

3.2 THE ZONES: General overview of Zones - What are they?

What are zones?

Zones in the body are regions, compartments, spaces closed in by borders. These regions can be body parts, sections of body parts, divisions of the breathing channel, etc. Respiration, for instance, has three regions, or zones; at rest we usually center our breathing in the middle one, but can switch to the lower or higher zones. Zones have borders, so that during normal respiration you cannot flow into another one without spending at least some small effort to get through the barrier. When we take a full and deep breath we can continuously fill all three zones with air, but it takes much more muscular effort than what normal respiration requires. This relatively large exertion covers up the lesser one needed to cross the barrier. Zones can also be projected outside the body.

The traditions of the **East** have long known and have described a number of yogic anatomic systems, which are all **geometrical in design**. They present interconnected geometric structures of various kinds: Taoist yogas speak of cauldrons, stoves, cavities, all of which are variously shaped enclosures, of spaces within these, of centers, which are like points, and of channels, which are lines; Indian yogas work with circular chakras, nadis, or linear channels, bindus, or points, and so on. Zen teachings discard these complex elements, and rely only on the dantian (tanden, or hara), a point or space located in the abdomen. These are geometrically defined elements which can be best analyzed and made use of in terms of zones. It is also clear that **zonal** divisions have been recognized in the Eastern traditions, but have not been expressed in an organized form. For instance, according to Taoist body mapping there are three horizontal (transverse) zones, namely the head, heart and abdomen, as well as three vertical (coronal) zones, the channel of function, the central channel and the thrusting channel. Different Taoist sources give alternate names to these elements. The geometrical nature of the body and mind was well known in the East, and it was only due to lack of anatomical knowledge that the system described in Pragmayoga was not earlier recognized. If the masters of meditation had been familiar with the inner body, as we are today, this book would have been written centuries ago.

Indent: Zen also uses a verbal device, the koan, but that can also be treated as geometry. To explain this: mental and emotional contents come attached to specific body behaviors. The emotions of sorrow, joy, surprise, doubt, and so on, have corresponding facial and other muscular counterparts. The so-called “sensation of doubt”, to be maintained during koan practice, is physically embedded in a muscular frame, and this frame generates the lines and anchoring points of interacting forces to create the sensation of puzzlement, of doubt. As for concentration, the action of powerfully focusing the

The three **nens**

The notion of separate compartments is well established in Eastern traditions, but never clearly defined in terms of triadic zones. For example, Zen master Sekida comes close, although he understands the compartments not as physiological entities, but only as mental ones. He describes three action stages of the mind he calls the three “nens”. The first nen takes in the world experience, and the second one “illuminates” and “reflects” on the first one, but neither contains the quality that the third nen possesses: being conscious of experiencing. (See Katsuki Sekida, Zen Training...) His analysis is correct, and it can be made more precise: there are three fundamental zones of the body-mind: one that perceives the outer world, the second one applies attention on it, and the third one is the sense of the self. It is the self that experiences itself and includes the other two in its zone.

Zones in general

In Zonal Yoga we are chiefly concerned with the **zones** of respiration, but it is useful to first become familiar with zones in general. Both zones and tripartite structure come into existence at the very beginning of our lives: the **fertilized** egg starts development by dividing in three planes and becomes a three layered ball. All tissues of our body derive from one these layers, namely, the endoderm, mesoderm and ectoderm.

The most general triad of the body consists of the head, body and limbs. The head, or the upper body, or the arms or the legs are, similarly, divisible in the same way, just as much as are the neck, or thorax or abdomen or the fingers, and so on.

Focusing attention on any zone and on any of its various divisions, projected in any of the three planes, may be employed in yogic and meditative practice, and in everyday life, as well. For example, you can target your attention on any zone of the head, be that the frontal, or upper, or central one. The same is true for the thorax, or the tongue, or the abdomen. You can concentrate on the hands or the lower arm or the upper arm, etc.

To visualize the way the body can be divided in so many ways, and in three different planes, we can imagine a large cubical block made of sugar cubes. Now imagine a flat blade that can slide through this assemblage along the three planes, separating it in many different ways.

CLASSIFICATION OF ZONES

Zones are classified according to their shapes. There are three kinds: **flat**, **linear** and **spherical**. The last two forms need no explanation, but the term "flat" needs clarification. Actually, such zones have the shape of a three-dimensional container, which can be of any shape as long as it has flat sides, such as a cube, a rectangular box, and so on, but it can also be a two-dimensional flat plane. After lengthy search no perfectly suitable term can be found that covers all such shapes, except when we consider that these forms have in common the flatness of their components. The linear zone, is simply a one-dimensional line, reducible to a point by shortening it, while a spherical one is a sphere, that can also be flattened to become a circle, which in turn, is reducible in size to a point. At this time only the last two types will be covered; linear zones are taken up in a separate chapter.

TYPES OF ZONES: Flat and Spherical

Zones in normal consciousness take on both flat and spherical shapes. The target of attention, that is, whatever one focuses on is a flat zone, and the space of awareness that contains the target is the spherical one. Since we think using both shapes, both appear simultaneously, but their relative proportions depend on the nature of the thought. During thought or actions directed to the outside the sense of awareness and space disappears, but it returns in the blank moments between thoughts. Also see "The two shapes" chapter.

If we engage in **thinking** the **flat** zone, in which the subject of thought resides, appears in the spherical field of awareness. Similarly, when the mind is **empty** of thought, we are conscious of an emptiness as a **spherical** zone, but there is in the background a flat zone, in which the perception of that space takes place. When you successfully merge the two they disappear and you enter the state of pure consciousness.

DIVISIONS OF ZONES

Flat and spherical divisions of the body

The Tripartite Body can be divided in **three** directions, that is, cut along the **sagittal**, **coronal** and **transverse** planes. Put in everyday language, the body can be segmented in three planes, into (a) right, center and left, (b) front, middle and back, and (c) top, middle and bottom zones. It is advisable to use the technical terms **sagittal**, **coronal** and **transverse** because there are no precise words in common language to refer to these planes.

Facing a person you view the **sagittal** right, middle and left divisions;

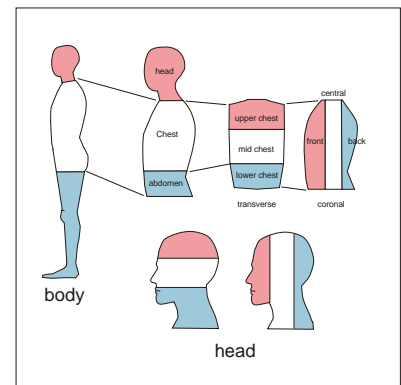
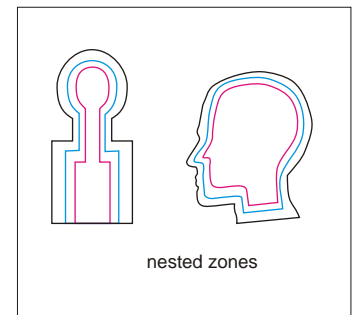
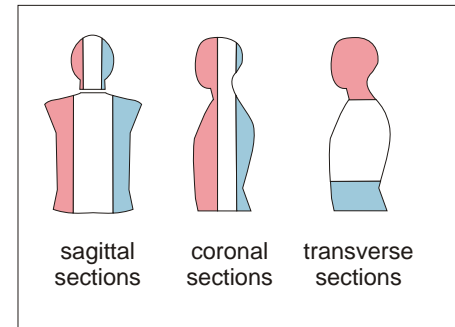
Viewing a person, from the front or from any side shows the **transverse** top, middle and bottom segments. When facing a person you only see one plane: only the **coronal** front one is visible and the middle and back divisions are covered up behind it.

Looking at the person's back you see the back coronal zone.

All zones appear in one of these three divisions. **Flat** ones, forming triads of adjacent blocks are most easily generated. They lie side by side or above and below each other, as, for example, the three zones of respiration, or the triad of the voice pitches, or the high, mid and low voice registers of speech and general sound production. **Spherical** zones can be understood as containers within containers.

Both **flat** and **spherical** zones can be tools of meditation. Any body part, or the entire body may be yogically sensed or projected either as flat compartments or as spherical concentric nested partitions, like enclosures within enclosures. The entire Tripartite body is a spherical nested construction consisting of the projected body, the somatic body and the UV. The **somatic** body itself has an outermost zone, starting with the skin; further in comes a middle, and finally the central layer of musculature.

This is observed through inward projection, but you can also, by directing projection outward, create layers outside the body. This is not an occult phenomenon: in daily life, when dealing with the outer world the mind is projecting itself into the outer zones; outward perception requires outward projection. In happy moments outward projection from the UV lifts the spirit, while unhappy times generate tension inward into the UV. Smiling projects tension outward, anger presses it inward. This is one of the reasons why yogic teachings, as much as ethical religions, direct us to love rather than hate, not only for the sake of morality, but to live in a happier projection.



Divisibility of ZONES and tripartite division: the bodily machine is divisible into large zones, and any of these, in turn, are also **further** divisible. Given segments may be large or small, and can take on various shapes, such as enclosures, or lines or points. This is why various yogic traditions can justifiably claim that there are innumerable channels, nadis and other projected elements in the body. Of course, only some of these are of high enough rank to be of practical significance in yogic techniques. Identifying, separating and correctly employing them is the key to successful body and mind control.

Subdivisions

As mentioned above, any zone is divisible into three parts, and its subdivisions can further be divided into their own three partitions. The **head**, in transverse sectioning, for example, can be divided into the upper skull, enclosing the brain, a middle region with the eyes, nasal passages and ears, and a lower one encompassing the mouth and the jaw.

The **arms** and **legs** each consist of three larger segments. The arms, for example, are composed by the humerus or upper arm, the radius-ulna or lower arm and the hands. Going further, the hands are constructed from three parts, the wrist, palm and fingers. The **fingers**, excepting the thumbs consist of three phalanges. As for the brain, its divisions into left and right **hemispheres** with different functions is an established fact. The left hemisphere deals with the verbal and the right one handles the visual agency of the mind. Is triplicity missing in this case? No, it is there: we have a central brain covered up between the two hemispheres. This makes sense in purely anatomic terms. However, this matter also manifests as a triplicity in mental functions. We are never wholly verbal or visual, but experience a mixture of various proportions of these functions. We are, in fact, conscious within a field that is a **merger** of the two halves. This region represents the mental middle part of a triad: the overlapping shared region where the left and right brains combine forms the **middle** zone. This makes sense since it is in the central inner region of the brain, encircled by the two halves of the cerebrum, that our primitive neural actions of experience operate. The central brain is the old, or primitive brain, that was already working in lower animals, and it consists of the **brain stem**, that is, the medulla, pons, mid brain, thalamus and hypothalamus. It is important to remember that the cranial nerves which insert into the **UV** connect directly, without any intermediaries, to the **brain stem**, which handles the most basic biological processes such as respiration, heart rate, swallowing, vomiting, etc. Functions among these that we can consciously manipulate, such as breathing, are strongly connected with our mental states.

When appropriately relaxed you can experiment and witness something of the contrasting roles of the right and left brains. For instance, being a Northern speaker, stand or sit erect and shift your weight to one side and relax the other side, or else focus your attention on the **left** zone of the head or of the whole body, i.e., allow the eyes to settle in these consciously selected target areas. You will notice that thinking in words easily takes hold, while visualizing things come far easier when, instead, the **right** side is attended. The Language Rule applies, and handedness may also influence this effect.

The various **other** divisions of the UV are also **tripartite**. In anatomy the tongue is considered to have three parts, the tip-blade, the body and the root (or base), which are coronal (also called axial) zones. Furthermore, the tongue musculature can be also split transversely (horizontally) into top, central and bottom layers, as well as sagittally into left, middle and right sections. The neck or the muscular covering of the head are no different.

However, it should be **emphasized** that although there are so many zones and so many possible arrangements of divisions and subdivisions, we need not trouble with this because only a small number play a role in yoga-mediation.

Tilting and rotation of planes

A zonal plane lies in a truly horizontal or vertical plane only if the body is vertically balanced, in a state where the forces exerted by coactive muscles, pulling forward, backward, left and right are **equalized**.

Whenever the body, head or even the arms are tilted to any degree, the zonal planes also become tilted and they move out from the body axis to the some degree. For instance, if you bend forward, the various zonal planes of the head also undergo tilting, forming angles with the absolute vertical or horizontal axes. The same action also projects the zone to extend partly or even entirely outside of the body. You can notice that when your body or torso is erect your thinking is projected in a region inside the head or body, but if you lean forward the thought region will be outside the head.

Both of these processes are responsible for the disappointing fact that when a meditator even slightly moves from a perfect position, or worse, gets up from a nicely working contemplative posture, the meditative state is immediately gone. What was lost can be regained by locating the projection, somewhere partly or completely outside the body. Keeping the meditative state is possible, of course, if the path of the zone movement is continuously watched and adjusted while one changes body positions—but this can be difficult.

Further divisions: Multiple Zones and segments

Eastern yogic traditions often speak of thousands or tens of thousands of channels and meridians and similar inner body elements existing in various planes.

While this is true in daily life or in meditation we do not separately deal with the myriad elements because the body merges its sections to form larger groups. These then act together as a single piece, and these are the zones we usually employ. For instance, although each contains several sub-zones appearing on various planes, the entire head or abdomen can act as a single zone .

Some zones are basic to normal practices, others are created for a brief time in executing special, usually more precise or stressful tasks. The zones worked with in Pragmayoga are those that come into action when the body-mind is balanced and settled in an equilibrium of forces.

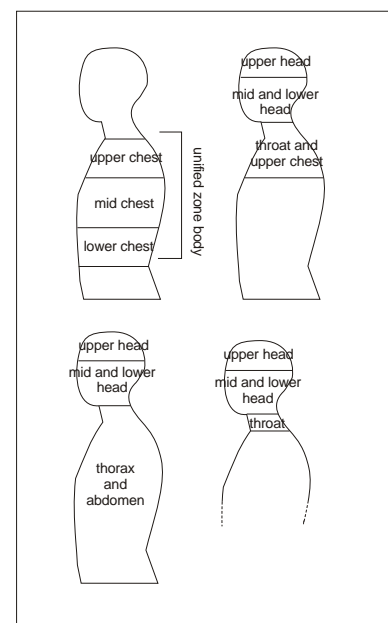
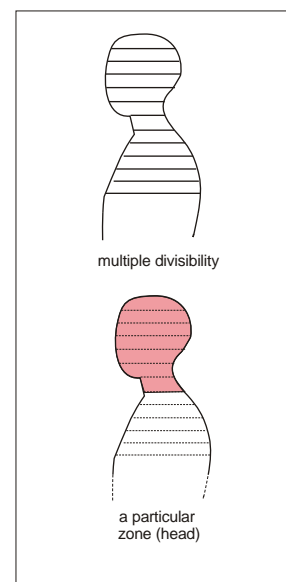
Zonal behavior in everyday life

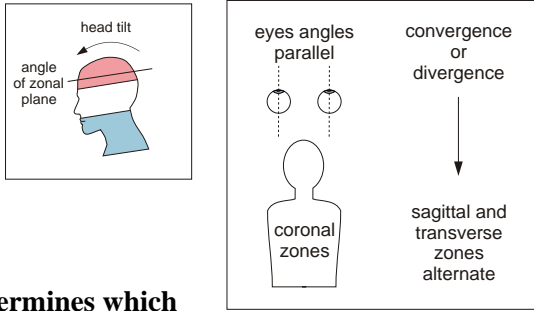
Normal automatic breathing is quite complex. To begin with, it is working with three zones, and then there are **four simultaneously** interacting factors controlling respiration at any moment: (a) the option of the zone where breathing takes place, (b) where mental projection lies, (c) the type of projection, whether it is anchored on the central point of the zone, or on the space surrounding it, and (d) the degree body of equalization and relaxation. Any change in any of these variables produces a reflexive adjustment in the others, and so your breathing is always changing in one or all of its aspects.

Moreover, in everyday actions the **zones** or their segments are not kept distinctly separated, but are **unified**, or **merged** into a single working apparatus. Midzone breathing (discussed in its own chapter) is taking place, but because of unbalanced posture or a tense state of the body the zones are compressed and not clearly separable. The zones are still present, but as body, head, face and other parts continuously change their positions the zones flow and blend into each other without clear borders. For this reason the different functions performed by each zone are not clearly observable. These functions are covered below in the paragraph on zonal mechanism.

Where a particular zonal triad of breathing appears at any one time in the body depends on how the body, head, arms, etc. are positioned. In most cases we move about and are not settled in equalized states for long, so the composition and actions of the triadic zones go through constant transformations.

The particular triadic zones that the **breathing** apparatus employs at one moment may be the three zones of chest, or the triad comprised by the head, the throat, and upper chest, or else, two merged zones of the head against the merged thorax and the abdomen, and so on. A simple way to ordering and simplifying ordinary respiration is presented in the Midzone chapter.





What determines which planes we perceive?

If zones can exist in three planes, what factor decides what plane we experience at any time? The answer is that it is body position, especially that of the UV that controls this option. As previously mentioned, if the eyes are first left completely relaxed, the UV will easily follow suit, along with the entire body. Because the eyes are the most important sense organ, and therefore play a primary function in the UV, we can define the choice of planes by defining the action of the eyes.

It is the convergence angle taken by the eyes that decides what zonal plane becomes projected. This is not unexpected since projection is fundamentally visual. And it is a fortunate fact that when working with the eyes, we need to deal with only a single pair of organs, and not with the great many others spread throughout the body and the UV. Although there are two eyes, they always act together and so in this context they can be considered as one organ.

The relationship between eye convergence and projection plane is simple yet somewhat complicated. To observe the following the eyes should be closed and relaxed. If the convergence is parallel, with each eye looking forward, without focusing on anything, then the projection is **coronal**. This is the projection in which chakras are perceived. But eye convergence or divergence creates projections that are **transverse** or **sagittal**. What determines this is how far the eyes are converging or diverging. When you gradually either converge or diverge them, you will go through an alternating progression of these two planes. Furthermore, this is true for each of the three settings, forward, midway or back, that the eyes can take. The Language Rule is also active here!

Keep your eyes closed and slightly diverge the axes of the eyes so you become conscious of the sides of the visual field as much or even more than the frontal field, and then relax the eyes in that position, leaving them comfortably locked in the setting. The frontal and lateral fields should now be equalized, midway between frontal and peripheral views. At this time the projection of central **sagittal** zone will appear. With the eyes aimed straight ahead, so that the visual lines are parallel, the coronal zone comes about. Similarly, by focusing with visual lines converging we get the transverse zones. The amount of eye rotation can be minimal in all cases.

The above covers the Northern language group. For the Southern one, including Asian, African and related speakers, the visual axes produce, respectively, (a) sagittals when converging, (b) coronals when parallel, and (c) transversals when diverging. In the middle languages, like Turkish or Hungarian, etc., these differences are seemingly cancelled as each eye is pulled in two opposing directions at the same time, so that the eyes seem to be practically parallel in all three cases. However, slight changes in balance bias, like tilting will produce sagittal or transverse projections.

In yogic practice we must often pay attention to the plane of projection. The visualization of lines, or nadis, or channels comes about in the sagittal zones, whereas chakras appear in the coronal zones.

The tilting of the body, or any of its parts influences the automatically caused visual angles of the eyes, so you should remember that the appropriate body position and visual angle must be combined to enter a particular zonal plane. Attention to this fact is important in generating inner body projections or any other visualizations. If the body tilts the projected planes will also tilt and therefore will partly lie outside the body. It should be emphasized that the above described relationship of eye angles and planes projected shows clearly only when the body is set in perfect equilibrium. Otherwise, the addition of other agents, such as variations in eye angle, in body tilt, in location of the breathing center, as well as the Language Rule alters the projections. In daily life this effect brings about a continually changing mixture of planes.

An **experiment** can demonstrate the determination of planes by eye convergence. Being an English speaker (the Language Rule applies!) first you must set the body to be vertically balanced, preferably sitting and breathing evenly. Except in a perfect equalization, other factors enter and they complicate the projections.

Tripartite zonal (trizonal) mechanism-how it works in respiration

Zonal divisions always connect and work together as a triad, and any zone is a member of some triad. Such a mechanically united triad can be called a **trizone**. Triads have a specific mechanical behaviors. It is essential to examine how this mechanism operates if we are to better understand the body-mind. As related earlier, the Japanese Zen master Sekida has explained mental processes in terms of trizones.

To control the body-mind we need to understand how **three part** zonal units operate. The process, which takes place not only in respiration, but in other tripartite body and yogic functions, becomes observable when the body and the UV are neutralized. At that time, seeing it as a tripartite zonal activity we can easily understand the basic mechanics of respiration.

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Two types of respiratory mechanics

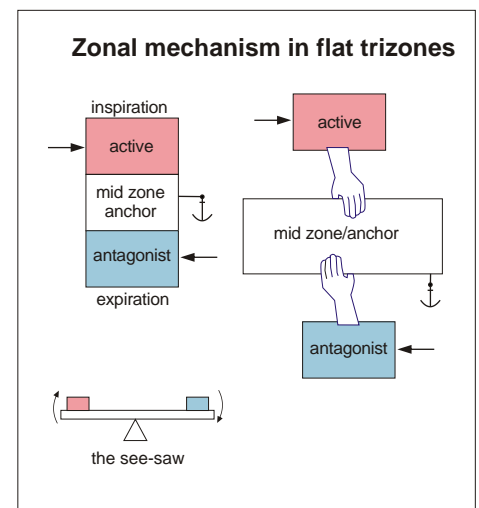
Flat and spherical trizones operate differently. Flat ones are comprised of three zones placed on either side of the middle zone. They are usually stacked vertically, but will tilt to various degrees as determined by body position. Spherical trizones contain nested zones, each surrounding one located within it. We experience the two modes according to mental behavior.

When dealing with the outer world, looking, listening, moving, thinking, walking, when there is a definite object of attention. This includes consciously watching one's own breathing.

However, when we engage with the inner world, but without visualizing it, and focus attention on nothing, observing respiration without any thought about it, in a state of awareness only, then the spherical trizone appears. This can also occur in brief moments between thoughts. And you experience freedom. The sphere, or center of awareness still has a location, and can be projected in any yogic region, including the head, throat, chest, abdomen, or any other body part.

Flat zonal mechanics

In the flat trizonal mechanics there are two outer zones, usually above and below, but at other times, on either side of the middle zone. The **two outer** zones of a triad are **executors** of actions; one is the active **agent** or moving force (usually called the "prime mover"), and the other one is its **antagonist**, which by opposing the active force gives controlling balance to the movement. In respiration the active, or agent zone is the one that inhales air, and the antagonist is, what exhales it and controls the rate of expiration. Note that if your breathing is thoracic, the agent zone is the top one, whereas in abdominal breathing the bottom one is the agent. As for the middle zone, it acts as the base, or **anchor** that holds the outer two zones together.



Agent-anchor-antagonist action

The agent-antagonist coupling was recognized by Zen master Sekida when he noted that by opposing the forces of the abdominal muscles and the diaphragm we gain a tool for managing the mind. (Zen training, p. 56.)

The **see-saw** is a good example of how the three zones in a flat trizone interact. The weights of the two children sitting at opposite ends represent the two outer zones and the central pivot is the mid zone. The outer zones are the actor and the antagonist, that is, they balance each other, while the central one makes the arrangement stable. Such use of zones appears in the Pranayamic method of breathing alternately through the left and right **nostrils**. The two sides are the agent and antagonist and the section lying between the two, the central plane running through the face, head and even the body form the middle anchor. Such organization of tripartite action has an evolutionary basis. The three part system is basic in vertebrate motion. For instance, the body is the stable mid anchor against which the legs and arms move. Similarly, in a swimming fish the body is center from which the head and tail bend away.

Spherical zone mechanics

Zones in spherical trizones are concentric, they are located one inside another. The central zone is the antagonist, or anchor and the surrounding, or border zone is the agent. The middle region between the center and the border is the midzone.

Antagonist relationship between two opposing forces, anchored on a third one is an essential factor in physical movement. Such interaction by an agent-antagonist couple is built into not only body action, respiration, as well as meditation, but is universally present in all physical movements. Two **adjacent** zones, opposing each other **cannot** produce sensible action, because each one would have to brace itself on the other, and this would be like two people pushing each other while standing on ice.

This is where the **middle zone** enters the process: it provides the stable platform, or anchor, against which the two other forces on either side of it can brace themselves.

Zonal triads are represented in Eastern tradition in many ways. One of the best known ones is the yin and yang concept. These are antagonists: one is positive, the other is negative. Here we see the divisions of a zonal triad: the agent and antagonist are the two outer zones, namely Yin and Yang, while the border region where they make contact is the middle zone. After merging the three become a single unity.

The three facial zones

The tree concentric spherical zones of the face are good examples of trizone action. They are prominent in directing consciousness. The outer and inner zones are concerned with the outer and inner world. If you look at a scene the involvement of the outer layers of the face can be felt as a tension in this region. The inner zones becomes the agent when you feel your self. The outer is served by the facial nerve, and the inner by the trigeminal nerve, both cranial nerves. It has been noted in physiology that these two distinct sets of nerves interconnect, but how they interact has not been discovered. The fact is that they merge and thereby create a middle zone. This merged area is the Midzone of the facial musculature, and acts as the agent when the mind is engaged in attention. The three zones are always cooperating in proportions depending on kind of mental content, but in meditation if one settles in the facial Midzone one will empty the mind.

An example: the three zones of respiration located by their barriers

Before we go on to locate breathing zones it is useful to understand details on the method. The perception of breathing movement in some body part is a matter of projection. When respiration movements and eye movements are merged and observed as a unified action, either vision or breathing can act as the agent.

If vision is made the agent, then eye movements will project respiratory movement to the place one is internally looking at. Thus, first feel the region where you feel the forces of inspiration arising, in the thorax or abdomen, etc.; second, make eye focusing the agent, and finally watch as you move breathing up or down into the adjacent zone. (For topic of *merger* see the chapter *Midzone Respiration*).

Locating and passing the zonal barriers

Zones are enclosed by barriers, or borders that oppose movement out of the zone. This is what we experience when inspiration automatically comes to a stop before it changes to expiration, which, in turn, ends when reaching its border limits. By finding their borders we can locate the space within zones.

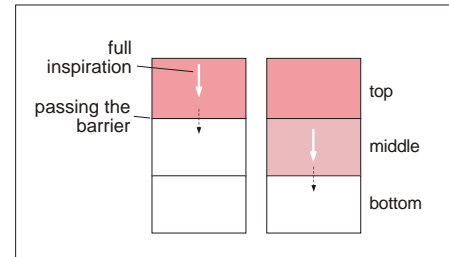
To observe this, you should slightly tense the breathing apparatus as you draw in air filling the upper chest starting at its top or bottom.. Now release the tension but hold on to the filled region. This allows you to reach over to the lower border, and then to draw air into the middle zone. Hold and relax the top and middle zone, and then repeat the action to arrive in the lower zone. If you have held on to each zone you will have identified and located all three zones of respiration.

Alternately, start the process at the bottom zone. (The Language Rule applies!)

By breaking through the envelope borders with only minimal force, that is, by gliding across the barrier, you can combine all three into a single envelope, centered in the mid zone.

Note that slight spontaneous movements in parts of the body, (like blinking or head tilting or tongue movement, or small changes in posture, etc.) must be allowed occur in order to pass through the barriers.

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Holding on to zones - Zonal aggregates

To successfully project a three-part trizone, it is most important to attach each zone to the next one in line, not letting go of the one(s) just passed. This is how a zonal aggregate is formed. In other words, when moving from one zone to another, you to have to hold on to the projection of the previous zone. This can easily fail unless you prevent various parts of the UV from inadvertent, unconscious action. For instance, while you are passing through a zonal border, you will tend to blink. This will dissolve the frame you are trying to maintain because blinking is UV action. Therefore, avoid blinking and other unrelated UV motions. The reason for adding zones and holding them is simply that if you want to work with trizones, you need to have all three, contained in a larger aggregate frame, where each one is available to perform its role in trizonal action. If you do not store previously projected zones you are left, at any time, with a single one.

The method of combining regions as aggregates is essential in Vajrayana, Taoist, Zen and other schools. For example, a sensation of warmth, of a liquid flowing down around the head and body, or visualizing geometric forms, or the undulating line of Kundalini is basically the act of merging adjacent zonal regions, and projecting them as various types of visual or tactile perceptions. The importance of aggregation was expressed in a simple way, and in a much more general sense by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj: “The art of meditation is the art of shifting the focus of attention to ever subtler levels, without losing one's grip on the levels left behind.” (from “I am that”, p. 413, Acorn Press, Durham USA, 1982).