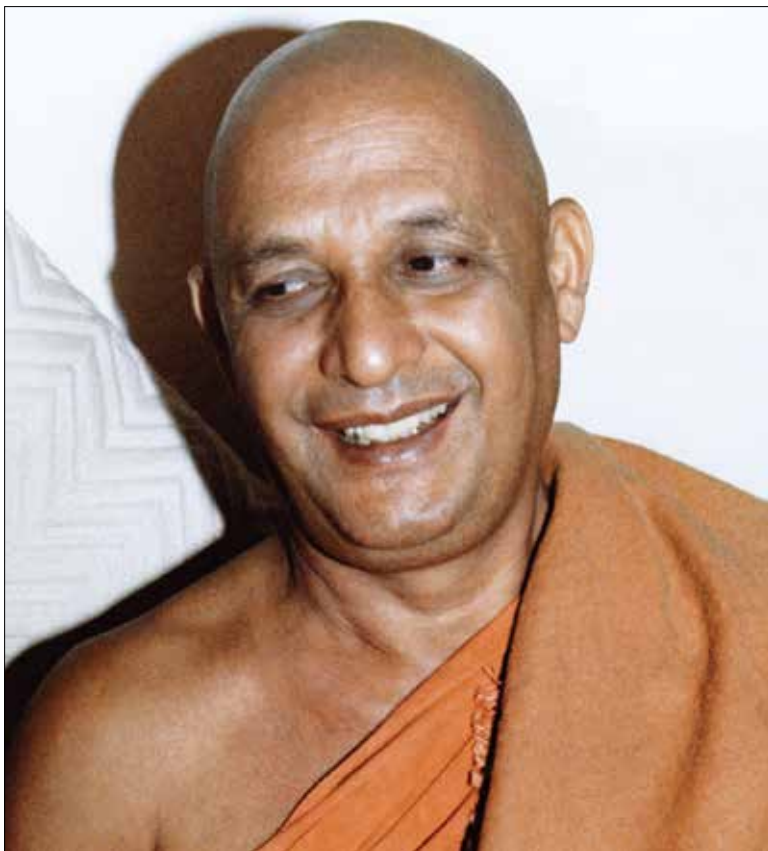


Satyam Speaks Pratyahara



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Satyam Speaks
Pratyahara

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

Satyam Speaks Pratyahara



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Satyam Speaks Pratyahara

Swami Satyananda Saraswati

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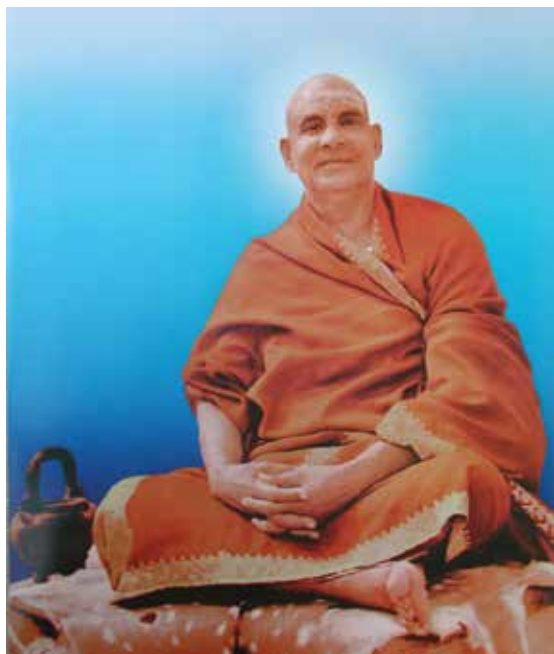
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



Dedication

*To our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our yogic and spiritual journey.*

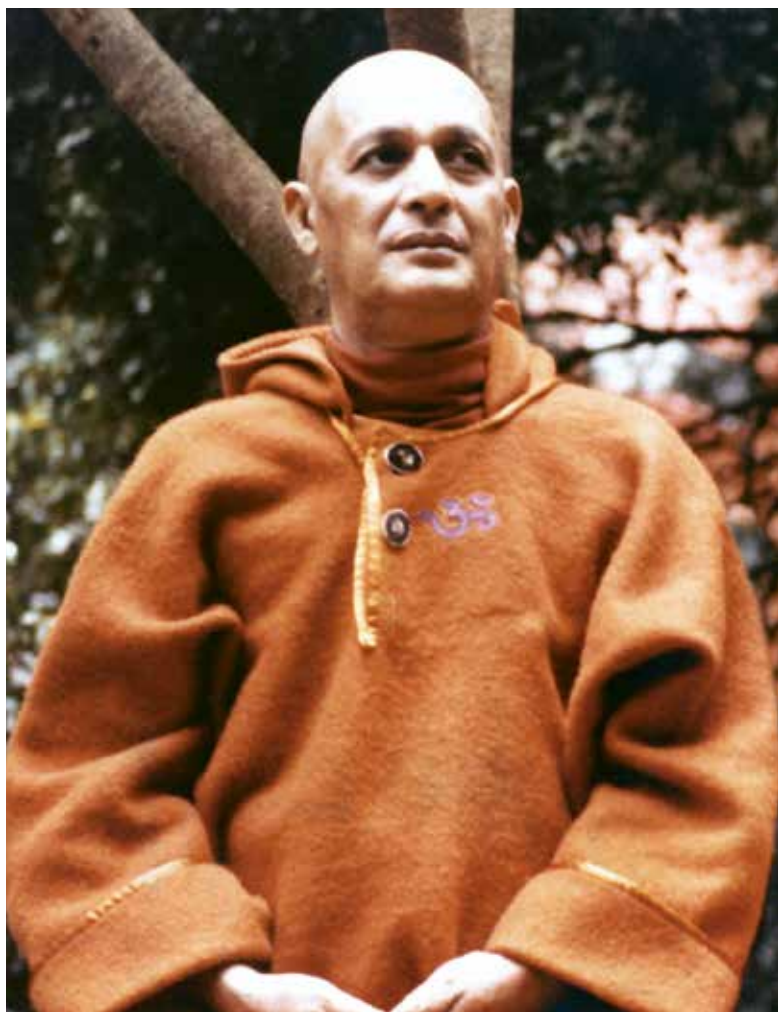
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Preface

Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati dedicated twenty years of his life to the propagation of yoga, and thus fulfilled the mandate given by his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati, 'to spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore'. He travelled around the globe many times bringing the message of yoga to people of all walks of life, regardless of caste or creed. Master of yoga vidya and creator of the Yoga Chakra, he adapted his knowledge and understanding of yoga to the needs and abilities of people. Swami Satyananda simplified valuable techniques and complex processes by giving systematic and clearly defined sequences. Everyone could understand and progress following the theoretical explanation and practical instructions. Everyone was able to benefit from yoga.

Satyam Speaks Series presents compilations of Sri Swami Satyananda's teachings on yoga. Each book explores a specific topic, concept or practice. The aim is to provide an easy way to understand and incorporate various components of the immense science of yoga vidya into one's daily life. For some titles, more information is provided of specific conditions or applications, which are for the information of the aspirant only and not for practice. These have been included to show the depth of understanding and experience Sri Swami Satyananda had of yoga vidya.

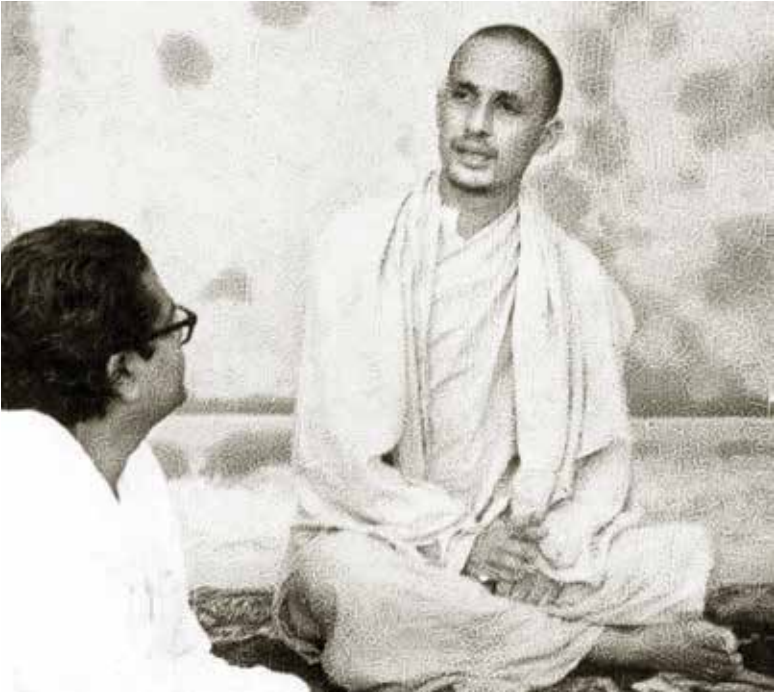


Satyam Speaks Series is a tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda, his teaching and to yoga vidya. *Satyam Speaks Series* is an invitation to all sincere aspirants to live yoga and thereby make the world a better place.

Learn from an accomplished yoga master, not from a book. This series is a knowledge guide and a yoga master is a practical guide.

1

Introducing Pratyahara



Most of us spend the majority of our waking life with our mind externalized. In other words, our mind is predominantly concerned with events which occur outside the body. To gain any success in meditational techniques,

we need to withdraw the mind from association with the outside world, and forget this external environment. This is easier said than done, for the mind has been habituated since birth to looking outside, and like all habits it is difficult to overcome.

Most people find it difficult to close their eyes and forget the outside world, even for one minute or so. During meditation we ask the practitioners to try and keep their eyes closed for the duration of the practice. We tell them that they should resist the temptation to open their eyes by asking themselves the question, "What is outside that can possibly interest me? I am in a room and certainly nothing is happening outside." All of us have this conditioned reflex always to think of external things. Our awareness is drawn outside in the same way as iron is attracted to a magnet.

The biggest problem is that our mind is continually receiving data about the outside world via the sense organs: the ears, the eyes, the nose, tongue and skin. Our mind cannot really dissociate itself from the outside world until it is trained or encouraged to ignore this never-ending stream of stimuli from the sense organs. This is a natural process, for the mind does not assimilate or take note of all the messages it receives from the sense organs. If it did, it would be unable to make decisions or obtain knowledge of the outside world, for it would be inundated with so much information that it would be powerless to act. The situation would be similar to having fifty radios in a room emitting fifty different radio stations with equal intensity. Sitting in the middle of the room, one would be unable to perceive any one station and comprehend any one program. The mind selects some of the data and then makes decisions.

What we must do is to reduce the selection of sense impressions which are communicated to the mind to zero. Actually we do this more than we think. If we are absorbed in an interesting book, we automatically lose awareness of the surroundings; we forget the sound of the clock or the voices of people in another room or the crackling of a fire

in the room. What we must try to do in *pratyahara* is to lose awareness of our environment, but without the help of an exciting book or any other external object that absorbs the intellectual faculties of the mind. The mind should be absorbed; one should be concentrated, but without intellectualization.

The mind is like a naughty child; it does the opposite of what you want it to do. So if you try to shut out sense impressions, the mind automatically makes them more intense. If, on the other hand, you force the mind to think of external things while the eyes are closed, it will after some time tend to lose interest in the external sounds, etc., and will not associate with sense impressions. This state of mind, called *pratyahara*, is exactly what we want for meditation.

In yoga the process of withdrawal is the process of relaxation. What Patanjali calls *pratyahara* or an act of withdrawal of external consciousness, or an act of disassociation of consciousness from the objects outside, is relaxation. But this relaxation cannot be complete until you have relaxation in the whole system.

Tensions are muscular, mental and emotional

Tensions are physical, mental and at the same time they are emotional. Faulty secretions in the endocrinal system can cause tensions and not necessarily the psychological problems of your society and family, not necessarily the economic pressure, not necessarily the emotional maladjustment in your family. There can be nervous disorders; there can be problems in your body due to a faulty endocrinal system, and those faulty endocrinal secretions are caused by faulty living, faulty breathing, faulty eating habits and so on. Therefore, in the scheme of yoga, *asanas* or yoga postures and *pranayama* or breathing techniques come first, in order to get rid of muscular physical tensions, to eliminate the toxins from your body and at the same time to neutralize the faulty secretions that take place.

Patanjali yoga

In Sage Patanjali's raja yoga there is a state called *pratyahara* when the mind and mental awareness are disassociated from the sensory channels. The perfection of *pratyahara* leads to concentration and then to meditation. The system of Patanjali yoga consists of eight steps or limbs which the aspirant must progressively master on the path to self-realization.

1. *Yamas* – self-restraints
2. *Niyamas* – self-observances
3. *Asanas* – postures
4. *Pranayama* – regulation of prana through breath control
5. *Pratyahara* – disassociation of consciousness with the outside environment
6. *Dharana* – concentration
7. *Dhyana* – meditation
8. *Samadhi* – identification with pure consciousness.

The first is known as yama or self-control. The second is niyama or discipline. The third is asana, a steady and comfortable posture, which can be maintained for one, two or three hours without wavering in the body. The fourth is pranayama – retention of breath. It does not mean breathing in and breathing out. Pranayama means the gap between inhalation and exhalation; the period of retention. The fifth is *pratyahara* which means de-linking the brain from the senses. The sixth is *dharana*, pictorial conception or visualization. The seventh is *dhyana*, total awareness of the object of your visualization. The eighth is *samadhi* which is a living experience of your object. In order to accomplish this, the seven steps of raja yoga have to be perfected. Each step is a preparation for the next and requires a different type of training in order to be perfected.

Meditation begins with *pratyahara*, which translates as 'to retreat' or 'to return to'. *Pratyahara* includes methods to induce a state of mind in which the awareness is withdrawn from the external world. One interacts with the external world through the sense of smell, taste, sight, touch and

sound. Using specific pratyahara practices, these senses are systematically withdrawn from external stimuli and turned inward. Initially, during the practice of pratyahara, the mind is easily distracted and is in an inert or dense state. However, through regular practice tensions are gradually released from the mind and prana begins to withdraw from external sensations. Over time the awareness and prana become internalized and the state of pratyahara is achieved.

This clearly defines the meaning of the fifth state of raja yoga, pratyahara, where a person's awareness is withdrawn from the external world and the sense organs. In fact, this all important stage is preliminary to the attainment of meditation through raja yoga techniques and is elucidated again and again in the Upanishads.

Pratyahara: the fifth stage of raja yoga and the first in esoteric yoga

When the senses do not carry the impulses to the brain, that is pratyahara. When the five indriyas are benumbed, are paralyzed, invalidated, and the mind does not receive the necessary stimulus from outside, that is pratyahara. That means the mind is isolated. This is the first step in esoteric yoga and the fifth in raja yoga. If you are able to isolate your mind from the sense impressions, you have started yoga.

Withdrawal of the senses is pratyahara. What is the withdrawal of senses? There are five senses, five sense experiences and five sense objects. How is it possible to withdraw the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching? First you close your eyes and become aware of the remaining sense experiences around you however disturbing they may be. For example, there may be a sound in the next room or even in the same room with you. You must try to analyze the sound, understand it and grasp the significance of it. You must separate the sense from the sense experience and only become aware of the experience of sound vibration. To illustrate this further, imagine a bell is ringing. First you consider the ear, second the bell, and third the sound of

the bell. You must be aware of the sound which is the sense experience. The bell, the sense object, belongs to the outer world. By realizing it you accomplish the first step of sense withdrawal.

It is important that you realize that it is not an absent-minded comprehension, but rather a present-minded awareness of the objective reality which you are trying to grasp. You may take one experience and analyze it fully, or you may take many, one right after the other, but sooner or later you must come to the point where you are able to analyze and understand the perception. Then the experience alone remains – devoid of the object, and later it is devoid of the subject as well.

The problem of how to isolate the mind comes because there is an unholy alliance between the mind and the senses. For incarnations the mind and the senses have lived together. When you isolate the mind from the senses it becomes restless, therefore there are certain yogic practices for isolation of the mind.

Withdrawal of consciousness

When the consciousness manifests itself through the body, it superimposes upon itself the attributes of body, mind and intellect. Thus it begins to feel pain, pleasure, heat, cold, hunger, thirst, which in essence belong only to the body and mind. Yoga prescribes a series of practices through which the consciousness detaches itself from the influence of the body and mind and realizes its inherent bliss and unconditioned nature.

The world of objects and events reaches us through the doors of perception, consisting of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. Just as the tortoise withdraws its limbs at will, similarly, through yogic practices, mind and senses are to be withdrawn from their respective objects.

When the doors of perceptions are all closed, your mind will communicate with consciousness within. But the senses are so turbulent and mischievous that they do not allow



us to commune with the consciousness inside. They are very powerful and drag the mind off the track, making it impossible to concentrate on the object. The *Bhagavad Gita* very aptly describes it as follows: “Just as a powerful wind tosses a small boat in various directions and prevents it from reaching its destination, in the same way, the turbulent senses mislead the mind and do not allow it to get a glimpse of the divine self.”

Therefore, in yoga the emphasis is always given to the control of the body, pranas, senses and mind. Through hatha yoga, the body is controlled. Through pranayama, the vital airs are controlled. Through japa yoga and trataka, the consciousness is withdrawn from the external world; this is known as pratyahara.

Two mental attitudes

Pratyahara is an act of dissociation of the sense impulses from the mind. However, concentration, tense effort, working hard to focus the mind will not give any positive result at this stage. It may appear to you that you are hurrying up the whole process, but ultimately you will realize that you will not be able to walk further.

Each *indriya* or sense organ is a channel which contributes to the influence in the brain, and if one of the channels is obstructed, then the mental experience becomes very keen. Usually when people do their work, they are not at all aware of their mental problems and distractions, although they are there. However, at night, when all the work is finished and they sit down for meditation, all the thoughts start coming. It is not because thoughts only come at night; the thoughts were there during the day also, but at that time the sense channels were not obstructed. Everything was functioning, and so you were not aware of what was going on inside of you. The *vritti*, the mental attitude, was extroverted.

At night, all the sense channels withdraw and it is at that time that you become aware of the troubles and anxieties. In the practice of pratyahara we are obstructing the sense organs. One by one, all these channels should be obstructed, not in order to inhibit them, but to enable us to sit quietly and see the fantastic panorama of awareness inside, which at present is not available to us due to our extrovert tendency. The obstruction of the passages of experience that contribute to the activities of the brain, is one of the methods of stimulating the consciousness, *samskaras* and *vasanas*.

The mind functions under two attitudes – *bahiranga mukha vritti*, the external attitude, and *antaranga mukha vritti*, the internal attitude. The external attitude has its basis in the sense organs and through this attitude the mind becomes extrovert. In the *Kathopanishad* we read: “The man does not see the higher self, because his consciousness is drawn to the external objects by the *indriyas* or senses and, in fact, the *indriyas* are the root cause of this extrovert tendency of the mind.”

If you light a candle and at the same time you keep the fan running, the flame can never become steady. In the same way, it is written in the *Gita* (6:19): “Just as a lamp can remain absolutely steady in a place without any breeze or wind, so the practitioner of yoga should try to avoid the cause of that wind or breeze which brings about mental fluctuations.”

Yogic approach to pratyahara

In yoga you first withdraw the senses, you cut off the connections, then the awareness becomes free of the senses. When your consciousness becomes free from sense association, it is known in yoga as withdrawal or pratyahara.

If you are concentrating upon a rose, on the sound *Aum*, on the cross or Christ, or upon your guru or your God, you must remember that many thoughts will come in your mind. That's natural and correct and it should happen. If they don't come there is something wrong. That's where everybody is making a mistake. They think that if you concentrate on the rose, only the rose should be there.

The purpose of a mantra, the purpose of concentration, pranayama and yoga, is not to suppress the mind; it is to explore the mind. Everything must come out: past memories, visions of the future, all your problems, all that you know, all that you can think about must come out. That is called the practice of pratyahara. That is called the practice of raja yoga in which you are expressing the whole mind from subliminal depths to the conscious plane. When you take a mantra you must allow your mind to function. How long can the mind function? How long will the distractions remain? Finally, the mind will be transcended. Therefore, in the yoga of meditation we consider the mind as a substance and express the whole mind, which is finally to be transcended.

The significance of pratyahara

Pratyahara means that the mind, which is facing the objects, is now returning from the objects. The consciousness has been withdrawn or the consciousness is being withdrawn from the

objects. Now this relationship is peculiar. The consciousness is always experiencing and this process of experiencing is constant. The experience is taking place consciously, subconsciously, and also unconsciously. You cannot stop it even while you sleep at night, even while you are dreaming. Even if you are not interested, it does not matter. The consciousness is so sensitive; the mind is so sensitive, like a sensitive microphone, accepting all the influences which are within the range of your knowledge, as well as, those which are not within the range of your knowledge. Complete disassociation of the mind from matter should take place. This is pratyahara. As soon as you are able to withdraw your mind temporarily from the gross objects, from the external life, that is relaxation, that is perfect rest.

Therefore, all those people who feel tired after their day's business should try to sit down in a particular posture and then do a particular exercise in pratyahara. In fifteen to twenty minutes they will find that they are getting better.

Pratyahara is conscious introversion, withdrawal of the mind and senses. This important part of human life must be understood by everyone. At night during sleep, the consciousness is withdrawn, disassociated from external objects, and we are not aware of our parents, friends, environment, pain and pleasure, profit and loss, not even of ourselves. This withdrawal of consciousness which nature has so benevolently provided saves us from mental crisis. It is nature's greatest gift to mankind; without it the human race would be mad.

Sleep is not a physiological state; it is a state of mind. According to Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, sleep is one of the *chitta vrittis*, the fivefold modifications of mind. In pratyahara as in sleep the objective awareness is withdrawn, but we still remain wide awake. Pratyahara is a yogic state of consciousness; sleep is a state without consciousness.

Pratyahara would be the easiest of all human activities if it were not for the one difficulty of maintaining awareness. Withdrawing the mind from external experiences and

perceptions is not a difficult task, but once it is withdrawn how will we stay awake? This is where yogic practices come in. They provide a focal point for the mind which keeps us from falling asleep. This is why they are so necessary.

Even as you train a wild horse, in yoga you train the wild and crude mind. In the course of evolution, the mind has manifested in the form of human life, but by no means is this mind perfect and infallible. Though it is a gift of nature, the mind also has its limitations. It has to depend on the sensory channels for information and stimulation.

Now we have to find a connection between the various practices of yoga. In fact, we should not say yoga or meditation, we should say that yoga is meditation and meditation is yoga. After all, what does the word yoga mean? Fusion, merging, union; that's yoga. What is meditation? Total cessation of the individual mind and total awareness of the universal mind, that is dhyana.

All the practices of the raja yoga system of Patanjali are necessary to refashion the consciousness. Just as a sculptor carves a beautiful masterpiece from a rough piece of stone, so too must the crude and primitive personality of the individual be hewn and purified. The qualities of tamas and rajas must be eliminated. After one is free from unnecessary past karma, his awareness is left completely isolated, so that consciousness is able to experience itself.

The awareness known as *chaitanya* functions on four different levels. In *jagriti*, the waking state, it functions through the medium of the senses and the mind. In *swapna*, the sleeping state, it operates on the dreaming level. *Sushupti*, known as the dreamless sleep state, occurs when all stimuli are removed, and the consciousness does not perceive an object, experience or vision. In the fourth stage, called *turiya*, the awareness is free from all impressions, all channels are closed and it experiences itself in its pure form – I know I am. When this knowledge takes place, we have achieved the purpose of yoga – the evolution of human life.

2

Exploring Pratyahara



Right from the birth of creation, man has been walking on the outer path in total darkness. He has followed this path for he knew no other way. When every experience came to a dead end, when every joy had its limitations, he came to realize that he should travel inward. Of course, man faced many difficulties and obstructions when he started the inward journey. First of all, he did not know the way, or

through which gate to enter. Then, wherever he turned his mind, he found so many doors. Upon entering through any one of them, he discovered fascinating roads, intriguing passageways and beautiful gardens on either side. However, if he stopped to explore these, he could be waylaid for a long time. In fact, this is what happens to many people who practise meditation.

Sometimes we teach meditation for the attainment of tranquillity and peace of mind, or to calm down an excited nervous system. But in fact, what we are really teaching is not meditation at all, it is pratyahara. The raja yoga of Patanjali explains this very well. When the brain is isolated, that is pratyahara. Pratyahara is a very important aspect in dhyana yoga. In the state of pratyahara, the first thing that you do is dissociate the sensory impulses which feed the mind and form the vrittis. When you concentrate on a form, repeat a mantra, or practise a certain technique of pranayama, you are actually trying to establish the state of pratyahara.

Scientists who are bravely exploring the new frontiers of consciousness have devised methods of propelling us inside ourselves as if powered by rocket engines. One of these techniques involves sensory deprivation tanks, structures designed to induce an artificial state of sensory withdrawal or pratyahara. These tanks are designed to cut off all sensory stimulation so that awareness has nowhere else to go but inside, it has no choice but to face the mind. They use the sensory deprivation tank for short periods of time to slowly gain relaxation and insight into new states of consciousness. Sensory deprivation tanks provide a means of moving inside quickly; however, this is not always desirable as one would tend to miss certain things in the same way as one would if travelling on a fast traffic highway. Meditation may be slower but it teaches its practitioners to explore, to face and understand the obstacles preventing inner awareness, to understand the relationship between mind and body.

In the state of pratyahara, when you dissociate your consciousness from the sensory channels and impulses, you

are conserving a great deal of energy, and this energy may manifest itself in the form of patterns or visions. Many people misunderstand these energy patterns and talk enthusiastically about psychic occurrences. They miss the purpose of meditation and wander right off the path.

If your practices succeed, then you are able to isolate the consciousness from perception, and this is the first step in meditation. To merely avoid external stimuli is not sufficient, the senses must be withdrawn before the mind can develop the ability to concentrate. One-pointedness can only come when pratyahara has been mastered. There are no shortcuts.

Where psychology ends, yoga begins

In Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* the first sutra says: "The definition of yoga is to be able to control the mind." Some people say that the definition of yoga is union of the individual soul with the cosmic soul. Others have their own definitions, but Rishi Patanjali, the codifier of raja yoga, defines yoga precisely as having absolute control over the tendencies of the mind. These tendencies are formations on the superstructure of the mind. Mind is consciousness – *chitta*. The homogeneity of consciousness throws out wave after wave or *vruttis* – just as a pond throws out ripple after ripple when pebbles are thrown into it.

The formations on the superstructure of the mind are the tendencies of the mind which we experience in our day-to-day life. Anger and jealousy are not unholy. Passion and hatred are not sinful. These are the tendencies of the mind caused by external stimuli from the life which we face during our period of experience of *raga* and *dvesha* – like and dislike, attraction and repulsion, passion and anger. I assure you that we can never control these unless we go to the very base. The base is *chitta*, the mind, not the formations of the mind. Once you have been able to hold total control over the whole *chitta*, you are master of the subject. Yoga is nothing but this. It is not magic, a religion, a cult, a mystic philosophy, it is just a science of mind – the whole mind. Psychology is a science

of mental symptoms. Yoga is the science of the whole mind. Therefore, where psychology ends, yoga begins. Psychology talks about symptoms, but we don't talk about symptoms, we talk about the whole subject.

Knowing the mind

What is the mind then? Mind is a reflection of supreme consciousness. The mind that is free from disturbances and psychotic manifestations, free from all its so-called attributes, the mind as it is, a thing in itself, that mind is a clue to the supreme consciousness. Indeed, the person who has been able to visualize the mind without its external manifestations can reach the highest experience.

Mind works within a definite area and not outside of that, but it can expand. Mind has no limitations. It can travel into the past or future; it is very powerful. It is not just a bundle of habits, a process of thinking or emotions. These are only the modifications of the mind and not the mind. These are the *vrittis* of the mind, the outer manifestations of the mind. The heat is not the sun, it is the modification of the sun. In the same way, mind is a different matter.

Mind is *chitta*, meaning consciousness. You should be able to expand your consciousness beyond the sense objects. Can you visualize those things that are not subject to the sense organs? No! You cannot perceive the sound beyond and below a certain range because you're limited. According to the *Yoga Sutras*, the mind has five model reactions. That is to say, the mind acquires knowledge in five different ways, and this is the limit of the mind. When that boundary is broken and the mind is able to function beyond the five senses, then we say the mind has transcended the barrier.

This mind, which has been realized as a very powerful source of knowledge and energy, is arrested by the limitations of the human senses. The five *karmendriyas* or motor organs and five *jnanendriyas* or sensory organs impose limitations upon the mind. If you withdraw the senses, block them by the practice of *pratyahara*, the mind won't respond at all.



Senses are the leading factors. If you are able to withdraw the senses and operate on the mental level, you can imagine how powerful the mind would be. Great men who are powerful in every field have always operated through the mind. I am talking of such great men as Alexander, Napoleon, Shivaji, Einstein, Newton, Gandhi, Nehru and Tagore. They all operated on the mental level, beyond the senses.

Delving into Patanjali's raja yoga

Raja yoga describes the process of evolution to samadhi in eight stages. That is why this science is known as the yoga of eight steps. Yamas and niyamas are the first two steps; asana and pranayama are the third and fourth steps. The fifth step is pratyahara, the sixth is dharana, the seventh dhyana and the eight is samadhi.

After pranayama comes the spiritual side of raja yoga. The detachment of the sensory-cortex from the motor cortex, in the language of science is in raja yoga called *pratyahara*. What does pratyahara mean? The mind is associated and connected with the sense organs. Through the sense organs it receives stimuli from objects. If you want to go in you will have to cut off these stimuli or these links for some time. So here is the sense cortex and here is the motor cortex and they are linked. That link has got to be cut down. The senses and the mind should be separated.

In raja yoga they say the senses responsible for action, *karma*, and the senses responsible for *jnana*, perception, should be detached from each other. This disassociation of mental and physical principles leads to absolute relaxation.

When the mind is connected – this is an important topic of raja yoga – when the mind is in association with the objects through the sense medium, then it experiences pleasure and pain. When your mind is in association with the objects of perception, through the medium of the sense of sight, for instance, it experiences pleasure and pain. So it is with the ears, with the nose, and with every part of the body that is capable of experiencing. If you want the mind to be free from pain and grief, then you should know how to relax.

In raja yoga pratyahara follows pranayama, and dharana follows pratyahara. You isolate the brain and the mind by de-linking them from the sense organs. Even as we retreat in the evening hours back to our own home, in the same way the sense organs have to retreat back to their own dwelling. When this is accomplished, then you can concentrate and fix your mind on one particular symbol of your choice.

There is a clear difference between pratyahara and dharana. Pratyahara is that practice in which you are trying to isolate the mind from the sensory channels. Therefore, dharana becomes perfect and complete if your practices of pratyahara are practised well. When you are trying to isolate the mind from sensory channels, then there is a lot of distraction that follows in your mind. Every time, the chitta vritti becomes disturbed because senses affect the mind and the mind has become so much dependent on the senses that it keeps on accepting those disturbances every now and then. Therefore, the practice of pranayama becomes also the practice of pratyahara. But besides this there are many other practices of pratyahara. Patanjali makes a clear reference about it. You concentrate on any great saint, you concentrate on any light, you concentrate on any sound, you concentrate on your own thought processes or you can concentrate on anything you like.

Pratyahara is a Sanskrit term, it is a retreat. Retreat means to return. Senses usually run towards objects; eyes after form, ears after sound and nose after smell. This is how the senses run after the respective sense objects. The knowledge

of the sense object is then transferred to the mind and thus stimulation is constantly sent to the different centres of the brain, thereby disturbing the mind. It is agitated, active and dynamic all the time. To silence the mind, we have to de-link the mind from the senses. This de-linking process between the mind and the senses is known as pratyahara.

For example, a candle is burning in a room and the windows are open. The flame therefore flickers and is sometimes extinguished. A wise person will close the windows to prevent the wind coming in; the flame then remains unflickering, unmoving. In the same way, we have to practise sadhana by which the delinking process is affected, and that is exactly what we teach, not meditation.

Raja yoga is considered by all to be a very powerful system. In his *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali makes it very clear that the purpose of yoga is to control the fluctuations of the mind. That is the definition of yoga in general, and raja yoga in particular and I should go by that definition without going too deeply into the classical text. But, I would like to say that in our interpretations we are influenced by our religious predispositions. If we interpret yoga to be a method for experiencing God, this is not a classical definition but is influenced by our religious personality, by our religious philosophy. I should go by the definition of Patanjali. Yoga is a system, a process, or a practice, by which you can control the fluctuations of the mind.

The fluctuations of the mind and the mind are not the same thing. Fluctuations in the mind arise on account of inherent disturbances. If there is a big storm there will be waves in the ocean. The storm causes the waves. In the same way, there are causes inherent in the individual's personality which cause these mental disturbances. Due to these disturbances, it is not possible for an individual to know all about himself. Just as you cannot see your own reflection in water if there are waves and the water is dirty, just as you cannot see your own reflection in a mirror that is dirty, so the individual cannot realize his own self, the depth of his nature,

as long as there are disturbances within himself, as well as the subsequent distractions. Therefore, the practices of yoga result in quieting the mind, making the whole consciousness unruffled, free from thought waves, so that you can realize your own self, or you can experience inner peace, or you can create positive impressions or effects on your body – this is the primary hypothesis of raja yoga.

Understanding pratyahara

On the material plane there is the cosmos of which we are aware as long as we are awake; the moment you enter meditation you enter a different realm, another universe. When you start withdrawing yourself from the external objective field to the field of self-awareness, that is called pratyahara, retreat; and when you are able to disassociate yourself for a particular period of time from external objective awareness, then you are asked to focus your attention on one point, the symbol; and when you are able to focus your mind on one symbol for a given period of time and the awareness of the symbol becomes very steady – if it is *Om* it is *Om*, if it is *Rama* it is *Rama*, if it is a cross it is a cross, if it is a flower, it is a flower – then meditation begins.

After the mind has withdrawn itself from the sense objects and is isolated and roaming within one's own self; when the mind is experiencing itself without an external aid, then you have other practices which the guru will teach you. But these practices in yoga which are taught not only by me and the swamis, but also by other schools like Transcendental Meditation and E.S.T. and by other various names, are all practices of pratyahara, not meditation.

What then is the difference between pratyahara and *dhyana*, meditation? In pratyahara, mind is trying to withdraw itself from the experiences into one unity. When you are in meditation, there are only three things that are surviving for you: the meditator, the act of meditation and the object of meditation. This is the trinity in meditation and other than these three, nothing is surviving for you. There is no fourth

experience, no experience of distraction or experience of dissipation, no knowledge of experience of time and space. There is just me and the object and process of meditation that is going on.

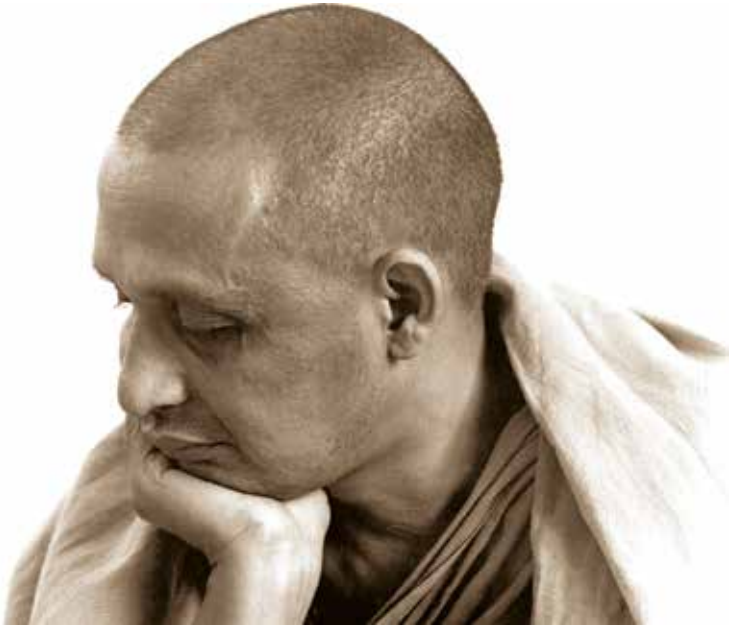
Disconnection of senses

It is certainly the dharma of the *indriyas*, the senses, to see, hear, taste, smell, and so on, but the Supreme Being within you is different from this dharma. By the practice of pratyahara you do not withdraw your senses but separate yourself from them. It is like pouring clear water into a yellow-coloured and a green-coloured jug. The water appears to be yellow and green, but if you wish to know the real nature of the water you will have to pour it into a colourless jug. In the same manner, the practice of pratyahara is not meant to control the senses but rather to separate the self from the senses. The senses continue their activities. Even after jivanmukti the eyes continue to see, the ears go on hearing and the mind continues to think.

Separation from perceptions

The mind functions on three levels. These three levels of mind are known in modern psychology as conscious, subconscious and unconscious. In yoga philosophy they are known as the gross mind, the astral mind and the causal mind. Through these three levels of mind you have objective and sensorial experiences.

There is a relationship, there is an interlink between the mind, the object and the senses. The mind experiences an object via the senses. Tasting, hearing, touching, seeing, all these experiences which you get through the senses are cognized by the mind. Now this process of cognition of objects is to be stopped in meditation. When you are very deep in meditation, then you don't hear external sounds and you do not have any experiences of the senses, because the connection between the mind and the object is separated. Therefore, the first step to meditation is to separate the mind



from the senses. If you are not able to separate the mind from the senses, meditation cannot take place, but there are many ways of achieving this. In our times, many people try drugs and with the help of these drugs they are able to separate the mind from the senses. In yoga there are techniques by which you can separate your mind from the senses. One of the most powerful is the technique of pranayama.

Inducing pratyahara

Yoga is a means to self-improvement. For this, certain techniques such as meditation on nada, bindu, prana, and so on, are very useful. Of these, meditation on *prana*, the breath, is the easiest and most effective. The goal of each one of these techniques is to attain peace and power. Just as a farmer sows seeds and reaps the harvest when it is ripe, so also you meditate and, in the course of time, reap the harvest of peace and power. But, as we all know, seeds can yield harvest only if favourable conditions exist. The soil should be fertile;

there should be no undergrowth of weeds. Similarly, peace and power follow meditation practices only after the correct receptivity has been created. Such receptivity is created by what we know as pratyahara. After this, the exploration of your unconscious becomes easier. When you go deep into your unconscious, you get rid of the samskaras that lie embedded there. When the samskaras go, mental tensions and agitations also depart. Then you get peace, *shanti*. Once peace is attained, the stage is set for the manifestation of *shakti*, power, through the practice of kriya yoga. With shakti, you attain *jnana*, knowledge.

As long as you do not acquire mental, emotional and muscular tranquillity, you cannot have favourable conditions for the manifestation of power. Power can manifest only when the dissipations of the mind stop. As long as the mind is not steady, it is weak. When mental turbulences vanish, power manifests. This power is called *atma shakti*. It takes various forms in its external manifestation. Great men in history realized this power and used it to advantage in their respective fields of activity.

Scriptures have laid down various methods for the realization of this power. First of all, by pratyahara practices such as asanas, pranayamas, japa, you introvert your outgoing senses. Thus the pratyahara sadhana is a prerequisite for acquiring power. When you hear a melodious song, your mind is en rapport with the song. When you watch an absorbingly interesting game, your mind withdraws itself from surrounding distractions and becomes one-pointed. Similarly, by pratyahara you make your mind one-pointed and go inside. Ordinarily, we are awake to the external world and asleep within. In spiritual terminology this is called *ajnana*, ignorance. When you are awake within and asleep to the outside world, it is *jnana*, knowledge. When you are awake both within and without, it is *samadhi*. In *samadhi* the line of demarcation does not exist. When this happens the mind becomes very powerful and acquires creative power. What it thinks and says, does take place. It becomes the doer.

Inducing pratyahara with breath

Concentration on the breath is one of the most powerful methods of introverting the restless mind. The practice of meditation is divided into four stages: *pratyahara* or introversion, *dharana* or concentration, *dhyana* or meditation, and *samadhi* or transcendence.

Concentration on breath comes in the first category. As you concentrate on the breath, the mind automatically becomes withdrawn. When this stage has been accomplished you must then try to fix your mind on one chosen point. If you continue to withdraw and introvert the mind without bringing it to one point it will be absolutely hypnotized. Therefore, when you are able to introvert the mind to a certain point and when psychic experiences suddenly begin, immediately start the practice of *dharana*.

Inducing pratyahara with mantra

A mantra is a word, a vibration, which liberates the mind from *samskaras* just as energy is liberated from matter. This is the etymology of mantra. It is purely defined in terms of mental and spiritual freedom or *moksha*.

Every mantra has a specific sound. We do not know all the sounds, but we do know that there are certain sounds which are milder and others which are stronger. What happens when a sound is produced? Scientists have seen that the brain wave patterns are altered. Tantrics say that when a sound is produced, it alters the formations of the mind.

Mantra exists as energy in the form of gross and subtle sounds. Different dimensions of *nada* or sound have been perceived and passed on by the great yogis, rishis and munis in the form of mantras. Mantra is to be used for spiritual evolution and must be received from a guru. In the practice of *nada yoga*, these inner sounds are used as a pathway to *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*.

According to *nada yoga*, the structure of matter is comprised of millions of sounds, both familiar and unknown. Every object is a dense composition of sound particles, and

the aggregation of these particles is conceived by the yogis in the form of a sound or mantram. When you recite the mantram, you are actually working out the problems of your awareness and your mind. This is a most powerful practice. Let us take, for example, the mantram *Om*. It is composed of two sounds, O and M, and can be repeated in four ways: audibly, in a whisper, mentally, or automatically. Finally, it becomes a part of your consciousness. As the canvas on which an artist paints a beautiful picture ceases to exist, in the same manner, the mantram is embedded into the general structure of the mind.

You must practise the mantram in four stages. First, aloud, either as *Ommmmmm* or *Oooooom*, allowing the sound to be registered by the brain, which in turn alters its waves so that peace of mind and pratyahara occur spontaneously. After a few months, it should be chanted in a whisper, then mentally, and finally in conjunction with the breath. Pratyahara becomes successful if mantra is taken as the basis of sadhana.

Psychic symbol

A psychic symbol is necessary for maintaining awareness. By concentrating on a symbol one can crystallize the tendencies of the mind at one point. When meditation becomes deep and one is able to visualize an object as if it were real, the mind has become creative. By thought, one is able to create an object. In pratyahara and dharana, psychic symbols are for the purpose of crystallization, but in deep meditation they are for materialization.

By pratyahara withdraw your mind from the external objects. After having done this successfully, you pick yourself one symbol. Remember, I am not talking about God but I am talking about a symbol. Mind needs a basis. Without a basis you cannot formulate mind into a pattern. If you have no glass, where will you put the tea, the water? Mind is fluid, it is in the form of consciousness and this mind has got to be brought into one pattern if you want to see your mind.

The symbol may be gross, medium or subtle. A gross symbol is an object outside. This object can be anything, but it has to be a concrete object. In the systems of yoga there are three types of symbols, three types of objects, which one can choose for one's meditation. One is a gross object, another is a subtle object and the third is a thought. Some people find it easy to concentrate on a thought, on an idea, but most people find it difficult or impossible. Therefore, for successful meditation one must first of all choose a form.



Pratyahara and the mind

Mind is homogeneous awareness. This awareness is twofold – external and internal. The material awareness is an external experience of the mind. Spiritual awareness is an internal experience of the mind.

When you have sensual perceptions, then you know that the awareness is external. When you dissociate the mind from the senses, the awareness becomes internal. The mind can turn either way. When the mind becomes extrovert, it has the experiences of form, sound, touch, taste and smell through the five different sense organs. The sensual experience is the game of the mind.

If the mind is introverted, the senses are inert and lifeless. Then one does not hear, see, smell, taste or touch. This is called pratyahara. We define awareness as external or internal; material or spiritual. The material awareness is an external experience of the mind. Spiritual awareness is an internal experience of the mind. When the mind has

a barrier, it is limited to material experience, but when the barrier is broken, then it has spiritual experience. In yogic philosophy, this barrier is known as *avidya*, ignorance, or *maya*, illusion. When the mind turns inwards, you approach the barrier and begin to see the cosmos, which is an infinite experience. It has no beginning and no end, no circumference and no centre. By the practice of mantra this barrier is broken.

The mind works like a camera. Whatever has been known and experienced through the senses remains imprinted in the subliminal part of the mind. These impressions or formations are so numerous that you may never be able to know them all, and it is not easy to classify them. Some are weak and insignificant, while others have a powerful influence on the character, habits and nature. Some are casual and periodical, while others accompany you all the time.

The formations of the mind have three ranges: *vikshepa* or distraction, *vikalpa* or one-pointedness, and *laya* or total dissolution. The first range occurs when the mind is continually jumping from one point to another and is never constant. For example, when you are concentrating on the flame of a candle and a distracting thought passes through your mind, it is called *vikshepa*. This is one formation of the mind.

The second formation is called *vikalpa*. When you have established *pratyahara*, dissociated your mind from the senses, one-pointed awareness takes place. Then you begin to see visions. You may be concentrating on the flame of a lamp, but you begin to see the inner television! These psychic formations of the mind are called *vikalpa*, and they are extremely difficult to break. In meditation if a thought comes to your mind, you can definitely force it out by your own will. But when *vikalpa* comes, you are helpless. These are involuntary expressions of the psychic formations and you have no control over them. How are you going to destroy or fix these formations? Here the mantra will be very useful. Mantra is capable of destroying the psychic formations known as *vikalpa*.

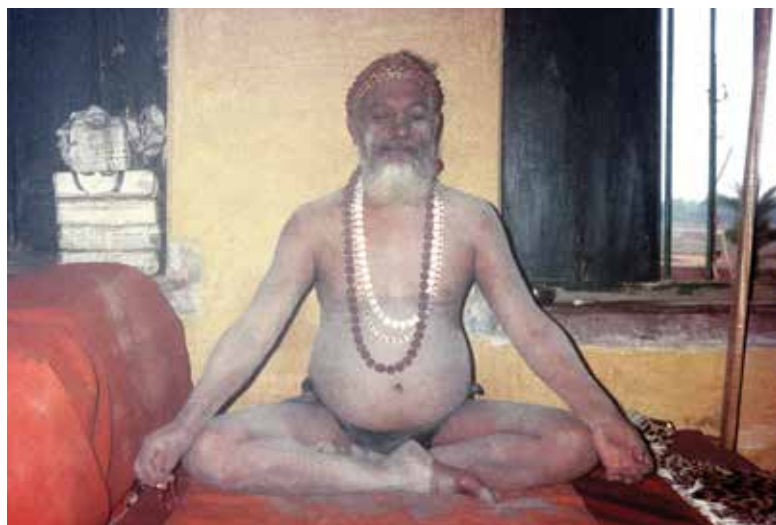
There is a third and powerful formation of the mind called *laya* which means dissolution, suspension. At that time the consciousness is completely eliminated and there is total *shoonya* or voidness. You have been concentrating on the flame of a lamp and suddenly everything is switched off; there is no flame, there is nothing, and you are totally helpless, lost. This is a very obstinate formation and in order to avoid staying in this state you should have a symbol.

Samskaras

The mind is not one unit. Just as water is formed by the combination of hydrogen and oxygen, the mind is a combination of numerous formations. In yoga and tantra, these formations are known as *samskaras*. They are the residue of individual experience through many incarnations.

When you enter into your subconscious mind, you come across your *samskaras*. These *samskaras* are the greatest disturbing factors. Just as you have seismic currents passing underneath the earth, you have *samskaras* within your subconscious body. Whichever thought comes in your mind at any time is a product of that subconscious thought. Just as the grass on the ground grows from the quality of the earth, what you think is produced from inside. Sometimes you are very happy. Sometimes you are very sorry. Sometimes you are very angry. Sometimes you are very depressed. Sometimes you are elated. What is that due to? That is a product of your *samskaras*. A *samskara* is like a seed in your subconscious body. When you go deep into meditation, these *samskaras* come up and disturb the mind. They come in the form of thought, feeling, visions. Therefore, it is necessary that you fix them properly in the initial stage. That is why the practice of *pratyahara* is of great importance.

There are three types of *samskaras*: distraction, psychic visions and suspension of consciousness. How are you going to free yourself from these formations? Mantra is a very valuable tool for this purpose. When you are practising mantra, it is absolutely necessary to use a mala. Mantra



and mala together will fix the formations of the mind. For example, while practising *Om, Om, Om*, your mind suddenly drops and visions appear. The turning of the mala will interfere with the visions and revive your consciousness. It will reverse the process of mental awareness. This is the importance of mantra in relation to meditation and the awakening of spiritual consciousness.

Dreams and pratyahara

Dream is a form of awareness. It is a *vritti*, a pattern of mind. This means that the mind undergoes a state of transformation in the form of dreams. If you remain a witness to this dream consciousness, then you are able to complete one aspect of pratyahara. Witnessing the dream is the dynamic form of pratyahara, and not the hypnotic form.

The nature of the mind also plays a very important part in one's dreams. There are people who jump from one thought to another like a monkey, and there are people who know how to think. When these people enter into dreams, they project their mental conditions. On account of mental incompetence, dreams come in very distorted forms. Many times, even in

dreams, there are traces of inhibition, then the dreams come in symbolic form. When the mind is completely free, the dreams are exact projections of one's personality, mind and inner space.

At a certain stage of pratyahara, the energy level is exploded, and when this happens, you have certain experiences. These experiences manifest from the contents of your mind, just as dreams come out of the contents of your own mind. So, the same objective is easily fulfilled by practising pratyahara. The difference is in the level of awareness. Usually what happens when you dream is that the awareness is gross and incapable. Therefore, many people have dreams, but don't remember them. The witnessing consciousness of the dream should be alert, then only is it possible to visualise the dream clearly.

Even if you change your situation in life, change your house, apartment, job or business, country, guru, method of sadhana, husband or wife, unless you change and silence this screaming child within you, you can never experience peace and joy, you can never be at rest. It is no good blaming the circumstances, your job, business, health, wife, husband, bank balance, or property. There is only one thing that has to be laid to rest, and that is the mind.

In the technique of yoga, it is believed that when the consciousness is detached from the conscious, from the subconscious and also from the unconscious, and when the awareness functions independently of these three dimensions of consciousness, relaxation takes place and meditation begins. Meditation can never begin before relaxation and the greatest thing and most difficult is relaxation.

Pratyahara as suffering

Sorrow exists because man enjoys being in that state. He likes it because his mind becomes one-pointed in sorrow, which is something that does not happen in happiness. When man is faced with sorrow, his mind jumps and sticks to it like Fevicol. Although man desires happiness, he enjoys being in sorrow.

The mind is attracted towards sorrow, because it attains pratyahara, withdrawal of the senses from every experience other than the sorrow. Sorrow causes a powerful jolt, whereas in happiness this jolt does not occur.

Suffering has a tremendous effect on the mind and emotions. By understanding sorrow and converting it into a form of sadhana, the same sorrow becomes a source of happiness and the end result is extremely fulfilling. Then neither death nor adversity will have any meaning. Searching for happiness is like trying to catch hold of your own shadow, which is impossible. Sri Rama was an incarnation of God. He endured many years of suffering and hardship. Why didn't he enjoy the treasures of happiness at all times? He was king of the world, but he didn't alter the course of events in his life to suit his own convenience.

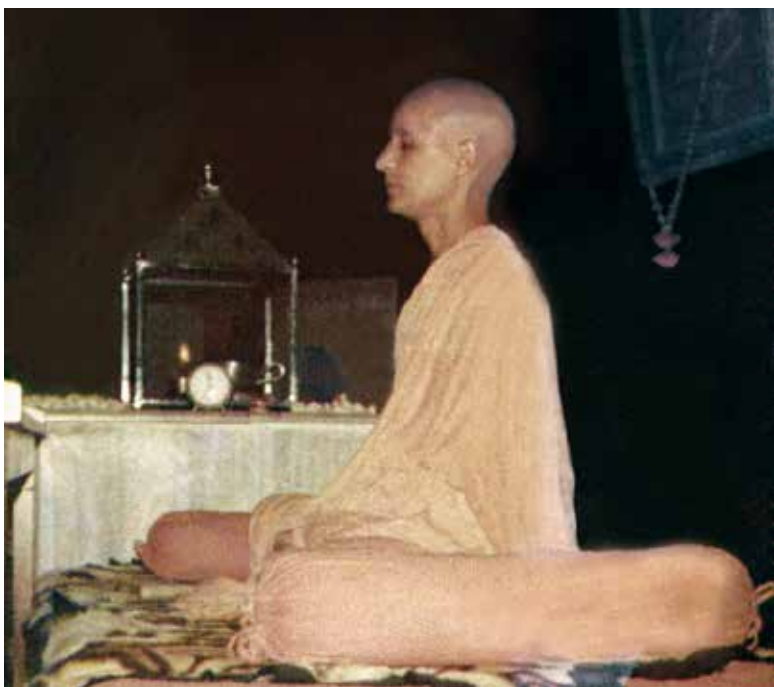
Therefore, sorrow, not happiness, induces pratyahara. The jolt of death is more powerful than the pangs of birth. Sorrow is an intense and powerful experience. Happiness is a mild experience. The experience of sorrow is so powerful that it pulls the mind, and thus the entire being, into it. The mind is immersed in sorrow and then gets carried away by it. Sometimes one gets involved to the point of becoming a neurotic or lunatic, and finds no escape route. This is a philosophical definition. According to psychology and medical science, when a man is affected by sorrow, certain channels of the brain are influenced, and they produce a certain secretion. When this secretion enters the bloodstream, it produces a state of depression which lowers the stress on the heart. This does not happen in happiness. Happiness excites and this increases the pressure on the heart. Therefore, though man desires happiness, he likes to remain immersed in sorrow.

Conclusion

The twentieth century is a time of suppression. Man is not free. He digs holes for himself and moves around within their circumference, unaware of anything beyond them. He

has created certain definitions, beliefs and etiquettes which bind and cause him suffering. Yoga can show people of this century the way to self-purification. For all those who wish to devote their life to God, attain samadhi through yoga and meditation, expand their consciousness, I have only one message: get the boulders out of the road first, and then you can proceed safely on your journey.

How can the incapable, finite mind, bound by shackles, experience super-consciousness? Just as a dirty mirror cannot reflect your image, so the dirty mind cannot reflect pure consciousness no matter how long you chant, sing or meditate. Therefore, spiritually minded people as well as those who are sick must work on self-purification as a means to pratyahara. When this is achieved, the door to meditation and spiritual awareness as well as health and happiness will open by itself.



3

Dimensions of Pratyahara



The biggest obstacle to meditation is the mind, but before we can tackle the mind we must subdue the senses. We are continuously receiving impressions and information from the external world through the medium of the senses. These impressions are the food of the mind. From the day we are born, we are conditioned to remain concerned only with the outside world and to believe that it is the only reality. Our whole motivation is directed to external experiences. It becomes difficult to internalize one's awareness and this is a block which is not easy to overcome.

The process of *pratyahara* is intended to disconnect one's awareness from the sense organs, thereby instigating internalization of awareness. It has been found that excessive effort to forget the outside surroundings leads to an increase in external perception. Induction of *pratyahara* depends on regularity and intensity of practice as well as your mental state. When the mind is calm, *pratyahara* can be easily induced, but if the mind is disturbed it may take months of practice to attain it. Without mastery of *pratyahara* it is impossible to induce *dharana*.

The first stage is tranquillity. If you want to be aware of the inner self, it is necessary to suppress or withdraw the senses from the outer personality. In the same manner, if you want to understand or become aware of the self in the deepest dimension, it is first of all necessary to settle the noise, dissipation and disturbances in the mental and sensual personality. When the senses become quiet and the thoughts become tranquil, you are able to witness your mind, personality and consciousness.

The first necessity is therefore tranquillity. In yoga it is called *pratyahara*, withdrawal of individual experiences from the medium of the senses. Listening to a discourse is an experience of the mind through the senses. However, when you want to go into the spiritual realm, the extrovert consciousness has to be completely stopped, external experiences have to cease. Tranquillity means withdrawal from sense experiences. When consciousness transcends outer experiences, forms are not seen, words are not heard, the skin does not feel sensations, fragrance is not experienced, and taste is not experienced even if a sweet is placed on the tongue.

To accomplish the first stage there are hundreds of techniques, all of which are effective. Swami Yogananda used to teach *kriya yoga*, Mahesh Yogi taught Transcendental Meditation, and I teach *ajapa japa* for this purpose. In Christianity one prays and prostrates in absolute surrender. In Hinduism one sings God's names. These are all methods

to pacify the disturbed personality. Then a stage of tranquility and a stage of transcendence will arise. After that, yoga begins.

Pratyahara

The first stage known as pratyahara, is the dissociation of your consciousness from the sense objects. Isolate your mind; isolate your consciousness from the sense objects. This is also known as withdrawal. Some people call it retreat of consciousness from sense objects. This pratyahara is so important that on the yogic path, three fourths of the area of practice is covered by pratyahara. What you have been doing in the form of *trataka* on the candle, *nada yoga*, closing the ears and listening to the inner sounds; concentration on the chakras, practice of *antar mouna*, inner silence; practice of psychic sleep, or counting the breath with the help of the mala and many more things, which are written in the yogic texts, are the practices which help your mind make a retreat from sense consciousness.

Once the mind is withdrawn or is isolated from the sense objects, the experiences begin. Next, close your eyes; you are isolating the senses of the eyes, the optic system. You are isolating the optic system from the object. When you close your ears, you isolate the auditory system from the sounds then isolate the skin from tactile consciousness. There are the auditory consciousness, optic consciousness, oral consciousness, tactile consciousness, like that you have five senses and these five senses have five different functions. When they reach this point of isolation, it was found that the people who were isolated from the sense contact started developing fantastic psychic images.

Awakening receptivity

I have come to the conclusion that the human mind should be made receptive first. Receptivity of the mind can be awakened only when the dissipations are annihilated. In pratyahara practices like yoga nidra you are able to awaken

this receptivity by awakening the emotional structure of the mind.

If I tell you that this is right and that is wrong, you will agree with me, but that is intellectual agreement. In spite of the fact that you agree with me, you may not be able to implement this in your daily life. Intellectual conviction is one aspect of human life and we are all intellectually convinced about good and bad. But we also have to be receptive emotionally to everything that we need to assimilate, and this is possible only when the dissipations and distractions of the mind are withdrawn. When the mind is flowing on one smooth level, the fluctuations and the waves in the mind are calmed. Then whatever is impressed upon the mind, that becomes the corrective, that becomes the destiny, that becomes the directive.

Pratyahara is a very special faculty that has to be cultivated. When you cultivate this faculty of pratyahara you can utilize it for self-therapy or you can develop it into concentration, meditation and samadhi. There are certain forms of pratyahara which carry the mind very deep. In those practices of pratyahara the brain is completely disconnected from the sensory information. You receive sensory perception through the eyes, through the nose, the ears, the tongue, and the tactile receptors of the skin. Even if the eyes are closed or you are unable to hear, you can still receive information in the brain through the tactile medium. But as you go into the deeper practices of pratyahara the dissociation becomes complete. All the sensory channels are not capable of supplying you with the necessary amount of information. When this absence of information takes place then the mind has to be hanged to the practice of *dharana*, concentration.

When pratyahara becomes deep and powerful and total isolation of the brain takes place, the silent areas of the brain are affected and energy flows around them. During this moment of isolation of the brain the cerebral fluid which flows around the brain beneath the skull is charged with a special energy.



The late Dr Itzhak Bentov developed a sound scientific model of this process. He recorded that standing resonant waves are set up in the circulatory system in deep meditation. In response to these waves, small rhythmic currents and wave forms are generated within the fluid surrounding the brain to gradually awaken the higher cerebral and psychic faculties and centres. Then you have certain psychic experiences.

In the practices of pratyahara, voluntary efforts help the mind to withdraw from dissipation and distraction, but in yoga nidra we try to eliminate this possibility because the moment there is concentration, there is also an element of exertion. Any voluntary effort made to achieve concentration generates a little bit of tension in the brain. So in the practice of yoga nidra the flow of awareness is smooth and constant.

I call yoga nidra 'taming the wild monkey'. It is a technique of taming this wild monkey, the human mind. This anarchical mind, this disorderly and broken and schizophrenic mind can be brought into a beautiful pattern if yoga nidra is rightly practised.

Steps to meditation

Meditation or *dhyana yoga* is to be accomplished in three stages. If you start practising meditation directly on an object, you will have to do a lot of fighting with the mind and as a result, you may have a lot of tension and difficulty. First of all, you must tranquillize your senses. You have to block the

sensory channels. You have to block the passage by which the impressions are coming from outside into the mind. That is the preliminary and the most important part of meditation. In raja yoga it is known as pratyahara, which literally means 'withdrawal of the sensory activities'. The senses feed the mind and, in turn, the mind feeds the senses. In pratyahara we are trying to separate these two principles from each other. If your pratyahara becomes successful, then you may practise dharana or concentration, and that will take you to dhyana.

The phrases – I am going to meditate, I have been meditating for a long time, I had a good meditation – are absolutely incorrect. According to all the great experts, meditation cannot be practised; it becomes by itself. It is not a process; it is a stage. You cannot know how to attain dhyana and samadhi. You can only know how to practise pratyahara.

Vasanas and samskaras

Vasanas are hidden desires. In the human mind, there are various levels of desires. Hunger is one desire and similarly, there are other desires such as sleep, to have more money and property, to have husband or wife, children, friends and relatives, to have love and affection. These are called desires.

There are desires that are on the upper mental plane. They are the ordinary and simple desires we are aware of. But at the base there are hidden desires which sometimes project themselves directly, or more frequently, indirectly. These hidden desires are known as vasanas. When you suppress your desires, the hidden desires do not dare to come up. They try to express themselves or channelize themselves by some other means.

So, suppression of desires strengthens the hidden desires. These hidden desires project themselves in dreams, in visions or during pratyahara, and they keep manifesting at different stages of meditation. Even just before the point of illumination, these hidden desires keep on projecting or exhausting themselves.

Samskaras are the residues of experiences, just as seeds are the residues of flowers. In modern psychology samskaras are known as archetypes. Let me explain them. In the soil there is potentiality. During summer the soil is generally dry and grass seldom grows, but the moment it begins to rain, grass springs up everywhere. How could this happen? There must be grass seeds in the soil. Samskaras were there, and from the samskaras the grass grew.

So, samskaras are transformed symbols of each and every experience. Just as your tape recorder is recording everything I am saying, and side by side it is also registering other sounds that are taking place within its range, in the same way, there is a non-stop tape of consciousness going on in the human mind. It registers every experience of touch, taste, sound, form and smell. When you sleep, the process of registration continues. Even if you are under chloroform in the hospital, it still goes on. It is only when the person dies and the subtle body leaves this body, that the registration stops.

In the system of yoga, it is said that, in order to consume the samskaras, you have to put a stop to vasana. Otherwise, you will continue to supply more and more. Vasanas add to samskaras, and in order to eliminate the samskaras you will have to work very hard. It is not easy. Theoretically, we can talk a lot about it, but as long as you have vasanas, how can you eliminate samskaras? And as long as you have samskaras, how can you eliminate vasanas? They are mutually helping each other.

Removing samskaras

There are some forms of karma which can be managed well. It is important that one works out one's karma, otherwise evolution is incomplete. Many ways have been suggested to work out the samskaras. The most important way is expressing and living them. Karma has to be lived and worked out, whether it is good or bad.

The second way the karmas can be worked out is by going deep into meditation: pratyahara, dharana or dhyana, and

expressing or transforming those samskaras in the form of visions. In the stages of pratyahara and dharana a lot of visions and feelings are experienced. This means one has not lost the individual ego. One is still at the level of duality. These experiences in meditation are only a transformed vision of one's samskara. One is expressing the samskara in that form. This can happen in the state of pratyahara, dharana, dhyana or in the early stages of samadhi. The deeper one goes, the greater is the fixing process of the samskara.

Millions of samskaras, latent impressions, buried in the depths of the mind, are always coming up and influencing our behaviour, personality and destiny. The practice of pranayama before antar mouna, explodes these samskaras from the bottom of the mind to the top, and makes us sensitive enough to see exactly what is there. We directly confront the contents of the subconscious mind – long forgotten memories, fears, hatreds, and so forth. Thoughts and feelings that have been hidden for years come to the surface and are exhausted.

Usually if a thought comes when we are trying to concentrate, we say 'No' and immediately set it aside. This is not good for our personality or spiritual evolution. It is like having diarrhoea or a bad stomach and trying to control it. We may take some strong medicine which will stop the purging, but then boils may erupt or perhaps the tonsils will be affected. Just as a bad stomach poisons the body, so a bad mind (which everyone has) poisons the psyche. This psychic toxin can influence us to commit suicide or become a criminal, it may cause us to worry day and night or bring on a host of diseases, physiological as well as psychological. Therefore, any thought that comes to mind should be accepted.

Overcoming samskaras

Samskaras, the archetypes that are barring the gate, won't allow the mental energy to be released. You have no control over the karma or the samskaras, because you are not

aware of them. These archetypes, these unseen karmas, this storehouse of man's total accumulation, acquisition and inheritance is unknown to you. Every time you want to release the mind, the samskaras come and grasp it, they don't allow the mind to get out.

In pratyahara, the awareness is temporarily disconnected from the sensory and motor nerves. The forward going impulses are withdrawn from the *karmendriyas*, senses related to action, and from the *jnanendriyas*, senses related to sensation and knowledge. As a result, the awareness is isolated from perception of extraneous stimuli. But within, one perceives a different kind of material, known as samskara. Samskaras are the mental impressions we have collected from our society and from our previous life. They are the karma, the mental archetypes, and there are millions and trillions of them. They have to come out, step by step, in the form of experience.

The flow of experience is blocked, therefore the mind broods upon the accumulated impressions of previous births, together with the last twenty to sixty years of one's present life. As each impression surfaces, a mental explosion occurs. Normally, when you are in the market, or watching television, your mind is quiet and you have no problem. But the moment you take the mala and start mantra japa, concentrating on the breath or one of the chakras, disturbances begin.

Is this good or necessary? Absolutely. These distractions or *vikshepas* must take place in the initial stage of pratyahara, otherwise you will have to face them in the stage of dharana, in dhyana or even in savikalpa samadhi. If your stomach is upset, it won't make any difference whether you travel to Calcutta, Bombay or Monghyr. You must clean it somewhere, and the sooner the better. It is easier to do the cleansing of the whole chamber of consciousness during the stage of pratyahara. Let everything come out. This process of cleansing is unavoidably painful and unpalatable.

During the practices of pratyahara which we do, there is interference, interception of one idea by another idea. When

you introduce one idea another idea intercepts. The flow of thought, the consciousness cannot become constant, it breaks from time to time as you may have seen in the recorded electronic waves; there is no straight line.

The transformation of the mind

The mind is not thought, emotion, anger, hunger, thirst, desire, passion. These are not the mind but rather what we call emanations of the mind. The artificial light which you have in this room is not light, it is an emanation of light. The heat which you have from the heater is an emanation of the heater. In the same way, all these symptoms are not the mind. You cannot say, for instance, that the mind is unhappy. The mind cannot be unhappy. What is happening is that your mind is sick; it is giving out emanations and you are experiencing unhappiness.

In the existence of man, mind is a very mysterious substance. I am not talking about God or the spirit, I am talking about the mind. In yoga, mind is known as *chitta*, which literally means the stuff responsible for awareness, the quality of awareness. The mind is composed of twenty-six elements. When we split these elements, there is no longer any mind. If you remove the bulb, the switch and the wires, then there is no electricity.

Mind is not a homogeneous substance; it is a combination of elements and in order to transform the mind these elements have to be broken down. This process takes place in tantra through the practice of kriya yoga. When it occurs, energy is released. In yoga this energy is known by different names. Some call it kundalini, some call it jnana, and others call it samadhi.

It is written very clearly in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali that the mind should undergo a series of processes. Just as you take some cotton and make some yarn, then a piece of cloth can be woven, and from that a shirt can be made. Of course, the spirit is made of the same cotton, but it has been completely transformed. This transformation comes about in

five broad stages. Initially the mind is very dull. In the second stage, it is dissipated. The third stage is the oscillating mind. In the fourth stage, the mind becomes one-pointed, and finally, in the fifth stage, it comes under control. This gradual evolution of the mind is brought about by the practices of yoga. This evolution eventually results in the complete transformation of the mind. From there the mind can move into higher realms.

Pratyahara and the ego

Ego is a very subtle principle of life, which follows the soul like a shadow follows a man. Throughout the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, the same ego migrates in different names and forms. At the time of death, the ego withdraws itself from the manifested state to the unmanifested. It enters into the causal body as dormant potential, and the moment you are given birth by your mother, the ego manifests. With the additional experiences and impressions which accumulate in the course of daily life, the ego becomes more and more fixed.

In yoga, the ego is known as *asmita* or 'I-ness'. It is the normal self-awareness by which you know yourself as an individual. It is the ego which brings you back each morning from your death-like sleep. Because of this principle, your dreams are broken and your sleep is disturbed.

In pratyahara, although the mind is dissociated from the sensory nerve channels, the ego is still present. In dharana, when concentration takes place and you begin to see visions, there is still ego, otherwise you would have no awareness or knowledge of the experience. Ego remains with you until you reach the ultimate state of samadhi.

Dharana and beyond

When pratyahara becomes complete, then for a moment you feel as if you have no mind; everything becomes completely silent. You are very happy at that time and give up your practices because you are under the wrong impression that

you have gone to kaivalya or the higher state of samadhi. However, wherever there is complete blankness in the mind, when the mind does not seem to function, then at that point a symbol must be visualized. The symbol could be fire, the sun, the moon, the guru, a flower or a star; it could be one static substance. Even if you have been very poor at visualization, when the senses and mind have been completely cut off, you can easily visualize the symbol at the mid-eyebrow centre and continue seeing it. Then your sadhana, your personal efforts are finished. Beyond that you cannot do anything.



4

Preparing for Pratyahara



In Patanjali's raja yoga, the first five practices are *bahiranga*, external, yoga and the last three are *antaranga*, internal, yoga. The inner and higher practices become easier to perform when the external and preliminary practices have been developed to a reasonable degree of perfection.

The reason for this is that most of us are totally unable to concentrate and meditate because of the continual wandering and rational thinking of the mind. Pratyahara means withdrawing the experience through the senses. Every sense has something to experience – sight, sound, smell, touch and taste. These create an experience and in the practice of pratyahara you try to withdraw them. How do you do it?

- Through the practice of mantra, of kirtan, or by concentration on a light, on a sound, on an idea, on a particular feeling, on some saint or divine personality and so on. What happens when you concentrate on one particular thing? The neurosis of the mind is withdrawn for the time being.
- Cutting off external sense stimuli, however, brings its own problems; it easily leads to the opposite extreme – total absorption in inner thought processes and psychic realms. People are conditioned in such a way that their awareness must always be absorbed or entangled in something. Therefore, disconnection of one's awareness from the outside world leads to absorption and identification with the inner processes of the mind. One starts to brood over personal problems, fear, conflicts, or becomes attached to beautiful psychic scenery. This is like a bee that pulls itself free from sticky honey on the inside of a jar only to fly into the honey on the opposite surface of the jar. Freedom from one extreme leads to entanglement in the opposite extreme. Each is as bad as the other. Thus disentanglement from external stimulation of the mind can easily lead to internal involvement. Both have to be avoided if one wants success in yoga practice.
- Many people close their eyes and manage to forget the outside world, but immediately become overwhelmed by subconscious thoughts and psychic visions. This is not a bad thing in the early stages of yoga practice. It is necessary since it helps to exhaust negative disturbing samskaras from the subconscious mind. Eventually one

must prevent awareness becoming abducted by both the events of the outside world and the processes of the inner psychic and mental realms. That is, one must tread the razor's edge between ida and pingala – the path of sushumna. In order to induce pratyahara one must be firmly fixed on the sushumna path, lost neither in the ida nor pingala dimension of being. This leads to real pratyahara and eventually to dharana. Without mastery of pratyahara it is impossible to induce dharana.

Different yogas for pratyahara

The practices of hatha yoga, asanas, pranayama and pratyahara, are all intended to develop a consciousness from within us. In hatha yoga one practises pranayama, kumbhaka, moola bandha, jalandhara bandha and uddiyana bandha; the prana is controlled. By controlling the prana, the mind is automatically suspended. A synthesized practice of hatha yoga, raja yoga and bhakti yoga must be taken up side by side with other yogas. Not one, but all three of these ways must be taken up as one way is never efficient. Therefore, the practices are combined.

Those who are predominantly tamasic in nature should first practise shatkarmas, then asanas and pranayama, then pratyahara and the raja yoga system. Those who are tamasic should not start with yama and niyama, otherwise they will have a lot of problems. So first, hatha yoga. Hatha yoga is for tamasic sadhakas. For rajasic sadhakas, karma yoga is of primary importance and bhakti yoga is also suitable. Those who are sattwic can practise anything.

Working on the mind

During the practice of sense withdrawal and concentration, you have to work out all the perceptions and experiences in the realm of *vichara*, reflection, as well as in the realm of *vikalpa*, imagination or visionary experience. If you are not prepared to exhaust the experiences amicably and with pleasure, you will face them in the subtler form of visionary

experiences. This may give rise to pride as you will feel that you have had some spiritual experiences. However, these are not spiritual experiences but your own samskaras coming out.

The totality of *vritti* or modifications of consciousness that sticks to you life after life takes considerable time to be discharged. It is not just a matter of two or three months only. It is impossible for this to happen in such a short time. In Patanjali's yoga system the cleansing of all the samskaras takes first priority. However, during the practice of pratyahara and dharana, when many samskaras come up from the depths of your consciousness, you resist them and push them back down. Whenever a thought comes into your mind you say, "No," and refuse to recognize it. Thus, during the period of concentration, when a thought comes into your mind to commit a crime or a murder or something like that, at that point you might give up hope and think that your meditation is spoiled. However, it is necessary to see these thoughts also.

This consciousness has two different areas of manifestation. When it is in the form of movement and activity, it has a definite pattern and structure known as *chitta*, but when it is free from modification and any kind of pattern or structure, it is known as *chit*. Chit represents consciousness with a capital 'C', that which we call *atman*, and chitta represents consciousness with a small 'c' which we call mind. When consciousness or atman identifies itself with the world of names and forms, and is able to express itself in certain patterns and modifications, then it is chitta.

The chitta is a storehouse of cosmic knowledge; it is a treasure trove, but you have also deposited your complexes, guilt, pride, pain and all your pathos there. When you look into it during the period of concentration and meditation, how can you expect to see something other than what is there? If the sun is behind a cloud when you try to look at it, you will have to face and accept the cloud because it is there.

In chitta shuddhi the same type of process should occur which happens whenever you purify the body of its foul

and dirty material. Naturally there is a horrible smell, but unpleasant as it is, it is necessary in the process of purifying the body. In the same manner, when the purification of consciousness or chitta is taking place, you have to face these foul experiences. If you are not prepared for them, forget raja yoga and all other yogas.

Dealing with vrittis of the mind

Most of us who are engaged in spiritual practices of any type and dimension regard visions, thoughts or fluctuations of the thought patterns as the mind. According to Patanjali, however, that which is mistaken for the mind is simply a *vritti*, a pattern, ripple or modification. It is not the actual consciousness. An emotion is not the definition of consciousness, nor is a memory of the past or an anxiety about the future. All these feelings which we have been experiencing during our sadhana or at any other time of our life are not chitta, consciousness or mind, they are the vrittis or modifications of the mind.

In his *Yoga Sutras* (1:2), Patanjali, however, presents us with another definition of yoga: 'To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga.' These patterns of consciousness are like ripples on the surface of water. They take a circular, concentric form. Even though they are still of the same substance as the rest of the water, they have temporarily assumed a different form. In the same way, consciousness or chit in an unmanifested form is *nirakara*, or pure energy, pure spirit. It has no name, no form and no dimension. However, when it is subjected to the constraints of a particular situation or item of knowledge, it assumes a particular form, just as ripples appear on the ocean surface.

These vrittis are to be withdrawn or stopped, but in order to stop them we have to know exactly what they are composed of. In Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* it is said that the vrittis are fivefold: right knowledge or *pramana*, wrong knowledge or *viparyaya*, fancy, imagination or *vikalpa*, sleep or *nidra*, and memory or *smriti*. All these are the mental patterns which

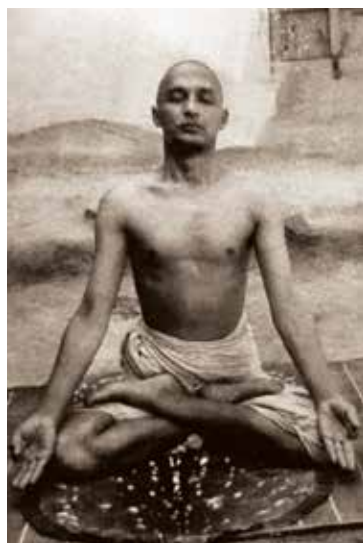
are infinite. During the practice of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, whatever experiences you come across are nothing but the manifestation of the knowledge acquired by you – the mind facing itself.

In the practice of yoga, we try to annihilate or withdraw these ripples from the surface of the mind, but we do not withdraw the mind itself. We should never assume that yoga is trying to suppress the mind stuff itself. There is no such indication or process by which the mind can be suppressed, and at no point in meditation does withdrawal of the mind take place. Self-awareness functions throughout, and this self-awareness becomes more and more effulgent and luminous when the forms that we identify with, the structure of consciousness or *chit*, are withdrawn. That is why it is said: 'To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga.'

Posture for pratyahara

Whatever the position might be it can be either the lotus pose, *padmasana*, *siddhasana* or *vajrasana*. If the practice takes twenty-five minutes, well for twenty-five minutes you are like a statue. If you cannot do it, it is due to the lack of willpower it is not due to the infirmity of the body. You decide and in one week's time you go from thirty minutes to one hour and in one year you can go from one hour to three hours. It does not matter even if you do not go to three hours, even if it is twenty minutes, even if it is fifteen minutes you resolve that for fifteen minutes you are not going to move. No! If you feel an urge to scratch no, no, no, you have to say no. This is how you are disciplining yourself.

You see, you are your own baby, you have to discipline yourself. Now this stability, this motionlessness of the physical body gives you a number of advantages. First of all, the tactile consciousness, the sense that is responsible for the tactile consciousness is desensitized. The heart undergoes a state of inertia, the consumption of oxygen goes to the minimum and the lungs stand at an un-agitated, un-fluctuating but rhythmic level. The motion of the lungs is rhythmic. Now I am



talking to you at an agitated level, there is no rhythm in my lungs and I am sure there is no rhythm in my heart at the moment because everything is in agitation. I have to talk; I have to decide the points.

But at that time, when everything is calm and quiet, not one thing is moving. Not even one part of your body is moving and your heart gets a rest, because it does not have to function, the lungs get rest and in turn, the brain gets rest because the heart does not

pump the influx of blood and does not proceed and does not recede. The rate of ventilation becomes just normal, there is no oscillation in the physical structure, there is no oscillation in the cerebral deeper structure and the flow of meditation, or the flow of the idea is maintained.

Witnessing in pratyahara

There are three different stages or layers of the mind: the harmonized mind, the turbulent mind and the dull mind. When the mind is in a turbulent state, it is known as rajasic mind. All the time the mind is jumping, and if you try to control it, a lot of tensions are created. At that time, you should practise your mantra or concentrate on the external object. If the mind wanders away from the object of concentration and thinks many different things, you should not oppose it. Rather you must observe what the mind is thinking, feeling and visualizing.

This process of witnessing can also cure so many physical ailments – nervous depression and the diseases of other layers of the human personality. When you are concentrating or trying to concentrate, there are moments when you have

so many memories coming into the consciousness, either directly or in a symbolic form. As these images come into the mind, we become aware of the archetypes stored up in the brain.

Man has hundreds and thousands of experiences from the past stored up in the brain in a symbolic form. Every experience is transferred to the brain and mind in a symbolic way. If you look at a flower and appreciate it, that experience is reduced to a symbol, which is registered or stored in your brain and in your consciousness. Like this, there are millions of these symbolic experiences in your brain.

As these symbols are stored in the unconscious body, when you start concentration, then they gradually begin to come out. When you start practising mantra, then the lid is opened and the samskaras, the latent impressions or the archetypes, come up from the unconscious body to the subconscious mind, to the conscious area, and you begin to see many of them either in a direct image or in a symbolic form. Sometimes you visualize the incidents of the past exactly in the same way, and many times you visualize the incidents in a symbolic fashion.

These images that come up during the practice of kundalini yoga, kriya yoga, raja yoga or mantra yoga should not be suppressed by force. If you are concentrating on the light, the more you are concentrating, the more the images will come out. After a few seconds, you will find that you have gone very far. Then you feel very sorry and you begin to say, "Oh, my mind is dissipated." Please remember that this is not dissipation.

The purpose of mantra and other techniques of pratyahara is to expel these archetypes, which will again come in front of you in the form of stronger images in later stages of samadhi if you don't expel them now. So, witnessing the mind is a very important practice in yoga and it has to be perfect. Now it is easy to witness the mind.

If you concentrate and images or thoughts come to you, you can just witness them. But there are certain moments later

when you enter into the state of meditation, when you are not aware of yourself, when your consciousness is transported into another realm, then you begin to see the images and to have experiences which you have no control over.

I'll give you a very simple example. If you sit at a particular place and if a very unhappy idea comes to you, you may say, "I don't want it." You just eliminate it by willpower. But if you are dreaming in the night and if you dream that somebody is coming with a revolver to shoot you, you can do nothing because ego is not there. In the dream whatever is happening has to happen.

It is not just a few thoughts. The deeper you go, the greater the crowd. There could be moments during your mantra or in ordinary meditation when there is confusion in the realm of thinking. So many thoughts come up at the same time that you can't even distinguish them. It is very difficult for me to express it. That is called purging. It is shankhaprakshalana of the psychic body. At this time, you should not be discouraged or affected adversely. You must say that this has to happen.

Therefore, it is much better to force the karmas as long as you are on the conscious plane. When you transcend the plane of consciousness and you go to the subconscious plane, or what you call semi-samadhi, deep meditation, then the images that come to you cannot be controlled because your ego is not present. So, you don't know how to strike them off, how to eliminate them.

Role of inner silence for pratyahara

The practice of inner silence, inner peace, is essential for success in spiritual sadhana. It is regarded as a secret element of sadhana, and at the appropriate time in sadhana, according to the guru-disciple tradition, the sadhaka is initiated into the proper techniques. Inner silence is the true definition of silence, for silence is not the silence of speech. In inner silence, thought vibrations are stopped and finally remain suspended. The true meaning of inner silence will be

understood if the thoughts that enter the mind are regarded as forms of mental disturbance. These mental disturbances prevent the experience of self-realization.

Inner silence is not 'not thinking'; it is really a positive state, when the sadhaka is either remembering the name or the form instead of all and sundry. Inner peace is dynamic. Sleep and lethargy do not represent inner peace. Thoughts should not come to the mind, except for the name and the feelings of His presence and divinity. This will bestow mental strength as well as psychological diversion. Once inner peace is obtained, nothing can shake the soul. Once established in this peace, sadhana becomes powerful and leads to self-realization.

Even though the complete course of inner silence is lengthy, one technique must be adopted to create a state of thoughtlessness. 'Stop thinking' is the 'Open Sesame' of sadhana, so learn the real art of sitting quietly. Give up the habit of merely sitting or lying quietly, and do not daydream, as it will undo your achievements. However, it is very difficult to sit quietly because the inner mind is always active, except when one truly meditates.

During the practice of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, whatever experiences you come across are nothing but the manifestation of the knowledge acquired by you; it is your mind facing itself, its own mind-stuff. The entire content of consciousness which is a large garbage box now, maybe it has some beautiful things too, it has just to be thrown out.

Of course the psychologist has to know how to maintain the balance of the person even as the guru knows. In yoga that is done and therefore it is said, that when you meditate you must have a guru by your side. You must have a guru who will give you a sort of balance and the balance is not a very difficult one, it is just an adjustment of a screw in the brain.

When the isolation in the form of pratyahara takes place, your whole psychic being expresses itself, which is higher than your intellectual being, which is almost a counter part of your emotional being, which is completely different and completely against your intellectual being. It has nothing

to do with your logical personality, nothing to do with your reasoning but something to do with your emotions. That psychic being is going to express itself. The expression of that particular dimension of your personality is in the form of symbols, is in the form of visions, is in the form of colours, poetry, expressions, and if the guru knows he can bring about most precious things which you call prophecies, because your psychic being is very powerful. Well, everybody's psychic being is very powerful.

In the scheme of meditation, we have the word *pratyahara* which means a scientific isolation. This is what we do. We ask the aspirant to sit down calm and quiet, close his eyes, concentrate on the breath. In certain practices he has to close his ears and then he has to practise a certain *pranayama* by which he has to win over or try to detach his tactile consciousness. Sometimes we ask him to sing a particular rhythm, say *Om Om Om* for two hours, three hours, four hours, five hours, sometimes for the whole day and the sound which he produces keeps him completely isolated as far as the external sounds are concerned.

In one week's time, well sometimes earlier also in some cases, it is within one day, the psychic being, the depth psyche which our modern psychologists have been working to discover frantically, it just comes out. It comes from the subject, the man feels and he tells his master, master this is what is happening to me, I see snakes coming down, I find I am feeling light or heavy, all these things. The master then makes an analysis and then gives him a practice which is known as inner silence and its name is *antar mouna*; internal, not external, internal silence.

What is internal silence? He says to his disciple, "Okay, whatever experiences come to you, you keep on seeing them very carefully. Whether it is the elephant, whether it is the quarrel between the two *rakshashas*, the demons, or whether it is a manifestation of a bull with the skin of a tiger, or whether it is a lady with feathers, whatever it might be, know it, do not be baffled, be a witness to it." Then what happens? The

aspirant is sitting in that state, he has never meditated on it, it just happened to him. It will happen to you if you practise the correct pratyahara. Therefore, the practices of pratyahara, involve closing the eyes, closing the ears, stopping the breath for some time in between, maintaining an absolute motionless position.

The less one thinks, the greater one becomes. Thoughts of various kinds kill spiritual stamina. Control the thoughts by means of sadhana; learn the art of pratyahara, concentration, and karma yoga. Keep the mind calm, quiet and serene for just a few minutes every day and try to practise inner silence all day on Sundays. There is no end to friendly invitations. Don't waste a single moment; the destination is still far. Close the eyes and become aware of silence, even if for a moment. Practise this mental silence in the form of swadhyaya; in the practice of antar mouna; sing His names, and do japa. These are all positive methods of initiating mental peace.



5

Practices for Pratyahara



When the senses are in contact with their objects, then they affect the mind, the consciousness. The mind is stimulated and agitated by the impressions created by the senses, with the help of the objects. In the first place, in concentration we have to deprive the mind of the supply of stimuli. Therefore, the practice is to cut off the supply line.

Through this line the mind is supplied with impressions. That supply line is fact. This practice in raja yoga is known as the sadhana of *pratyahara*, withdrawal of senses. Pratyahara is a practice and the different techniques in yoga like pranayama, mudra, bandha or nada yoga, bhakti yoga, kirtan, japa yoga, ajapa japa, or yoga nidra, prana nidra, antar mouna, trataka, kriya yoga are the items of pratyahara and dharana. These practices train the mind to withdraw the senses from the external world and to become aware of the internal world.

Two methods of pratyahara

The overall methods of pratyahara fall into two categories. One category includes the practice of *viveka*, discrimination, to prevent impressions registering in the mind as a result of attachment. Thus no samskaras are gathered in the mind, and even if they are, their effect will not be lasting. This is one technique of making the mind free from influences. Nothing is to be done. Nothing is to be thought of, believed, or suggested. You have only to regard every influence as an aspect of the attitude of the mind and to maintain detachment towards it.

You may not be able to do this immediately, but it can be developed in time. Those impressions which cast an influence on the mind are called samskaras. You will have to develop an attitude whereby you do not accept anything, though you hear and understand everything in this world. This will purify your subtle plane. The sadhaka who is influenced by the pairs of opposites, or whose mind reacts to the impact of happenings in the world, will only see the vision of his samskaras in meditation. If it is not possible to free the mind from all influences, then let a single influence remain predominant. Then the mind will not accept any other influence.

The purpose of pratyahara is to free oneself from influence. To acquire this state, you should practise viveka and vairagya, and develop peace of mind, control of the senses, indifference, tolerance, faith and understanding free from doubt, and intense craving for a vision of the ishta.

The second category consists of the practice of withdrawing the senses from their fields of experience and making them enter the subtle plane, or withdrawing them from external objects, and making them subtle and introvert before finally merging them. This being achieved, the mind immediately absorbs itself into the *dhyeya* or the object of meditation. When you sit in meditation, you have experiences of sound, sight, taste and so on.

As you become absorbed in meditation, the sensations become weaker and finally disappear. Such an experience is a daily affair in the process of sleep. An identical condition must prevail during meditation also. Remember that meditation depends on the suspension of sense consciousness. The second category of *pratyahara* relates to that aspect and enables you to become introverted.

Asanas

Static practices of intermediate and advanced asanas have a more subtle and powerful effect on the pranic and mental bodies. They are performed with little or no movement, the body often remaining in one position for a few minutes. These asanas are intended to gently massage the internal organs, glands and muscles as well as to relax the nerves throughout the body. They are specifically concerned with bringing tranquillity to the mind and preparing the practitioner for

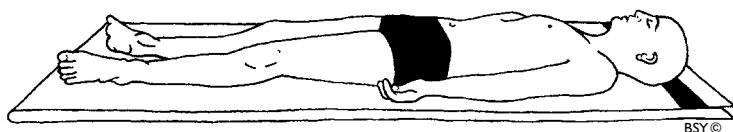
the higher practices of yoga, such as meditation. Some of them are particularly useful for inducing the state of sense withdrawal, *pratyahara*.

Padmasana (lotus pose) is traditionally regarded as one of the best postures for *pranayama* and *pratyahara* as it allows the body to be held completely steady for long periods of time. As the body is



steadied, the mind becomes calm and gives a firm foundation for concentration. Padmasana directs the flow of prana from mooladhara chakra in the perineum to sahasrara at the crown of the head, heightening the experience of meditation.

The asanas in the padmasana group clear physical, emotional and mental blocks, help awaken the energy centres of the body and induce tranquillity. They increase the ability to sit in padmasana for extended periods of time as required for advanced meditation practices, but should only be practised by people who can already sit in padmasana without the slightest difficulty or strain.



Shavasana (corpse pose) relaxes the whole psycho-physiological system. It should ideally be practised before sleep; before, during and after asana practice, particularly after dynamic exercises such as surya namaskara; and when the practitioner feels physically and mentally tired. It develops body awareness. When the body is completely relaxed, awareness of the mind increases, developing pratyahara.

Pranayama

Ujjayi (psychic breath) is used in meditation practices, kriya yoga and prana vidya because it helps relax the physical body and the mind, and develops awareness of the subtle body and psychic sensitivity. Ujjayi promotes internalization of the senses and pratyahara. When it is practised for relaxation and concentration of mind, it should be done after other pranayama techniques and before concentrating on a psychic symbol.

Moorchha pranayama (swooning or fainting breath) is very powerful in inducing pratyahara and rendering the mind free



from thoughts, especially when kumbhaka is prolonged.

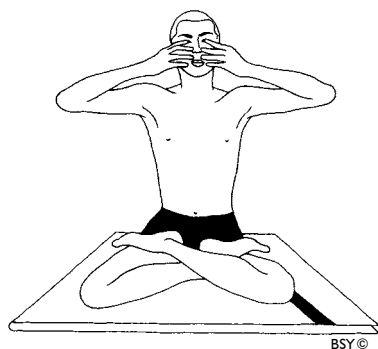
Mudras

The attitudes and postures adopted during mudra practices establish a direct link between *annamaya kosha*, the physical body, *manomaya kosha*, the mental body, and *pranamaya kosha*, the energy body. Initially, this enables

the practitioner to develop awareness of the flow of prana in the body. Ultimately, it establishes pranic balance within the koshas and enables the redirection of subtle energy to the upper chakras, inducing higher states of consciousness.

Mudras manipulate prana in much the same way that energy in the form of light or sound waves is diverted by a mirror or a cliff face. The nadis and chakras constantly

radiate prana which normally escapes from the body and dissipates into the external world. By creating barriers within the body through the practice of mudra, the energy is redirected within. For example, by closing the eyes with the fingers in shanmukhi mudra, the prana being radiated through the eyes is reflected back.

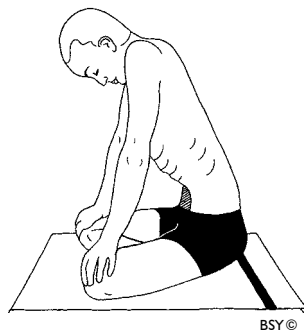


Bandhas

Through the perfection of bandhas, the yogi is able to lock himself into the eternal now, devoid of the dualities of existence, motion and change. In this state, his consciousness is unfettered by the modifications of thought, enabling him to merge into the field of unified consciousness. As such, the

bandhas induce *pratyahara* or sense withdrawal, and are preliminary techniques for meditation.

Maha bandha – Though there are many techniques for establishing a state of equilibrium and union between mind and body, the most effective is said to be the combination of three bandhas. Maha bandha is the culmination of asana, pranayama, mudra and bandha. Perfection in it induces a state of perfect equanimity which unfolds into *pratyahara* or even spontaneous *dhyana*.



YOGA NIDRA

Yoga nidra means psychic sleep. It is a state of sleepless sleep where one is on the borderline between sleep and wakefulness. It is a state of inner awareness and contact with the subconscious and higher consciousness.

- Yoga nidra is practised in a lying position known as *shavasana*. In order to first induce a state of physical relaxation, the consciousness is systematically rotated through the different parts of the body followed by awareness of a breathing pattern such as alternate nostril breathing. Development of feelings like hot and cold, pain and pleasure, and lightness and heaviness, is intended to create a state of emotional relaxation. This is followed by complete mental relaxation through visualization of images and stories that have powerful and universal significance.
- In this practice one remains awake, attentive and aware of the instructions but forgets one's own body and senses. The scientific basis behind the practice of yoga nidra is that by different methods of rotation of consciousness and by imagination of material things, one detaches the individual awareness from the sense experiences,

memories, samskaras and any kind of reaction to outer impressions. The awareness is made devoid of any mechanical reaction, but at the same time the awareness is kept attached to the voice.

- In yoga nidra the physical centres of the body become introverted. This is pratyahara. When the mind is fixed on a centre, blood and energy are drawn to it and this causes withdrawal of the senses at that centre. In the deep state of relaxation that results, tension is released, the mind becomes clear and thoughts are more powerful. By its practice different psychic faculties are controlled and harnessed for various occult purposes. In psychic sleep we contact our inner personality to change our attitude towards ourselves and others. It is a method of introspection. It has been used by yogis since time immemorial to bring them face to face with the inner self.
- So, it is apparent that the use of guided imagery in yoga nidra is a very powerful method of resolving suppressed conflicts, desires, memories, and samskaras. At the same time, it is the key to the awakening of a new creative individual with unlimited resources of knowledge readily accessible.

Important guidelines for practice

We must see that yoga nidra has no visions, no psychic explosions, no psychic developments, or experiences. The only thing that is acceptable in yoga nidra is that the voice which you hear becomes remote, as if someone is talking to you or whispering to you from a great distance. The flow of motion in the mind is continuous; the pattern of awareness remains constant, unbroken. You are not on the psychic plane, but you are on the borderline of the conscious plane. The quantum of consciousness is not the same as it is now; it is not the same as when you are thinking. This is a very beautiful state which scientists call the hypnogogic or hypnopompic state but which I call the threshold between this and that.

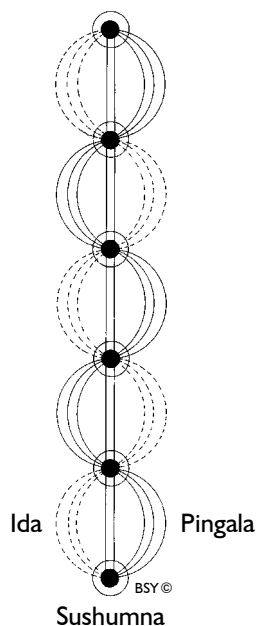
Physiology of yoga nidra

There are three important channels in this physical body. In yoga they are known as ida, pingala and sushumna. In other scientific terminology they are called the sympathetic, the para-sympathetic and the central nervous systems. In the language of tantra and hatha yoga, we could say the life force, the mental force and the spiritual force. Here we will only use the words ida, pingala and sushumna.

- Ida and pingala nadis feed the brain all the time with necessary stimuli. Then the brain is able to cognize an object, a sound, an idea. If you close off ida and pingala by means of pratyahara, then the brain is isolated. That is hypnosis.

But at the same time, if you awaken your sushumna (this is not awakened in most people), then, although you have closed the two channels of communication, ida and pingala, and you have disassociated them from the brain, the central nervous system is awake, and in place of ida and pingala, it will supply the necessary energy, stimuli and life to the brain.

- What your brain is receiving now is through ida and pingala. What it lacks during hypnosis is the ida-pingala connection. But in yoga nidra the central nervous system – sushumna nadi, awakens the brain completely. During yoga nidra, because sushumna nadi is functioning, the brain receives a higher quality of stimuli and a different type of knowledge. Therefore, the kind of awareness one experiences is completely different from what one has at any other time.



PRANA NIDRA

Prana nidra is a technique of pratyahara that works directly with pranamaya kosha. In practice it is similar to yoga nidra. In addition to bringing about a state of pratyahara, withdrawing of the mind from the senses, prana nidra also develops pranic sensitivity and balances or harmonizes the pranas. Both these aspects are crucial for success in prana vidya. Usually in the beginning, prana is experienced as forms of uncontrolled energy, such as tingling or sensations of warmth in the body. In prana vidya, control and direction of energy is developed, which requires the ability to perceive currents of prana flowing within the pranic body. Prana nidra develops this pranic awareness in a systematic way. Prana may be directed to:

- the physical organs and systems
- the pancha pranas: prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana
- the nadis: ida, pingala and sushumna
- the chakras.

The aim of the practice of prana nidra is to expand the awareness and experience of prana to previously unconscious areas. In a technique similar to yoga nidra, the awareness is systematically directed to various forms, levels and experiences of prana. In both yoga nidra and prana nidra one experiences, at increasingly subtle levels, things about oneself of which one was previously not aware. One relaxes the physical body, the *annamaya kosha*, in shavasana or any other relaxation posture. One relaxes the energy body or *pranamaya kosha*, through the breath. One relaxes the mental body, the *manomaya kosha*, by awakening the experience of opposite feelings or memories. One awakens the *vijnanamaya kosha*, the intuitive sheath of knowledge, through the use of symbols, and the *anandamaya kosha*, the inner awareness of bliss, by encouraging deeper and deeper states of relaxation while maintaining the witnessing awareness. When relaxation is complete, receptivity is greater.

In yoga nidra and prana nidra the consciousness is in a state between waking and sleep, yet it is subject to neither. In this state, the mind is exceptionally receptive. While the mind is open and receptive, yoga nidra brings the deeper layers of the psyche into the conscious experience and prana nidra brings increasingly subtle experiences of prana into the awareness.

AJAPA JAPA

The constant repetition of a mantra is known as japa. Japa becomes ajapa (spontaneous) japa when the mantra automatically repeats itself without conscious effort. It is said that ajapa japa comes from the heart, whereas japa comes from the mouth. Ajapa japa is a complete sadhana in itself which can take an aspirant from the most elementary level of body and environmental awareness to the highest stages of meditation.

Its practice, if undertaken gradually and with full awareness, will eventually bring all the hidden desires, fears and complexes of the mind to the mental surface. When this occurs, little by little over a period of months, the practitioner should view these previously hidden samskaras and vasanas with the attitude of an unconcerned witness. Through this process, ajapa japa relieves the mind of all tensions, which in turn removes the root cause of most physical and mental ailments.

Ajapa japa can be practised in any meditation asana. It can also be practised while sitting in a chair or lying in shavasana, but this is not as beneficial. Try not to move your body once you have started your practice. Any mantra can be used during the practice of ajapa, though traditionally the mantra *So Ham* is utilized since it corresponds with the natural sounds of inhalation and exhalation.

You make the breath the basis of your concentration. In one minute you breathe fifteen times, in one hour ninety times, and in twenty-four hours twenty-one thousand six

hundred times. We breathe but we do not know we are breathing. If you follow the process of breathing for a moment, the breath becomes the basis of pratyahara.

Concentration on the breath can be practised in the nostrils, in the throat and windpipe or in the spinal column. When we have mastered concentration on the breath, we should add another component to the practice which is known as mantra. The mantra can be *Om*, *So Ham* or any mantra. This is how we proceed on the path of dhyana yoga.

JAPA

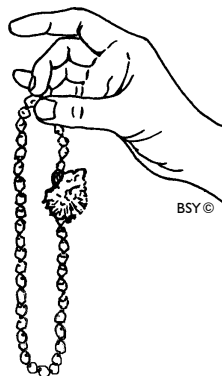
Of all the systems of yoga used to induce pratyahara and intended to lead eventually to samadhi, japa yoga is the easiest and safest and can be practised by anyone at any time and under any conditions. The word *japa* itself means 'to rotate'. Japa yoga means union of the self with the highest existence through the rotation of consciousness.

A mantra is the first requirement for japa yoga. A mantra is a grouping of sound vibrations which have an effect on the mental and psychic consciousness of man. Tradition says it is best if it is given by a guru or in a dream. Mantra repetition is another method of pratyahara. Mantra repetition should not create tension in the mind. The mind becomes tense if there are conflicts present due to various mental obstructions. To avoid mental tension, do not try to concentrate while practising mantra. Simply repeat the mantra as you would spontaneously carry on a conversation. If you talk and try to concentrate on how you are talking and what you are saying, tension will be created. When the mind is very distracted you should never try to concentrate. Concentration can only come when sense withdrawal has been achieved. The purpose of mantra repetition is not to develop concentration but to withdraw the senses and still the mind.

An important point is that the mind should be fully impressed by this mantra. When the mantra is spoken verbally

or mentally, the sound vibrations create a certain form inside the human being. This is the inner or psychic symbol and it has a physical manifestation.

A mala or rosary is the second requirement for most types of japa. A mala is a string of small beads, usually 108 in number. In japa there is a continued rotation of consciousness centred on the mantra and the mind becomes concentrated and relaxed, which tends to bring all the physical and mental faculties of man to their most efficient working state. The repetition of the mantra should seem to be a natural process emanating from within, and the mind should only be an unconcerned observer of this spontaneous process.



What happens in japa is that you slowly create a rhythm, and then a momentum in your brain is produced. After a while the mind loses touch with external objects, and the consciousness is withdrawn and elevated. A blissful state is reached and eventually it brings you to a state that is higher than pratyahara. Sometimes it gives a glimpse of meditation also. You will thus see that japa is not repetition of the Lord's name for the sake of repetition and that it is not a prerogative of the Hindus.

Japa is practised in all faiths, but maybe without understanding its psychological importance. The emotional energy should be sublimated and properly channelled for constructive work. Japa is the easiest and safest way by which a person can elevate the state of consciousness, by reciting the name in a particular manner, either alone or in a group.

ANTAR MOUNA

The Sanskrit word *mouna* means 'silence', and *antar* means 'inner'. Therefore, the English name of this practice is 'inner silence' and it is a great sadhana designed to make the aspirant aware of the inner silence as well as the inner noise which generally prevents one from knowing the silence. In our daily life our minds are almost continually externalized. We see and hear only what is going on outside of us, and we have little understanding of the events taking place in our inner environment.

In the practice of antar mouna we are aware of the thoughts and visions before us, the sounds raging around us, feelings – the chair we sit on, people around us, the train passing by. We are aware, not trying to escape from the fact that we are aware. This is the first step in pratyahara. Throughout each day our minds are almost continually externalized. By practising antar mouna, self-awareness develops and one comes to know the processes of the mind and the methods of bringing them under control.

Pratyahara means withdrawal of the senses, not by force but by a technique. The senses should be withdrawn from the respective objects of the senses. The senses should be calmed down by the *drashta* or *sakshi* attitude – 'I am witnessing the experience of hearing and I am aware of the sound, the music of birds'.

The practice of antar mouna is subdivided into a number of stages. The first stage of the technique is to be aware of all the outside sounds and occurrences that are going on around you. The second stage is to withdraw oneself from all outside stimuli and to be aware only of the workings of the mind: what it is thinking, how it is reacting and what images are coming from the subconscious. The third stage is the conscious creation of thoughts, which is followed in stage 4 by awareness and dissolution of spontaneous thoughts. Stage 5, the last practicable stage, is the suppression or removal of all thoughts, or the awareness of *shoonya*, the void, followed in stage 6 by the state of spontaneous meditation.

It can be practised at any time by simply reflecting on the question, 'What am I thinking? What is occurring now in my mental sphere?' When practised many times daily, this witnessing process becomes an automatic occurrence continuing by itself and showing you who you are, what you are doing here and where you are going. It can truly be said that in this practice through the awareness of inner noise you will come to know the voice of silence, the golden sound that sings of eternity.

The technique for the meditational practice of antar mouna is the first step towards attaining this permanent state of inner understanding. Although it is to be practised for a maximum of one hour a day, its effects carry on after the practice is over and one will automatically start to know one's own 'hidden side' and to see how one is reacting to life's situations in a clear and honest manner.

JAPA AND ANTAR MOUNA

In tantra there is a method to release thought processes without unbalancing the mind, and the method is to let the thought process and the japa process continue simultaneously. Sometimes the awareness of thinking becomes keen, and at other times the awareness of mantra becomes keen. Sometimes you are very engrossed in your thinking and then you regain awareness of your mantra, *Om, Om, Om*. There is alternate awareness of wavering and concentration, fluctuation and unification, and this must happen. The thoughts other than your mantra must cease spontaneously and never by force.

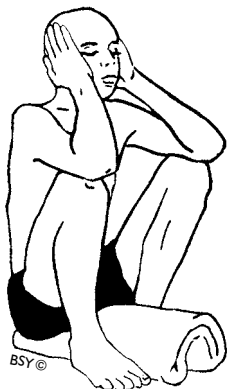
Secondly, you should never try to be completely free from thoughts during meditation and to be aware only of the japa or the mantra. You should never aim for this; it is impractical and can never happen. Along with your mantra, along with your spiritual practice or meditation, thoughts will come, fluctuations must take place, memories must return, your mind must wander here and there. That is natural. If

it doesn't happen, you can be sure that somewhere a mental blockage has taken place and you must remove it. So, side by side with mantra, you must practise antar mouna, the art of witnessing the thought processes.

NADA YOGA

Nada yoga is a distinct path of yoga. It is closely related to mantra yoga, japa yoga, music and any other path that is concerned with sound. In fact, nada yoga is often used as a collective term to describe all yogic practices which utilize sound.

Nada yoga is a simple yet powerful practice. It is a method of tracing sound back through its psychic and more subtle manifestation to the source. This outside world composed of vibration is called the *mahakasha* or great ether. In nada yoga we are specifically concerned with the inner ether, the *chidakasha*. Nada is the sound of the *chidakasha*, but this sound means far more than the sound we hear in the external world. This inner nada operates on different levels of subtlety. The aim is to use this inner sound as a vehicle of awareness so that one can transcend normal limitations and dive deep into the mind. Complete absorption in the inner sound makes one oblivious to outside sounds and disturbances, and this leads to *pratyahara*. When the mind flows towards the sound then it becomes very concentrated. Nada yoga is the link to expanded awareness. It leads directly to meditation.



The practice of nada yoga tries to take the practitioner through progressively subtle manifestations of sound, to hear the full spectrum of gross and subtle sounds. It is an excellent practice for inducing *pratyahara*. It can induce states of meditation. Just as music can create subtle states of mind, nada tries to do the same thing.

Beginners should practise at a time when the surroundings are very quiet; this is to prevent external sounds interfering with perception of the internal sounds. Late at night or very early in the morning are recommended. As one becomes able to detect the subtle sounds without difficulty, then nada yoga can be practised at any time, any place, and even without closing the ears. To gain noticeable experiences, it is essential to practise every day.

KIRTAN

Kirtan, is an example of pratyahara when viewed from the point of raja yoga. When you practise kirtan, automatically the superficial sense impressions are cut off. This is just one example. The more you sing kirtan the better is the form of pratyahara. The melody, rhythm, sweetness and grandeur of music promote the spontaneity. If you could get into it more and more, the pratyahara in kirtan could come to the point where you would lose even the awareness of yourself.



When the practice of pratyahara is complete, for a moment one forgets oneself. This however should not be mistaken for being in a state of samadhi. At the end of the perfection of pratyahara, no matter whether you do it through trataka, nada yoga or kirtan, there is a point when the mind is completely deprived of the experiences and impressions, the mind becomes quiet. Singing kirtan and spiritual songs is an important part of nada yoga. It is also a powerful way of attaining pratyahara.

KRIYA YOGA

The Sanskrit word *kriya* means 'movement'. In this sense it represents internal movement of consciousness. Kriya yoga is one of the easiest and most powerful methods of practising meditation and awakening the spiritual consciousness in man. The kriya practices demand neither a steady pose nor concentration of mind. Even if one is unable to concentrate on one point and the mind is just jumping all about, it does not matter; you allow it to do so. In fact, in kriya yoga you are not trying to withdraw your mind to one-pointedness but you move the mind from one point to another in a particular order. This brings about development of certain parts of the brain, activity in the nervous system and awakening of mental energies. The kriya practices help you evolve the mind to that height where you can experience your real nature.

Traditionally, kriya yoga was transmitted only from guru to disciple, but the time has come for it to be more widely known. Actually in many ancient traditions throughout the world there were mystic practices similar to kriya yoga and communicated in the same way. One example is the Chinese meditative system called chi kung. In both kriya yoga and chi kung the flows of prana are utilized to establish balance and harmony of the physical, mental and pranic bodies.

Preparation for kriya yoga

Kriya yoga combines the asanas, pranayamas, mudras and bandhas of hatha yoga which specifically induce pratyahara. For example, siddhasana, padmasana, ujjayi pranayama, khechari, shambhavi, vajroli and yoni mudras, nasikagra drishti, uddiyana, jalandhara, moola and maha bandhas.

Kriya yoga is an ancient initiation and practice for which adequate preparation is required. Each individual kriya is comprised of a number of subsidiary techniques. These are the basic tools of kriya yoga. Many of these subsidiary techniques are widely known and practised individually. They can be classified into the following groups:

1. *Asana* (mostly sitting poses) Without a steady comfortable position it is impossible to induce pratyahara. It is necessary to master the relevant asanas so that they are comfortable to assume and maintain and are not a continual source of discomfort and distraction.
2. *Mudra* (external expression of an inner attitude) These are special physical positions of the body which induce specific physiological, psychic and mental changes in one's being. Mudras often involve the use of bandhas and pranayama, and the internal rotation of awareness through certain specific psychic passages.
3. *Bandha* (physical locks which tighten and contract specific parts of the body) They are associated with breath retention and concentration on specific regions of the body. Beside the physical influences, they also induce profound psychic and mental changes in the human framework. They are especially powerful in inducing control of the pranic forces of the body.
4. *Mantra* (special sound pattern which produces subtle impact and change) There are a vast number of mantras, each with a specific power.
5. *Pranayama* (in the first group of kriyas is concerned with pratyahara) Pranayama is widely utilized as a means to harmonize pranic forces in the body. The flow of breath is integrated with the psychic passage awareness. In later kriyas, the more subtle form of pranayama, namely ujjayi, is widely used. This is a great help in inducing pratyahara and dharana.
6. *Psychic passage awareness*. This is a vital aspect of kriya yoga practice. It is due to the subtle perception of ancient yogis that the significance of psychic passages became known. In kriya yoga, awareness is rotated along specific pathways of the body. This in turn induces changes in the pranic and psychic flow patterns of the body. This harmonized flow pattern influences the more subtle aspects of one's being and greatly helps to induce pratyahara and dharana.



These six groups of techniques are the building blocks of the kriyas. Individually they are very powerful physio-psychic-psychological instruments. When they are combined they become irresistible yogic bulldozers. They all act in very subtle ways in the pranic and mental body. They transmute one's being into a sensitive yet powerful instrument of perception. They are combined together in a scientific and specific manner in order to bring about changes in one's being. These changes induce the process of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Individual practice of these subsidiary techniques can have powerful influences on the physio-psychic-mental body.

In kriya yoga the emphasis is not on concentration but on the practice. If you consciously keep your eyes open for a period of half an hour, pratyahara will become automatic and easy.

If you keep your eyes closed, you will become aware of most of your mental problems and worries. When the eyes are closed, the brain is quieter and the subconscious forces are able to come into operation. When you keep your eyes open,

however, the brain is functioning more and the unconscious conflicts stay out of the consciousness.

For example, if you practise a mantra with the eyes closed and then with the eyes open, you will find that the state of pratyahara is much better with the eyes open than closed. In pratyahara there is a temporary disconnection between the nervous system and the brain which can be best achieved by keeping the eyes open. Dharana has to be done with the eyes closed. Therefore, in kriya yoga the first practices, which develop pratyahara, are performed with the eyes open, but after tadan kriya, dharana begins and at that point you are asked to keep your eyes closed

INFLUENCE OF THE GUNAS

Pratyahara can be accomplished by one or more systems. Now, this also depends upon the quality of the person. Some are predominantly balanced, others are predominantly aggressive, dynamic, and others are predominantly lethargic, indolent, lazy and inert. These three types of people are known in yoga as sattwic, rajasic and tamasic people respectively. For those people who are tamasic, like the python, seldom moved, one type of practice is needed; for rajasic people another type of practice and for sattwic people a different practice should be taught.

Kirtan is suitable for tamasic people

Tamasic people are the most passive type of people. If you put them in lotus posture and give them a mantra of *Om Namah Shivaya*, after fifteen minutes they become blank, no idea, no emotion, no consciousness, no mala – the mala falls down. This is the tamasic person who does not want to take the minimum pain, who thinks that everything comes without difficulty. They do not want to make an effort, or budge an inch or have a little difficulty in lotus posture or siddhasana. These tamasic people need a different sadhana so that they can avoid sleep and get a little pleasure; something like kirtan which is pleasant.

Antar mouna is suitable for rajasic people

Antar mouna is not suitable for sattwic people but is a better practice for rajasic people. Who are rajasic people? You have seen a monkey. It is always restless; it is never constant. The type of person known as rajasic is restless by nature, stung by the agonies of life and having drunk the pleasures of life. If you give them the actual practices of one-pointedness, they will have fearful experiences, they will not be able to handle them. So they are taught antar mouna. Just letting thoughts come, just see them without controlling them. Here you do not have to control them because you cannot control them.

Trataka is suitable for sattwic people

Then there are sattwic people who have a harmonious mind. True, their mind also oscillates or dissipates, but generally it is not so unruly as is the case with the rajasic people. Teach them trataka or give them concentration on a symbol or an object, they will have difficulties no doubt, but they will be able to get through them.

There are sadhanas meant for those who have predominant instincts in them; also practices for those who have divinity in them and also practices for those who have human passions manifesting. So accordingly, you practise pratyahara.



OTHER SADHANAS FOR PRATYAHARA

Then there are other sadhanas or other practices which can only be done in an ashram. Not only because there is a guru there, but because of the ashram atmosphere itself. It is an important guidance or lighthouse, the practice of mouna (one-day silence) or one-night vigil, it is not a religion, and if it is a religion – well and good. It improves the quality of awareness, and improves the state of mind, this is important.

In India people go to the temple of Shiva or an ashram during Sivaratri (the Night of Shiva) once a year and the whole night they keep awake and sing kirtan, and after that if you sit in padmasana, siddhasana, sukhasana, vajrasana or in any asana and close your eyes and try to make your mind jump, it will not jump. You try to make your mind change to passions, desires and anxiety but it will rest because by the practice of *jagara*, vigil or the practice of keeping awake, pratyahara takes place by itself. It facilitates the process of concentration, so mouna (silence) vigil, two days fasting, satsang and you can do kirtan all night or for four or five hours, and lose yourself.

Conclusion

The practice of pratyahara automatically leads you to the point of concentration. If you have done well with the practices of pratyahara it will be easier for you to practise *dharana*, concentration, holding one form, one idea before the mind. Here crystallization of the mental energy takes place. The mind which is otherwise aware of all and sundry becomes aware of one thing, one form and one object. When the awareness of one object remains in the mind for a particular period of time, if it stays there, transformation takes place. This transformation is known as *dhyana*, meditation. So, in yoga all the different practices you have learned, taught or practised are in fact not practices of meditation. There is no practice of meditation, it is an experience. Meditation is not an effort; it is a state of being. You are just there.

6

Benefits of Pratyahara



Once we reach pratyahara we are on the border of the internal and external worlds and our awareness fluctuates from one state to another. This is the same state that occurs just before and just after sleep.

There are many practices which can help you to perfect pratyahara. In fact, many of the yoga practices which you learn are practices of pratyahara. Yoga nidra, antar mouna,

trataka, ajapa japa, nada yoga, mantra writing, practising mantra, singing kirtan and a few others, whilst being known to us as meditation, are in fact, practices of pratyahara. Of these, two are important practices of pratyahara. One is yoga nidra and the other is antar mouna.

YOGA NIDRA

It is impossible to ignore the connection between the discoveries of modern brain researchers and those of the enlightened yogis who long ago evolved the practice of yoga nidra. Of course the yogic scientists of former ages did not devise this powerful technique merely as a means of alleviating diseases, but primarily as a way of attaining higher consciousness by expanding and liberating individual awareness from its fixation within the physical body and its sensory modalities, towards the more subtle pranic, psychic and spiritual dimensions underlying gross material existence.

Restoring health

In the context of modern man suffering from stress-related diseases, it is sufficient to recognize that these originate out of excessive identification of the psyche with the *soma* or material body, through the medium of the sensory channels, leading to nervous depletion and even breakdown. In yoga nidra, this destructive psychosomatic tendency is effectively alleviated by the opposite somatopsychic route. The psychosomatic imbalance is restored spontaneously due to liberation of prana or nervous energy, which is withdrawn from the sensory channels and modalities as pratyahara is attained. This energy is redirected for healing and rejuvenation of overtaxed tissues, glands and organs.

Therapeutic application

Relaxation, by withdrawing the awareness from the external environment, reduces the stress of daily living experiences. Yoga nidra affects all aspects of the individual, because

physical and mental relaxation through withdrawal of the empirical awareness, and concentration, the focusing of attention, or *dharana*, are important elements of that technique.

Yoga nidra is intended to balance muscular, mental and emotional tensions. It is a perfect system for inducing relaxation by creating one-pointedness of the body and mind. It induces a state of pratyahara by systematically withdrawing the awareness away from the body and the external world. In this state of deep relaxation, contact is made with the subconscious and unconscious mind, the storehouse of those fears, memories, complexes and obsessions that disturb us daily. If we can remain as a detached observer, the tensions are released without any emotional involvement or further reaction.

The purpose of rotating awareness through the different parts of the body is to enable the body to be transcended. The mind becomes one-pointed and very relaxed. This induces simultaneous relaxation of the entire physical body. Consequently the whole body-mind is rested. Tensions are soothed away.

Shavasana is a simple practice, but most people find it almost impossible to completely relax the body. There is a tendency to hold tension in some part. The whole body must relax, then the breathing will simultaneously slow down. One must try to ignore the mental chatter and concentrate only on the breath and body.

This practice is useful for developing body awareness and pratyahara. When the body is completely relaxed, awareness of the mind develops. Its effects influence the physical as well as the psychological structure. It is useful in yogic management of high blood pressure, peptic ulcer, anxiety, hysteria, cancer and all psychosomatic diseases and neuroses.

Unified awareness

In the practice of yoga nidra there is special emphasis on the maintenance of unification of awareness during the state of relaxation. This means that your consciousness, which is

normally extroverted, should become unified and totally aware inwardly during the process of relaxation. Therefore, yoga nidra literally means relaxation by following a process of unification of the mind.

When one practises yoga nidra, one is not asleep. The consciousness is functioning in a certain state of awareness. It is a state in which one is neither asleep nor awake. Yoga nidra is a state in which there is awareness of the conscious, subconscious and unconscious fields of the mind at the same time. This profound state of consciousness is such that even the sense of self-awareness is completely consumed.

When you are concentrating, you know you are concentrating, but when you are in yoga nidra, there comes a moment when you do not know that you are in yoga nidra. When the mind disassociates itself from the sensory channels, it becomes powerful, but at this point it needs training. The involuntary systems of the brain have to be properly trained. otherwise, there is practically no difference between ordinary sleep and yoga nidra.

Awakening the dormant faculties of the mind

Yoga nidra is a dynamic method by which the individual consciously cultivates his inner faculties. Instead of planting knowledge inside, in yoga nidra we allow the intuitive inner knowledge to blossom forth. Memory, sensitivity, relaxation, intelligence, ability to control the senses, and so on, are just a few of the dormant faculties within, waiting to be awakened and tapped. These are just side products of the main process which leads to the dawning of greater awareness and the evolution of consciousness. This is achieved by consciously participating, by learning how to dive into the mind and the brain and activate the various switches and internal mechanisms that lead to new modes of perception, creativity and intuition, to the source of all outer knowledge. All this comes from one simple technique that can be used by anyone.

So in yoga nidra we have realized that there is a state of mind which is very sensitive, very potential and absolutely

receptive. In children that state of mind occurs readily, but for a very short period. In adults, whose brains are already seasoned, it takes time for this state to occur.

Controlling the dreaming process

Dreams arise as energy patterns due to an awakening, release or explosion in the psychic body. They come of their own accord, and in yoga nidra we even precipitate this release.

Once you reach a certain stage in spiritual life, it becomes possible to change your dreams while they are taking place, and actually create your own dream. To do this, you must be able to maintain the dual consciousness of the dreamer and the dream, so that while you are dreaming, you know that you are dreaming. The ability to witness this dream consciousness is a dynamic form of pratyahara.

Yoga nidra is the best way to increase the level of awareness of the dream. Many people have dreams, but their awareness of the dream remains gross and ineffectual. This is why they usually cannot remember their dreams. It is only possible to visualize the dream clearly when the witnessing consciousness remains alert. This awareness is attained by yoga nidra.

ANTAR MOUNA

When the mind is silent and peaceful it becomes very powerful. It becomes the receptor of bliss and wisdom, a perfect instrument. Life becomes a spontaneous flow and expression of joy. All this arises naturally when the mind is in a state of inner silence.

Achieving inner silence

This inner silence can never arise when there is a continual stream of disturbing thoughts and turbulent emotions. All the inner noise of thoughts and emotions has to be removed before one can experience the soundless sound of inner silence. Antar mouna is designed specifically to eradicate



mental noise and induce calmness in the mind. By the practice of antar mouna you achieve mastery over a great part of your mind.

Many times we have seen that when a thought emerges on the conscious plane, it immediately releases a particular disease from the body. I have seen so many cases where the most deadly diseases have just gone away miraculously overnight by the witnessing of one thought and the expansion of it. So, witnessing the thought, the images, the whole process, and everything that is taking place in the mind during the mantra meditation or any type of meditation, is a very powerful sadhana known as antar mouna.

Removal of samskaras

The samskaras hidden within act as powerful barriers to spiritual development as well as day-to-day happiness. These samskaras must come out; if you go on pushing them back, they will erupt sometime in the form of an explosion which you may not be able to cope with at the time. There is no way around them, you must bring them up little by little, item by item, and eliminate them. In yoga this stage is called *atma shuddhi*, self-purification, or *chitta shuddhi*, mental purification. All spiritually minded people must understand that until this stage is reached, the superconscious entity, God, or whatever you wish to call Him, will not be clear to you.

Chitta shuddhi

Chitta shuddhi or purification of the mind is not necessarily a pleasant or sweet process, but it is definitely a beneficial process. Through purification the mind becomes effulgent, and with this purified mind you are able to perceive your true nature. In the *Bhagavad Gita* it says (3:38): “As fire is enveloped by smoke, as a mirror by dust, as an embryo by the womb, so is This covered by that.”

Spiritual development is a slow process of transformation. Chitta is the most fantastic stuff, the ultimate form of which is chit; just as nuclear energy is the ultimate form of fissionable matter. During the process of transformation we must be prepared to face ourselves. Before reaching chit or atman, a lot of unpleasantness has to be worked through and a lot of effort made in spiritual life as well as in day-to-day life. This applies to everyone, whether householder or renunciate.

There are of course those people who need meditation for tranquillity, for soothing the tensions in the nervous system, for lowering the blood pressure and creating a state of relaxation. For such people it is not necessary that they do meditation because pratyahara alone is sufficient. When you isolate the consciousness from experience there is a state called pratyahara, when there is absolute tranquillity and the physical body experiences peace, relaxation.

Applications of Pratyahara



YOGA NIDRA

We have emphasized the use of yoga nidra as a relaxation technique and have suggested that yoga nidra be utilized, if necessary, as a method of inducing sleep. This may give the impression that yoga nidra is a preliminary technique for beginners; but actually yoga nidra, if practised correctly, can lead directly to meditation.

Yoga nidra as a meditative technique

Yoga nidra is a powerful meditative technique. In yoga nidra there are two general stages:

1. Deep relaxation of the physical, emotional and mental planes; this corresponds to pratyahara and dharana. All meditative techniques are intended to induce pratyahara as a preliminary to dharana. Yoga nidra does this very systematically; it is probably the most systematic of all meditative techniques. First of all, the *karmendriyas*, organs of action, are put out of action: hands, feet, etc. Then most of the *jnanendriyas*, organs of sense knowledge, are put out of action, leaving only perception of hearing and touch. Stimulation of the brain is drastically reduced. The field of perception and awareness is narrowed; the mind becomes very one-pointed and this leads to dharana.
2. Spontaneous meditation which is dhyana. At the stage of dharana one should fix awareness on a psychic symbol. This can be done at a suitable stage of yoga nidra. As concentration deepens, dharana is transformed into dhyana (meditation). One contacts the deeper layers of one's being. One reaches the regions beyond the conflicting thoughts of the subconscious mind. One contacts the seat of super-consciousness, intuition, bliss and transcendental experience.

In yoga nidra one does not fight the mind but systematically tranquillizes it. Attention is not fixed on one point as in many types of meditative techniques. Instead, one is asked to move attention from place to place in the body. At a certain stage, the mind will automatically concentrate on one point.

You can use yoga nidra for any purpose that you wish, whether relaxation, sleep or removal of personality problems. The highest purpose of yoga nidra is to bring the joy of meditation.

Applications of yoga nidra for children

For children, we use yoga nidra to change some of their personal habits or negative patterns.



- Mothers came to me because their children had a bad habit of bed wetting, and they had tried homeopathy and ayurveda, and sometimes they slapped them, but nothing worked. I asked them to stay with the child in the ashram for five to ten nights. While the child slept, I observed him. As I narrated a story to the child I noticed that the child was going to sleep, or dozing off, so I realized that now the child is getting out of the realm of the senses. At once I called it by name and when it responded I said that if it wanted to urinate during the night to please wake me up. Then I repeated the process several times. After fifteen days the child stopped bed wetting.

I am not talking about suggestion. The word suggestion is an incomplete expression. This is called samskara. How do you develop a flower? How do you grow wheat? How do you develop a mango tree, an avocado tree or an apple tree? There has to be a seed. If you want your child to do or not to do something, you do not have to use the wrong expression called suggestion. A thought is a seed which develops into an experience, develops into character, develops into a personality. It is a seed, it is a bija, it is a samskara, it is a karma. Not only the action you do with your hands is karma. Not only is the action you do with your feet karma. But a thought is a karma,

because karma is a movement in the realm of nature, in the realm of events, disturbing events, changing events or modifying events, that is called karma and that is what I was doing with the children.

- During my earlier years, I often experimented with this state of mind. One of the most interesting experiments was with a little boy who presented himself at my ashram for sannyasa. I wanted to send him to school, but he flatly refused. He was a very naughty boy, an absolute monkey. All day long he broke things, harassed the visitors, and caused accidents. Finally, he became such a liability for the ashram that I decided to try yoga nidra on him.

Every night I put him to bed in my room and as he was falling asleep, I taught him *Gita*, Upanishads, Bible, Koran, English, Hindi, Sanskrit, all that I knew. It took me nearly two years. When the boy was ten years old I sent him off to Belfast to teach yoga. When he was thirteen I sent him to South America, at sixteen to Australia, at eighteen to Europe. Now he is twenty and I have sent him to USA. He speaks eleven languages fluently, writes in English better than I do, yet he has never been to school. All of his studies and learning took place within that two-year period when I gave him yoga nidra, and he doesn't even remember it now.

How does this happen? The answer is simple. When relaxation is complete, the receptivity is greater. When the consciousness is connected to all the senses, the receptivity is less. This is yoga nidra. The receptive state of yoga nidra can be effectively used to correct the habits and behaviour of your husband, wife or children. If you want to try it, don't say anything to them. Just note what is wrong and keep quiet. At night, as soon as they fall asleep, wake them. At this point, everything you say will make a deep impression on their mind.

When the child goes to bed, it usually only takes him about three minutes to fall into deep sleep. After this, he

loses all contact with the sensory channels and you cannot contact him. Adults generally take much longer. When the person is falling asleep and has nearly lost contact with the sensory channels, wake him up by name. He will not respond at the first call if he has lost all sensory contact. So move him a little and call him by name, then he will turn his body. The moment he mumbles, it means one sensory channel is in contact with the consciousness. Intellect and discrimination are not in touch. At this point, repeat what you have to say two, three or more times. This is especially necessary with children because they are unable to maintain contact with the sensory channels once they have fallen asleep. Carry on this process for fifteen days and you will be surprised at the changes it brings about.

Yoga nidra and disease

I have experienced the positive effects of yoga nidra on many diseases. It works wonderfully on nervous depression, high blood pressure, insomnia. In fact, it is more powerful than hatha yoga. Nowadays I tell everybody: practise yoga nidra, if it doesn't work then practise hatha yoga. In yoga nidra you are dealing with the problem through the mind, and the mind is more powerful than the body. Mind can cause cancer. Mind can cause heart attack. Mind can cause many problems in the body. If the mind can cause problems, then it can also solve problems. A negative mind causes problems, an impure mind causes problems, a weak mind causes problems. A positive mind solves problems. It is a very simple science.

In your garden, you sow flowers and you plant cactus. In the same way, in your mind you can plant any thought. That is why yoga nidra can help in diseases which are physical in nature. A habit is a product of the mind. Success and failure are products of mind. Love and hatred are products of mind. Depression and happiness are products of mind. Eczema and asthma are products of mind. Constipation and diarrhoea are products of mind. The mind controls man's entire life. Therefore, it is necessary for all of us to know how to handle

the mind. Like a good farmer, first soften the soil, then sow the seeds. And when you sow the seeds, you must examine the seeds very well.

Children, women and old men who are suffering from physical ailments and have many handicaps should be taught yoga nidra. Please understand that all these diseases, although they appear to be absolutely physical in nature, cannot only be greatly influenced, but they can be totally influenced through yoga nidra. In yoga therapy, yoga nidra is also used for mental diseases.

Yoga nidra for overall harmony

You should not confuse yoga nidra with a psychic system, psychological system or inner system. There is no dividing line between matter and energy; it is only a matter of understanding, a matter of an arbitrary judgment. The physical body and the mental body, they interpenetrate each other. Body affects mind and mind affects body. At one level you are the mind and at another level you are the body, and therefore the practices of yoga nidra should be mastered by everybody.

In daily life, most people are not very receptive. This state occurs only when the mind is withdrawn and brought to a point of innocence. There is a scientific definition of innocence which describes it as a state of mind free from the association of logic and mathematics. Innocence is a state of the brain also. There is a time when our brain is completely without inhibitions, and if you plant a seed it will definitely germinate.

The practices of yoga nidra can help you to improve the quality of your inner experience. The practices of yoga nidra can help you to implant the samskara, the seed, or the experience of your choice, in your mind, and you can develop it as you like.

This should be tried not only with yogis, not only with the meditators, not only with the good people, but it should be tried with people who are hardened criminals. Here the



method has to be improved, you have to discover a method of how to teach them, so that their negative energy can be transformed into positive contributions to their own life and the society at large.

ANTAR MOUNA

To have a healthy personality we must respect our mind; whether our thoughts are holy or vicious, we must accept them. In practising antar mouna one should be very careful not to concentrate the mind. Be a silent, impartial witness to all functions of the mind. Observe the part of the mind which thinks and the part which rejects that thought. This is a practice of seeing the mind, observing perceptions and accepting experiences. Even if someone comes, or an aeroplane flying overhead disturbs you, observe and accept the reactions of the mind.

Antar mouna is an excellent remedy for schizophrenia. To some degree we are all a little schizophrenic. When we have an undesirable thought we fight with it and this creates conflict. One portion of the mind is in total conflict with another and when this conflict becomes intense, it is called schizophrenia.

PHYSICAL HYGIENE

Maharishi Patanjali's method of yoga includes a wide range of techniques that slowly harmonize the mind and gradually induce more subtle perception, so that success in meditation practice can eventually be attained. In the *Yoga Sutras* he recommends different techniques to cater for individual temperaments so that the mind-stuff can be brought into a state of peace and equilibrium. The main path of his system is contained in eight fundamental stages. The first five are the preparatory stages, or external practices of yoga: *yama*, social code, *niyama*, personal code, *asana*, sitting pose, *pranayama*, control of prana, and *pratyahara*, sense withdrawal.

These five stages progressively prepare the body-mind for the last three stages: *dharana*, concentration, *dhyana*, meditation, and *samadhi*, superconsciousness. The stages up to *pratyahara* gradually remove external distractions, whilst the more advanced practices from *dharana* onwards eradicate inner disturbances from the thoughts and psychic manifestations, so that the mind becomes steady and awakened to transcendental dimensions. These last three stages are the internal practices of yoga, and can only be practised successfully after mastering the earlier preparatory stages.

The psycho-physiological aspect of yoga is of profound importance. This ancient science never regards man as a mere biological entity. The ancient thinkers paid great attention to the functioning of the mind and the inner mechanism. Today, psychology has also accepted this basic aspect in its scope of investigation and is increasingly recognizing the correlation between the body and the mind. It thus becomes patent that for the progress of man in any field of activity, it is necessary that he should possess not only a healthy body but also a healthy mind. Yoga has always aimed at the emergence of a healthy and integrated personality in man as the indispensable condition for his ability to take to higher flights in yoga.

8

Scriptural References



The path of evolution leads us to a gradual conquest of body and mind. According to Samkhya philosophy and according to our experience, there are two birds that live on the same tree of life: one is sitting in peace and is only aware of all the events and the other is all the time active – it is flying, searching for food, eating, enjoying life, and so on. The natural law reigns supreme for this bird. To become conscious of this unity is what the human being is searching

for. Our whole history is a continuous struggle to reach this goal.

When people try to comprehend the truth with the intellect and do not become one with the inner self, the result is that one's actual life is in contradiction with the assertion, "I am Brahman," or "I am eternally liberated in Brahman." It is something like the parrot that has been taught to repeat "Ram, Ram, Ram . . ." He keeps on repeating "Ram, Ram, Ram . . ." day and night, but when a cat appears and tries to bite him, the parrot forgets this mantra and shouts simply, "pip, pip, pip."

Similarly, there are two types of Vedantins – pseudo Vedantins or Vedantins who repeat like a parrot, "I am Brahman" without having realized the meaning, and the others, the real ones, who actually practise it. The following story illustrates both kinds.

Indra, the god of gods, and Duryodhana went to Brahman, the creator, and asked him for spiritual instructions. He said to both, "*Tat Tvam Asi* – That Thou Art"; that is to say, 'I am Brahman.' Indra went to his heaven and Duryodhana to his land. They became full of this idea, but Duryodhana told himself, "I am Brahman, this moustache is Brahman, these cheeks are Brahman, Brahman has one thousand wives." He went on this way repeating, "Thou art That – Brahman."

Indra said, "I know that Brahman is immortal and without form and that this body is mortal and perishable." Through this kind of introspection of the senses and the mind, Indra became concentrated and one-pointed. Thus the real knowledge came to him, the realization of Brahman. It is for this type of person who is pure in heart, who can think deeply and is capable of introspection, that jnana yoga is suitable. For other people, raja yoga, bhakti yoga and karma yoga might be needed as a supplement. It means that before starting higher practices of Vedanta, one must go through pranayama, pratyahara, and so on, as it is written in the *Brahma Sutras*.

BHAGAVAD GITA

*Yadaa samharate chaayam koormo'ngaaneeva sarvashah;
Indriyaaneendriyaarthebhyastasya prajnaa pratishthitaa.*

When such a person completely withdraws his senses from their respective objects, as a tortoise withdraws his limbs into his shell from all sides and rests within, then that person has achieved steadiness of wisdom. (2:58)

Explanation

As a tortoise spontaneously draws its limbs within the shell against possible harm and danger, so a person established in intuition practises *pratyahara*, the complete withdrawing of the senses from all sense objects.

The literal meaning of *pratyahara* is retreat or return. *Prati* means return or about turn. *Ahara* means food, feeding, enjoying. Thus, *pratyahara* means about to turn from food, from feeding, from enjoyments. As the cows go out to pasture in the early morning, so they return home at dusk. It is this act of returning that is *pratyahara*. Likewise, as the senses are pulled and exercised, attached to various sense objects during the daytime, so too, at the time of meditation, the senses are withdrawn from these objects. *Pratyahara* in yoga is an act of returning within and getting away from the world during the spiritual practices.

Indriya means both senses and medium. Anything which is a medium for an action or act is *indriya*. The medium of speech is the tongue and above the physical *indriyas* is the mind. These *indriyas* are inert by themselves. It is the mind that manifests them through the senses in the form of speech, sight, sound, smell and touch.

He who practises *pratyahara* is as if dead to the world. He is not affected by outside vibrations. By merely willing it, he brings his senses under perfect control. Such a man becomes steady in wisdom.

It is also said in the *Gita* that the consciousness is constantly fluctuating because that is its nature. There are two things which bring about absolute quietness. One is persistent practice or *abhyasa*, and the other is complete detachment from the insignificant, irrelevant and meaningless affairs of life or *vairagya*.

Again in the *Gita* we read (2:69): “That which is night for all living beings, is the time when the yogi is awake. And when all beings are awake, it is night for the yogi.” This means that when the senses are aware of the sense objects, it is day for all living beings, but for the yogi it is night because he does not see himself. When the senses are withdrawn completely and all beings are asleep, it is day for the yogi because the consciousness is awake.

In the *Ramacharitamanas*, the same thing is written, “When the mind is withdrawn from the insignificant objects of life, that is actually the awakening of the soul.” In the same context, in the *Gita* we read, “When you do not feed your senses, the awareness of the sense objects is diminished, but the taste remains.” Taste means craving, a very subtle kind of thirst. Even that longing and craving disappears when you become aware of yourself.

UDDHAVA GITA

The methods of unfolding bhakti

In the *Uddhava Gita*, Krishna instructs his disciple Uddhava, “Having withdrawn the senses (pratyahara) from contact with the surroundings, the devotee should concentrate on my form, especially one part such as my smiling face. Then he should be aware of my all-pervading self which is free like the sky. Leaving that after some time, he should feel as though he is one with me, and stop thinking of all other things. He will see me, the *antaryamin*, the inner being, in himself, and himself in me like the light that is united with the fire. All doubts about matter, knowledge and action will completely cease.”

Use any symbol of the supreme. This will take you beyond the symbol itself, if you have intensity and sincerity. It is difficult for most people to feel love or *prem* for something intangible or impersonal. It is for this reason that a concrete form is utilized. Total absorption in the limited form or name will lead to the unlimited.

GHHERAND SAMHITA

Yoga: the path to perfection

Progress in yoga depends on various physical and mental qualifications in an individual that have to be gradually cultivated and awakened. All these qualifications are listed in a yogic text called the *Gherand Samhita* as follows:

1. *Shodhanam* (body purification)
2. *Dridhata* (steadiness of the body)
3. *Sthairyam* (determination)
4. *Dhairyam* (patience)
5. *Laghavam* (lightness of the body and mind)
6. *Pratyaksham* (direct perception)
7. *Nirlipta* (unaffectedness; detachment; to be untouched by the woes of the world and life).

The text continues as follows: “Bodily purification is attained by the practice of the shatkarmas, steadiness of the body by asana practice, determination by practice of mudras, patience by practising meditative techniques to induce pratyahara, lightness of body and mind by pranayama practice, direct perception by the experience of dhyana and unaffectedness by samadhi (perfect merging).” (1:10–11) These practices and experiences are the means to achieve perfection.

SHIVA SAMHITA

Tantric literature states that once the dissipation of prana is arrested through the practice of mudra, the mind becomes introverted, inducing states of *pratyahara*, sense

withdrawal, and *dharana*, concentration. Because of their ability to redirect prana, mudras are important techniques for awakening kundalini. For this reason, they are incorporated extensively into kriya and kundalini yoga practices. In the *Shiva Samhita* (4:13–14) it is written:

*Suptaa guruprasaadena yadaa jaagarti kundalee;
Tadaa sarvaani padmaani bhidyante granthayopi cha.
Tasmaatsarvaprayatnena prabodhayitumeeshvareem;
Brahmarandhramukhe suptaam mudraabhyasam
samaacharet.*

When the sleeping goddess Kundalini is awakened through the grace of guru, then all the lotuses and the bonds are readily pierced through and through. (13)

Therefore, in order that the goddess, who is asleep in the mouth of the brahmarandhra (the innermost hollow of sushumna) be awakened, the mudras should be practised with the greatest care. (14)

Just as the gopis on hearing the flute of Sri Krishna left their husbands, the *gopas*, and went for the dance, *rasa*, likewise the senses will have to leave their objects and become introvert. Sound, touch, sight, taste and smell are the five sense objects. The experiences they provide are termed extroversion. When our mind detaches itself from these objects and becomes quiet, then the ishta descends into us. Therefore, to bring in the ishta deva, the veil will have to be removed. The practice of doing so is called *pratyahara*, abstraction. Concentration and meditation develop when this practice is successful.

The form of the ishta is visible sometimes and sometimes not. Why does this happen? The reason is that if and when the veil is lifted, the form is visible, not otherwise. Therefore, instead of going straight into meditation, you should practise all the sadhanas of pratyahara. In other words, if after fifty-five minutes of the pratyahara sadhana the vision of the ishta is seen even for five minutes, it is better than fruitless meditation for sixty minutes.

PATANJALI'S YOGA SUTRAS

What is yoga? (Samadhi Pada, sutra 2)

Yogashchitta vritti nirodhah.

To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga.

Yoga chitta vritti nirodhah can be translated as 'yoga is the control of the modifications of consciousness'. The 'modifications of consciousness' entails the process of recognition of experiences, as against pure experiential awareness without relation to past experiences.

By concentration on a particular inner object the outer experience is diminished until the mind is completely withdrawn. At this point the body can be touched, but one does not feel it; burning incense can be placed under the nose, but one does not smell it; verbal sounds, musical sounds, or noises can be made, but one does not hear them; the eyes can be open, but one does not see anything outside. This state is called *pratyahara*, or sense withdrawal.

It is in order to reach the stage of *pratyahara* that we perform so many practices, such as *asana*, *pranayama*, *mudra*, *bandha*, *ajapa japa* and other branches of yoga, such as *bhakti yoga* and *karma yoga*. To achieve *pratyahara* we must diminish the outer awareness to a point of no dimension. However, once *pratyahara* is reached the inner awareness begins to expand until the mind with all its faculties for thinking, remembering, dreaming can be witnessed with an ever-expanding, ever-awakening awareness.

Or by observing sense experience (Samadhi Pada, sutra 35)

Vishayavati va pravrttirutpanna manasah sthitinibandhani.

Or else the mind can be made steady by bringing it into activity of sense experience.

This sutra describes an additional technique which may be followed by those who are not able to practise Ishwara pranidhana, or even maha bandha or pranayama. It is true that many aspirants find it difficult to practise pranayama on account of a lack of proper guidance, or due to inefficiency, or lack of proper nutrition. This sutra provides a simpler method of bringing the mind under control through arousing an activity of sense perception. Here the mind is made to observe itself in sense perception; that is, perception through the senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. By merging the mental consciousness into these sense perceptions, the mind comes under control. That is to say, the mental consciousness can be merged into sound consciousness by repetition of mantras, bhajan, kirtan, etc. A sophisticated person may not find this interesting, but it is true that if one goes deep, one can control the mind by making it sound conscious. This is a principle of nada yoga.

Eight parts of yoga discipline (Sadhana Pada, sutra 29)

*Yamaniyamasapranayama pratyaharadharanadhyanasama
dhayo'shtavangani.*

Self-restraints, fixed rules, postures, breath control, sense withdrawal, concentration, meditation and samadhi constitute the eight parts of yoga discipline.

The raja yoga of Patanjali is divided into eight limbs, and these eight limbs are interdependent and of similar value. Yama, niyama, asana, pranayama and pratyahara form the external aspect, *bahiranga*, or exoteric yoga. Dharana, dhyana, and samadhi form the internal aspect, *antaranga* yoga.

The entire range of yoga is divided into two: *bahiranga* and *antaranga*. *Bahiranga* means the yoga which is practised with the objects outside, in relation to the body, society and many other things outside oneself. Asana, pranayama, yama, niyama and pratyahara form *bahiranga* yoga. Dharana, dhyana and samadhi form *esoteric* yoga because in these

practices you switch yourself off from the objective to the subjective method of contemplation.

The external and internal means are interdependent. It may be possible for a few people who are born with great samskaras to be able to practise meditation directly without going through the initial stages of yama and niyama. For most of us it is necessary to go ahead step by step, beginning from yama and niyama, because in a life lacking restraint and discipline there is the possibility of an unconscious explosion, which might create mental derangement. Sometimes such explosions take place in meditation and there is a disturbance due to these impurities. It is one of the main reasons for failure in meditation.

Meditation should not be practised in a hurry; there should be no haste. Every stage of raja yoga makes way for the next higher stage, therefore, all these parts are interdependent. The boundaries cannot be previously known; they can be known through experience. It is one complete path leading the aspirant upwards. The eightfold division is made just to make the aspirant alert. Yama and niyama are universal in nature because they are respected everywhere.

The wisest way for the aspirant would be to practise all these stages as slowly as possible, so that there is no reaction due to suppression. The preliminary part of raja yoga must be practised in the presence of a group with whom the aspirant must live for some time.

Pratyahara (Sadhana Pada, sutra 54)

*Svavishayaasamprayoge chittasyasvaruupaanukaara
ivendiyanaam pratyaaaharah.*

Pratyahara is, as it were, the imitation by the senses of the mind by withdrawing them from their respective objects.

The capacities of smell, taste, sight, touch and hearing are withdrawn from their objects and the senses begin to follow

the mind inward and not outward. This is withdrawal of the mind from the sense activities so that the sense organs also become introverted with the mind; they imitate the mind and follow it inside.

Mastery over the senses (Sadhana Pada, sutra 55)

Tatah paramaa vashyatendiyaanaam.

There is highest mastery over the sense organs (by pratyahara).

It is felt by some scholars that controlling the senses only means suppressing the sense organs. They consider it to be an abnormal condition, but for one who wants to meditate and dive deep into the depths of the mind, it becomes very important to introvert oneself from the world of objects. To penetrate into the depths of the mind, the contact with the object must be cut off. When the mind is in contact with the external world, it is not aware of the deeper facets of consciousness. When one is aware of these deeper facets, one does not know the world of the senses.

OTHER TEXTS

The importance of *Aum* in a sannyasin's life is reiterated in a large number of other scriptures, including the *Mandukya Upanishad*. Other mantras can also be used. In the *Kularnava Tantra*, continuous remembrance and reflection on *So Ham* is recommended. The purpose of the mantra is to make the mind one-pointed. Continuous remembrance brings this about; the whole mind flows in one direction like the river Ganges. Continuous reflection on the meaning of *So Ham* brings about illumination, revelation of its deepest implications.

The process is clearly described in the *Mahanarayana Upanishad* as follows (verse 79:15): "... by dedication (to the practice) comes mental power. From mental power comes sense withdrawal or pratyahara; this makes deep reflec-



tion possible. From reflection comes calmness of mind; this leads to illumination or conclusive experience of truth. This illumination intensifies remembrance of truth. This remembrance produces continuous remembrance. Continuous remembrance leads to unbroken, direct realization of truth. By such realization, a person lives in atman.”

Consciousness, the *atman* or the self, does not actually evolve. There is no evolution of the atman, or soul. By the practice of pratyahara we do not actually evolve; it is a process of involution. It is not true to say that our souls have evolved from the primitive state to our present developed state. The supreme existence, or the soul, is the same as it was thousands of years ago. It does not undergo a change. The only difference is that our lower self or the individualized self becomes aware of that supreme form slowly, step by step.

9

Conclusion



The practice of pratyahara is concerned with checking and curbing the outgoing tendencies of the mind so that awareness can be directed inwards. It is impossible to explore the inner realms of the mind if one is addicted to, disturbed and distracted by external sense experiences. Therefore, the sense experiences, such as sound, smell, sight, touch and taste, are cut.

All meditative techniques such as nada yoga, antar mouna, ajapa japa and trataka are initially concerned with inducing

this stage of pratyahara. These practices have to be continued for a considerable length of time. In yoga there is no fighting with the mental impressions. The incoming impressions have to be dealt with gradually and very systematically. At a particular point in this practice, there comes a state of introversion, where one becomes more aware of the inside and less aware of the outside. Inner experiences occur. These experiences are not an indication of spiritual enlightenment, but they prove that the mind is becoming introverted. They are psychic experiences such as seeing objects, colours, light, feeling something moving in the spinal cord. When these non-empirical experiences start from within, you are ready for the next step in meditation, which is to hold your mind on one object or point.

The stages up to pratyahara gradually remove external distractions and the practices from dharana onwards eradicate disturbing thoughts and psychic manifestations so that the mind ceases to function. *Ida*, the inner world, is balanced with *pingala*, the outer world, so that *sushumna*, the transcendental, begins to function in samadhi. Those who are serious about realization, about attaining the deeper states of consciousness, must earnestly involve themselves in some form of sadhana.

Sadhana removes the blockages within the mind which prevent the unobstructed flow of consciousness. Once the obstruction has been removed, the consciousness flow will do the rest. Whether the sadhana is centred around Hindu or Buddhist concepts or Islamic ideals, it is only a method by which the mind in its wholeness undergoes transformation and realignment of its functional capacities.

The sole purpose of sadhana is to aim the aspirant in the only real direction in which a human being can go – towards expanded awareness. Before an individual consciousness can express itself in states of unhindered perception, distortions and imbalances within the mind have to be removed. One should do everything with complete awareness. We must work at separating from our gross consciousness step by step,

purifying and isolating the unreal self from the true eternal self. We must keep eliminating all our foreign elements and concepts which have, through habit, coloured our pure awareness. We can do this by practising *viveka*, discrimination, yama, niyama, pratyahara, dharana and dhyana.

Asana, pranayama, ajapa japa, nada yoga and the other practices of yoga help to rid the mind of the accumulated samskaras, impressions and unconscious memories. No matter which yoga one practises, the toxic matter of life is going to come out: thousands of patterns of experiences, unworked karmas, suppressed emotions and everything else that is there, desirable and undesirable, necessary and unnecessary, horrible and wonderful.

So long as true knowledge does not come, agitations always exist. There are agitations in the minds of men. They increase if one is made conscious of them. The way to arrive at the final conclusion lies in self-knowledge, and the condition for acquisition of this knowledge is that the mind and the intellect should be merged into the infinite so that awareness of the infinite maybe expressed in life.

Just as darkness is not removed by continuing to light matchsticks, so also complications of life are not solved by suggestions given by the intellect. But just as darkness is dispelled at the rising sun, so also when the knowledge of the self is gained, all the knots are untied. It is said that as the knowledge of the supreme is being realized the knots of the heart are untangled, all doubts are resolved and all actions are ended.

Therefore, a man of understanding should realize the knowledge of the self or remain a seer instead of trying to solve the complication. As long as this jiva covered by ignorance does not merge with the infinite, how can ignorance be removed?

In order to remove all the doubts that exist in this world, first of all worship at the altar of the inner light of the self. The light of the self is acquired by meditation. As the external light begins to fade, the inner light begins to shine.

Go on extinguishing the light of the senses by abstraction or pratyahara. By constant japa weaken the power of the world consciousness, and by faith go on lighting the inner light.

Today, in relation to samadhi, there are many people who are in the same position as the early explorers were when they faced a flat world, a world in which the likelihood of falling off the edge seemed to be an imminent possibility. With the guidance of the guru who has himself made the journey to samadhi, the path is made clear and there is little danger of losing one's way. There have been other travellers, such as Patanjali, who carefully mapped out the journey step by step so that others might follow the same path and realize the goal.

The ultimate aim

Even as a scientist develops energy from within matter, in the same way a yogi is experimenting on this body and considers the body as the base. Within this body the yogi becomes aware of the distance. Within this body he becomes aware of time, space and object. Finally, there is an experience which is known as the Divine experience or Self experience. People have different names for that experience. Devotees call it God experience, raja yogis call it *samadhi*, Buddhists call it *nirvana*. Others call it emancipation, yet others call it salvation. Vedantins call it *atmanubhuti*, Self-experience.

I think the ultimate goal of yoga is to have an Absolute experience, an experience in which you, me, all and everything is seen as one. That is the vision of Reality and that is the purpose for which we are practising, teaching and preaching yoga. I have come to the conclusion that if we want to change ourselves, then we have to start with the mind. If we want to change the world, we will have to tackle the minds and not just the men. Unless the mind becomes quiet and peace is attained, the distractions eliminated, then neither me nor the whole world will become peaceful. Evolution of man can never take place unless the mind is transformed.

Notes

Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



Satyam Speaks Series presents compilations of Sri Swami Satyananda's teachings on yoga. Each book explores a specific topic, concept or practice. The aim is to provide an easy way to understand and incorporate various components of the immense science of yoga vidya into one's daily life. *Satyam Speaks Series* is a tribute to Sri Swami Satyananda, his teaching and to yoga vidya. *Satyam Speaks Series* is an invitation to all sincere seekers to live yoga and thereby make the world a better place to be.

Pratyahara, or withdrawal of senses, is the fifth stage in the system of Sage Patanjali's raja yoga. The practices help to withdraw from the involvement with the senses in the external environment. This volume describes how the mind can be gradually trained to go within.

Note: This series is for knowledge only. The practices must be learnt from an accomplished yoga master.



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