetypal harmony, as it involves keying into something elemental in the mind at a very specific level.

According to most contemporary western depictions, the colours of the chakras follow the colours of the rainbow, although in the source texts if colours are mentioned, then completely different ones are described.

Hopi - The Peaceful People
The Hopi of Arizona refer to the chakras as spiritual centers, which directly correlate to physical parts of the body. These centers or points form an axis in the body that is related to the polar axis of the Earth. Each center has its own vibration. These vibrations travel up and down the body's axis similar to the Kundalini of the chakras. The first of these spiritual centers lies at the top of head. This is where the soul enters the body upon birth and exits
upon death. The next vibratory center corresponds with the brain. Below the brain center lies the throat and place of speech. Moving downward, the heart center represents the duality of nature and life. A person of true intent is said to be of One Heart, one purpose, and one ideal. If their thoughts and actions are not at one with the Universe they are said to have Two Hearts. The last spiritual center is at the solar plexus from which the spiritual life of the person is directed.

**Anahata**

There are mantras that activate the specific energies associated with the chakras, principally achieved via a number of specialized sounds called bija mantras: lam, vam, ram, yam, ham, aum. This is a process of archetypal harmony, as it involves keying into something elemental in the mind at a very specific level. For each of the chakras there are a large range of images, sounds and melodies which will create activity or stimulation of that region. In their most essential or archetypal form the images are known as yantras (specific geometric shapes) and the sounds are known as mantras. Anahata, the heart chakra, is the fourth primary chakra. In Sanskrit, anahata means unstruck which refers to the concept of the eternal sound. Anahata is associated with balance, calmness, and serenity. It is represented by a twelve petalled lotus flower inscribed with the syllables kam, kham, gam, gham, ngam, cham, chham, jam, jham,
Yantras are geometrical patterns and forms representing archtypal energies. Although they can be analysed, studied and interpreted, they communicate on a subtle level beyond language. In tantra they are used as visual tools to enhance our comprehension of the outer and inner environments. The root yam means to support or contain, to maintain the essence of an object, thought or concept. Tra means to liberate. So a yantra is that which preserves the essence and liberates.
Breath

“When breath is all out and stopped of itself, or all in and stopped - in such universal pause, one’s small self vanishes."

Vigyana Bhairava Tantra

The first time breath awareness is used is to calm the mind prior to the sankalpa, lasting only a few minutes. This time is to go deeper into the subconscious level, while still maintaining awareness. Here the focus is on the air passing through the nostrils. It can be done with counting, or visualising breathing through alternate nostrils, or both. Longer pauses between instructions is also possible, as you give them a mental task, count backwards from 108 with the breath, for example, and after a 20-30 seconds pause come with a reminder to return to the practice. Although alertness is generally encouraged, we allow them to occasionally dip below normal consciousness, to let go and forget the effort of visualising the breath in the nose, and bringing them back to the practice with a timely reminder.

The breath is also a natural stepping stone between the physical and mental layers. It allows us to sink below the conscious expression of the mind, preparing it for the visualisations to follow. Awareness is maintained and brought deeper into the sleep state, beyond thought of time and space, where we introduce archetypal imagery to the subconscious level.

Pranayama

The word pranayama is comprised of two roots: prana plus ayama. Prana means vital energy or life force. Pranayama utilizes breathing to influence the flow of prana in the nadis or energy channels of the pranamaya kosha or energy body.

The word yama means control and is used to denote various rules or codes of conduct. Ayama is defined as ‘extension’ or ‘expansion’. Thus, the word pranayama means ‘extension or expansion of the dimension of prana’.
Breathing exercises can alter the pH and pressure of the blood, enrich it with oxygen, strengthen the lungs and balance the nervous system. They can also be used to train the body’s reaction to stressful situations and dampen the production of harmful stress hormones. The breath is a mirror to the mental and emotional state, becoming faster and shallower in moments of excitement, stress or fear, and slower and deeper during relaxing activities and sleep. But it can also be turned around. Willfully slowing the breath induces calmness and greater mental clarity. The breath rate directly affects the vagus nerve, the longest of the cranial nerves, so named because it wanders like a vagrant, sending out fibres from the brain stem to the organs. The vagus nerve oversees a vast range of crucial functions, communicating nerve impulses in the parasympathetic nervous system.

The autonomic nervous system governs the body’s sympathetic (fight or flight) and parasympathetic (relaxation) responses, and controls the actions and reactions of the body’s systems, including the cardiovascular, respiratory, and digestive systems.

**The importance of breathing through the nose.**
The nose has various defense mechanisms to prevent impurities and excessively cold air entering the body. At the entrance to the nose, a screen of hairs traps dust, tiny insects and other particles that may injure the lungs if you breathe through the mouth.

After the entrance of the nose, there is a long winding passage lined with mucus membranes, where excessively cool air is warmed and very fine dust particles that escaped the hair screen are caught. Next, in the inner nose are glands which fight off any bacilli which have slipped through the other defenses. The inner nose also contains the olfactory organ, our sense of smell. This detects any poisonous gases around that may injure our health.

There is no difference in the amount of oxygen consumed by the body whichever way one breathes, by nose or mouth, but there is a vast difference in the amount of work required. The workload on the cardio-respiratory system may be reduced by as much as fifty percent by breathing through the nose to accomplish the same amount of oxygenation.
Breath sidedness
Erectile tissue is only found in a few areas of the body, including the nose. This tissue receives extra blood through microscopic passageways, causing the tissue to expand and harden. It follows a distinct and regular pattern, causing one nostril to be more open than the other at various times through the day. This creates a right/left variation in breath flow, which alternates every 60-90 minutes. This natural pattern can be interrupted by emotional disturbance, irregular mealtimes, sleep problems, pollution, infection and other forces that affect the bio-organism.
This switch can be triggered intentionally by laying down on one side of the body to open the other side. It can also be achieved by the use of a yoga danda, a carved stick that is used like a little crutch under the armpit, opening the breath on the opposite side.

Swara yoga
In addition to the chakras, the Tantras describe a network of subtle channels known as nadis through which the life force, prana, circulate. Nadi means current or stream. Of these, Ida, Pingala and Sushumna are considered the most important. Swara yoga is a science which involves the study of the breath flow through the nostrils in relation to the activities of the sun, moon, planets, seasons, time of day, with the physical and mental condi-
tions of the individual and then taking the appropriate action. For example, knowing the moon phase and checking the flow of the nostrils before getting out of bed and letting the corresponding foot be the first to touch the floor and make the first step to ensure success for that day.

Swara yoga states that during the day we switch between Ida and Pingala dominance every 60-90 minutes. For a few minutes during the transition it is possible for the breath to be equally open on both sides, indicating that Sushumna flows.

Ida and pingala are also connected to the two hemispheres of the brain. The brain cortex is divided into two clear hemispheres, each having highly specialized functions and receive sensory information from the opposite side of the body, so that the right eye goes to the left brain and vice versa.

The right hemisphere, stimulated by an open left nostril, ida, is connected to creativity, introspection, music, visual and peaceful activities. The word ida means comfort, and has a lunar energy and feminine nature, with a cooling effect and pale or white in colour. It corresponds to the river Ganges.

The left hemisphere, stimulated by right nostril dominance, pingala, is connected to language, logic, rational, verbal and more energetic activities. When you need to retrieve a fact, the left brain pulls it from memory. Pingala means tawny, a brownish-orange colour, and has a solar energy and masculine nature, a warming effect and red or black in colour. It corresponds to the river Yamuna.

Sushumna, meaning most gracious or joyful mind, interpenetrates the cerebrospinal axis, and in swara yoga is associated with both nostrils being open and free to the passage of air. The river Saraswati is Sushumna and connects the base chakra to the crown chakra, making the way for the ascent of Kundalini. From Muladhara chakra, ida and pingala alternate from the right to left sides at each chakra until they reach ajna chakra where they meet again with sushumna, then continuing beyond where ida and pingala end in the left and right nostrils respectively.