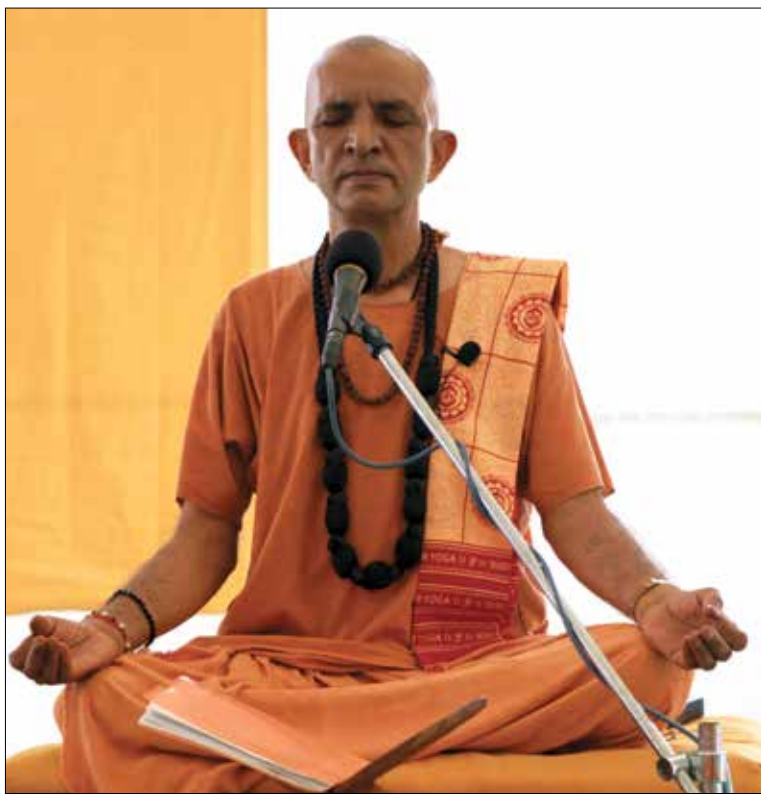


Progression of Pratyahara 1

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Progression of Pratyahara 1

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

Progression of Pratyahara 1

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Discourses given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati
during the Progressive Yoga Vidya Training,
held at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth,
Bihar School of Yoga, Munger,
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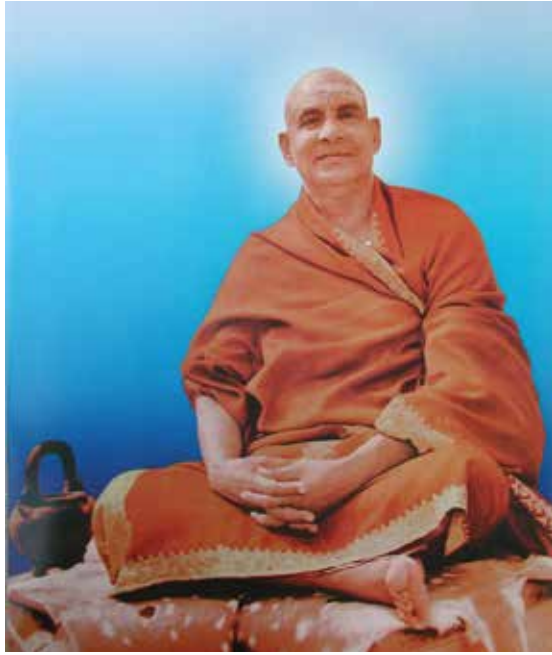
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Dedication

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

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The 2nd Chapter of Yoga

Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati established the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963, in order to fulfil the mandate of his guru, Swami Sivananda Saraswati. The mandate Swami Satyananda received was to propagate the science of yoga and take yoga from “shore to shore and door to door”. In the days of Swami Sivananda, yoga was far from the globally recognized and accepted word it is today. Yoga was considered a spiritual practice reserved for sannyasins and renunciates who had renounced society and were seeking enlightenment. It was not seen as something that could be incorporated into society and practised by the general public.

When the Bihar School of Yoga was established, the philosophy, practices, applications and lifestyle of yoga as practical and scientific systems were unknown, even in Indian society. From the beginning, yoga training and propagation by the Bihar School of Yoga took the form of intensive residential programs, in which yoga was taught as a way to qualitatively enhance physical health, mental peace, emotional harmony. A sequence of progression in yoga was defined fifty years ago by Swami Satyananda, by giving systematic training first in hatha yoga, raja yoga, and kriya yoga, as *bahiranga yoga*, external yoga. Simultaneously, training in *antaranga*, internal, aspect of karma yoga, bhakti and jnana yoga was provided through the lifestyle and inspiration of the ashram environment. A holistic or integral yoga system developed in which the yoga aspirant

could awaken and integrate the faculties of head, heart and hands. The different *angas*, limbs, of yoga become the means of attaining this personal harmony and integrated expression.

In the early 1940s, the subject of yoga was propagated across the world by teachers and masters of different traditions, introducing the idea that through the practice of yoga one could explore the body, mind, emotions, and have a glimpse into one's spiritual nature. The first-generation teachers focused on bringing the knowledge of yoga to human society according to the need of the society at that time. In the 1960s, yoga was seen as a physical culture. In the 1970s, it was seen as a way to overcome stress, anxiety, tension and to improve the physical and mental functions. In the 1980s, research into the various possibilities and potentials of yoga to assist and promote physical and mental health took the forefront. By the 1990s, a rapid increase in the popularity of the practice of asana was evident across the globe. The asana component of yoga had been accepted worldwide and other components of yoga were relegated to the background and largely ignored by the mainstream practitioners and majority of yoga teachers. Today, 28 million people are practising yoga in the United States alone and statistics estimate 300 million practitioners worldwide.

In 2013, the World Yoga Convention was conducted in Munger to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga. Over 50,000 yoga practitioners, teachers, students and aspirants participated in this historic event either in person or through the internet. The Convention was a milestone that marked the completion of fifty years of yoga propagation. The mandate of taking yoga from shore to shore and door to door was fulfilled. Over a fifty-year period, with the help of yoga aspirants and well-wishers all over the world, a yogic renaissance had taken place. The chapter of yoga propagation was complete and when one chapter closed, the next chapter opened.

Thus the World Yoga Convention also heralded the beginning of the second chapter of the Bihar School of Yoga.

The hallmark of this second chapter is a new vision of yoga not as a practice but as a *vidya*, a wisdom to be understood, imbibed and expressed in life. This understanding of the fundamental need for integral development was the vision of Swami Satyananda, which he imparted and taught through the concept of the *yoga chakra*, or the wheel of yoga.

The second chapter of the Bihar School of Yoga and the teachings which are being presented are not concerned with propagation of the practices of yoga. Isolated practices of yoga do not bring about the qualitative change and spiritual evolution intended and envisaged by the seers. The transcendence of the negative and restricting conditions and the real evolution and growth of the personality takes place only when the *vidya* of yoga is comprehended, absorbed and realized.

The profundity of yogic understanding must increase and the depths of yoga must be fathomed, if the *vidya* is to be realized and maintained for future generations. The experience and wisdom of accomplished yogis and spiritual scientists is recorded in the scriptural and classical texts detailing each *anga* of yoga. The second chapter teachings are a progressive effort to discern and elucidate the experiences and realizations of the ancient seers, within the blueprint of the *yoga chakra*.

For individual aspirants, the challenge of the second chapter is to deepen the understanding and experience of yoga. Practice is merely an introduction to yoga, which is limited by personal motivation and constraints. The *yoga vidya* dimension is accessed only when one moves from practice to *sadhana* and makes a sincere effort to experience the aims defined by the different *angas* of yoga. Until that sincerity awakens, the commitment to adhere to the system and the *vidya* of yoga is lacking. With sincerity, seriousness and commitment, each aspirant has to accept responsibility for their own development and betterment in life.

Ultimately, yoga is a lifestyle. It is not a practice. For, once the yogic principles are imbibed and become part of life, the attitudes, perceptions, interactions, the mind, actions and

behaviours will improve. To meet the challenge of the second chapter, the expressive and the behavioural components of yoga, the antaranga and the bahiranga aspects, have to come together. When head, heart and hands unite, an ordinary moment can become divine. An ordinary life can become a divine life.

Progressive Training in Yoga Vidya

1 October 2017

The original Satyananda Yoga

I want to introduce you to the yoga vidya system that Sri Swami Satyananda taught us. What he taught us was different from what is being taught today by the group that calls itself Satyananda Yoga teachers. There is a reason for it. Sri Swamiji taught us according to the instructions given in the scriptures, along with the rules of diet, the number of times of practice, and it was a challenge. Our yoga class was not like your yoga class. Your yoga class is simple, basic and introductory. We learnt the intense, hard and difficult way. He used to push us to test our physical and mental boundaries, he used to push us to concentrate and to visualize.

The people who were present in the early courses in the 1960s will remember that for one month we only had asana classes, from morning until night, eight hours of asana practice every day. We would do the difficult asanas from day one, sustaining and holding each posture. No matter what we were going through in our body, we had to hold it, and we did. Similarly, when we were taught pranayama, it was for eight hours a day, morning, afternoon, evening, with the necessary change in the diet to support the process of pranayama. The same happened with all the other practices as well. This training was meant for those who were interested in learning the yoga vidya.

Our interest was to learn yoga not to teach. The idea of becoming a yoga teacher never even entered our mind. This

was the first group of trainees. When the civilians, the society people came to learn yoga, Sri Swamiji knew that it would not be possible to teach them yoga in the manner he had taught us. It would be too rigorous a discipline. He modified the training, and limited it to the practice of a few series of asanas, such as Pawanmuktasana 1, 2, 3, the standing, the balancing, the twisting: the simple postures. He identified a few pranayamas, such as nadi shodhana, bhramari, ujjayi, sheetali, sheetkari. He spoke on every aspect of asana and pranayama. It was the same with pratyahara and dharana. Although he spoke about and developed the entire subject and theory, he only taught yoga nidra and a few simple techniques of concentration, such as chidakasha dharana, ajapa japa, antar mouna.

What people today call Satyananda Yoga and what the Satyananda Yoga teachers are teaching is only a limited number of asanas, a limited number of pranayamas, one simple technique of pratyahara, and a few concentration techniques which aid in stopping the dissipation of the mind. This package is globally known as the Satyananda Yoga system, and the system continues to be useful for people in society.

Apart from that limited system reaching out to the majority of people, this group of trainees has to understand yoga as a vidya, as a culture, as knowledge, and not just as practice of aerobic-style asanas, breathing techniques, some type of relaxation and some type of meditation. The purpose of the Progressive Yoga Vidya Training is to introduce people to the *vidya* component, the knowledge of yoga, and to experiment with that in our own life.

Relevance of yoga in present times

The physiological and psychological conditions that exist in the decade of 2010 are different from the conditions that existed in the past generations. The technological advancement has been a scientific achievement for humanity, however, it has distanced people from their own bodies

and nature. People are no longer conscious of their own bodies nor are they healthy. A little bit of allergy affects people, a little bit of mental stress and anxiety affects them, a little misunderstanding and disharmony can change the psychological structure and behaviour.

The physical body has become weak, immunity has gone down, stiffness has set in, many movements that we could do in the past today have the risk of breaking bones. At one time, the practice of padmasana was as easy as the practice of pawanmuktasana. Today ninety-five percent of people in the world cannot practise padmasana. Those who make the effort injure their knees and ligaments, and those who make an extra effort snap their knees. Therefore, there are a limited number of asanas that people can now do due to the physical limitations. The same is true of other techniques. Due to the weakened condition of the mind and the senses, people are unable to confront their own dissipations, anxieties and negativities, and these become traumatic when they come to the surface.

The relevance of yoga has decreased due to the physical and the psychological conditions of people today. They cannot practise yoga anymore. People don't have that command, control or strength to do things that our parents and grandparents were able to do. Therefore, for society, a select number of practices of asana, pranayama and concentration are enough, to give them good health and a pleasant mind. This is the social yoga. It is not yoga vidya. Therefore, what you learn in the Progressive Training is for developing your own understanding and experience of what yoga can do and how far it can take you.

The ground covered and the path ahead

In the last two Progressive Trainings we have covered the asanas, which have been limited to the simple and basic ones, such as the pawanmuktasana series, the shakti bandhas, the standing and the balancing. We will move beyond them in Progressive Training 2. In this Progressive Training we

shall carry on with what we have learnt so far, and clear misconceptions about any system or practice of asana and pranayama.

The first year also focused on the practice of yoga nidra: teachers from different parts of the world taught their version of yoga nidra. From their attempt it was visible that some were floundering and had no idea of how to give a yoga nidra, and some were experts. Along with this, we also introduced Tattwa Shuddhi Part 2. In the second year we followed the same process and this time yoga nidra was given by one trained person only.

What came through from all this is that there is a big gap in the understanding, practice and application of yoga nidra. Therefore, in this third year of Progressive Training 1, the subject is understanding the practice and the principles of pratyahara, as yoga nidra is part of that, and understanding raja yoga, as pratyahara is part of that. If you understand raja yoga and pratyahara, then the intent of yoga nidra will become clear.

A new perspective on raja yoga

The most commonly known book on raja yoga is the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. However, raja yoga predates Patanjali. If you study *Yoga Chakra 1*, you will come across the three periods of yoga: early period, middle period and the modern period. In the early period, yoga was taught by Shiva himself. His teaching gave birth to a system of yoga called Pashupata Yoga, which comprised of five different yogas: sparsha yoga, mantra yoga, bhava yoga, abhava yoga and maha yoga. From these yogas emerged mantra yoga, dhyana yoga, bhakti yoga, hatha yoga and raja yoga. These classifications were made in the early middle period, and Patanjali came much later. Therefore, raja yoga existed before Patanjali. The second point is that raja yoga was part of the collection of five yogas, that is, mantra yoga, dhyana yoga, bhakti, hatha yoga and raja yoga.

What was the original intent of mantra yoga? Not to repeat a mantra but to place mantras in different parts of the

body and become aware of the energy and vibrations in those body parts. The system of mantra practice was similar to that of yoga nidra where the awareness is moved from one part of the body to the next. In mantra yoga, one chants a mantra corresponding to each part of the body to awaken that part. This is known as placement of matrikas. The purpose of mantra yoga was not doing japa, it was placing the sound vibrations in different centres of the body to awaken and activate them. This activation of the psychic centres could lead to dhyana yoga, which was given an alternate name: laya yoga. *Laya* means dissolution. If you put salt or sugar in water, it completely dissolves and becomes inseparable from the water, yet it maintains its distinct identity in the form of taste. The dissolution of one into another, merger of one into another, is laya yoga. This is also the purpose of meditation or dhyana yoga.

Hatha yoga is for pranic activation and raja yoga is to experience the higher states of consciousness. The early raja yoga was influenced by the vedic and vedantic thoughts. When Patanjali came into the picture, he diluted the concept of vedantic raja yoga into Samkhya raja yoga. The common book by Patanjali is not the original raja yoga. It is the modified raja yoga from the Samkhya perspective, not the vedantic perspective. There is a reason why that happened, and it will become evident as we go into the study of raja yoga.

There are two systems of raja yoga. One is the vedantic system, which is pre-Patanjali. The other is the Samkhya system, which is post-Patanjali. Patanjali took the Samkhya ideas and incorporated them into raja yoga. Patanjali has written his thesis on raja yoga; he is not the discoverer of raja yoga.

Origins of raja yoga

Who was the founder and propagator of raja yoga? The founder and propagator of raja yoga was a rishi whose name was Shukracharya. He was the guru of the demons. In the

Indian mythology, Brihaspati or Jupiter is the guru of the *devas*, gods, and Shukracharya or Venus is the guru of the *asuras*, the demonical people. The guru of the gods did not teach them any yoga, but the guru of the demons taught them raja yoga.

The demons were tribal people, uncivilized forest-dwellers, with little in their possession. They were not industrialists or business people, nor were they inventors or creators. The *devas* were inventors and creators; they enjoyed life and lived in luxury and comfort. The demons had a totally different lifestyle. They were aggressive, always trying to assert dominance over weaker tribes, looting, raping, killing, acquiring, all to feel a sense of power. Shukracharya said, "I will be their guru. I can make the effort to at least wean them away from the destructive path and orient them to the righteous path. I cannot make saints out of sinners, as their *samskaras* and *vrittis* are too deep, strong and powerful, and supported by the culture they live in. Nevertheless, I can make the attempt to wean them away from the path of destruction and introduce them to the path of construction." With this inspiration, he propagated raja yoga.

Components of pre-Patanjali raja yoga

Pre-Patanjali raja yoga had eight *angas* or stages: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, samadhi. The same eightfold path both pre-Patanjali and post-Patanjali. The difference: Shukracharya taught only one yama and one niyama. The yama was *mitahara*, moderate eating, as demons are known for their excesses: overeating, over-drinking, over-partying. Therefore the yama for them was: balanced eating, to control the tendency of excess. The niyama was *ahimsa*, non-violence, to control the aggressive nature. Later, other exponents of raja yoga added more yamas and niyamas to the body of yama and niyama that Shukracharya had propagated.

The other pre-Patanjali yamas and niyamas number ten each. Patanjali was selective, he used five of each. Patanjali

places ahimsa as a yama, whereas pre-Patanjali, ahimsa has been given as a niyama. Shukracharya was addressing the demonical people, and for them ahimsa has to be an effort, that is why it is a niyama. What they have to keep in mind is to eat moderately, therefore that is the yama. This is the first difference: in yamas and niyamas.

The other difference is that in the early raja yoga, only eight asanas are described, no more. Asanas were not given much prominence in early raja yoga, as it was believed that you have progressed through hatha yoga and don't have to go through the same practices of asana, instead select eight of them which help in the fulfilment of the objectives of raja yoga. Post-Patanjali raja yoga mentions only meditative asanas. Patanjali has defined asanas with just one sutra: *Sthiram sukham asanam*, meaning that any posture in which you are comfortable and steady can be called an asana. Patanjali does not refer to the eight asanas from the existing raja yoga literature, nor any asana from hatha yoga. He says that any posture in which you are comfortable is asana, indicating that asanas are not relevant in raja yoga, you should have practised and perfected them in hatha yoga. In raja yoga you have to follow another path.

With regard to pranayama, pre-Patanjali, three pranayamas are described. Post-Patanjali, three pranayamas continue to be part of raja yoga: inhalation, exhalation and retention. Pranayama practice has not been defined in raja yoga as it has been described in the hatha yogic literatures: how to perform sheetali, sheetkari, bhastrika, bhramari, chandra bheda, surya bheda, and so on. In raja yoga, pranayama is only inhalation, exhalation and retention, and the perfection of pranayama is the ability to retain the breath, *kumbhaka*.

Pre-Patanjali, five systems of pratyahara have been defined. Post-Patanjali, there is only one system: withdraw the mind. Pre-Patanjali, innumerable numbers of dharanas have been described; post-Patanjali, dharana is focusing on only a few items. Three levels of meditation are described pre-

Patanjali; post-Patanjali, only one meditation is described. Pre-Patanjali, one samadhi is described; post-Patanjali, eight samadhis are described. You see the difference? There are certain aspects that Patanjali has highlighted more, due to the influence of the Samkhya tradition.

Another observation is that in the pre-Patanjali raja yoga, there is no *drashta*, the witnessing self. In post-Patanjali raja yoga, everything centres around the drashta. In pre-Patanjali raja yoga, there is no observation, no observer, no seer; everything is just merging, rolling into one another, so there is nothing to observe. A is merging into B, B is merging into C, C is merging into D, D is merging into E, and in this way the merging goes on until only the last consonant remains. In Patanjali, due to the Samkhya influence with its concept of Purusha and Prakriti, there is an observer and there is something to observe. He says, “Observe what happens out here, become the drashta, see your vrittis.” Pre-Patanjali, there is no talk of vrittis, post-Patanjali everything is about vrittis: how you are interacting, how you are perceiving, what is the response, the cognition, the reaction. That kind of observation is all post-Patanjali.

Many people ask: from where do emotions come? In the yogic concept of mind, where mind is seen as comprising of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara, there is no place for emotions. Manas is not emotion, buddhi is not emotion, chitta is not emotion and ahamkara is not emotion. Then what is the role of emotion? A sutra in pre-Patanjali raja yoga defines emotions. It says that emotions are caused due to the interaction of buddhi and ahamkara. When the ego and intellect come together, then they give birth to a *bhava tattwa*, an emotional element.

Table 1. Comparison between Shukracharya and Patanjali Raja Yoga

Pre-Patanjali (Shukracharya) Raja Yoga	Patanjali Raja Yoga
Eight angas	Eight angas
One yama and one niyama. Post-Shukracharya: 10 yamas and 10 niyamas.	5 yamas and 5 niyamas
8 asanas (asanas not given much importance, as you have gone through hatha yoga already)	Only meditative asanas
3 pranayamas	3 pranayamas. Perfection: kumbhaka
5 systems of pratyahara	1 system: withdraw the mind
Innumerable dharanas	A few only
3 dhyanas	1 system of dhyana
1 samadhi	8 samadhis
No drashta	Drashta
No mention of vrittis	Emphasis on vrittis
Basis is vedic monotheism	Basis is Samkhyan dualism

Raja yoga and the seven foundations

From where did the term ‘raja yoga’ come? This term has appeared many times in the ancient literatures and is used to indicate a process of sublimating the human nature and the mind. ‘Raja’ meant ‘the supreme yoga’, not ‘the kingly yoga’ as suggested by the word *raja* or king. Anything that you do, any preparation that you make to connect with the Supreme is part of raja yoga. This perspective gave birth to the seven

foundations, *sapta bhumika*, of raja yoga. The theory of raja yoga revolved around the concept of seven.

1. **Sapta jnana bhumika:** The first is *sapta jnana bhumika*, the seven foundations of knowledge. To attain those seven foundations of knowledge, you have to go through dharana, dhyana and samadhi.

In the area of dharana, two types of dharana are defined that have to be perfected: Prakriti dharana and Brahma dharana. *Prakriti dharana* is dharana in the world, *Brahma dharana* is dharana in the abstract. One is quantified and objectified, the other is transcendental and internal.

The dhyanas to be mastered are virata dhyana, isha dhyana and Brahma dhyana. *Virata dhyana* is meditation on the all-pervasive, like the universal form of Krishna, the *virata rupa*. *Isha dhyana* is meditation on the object of one's desire. *Brahma dhyana* is meditation on the transcendental.

Two types of samadhi are given: *savichara* and *nirvichara*, with cognition and without cognition. These constitute the seven foundations of knowledge in raja yoga.

2. **Sapta darshana:** The next is *sapta darshana*, seven ideas, principles, abstracts or philosophies. These define what has to be the outcome or the vision. The first is to see God as the cause of creation. The second is knowing the right from the wrong. Third, attainment of sanyam. Fourth, realize the harmony in nature. Fifth, realize the importance of karma. Sixth, realize the importance of bhakti, of one-pointed awareness. Finally, realize the importance of knowing 'I am That'. These are the seven idea foundations of raja yoga, which change your thinking pattern from the gross to the transcendental, which change your normal way of thinking.

3. **Sapta karma bhumika:** Then there are seven foundations of karma: shubhechha, vicharana, tanumanasa, sattwapatti, asamsakti, padarthabhavana, turyaga. These are actions that create a state of mind. For example, the first one, *shubhechha*, is to have good thoughts or desires. *Vicharana* is good interaction, good learning and good behaviour. In this way, anything that you do to transform your behaviour,

mind or attitude falls in this category of seven foundations of karma.

4. **Sapta upasana bhumika:** There are seven foundations of upasana: nama para, rupa para, vibhuti para, shakti para, guna para, bhava para, swabhava para. In pre-Patanjali raja yoga, the seven foundations of upasana bring one closer to the realization of the inner nature where you overcome duality and try to perceive and experience the divinity in everything.

Nama para is to experience God in name. For instance, when you say the name Durga you have an image in your mind, when you say the name Christ you have an image in your mind, when you say the name Rama you have an image in your mind. That image is coloured with your own projections. Can those colours be removed and the idea of that divine quality in the name be perceived? It says that through *sanyam*, restraint, you should be able to see that, you should be able to see God in the name. Likewise, through restraint you should be able to see God in the form: *rupa para*. You should be able to see God in His vibhutis, in His glories, in His creation: *vibhuti para*. You should be able to see God in the manifestation of energy: *shakti para*. You should be able to see God in the three gunas: *guna para*. You should be able to see God in the three bhavas: *bhava para*. You should be able to see God as the transcendental self: *swarupa para*. In these seven stages, there is a progression of mind, a gradual change in the way of thinking and perceiving.

5. **Sapta jnana yoga bhumika:** These are seven foundations of jnana yoga: jnanada, sanniyasada, yogada, liloma mukti, satpada, ananda pada, paratpara. *Jnanada* is to know what is to be known. *Sanniyasada* is to renounce that which is to be renounced. *Yogada* is to attain the shakti which is to be attained. *Liloma mukti* is being free from maya, from the involvement with the senses and sense objects. *Satpada* is knowing that the world is Brahman. *Ananda pada* is knowing that Brahman is the world. Finally, *paratpara*: knowing the transcendental self.

These seven foundations are guidelines given in pre-Patanjali raja yoga for rectification of karmas, attitudes and perceptions, and for elevating the mind from its gross nature to the higher nature. This constitutes the philosophy of raja yoga while the ashtanga yoga constitutes the practice of raja yoga.

Table 2. The concept of seven bhumikas in pre-Patanjali Raja Yoga

Pre-Patanjali (Shukracharya) Raja Yoga	Patanjali Raja Yoga
Sapta jnana bhumika (knowledge foundations)	2 dharanas: Prakriti and Brahma 3 dhyanas: Virat, isha, Brahma 2 samadhis: savichara, nirvichara
Sapta darshana bhumika (idea foundations)	See God as cause of creation Know right from wrong Stop the mind Realize harmony in nature Realize importance of karma Realize importance of bhakti Realize importance of knowing 'I am That'
Sapta karma bhumika (action foundations)	Shubhechha Vicharana Tanumanasa Sattwapatti Asamsakti Padarthabhavana Turyaga

Sapta upasana bhumika (foundations for coming closer to divinity)	Nama Para Rupa Para Vibhuti Para Shakti Para Guna Para Bhava Para Swabhava Para
Sapta jnana yoga bhumika (wisdom/ understanding foundations)	Jnanada Sannyasada Yogada Liloma Mukti Satpada Ananda Pada Paratpara

Patanjali and the Samkhya influence

The theoretical aspect of raja yoga as given by the earlier seers has been totally ignored by Patanjali in his work, and he has tried to define the vedantic principles of yoga from the Samkhya perspective.

In the Samkhya perspective, Patanjali's focus is more on the practices of pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi, with passing references to asana and pranayama, and with a slightly greater exposition on yama and niyama. In pre-Patanjali raja yoga, the focus is on pranayama, pratyahara and dharana. The belief is that dhyana and samadhi are not something that you can practise, they happen by themselves. No matter how hard you try to stay awake in yoga nidra, sleep comes. In the same manner, if you have perfected pranayama, pratyahara and dharana, the natural outcome is dhyana, and the natural progression of dhyana is samadhi.

Thus, in pre-Patanjali raja yoga, emphasis is placed on the practices of pranayama, pratyahara and dharana. There is five percent of focus on yama, five percent on niyama, five percent on asana, twenty-five percent on pranayama,

ten percent on pratyahara and the remaining on dharana. Pranayama and dharana are the important pre-Patanjali practices, whereas post-Patanjali, pratyahara, dharana and dhyana become the important practices.

Patanjali's raja yoga became accepted as it was something that people could identify with. It told them about something that happens in their mind which they are able to observe and clear. His system gained in popularity with the civilian population. However, the yogic population favoured the pre-Patanjali raja yoga, as it indicated a process of complete transformation in the nature and personality, by making the effort to create the bhumikas, the foundations, which become the launching pad for self-discovery. Thus in a broad sense, it can also be said that Patanjali's raja yoga is for civilians and Shukracharya's raja yoga is for people who have only one focus. Civilians are people with two focuses: material and spiritual, and Patanjali caters to them. The pre-Patanjali system is more for people who are committed to the vidya and want to experience the ultimate by merging one element into another to arrive at the state of complete laya, the state in which everything has dissolved, you don't remain, the body doesn't remain, the identity doesn't remain, nothing remains.

It is the same with hatha yoga. It is also in two parts: one for civilians and the other for renunciates. Hatha yoga for civilians is described in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* by Yogi Swatmarama, and hatha yoga for renunciates or the dedicated people is described in *Gheranda Samhita* by Sage Gheranda. The practices, the theory and the understanding are different in the two books, as they cater to two different mentalities. The same is true of raja yoga. For people who are committed to spiritual life it is pre-Patanjali raja yoga, and for people committed to civilian life it is Patanjali's raja yoga.

Different paths for different types

Shukracharya and Brihaspati were gurus who catered to two kinds of people. Sri Swamiji said often that there have always been three kinds of people, right from the early beginnings

to the present day. One group is called devata, which means the affluent people. The second group is called danava, the backward people, who don't have resources, facilities or economic support, and are struggling to survive. The third group is that of manava, the middle people, who can go both ways. These three groups indicate the nature, the behaviour pattern and the mindset of the sattwic, the tamasic and the rajasic. Tamasic is the demonical, which is always in conflict. Sattwic is the devata nature, the divine nature. Rajasic is the manava nature. These three groups have always been there, called by different names in different times, cultures and religions. Therefore, do not think of devata and demons as godly beings and demonical beings; you find them everywhere.

In society, home, ashram, anywhere and everywhere, you will find these three groups representing three different natures: the godly nature, the demonical nature and the human nature. Godly nature is always helpful, demonical nature is unhelpful, and human nature can go both ways – it can be either helpful or unhelpful. It is the flexibility that defines the human being, to go to the right or the wrong. This flexibility has been utilized by the yogis to the maximum, to ensure that they are able to connect with the right path and not the wrong. It is also known as *viveka*, the ability to discriminate between the right and the wrong.

People who are negative and pessimistic by nature have the danava tendency in them. For them everything is dark, dull and gloomy. That is the tamasic danava nature. For a happy and content person, everything is bright, shiny and happy; that is the sattwic nature, the devata nature. The human nature can say the glass is half-empty and it can also say the glass is half-full. If you are attracted to the positive side, you say the glass is half-full; if you are inclined to the negative side you say the glass is half-empty. It is the inclination of human beings that determines what they will become. The problem is that human beings are not aware of their inclinations, and are always unsure of themselves.

It is this human nature that has to be channelled in the right direction. Therefore it is said that humans can become devatas. We have the capacity to become devatas, but devatas cannot become danavas. They don't have the capacity to become danavas, and danavas don't have the capacity to become devatas as they are too rigid and fixed. It is the human temperament which is flexible, and viveka is used to direct this flexibility. Viveka means common sense, and as you know, common sense is the least common in people.



Original Raja Yoga and Pratyahara

2 October 2017

Patanjali and Shukracharya systems of raja yoga

Patanjali's system of raja yoga and the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali is based on the Samkhya philosophy, which is dualistic in nature. Therefore in Patanjali's teachings you will find references to you as the observer and what you are witnessing as the object: two things. The world and the self; the manifest Shakti as Prakriti, and the unmanifest Shiva as Purusha. Patanjali's raja yoga consists of eight angas. It has five yamas and five niyamas; no reference to asana except for the condition that one needs to have during the practice: *sthiram* and *sukham*, stability and comfort; three pranayamas with emphasis on *kumbhaka*, retention of breath; one type of pratyahara, which is pure sensory withdrawal; a few practices of dharana, one system of dhyana; he defines eight types of samadhis. The theory that he follows is management of the chitta vrittis, cultivation of the drashta, and restraining the mind and its behaviour. These are the main areas of focus in Patanjali's raja yoga theory.

Shukracharya's raja yoga is based on the vedantic school of thought. He describes eight angas: one yama and one niyama; eight asanas with explanations of the practices and benefits; three pranayamas, also emphasizing on *kumbhaka*; five systems of pratyahara; three types of dhyanas; one type of samadhi. In his theory there is no drashta. The terms vritti or drashta were not used when the raja yoga was originally created. Instead, what is defined is different foundations,

bhumikas, that are necessary to come to the fulfilment of raja yoga, the supreme yoga, to achieve that supreme level of existence and consciousness.

The original texts of hatha yoga speak of *bhumikas*; *bhumika* means foundation or level or stage. In hatha yoga there are seven conditions that you must have in order to perfect it. The first is *sthirata*, stability; two, *shuddhata*, purity, and so on. In this manner, in hatha yoga seven foundations are described: seven steps that you need to climb up. A similar concept has been used in the raja yoga system.

In the vedantic literature, the method for spiritual illumination is merger, *laya*. You go on merging one with another, so there is no observation, there is only a sequence of merging back. The senses merge with prana, prana merges with the mind, the mind merges with the vijñanamaya consciousness, the vijñanamaya consciousness merges with the anandamaya state. This represents the vedantic or the monistic belief system or school of thought.

Patanjali had studied Samkhya, therefore his perspective was more Samkhyan in nature. He was looking at raja yoga from the Samkhyan viewpoint. To him the idea of merger and *laya*, dissolution, did not make much sense. His point was that when one is living in the world, there is an experience of duality which stops one from realizing one's true nature, therefore it is this duality that has to be observed and managed.

Where does one experience duality or singularity? First, it is a cognitive process, then it becomes a mental experience, and that mental experience evokes a mood. This creation of a mood is similar to when you open your eyes from sleep. You are not hundred percent connected with everything at that time, it takes time for you to reconnect. That mood is a *vritti*, a modification.

Patanjali adopted this approach to observe one's relationship with the world and then to separate from the world. That was the Samkhyan idea. It has gained in popularity since we are all followers of Samkhya at some level. We like to know

which dot connects with which dot. We like to know what is the sequence: A–B–C–D–E–F–G–H. That is human nature. Patanjali's system became more popular as it appealed to the human mind. People in society said, yes, this is a good way to see what we are going through and how we are affected; it is a good way to know whether we can eliminate any of the accumulated garbage. If we follow this process of observing the mind, maybe we can come to a point where we can observe our inner self also. This was the thought that motivated Patanjali and it gained in popularity.

The monistic concept of merger was based on the idea of tapas: you make the effort and you achieve. Just keep in sight the next step and keep on working towards it, don't bother about what is happening around you, for this is all transitory. The pain that you are feeling is of this moment, it won't be there one hour later. The happiness that you are feeling is of this moment, it won't be there two hours later. The heat you are feeling is temporary. The cold you are feeling is temporary. All the experiences in the world are temporary and temperamental. If they are temporary, then they don't have any role to play in your life. You just keep on moving, keep on rolling, keep on merging.

The first acharya of raja yoga was Shukracharya and the last was Patanjali whose teachings everybody is following now. In between Shukracharya and Patanjali there is a whole line of yogis who have written their treatises.

After Shukracharya, three individuals have been considered important for raja yoga. First, Dattatreya, a sannyasin who is considered an incarnation of the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. He has given lessons on raja yoga, and the text of *Dattatreya Samhita* is close to the original text of Shukracharya, with a slight difference: there is an increase in the number of yamas and niyamas. Quite likely, he felt that this was the need of the time, that people needed to deal with certain quirks of the mind. Second, Rishi Yajnavalkya, who also wrote a treatise on yoga, *Yoga Yajnavalkya*, defining the process of raja yoga. Third, Sage Vasishtha, whose teachings

are contained in *Yoga Vasishtha*, where he instructs Sri Rama on spiritual life. That is also raja yoga. In addition, there is a samhita called the *Raja Yoga Samhita*. It seems to be an ancient text, as the use of the language and the ideas are totally different from those of Patanjali. Thus, *Yoga Yajnavalkya*, *Dattatreya Samhita*, *Yoga Vasishtha* and *Raja Yoga Samhita* are the known scriptures on raja yoga that predate Patanjali. All these are vedantic in nature, not Samkhyan. They all speak of dissolving one tattwa into another until nothing remains.

The bhumikas

In the yoga that emerged from the vedic literature, you will find the concept of bhumikas. In yoga that comes from the Samkhya and tantric systems, you will find stages, which enable you to observe a particular quality, nature or activity of the self. Ajapa japa, for example, makes you observe the breath; that is the practice. Antar mouna makes you observe the thoughts; that is the practice. Chidakasha dharana makes you look into one specific activity of the mind; that is the practice. In none of these methods are you dissolving an existing state; you are observing it.

1. Foundations of knowledge: Among the bhumikas defined in the Shukracharya tradition, the first is seven foundations of knowledge. This includes dharana on Prakriti and Brahma, knowing what is *Prakriti* and what is *Brahma*, the gross and the transcendental, and to know the difference between the two. There are three types of dhyana: virata, isha and Brahma; *virata* is the cosmic, *isha* is the quality one is attracted to of that cosmic nature, and *Brahma* is the personal realization. You are developing a perspective which is cosmic, which can see the essence of the cosmic, and which is personal. Then two types of samadhi: savichara and nirvichara, with attachments and without attachments. *Savichara* is with attachment, holding on to something, and *nirvichara* is not holding on to anything.

2. Seven ideations: The second bhumika is *sapta darshana*, seven ideations. The first is knowing God as the cause of

creation, which is like a constant Ishwara pranidhana. Second, knowing right from wrong, the continuous application of viveka. Third, attainment of sanyam. Fourth, realizing harmony in nature: accepting the environment and making it conducive to one's growth. Fifth, realizing the importance of karma, the need to be active. Sixth, realizing the importance of bhakti, the need to flow in life. Seventh, realizing the importance of knowing 'I am That I am'. These are the seven ideas that grow as you progress in the bhumikas mentioned earlier.

3. Action foundations: The third is the *sapta karma bhumikas* or the action foundations. We have spoken about these in *Yoga Chakra 3* in the context of jnana yoga. There, all these ideas have been presented as jnana yoga ideas. You have to understand that the term 'karma bhumika' is not reflective of karma yoga or the participation of the senses and the mind. Karma here is the natural behaviour of the self. It is not a performed karma, it is manifest karma, what you are naturally and how you can come to that natural state where you are filled with positivity, optimism, hope and clarity.

The *sapta karma bhumika* are the following. One, *shubhechha*, good thoughts, good desires. Two, *vicharana*, good learning and good behaviour. Three, *tanumanasa*, detachment from objects. Four, *sattwapatti*, detached from the material, connected to the spiritual; detached from the tamasic, connected to the sattwic. Instead of seeing the thorns on the stem, you are looking at the softness of the rose; both coexist, it is your choice where to look and with which to identify. Sattwapatti is looking at the benevolent, the positive, the good, the appropriate, the sattwic. Five, *asamsakti*, the drive to realize the higher self. Just as at the time of examination children spend night and day studying hard without bothering about food or parents, the same intensity has to be there. Ramakrishna Paramahansa used to say that the yearning has to be as intense as a thirsty man in the desert looking for water. He cannot be diverted or distracted by any other pleasures, he only wants water. That

is asamsakti. Six, *padarthabhavana*. Sri Swamiji has called this atmabhava, 'I am That and I am in you, I see myself in you.' Seven, *turyaga*, when the whole brain and mind is covered by one vritti only, the God vritti, the Brahmi vritti.

4. Foundations for coming closer to divinity: Then there are seven upasana bhumikas, foundations for coming closer to divinity or the Supreme Self. Among these, the first is *nama para*, experiencing God in name. That experience can happen. How? Say, in a crowd a mother and child get separated. The mother calls out the child's name, he hears it and focuses on the sound to find the mother. Nama para is a similar condition of mind. When you are chanting the mantra, you have to use the mantra to experience that higher power; not just mechanically repeat it but also try to experience it, feel the presence in the name. This keeps you connected.

The second is *rupa para*, seeing God in all forms. The third is *vibhuti para*, seeing the transcendental self in all aspects of perception: whatever you perceive, you have to feel the presence of That in it. Even if it is a grain of sand, you have to experience infinity in that grain of sand, as William Blake said it. Fourth, *shakti para*, God as manifestation of shakti: the visible, the invisible, the material and the transcendental. Fifth, *guna para*, perceiving the presence of divinity behind the gunas. You should be able to perceive divinity in even a tamoguni person, knowing that this nature is only an outward manifestation.

Sri Swamiji used to say, "I don't look for good people, I look for bad people. They need help. If I find one good quality in a bad person, I will go for that. Among the thousand evils, if I see one good virtue, I will ignore the thousand and help the person bring out that good virtue." This represents guna para. When you look at a person, what do you see? The guna. It is the gunas that give the impression in your mind of that person being good, bad, neutral. From where will the thought come that this person is not nice? What have you identified? You have identified the guna. How do you

get the idea that this person is aggressive and forceful? You have identified the guna. How do you get the idea that this person is calm and peaceful? You have identified the guna. You are always seeing the guna, and your opinions are being created by the gunas. Now, behind the tamoguna, who is the person? The self. You are seeing the tamoguna since that self is living tamoguna, but don't become caught up in that drama. Behind that tamoguni person is a better person, a divine person, a good person. If you can see that in your enemy then you have attained this bhumika.

Next is *bhava para*: to perceive God in all sentiments, all bhavas, physical, psychological and spiritual. You may feel compassion on seeing a person suffering, and you may also feel annoyed if you see too much compassion around and respond with, "Ah, what is all this nonsense? Everybody is too compassionate here, too gooey-eyed!" It is the bhava that makes your mood swing. You have to see the permanency behind that mood-swing. The mood-swing is a reaction but behind that is a better you, a better bhava.

Swarupa para is seeing God as the transcendental self within one's own form, but then again one has to be practical. You have heard the story of the sannyasin and the elephant? This sannyasin was a big fan of meditation and he had this zeal, 'I am a sannyasin. Paramahamsaji says one can be realized, I am going to be realized.' He was a musician so he had good knowledge of swara and everything. He sat down one day and started humming to himself, 'I am Brahman, I am Brahman, I am Brahman', then it changed into Sanskrit, '*Aham Aham, Aham Aham, Brahma Brahma, Asmi Asmi, Aham Asmi, Brahma Asmi.*' He continued that chanting and lost the concept of time. For a few days we did not bother him, but after a few days we knocked on his door. He came out and said, "I am a realized being now." The other sannyasins came and informed me of this realization. I called him and said, "I have a tamera which needs to be restrung. Can you get some strings from the market and restring it?" He said, "Sure I can." He took the gate pass and money, and left. In

the market, he saw people running helter-skelter. Stopping one person, he asked, "Why is everybody running away? Why are the shops closing their shutters?" The person replied, "Swamiji, run run run, mad elephant, mad elephant kill." The sannyasin was in an enlightened state. He said, "I am God, elephant is God, this world is God; if you throw water in water, nothing will happen." Now, the elephant had not done any mantra sadhana, it had not done any singing or chanting, it was just mad. So when it came before the sannyasin, it didn't see the spiritual halo of Brahman around him, it just saw good stamp-able meat. Fortunately, at the last minute the sannyasin had a rush of fear, and he moved out of the way, still the elephant's foot crushed his toes. He returned to the ashram with a huge bandage around his foot and a broken tanpura. I asked him what had happened. He became almost as mad as the elephant, and then told the whole story. After listening to him, I said, "There was one point you missed. You felt the elephant to be God, but you did not see the person who warned you as God. The person who was warning you was the advance party sent by God to tell you to get out of the way, and you did not heed that message." That is swarupa para.

Swarupa para means that you have to get out of the ego structure to experience the divinity within. People are not able to have an experience of divinity as they cannot rise above the ego. They can see lights and the fluttering wings of angels in their meditations, but it is a rare sadhaka who has an actual encounter with God. Even people who go through after-death experiences only describe flashes, lights or luminous bodies – all hazy. Nobody can describe the actual experience, as you are always contained in the ego container.

Swa-rupa means one's own form. Does one's own form mean the body? No. It is that aspect of your life which keeps you separate from knowing your true nature. That aspect, that veil, as it is described in the Bible, has to be removed. The Bible mentions seven veils and yoga speaks of seven chakras. Each chakra is a conditioning, a veil, which has to be

opened up. The final union of Shiva and Shakti takes place only when the last veil, the ahamkara or the container of the ego in which you live is dissolved. Death is not the absence of swarupa; ego is the absence of swarupa. Death is the absence of the physical body, but the physical body is not the swarupa. Swarupa is your astral body: the mind-soul unit. You can drive any car, but the driver is you. You have all come in your cars, but who is the driver? Not the mind. The total antahkarana: manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. When you can go beyond this swarupa and realize your transcendental nature, then you have attained the foundation of swarupa para.

You may be wondering: what is the difference between rupa para and swarupa para. Rupa para is *Siyarama maya sab jag jaani* – I see the divinity in everything, and swarupa para is *Aham Brahmasmi* – I am That.

5. Wisdom foundations: The last bhumika is jnana yoga bhumika. The first foundation here is *jnana*, know all that which is to be known. The second is *sannyasada*, leave behind, renounce, everything which is to be left behind. Third, *yogada*, attain personal power and shakti which can be attained. Fourth, *liloma mukti*, become free of attractions, attachments, infatuations, maya. Fifth, *satpada*, know that the whole world is Brahman, an emanation of that supreme energy. Sixth, *ananda pada*, know Brahman to be the world, that there is no difference between the macro and the micro. Finally, *paratpara*, transcendence.

These are the foundations that one must walk through. As you walk through them, the experiences simply merge. The previous one merges with the next, the next one with the subsequent one, and so on. As you walk, things dissolve behind you, and you keep on walking to new destinations. This is the vedantic raja yoga.

PRATYAHARA

Now pratyahara. First, Patanjali's pratyahara.

Patanjali's concept of pratyahara

In the *Yoga Sutras* (2:54) it is said:

*Svavishayaasamprayoge chittasyasvaroopaanukaaraiv-
endriyaanaam pratyahaarah.*

Pratyahara is the imitation by the senses of the mind by withdrawing them from their respective objects.

Sri Swamiji said, "It should be understood that pratyahara means withdrawing the mind from the objects of sense experience, then the senses function according to the mind, and not vice versa. The capacities of smell, taste, sight, touch and hearing are withdrawn from their objects and the senses then 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."

The next sutra (2:55) states:

Tatah paramaa vashyatendriyaanaam.

There is highest mastery over the sense organs by pratyahara.

These two sutras define the content matter of pratyahara.

The idea of pratyahara, withdrawing the senses, is also mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita*, which has a Samkhyan influence. Sri Krishna's philosophy is based on the Samkhya system. Therefore what Sri Krishna and Patanjali say about pratyahara is practically the same. Sri Krishna describes pratyahara: "Just as a turtle withdraws the limbs into its shell, in the same manner a person must withdraw the senses into the mind." Patanjali also says that you have to withdraw the senses from their attachment to the outside

sense objects and free them, so that they follow the mind inside.

According to the Samkhya school, you remove the awareness of the sense perception from the sense object, free it. You are hearing the sound of the fan, acknowledge that ‘Yes, I can hear the sound of the fan’, and then move the mind away from it. The sound is there, but it is not the highlight of your mind, it is not being projected as the main event of your mental process. The awareness has gone away from the sound. This is what you do in yoga nidra when you move from sound to sound. When you follow the process of observing the sound, first you hear the sounds to which you respond as they are loud and clearly audible. Then, as you go further and deeper, you hear sounds which have been there but you have not heard them, like the chirping of a bird, the walk of a centipede on the ground, or the soft sound of your breath. Usually you focus on the loudest sounds outside, but when you are focusing on the subtle sounds, you forget about the loud ones. You disconnect from those, and the disconnection has to be such that it does not again interfere with your state of mind.

Normally, your attention will go back and forth. As long as your mind is distracted by something else, you will not hear the sound of the fan. If your mind again becomes focused, again the sound awareness will come. In this way, you are shifting between sound and no sound, sound and no sound, but then there has to come a point where this detachment from the external source is complete and it does not reappear in the field of your perception to disturb or dissipate your awareness. That level of pratyahara is not easy. Usually it is a fluctuating pratyahara; only rare people are able to achieve the final pratyahara by cutting the connection.

Pratyahara is to remove you from the experience of duality and Prakriti. What you are experiencing is the duality and that is Prakriti. The solidity of the ground is Prakriti, you withdraw your awareness from it. The vision has a tattwa, you withdraw your awareness from it. The sound has a tattwa,

you withdraw your awareness from it. The withdrawing of awareness from each tattwa, which is material and physical, is called pratyahara, or rather sensory pratyahara, by Patanjali and Sri Krishna.

Pre-Patanjali concept of pratyahara

The pre-Patanjali literatures of raja yoga state that pratyahara has five practices and covers three states of existence: annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha and manomaya kosha. Beyond manomaya there is no pratyahara. In vijñanamaya it is dharana and dhyana, and in anandamaya it is samadhi. Whatever you have to withdraw has to happen at the annamaya, pranamaya and manomaya levels. You cannot withdraw anything from the vijñanamaya or anandamaya levels.

If we look at Sri Krishna and Patanjali's pratyahara in the context of this three-level pratyahara, theirs is only annamaya pratyahara, they don't go beyond. In the pre-Patanjali yoga, techniques are described to withdraw from the annamaya kosha, the pranamaya kosha and the manomaya kosha. They speak of not only withdrawal but also merger. You merge annamaya kosha with pranamaya kosha and pranamaya kosha with manomaya kosha in pratyahara. The moment you achieve that, you move into dharana, which is vijñanamaya kosha, the field of consciousness.

In the vedantic raja yoga, the practices described for withdrawing from the annamaya or the sensory level are based on the experience and feeling of the elements: the body, the influence of the environment on the body, and the response of the self to outer stimuli. This is the annamaya withdrawal. Then comes pranamaya withdrawal. Raja yoga makes another important point here: you can withdraw the awareness from something, but as long as your prana is connected with that object, your association is there and you can return to it. Therefore, it is not only the senses that have to be removed, but also the prana that you infuse in it has to be removed.

I will give you an example. A statue comes here and we place it without the invocation of prana. It remains a dead statue. It may have a nice carving or sculpting, maybe it wears a nice dress, maybe it is attractive, but there is no feeling, no connection, as the prana has not been invoked. The moment you do prana sthapana in that statue, it comes alive. There is a connection now, you feel that it is responding to your sentiments, needs, thoughts, moods, desires. That feeling comes as you are connected, not at the physical level but at the pranic level.

You can see this in practically every situation in life. There is an old pen belonging to your grandfather, it doesn't work anymore, you don't get its nib or ink, it is bent and crooked. Why are you still holding on to it? You may say attachment; you may justify that it belonged to your grandfather. What is it in reality that is connecting you to it? Prana, not the mind. The mind says, "This is old, it doesn't work, it's just kept as a family heirloom, maybe one day it can be sold as an antique for one thousand Euros. Beyond that, it has no other purpose." But the feeling is, "No I can't let it go, I feel sad in my heart if I let it go." That is prana, and prana is closely related to emotion, as it evokes an emotional response.

Withdrawal of prana is the second level of pratyahara. The system used for prana pratyahara is similar to that of yoga nidra. To withdraw prana from the body, yogis use sixteen points of the body, which are the marma points. The prana has to be withdrawn from those sixteen marma points, to neutralize the possibility of re-emergence of sensory involvement.

At the third level, after prana pratyahara, we come to *mana pratyahara*, pratyahara of the mind. In pratyahara of the mind, sages speak of nidra and yoga nidra. Nidra and yoga nidra both are pratyahara, you have to maintain awareness and alertness, you cannot sleep. You have to follow the instructions, and you have to bring out the impressions that hold you down. There is a clear reference to the term and the practice of yoga nidra.

Then there are two more practices which internalize you and take you to a stage where there is total *shoonyata*, disconnection, from everything around, and then dharana sets in. Thus in the original raja yoga, five practices of pratyahara are given to overcome three levels of existence: annamaya, pranamaya and manomaya.

The word pratyahara

Sri Swamiji has given two definitions of the word 'pratyahara'. One definition comes from seeing it as a combination of 'prati' and 'ahara'. *Ahara* means feeding and *prati* is reverse, so pratyahara is to reverse-feed the senses. Right now the senses are feeding the mind, connecting you to everything around you. Now reverse the process. Stop receiving anything from the senses and start feeding the senses through your mind, tell them what they need to do. This concept of prati-ahara, reverse feeding, refers to indriya pratyahara, or annamaya pratyahara.

The other definition is derived from seeing the word as pratyaya + hara. *Pratyaya* means impressions, archetypes; *hara* means to remove, so to remove the impressions or archetypes, to disconnect from them is pratyahara. The first definition belongs to Patanjali's pratyahara, the sensory one, and the second definition belongs to the vedantic pratyahara where you remove the impression, dissolve it, finish it – don't have it, move forward. If you come across these two definitions of pratyahara, know that one is from the Samkhya school of thought: reverse feed, throw back everything, and the other is from the vedantic school of thought, where you simply dissolve one pratyaya, then the next, until you become absolutely clean and pure.

Pratyayas are connected to desires. It is desires that make pratyayas. What you wish is what you do, so it is desires that build your life. If you desire to be here, you are here; if you desire to be there, you are there. If you don't desire this, you don't go for it; if you desire this, you go for it. Everything revolves around desire, and desires have been

identified as threefold: *vitteshana*, desire for wealth, comfort, prosperity, resources, finances; *putreshana*, desire for progeny; *lokeshana*, desire to be popular, recognized, appreciated, thanked, believed in. These three desires guide the actions in life, the karmas. These karmas, fulfilled or unfulfilled, create pratyayas. The pratyayas are impressions that can emerge when the time is ripe: as a nature, a trait, a quality, a behaviour, an attitude, an understanding.

Pratyayas exist in chitta; they don't exist in manas or buddhi. This is one reason why Patanjali has used 'chitta vritti nirodhah' as the main theme. Patanjali speaks of chitta vritti, he does not speak of manas vritti. People translate chitta vritti as mental modifications, and the whole concept of chitta is then distorted by the concept of manas. Patanjali is not referring to the mind when he says chitta.

We can use the analogy of the body to understand this. If you cut the body in four parts, the lower part would be manas, the middle would be buddhi, the thoracic part would be chitta and the head would be ahamkara. Therefore, chitta vritti would relate to the thoracic region. Yet every commentator uses the word 'mind' and your attention always goes to the lower level, as that is what you identify as the mind: manas. Patanjali hasn't used the terms manas vritti, buddhi vritti or ahamkara vritti; he has said chitta vritti, indicating that you have to work at the third level, not at the levels of rationality, intellect or ego.

In chitta, it is the pratyayas that have to be exploded, which can be pramana, viparyaya, vikalpa, nidra or smriti. The vrittis have nothing to do with manas or buddhi. The vrittis that Patanjali speaks of are the mental modifications appearing with the emergence of a particular pratyaya.

Pratyayas are like stamps on your passport. Every country that you visit is stamped on your passport. Every desire that you fulfil or do not fulfil, is marked. Recalling those is a function of memory, smriti, and therefore smriti is also a vritti. It is possible that you meet a person, have a nice interaction with him and then he completely disappears

from your mind. Even when you see him again, you don't recognize him. That is because that pratyaya got removed. Sri Swamiji used to say: "I am clearing my blackboard." Now I can understand what he meant. There were times when he would ask me, "Who is that person, I can't recall that person," not due to loss of memory, but because there was no impression of that person anymore. It is possible to come to that stage of pratyahara where some things may seem like memory lapses since you are not expecting that level of clearing. It is only when smriti, memory, is cleared, which is one of the vrittis, that you move into dharana.

Memories and pratyayas have to be cleared before you enter into dharana. Therefore in the past meditation was practised and studied in isolation. People would go to the mountains and monasteries to learn meditation. The focus of meditation was not what it is today; it was to experience that clean slate, the shoonya state.

It is difficult to let go of memories and for that reason tyaga, renunciation, is a niyama. In the ten niyamas of vedantic raja yoga, tyaga is one niyama. One of the bhumikas is also that: let go of anything that you can let go of. If you hang on to something, it is your own weakness.

The application of vidya

As we move into the practices, all these raja yoga ideas will become clearer. Nevertheless, you have to see them within the context of your capacity to understand and apply. The mind of people has become much weaker and the reactions and responses are more violent today compared to the times when people led a different kind of life.

People are unable to deal with their nervous tensions and anxieties, they suffer from chronic fatigue syndrome and so many other illnesses. The nervous system, the physiological system and the mental system are all debilitated. Therefore the same raja yoga cannot be taught to everyone. You need to understand how to apply this knowledge in today's context.

For example, somebody does a practice of yoga nidra or antar mouna and they come across a trauma, how do you deal with that? A memory is exploded, it disturbs you, how do you deal with that? What makes you happy you can deal with, but that which makes you sad, how will you deal with that? Therefore, there are many concepts and practices which in today's context one cannot practise or teach. Yet the knowledge has to be maintained. The vastness of the yogic principles is mind-boggling, and if somebody has the ability to complete the journey, it will truly be special.



Levels of Pratyahara and Beyond

3 October 2017

The original raja yoga is based on the vedantic system. After a gap of possibly eight or nine centuries, Patanjali came into the limelight and projected raja yoga with a Samkhya tint. Earlier the vedantic raja yoga was meant for the rishi group of people who were committed to spiritual life and had little ties to material life. They could afford to go deep into sadhana and experience the merger of the gross into the subtle, the subtle into the causal, the causal into the transcendental. This process was difficult for the civilian society, as they had limited time. Thus, Patanjali did not elaborate on any of the previous theories of raja yoga as defined in the vedantic system, but brought in concepts of chitta vritti and drashta. The sequence of the practices remained the same and consisted of *ashtanga yoga*, the eight limbs of yoga. However, the theory was changed by Patanjali: from the *sapta bhumikas* to chitta vritti and drashta. Today, the world knows Patanjali, therefore the understanding of raja yoga is based entirely on the behavioural patterns of the mind. The vedantic raja yoga describes a different process.

We also went over the differences between vedantic pratyahara and Samkhya pratyahara. In the Samkhya system, Patanjali describes pratyahara as withdrawal of the senses into the mind. The same concept is defined in the *Bhagavad Gita* by Sri Krishna: withdraw the senses from their connections and associations outside and hold them still in your mind. From the Samkhya perspective, pratyahara is only sensorial.

This seems to be the trend of the Samkhya philosophy, as the same statement is given by both Patanjali and Sri Krishna despite having lived far apart in time.

Vedantic pratyahara

The vedantic raja yoga describes five practices of pratyahara, and the focus of these practices is to move from one kosha to another. For the annamaya kosha, the physical body, the vedantic pratyahara recommends sensory withdrawal, *indriya pratyahara*. However, instead of saying merge the senses with the mind, it says merge the senses with prana, and come to pranamaya kosha. Then the next practice is that of *prana pratyahara*. Now pratyahara has to happen in the second kosha.

The connection of prana can be with anything, and that connection is not logical, it is sentimental. The example of the grandfather's pen. Rationally, manas and buddhi cannot see any utility of the pen. The connection is sentimental. That sentiment towards any object or person represents a pranic connection, and it has to be withdrawn. If the sentiment from the grandfather's pen is withdrawn, then there is no feeling of 'I am attached to this'. Then you can make a conscious decision to keep the pen with dignity in the right place, or chuck it in the rubbish bin. The sentimental value represents a pranic connection.

After the pranas are withdrawn from objects, they are merged with the mind. Now you begin to work with the mind and its dissipations. You do not do this by removing the peels of the onion or the vrittis of pramana, viparyaya, vikalpa, nidra and smriti. Removing them is like peeling an onion. In the state of mental pratyahara, you are not looking at any individual aspect of the mind; you are looking at the total mind. You are not pulling one string as it is done in Samkhya pratyahara; you are pulling the whole rope. The whole mind is engaged, and the external or gross mind dissolves into the subtle mind. That is the end of pratyahara, for there cannot be vijñanamaya pratyahara or anandamaya pratyahara.

Pratyahara can only happen up to the level of the mind, not beyond.

Beyond pratyahara

To go deeper into the conditions of mind that you experience when you perfect pratyahara, two other pratyahara instructions are given. The first is attaining the state of *shoonyata*, nothingness. You have withdrawn everything, yet you are not enlightened, you still have a body and a mind. Therefore, when you withdraw, the physical and the mental feeling is that of void, blankness, shoonyata.

From the yogic perspective, shoonyata is an experience that happens spontaneously and naturally, nevertheless you have to go beyond the state of shoonyata. Buddhism, on the other hand, says that the goal is to go to the void, shoonyata, and when you are able to remain there that is Buddhahood. When you are totally unaffected by everything that is happening, including what is happening in your own body, when you forget the outer objects and also those within yourself, that is shoonyata. According to the yogic tradition, that is a passing experience. When you go on a long journey on a train travelling day and night, you sleep at night – that is shoonyata. You have not reached the destination, you have to get off at your station the next day when you are active and not in the shoonya state. If you continue in the shoonya state, you will miss the station.

Yoga says that beyond shoonyata, there is the experience of the Atman, the Supreme Self, the Cosmic Self. In shoonyata there is no identification either with oneself or the Cosmic Self. It is when you go beyond that void, that nothingness, that you again connect with the universal nature. Shoonyata indicates that you are not connected with the material and you are prepared to connect with the transcendental. The different forms of pratyahara bring you to this level of shoonyata. Then comes the experience of *prakashatva*, luminosity. From this point onwards begins dharana, where the mind is totally focused, one-pointed and absorbed.

How long you spend in the state of shoonya depends on you. Time has no relevance here, it is about how you are able to deal with yourself and come to that experience. Some people may take years and for some people it may happen in a flash. For this reason, these advanced practices of yoga were never taught in public; they were only transmitted orally between master and student.

As long as the student is under the stewardship of the master, the routine, the practice, the timing, everything is regulated. You go back home and you find difficulty in finding even half an hour to practise your asana without distraction and dissipation. How then do you measure time? In an ashram it can take from one to twelve years, in civilian life it can take from one lifetime to twelve lifetimes. The time taken will be longer in civilian life as too many pebbles are being thrown in and you are not able to lead a regulated life. Therefore, time is relative when it comes to spiritual attainments.

Indriya pratyahara

What is the first practice to attain indriya pratyahara? It is known as *kaya sthairyam*, the first level of meditation, the kindergarten level of meditation. *Kaya* means body, *sthairyam* means stability. Generally, people sit down, try to be still, minimize the movements, identify with the feeling of stability and stillness, and after spending ten–fifteen minutes like that, they say, “I have practised *kaya sthairyam*, stillness of the body.” That is not the practice. The practice has to be done progressively. Even in the simple practice of *kaya sthairyam*, there is a progression. There are six progressions of *kaya sthairyam*.

1. **First level of *kaya sthairyam*:** Physical stillness, developing the ability to sit quietly and silently for a period of time without any distraction, dissipation or movement, whether sensorial, muscular or even mental. Trying to be fixed and firm like a statue.

What is the purpose of this stage? The normal tendency of the body is not to be still, but to keep on changing its position, keep on moving. More so nowadays, when everybody is

running from morning until night, both physically and mentally. Once I had to give a lecture during one of my travels. There were about four or five hundred people in the hall, all waiting for the lecture to begin. I walked in, the kirtan stopped, I sat down, half closed my eyes and just remained quiet for five minutes. During those five minutes, I watched the most uncomfortable group of people. They did not know what to do, nothing was happening, no kirtan, I was not speaking, all the organizers were staring at my face: ‘What is happening, when is Swamiji going to speak?’ After a minute, they started fidgeting; the anticipation and the excitement converted to fidgeting, and the fidgeting gradually increased. First it was just moving the head, then moving the arms, then moving the whole body. Finally, I opened my eyes and said, “How did you like the five minutes of still meditation?”

This gives an indication that people are not at peace with themselves and therefore they cannot be quiet, even physically, in moments of peace and quietude. In the age of mobiles and net, sitting quiet and still is becoming challenging. Attaining this is the first level of *kaya sthairyam*. After all, if there is silence in a lecture hall, it is an indication that you should be silent and still. Instead of understanding that, people go into an intellectual analysis: ‘Why is he not speaking? What is he doing? For how long will he not speak?’ and the mind becomes disturbed. *Kaya sthairyam* is holding the senses and the mind together, and not allowing them to go into other routes. Therefore the first level of *kaya sthairyam* is where the physical systems, whether muscular or skeletal, are comfortable.

2. Second level of *kaya sthairyam*: The second level of *kaya sthairyam* is described in the *Gheranda Samhita* (4:3):

*Yatra yatra gataa drishtirmanastatra prayachchati;
Atah pratyahaaredetadaatmanyeva vasham nayet.*

It means that wherever your sight goes, you follow it and then withdraw it. For example, I am looking at nobody in particular right now. If I look at one specific person, I become aware

of that presence. Therefore I withdraw my sight from that visual perception. When my sight withdraws, the cognition also withdraws. He is not a specific person anymore; he is just someone sitting there. Another aspect of this practice: I look at a leaf. Then I withdraw my mind from it and throw the leaf. Now, even when I am not looking at the leaf, I can replicate the image in my mind. My vision is not there, but I have merged that vision with my mind; I am visualizing it internally.

In the second level of *kaya sthairyam*, you see something, then you withdraw your sight from it, close your eyes, merge what you have seen with your mind, visualize it internally, and then let it go. It is possible to perfect this with practice. Whatever you look at is registered in your brain, that photo is already there. In the practice, you close your eyes, bring forth that picture, and see every detail in it. What you have seen outside now becomes a part of your mind, not of your sight.

Sri Swamiji would teach us these practices, by taking us to the garden. We would sit down and he would say, “Open your eyes, look in front of you for a few minutes. Then close the eyes.” After we had closed the eyes, he would say, “Now see the tree that you had seen, which was to your right. See the flower which was to your left. Recreate that image in your mind.” That was the second level of *kaya sthairyam*. Here also we are learning how to withdraw, but we are not withdrawing and going into a blank state, we are converting that into visualization. After visualizing it, you remove it; it’s gone. Then you pick up the second thing.

3. Third level of *kaya sthairyam*: The third level of *kaya sthairyam*:

*Puraskaaram tiraskaaram sushrrvayam vaa bhayaanaam;
Manastamaannityamyaitadaatmanyeva vasham nayet.*

Anything that you hear, pleasant or unpleasant, has to be heard, and then the mind to be withdrawn from that. In the third level of *kaya sthairyam*, the sound awareness becomes the primary focus. However, this is not the same as what you do in yoga nidra. In yoga nidra you move your mind from

sound to sound, here you are not moving your mind from sound to sound; you are listening to one sound, experiencing it, releasing it, then picking up the next one. For example, how many sounds can you hear right now? The loudest is that of the fans, and the softest is that of the chirping of birds. All these sounds have come into your mind, but you have not released them.

With sound also, you observe, say, the fan, the birds, my voice, the dog scratching itself, your heartbeat. You work with these five sounds; you hear them and then you stop hearing them. You observe how that sound is being produced, by whom – say, the bird. The sound that you are hearing is that of chirping, but when you connect that sound to your mind, you see the image of a bird. Your attention has gone from the sound into your mind, and it is your mind which is bringing out the sound and the image. Even if you cannot precisely identify which bird, you can have a general image of a bird in your mind. What is important is the recognition: that you have identified the bird sound, the fan sound, the speech sound, the heartbeat sound. Then you pick up the next lot, and then the next lot.

This has to go on until you come to the state where anything that you hear has no effect on you. Even if somebody calls you a dog, so what? You will not feel it, your ego will not be hurt by it. If somebody calls you God, so what? There is no need to boost the ego when somebody calls you God and there is no need to deflate the ego when somebody calls you a dog. The disconnection takes place from sounds, words, and also the intellect. It is the intellect that is listening and reacting. Therefore the intellect is cut off from the sensory sound experience.

4. Fourth level of kaya sthairyam:

*Sheetam chaapi tathaa choshnam yanmanassamparsharayogatah;
Tasmaatpratyaharedetadaatmanyeva vasham nayet.*

This is with reference to the experiences of heat and cold. If the fans are turned off, you will feel hot. However, in your mind can

you disconnect from the experience of heat? If you can, that will be pratyahara, and it is possible. I have done the panchagni sadhana and I can tell you. Normally, 45 degrees centigrade outdoors is too much for anybody. In the panchagni veda, the temperatures would range from 35–40 degrees centigrade in the coldest months, to 70–80 in the hottest months. Is it humanly or physically possible for anybody to sit through that heat? I did it. Does that make me inhuman or superhuman? No, it is a training. I discovered that the experience of heat is a mental experience. If my attention was drawn into the body, I would move and try to ease the heat. If I remained focused on what I was doing, the mantra or whatever sadhana it might have been, the heat was not experienced. The moment the mind would be diverted, again the heat experience would return. This is pratyahara of the skin and touch sensation.

The touch sensation does not connect you with the intellect. Sound connects you with logic, with the intellect, but vision does not connect you with the intellect, it connects you with chitta. Similarly, skin does not connect you with the intellect, it also connects you with chitta. As long as you are able to hold the non-fluctuating state of chitta, everything is fine. The moment a thought appears and you lose your concentration, the heat or cold is experienced. Therefore, heat and cold have to be dealt with by removing the mind from the experience of the sensation. If the sensation right now is, ‘I am feeling hot’, the awareness has to move away from ‘I am feeling hot.’ It is the same with cold. Of course it is not a state that you can arrive at instantly, it takes time. Nevertheless, it is attainable.

5. **Fifth level of kaya sthairyam** is of the sense of smell, being able to withdraw the awareness from both putrid and pleasant smells:

*Sugandhe vaa’pi durgandhe mano graaneshu jaayate;
Tasmaatpratyaaaharedetadaatmanyeva vasham nayet.*

When a smell comes within the periphery of your perception, the body responds and reacts to it. That response and

reaction should stop. If you smell something putrid, you say, “Yuck!” That reaction should not take place. The bad smell is there, but the physical response and the speech have to be non-reactive; you have to maintain your balanced nature. Instead of holding your nose, trying to run away or spraying perfume, you have to be able to ignore it, and ignore in the truest sense of the word. You have to disconnect your awareness from the sense of smell.

6. Sixth level of kaya sthairyam: The sixth level of indriya pratyahara relates to taste:

*Madhuraamlakatiktlaadirasamn gatam yada manah;
Tasmaatpratyaharedetadaatmanyeva vasham nayet.*

The verse means that if the mind becomes attracted towards tastes which are sweet, alkaline, sour, etc., take it away from these and place it under the control of the mind. You have to do the same with taste as with smell. If the most bitter neem leaves are given to you, you should not be saying “Yuck!” and if the most delicious sweet halwa is given to you, you should not be saying “Wow!” Can you maintain a neutral state of mind irrespective of the taste your tongue experiences? That is the practice.

The indriya pratyahara practices lead you to merging the senses with the mind. You recognize your connection with the world of senses, and then disconnect and withdraw. You watch the leaf, then close the eyes and see the leaf inside. The connection with the world of senses is there, to become aware of that connection and then withdraw. This is the practice of kaya sthairyam: the first practice of pratyahara and the technique used for indriya pratyahara. Sri Swamiji has also spoken of it and taught it as the first practice to be mastered.

Prana pratyahara

The second level of pratyahara is pranic pratyahara. In the vedantic pratyahara system, the practice of pranayama is recommended for pranic pratyahara to be effective. By

gradually working with inhalation, exhalation and retention, pranayama has to be perfected. When you are completely at ease in retention, then the pranas are withdrawn.

Practices such as prana nidra and prana vidya are also part of prana pratyahara. The whole practice of prana vidya is about generation, distribution, withdrawal and storing of prana. What you create you use, withdraw and put it back in storage. In prana nidra too, after you have experienced the pranic body withdraw your awareness from it.

Pranayama is the starting point for prana pratyahara, with the focus on kumbhaka to attain the final state of kevala kumbhaka. Kevala kumbhaka is complete ease in external retention. The scriptures state that when kevala kumbhaka is perfected, the world does not influence the mind in any manner whatsoever. You have stopped everything, nothing is coming in, you have exhaled everything, and you are holding the material outside, inside you are empty. That is kevala kumbhaka.

After kevala kumbhaka, the next step is withdrawing the pranas from the marma points through prana nidra. The vedantic prana pratyahara describes sixteen points as centres of prana, which are the marma sthanas. They are not the chakras, they are the local centres – not the hospitals, but the first-aid centres. Chakras are like hospitals with full facility. Marma points are first-aid centres where you go to receive the emergency treatment and then you are referred to speciality hospitals. There are seven major chakras, a few minor chakras, and sixteen marma points. The majority of marma points are located in the legs, as the marmas govern the *karmendriyas*, the organs of action.

The marma points are the big toes on both feet; ankle; mid-shank; base of the calf muscle; knee; mid-thigh; perineum, root of the anus; the bladder; the centre of the body, below the navel; the navel; the heart; the neck-pit, at the back; root of the tongue, which you turn for khechari mudra; root of the nose; eyes; the middle of eyebrows; forehead; crown of the head.

In the practice of prana pratyahara, you withdraw the prana from these marma points, bring it to ajna chakra, take it to manipura, and push it down to mooladhara.

There is another term for prana pratyahara: *vayu pratyahara*. *Vayu* means the flowing wind. People sometimes think of prana as static: as confined to a mass of prana. By using the term *vayu*, air, the flow, the flare, it is indicated that the mass is there, but the flare takes place. In the practice, it is the flow, the flare, that you have to be aware of and withdraw. You do not empty the marma centre, you do not make it devoid of prana; you remove the flow as it reaches outwards from the centre, you withdraw the flow. This is prana pratyahara or *vayu pratyahara*, and is the second stage of pratyahara.

Manas pratyahara

The third stage of pratyahara is *manas pratyahara*, mental pratyahara. Quite a few techniques for this have been mentioned in the yoga publications. *Antar mouna* is mental pratyahara: you are observing a subtle activity of the mind, the thoughts, stopping them, creating them, removing them, emptying the mind, etc. Sri Swamiji has described seven stages of *antar mouna*, and in each stage you have to go deeper into investigating your own thought patterns and try to reach the source. This is one practice of mental or *manas pratyahara*.

I introduced another practice several years ago to a limited group of students: *antar darshan*, observing the emotions. Just as you observe the thoughts in *antar mouna*, in *antar darshan* you observe the emotions and clear them out.

The third practice is *ajapa japa*, which uses the breath and mantra. The breath is a physical activity, and mantra a mental activity. *Ajapa japa* is a practice that effectively uses a physical awareness to go into a deep meditative state.

Moving into dharana

After the thoughts have been observed; after the logical, analytical process has been observed; after the bhavas, the emotional process has been observed; after the breath and mantra have been used to go beyond the intellect and the emotions into the deeper psyche – pratyahara is complete. From Patanjali's perspective, after attaining sensory pratyahara, the sadhaka moves into dharana, and these dharanas are specific. In the vedantic system, when one arrives at the mental level of pratyahara, there are two more practices to be perfected before one can go to the level of dharana. These are shoonya and prakashatva. They complete the state of pratyahara.

The three dharanas that are taught by Sri Swamiji in the BSY tradition are hridayakasha dharana, chidakasha dharana and daharakasha dharana. They are neither from the Samkhya nor the vedantic system. They are from the tantras. The tantras have defined three specific dharanas: chidakasha for the upper frontal region, hridayakasha for the middle, and daharakasha for the lower. These represent the three *granthis* or locks in the body system. When you are under tension and stress, three areas of the body become naturally tight: the neck, the abdomen and the perineum. This tightening is known as a *granthi* or knot, so the perineal knot is known as Brahma granthi, the abdominal knot is known as Vishnu granthi and the cerebral knot is known as Rudra granthi.

The three dharanas of hridayakasha, chidakasha and daharakasha have been published in the book *Dharana Darshan*. In Patanjali's system, the dharanas are more of chidakasha visualization. In the vedantic dharanas, innumerable techniques have been given, where you identify and merge your mind with the object of your concentration. You can practise dharana on breath, on a sound, on a vision, on an idea. You don't have to practise all of these innumerable dharanas; you have to use what is applicable to your nature and personality.

Different yogas indicate the application of yoga for different personality types. Psychology speaks of four personality types: dynamic, intellectual, emotional and psychic. For the dynamic personality, the yoga most applicable is hatha yoga, for the emotional personality bhakti yoga, for the intellectual nature jnana yoga, for the psychic nature raja yoga. Similarly, from the innumerable practices of dharana, you take what is suitable and appropriate to your nature, and that freedom has been given. Up to pratyahara you were not given the freedom, but in dharana, believing that your mind is under your control and you are aware of your personality and patterns of mind, you select the practice that is appropriate for you to experience the state of dharana. This is the beauty of the system.



Beginning to Practise Pratyahara

6 October 2017

Vedantic raja yoga is an earlier approach and Samkhya raja yoga is a later approach. Vedantic raja yoga has had a series of masters and teachers who developed it, while Samkhya raja yoga is the product of Sage Patanjali.

In both yogas, the eight angas are the same: yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana and samadhi. However, while Patanjali emphasizes cultivation of management of chitta vrittis and the drashta nature, vedantic raja yoga talks of merging one *tattwa*, element, into another until you come to the *param tattwa*, the transcendental tattwa.

Another difference: Patanjali's pratyahara is to withdraw the senses into the mind, to make the senses follow the mind. This is disconnecting or releasing any hold that the senses have over sense objects. In the vedantic pratyahara, after sensory pratyahara there is pranic pratyahara, then mind pratyahara, then shoonya pratyahara, going into nothingness, then prakashatva pratyahara, going into luminosity.

First level of pratyahara

Indriya pratyahara, sensorial pratyahara, is not merely withdrawing the senses into the mind. It begins with a simple practice called kaya sthairyam, which Sri Swami Satyananda taught as the first stage of learning to meditate. *Kaya* means the physical body, the physical form, and *sthairyam* means stillness. The stillness of the physical form has to be acquired before you still the mind. To become still physically, you have

to be in a comfortable state in the body and in the mind. You have to observe the body, the movements of the body, and restrict them. You have to be still, in that stillness there should be no tension or tightness, only stability. In that stability you have to be totally at ease with yourself. The condition that you create in your body will also encourage the mind to become like that: still. That is the first level.

Practising drishti (vision) pratyahara

The second indriya pratyahara comes when the body has become still. Then use your vision. For example, I have a flower before me, I look at it intently for thirty seconds, as if performing trataka, then I close my eyes and recreate, visualize the flower in my chidakash, as I have seen it. If it has five petals, there should be five petals in my vision; if it has a hole in one of the petals, there should be a hole in one of the petals; You have to recreate the same flower inside. The impression that you have taken from outside has to be seen inside. You have clicked the shutter of the camera, now you have to see the photo inside. After seeing the photo, you drop that image, and maintain a blank visual state in which no colours, shadows, shapes or lines appear. If you find that there is a play of light and shadow, dots and sparkles and all that, which tends to happen, then you again open your eyes and focus on another object.

The practice is similar to trataka, the difference being that in trataka you have to use bright objects, or contrasting objects, such as a white sheet of paper with a black dot on it, or a white sheet with a hole in it to look at the moon, or a candle flame. The objects that can be used for trataka have been specified, as the intent is different. Here you work with whatever you see to help focus and concentrate the mind. Each time you open your eyes, you look at a different object, and the focus, awareness and concentration are of a different quality. If you look at a more complex object and try to see the same thing internally, the experience is different from when you try to recreate a simple object.

You may not be able to do the practice in the first attempt, but through sustained effort you will find that there comes a time when you can look at something, acknowledge it, and drop it. Your mind is not attached to that object, person or idea anymore. How you use your drishti, when you withdraw, and when you shut down becomes your choice.

Practising ghrana (smell) pratyahara

The third level of pratyahara is of smell. The peculiar aspect of smell is that your senses tend to get habituated to it. If incense smell is in the room, when you walk in, you can smell it and after some time you don't notice the smell anymore, it doesn't register anymore. If there is another smell, again the mind registers it, and the reaction to smell is based on raga and dwesha. For sight, the reaction is not raga and dwesha, but awareness. With smell, raga and dwesha come alive; In foul smell the nervous system reacts instantly: 'I don't want to smell that', the olfactory nerves tend to shut down and you blow out whatever has gone in. That one foul smell evokes many subtle actions.

You have to identify all those subtle actions and not allow your nervous system to cringe, not allow your nose to shrink, not allow your brain to react with, 'Yuck!' Instead maintain a normal state, saying, 'I acknowledge it as a pleasant or foul smell.' If you can observe all these little components of the smell factor, then you can use this awareness to deal with raga and dwesha when you are faced with the vrittis. Thus the ghrana pratyahara of smell is remaining unaffected and unresponsive to any kind of smell, pleasant or foul.

Practising swad (taste) pratyahara

Next is taste pratyahara. There are five different types of taste. The same principle of smell pratyahara is applied here: taste something, see the reaction, hold the reaction. When you sip Coca-Cola, feel the taste, then neutralize it. Taste of white wine, feel it, neutralize it. Taste of pungent food, spicy food, bland food – feel it, neutralize it. The main

point here is that one should not be affected by craving. That is the purpose of taste pratyahara: the cravings of the senses have to reduce. If you are thirsty, you should not start dreaming of drinking something cool and sweet and pleasant, or desire that. You have to be free from that desire, that craving.

During our sannyasa course in 1970 in Munger, as part of our training, we were given a bucket. There were no thalis, katoris, spoons or forks, and all food used to go into that bucket, like into a begging bowl. Dal or kheer, samosa or rasagulla, everything used to go into the same pot. We used to mix everything and eat. Sri Swamiji used to eat in the same way with all of us. We did it for one month. There are some people like Swami Kaivalyananda, who still eat like that every now and then even today. In swad, taste, pratyahara taste may be enjoyed, but the craving of the taste should not be there.

Practising charma (skin) pratyahara

Skin pratyahara is meditative. During shavasana or yoga nidra you are sometimes told to feel the contact points between the body and the floor. That is one level of knowing the touch sensation. The second: becoming aware of the clothes that you wear around yourself. The third: the texture of objects; some are pleasant to touch, some are hard or rough, some are thin, some are thick, and so on. Each texture, each touch perception evokes a different response. You observe the body and the items by which the body is enveloped, as that is the touch you are experiencing at the moment. You become aware of the touch of clothes and then the outer environment.

The heat and the skin. Feel the heat on the surface of the skin, feel it in the deeper parts of the body, and then find your comfort level. I had to practise this during panchagni. If skin pratyahara had not been there, I would have been conscious of the heat and become uncomfortable. It was due to pratyahara that extreme heat did not disturb the focus,

the concentration and the stability of the mind and the physical body.

Practising sravan (hearing) pratyahara

The fifth is hearing pratyahara. You have experienced this in the practice of yoga nidra: becoming aware of a sound, letting it go, and then moving on to the next sound. Those of you who are able to do this practice properly would have noticed that when you don't do the practice, the sounds disturb you during yoga nidra. If you do it properly, even a loud bang next door is not going to make you jump. You are hearing the noise, you are wondering what it is all about, but the physical and psychological reactions are much reduced.

Merging the conscious with the subconscious

Finally, 'merge the mind into the mind'. What is this? First you have withdrawn the tentacles of the octopus. There are six tentacles: body, vision, sight, taste, touch, hearing. These are withdrawn. Now the mind has to be withdrawn. How do you withdraw the mind into the mind?

If the mind is seen as a triangle with the three levels of conscious, subconscious and unconscious, as long as the conscious is active it will be connected to the senses, as the conscious cognition takes place only due to the senses. Once the cognitions have been withdrawn, the senses have been pacified, their grip on you has been loosened and your association with them has been released, then the consciousness merges into the subconscious. As there is no activity, it becomes quiet. You are not sleeping, only there is no conscious activity and you are in a state of sleepless, wakeful harmony and peace. That is the final level of kaya sthairyam or sensory pratyahara.

Yantra pranayama and kaya sthairyam

There is a technique called yantra pranayama, which is to be practised in kaya sthairyam, as it symbolizes the state of kaya sthairyam. The following drawing will illustrate this:



When you are sitting in the cross-legged posture, the legs make one triangle with the apex at the tail bone while the arms and the head make another triangle. The triangle that you make when you sit is the Shakti triangle. It represents the element earth: the final manifestation, the final creation, matter. When you sit on the floor like that and create the Shakti triangle, you are connected to earth. Why don't yogis meditate on chairs or with their legs hanging down? Why do they sit specifically in a crossed-legged posture? It is because they are creating a yantra.

When you are connected to earth from the base of your spine to your thighs and knees, your body has created a triangle. The tip of the triangle is the tip of your coccyx bone from where the upward ascent takes place. From the prithvi element you move up. In the meditative pose, yogis visualize everything happening up and down the spine: the chakras, the breath, the movement. The spine represents the path of ascent from mooladhara, the prithvi base, to sahasrara, the transcendental. The body, from the prithvi base upwards, takes the shape of Shiva triangles, upward triangles. There is one Shakti triangle at the base and all the rest are Shiva triangles.

If you see from the front, there is a Shiva triangle pointing up. If you see from the side, there is a Shiva triangle again pointing up. If you see from the back, it is a Shiva triangle. The body becomes like a pyramid when you sit in meditation, and just as pyramids attract energies, the body also attracts the higher cosmic energies when you are in the meditative state. Therefore, the posture of meditation in yoga is clearly defined: body upright, hands straight but relaxed, legs crossed and relaxed. You remain in that pyramid while you are doing your sadhana. Starting from the Shakti base, you move along the Shiva element until you come to sahasrara where Shakti joins with Shiva.

The whole process of kaya sthairyam indicates a journey from the gross to the transcendental. It begins with awareness and stillness of the body, then gradually withdrawing the senses one by one, then merging the mind into the mind. The conscious and subconscious aspects of the mind are experienced as one. There is no conscious activity, nor are you asleep. You are awake yet you are in a passive state.

PRACTICE: KAYA STHAIRYAM LEVEL ONE

Preparation: Sit in a comfortable posture. Body upright and straight. You can be in the posture of sukhasana, padmasana, swastikasana, siddhasana/siddha yoni asana; any posture in which you can be comfortable for some time should be adopted. Place the hands on top of the knees in either jnana mudra or chin mudra. Keep the spine upright and straight. Relax your shoulders. Keep the head straight, not tilted or turned. Gently close your eyes.

Body yantra: With eyes closed become aware of the whole body. Observe the whole body mentally. Visualize a triangle drawn on the ground on which you are seated. Visualize the triangle as red in colour and you are seated on top of that triangle, that yantra. The two front corners of the yantra are where the knees are placed. The tip of the yantra is under mooladhara chakra.

Feel the stability of earth, the solidity of earth. Feel the base of the body like the base of a triangle placed flat on the ground. Observe if there is any tilt towards any side. If there is, the balance of pressure and weight will change. Equalize the weight and pressure so you are seated firmly on the triangle.

Imagine that your body is part of the ground. Imagine that your body is immobile, immovable like a pyramid. Be sure that your body is part of the ground and it will not move.

Awareness of sensations: Feel all the sensations of your body, and if possible try to create a mental image of your body in your mind.

If there are any aches and pains, if there is any tension and stiffness, then become aware of them. Do not move, but be aware of the discomfort, be aware of the pain, be aware of the aches, stiffness or tightness. Direct your awareness to the source of this discomfort and try to be aware of nothing else. Let the pain, the stiffness or the tension be the focus of your awareness. It is not difficult.

Remain alert. The body is still. If the mind wanders, bring it back to the awareness of the discomfort in the body.

Awareness of sensations in body parts: Now direct your awareness to your right foot. Be aware of nothing else but the right foot. Create a mental picture of the right foot and feel the sensations connected with it.

Become aware of the left foot. Transfer your awareness to the left foot. Observe and feel the sensations connected with the left foot.

Transfer your awareness to the right leg. Observe the areas of discomfort. Accept that, recognize that. Become aware of all the sensations in the right leg.

Become aware of the left leg, the pressure, the stiffness, the contact, the sensations. And experience the stability of the left leg.

Observe the whole back, all the sensations in your back.

Observe the right arm and the right hand. Go into the experience of all the sensations in the right hand and arm.

Observe the left hand and the left arm. Intensify the awareness as much as possible.

Observe the whole front: the chest, the throat, the abdomen.

Observe the head.

Observe the whole body.

Resolve to remain still: Intensify your awareness as much as possible. Even if your awareness strays to other subjects, maintain the awareness of your body.

Suggest to yourself, 'I will not move my body'; make a resolve that you will be still and that you will not move or shake throughout the practice. Your whole body must be like a statue, motionless.

Even if you have the impulse to move a finger or a toe, to adjust your clothing or to scratch, try to overcome the urge to move. When you feel the need to move, you must say to yourself, 'No, I will not move my body until the end of the practice.'

Once again, go through the whole body, starting with the right foot, the left foot, the right leg, the left leg, the whole back, the right arm, the left arm, the whole front, the whole head, the whole body, the whole body, the whole body.

Experiencing lightness: After some time you will find that your physical body becomes stiff and rigid.

After some time you will find that you become increasingly detached from your body. You will see your body as something separate from yourself.

After some time you will find that your body feels as though it is weightless. You will find that you have less and less need or inclination to move the body.

Just be aware of the stability, the stillness and the silence.

Externalization: Now, stop this practice and externalize the awareness.

Breathe in and breathe out long and deep to reconnect with the movements in the body.

Begin to move the fingers gradually; move the arms, the shoulders, the back, the front. Move the legs a little and shift them.

Slowly bring the hands together, rub the palms and place the warm palms over the closed eyes. Then gently open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

This is the basic practice of kaya sthairyam. As you practise it, initially the body becomes stiff and rigid. That is an indication that things are happening in the right manner. That is physical awareness. When you stop moving, first the awareness moves into the body: 'I am tight, I am stiff, I am rigid.' Then that awareness of the body drops and you move on to other levels of awareness, which was indicated towards the end of the practice, until you come to a point of absolute physical stillness and mental silence.



Delving Deeper

7 October 2017

In the first practice of kaya sthairyam, the physical body is brought to a state where it becomes comfortable and immobile. The main focus is the body itself and all its different parts: awareness of the feet and all sensations therein, awareness of the legs and all sensations therein, and so on. An awareness is contained in the whole body itself. In kaya sthairyam, first there is a general awareness of the body, then awareness of the sensations, and then awareness of firmness or stability.

In the second practice of kaya sthairyam, focus is on each sense organ. The biggest sensory organ in the body is the skin, therefore pratyahara begins with skin and the touch sensation, following from the practice of physical immobility. We will practise both techniques of kaya sthairyam.

KAYA STHAIRYAM STAGE I: BODY STILLNESS

Awareness of Shakti triangle: Become aware of the Shakti triangle that your body is making in the cross-legged posture.

Visualize your knees, the thighs and the coccyx bone making a triangle on the floor. The two knees represent the two points of the triangle and the coccyx is the tip of the triangle. You are sitting on that triangle, and it is the Shakti triangle: you are not facing the apex but the base; it is a downward-pointing triangle.

The Shakti triangle also represents the *prithvi tattwa*, the earth element, the solidity of matter. Earth is the Shakti aspect of Prakriti, symbolized by the red Shakti yantra. The red colour is the Shakti component and the triangle is the elemental component, and you are sitting on top of that in meditation.

(If you do this practice at home, you can even cut a piece of cardboard according to the size of your body, paint it red, and sit on it.)

Body awareness: Sit down comfortably on top of the triangle, legs in a comfortable posture, in sukhasana, siddhasana, swastikasana or padmasana. Place both hands on the knees and hold the fingers in either chin mudra or jnana mudra. Keep the spine upright and straight, but not tight and tense. Keep the head straight, not tilted, bent or twisted. Gently close your eyes and lips. With eyes closed become aware of the whole body and see the whole body mentally. Minimize all physical movements. Say to yourself mentally, 'I am seated in an asana in which I am fixed and comfortable.' There may be a desire to move, to itch, to change the body posture. Remain firm and still, without moving the body no matter what you feel like doing. If any sensations arise, become aware of them, as and when they arise.

Awareness of sensations in body parts: Take your awareness to the right foot. Become aware of the right foot as it is placed right now. Become aware of the sensations that you are experiencing in your right foot: heat, tingling, micro muscular movements; observe all sensations.

Become aware of the left foot and observe all sensations in the left foot. Be firm, do not move.

Become aware of the right leg, observe all sensations in the right leg.

Become aware of the left leg and observe all sensations in the left leg.

Become aware of the buttocks, all sensations in the buttocks.

Become aware of your back, the sensations in your back.
Become aware of the right arm and the right hand and all the sensations.

Awareness of the left arm and the left hand and all the sensations.

Awareness of the head and face and all the sensations.

Body stillness: Experience the stillness and motionlessness of the body, still like a statue.

If you feel any discomfort in the body, then take your mind to that part and experience it, but you cannot move, you cannot alter the posture.

Say, 'I am still like a statue' and experience the state of stillness. Say, 'I am firm like a statue' and experience the firmness, the solidity of your body.

Externalization: Now stop this practice and become aware of the natural breath. Watch the flow of the natural breath.

Externalize the mind. Become aware of the outer environment, the place and the people around you.

Slowly, take a deep breath in and chant the mantra *Om* once. Then slowly begin to move your hands, arms, shoulders, knees, feet, toes, head.

Rub the hands together, place the palms over the eyes, and then slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Discovering micro sensations

This is the short version of what we practised yesterday. In this practice the focus is mainly body awareness, and not a specific part of the body but whole areas, such as the whole foot or the whole leg and all the sensations therein. If your foot is turned, you should know that it is turned; if there is a warm sensation on the soles of the feet, you should know of it; if there is tingling at the ankle region, you should be aware of the tingling; if there is a rush of blood, you should know of it. You have to be witness to all the sensations that you can possibly experience.

Each time you do the practice, you will discover something more. Your mind is not aware enough to notice the gross and the subtle, the major and the minor, the macro and the micro at the first glimpse. As you continue, each practice will take you deeper and deeper into your own perceptions, and you will become aware of them. In kaya sthairyam you are not only becoming aware, but visiting every perception in different sections of the body with your awareness.

From the yogic perspective, you have to become aware before you can detach. Generally, when the word 'detach' is used, people think of letting go. Yoga says that before detachment, there has to be intensification of identification with what you are holding, the good or the bad. It is only when this awareness and identification has taken place that you can find the inner strength and courage to let go of the hold gradually. You are able to see what made it into a desirable or undesirable experience, and with that level of awareness you are able to manage the pull into the tamasic or the sattvic, and keep your balance.

In this practice of kaya sthairyam, while going into a body part, you were not detaching yourself from it. You were not saying, 'Okay, right foot, you can feel whatever you want, I don't care.' No. You were reminding yourself that no matter what happens, you will not move, you will only observe the sensations. You were not separating yourself from the body experience. Even if there was pain in the lower back as you were unable to move, you had to observe it, and then you might have noticed that the pain was not only at one point, rather it stretched across the back, like a spider's web. When such an awareness develops, the releasing begins.

Finally, the whole body is visualized still like a statue, and that prepares the mind and the senses for the practices that follow. It warns them that something is happening and they cannot follow their normal behaviour. The senses are in a state of wait and watch, whereas normally they are always trying to grip at something. When you arrive at this state, then you can go on to the next stage of the practice.

KAYA STHAIRYAM STAGE 2: SKIN PRATYAHARA

Body stillness: Once again, visualize the triangle on the floor, and you seated on top of the triangular seat. Adjust the body posture, as this time you are better prepared to make yourself more comfortable than in the last practice. Once you have adjusted the body posture, become aware of yourself by closing the eyes. For a few minutes, develop the awareness of physical stability. Only when physical firmness and stability has developed shall we move on to the next stage of the practice. Become fixed like a statue. In the following practice the body will not move, only the mind will follow the experience.

Awareness of touch sensation: Become aware of the flow of air of the fan, and all the different parts of the body where you feel the flow. Be aware of where you feel the flow maximum, and also minimum.

Move your mind from top of the head into the mid-face region, into the neck region, into the shoulder region, chest, elbows, hips, hands, knees, feet, and feel all the places where the air is touching your skin. Just the flow of air.

Now become aware of the cloth that you are wearing. Become aware of the movement of the cloth due to the air.

Where do you feel the movement in your cloth? Check the whole body, check all the areas where you can feel the movement of the cloth with the air.

Expand and enlarge your awareness, be firm, do not move. Don't focus on the air now, focus on the movement of the cloth. Experience the sensation that is created with the movement of the cloth in that particular part of the body.

Now take your mind to those areas of the body where the air is not moving the cloth, but where the cloth is gently covering the body. Feel the contact of the cloth with those body parts, only the cloth that is not moving.

Leave the awareness of the moving cloth and the respective body parts, focus on areas where there is no movement of the cloth, and on the sensation of the still cloth covering and touching the skin.

Take your mind to the legs, and become aware of the parts touching each other and the pressures and sensations created due to the touch.

See all the touch sensations in your legs: the toes, the ankles, the feet, the shins, the knees, the thighs, the backs of the thighs, the buttocks. Check each and every centimetre of the leg, from toes upwards to the hips and the waist, and experience the touch sensation everywhere, experience the contact of material with skin, of body with the floor, of skin against skin, the space between the fingers.

Now come up the body and become aware of the contact point between the lips, the sensation of the two lips touching each other. Take your awareness further up into the eyelids, the touch of the eyelids against the eyes.

Disconnecting from sensations: Now disconnect from all that you have experienced. Let the body awareness drop, the touch sensations drop; just become the space inside your body. Let the awareness of the wind, the cloth, the contact, all drop, and just become the inner space, the space that pervades the whole body internally.

Experience stability, experience silence, experience comfort.

Visualize a jyoti at the eyebrow centre and become one with that. Experience the luminosity of the jyoti.

Externalization: Now stop this practice and once again become aware of breath. Observe the movement of the breath in the still body.

Externalize the mind and become aware of the sounds and the environment.

Breathe in deeply and chant the mantra *Om* once.

Slowly begin to move your hands, fingers, arms, head, body, knees.

Rub the palms together, place them over the closed eyes and then slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Long way to go

This practice is only a beginning. It is not the complete practice of pratyahara of *charma*, skin. The full practice takes about forty minutes, as you have to go through each and every body part and sensation. To do that, you have to maintain your awareness and alertness throughout and not nod off midway, as some people tend to do. The tradition says that with a regular practice of three hours daily, it can take about two months to perfect pratyahara. It is not that you pass through one awareness and say, 'I have perfected the practice.' By doing it again and again, you sensitize your awareness to notice the miniscule and micro experiences which the bigger, broader mind misses all the time.

You would have also noticed that as you go into a different stage, the awareness of the previous stage has to drop completely. For example, first you feel the wind and the movement of the cloth, then you focus on areas where there is no movement. One awareness drops and you focus on the second one. Then you move into the next level and this awareness drops. Then you move to another experience, and the previous one drops. As the experiences are left behind, gradually you come to the state of pratyahara.

Another important thing is the sequence. You have to go from the gross to the subtle, from the maximum to the minimum. Skin is the largest sense organ, therefore skin and touch form the second pratyahara. The other sense organs will follow after skin.

Going deeper into pranamaya kosha

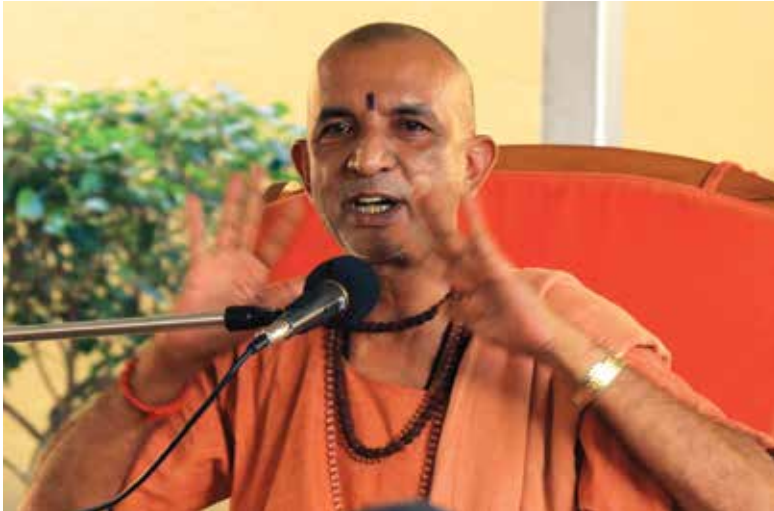
The deeper you go into your own experience, the more you will be able to connect with pranamaya kosha. Beyond the senses lies the experience and the movement of the pranas.

Generally people think of pranas as five major and five minor. The major ones are identified as prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana. Those who are able to memorize well, name the minor ones also: kurma, krikara, devadatta, dhananjaya and naga. However, in the prana pratyahara sequence, we delve into various other pranas that exist, which are beyond the major and the minor pranas.

The physical level of pranas is called sthoola sharira prana, and in this are included the pancha pranas, upa pranas and the marma sthanas. They comprise the pranas of the physical body, of annamaya kosha.

Then there is manas-buddhi prana, the prana in the surface mind that you use for thinking and analysis, and this is the manomaya kosha prana, energizing the manomaya body.

Similarly, there is prana for vijñanamaya kosha and prana for anandamaya kosha. In this way, there are various levels of prana, which are generally not discussed, for knowing about the physical level is good enough. Anything beyond that requires a depth of understanding that most people don't have.



Finding Peace

12 October 2017

In the sequence of indriya pratyahara, the first was for stability of body; and the second was for the touch sensation: vision and hearing.

If you look at the function of the five senses, skin becomes aware of the immediate environment, smell becomes aware of whatever goes in the nostrils and taste recognizes whatever goes in the mouth. These three senses are body-related senses. They make you aware of what the body is experiencing as touch, smell and taste. The other two senses, vision and hearing, can see into the distance and hear into the distance. They connect you with the world outside, both near and distant.

The first practice of vision pratyahara is a simple one, opening and closing the eyes and recreating with eyes closed what was seen with eyes open. The next stage involves the practice of shambhavi mudra.

PRACTICE: DRISHTI – VISION PRATYAHARA

Preparation: Sitting in a comfortable posture, place the hands on top of the knees, in either jnana mudra or chin mudra. Keep the spine straight but not tight, head in a straight line with the body, not tilted or bent to any one side. Gently close your eyes. With eyes closed, first become stable and comfortable. If there is any tension, stress or

tightness in any part of the physical body, then observe it and release it, and become comfortable.

Chidakasha awareness: Once you have become physically comfortable, bring the awareness to chidakasha, and just observe chidakasha.

Chidakasha is the dark space that you see in front of the closed eyes. It is the space of chitta. It is the space where deep-rooted, subconscious experiences and also memories and impressions contained in chitta can manifest.

Just become an observer of chidakasha, and watch the colours, the shapes, the shadows, the streaks of light that move in this inner space. Some big, some small, some colourful, some dull; they naturally come and then dissolve in the black chidakasha.

Be an observer to everything that you can see in chidakasha. If you see a colour, acknowledge it and then move on to the next one. If you see a shape, a figure, a shadow, a streak of lightning, acknowledge it and then move on to the next one. If you see images or pictures, acknowledge each one and move on to the next one.

Be a passive observer of chidakasha. Watch the dark space like a movie screen.

Now try to clear out everything from chidakasha, like you wipe a blackboard of all writings, and keep only an awareness of the dark space. No shadows, no figures, no lights, no streaks, no shapes, no images, nothing. Just blackness, just deep dark space. If anything appears in chidakasha, wipe it clean. Awareness of only the black space.

Now, in the centre of the black space, see a tiny point of bright light. This light is moving towards you. As it comes nearer, you are able to see it in the form of a tiny flame.

Develop the visualization of this flame burning bright in the darkness of chidakasha. Try to develop a clear visualization, a clear image of the flame. If it dissipates, let it dissipate. Again wipe the chidakasha clean, again visualize in the centre a bright dot which is moving towards you and taking the shape of a candle flame.

Now before we move into the next stage of the practice, clear the chidakasha of the image of the flame.

Chidakasha writing: Mentally visualize chidakasha as a blackboard. In your hand is a white-coloured chalk. Use it to write on the board of chidakasha the number 1. Another 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. 1. Stop writing.

In your hand is a yellow chalk. Draw a circle underneath 1. Another small circle, like a golf ball. Another circle with the yellow chalk. Another circle. Another circle. Another circle. Another circle. Another circle. Another circle. Another circle. Another circle. Another circle. Stop drawing the circle on chidakasha's blackboard. In your hand is a red chalk. Draw an inverted triangle underneath the circle. Draw another triangle with the red chalk. Another one. Another one. Another one. Another one. Another one. Another one. Another one. Another one. Another one. Stop drawing the triangle.

Pick up a white chalk in your hand, and write your name under the red triangles. In capital letters. Look at what you have written, and count the number of vertical lines on the letters of your name and also the horizontal lines. Stop this practice and clear the blackboard.

Visual retention: Now listen carefully. You will be asked to open your eyes and when you do that, look straight forward, without focusing on anything. Keep your eyes open for a count of 30 seconds. In those 30 seconds try to capture everything that is in the field of your vision: to the left, right, bottom, top, centre, all sides. Then close the eyes and wait for the next instruction.

Open your eyes, 30 seconds (*count of 1 to 30*), close your eyes, and look at the photograph which you have clicked. Can you look to the right of the photograph and see what you have seen there, what you have recorded? Try to be as accurate as possible, knowing that apart from your sight, your mind has also captured the image.

Look at the photograph from the left side, the bottom, the top, the centre; look at the whole picture.

Clear the blackboard, breathe in and slowly raise the head up and practise shambhavi mudra with eyes open while retaining the breath in for as long as you can comfortably. Then gently close the eyes, breathing out, and bring the head back to the centre. Experience the lightness in your head.

Again open the eyes for 30 seconds (*count of 1 to 30*), close your eyes, and this time try to look at the image in greater detail. Recreate the things you might have missed in the previous visualization.

Again clear the blackboard, inhale, and slowly lift the head up, opening the eyes, and practise shambhavi mudra while retaining the breath in for as long as you can comfortably. Then exhaling, close the eyes and bring the head to the centre.

Again opening the eyes for 30 seconds (*count of 1 to 30*), close the eyes and see the picture again in greater detail. Try to see things that you missed in your previous visualization. Focus and sharpen your mind and awareness more.

Observing chidakasha: Clear the blackboard once again and be an observer of the natural manifestations in chidakasha.

A geometric shape may appear, a streak of light may appear, a shadow may appear, a shape may appear, or nothing may appear. Whatever is happening in chidakasha, observe that.

Externalization: Now stop this practice and externalize the awareness.

Slowly move your fingers, hands, arms, legs, toes, feet, head from side to side.

Bring the hands together, rub the palms and place them over the closed eyes, and slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Seeing with eyes closed

The simplest form of vision pratyahara is trataka, and trataka creates a strong introversion of the mind.

Trataka is done in two forms: one using an external agent and the second using an internal perception. Train your mind with the external practices, the simplest form being trataka on a candle flame or a black dot on a white sheet stuck on a wall. In these forms of trataka, you use a single simple image to focus on the imprint of that image in your mind. You are only focusing. By focusing on one small single image, you are able to still the dissipations of the faculty of vision.

Once the dissipation of vision stops, concentration begins. There are many researches that substantiate the relationship between vision and the state of mind, especially the sleep and dream researches that speak of different movements in the eyes each indicating a different state of the brain, such as REM (rapid eye movement) sleep pattern. Even in sleep the visual cortex is active, only you are not aware of it.

Trataka begins with focusing on one tiny object and maintaining the after-image of that object in your mind for as long as you can without letting it waver; before it dissolves completely into the black nothingness. This is external trataka. The other aspect of trataka is bringing out the internal experience. This can happen only when the external trataka has been perfected. When you are able to visualize the colours of the candle flame and it does not dissolve, when your will directs it to stay or change shape or colour, at that level of competence the other experience of trataka is to be generated.

In drishti pratyahara, you begin with not looking at one point but at many things. With each subsequent practice, as you deepen your awareness, you will become aware of something more, something that you were unable to see before. This practice has to go on for a minimum of 40 minutes, for during that repeated process of opening and closing the eyes, you have to create a receptive condition in

your mind. It is not just 'I look and then I close and try to imagine.' Each time you open and close, you try to look at more and more details.

When you add shambhavi mudra into the practice, it clears the mind of all impressions. After shambhavi, the images don't come into the mind, and when you open and close the eyes again, the awareness is sharper and more precise. Shambhavi acts on the visual experiences, helping to clear the previous ones and enhancing the upcoming ones.

In the next stage of the practice, memories have to be brought up, such as a sunrise you might have seen which created an impact on you, a beautiful Mona Lisa you might have seen in a restaurant and which created an impression on you. Those visual impressions have to be brought up and cleared.

If you do the practice regularly and sincerely, there will come a time when the ability to see with eyes closed will be exactly the same as with eyes open. This is vision pratyahara.

Hearing with ears plugged

The next sense to be withdrawn is the auditory. The auditory withdrawal follows the principles and theory of nada yoga. You sit in the nada anusandhana pose, place the elbows on the knees, and plug the ears. For the first few minutes you listen to the sounds that you can hear inside. You may begin with listening to the rush of blood and then hear other sounds, such as that of birds chirping, bells ringing, an imp playing a guitar in your head or throwing stones that clash off the rocks, the sound of a flute, thunder – any sound that comes in your auditory awareness has to be recognized. Then, remaining in the same pose, you practise bhramari pranayama five times. Stop and again listen more acutely, with greater sharpness and focus, and try to hear other sounds. Do this for a few minutes, then again bhramari five times and then going a third step deeper. You move from big sounds to intermediate sounds to smaller sounds.

PRACTICE: AUDITORY PRATYAHARA

Preparation: Place your legs in front with knees bent, elbows on the knees. Adjust your body so you can sit in this posture comfortably for at least fifteen minutes. Close your eyes and with eyes closed, first of all observe the whole body and the body posture. Don't plug your ears yet.

Listening to external sounds: Listen to all the sounds that you can hear externally: the sound of the fan, the sound of birds. Any sound that you can hear, become aware of it – only the external sounds.

Listening to internal sounds: Now you will plug your ears with your thumbs and listen to all the sounds that you can hear inside and continue doing this until I say *Om*. When you hear *Om*, practise bhramari pranayama five times. Again continue to observe the sounds that manifest inside. Again I will say *Om*, and again you will do bhramari pranayama five times and listen to deeper and subtler sounds. So plug your ears and listen to the sounds internally.

Om (practice of bhramari followed by listening to internal sounds).

Om (practice of bhramari followed by listening to internal sounds).

Om (practice of bhramari followed by listening to internal sounds).

Externalization: Hari Om Tat Sat. Stop the practice, bring the hands down, and release the posture. Then slowly open your eyes.

Music in my head

I have had an experience with this auditory practice. In the eighties when I was in the US, between Christmas and New Year I used to go away to a national park, rent a trailer or take my tent in the KOA Campgrounds of America, stay in isolation and do advanced sadhanas, as that was the only free time I would have during the year.

Once, before practising kriya yoga, I did this practice. Then I did the kriyas and went to sleep. After a few hours, I was woken up by very loud music. I thought that some other camper had come to the spot beside mine and was playing the radio or watching television. The music was classical western. I tried sleeping, but no luck. So I decided to go to the neighbour and say, "Can you lower the volume a bit?" When I came out of the tent and looked around, I found there was nobody, yet the music was in the air. I got into the car and drove around the area to see if there were people. Nothing. I was perplexed. Then I thought, 'Could it be my own head?' And then, 'If so, can I reduce the volume?' When this thought came, that's exactly what happened. The volume of the music came down.

It was a revelation of what is possible with the practice of nada anusandhana. For about two to three months after that, I used to continuously hear the music. It was delightful, as I could increase and decrease the volume. It was not annoying, as some people might think: 'Oh, I can't get rid of the music. It is there twenty-four hours. I can't sleep. I can't think.' No, nothing. No problem at all, for I was in control of the music. I was the sound man.

This is an indication that when you go deep, all the audio impressions, the pratyayas that are there, will come out to the surface. Many people hear the buzzing sound. They think it is tinnitus and try to avoid the sound. They should simply try to lower the sound or the pitch. Those who are able to do this will find that their 'tinnitus' clears in fifteen days.

The trick in this practice does not lie in listening to the sounds but in developing the ability to control the volume. In the next stages of the practice, you listen to a distant sound which is soft and micro, and then consciously try to increase its volume by highlighting only that sound. Similarly, you reduce the volume of the loudest and closest sound. This is the sadhana of hearing pratyahara, not listening to sounds.

Listening to sounds is part of nada anusandhana and other practices. Here we are talking of pratyahara. In order to induce pratyahara, you have to create a sound and listen to it. Then you have to lower the volume. You are not negating the sound, you are only lowering the volume. You are allowing the sounds to exist, but now they are not distracting you or dissipating your awareness.

The pratyahara principle

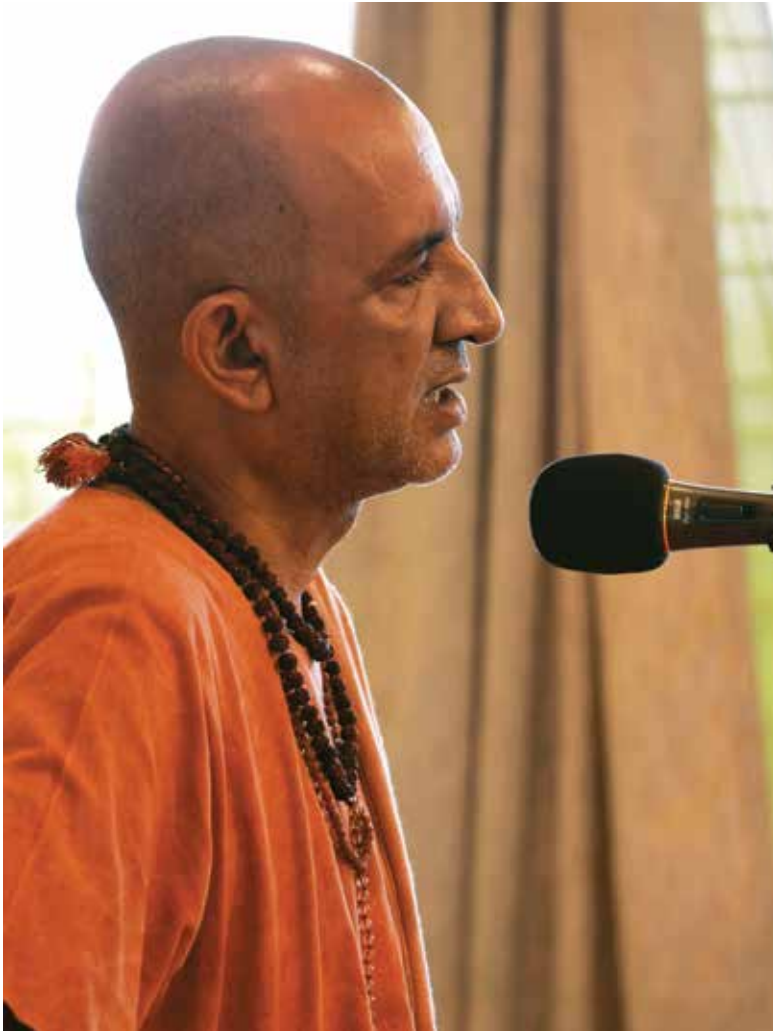
There are two definitions of pratyahara. *Prati-ahara*, reverse feeding, and *pratyaya-hara*, elimination of impressions. Both approaches are being used in the pratyahara techniques. First, you identify, acknowledge and know what the sense experience is. Only when one hundred percent identification has taken place, you are able to gradually release and come out of that state. You are not eliminating whatever was the experience; you are withdrawing yourself from experiencing that experience. You are distancing yourself. The better is your ability to distance yourself, the more stable is your pratyahara.

The visual and auditory practices are related to bringing forth pratyayas. First you see or hear outside, then the actual pratyaya has to come up from inside. Seeing and hearing outside and then disconnecting from those perceptions is the mental training you go through to deal with the pratyayas that come up in deeper meditations. When the visual pratyayas come up, then visual pratyahara needs to be practised to overcome them. When auditory pratyayas come up, audio pratyahara has to be done to overcome them.

At that time, there should be enough discrimination to not like or dislike whatever you are experiencing. Sometimes your natural inclination will be to like the sound or music you hear. The moment the thought comes, 'I like that sound', music, vision, or experience, you have missed pratyahara. You have identified with the experience, and you go back to zero. You are not a hero. Therefore, the moment you think, 'I like' or 'I dislike', disconnect from that

identification. Let the rasping sound be there and let the musical note be there. Don't listen to either. That isolation is pratyahara.

You cannot destroy the world in order to find your peace. You have to change your associations to find your peace. That is pratyahara.



Into the Next Level

13 October 2017

PRACTICE: VISION PRATYAHARA

Preparation: Sit in a comfortable posture, legs crossed, hands on the knees in either jnana mudra or chin mudra. Spine upright and straight but not tight. Head upright, not bent or tilted to any side. Gently close your eyes and lips.

With eyes closed, become aware of the whole body, see the whole body mentally. See the whole body from top of the head right down to the toes. If there is any tension, stress or tightness in any part of the physical body, then watch it, observe it, release it and become comfortable.

Do a final check on your posture, check each and every part of the body, and ensure that you are in a comfortable pose, in a firm and steady pose.

Chidakasha awareness: Once you have become physically comfortable, bring the awareness to chidakasha and observe chidakasha.

Chidakasha is the dark space that you see in front of the closed eyes. It is the space of chitta, a space where deep-rooted subconscious experiences and memories, the impressions contained in chitta, can manifest.

Become an observer of chidakasha. Watch the colours, the shapes, the shadows, the streaks of light, the figures that form, move and change in this inner space. They appear without your effort and then they dissolve in the dark chidakasha.

Be an observer of everything that you can see in chidakasha. If you see colours, acknowledge them; if you see polka dots, acknowledge them; if you see streaks of light, acknowledge them; if you see a shadow, a figure or a shape, acknowledge it and move on to the next one.

Be a passive observer of chidakasha. Watch the dark screen like a movie screen. Whatever you see, acknowledge, and then look beyond.

Now clear everything from chidakasha, like wiping clean a blackboard. Be aware of only the dark space. No shadows, no figures, no lights, no streaks, no shapes, no images, nothing. Just blackness, just a deep and dark space. If anything appears in chidakasha, wipe it clean. Maintain awareness of the dark space.

Now, in the centre of the dark space, see a tiny point of light. In the distance, a tiny point of light. This point of light is moving towards you. As it comes nearer, you are able to see it in the form of a tiny candle flame.

Develop the visualization of the flame burning bright in the dark space of chidakasha. Develop a clear visualization, a clear image of the flame. If it dissolves, if the image dissipates, let it dissipate.

Again wipe the chidakasha clean. Again visualize in the centre of chidakasha a bright dot, which moves towards you and takes the shape of a candle flame.

Now wipe out everything from chidakasha. Clear the chidakasha with the image of the flame and visualize it as a blackboard.

Chidakasha writing: In your hand, you find a white-coloured chalk and with that chalk, draw a small circle on the blackboard of chidakasha. Another circle. Another circle. Another circle. Another circle. Another circle. Another circle. Now stop drawing the circle.

In your hand is a silver chalk. Under the circle, draw a crescent moon. Another crescent moon. Another crescent moon. Crescent moon. Crescent moon. Crescent moon. Crescent moon. Crescent moon. Now stop drawing.

In your hand is a red chalk. With the red chalk, draw a triangle pointing up under the crescent moon. Another triangle. Another triangle. Another triangle. Another triangle. Another triangle. Another triangle. Another triangle. Now stop.

In your hand is a yellow chalk. Underneath the triangle, draw a smiley face. Another smiley. Another smiley. Another smiley. Now clear the blackboard. Clear the blackboard completely.

In your hand is a red chalk. With the red chalk, draw a three-inch wide inverted triangle. Above that triangle, another triangle, bigger than the previous one, a six-inch wide triangle. Above that, another triangle, nine-inch wide.

Then in your hand is a white chalk, draw a circle around the outermost triangle and put a dot in the centre of the innermost triangle.

The three triangles surrounded by a circle and a dot in the centre is the Kali yantra. See the three red triangles, the three red lines of the triangles of the Kali yantra, the white luminous circle on the outside, and a white dot in the inner triangle.

Now stop this practice and wipe the blackboard clean. Again become aware of the dark chidakasha.

Visual retention: Now listen carefully. I will ask you to open your eyes for 30 seconds. At that time, straightaway open your eyes and with a fixed gaze look ahead. After a gap of 30 seconds, when I say *Om*, close the eyes and wait for the next instruction.

Open the eyes and look. (*Pause for 30 seconds*) *Om*.

Close the eyes. Now try to see the image, the photograph that your eyes have captured in your chidakasha. Deepen your awareness, focus your attention. Look at the broad images, the big images, focus on them. See the colour, the sharpness, the whole image.

In your awareness you have captured everything. The eyes have only been the windows to look into the world; it is

awareness that has seen from behind the windows of the eyes. The windows are shut, now awareness has to recreate what it has seen through the eyes.

In the canvas of chidakasha, see the images that appear like on a Polaroid film. Where you are unclear or hazy, focus on that. Try to be clear. Just as in a photograph, you are able to look at the details, in the same manner in your mind, with your awareness, you should be able to look at the details of the image that you are seeing in chidakasha. In the mental picture, look at the right side, and see if what you have created corresponds with what you know to be correct. Look to the left side. Try to see if it is accurate. See the bottom of the photograph, the top of the photograph, the full photograph. Have you missed anything?

Clear the blackboard. This time, when you open the eyes for 30 seconds, look around without turning the head and sharpen the awareness of the areas where you were fuzzy before. *(Pause for 30 seconds) Om.*

With eyes closed, recreate the image in your mind. You are the artist; you are seeing the picture emerge in the dark of chidakasha. It is the same picture that you have seen through the windows of the eyes. Try to recreate it.

Again clean the blackboard completely. Now we shall practise shambhavi mudra. Inhale and gently raise the head 45 degrees and look at the eyebrow centre with both eyes, holding the breath in for as long as you can comfortably. When the breath retention cannot be maintained, gradually exhale, close your eyes and bring the head forward.

Once again, open the eyes for 30 seconds. *(Pause for 30 seconds) Om.*

See the image inside. Sharpen and focus your awareness, try to see things that you did not notice before.

Clear the blackboard again of everything. Once more inhale, raise the head 45 degrees into shambhavi mudra, focus the eyes at the eyebrow centre, retain the breath

while practising shambhavi mudra, hold the breath for as long as possible comfortably, and when you can't hold the breath any longer, exhale, close the eyes and bring the head to the centre.

Once again open the eyes for 30 seconds, and this is the final round. (*Pause for 30 seconds*) Om.

Close the eyes and once again look at the picture, see the scene that the awareness has seen from behind the windows of the eyes. Focus and intensify the awareness.

Clear the blackboard, wipe everything clean.

Clearing pratyayas: Now you have to search the photographs in your memory to look at the best image that you have ever seen. It can be anything: mountain, river, lake, jungle, sunrise, sunset, moon, Mars, Jupiter, anything. What is the best thing that you have ever seen in your life – see that in your chidakasha now. Bring it out from your memory. Recall, look at the picture. It can be anything in creation, abstract or concrete, just look at it. Look at that special memory, that special image, the picture that is there. Bring it out and look at it in technicolour.

Clear the blackboard of this memory. Acknowledge it, you have seen it, now clear it. Search for another memory of something pleasant or beautiful that you might have seen in the course of your life and which has created an impact in your mind. Recall that, see that.

Clear it, wipe the blackboard clean.

Observing chidakasha and externalization: Just be an observer of the natural manifestations in chidakasha. You are not trying to see anything now.

Observe the natural chidakasha, and while observing the natural chidakasha become aware of the outer environment. Gradually extend your senses outside, drop chidakasha awareness, and connect with the world around you.

Slowly move your fingers, hands, arms, toes, feet and legs, shoulders and head.

Bring the hands together and rub the palms, place them over the closed eyes and then slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

The second component of Drishti pratyahara

This is the second component: bringing forth a memory, bringing forth what is already there in your mind. You brought it up, acknowledged it and then cleared it. Then you brought up another memory. As you go deeper into the practice over a period of time, you will find that remote memories come to the surface. Sri Swamiji says that in this practice, sometimes you can even see events of past lives. The important point is, when you begin to see remote memories, whether of this life or a past one, you should stop the practice, otherwise it can become a traumatic experience.

You have to understand that people are not geared to deal with their mind any more. They identify more with the traumas and weaknesses of the mind rather than with the strengths and positive qualities of the mind.

PRACTICE: AUDITORY PRATYAHARA

Now *sravans*, the auditory pratyahara. You will do four rounds of the practice with bhramari pranayama: two times listening to sounds and controlling the volume and two times creating sounds from memory.

Listening to sounds: After assuming the posture of nada anusandhana, at first listen to the normal sounds that you can hear without the practice of bhramari.

Controlling the sounds: After identifying the different sounds, practise five rounds of bhramari.

Now identify the same sounds that you were hearing before but with a difference: control the volume. Begin with one sound, increase its volume, decrease its volume, shut down the volume, and then move to another sound behind that sound, a subtler sound. Again increase the

volume, decrease the volume, shut down the volume, and move to a third sound. You may only be able to hear two sounds, not a third one, it does not matter.

After three attempts, again five rounds of bhrumari followed by three attempts to hear sounds and to alter their volume.

You have done two rounds of the practice. Again practise bhrumari.

Clearing pratyayas: Now, instead of listening to a sound, create one by searching in your memory. What is the best piece of sound you have ever heard in your life? Recreate that. Then clear it out.

Repeat the sequence: five rounds of bhrumari, creating another sound from memory, clearing it out.

Externalization: When you finish, bring the hands down, and reconnect with the outer world. Reconnect with the auditory sense by listening to the sounds in the environment. Then practise palming and open the eyes.

The perils of modern life

It is recommended that you maintain a notebook to write down the sounds and visions that you bring forth from your memory. That will become like a map of your journey: what you have heard, what you have seen, what you have brought forth from your memory, consciously, and what has come naturally, unconsciously. You have to understand one point clearly. Modern life has gifted two major weaknesses: one is mental and the other is nervous. Both the mind and the nerves are used to comfortable living and anything that changes or challenges their comfort level is seen as a threat. The nerves will react to a change, whether positive or negative.

Yoga recommends the practice of pranayama to calm the agitated nerves, especially for those who are going through a nervous breakdown. The respiration has a strong effect on the nervous system. Advanced yogis don't focus much on asana, but on the practice of pranayama, as the nerves, the

nadis which are the carriers of prana shakti at pranamaya kosha, have to be strong. Their flow has to be absolutely clear. If there is a block, then whatever you are attempting to do at a deeper level, will not happen. Therefore pranayama techniques are used frequently in the higher yogas for the purpose of strengthening the nervous system and maintaining its balance.

The mind, the second weak factor, has a peculiar tendency. When it becomes conditioned to a situation, it rejects all previous conditions. There is always a search for mental comfort. You seek contentment, but only at a sensorial and mental level. Therefore, the mind tends to unconsciously put aside many things from your conscious perception. However, every impression is stored. Even when you look at something, you see much more than what your mind brings into the field of your awareness. What is happening to all the things that you have seen but are not in the field of your awareness? They are retained by the mind as impressions, *pratyayas*.

The mind has a limited awareness. It is like a torchlight. When you turn on a torchlight in a big dark field, it will illuminate only a little piece of the land. That is awareness, and it is what makes you function in relation to the senses, sense objects and the world. However, the other unconscious impressions that go into the mind are registered and become *pratyayas*.

If you have never sat under air-conditioning and one day you do sit in an air-conditioned room, from that moment onwards the mind will crave air-conditioning. It will not think, 'Okay, that was a one-time experience.' It will always think, 'I wish I could have it. Then I would sleep comfortably. Then I won't have to suffer the heat.' In that manner, whatever new experience you have, you relate it to the enhancement of your comfort and wellbeing. In that process, anything inconvenient is pushed into the background, including the training to survive in extreme conditions.

Fifty years ago, there were no geysers in India and everyone managed with cold baths in the winter when the

temperature were low. Today people are conditioned to using hot water in winter and if it is not available, there is irritation and a feeling of discomfort. Even in summer people bathe in hot water. The body and mind have become used to an easier way of life and run away from hardships. This happens at every level.

Be willing to change

People want rights but nobody wants any responsibility. Human rights are seen as universal but human responsibilities are seen as individualistic. That is the cockeyed mind, which is always looking for satisfaction of its own needs and not reaching out to help others.

Can such people clear the mind and become spiritual? If they try to meditate, they will face more mental traumas and agonies in their meditation than in their normal life. They are not geared for these practices. They are not prepared psychologically to bring about a change in their life or pattern of thinking, attitude, behaviour and lifestyle.

With mental change comes a change in your lifestyle. People resist these external and internal changes. The intention has to be proper. These practices are to enhance and deepen your own experience before you even think of teaching them to somebody else. You are dealing with the human personality and human psychology in the practice of yoga. You have to deal with each individual according to their personality, conditioning, mentality and understanding. Everybody has a different level of understanding and imbibing capacity. Even in the primary class, thirty students will have thirty different ways of learning. The teacher cannot be with each of the thirty; the teacher has to teach what is appropriate and all students have to pick up whatever they can according to their abilities. Some will fail, some will pass. Therefore, be humble, honour and respect the teachings, and be proper and correct with the practice. Then yoga will take you to another level.

Prana Pratyahara

16 October 2017

After indriya pratyahara comes: prana pratyahara. It is the second stage of pratyahara in the vedantic raja yoga. Indriya pratyahara is based on the practice of kaya sthairyam, sitting in a stable pose, then becoming aware of the touch, then becoming aware of the visions, then becoming aware of the sounds, then becoming aware of the tastes, then becoming aware of the smells. We have gone through the senses of touch, vision and sounds and we will not deal with taste and smell for the time being, but move on to prana pratyahara.

The vedantic raja yoga scriptures have maintained that prana is the shakti of the universe. They say that any motion that takes place in any form, macroscopic or microscopic, subtle or gross, is due to prana motivating the movement. The movement of a finger is due to prana and the movement of the galaxies is also due to prana. Prana is the substratum of everything in creation. It is the basis for the elements of earth, water, fire, air, and it exists in ether too. *Yadidam kim cha jagatsarvam prana ejati nihsritam* – “This whole world, whatever there is, vibrates having originated from prana.”

The concept of prana was overtaken by the concept of the gross mind among the followers of Samkhya. Sage Patanjali, being a Samkhyan, does not speak of prana, but of the mind. The pre-Patanjali exponents of raja yoga do not speak of the mind, but of prana.

Prana: the connecting factor

From the vedantic perspective, that which connects us with anything in life is prana shakti, and it is that prana which has to be withdrawn. If I look at a notebook, then my eyes are looking, the vision is active; however, the power that allows me to perceive it is prana shakti. If prana shakti were absent from the eyes, there would be no vision. Similarly, if there is no strength in the hands, you cannot even lift a blade of grass, let alone a 80 kg dumb-bell. Any perception of strength is identified as prana. Prana is what energizes and brings to life the dormant senses and faculties.

In 1981, I had visited a medical college in the US. In the laboratory was a line-up of dead bodies on the table. They were perfect bodies, yet they were dead. Looking at them, the question that came to my mind was: everything that is required to make a human body is here, what can we do to inject life in it? The answer was: prana.

To understand how prana works, think of the gears in a car. There are four gears and the reverse gear, and you shift from the first to the fourth to move forward. However, before you shift a gear, you have to come into neutral. The neutral gear is the pathway through which you can go to any gear, whether first, second, third, fourth or reverse. When you are in neutral, you are free to move around, but when you are in a particular gear, you are fixed. Although the five koshas are defined as annamaya, pranamaya, manomaya, vijnanamaya, anandamaya, yet prana is not a separate kosha, rather it is the neutral gear that connects the annamaya kosha, the first gear, with manomaya kosha, the second gear, with vijnanamaya kosha, the third, with anandamaya kosha, the fourth. The pathway is pranic. Once you come out of the neutral gear into a fixed gear, one or two or three or four, then you begin to experience that level. Then again you go back into the pranamaya to go to another level.

You should also know that there are different intensities of prana. Generally, people only know of the five major and five minor pranas that are in the body and are responsible

for the body functions. In the vedantic terminology, these are physical pranas, but then there are mental pranas, psychic pranas, causal pranas, and they all vibrate and function at different frequencies to give rise to different experiences. Therefore the knowledge of prana is of prime importance in vedantic raja yoga.

Prana-based practices

There are four practices in relation to prana in yoga: prana-yama, prana nidra, prana vidya, and prana pratyahara.

The engagement with prana begins with pranayama. There are two different meanings of the word pranayama. The first is: prana + yama, restraint or control over prana. The second is: prana + ayama, increasing the dimension of prana. Both together constitute pranayama, though they indicate two different processes.

Prana-yama is control of breath. How you breathe in, for how long you breathe in, what count you breathe to, how long you hold the breath in, how long you hold the breath out – any exercise that you do with your breath and lungs is called prana-yama.

When your physical capacities have increased to the extent that you can guide and control your inhalation, exhalation and retention, then the process of expanding the dimension of prana begins, which is the second stage, prana-ayama.

After control of prana and expansion of the dimension of prana comes the next stage: relaxing and withdrawing the pranas or prana nidra.

In the third stage, you direct the pranas, which is prana vidya.

The fourth stage is prana pratyahara, withdrawing the pranas, focusing them into one point, and getting ready for dharana.

1. **Prana-yama:** To work with prana, first of all one should learn how to regulate the breath. Breathing has a substantial impact on the mind and body. Long, deep slow breaths are indicative of introversion or mental relaxation, and short

gasps or upper thoracic breathing is indicative of a disturbed mind and body.

You do all the respiration gymnastics to control the breath: breathing in through one nostril, out through the other, increasing the ratios gradually, integrating kumbhaka when you are comfortable with an equal length of inhalation and exhalation, gradually building up the kumbhaka, adding external kumbhaka and building it up.

It is in the state of kumbhaka that you experience your pranas. When you are breathing in and out, you are observing the breath. It is when you hold the breath that you experience prana shakti, and the perfection of the practices is seen in kevala kumbhaka. In fact, the purpose of prana-yama practices is to lead you to kevala kumbhaka.

Kevala kumbhaka is the state where the breath spontaneously drops, there is neither inhalation nor exhalation. It is the kind of breath retention which is not dependent on inhalation or exhalation. In fact, this state can take place not only by practising pranayama but during any yogic practice where the pranic dimension has been accessed. At that time, the breath just stops and you are in the dimension of prana spontaneously. Many of you might have experienced that sometimes during kirtan, japa, a practice of meditation, even asana, suddenly the breath stops on its own. You are not trying for the breath to stop, you are not inhaling and holding or exhaling and holding; the practice has taken you to a level where the breath simply drops. That is the experience of kevala kumbhaka.

Kevala means only or complete and *kumbhaka* means retention. When complete breath retention takes place, that is kevala kumbhaka. The advanced yogis could remain in the state of kevala kumbhaka for long periods of time, indicating their mastery over prana. Thus, one of the aspirations of yogic practices is to develop the state of kevala kumbhaka, to be able to access the dimension where, without the effort of inhalation or exhalation, the complete suspension takes place, and there is only an experience of prana. It is a state

where there is suspension of mind and body; you remain only in the experience of prana.

Kevala kumbhaka will not happen if you hold your breath in, it is something that happens spontaneously and naturally. Nevertheless, kevala kumbhaka is more likely to happen if you develop and perfect external retention as a practice. The better capacity you develop to retain the breath outside, the easier it becomes to remain in the state of kevala kumbhaka. Once kevala kumbhaka has been perfected, it indicates control over the breathing process.

2. **Prana-ayama:** The second dimension of prana practices is prana-ayama. Here you merge the pranas. You become aware of the pranas and then merge them: apana and prana become one. The two opposite flows are reversed and become one shakti, and all the other pranas merge back into the main pranic dimension. Right now you have five main pranas functioning in the body: prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana. When the merger takes place, then only one prana is active in the body of the sadhaka. That one prana manages the whole show, whether it is digestion, expulsion, or respiration. The distinction of the pranas dissolve and only one prana becomes active, which is the main prana. That is the state of prana-ayama.

3. **Prana nidra:** When only one prana is active, comes the third stage of prana nidra. Now you have to withdraw the intensity of that pranic shakti from all parts of the body, from all the marma points, and focus it in chakras. This is prana nidra.

4. **Prana vidya:** The fourth aspect is prana vidya, the ability to use the pranic energy consciously for a specific purpose: healing, creating a good environment, and so on. You can now use the prana shakti for whatever you want to use it for, including awakening of chakras and the ascent of kundalini.

This is the progression of vedantic raja yoga.

PRACTICE: PRANA PRATYAHARA

Preparation: Lie down comfortably in the position of shavasana. Adjust your body posture, release all tensions, stiffness and tightness from the body. Become calm, composed and relaxed.

Gently close your eyes and mentally observe the posture of shavasana. See yourself lying on the floor with feet apart, arms beside the body with palms open, head straight, and eyes closed. See the body lying on the ground, comfortable, relaxed.

Mentally check yourself. Is anything tight? Is any part in tension? Relax the whole body.

Breath awareness from toes to perineum: Once the body is relaxed, bring your awareness to the right leg, and see the incoming breath enter through the right toes, come up to the perineum and then exit through the left leg and out through the left toes. Again inhaling through the left toes, see the breath come up to the perineum, and at the time of exhaling, see the breath go out through the right toes. Repeat this process. See the movement of breath.

Breath awareness from toes to eyebrow centre: Now see the breath flow up to the eyebrow centre: from the left toes to the eyebrow centre, and from the eyebrow centre down to the right toes. Then again up from the right toes to the eyebrow centre and down from the eyebrow centre to the left toes. See this movement of breath.

Awareness of ida and pingala flows: Now, when you inhale from the left side and exhale through the left side, visualize the left breath as blue. When you inhale from the right side and exhale down the right side, see the right breath as red. When you are inhaling through the left, you are inhaling blue breath, blue air, blue light; when you are exhaling through the right, you are exhaling red colour, red light. When you are inhaling through the right, you are inhaling red colour, red light. When you are exhaling through the left, you are exhaling blue colour, blue light.

Inhaling blue, exhaling red, inhaling red, exhaling blue. In this manner, watch your breath move from the left toes to the eyebrow centre, and from the eyebrow centre to the right toes, from the right toes to the eyebrow centre and from the eyebrow centre to the left toes. See the movement of the blue breath, the blue light, and the red breath, the red light.

Now, develop the sensation of coldness on the left side of the body and develop the feeling of heat on the right side of the body.

When you are breathing in through ida, the blue breath gives a cool sensation to the body. When you are breathing through pingala, the red breath gives a warm sensation to the body.

Experience the cool sensation in the left side of the body as you inhale, experience the warm sensation on the right side of the body as you exhale. Experience the warm sensation as you inhale through the right side, experience the cool sensation as you exhale from the left side.

Convergence of prana: Now bring your awareness to the eyebrow centre. Hold the awareness in the eyebrow centre and visualize that your pranas are being withdrawn from the feet up to the crown of the head. When you breathe in, visualize the blue and red breaths come up and go to sahasrara. Your awareness is in sahasrara, and you are seeing the colours in sahasrara.

Moving prana through marma sthanas: Now draw the awareness and the pranas from sahasrara, from the crown of the head, and focus it in the forehead – the full length and width of the forehead. Draw the prana from the forehead and focus it between the eyebrows, in bhrumadhya.

Draw the prana from the centre of the eyebrows and focus it in the root of the nose.

Bring the prana to the root of the tongue, the point from where you do khechari mudra, the part of the tongue that is under pressure at that time.

Draw the prana from the root of the tongue and focus it in the base of the throat.

Draw the prana from base of the throat and focus it in the centre of the hridaya, the heart.

Withdraw the prana from the heart and focus it in the centre of the navel.

Withdraw the prana from centre of the navel and focus it in the bladder.

Withdraw the prana from the bladder and focus it in *dehamadhya*, the middle of the body.

Withdraw the prana from the middle of the body and focus it in the root of the anus.

Withdraw the prana from the root of the anus and focus it in both the knees.

Withdraw the prana from the knees and focus it in the ankles.

Withdraw the prana from the ankles and focus it in the big toes of the feet.

Breath awareness: Now stop this practice, and once again become aware of the breath.

Observe the breath in the abdominal region. See the movement of the navel with every incoming and outgoing natural breath.

See the expansion of the body at the time of inhalation and the contraction and relaxation of the body at the time of exhalation. Expansion of the body with every incoming breath, relaxation of the body with every outgoing breath.

Externalization: Stop this practice and just observe the condition of your body, the relaxed, peaceful nature of your body.

Become aware of the external environment.

Slowly move your toes, feet, legs, fingers, hands, arms, the head from side to side.

Take a deep breath in, stretch the whole body, and then gently sit up facing this side, keeping the eyes closed.

When you are fully seated and connected with your body and the environment, rub the hands together, place the palms over the closed eyes, and slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Points to note

This was a simple practice of prana pratyahara. The body parts that were named represent the marma points. From each marma point the prana has to be withdrawn and then focused on the next marma point. In this practice, it is important to know the exact location of each marma point and develop the ability to withdraw the prana from each point and taking it in the next one.

The whole body is taken into consideration in the practice, yet the start is important. You have to bring the prana from the toes: the ida and pingala both have to come up from the toes into sahasrara. Then, as you go down, you go all the way to the toes.

When you bring the pranas up from the toes, you are bringing two shafts of light to sahasrara chakra. At sahasrara, you see them as half-half: a half-blue and half-red circle. As you move down, you see that blue-red ball of light move down – it becomes a small ball if it is in a small space, a big ball if it is in a big space. When you reach the root of the anus and then start moving into the legs, again you have to separate them as two circles, each one half-blue half red.

You have to repeat the whole process several times, then you actually experience prana pratyahara. In the practice above, it has been done only once, to give an indication of the process.

Withdrawing to a Point

17 October 2017

There are stages of development of the pranic awareness. Prana-yama, regulation of breath; prana-ayama, merger and expansion of pranas into one another; prana nidra, harmonizing the activities of prana; prana vidya, mastery of prana; and prana pratyahara, the final absorption of prana into the mind.

We have practised a simple technique of prana pratyahara, in which different processes were experienced: 1. Feeling the flow of air from the toes to the perineum, and from the perineum to the toes. 2. Feeling the flow from the toes to the eyebrow centre and down. 3. Visualizing the ida and pingala breath, the blue and red light. 4. Awareness of the blue and red breaths converging at the crown of the head, as a half-blue half-red ball. 5. The movement through the marma sthanas.

Now, at each marma sthana, rather than visualizing the whole area, you have to bring the awareness to one point. For example, when I say 'crown of the head', then instead of visualizing the whole crown, focus the awareness at the top. When I say 'forehead', focus at the eyebrow centre. Therefore, each time you are taking the prana and focusing it, taking the awareness and focusing it. In this there is no experience of either heat or cold, only the movement. Hot and cold experiences are invoked when you are visualizing the ida and pingala flows. Here the heat and cold and the colours converge into one half-red half-blue ball, tika type. The focus

of your attention should be on the movement of this ball. Remember that it separates into two balls, each one blue-red, when you go down the legs, as you are not separating ida and pingala at this stage; it is the same prana which you are carrying down.

PRACTICE: PRANA PRATYAHARA

Preparation: Lie down comfortably in the pose of shavasana.

Feet apart, arms beside the body with palms open, head in a straight line to the body. Gently close your eyes and lips. Adjust your body posture and become comfortable. Release all tensions and stiffness, release all tightness from the body. Become calm, composed and relaxed.

Observe the pose of shavasana in your mind. Observe the posture in which you are at present lying down. Check each and every part of the body from top to bottom, and make sure that you are in a state of complete physical relaxation. Relax the whole body.

Breath awareness from toes to perineum: Once the body is relaxed, bring your awareness to the right leg, and see the incoming breath enter through the right toes and come up to the perineum and then exit through the left leg and out through the left toes. Again inhaling through the left toes, see the breath come up to the perineum, and at the time of exhaling the breath goes out through the right toes.

Continue with this type of psychic breathing, visualizing the flow of breath ascending from the left toes to the perineum, descending from the perineum to the right toes, again ascending from the right toes to the perineum, then descending from the perineum to the left toes.

Continue with this practice for some time.

Feel the flow of breath in your legs as you breathe in and as you breathe out. Feel the movement of awareness as you breathe in and breathe out. Breath and awareness move together as one.

At the time of inhalation, breath and awareness come up from the toes to the perineum; at the time of exhalation the breath and awareness move down from the perineum to the toes. Develop a precise experience: the vision of breath and awareness moving together from the tip of the toes to the perineum and then down to the toes again.

Breath awareness from toes to eyebrow centre: Now we move to stage two. Inhaling, feel the breath come up from the left side right up to the eyebrow centre. Exhaling, feel the breath go down from the eyebrow centre to the right toes. Inhaling, the breath comes up from the right toes to the eyebrow centre; exhaling, the breath goes down from the eyebrow centre to the left toes.

Observe the movement of breath and awareness. Develop the awareness, develop observation, develop the experience.

Awareness of ida and pingala flows: Now when you inhale from the left side up to the eyebrow centre, visualize the breath as blue. When you exhale from the eyebrow centre into the right leg, visualize the breath as red. Again when you inhale from the right toes to the eyebrow centre, visualize the breath as red, and when you exhale from the eyebrow centre down to the left toes, see the breath as blue.

All inhalation and exhalation through the left side is to be visualized as a blue ray of light. All inhalation and exhalation on the right side is to be visualized as a movement of red light. Develop colour awareness with every inhalation and every exhalation.

Feel one half of the body becoming blue when you breathe in through the left side and the other half of the body turning red as you breathe out from the right side.

Continue for some time in this way with total awareness. If you find the awareness dissipating, then bring it back to the instructions and continue. Do not allow yourself to be distracted. Maintain constant awareness of the blue breath and the red breath.

Now, as you breathe in through the left side as the blue light comes up, develop the sensation of coldness on the left side of the body, and as you exhale through the right side, develop the feeling of heat on the right side of the body. Again, as you inhale through the right side, experience the warm sensation, and as you exhale from the left side, experience the cool sensation.

When you are breathing through *ida*, the blue light gives a cool sensation to the body. When you are breathing through *pingala*, the red light gives a warm sensation to the body. Continue with this practice for some time. Apart from watching the flow of blue and red breath, also be attentive to the sensation of heat and cold in the body.

Now stop the breath awareness.

Convergence of prana: Focus your attention at the eyebrow centre. Visualize a tiny ball of red and blue here.

Hold the awareness at the eyebrow centre and visualize that your *pranas* are being withdrawn from the toes and coming up to the crown of the head, to *sahasrara*.

Gradually withdraw all sensations including the heat and cold to the crown of the head.

Now, from the region of the crown of the head, focus all the *prana* to a point, as if all *pranas* have been concentrated and focused at one single point in the top centre of the head. See the red and blue ball at this point, while breathing normally.

Moving prana through marma sthanas: Now draw the awareness and the *prana* from *sahasrara* and focus them in the forehead: the full length and width of the forehead. See the play of blue and red in the forehead. Again draw the *prana* from the forehead and focus it between the eyebrows, at mid-eyebrow. See the play of blue and red in *bhruvadhya*, the eyebrow centre.

Draw the *prana* from the centre of the eyebrows and focus it at the root of the nose. Visualize the base of the nose and experience the *prana* here.

Take the prana to the base of the tongue, inside the mouth. See the swirling red and blue light here.

Focus the prana in the throat region. Draw the prana from the root of the tongue and focus it at the base of the throat. See the play of blue and red in the throat region. Draw the prana from the base of the throat and focus it in the centre of the *hridaya*, the heart.

Withdraw the prana from the heart and focus it in the navel.

Withdraw the prana from the navel and focus it in *mutra kosh*a, the bladder.

Withdraw the prana from the bladder and bring it to *dehamadhya*, middle of the body, below manipura and above swadhisthana, a point between manipura and swadhisthana.

Withdraw the prana from the middle of the body and focus it at the root of the anus, in the rectum region.

Withdraw the prana from the rectum and take it into both legs to the middle of the thighs.

Withdraw the prana from the middle of the thighs and focus it in the middle of both knees.

Withdraw the prana from the middle of the knees and focus it in the middle of the lower legs, at the end of the calf muscles.

Withdraw the prana from the middle of the lower legs and focus it in the ankles.

Withdraw the prana from the ankles and focus it in the big toes of the feet.

This is one round. We will practise another round.

Second round: Again see the pranas move up the legs and through the body and come to the crown of the head. Once again, see the withdrawal of all sensations, the heat, the cold, the tingling, and coming to sahasrara. Focus the pranas to a single point in the top centre of the head.

Withdraw the prana from the top of the head and come to the forehead.

Withdraw the prana from the forehead and come to the eyebrow centre.

Withdraw the prana from the eyebrow centre and come to the base of the nose.

Withdraw the prana from base of the nose and go to the base of the tongue.

Withdraw the prana from the base of the tongue and focus it in the throat region.

Withdraw the prana from the throat and focus it in the heart region.

Withdraw the prana from the heart and focus it in the navel.

Withdraw the prana from the navel and focus it in mutra kosha, the bladder.

Withdraw the prana from the bladder and focus it in the region between manipura and swadhisthana, dehamadhya.

Withdraw the prana from dehamadhya and focus it in the rectum.

Withdraw the prana from the rectum and distribute it to both legs and focus it in the centre of the thighs.

Withdraw the prana from the middle of the thighs and focus it in the knees.

Withdraw the prana from the knees and focus it in the middle of both lower legs at the point where the calf muscle ends.

Withdraw the prana from the middle of the lower legs and focus it in the ankles.

Withdraw the prana from the ankles and focus it in the big toes of both feet.

Now stop this practice.

Breath awareness: Once again become aware of the breath. Observe the breath in the abdominal region.

See the gentle rise and fall of the navel with every incoming and outgoing breath. As the navel moves up, the whole body expands. As the navel comes down, the whole body relaxes.

Feel the expansion of the body with every incoming breath and relaxation of the body with every outgoing breath.

Stop this practice.

Externalization: Once again become aware of your body.

Observe the condition of your body, the relaxed and peaceful nature of your body.

Become aware of the external environment. Externalize the mind completely.

Slowly move your toes, feet, legs, fingers, hands, arms, the head from side to side.

Take a deep breath in, stretch the body, and then gently sit up facing this side, keeping the eyes closed.

Slowly bring the hands together, rub the palms and place the hands over the closed eyes and then slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Prana visualization

Prana is symbolized in yoga as sparks moving in a spiral. These sparks represent the different sensations such as tingling, heat, movement. Prana has a form to focus on. You imagine a spiral made up of hundreds of tiny sparks, with everything in continuous motion.

Whenever you are asked to visualize prana in a part of the body, that is how you have to visualize it. If it is the tip of the left hand thumb, you visualize the pranic spiral at that point. If it is the tip of the nose, you visualize it there. If it is the eyebrow centre, visualize it there. You are giving a definite form to prana to experience it.

Yoga for civilians and yoga for yogis

There are two approaches to yoga: one for yogis and the other for civilians.

Civilians cannot be taught the yogis' methods. They are too caught up in family, society and profession, while yogis are free. They don't have anything; they are not caught up

in family or profession. The inclinations of householders and yogis are different.

Sri Swamiji was clear about these two approaches. In the seventies, he taught us the complete Yoga Chakra, but we could not teach it outside. The teachings of Yoga Chakra were for those of us living in the ashram as sannyasins. For the outside population we had to teach the practices of pawanmuktasana 1, 2, 3, the standing and balancing postures, the forward and backward bends – just a few simple practices that people could do. It was the same with every yoga.

People think of yoga as one system applicable to everyone. That is a mistaken notion. Natures are different, priorities, mentalities, lifestyles are different. In a cave, forest or ashram, you can live a regulated lifestyle and follow a specific routine. In civilian life, there are too many distractions and therefore you cannot practise the advanced yogas. There are many people who learn kriya yoga but never practise at home, as there is no time or inclination. The mind is in a different state. You are worrying about work and family pressures, so even though you may know kriya yoga, you are not inclined to practise it. You may have a mantra, but you even miss your japa when you are busy. Thus, a limited practice of yoga is prescribed for civilians, which only skims the surface of the *yoga vidya*, the yogic knowledge. For the yogis, recluses, sadhus and sannyasins, who live a different, regimented lifestyle, the process of yoga is different.

Nevertheless, how far you can go in your journey depends on you, on your sincerity, commitment and seriousness. If sadhus are not sincere, committed and serious, then no amount of practice can make them enlightened. If a civilian is committed, sincere and serious, then that person can advance more than a sadhu. Everything depends on how you choose to apply the practices. It is the inclination, the drive and the motivation that decides your success. If you have these, you can go far.

Knowing the Pranas

18 October 2017

PRACTICE: PRANA NIDRA (AWARENESS OF PANCHA PRANAS)

Preparation: Lie down comfortably in shavasana, feet slightly apart, arms beside the body with palms open, head straight. Gently close your eyes and mentally say to yourself, 'I am going to practise prana nidra.'

Before beginning the practice, remove all metal objects from the body. Adjust your clothing.

Settle the body into shavasana and make the necessary adjustments. Take the time to arrange the body comfortably. See yourself lying in shavasana.

Relaxation: Feel the solidity of the body as it settles on the floor. Make any adjustments necessary in the body so you can remain still and comfortable for the duration of the practice.

Be aware of the clothing and covering on the body.

Be aware of the skin covering the entire body.

Feel the warmth and energy of the body on the inside of the skin, and space on the outside.

Become aware of any sensation in the head, neck, shoulders, right arm, left arm.

Be aware of the sensations in the chest, the right side of the chest, the left side of the chest, the whole chest.

Become aware of the upper abdomen, the lower abdomen, the whole abdomen and the sensations therein.

Become aware of the whole trunk of the body and the back and the sensations that you can experience in these regions.

Become aware of the whole right leg and right foot, the whole left leg and foot. Develop awareness of the whole body.

The physical body should be comfortable so that you are not disturbed by it and you can become aware of the more subtle energies of pranamaya kosha permeating the body.

Breath awareness: Now bring the awareness to the breath in the nostrils.

Feel the breath in the nostrils, and be aware of the temperature of the breath.

Feel the difference in the temperature of the breath as you breathe in and breathe out.

Each time you breathe in, feel fresh energy flowing in, and each time you breathe out, feel the body relax. All the tensions and toxins are being discharged effortlessly as you breathe out.

Continue. Be aware of the natural, spontaneous breath in the nostrils, and become consciously aware of prana, of energy coming in as you breathe in and relaxing the body as you breathe out.

Rotation of consciousness Become aware of the whole physical body.

Feel the whole physical body resting on the floor and prepare to rotate the awareness around the body.

As a part of the body is named, feel that part from the inside, move the awareness into it and feel energy in it. Feel that all the different parts of the body which are being named are being refreshed and revitalized.

Begin with the right hand thumb. Be aware of the whole thumb, from the tip to the base. Become aware of the energy in the thumb, and also the energy emanating a little beyond the thumb, like what you see in Kirlian photographs. Become aware that there is warmth and energy emanating a little way all around the thumb.

Now smoothly move the awareness to the first finger. Feel the energy flowing with awareness, filling the whole of the first finger, right to the tip.

Move the awareness to the second finger and feel the energy flowing into the second finger right up to the tip. Third finger. Fourth finger. Palm of the hand, feel the energy emanating from the palm of the hand, feel the warmth in the palm of the hand.

Move the awareness to the back of the hand. As though you are shining a warm lamp into the back of the hand, let the energy flow to the back of the hand. Feel the warmth, experience the luminosity.

Bring your awareness to the wrist, the forearm, the elbow, the upper arm, the shoulder. Feel the energy in the whole shoulder. If the shoulder is tense, let it relax.

Become aware of the armpit, the side of the chest, the waist, the hip.

Move the awareness into the right thigh and feel the energy throughout the thigh, the knee, the shin, the calf muscle, the ankle, the heel, the top of the right foot, the sole of the right foot.

Bring the awareness and energy right down into the big toe of the right foot, the second toe, the third toe, the fourth toe, the little toe. Push the energy right down into the little toe of the right foot.

Experience the pranic sensation in the whole right side of the body.

Notice that the right half of the body feels more alive, refreshed and invigorated. Be aware of the energy all through the right side of the body.

Now switch the awareness to the left side, to energize the left side of the body.

Bring the awareness to the left hand thumb. Be aware of the whole thumb, from the tip to the base, the energy inside, and the aura of energy emanating a little beyond the thumb.

Move the awareness to the first finger, feel the energy flowing with awareness, filling the whole of the first finger, right to the tip.

Let the energy flow to the second finger, the third finger, the fourth finger.

Become aware of the hand, the warmth of the energy in the palm of the hand.

Let it flow to the back of the hand, the wrist, the forearm, the elbow, the upper arm, the shoulder. Feel the energy in the shoulder. Let the whole left shoulder relax, let the muscles relax, let go of all tensions.

Move the awareness to the armpit, the side of the chest, the waist, the hip.

Feel the energy throughout the left thigh, the knee, the shin, the calf muscle, the ankle, the heel, the top of the foot, the sole of the left foot.

Feel the energy move into the big toe of the left foot, the second toe, the third, the fourth, the fifth. Push the energy right down into the fifth toe of the left foot.

Do not sleep. Be sure that you are awake and aware of the energy. Feel the energy in the whole left side of the body.

Feel both sides of the body energized and balanced.

Now we will move the awareness and energy throughout the back of the body.

Be aware of the heels, the calf muscles, the back of the knees, the back of the thighs, the buttocks, the curve of the back, the lower back.

Become aware of the whole spine. From the base of the spine, move the awareness along the natural curve of the spine, right up the back of the neck, the shoulder blades, the neck.

Feel the back of the hands, the elbows, the back of the head.

Become aware of all sensations in the whole back of the body.

Become aware of the whole head, relax the whole head. Bring the awareness and energy to the top of the head.

Awareness of the forehead and relax the muscles of the forehead.

Awareness and energy in the left eyebrow, the right eyebrow, the eyebrow centre. Become aware of a distinct pulse of energy. Become aware of a distinct pulse of energy at the eyebrow centre.

Move your awareness to the right eye. Let it relax, feel the small muscles around the eye and let them relax. Move your awareness to the left eye, feel the small muscles around the eye and let them relax. Feel the energy of the eyes.

Become aware of the nose tip, left nostril, right nostril, both nostrils.

Feel the energy move in the body with the breath as you breathe in, and the body relax as you breathe out.

Be aware of the sensations in the nostrils, feeling the energy moving with the breath.

Bring your awareness to the left ear, the outside part of the ear, the inside part of the ear. Bring your awareness to the right ear, outside of the ear, inside of the ear. Be aware of the energy in the ears.

Be aware of the mouth, the upper lip, the lower lip, the teeth and the tongue, the chin, the jaw. Relax the whole face. Let the whole face relax.

Now, move the awareness and the energy down through the front of the body.

Awareness of the whole face, the throat, the collarbones, the shoulders.

Feel the whole right arm, and the energy in the palm of the right hand.

Feel the whole left arm, and the energy in the palm of the left hand.

Feel the whole chest, and the gentle movement of the chest with the breath.

Feel the lungs and the ribs, and the energy expanding as you breathe in and relaxing as you breathe out.

Be aware of the whole abdomen, and the gentle movement of the abdomen with the breath.

Feel the energy in the solar plexus, manipura, glowing a little with energy as you breathe in, like a fire glows more brightly when it is oxygenated.

Feel the hips, the pelvis, the groin, the thighs, the knees, the shins, the top of the feet.

Awareness of the whole front of the body from the top of the head to the toes, and be aware of the energy emanating from the body.

Feel the energy permeating and emanating from the whole body.

Breath and prana awareness: Bring your awareness to the breath. See the flow of breath in the nostrils, and the energy riding the breath.

The breath goes straight in from the nose and down through the throat to the lungs. Become aware of this for a few breaths.

See the breath flow from the nostrils into your lungs.

In the next inhalation, draw the awareness and energy from outside and take them to the eyebrow centre.

Experience a distinct flow of energy going in through both nostrils and flowing upward to the eyebrow centre as you breathe in. Then feel it flowing out from the eyebrow centre through both nostrils as you breathe out.

Often we are not aware of the energy, it just rides the breath. Now feel the energy coming in, distinct from the breath, through both nostrils to the eyebrow centre on inhalation, and moving out from the eyebrow centre out through both nostrils during exhalation.

The whole area of the face, head and brain is revitalized as you breathe in and the energy reaches the eyebrow centre and disperses.

As you breathe out, feel the tiredness, strain, mental fatigue flowing out.

Pancha prana awareness: Now become aware of the prana-maya kosha, the energy body. The pranamaya kosha, the energy body, has five main regions of vital forces.

Prana: Prana, the first vital force, occupies the region between the diaphragm and the throat.

Move the awareness down to the diaphragm in front of the body.

Feel a subtle sensation, warmth, tingling, a subtle force moving from the diaphragm through the chest region to the throat.

Irrespective of inhalation and exhalation, this force moves up. Feel the flow of the force as gentle waves coming up from the diaphragm through the chest to the base of the throat.

Be aware of this flow of energy as waves in the upper part of the body. Experience the flow of prana as gentle rolling waves ascending from the diaphragm region up to the chest to the throat.

Continue with this practice for some breaths.

Apana: Now become aware of apana, the second vital flow.

Apana has a downward flow from below the navel down to the groin.

Take your awareness to the navel and feel warmth, movement – a subtle energy moving down from the navel to the perineum.

Irrespective of inhalation and exhalation, this force moves downwards.

Become aware of this flow of energy as waves flowing down.

This is the flow of apana in the lower part of the body.

Become aware of this flow of energy for a few breaths.

Samana: Now become aware of the energy in the region of the navel.

Samana is the third vital force. It is the field of energy between the fields of prana and apana: between the navel and the diaphragm.

It is a dynamic energy that moves from side to side, like the swing of a pendulum from left to right and right to left.

Watch and experience the flow of samana in the form of gentle rolling waves.

Udana: Now become aware of the limbs of the body. Udana is the fourth vital force, which flows in the extremities.

Feel the whole right arm. From the right shoulder, udana circles around the right arm, a spiralling flow down the whole right arm from the shoulder to the fingertips. Move the awareness into the right arm, from the shoulders to the fingertips and feel udana encircling it.

Now move the awareness to the left arm. From the shoulder to the fingertips, udana encircles the whole left arm, a spiralling flow down the whole left arm from the shoulder to the fingertips. Feel it.

Move the awareness to the right leg. The whole of the right leg from the perineum to the tips of the toes, encircled by the spiralling flow of energy of udana. The energy is there, you just have to sensitize yourself and feel it.

Become aware of the left leg, the energy inside, permeating it and encircling it in the spiralling flow of udana.

Move the awareness to the neck and the head. Here also udana moves, flowing upwards from the base of the neck to the top of the head, a subtle, moving current of spiralling energy.

Keep the awareness in the region of the neck and head and feel the energy of udana.

Vyana: Now behind these four pranic fields, like a backdrop, is the fifth vital energy called vyana. The whole body is permeated by the integrating field of vyana. Vyana pervades the whole body. It is like a template on which the other energies move.

Feel the whole body, the whole body full of energy and light. Observe the vyana energy-field throughout the body. Feel your energy revitalized and refreshed by the focused attention of your awareness. Feel yourself rejuvenated physically, mentally, in all dimensions.

Ending the practice: Now from the awareness of the energy body return to the awareness to the physical body.

Be aware of where you are and be aware that you have been practising prana nidra. Feel the energy in the body and the hardness of the floor. Become aware of the physical body in shavasana. Become aware of the solidity of the body, the position of the limbs, the back and the head. Experience the contact points between the body and the floor.

Externalize your mind, become aware of the outside sounds, become aware of the external environment.

Slowly move your toes, feet, legs, fingers, hands, arms, the head from side to side. Take a deep breath in and stretch your whole body, and then gently sit up facing this side, keeping your eyes closed.

Keep your eyes closed, become aware of your physical and mental condition and state. Slowly bring the hands together, rub the palms, place the hands on top of the closed eyes, and then gently open your eyes. Hari Om Tat Sat. The practice of prana nidra is over.

Aspects of prana nidra

This was a sample of prana nidra, and prana nidra follows its own progression. In the first stage, you become aware of the annamaya and pranamaya koshas together and then create a separate awareness of pranamaya kosha, distinct from the physical body. At first you follow the technique of rotation of awareness through different body parts and at that time you also become aware of the energy therein. Then you become aware of only the energy, which rides the breath, through the body.

In the second stage, which is what we have done, after completing the first stage as above, you develop the awareness of the five different pranas. In this you have to cultivate the experience of prana in the form of waves, and eventually the visualization and awareness will increase to the point that you will feel the rolling of waves inside. This can take different forms: you may experience several small waves or one big wave, depending on how dissipated or harmonized your pranas are.

In the prana practice, you visualize the waves rolling up. In this practice, remember that when the flow of prana in the chest is focused on, some people have the sensation of suffocation. If that happens, it means that you have jumped into an advanced class. You are not ready physically or psychologically for prana nidra, therefore you should stop the practice and go back to your previous practices.

In the apana practice, you visualize the waves rolling down. In samana, they move sideways. If you have the tendency to be seasick, be careful with samana concentration. Feeling the actual movement of samana, like a pendulum swaying from left to right and right to left, can cause queasiness.

Udana is the circular movement, downwards in the arms and legs and upward in the head. Vyana is the canvas on which the other four colours can be painted. It is like a white canvas on which the four different colours of prana, apana, samana and udana are painted. The experience of vyana is like floating in space, being surrounded by space on all sides.

In the next progression of the practice the pranas moving in all directions are brought together and merged into one. After they are merged into one comes the last stage. Now you experience the tranquil lake of prana. When the pranas become stable and still, that is the end of prana nidra and the beginning of prana vidya.

After the practice of prana nidra, when the pranas become active, it is possible that you have difficulty sleeping at night. If that happens, then count your breath from 100 back to 1. This will help to divert your awareness from the pranic experience into the body.

Keep the head moving clockwise

Someone asked whether udana moves clockwise or anticlockwise. The answer is: it is best for you to visualize however it happens naturally. That will indicate the awareness. If you have to struggle, it means that you are going anti to or against the pranic flow.

The head, of course, should always go clockwise. If the head goes anticlockwise, it's a problem! A good head moves clockwise. This is not a joke. When people think right, they are happy and peaceful. When their thoughts go anticlockwise, they become disturbed mentally. So you should watch whether your head is going clockwise or anticlockwise.

Most people are not interested in the mind. They don't want to see their mind, but they are happy to work on their body. If I ask you to come for an asana class, everyone will drop whatever they are doing and join the class. If you learn a new asana, you will be so excited that you will keep on trying it even during the rest of the day. However, if I say practise a yama during the day and be happy, you will not pay attention to it.

People have an obsession with the body. They love turning, twisting, stretching, bending and moving the body, but when it comes to gymnastics of the mind, turning the mind to create a condition of positivity, everybody steps back. They focus more on the body, believing that they are spiritual as they practise yoga, and ignore the basic awareness of the mind. If they go into meditation, it is only a way to release the stress, or to go on a flight of fantasy for the feel-good factor.

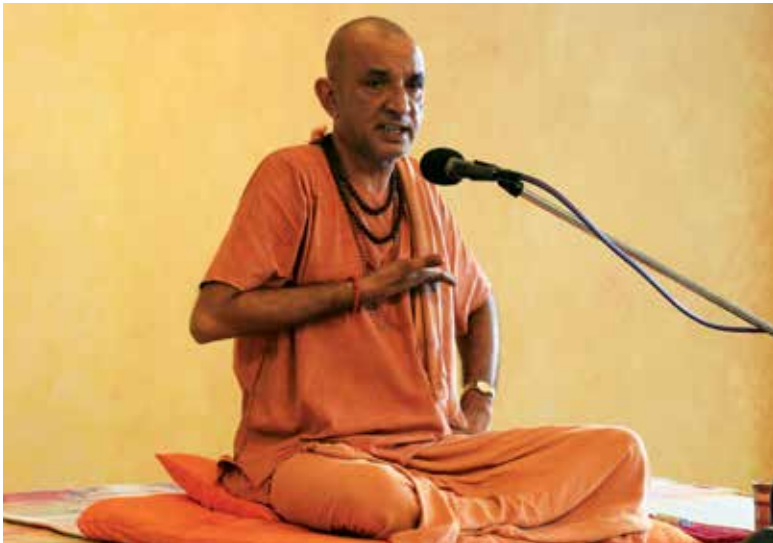
A coin has two sides, heads and tails. When the heads is seen, it is the feel-good factor, everybody talks about it and the expectation builds up, 'I should have that experience again, I really felt good after that. The world was brighter, I was optimistic and happy. I want to have the same experience again.' When the tails is seen, then there is doubt, 'Did I do something wrong? Do I have a problem? Why am I seeing this? Why am I experiencing this?' and there is rejection of the process that triggered the experience.

Even yogis go for the feel-good factor and not mind awareness in their meditation. If mind awareness was important to them, then both heads and tails, the good and the bad, would be appreciated and managed. Unless you are willing to look at your shortcomings and negativity, you can never cure your tamasic nature. Even after fifteen years

you will be doing prana nidra and yet have the same state of mind. There would be no progress.

Yoga has to be seen from both perspectives: the physical and the psychological. Both have to be considered equally important. Just as during the day you can find two or three opportunities to practise your 'yoga' and try out new practices, in the same way find more moments to practise a simple yama like *manahprasad*, happiness. If you can, it will have a positive effect on all other practices also. It will affect your concentration, balance, pranas, everything.

There should not be an imbalance between your involvement with the body and the mind. There has to be a constant effort to maintain the clarity, the positivity, the joy, the happiness, the goodness of mind. If you lose it, again make the effort to bring it back. There should not be the thought, 'I am a failure.' There should only be a continuous effort to maintain that uplifting nature. Just as you enjoy doing asanas, learn to enjoy practising the yamas, niyamas and other techniques that involve inner purification and transformation so that you can become a true yogi.



Prana Vidya

20 October 2017

PRACTICE: PRANA VIDYA

Preparation: Lie down comfortably in shavasana, feet apart, arms beside the body with palms facing up, head straight. Gently close your eyes and lips.

With eyes closed, mentally observe the whole physical body lying on the floor. Develop an awareness of the whole physical body lying on the floor. See the body lying in the pose of shavasana, completely relaxed.

Check each and every part of the body mentally and if there is any tension, any pocket of tightness, then become aware of the problem and try to become comfortable.

Adjust your body. Remove all metal objects from the body. Once again, check the whole body. Once the final adjustment is made, become calm, motionless and relaxed. Once the physical body is adjusted, feel the solidity and relaxed state of the body as it settles on the floor.

Observe the whole body mentally from head to toes, move your awareness through all the different parts to check for and release any remaining tension. Check your head, facial muscles, neck, shoulders, back, chest, abdomen, arms, hands, buttocks, legs and feet.

Inner space: Once the body is calm and relaxed, internalize the consciousness and observe the body from within.

Do not visualize the body in terms of the muscular system, the skeletal system or the internal organs.

Try to develop awareness of the body as space, emptiness within. Experience the body as being empty from inside; only the space.

Develop the awareness of space in each and every part of the body, from the head right down to the tips of fingers and the toes.

See this space contained within the body.

Experience the whole subtle space.

Direct your awareness systematically through each and every part of the body and become aware of total space: awareness of the right leg and the space within the right leg; awareness of the left leg and the space within it; the right arm and the space in the right arm; the left arm and the space; the whole trunk of the body and the space within the trunk; the head and the space contained within the head.

Go on developing homogeneous awareness of the space contained within the body.

Visualizing pancha prana: Now become aware of vyana, the pranic energy that pervades the whole body.

Feel and visualize vyana in the form of streaks of light moving rapidly throughout each and every part of the body, pervading the entire body from head to toes. Streaks of light moving in the body from head to toes. Develop the awareness of vyana, the energy which is in the whole body.

Continue to develop the experience of vyana, the all-pervading pranic energy, in the form of particles of light darting at random throughout the entire body. Try to feel this prana in the form of a subtle movement throughout the whole body, like the flow of a gentle wind on a still, hot day.

Now become aware of udana in the extremities of the body: the legs, the arms, the neck and the head. Have a vision of this prana in the form of spiralling rings of energy or circles of light, moving clockwise. Have a vision of udana from the hips down to the toes, from shoulders

down to the fingertips, from throat up to the top of the head. Take your awareness to these different organs and feel the circles of energy moving at immense speed in the clockwise direction. Intensify this experience; have an internal visualization, instant feeling, instant awareness of the continuous spiralling movement of energy in the extremities of the body.

Now, concentrate on samana in the region of the upper abdomen between the diaphragm and the navel. Visualize the energy in samana moving in a sideways direction. Experience waves of light travelling from left to right and from right to left across the waist like a fast shuttle on a weaving loom. The feeling and visualization should be instantaneous. Intensify the awareness of samana and the visualization, waves of light travelling from left to right and from right to left.

Now become aware of apana, the energy moving in the lower abdomen from the navel to the perineum. Experience apana as waves of light energy moving downwards.

Synchronize this movement of pranic light with the breathing process. At the time of inhalation, see the light travelling down from the navel to the perineum. At the time of exhalation, reverse the flow of energy and send it back upward to the navel.

Become aware of the apana movement. When you inhale, when the stomach is filled with air, the apana is pushed down from the navel to the perineum and at the time of exhalation apana comes back to the navel. While inhaling, feel the downward movement of apana; while exhaling, reverse the flow and send the energy back up to the navel. Now become aware of prana, the movement of energy in the chest from the diaphragm to the throat. Experience it as waves of prana moving upward and filling the whole chest cavity with light.

Begin to synchronize the rhythm of the natural breath with the movement of pranic energy. As you inhale, follow

the upward movement of prana from the diaphragm to the throat. During exhalation, reverse the flow and send prana down, from the throat to the navel. A wave of light rolling upward during inhalation and downward during exhalation.

Maintain your awareness without a break. Do not sleep. Intensify the awareness of prana.

Merging prana and apana at manipura using exhalation:

Now visualize and synchronize the movement of prana with breath, and at the same time also become aware of the apanic movement. Each time you inhale, prana moves up and apana moves down. Visualize and feel these two forces moving away from each other during inhalation. At the time of exhalation, both pranic flows are reversed: prana moves down from the throat to the navel and apana moves up from the perineum to the navel.

See and feel these two forces coming together and meeting at the navel on the exhalation, and see and feel them move apart during inhalation. During inhalation, prana moves up, apana moves down. During exhalation, apana moves up to the navel, prana moves down to the navel.

Feel the strong and powerful merger of these two energies in manipura.

Each time prana and apana meet at the navel centre, feel the heat and light building up at the solar plexus, the centre of prana shakti.

Maintain total awareness of the movement of prana and apana at the time of inhalation and exhalation without any break in concentration or awareness.

Experience the two waves of light energy separating and meeting in manipura, in the solar plexus. At the time of their coming together, experience increased heat generated in the solar plexus.

Continue with this practice for some time.

Raising prana shakti to ajna chakra and directing it throughout the body: Now bring your awareness to the eyebrow centre. With inhalation, bring the experience of prana

moving from manipura to the eyebrow centre. Gradually feel the build-up of prana shakti at the eyebrow centre, ajna chakra. Breath is like the conveyor belt, it brings prana shakti from manipura chakra to ajna chakra. Inhaling, prana shakti ascends and is retained at ajna chakra; exhaling, the awareness descends.

Experience the build-up of pranic energy in ajna chakra. See the ajna chakra region becoming filled with light and warmth.

Now, using the exhaling breath, you have to direct prana shakti from ajna chakra throughout the body. Each time you exhale, see prana shakti in the form of streaks of light moving down from ajna chakra into the hands, arms, into the toes, feet and legs. With each inhalation, bring your awareness back to ajna chakra.

With each exhalation, see the distribution of prana throughout the body. Visualize it in the form of streaks of light travelling from ajna chakra to each and every part of the body. Send prana shakti to the whole body. Feel the warmth, feel the solidity, see the streaks of light, feel gentle pulsations in the body.

Each time you breathe in, bring the awareness back to ajna chakra. Each time you breathe out, distribute the prana shakti.

Now stop this practice.

Storing prana shakti in mooladhara chakra: Once again focus your awareness of prana in ajna chakra and this time you have to take prana down to mooladhara and store it there with every exhalation, and with inhalation bring the awareness back to ajna.

With exhalation, take the sensation of heat and light to mooladhara. With inhalation, come back to ajna.

Partial externalization before next stage: Now stop this practice, and again feel the solidity of the physical body. Feel the solidity of the physical body.

See the body from outside. Try to develop awareness and visualization of the body from outside. Just as I can see you

lying on the floor, in the same manner try to see yourself externally, lying on the floor. Become aware of people around you. Become aware of the outer environment.

Slowly move your toes, feet, legs, fingers, hands, arms, the head from side to side. Take a deep breath in and stretch the whole body. Then gently sit up facing this side, keeping the eyes closed.

Awareness of mooladhara, manipura and ajna chakras:

Sitting in a comfortable posture, keeping the eyes closed, once again mentally observe the body and the sensations therein.

Become aware of the spinal passage. Go into your back, see the spinal cord: the tip of the spine at the bottom, the coccyx bone, and the top of the spine in the mid-brain.

Visualize the spine in the form of a hollow tube and in this tube, see the first point of light in the coccyx region. The second point of light behind the navel. The third point of light behind the eyebrow centre in the mid-brain where the spine enters into the brain.

The first light represents mooladhara, which is the storehouse of prana shakti. The second light represents manipura, which is the generation place of prana shakti. The third light represents ajna chakra, which is the distribution centre of prana shakti.

Awareness of the flow of prana shakti along pingala and ida pathways through mooladhara, manipura and ajna chakras along with bija mantras:

See the breath rise up and go down in the spinal passage. Experience the flow of breath from mooladhara to ajna along the spinal path. At the time of inhalation, as the breath ascends from mooladhara to sahasrara, say the bija mantras of the three chakras. Mental repetition of *Lam, Ram, Om*. With the descending breath, mental repetition *Om, Ram, Lam*.

Lam, Ram, Om.

Om, Ram, Lam.

Continue in this manner for a few moments, observing mentally the ascent and descent of the breath in the spinal

passage. As the awareness crosses each chakra, mentally repeat the bija mantra of the chakra.

Now, as you continue with this practice, add another visualization. From mooladhara, your awareness comes up from the right side along the pingala nadi up to manipura, and from manipura from the left side to ajna. Then the descending breath from ajna to manipura from the right side following the ida path and from manipura to mooladhara from the left side. Pingala path on the right side of mooladhara entering ajna from the left side; ida path leaving ajna from the right side, coming to manipura and leaving manipura from the left side going to mooladhara.

The bottom and the tip are mooladhara and ajna, one crossover in the middle is manipura. Let the breath follow descent during the path of pingala and let the breath follow during ascent the path of ida.

As your consciousness merges with the experience of the breath, there may be a slight swaying of the body. That is all right, as long as it does not distract the awareness.

Go on with the practice.

Lam, Ram, Om.

Om, Ram, Lam.

Ending the practice: Now keep your awareness fixed at the eyebrow centre. No more ascent or descent of breath or awareness. No more mantra.

Focus the awareness at the eyebrow centre. Visualize the symbol of a candle flame. Looking at the flame mentally, breathe in deeply and chant the mantra *Om* once.

Slowly bring the hands together, rub the palms and place them over the closed eyes. Then slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Understanding the sequence

In this practice, a simple sequence of prana vidya is followed. At first you develop the awareness of the five pranas but in the reverse order. You start with vyana and finally come to prana. The next step is focusing on prana and apana. First their separate movement: apana moving down, prana moving up, apana moving up, prana moving down; then their union in manipura.

During the merger of prana and apana in manipura, you have to remember a point. It is apana that originates at manipura and goes down to the perineum; prana does not originate at manipura. Its field is from the diaphragm upwards. This means that prana has to go further down for the union to take place. Apana is coming back to manipura to its origin, but prana has to go down to samana and merge with apana in manipura. That awareness has to be developed and intensified.

You may also find that when prana and apana meet in manipura, kumbhaka take place naturally. That is an experience of kevala kumbhaka, spontaneous retention. As the pranas become active, you may also find that at different times the breathing becomes quite slow: you may breathe in two or three breaths per minute without any discomfort.

I know someone who is today a successful lawyer. He has been practising pranayama regularly since the age of thirteen or fourteen when he first came to the ashram, and his normal breathing rate is two or three breaths per minute. He is an extremely calm person, never hyper, agitated or angry – even in court. It is possible that he goes through natural retention between each breath, though he is not aware of it, for when the breath becomes slower, retention becomes spontaneous. Therefore, when the pranas meet in manipura, it is possible to experience a moment of kevala kumbhaka, when there is no movement of the breath.

The next stage is to bring the experience of prana shakti to ajna chakra and then distribution of prana shakti from ajna chakra to the rest of the body. When the distribution is complete, you take the prana shakti from ajna chakra back

to mooladhara. Thus three chakras are important here: manipura as the generation centre, ajna as the distribution centre, and mooladhara as the storage centre.

Purpose of prana vidya

Once you become sensitized to the practice and develop the mastery to move and control the pranas, prana vidya becomes a powerful tool to rectify any type of pranic, manomayic or vijñanamayic imbalances.

An important aspect of prana vidya is the practice of visualization. The ability to visualize represents a focused mind. Sri Swamiji says that the normal mind is a dissipated mind and the focused mind is known as willpower, or sankalpa shakti. It is through this willpower, this sankalpa shakti, this visualization, that you are able to direct prana shakti.

Initially you may direct the prana shakti to heal the body of imbalances – to remove the blocks, clear the path and allow the pranas to flow. The other purpose of prana vidya is to direct all the pranas to sahasrara. These are the only two main purposes of prana vidya: healing and raising the pranas to sahasrara.

When people hear about healing through prana vidya, they think, ‘Very good idea! If I learn this practice, I can heal myself, I can heal others, I can help others.’ They think all this without realizing the intricate details of prana vidya. They create their own imagination of what they can become, and the focus moves away from going into the depth of the practice to experience its possibilities. This tendency to become distracted by one’s own desires is one of the reasons why only a few people are able to succeed in their efforts to experience something yogic.

In prana vidya, although the focus initially is on self-healing, that is only for balancing out the dissipated energies and the misdirected responses of the body due to the imbalance. Once that is clear, then you go to the real purpose of the practice: raising of the pranas to sahasrara. With the raising of the pranas to sahasrara, deeper states of meditation can be experienced. Now you move into dharana.

Remember This

What you have been given here is only a glimpse. Don't think that you are qualified for the higher levels yet. To reach there, remember a few things. Practise what you have learned. Don't worry about teaching yet. Perfect your practice of asana by including awareness of all the five koshas. Just as you have been identifying with annamaya kosha and the experiences of the annamaya kosha in your postures: the tiredness of the body, the movement, the contraction, the expansion; the same level of awareness should be developed in each posture for pranamaya, manomaya, vijnamaya and anandamaya.

The practices are not advanced, but your aim now is to go further than what you have in the past. In pranayama, focus on retention, as that is the means to experience the pranamaya kosha. Inhalation and exhalation are the two sides of the ladder but the rung on which you climb is kumbhaka. That is the important aspect of pranayama. Even in nadi shodhana pranayama, the ratio you have to attain is 1:4:2. While inhalation is only one unit and exhalation is only two units, you have to learn to hold the breath for four units. Therefore, if you want to progress in yoga you have to work with kumbhaka. However, it should not turn you black and blue. You should develop a kumbhaka where you are holding the breath comfortably for the maximum length of time without feeling breathless. Combine asana and pranayama with bandhas, which help you to come to the

point of kumbhaka and to activate the prana shakti. There are many techniques of prana vidya given in the books.

You can study them and also experiment with them, nevertheless let things happen progressively and gradually so that you are in control of your experiences. Walk the safe path, for you don't know what stuff is in there, what experiences can come and whether you are capable of handling those internal changes. Let the flower bloom gradually.

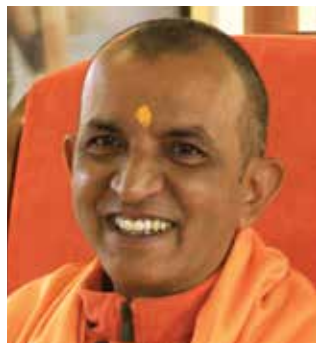


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Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual 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.



The third Progressive Yoga Vidya Training I held at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth, Munger, in October 2017 focused on pratyahara – the origin, development, purpose and practical application of the fifth limb of raja yoga. Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati introduced the participants to an extraordinary understanding and experience of pratyahara. The in-depth explanations gave a new perspective to known practices and thereby emphasized that the second chapter of yoga is truly an exploration into *yoga vidya*, the science of yoga.

The practices relating to the body, the senses, mind and prana make pratyahara come alive as never before and encourage one to ‘delve deeper’. This book is an inspiration to all serious, sincere and committed aspirants who wish to enhance the quality of their life and being with yoga.



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