

Raja Yoga Yatra 3

Practical Pratyahara

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



Raja Yoga Yatra 3

With kind regards, ॐ and prem

Sriani Niranjan

Raja Yoga Yatra 3

Practical Pratyahara

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Discourses given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati
during the training of Raja Yoga Yatra 3: Practical Pratyahara,
held from 17th to 23rd September 2018 at Ganga Darshan
Vishwa Yogapeeth, Bihar School of Yoga, Munger.*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

© Bihar School of Yoga 2019

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted or stored in a retrieval system, in any form or by any means, without permission in writing from Yoga Publications Trust.

The terms Satyananda Yoga® and Bihar Yoga® are registered trademarks owned by International Yoga Fellowship Movement (IYFM). The use of the same in this book is with permission.

The purpose of this book is to provide relevant information regarding yoga practice; it is not a practice book and it is not to be used for teaching oneself or others. All yoga training is to be learned and practised under the competent guidance of a person well versed in the practice. It is the responsibility of the practitioner to choose the teacher and the manner in which the classes are being conducted. Bihar School of Yoga is not responsible in any way for the individual's choice.

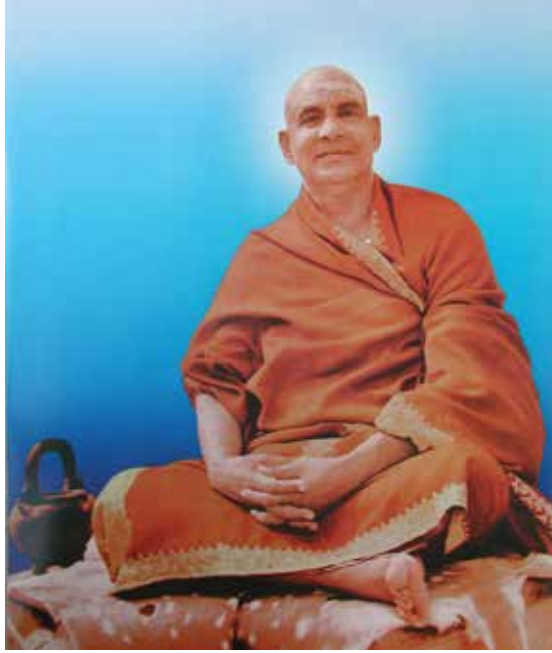
Published by Yoga Publications Trust
First edition 2019

ISBN: 978-81-940805-4-1

Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

Website: www.biharyoga.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001



Dedication

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



Dedication

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

Contents

Preface: The 2nd Chapter of Yoga	<i>ix</i>
The Yatra of Raja Yoga	1
Entering the Inner Dimension	11
Awareness and Relaxation	26
Consciousness and Prana	40
Working with Prana	55
Open Your Heartbook	68
Progressing through Pratyahara	78
The Path Beckons	90

Preface:

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.

The Yatra of Raja Yoga

16 September 2018



The present training in raja yoga has been named a *yatra*, as it is a journey into the various levels of raja yoga. Raja Yoga Yatra 1, Raja Yoga Yatra 2 and Raja Yoga Yatra 3 each focus on a different level of practice and understanding. The purpose of conducting these specialized trainings in raja yoga, and also hatha yoga and kriya yoga, is to understand the deep application of yoga in our life.

In the last few decades, yoga has been seen by people not as a personal practice but as something that you learn in order to teach others. People have felt compelled to become yoga teachers, therefore everyone is a yoga teacher and no one

is a yoga student any more. Even the students who come to learn yoga aspire to become teachers without understanding its depth. People are enamoured by the physical practices, by the relaxation practices, and they classify these as yoga. However, yoga is a much deeper subject than what you teach. I am not interested in making you teachers of raja yoga, for you need to first understand raja yoga.

In the seventies, when Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati started training us in the various applications and systems of yoga, he created a specific sequence of learning:

1. Hatha yoga, for the body and *prana*, vital energy
2. Raja yoga, for *manas*, mind
3. Kriya yoga, for psychic and spiritual awakening.

After fifty-five years of yoga propagation, we are now going back to the original teachings to experience the yoga vidya. It is not just to propagate yoga, which was the mission of the first chapter of BSY, but also to experience yoga, which is the aim of the second chapter of BSY. To experience the depth of yoga, specific trainings in hatha yoga, raja yoga and kriya yoga have been conceived.

The original raja yoga

When raja yoga is spoken of, immediately everyone thinks of the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. However, Patanjali is not the sole authority on raja yoga. Raja yoga existed prior to Patanjali and there are many older texts which describe the system. Patanjali removed many of the original ideas of raja yoga and added many of his own ideas to it since he came from a different background. Patanjali's raja yoga is a modified version and not the original raja yoga.

The original raja yoga has a story. Its founder was Sage Shukracharya, the guru of the demons. In the olden days, there were three main tribes, classified as *devas*, gods; *danavas*, demons; and *manavas*, humans. Devas represented the mature class and their guru was Sage Brihaspati, known as deva guru. Sage Brihaspati advocated a life in which restraint of the mind and senses would be followed. It was a balanced

lifestyle, appropriate for the deva group as they were affluent and reflected a tendency towards excess. Sage Brihaspati focused on the needs of the devas, and his teachings became part of the vedic lifestyle, tradition and culture. You will find many verses and hymns in the Vedas with references to the devas and Brihaspati. That was one aspect.

The second tribe was that of the danavas. They were the demonical, immature, illiterate, unsophisticated tribal people, who lived with basic necessities in a frugal environment, and were always struggling in life. Due to their needs, they were always warring for resources, for money, weapons, objects of comfort, clothes, wives, everything. Sage Shukracharya became their guru, and he was in a dilemma as to how he could wean them from the dark side into the light.

Sage Shukracharya started teaching the practices of raja yoga to the danavas. In the system he gave, he talks of merging one level, one state of consciousness, one state of perception, into a higher state. He does not talk about *chitta vritti*, modifications of the inner impressions, or *drashta*, the inner witness, which are the two prominent ideas in Patanjali's raja yoga. Rather, the aim of raja yoga was simple: you introspect and change the *tamasic* or negative qualities in you into *sattwic*, positive qualities, by dissolving the lower tendencies of the mind into higher tendencies. In classical raja yoga, the dissolution takes place at every level. Through dissolution, you connect with the higher state and disconnect from the lower states. This is the original raja yoga, which was developed further by other rishis and sages.

Thousands of years later, when Maharshi Patanjali came into the picture, he found that the people in society were not able to practise this raja yoga, so he modified the raja yoga into what you read today in the *Yoga Sutras*. Being a *Samkhyan*, follower of the Samkhya system of thought, he brought in the concept of chitta, chitta vritti and drashta. He removed the components of dissolution and simply said 'observe' instead of 'end, finish and dissolve'.

Yoga for civilians and yogis

This gives rise to another understanding of yoga, that there are two yogas: one meant for the civilians and the other meant for the recluses. The civilian yoga is a simple yoga. It does not involve much effort, as it only takes you a little farther. The yoga meant for recluses, however, is tough, as it involves a lot of practice and perfection. A recluse can reach the point of dissolution in their practice, whereas civilians are unlikely to due to the limited time they can devote to yoga. They spend maximum time in pursuit of material goals: family, society, profession, house, and so on, and minimal time in yoga practice. In twenty-four hours, you may be able to dedicate one hour to the practice of yoga, comprising asana, pranayama, relaxation and meditation, and the rest of twenty-three hours are engaged in worldly affairs. For most people even this is too much.

Some say, “Oh, I practise yoga when I teach; I don’t have to practise otherwise”, “I practise my yoga three times a day because I am teaching three classes a day.” What you are practising at that time is basic asana and pranayama which shows that even teachers do not have the experience of yoga. Teachers are more concerned about earning, so instead of focusing on developing their own experience they are focusing on how to gather more and more students for their own status, prestige and recognition. Therefore, yoga for civilians is a different subject altogether.

A recluse indicates a person who is devoted and committed to the experience of the yogic process and to overcoming the limitations of body and mind. The focus is greater when the environment is appropriate. Some can practise for eight or nine hours, like the monks and recluses do in some traditions. A civilian cannot do that. The monks and the civilians each follow a different path, tradition and practice.

Just as there are two raja yogas, one that people are aware of as Patanjali’s raja yoga and the other which pre-dates Patanjali, similarly there are two hatha yogas. The hatha yoga which the civilian society follows is that of Swatmarama.

There are many other treatises on hatha yoga which people are unaware of and which are meant for the recluses or *sadhakas*, aspirants who have committed and devoted their life to developing that transcendental experience, and do not do the practices merely for the feel-good factor of the body. These are the two distinct branches of hatha yoga and raja yoga.

Hatha yoga precedes raja yoga

Hatha yoga has to be practised and mastered before you come to raja yoga. The intent of hatha yoga is evident in its name. *Ha* and *Tha* are the two sounds or mantras of the two main *nadis*, pranic channels: ida and pingala. *Ham* is the bija mantra of the pingala nadi, the solar force, and *Tham* is the bija mantra of ida nadi, the lunar force. When these two mantras are combined together, it becomes 'hatha'. The intent of hatha yoga is to bring about a balance and awakening in the pranic and the mental energy systems. The practices lead you from the physical to the pranic level. Hatha yoga is the primary class, as it begins with the body, the *annamaya kosha*, and goes up to the pranic level, *pranamaya kosha*, and that is where hatha yoga ends.

The practices of the original hatha yoga begin with *shatkarma*, six techniques of detoxification. Hatha yoga does not begin with asana; it begins with body purification. The body has to be detoxified before you start even the practice of pawanmuktasana, the first level of asana. The body has to be free of all toxins before you practise asana since only a toxin-free body will allow access to the pranic dimensions. Otherwise the toxins in the body will block your perception of the pranic level, the pranamaya kosha.

In the six practices of shatkarma, the first three are physical: neti, for the head; dhauti for the chest, and basti for the intestines. It is a cleaning of the internal physical systems. The next three shatkarma are kapalbhathi, nauli and tratika. Kapalbhathi is for prana, nauli is for manipura chakra, the centre of prana shakti, and tratika is an introduction to

pratyahara. Hatha yoga begins with these six practices, while most of you have started with asana without having done the shatkarma. This shows that your approach to and practice of hatha yoga is incomplete. There is a saying in the *Bible*, “Man does not live by bread alone,” and there is a saying in yoga, “Man does not live by asana alone.” This should tell you how much you have missed in your practice.

After the completion of shatkarma, you move into the asana component, then into the pranayama component, and then into the mudra component. Hatha yoga is perfected by following this sequential method. The purpose of hatha yoga is to deal with the physical and the pranic body. The practices bring about balance, remove the ills, create harmony in the system and awaken the pranas.

After this, raja yoga begins. If raja yoga is the second stage, then what is its focus? In Patanjali’s system, raja yoga begins with yama and niyama, asana and pranayama. According to Patanjali, asana and pranayama are not dynamic practices; they are meditative postures that allow you to internalize. Asana and pranayama, as you normally think of them, do not have a role in raja yoga. Similarly, pranayama is taught only as inhalation, exhalation and retention, with the understanding that you have perfected the ratios, count and so on in hatha yoga. Here, the focus is only on the breath, and not on the practice of pranayama. Asana and pranayama are stepping stones into the other components of raja yoga, pratyahara and dharana. The last two limbs, dhyana and samadhi, are experiences. The entire focus of Patanjali’s raja yoga is to perfect pratyahara and dharana, although he speaks of dhyana and samadhi as theory.

In the raja yoga yatras that are being conducted here, the first yatra is aimed at understanding asana and pranayama, for the practice of asana and pranayama will lead you into the pratyahara state. They are not meant for the body. They are not meant to release tensions, stretch the muscles or tone the body, but to lead to the attainment of pratyahara. The same is true of pranayama.



Intent of Patanjali's raja yoga

Patanjali uses asana and pranayama to go into the pratyahara state, and it is in the pratyahara state that he says, "Become the witness of what is happening in your mind. Observe the thoughts, the modifications, the chitta vrittis." These are new concepts given by Patanjali: to become the drashta, and to know that there are chitta vrittis.

When commentators describe chitta vritti, they miss a vital point. Chitta vritti is spoken of as 'modifications of mind', but chitta is not the mind. Manas is the mind. Patanjali does not speak of manas vritti. *Manas vritti* means modifications of the mind. He has spoken of chitta vritti, for it is when you enter the dimension of chitta that pratyahara begins to develop and not when you are in the mind or in the buddhi. You are all at the mental level right now. You are all the time in your mind. You are observing, thinking, reflecting, analyzing, discriminating and criticizing through the mind. If you want to observe the mind vrittis, then you have to open your eyes and observe your response to every situation, as you react on a moment-to-moment basis.

If I say, "Swami So and So, you and I will go and clean the whole Main Building," her response to me will be a mental vritti, manas vritti, not chitta vritti. She will either say 'yes' or

‘no’, an instant response. If she agrees, then she is my friend, and if she says no she becomes my adversary, ‘She is refusing to work with me.’ These are *manas vrittis*. *Manas vritti* is your response to any situation, to any moment, at any time of the day. To know them you do not have to close your eyes; you only have to be aware of your interaction and response. Somebody comes to you asking for help; you feel pressurized so you say no. That is your *manas vritti*. How you say it is also your *manas vritti*, for if you are feeling under pressure, you will possibly snap, “No!” If you are relaxed, you may look at the person, smile and say, “No, thank you.” The response is different when you are under stress or relaxed, yet both fall under *manas vritti*.

Buddhi vritti is the *vritti* of intellect, logic. When you read a book and start comparing it to other books saying, “In that book it is written like this” or “that person has stated it like this,” the intellectual analysis becomes the *buddhi vritti*, modification of logic and intelligence.

Patanjali speaks of *chitta vritti*, and *chitta* is the storehouse of impressions and memories. To deal with *chitta vritti*, you have to go into your *chitta* through *manas* and *buddhi*. The process of introspection and maintaining awareness during internalization is becoming *drashta* of the *chitta* state. When you practise *antar mouna* you are not watching your *chitta vritti*. You are only watching the thoughts that come to the surface of your *manas*. Therefore, none of you have understood what *chitta vritti* actually is and everybody has confused *chitta vritti* with modifications of mind, with *manas vritti*. The understanding is incomplete.

The way to deal with *chitta vritti* is a totally different subject. You cannot attain it through *antar mouna*. You have to gradually progress through *manas*, clear *manas*, move into *buddhi*, clear *buddhi*, and then move into *chitta* and work there. It is the third level of awareness, observation and purification that Patanjali is talking about.

The five forms of *vrittis* Patanjali mentions are all *chitta vrittis*: *pramana*, correct knowledge; *viparyaya*, wrong

knowledge; *vikalpa*, fancy, imagination; *nidra*, deep sleep, unconscious state; and *smriti*, memory. They are not mental, logical or emotional concepts.

Intent of traditional raja yoga

The intent of raja yoga is not meditation or samadhi. The focus is on clearing the chitta vritti, the third strata of the greater mind. Patanjali stays at this point. What happens if you go back into the tradition of raja yoga, where chitta vritti is not spoken about and where drashta is not conceived of? You complete the hatha yoga practices, then you come into raja yoga and begin to dissolve the lower, gross and instinctive tendencies into more harmonious and luminous tendencies; you move from tamas to sattwa. The focus is on pratyahara. That is the hardest sadhana. Once pratyahara is attained, then dharana and dhyana become spontaneous. The main effort lies in pratyahara.

Pratyahara has been described in a beautiful form in the classical raja yoga. First, withdraw the awareness from the senses. Second, withdraw the awareness from the pranas. Third, withdraw the awareness from the mind, and finally withdraw the awareness from buddhi. As you do so, you purify and merge with the higher element. Thus, the experience of the senses merges with the pranic experience, then the senses and prana merge with the experience of manas, then senses, prana and manas merge with the experience of buddhi, and finally all four, the senses, prana, manas and buddhi merge into chitta, carrying you into the higher state. The effort is in dissolving and not in observing. In the original raja yoga, the effort is in dissolving and transcending, and not in observing, managing or manipulating.

Raja yoga yatra

The subject for Raja Yoga Yatra 1 is *Understanding Asana and Pranayama*, for only by understanding the practices of asana and pranayama and how they help in the attainment of pratyahara, can you understand pratyahara. Raja Yoga

Yatra 2, *Understanding Pratyahara*, covers the basic practices that people do, such as yoga nidra, thinking them to be pratyahara. Even with *antar mouna*, observation of thought, people think it is pratyahara. Similarly with *ajapa japa*, mantra and breath, people think they are practising pratyahara. But what really is pratyahara? That is the focus of yatra 2, and it also includes practices and capsules to develop the state of pratyahara. In Raja Yoga Yatra 3, we cover more aspects of pratyahara and understand how to apply it in life: *Practical Pratyahara*.

An important subject in pratyahara is the practice of yoga nidra. People have forgotten how to practise yoga nidra and they use it to sleep. That is fair enough if you have the need to sleep yet do not let your life pass sleeping in yoga nidra. There are other experiences that can take place with yoga nidra. The second point is, the original practice of yoga nidra as taught by Sri Swamiji, has been altered by the recent yoga teachers. They feel that they are experts in yoga nidra and therefore they can change as per their whim to be politically correct. Therefore, we have to again go back to the basics to note the intent of yoga nidra, why each component is taught in a certain manner, for what purpose, and what is the aim of teaching it the way Sri Swamiji designed it.

All the sessions for this training, whether asana, pranayama, yoga nidra or meditation, have been tailored specifically to make you aware of how far it is possible to go with a practice. This is the beginning of a new yogic journey beyond what you have done so far. Whether or not you become a pratyaharist, you will definitely have a good awareness of the direction in which we are going. With sustained practice I am sure that you will be a winner.

Entering the Inner Dimension

17 September 2018



Raja yoga is seen as internalizing the awareness to experience the gross, the subtle and the higher states of consciousness. From this perspective, raja yoga means becoming aware of the inner dimension. The inner dimension comprises of two components: *vichara*, logic, and *bhava*, feeling. Vichara and bhava constitute the internal dimension of the individual. Logic controls *manas*, the rational mind, and *buddhi*, intelligence, while feeling controls *chitta*, the storehouse of impressions, and *ahamkara*, ego. There is no logic in chitta and ahamkara. There is only a feeling. In manas and buddhi, there is no feeling; everything is logical, defined, pre-determined, following a sequence: a-b-c-d-e-f-g.

The two components of vichara and bhava constitute the dimensions you enter to explore your nature, and entering this field is known as *pratyahara*. Moving your senses from

the outside world and entering inside, into the fields of logic and feeling, centering within or coming together inside, is pratyahara. This is what you experience in pratyahara.

Reverse feeding

The word ‘pratyahara’ has been defined in different ways. One definition is derived when you look at it as a combination of two words: *prati*, reverse, and *ahara*, feeding or craving. It means that pratyahara is a process in which what feeds the mind and the senses, is reversed. Instead of the senses acting according to the mind, the mind now acts according to what you choose. The mind does not dictate, you dictate. The component of awareness dictates. This is *prati-ahara*, reverse feeding.

The mind consumes everything, all the information from the surroundings: the communication between people, the influence of another person on you, your beliefs about the other person, your beliefs about your friends, associates and family members, the desires you have at social, professional, emotional, physical, psychical or spiritual levels. These are the influences that are coming from the outside world into your mind, and your mind responds and reacts by creating two conditions: *raga*, attraction, ‘This is nice’, and *dvesha*, negation, ‘No, I don’t want that’. Acceptance or negation become your normal responses due to raga and dwesha.

An example: when two people are asked to go for a cleaning seva, their responses will depend on their raga and dwesha. If there is raga they will say, “Yes, why not? Let’s go and do it. Two of us are enough, we don’t need more people.” There will be a feeling of optimism, of looking forward to doing something, achieving something, a response of raga which is positive. If raga becomes obsessive, then it becomes negative and detrimental.

Raga and dwesha correspond to your responses, which are instinctive and instantaneous. There is no thinking about a response, there is only expression. There are people who try to think, but often that creates a contrary state: their

expressions indicate uncertainty while their words are chosen to portray confidence. It is the response that shows what you are truly experiencing or feeling, and not what you say, as speech can be modulated or modified while reactions based on raga and dwesha are instant, you cannot stop them. You may be able to maintain a stony face, yet the dimness or glitter in your eyes will indicate your mood and your response.

You always respond to whatever you are receiving from the outside. You are not in control of your faculties, whether of your senses, logic or feeling. However, when you can send back what you are receiving to where it came from, if not fully then at least fifty percent, so its effect on you reduces in intensity, that becomes the practice of pratyahara: 'prati' plus 'ahara', reversing the effect.

Two aspects of pratyahara

Another definition for the word pratyahara comes from seeing it as a combination of the words *pratyaya*, meaning content of the mind, and *hara*, meaning elimination. Pratyayas are the impressions or archetypes which are mental, internal, psychic and emotional in nature, and *pratyaya-hara* is to remove these impressions. Here the internal component is being dealt with whereas in prati-ahara the sensorial, physical and interactive nature is being dealt with. Thus, the two definitions of pratyahara cover both aspects of the personality.

An example is anger. The *Bhagavad Gita* and many other scriptures say that anger comes due to unfulfilled desire. When desires are not fulfilled, then the resulting anxiousness, anxiety and frustration build up to anger. Here, Sri Krishna is talking of the mental aspect of anger, since desire and frustration are internal. It is the lack of what you want that leads to frustration.

Anger also has a physical and sensorial component to it. If a child pulls another child's hair or punches him, a fight will begin. The fight started due to a sensorial action and not due to a desire or frustration. The second child retaliated to the physical sensation. The anger at this point is not mental, but sensorial and physical.

Thus, there are two aspects to the experience of pratyahara. One that has to do with the senses and the other has to do with the mind. Prati-ahara relates to the inputs received from the sensorial, external, environmental dimensions, including friends, companions, family, colleagues, and so on. In pratyaya-hara, the mental component is highlighted. Your expectations, desires, self-image, self-esteem, self-projection, everything connected with the self becomes prominent. When you wish to see yourself as a happy and enlightened being, loving and kind, gentle and compassionate, although you are not any of those, it is also self-projection. Anything that highlights the aspect of the self, be it preservation, esteem, projection or any other, becomes a pratyaya: an impression, a thought, a desire that has germinated and is expressing itself.

The pratyaya of self-projection

Self-projection is a big pratyaya in today's world. Everybody is trying to project themselves through Facebook, Twitter, and other forms of social media. If you do not see enough 'likes' on your posts, you feel people do not like you. You feel that people have to like what you write and if a friend does not like it, you mind it.

The idea of pratyaya in the negative sense started with Narcissus who was infatuated by his own image in the water. The word 'narcissist' came from this act of being self-absorbed. Social media is the global projection of the same narcissistic condition. From an individual, it has become global and now everybody is part of this narcissism. The need to be acknowledged, recognized, respected, seen as someone special and unique is a pratyaya. In this way, the self-motivations become pratyaya.

The dark pratyayas

Pratyayas can be tamasic, rajasic or sattwic. If the pratyayas are negative, then destructive and criminal-like conditions set in, where thoughts, behaviour, actions and understanding

are in the dark space. This is tamasic pratyaya and the most difficult to manage.

When I think of the conditions in the world, especially in the war zones, where people are continuously fighting, seeing bullets, death and destruction, I sometimes wonder what type of pratyaya is forming in their mind. What do they dream of? Are they happy even for a moment in the twenty-four hours? Do they ever experience silence and peace in the middle of the rubble, the bombing and shooting?

What kind of responses are these people developing both at the psychological and sensorial levels? What type of personality, thoughts, desires, ambitions and aspirations are they developing? Children who have never seen a ray of love in their life, who have never known sympathy, who have heard the boom-boom of bombs and bullets right from birth, I wonder what kind of nature, behaviour and pattern of thought are they developing? Do they realize there is something called compassion, love, affection, support and care? Or is it that you become self-aware for an instant and the next moment you die from a bullet?

They have not dealt with or even seen the pratyayas they carry. This is true of many people. Trauma has become a household word nowadays. Earlier, it was a taboo word. If somebody was traumatized, it meant something was seriously wrong, whereas today even three or five-year-old children say, “I am traumatized.” How do they experience, know, or realize the word trauma? They may not understand the word in the way that you do, yet a pratyaya is forming when they say that.

Building blocks

The pratyayas keep forming as you go through experiences, and they become the building blocks of life. They define your nature, personality, the habits you are going to develop, the samskaras you are going to have, and the culture you will create. All this is determined by pratyaya. The yoga tradition believes that if you are able to remove the negative pratyayas

and plant positive pratyayas, life will improve dramatically and drastically.

It is like going into a barren land, working there and converting it into a garden. What was a piece of barren land for thousands of years, has in just ten years become a thriving garden which attracts the attention of everyone. With hard work, care and maintenance, a desolate land was turned into a beautiful garden. This has been the thought behind yoga in relation to pratyayas, “Yes, we have gone through difficulties, we are going through challenges, yet if we can remove the pratyayas that have become the blocks hampering the birth of our creative energy, faculty and awareness, then we can make progress in our lives.” If the tamasic pratyayas or the limiting pratyayas are removed, then the luminous pratyayas will be seen automatically.

A glass half-full

When the dark pratyayas are prominent, the mind is in the dark space. When the rajasic pratyayas take over, the mind has the option to either be selfless or selfish. This is the only saving grace. If you become selfish at this time, then you move further into the dark space. If you connect with the beauty of life in the rajasic state, then it becomes your motivation and inspiration; it becomes an uplifting pratyaya.

It is like saying “The glass is half-full” or “The glass is half-empty.” The situation has not changed, the water level has not changed; it is your analysis, understanding and appreciation that have changed. When you say the glass is half-empty, it indicates a craving, selfish mentality. When you say the glass is half-full, it indicates a recognition of something which is there, which is full. Whether half-full or a quarter-full, it is still full. There is a feeling of something nice being there, and not of absence or a void. It indicates a *swabhava*, a nature of your self, which is positive. You can still quench your thirst, as it is half-full for you and will satisfy you. However, by saying ‘the glass is half-empty’ you are expressing a nature of your self in which absence and craving

are highlighted rather than appreciation of what is there in front of you.

Rajasic pratyayas give you an option to either become selfless or extremely self-oriented and more selfish. If you become selfless, or find a balance between selfishness and selflessness, then you move into the sattwic pratyayas. There is no removal or negation of the rajasic pratyayas, but a gentle movement to the sattwic pratyayas, where the mind becomes luminous due to wisdom and creativity. Wisdom and creativity are qualities of the sattwic pratyayas. This is pratyahara from the second perspective: removal of the negatives and increase of the positives, pratyaya-hara.

The vast range of pratyahara practices

The practices of pratyahara go through awareness of the senses, awareness of the pranas, awareness of manas, awareness of buddhi, awareness of chitta where chitta vrittis are dealt with, which humanizes the ahamkara. This is the range of pratyahara.

People say antar mouna is a practice of pratyahara, yet which pratyahara? It deals with thoughts, therefore it becomes manas pratyahara. It tells you to follow the thread of thoughts, so it also becomes buddhi pratyahara. When you observe the thoughts that appear in the field of your consciousness and awareness, it is manas observation, and when you pick up a thought and follow its link backwards to where it originated, then it is buddhi pratyahara. If that thought created an experience, an impression, good or bad, which has affected you in any manner, and you observe that and remove it, it becomes chitta pratyahara. You are dealing with an experience and not with thought or logic, you are dealing with an impression that you have carried in your storehouse of memories, therefore it is chitta pratyahara. Then, if you let go of your individuality and move into the space of the soft emotions that include compassion, kindness, love, forgiveness, luminosity, then you are removing the aham pratyayas, and it becomes ahamkara pratyahara.

Depending on what you are aiming to achieve, you can practise different levels of pratyahara and access different levels of your self. Yoga nidra for example, if used in the right way, becomes a powerful tool to aid kundalini and chakra awakening. If you practise it only for relaxation, that is another matter, but it can also be the switch for awakening the chakras and kundalini. When a switch is turned on in one location, the fans begin to rotate in another location. In the same manner, the switch for awakening the chakras and kundalini lies in the practice of yoga nidra. When done in the right manner, yoga nidra also awakens many psychic abilities. That is because it clears the chitta. The moment the chitta pratyayas are cleared, the creative abilities or *siddhis* manifest. Siddhis are not powers, they are creative abilities with which you can equip yourself.

Thus, pratyahara has a wide range. It is not just sitting down to withdraw your senses. The pre-Patanjali raja yoga spoke of sensorial and prana pratyahara along with the other levels of pratyahara, whereas Patanjali's raja yoga speaks only of manas and buddhi pratyahara. The practice of pratyahara begins with sensorial awareness and recognizing the need to quieten and relax the sensorial input and activity. Once the distraction of the senses is removed, you then move into prana pratyahara to remove the distractions of the energy field, the pranic field. From here you move to manas pratyahara. In this way, you progress through the subject of pratyahara.

The focus has to be to realize the different layers of pratyahara, to learn to use the techniques to achieve pratyahara at each level so it becomes possible to reach the state of dharana without effort.

Directing the senses

When you begin at the first level, the sensorial aspect, you must keep in mind that the mind has to feed the senses rather than the senses feeding the mind. This is where the prati-ahara concept comes in. The mind has to guide the

senses, rather than senses filling the mind with nonsense. You attempt to develop a state of mind where you wilfully disconnect from whatever the senses are offering you by directing your senses to experience what you want to experience.

An example: if a group of one hundred people start talking all at once and you are trying to listen to me, what will you do? You will make the effort to block out the sound of ninety-nine people just to hear one person. Similarly, you have to shut yourself to anything the environment is offering, and instead direct your senses to achieve what you want, ‘I want to hear only you so I am directing my senses to you and not listening to the outside cacophony that other people are creating.’

I experience this frequently during the sadhanas that are conducted here. The two hundred people gathered may be chanting some mantras or stotras while I have to listen to something else. I have to block everyone out to focus only on what the pandit is saying and be able to repeat it despite the sounds all around. This is management of the sensorial component, prati-ahara, where the mind has to direct the senses to function, according to its choice. Instead, if I follow the senses and repeatedly say to the pandit, “I can’t hear you, can you say that louder?” till I hear his voice overpower other people’s noise, it will indicate that I have not disconnected from the sounds of the crowd. This is an example of how sensorial pratyahara is practised: the senses have to respond by clearing the flood of information and remain true to and focused on what the mind is directing the senses to do or to experience.

Drop the little things

The second is the pratyaya aspect. Here you have to remember that the mind has the ability to dissolve every pratyaya that it encounters. It has the quality to dissolve every impression that it encounters, not only those from the outer world but also those in the inner world of chitta. If you

can remain aware of the pratyayas during the daily activities and keep dissolving them as they come, they will not even enter the psyche or affect you. That in normal language is 'letting go', 'dropping it'. You have to learn to drop the pratyayas in day-to-day situations instead of carrying them: the communications that happen between people, the look that you give to someone, and so on.

Once, when I was one of my tours and it was coming to an end, a senior sannyasin said, "When do we get to see you again?" I shrugged my shoulders and said, "God knows. Whenever the next opportunity comes." After that moment, the sannyasi did not speak to me for three years. I kept wondering, 'What did I do to rub him in the wrong manner?' Finally, when his anger had calmed down, after three years, he told me, "You had shrugged your shoulders and I took that as rejection of me, so I was angry with you." I asked, "For three years you kept that in your heart? Just my shrug?" I realized that he was expecting some kind of solace or an answer such as, "Oh, I'll see you in one or two months or in one year's time." He may have had some expectation which I did not realize then and as the expectation was not fulfilled, it became a personal challenge, a threat, an emotional rejection. He was angry for three years. That made me wonder, how many people carry such innocent little things which change their awareness, thoughts and attitude. Someone will tell you, "You did not look at me and smile." That became the cause of anxiety and depression for them.

What you keep accumulating, and not releasing, becomes a pratyaya. A mere shrug changed his entire relationship. That was a pratyaya. However, if the shrug had been understood in the right perspective, this pratyaya would not have formed. The anger and the feeling of rejection would not have been there and instead, friendship, attachment and the love that has always existed would have strengthened. When you are not able to drop things, they become part of your nature. In life, you have to drop the little things that irritate or hamper you, and not carry them over. You cannot

drop the person who is irritating you, but you can drop what you carry about the person. When you go to sleep at night, you must close one chapter of the day and have a clear, clean page for the next day. Do not carry over any pratyaya balance from today to the next day.

Practising pratyahara

During this training, we will follow the original raja yoga and go through the full spectrum of pratyahara. We will start with a simple practice known as kaya sthairyam. *Kaya* means the body, *sthairyam* means stillness. People think sitting still is kaya sthairyam, and that is the name of the practice. However, this stillness does not apply to the body only; it also applies to the senses, the sensory activities, the mind, the mental activities, and all other dimensions where you experience yourself. Everything has to become still.



KAYA STHAIRYAM STAGE 1: EXPERIENCING STILLNESS PRACTICE

Preparation: Sit in a comfortable posture, hands on the knees in either jnana mudra or chin mudra. Keep the spine upright and straight, gently close your eyes and lips. Become aware of the physical posture, become aware of your body, how you are seated, the position of your legs, feet, hands, arms, back, neck and head. Complete awareness of the whole physical body.

Relax your shoulders, keep the head straight. With the closed eyes become aware of the whole body. Observe the whole body mentally.

Body yantra: 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 front two corners of the yantra are where the knees are placed and the tip of the yantra is under the mooladhara chakra. The knees represent the right and the left sides of the triangle, and the coccyx at the tip of the spinal cord represents the tip of the triangle. Visualize that triangle under the body, and you are seated on top of that triangle.

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

You are sitting on the triangle and it is the Shakti triangle: it is an inverted triangle; you are facing the base of the triangle. The Shakti triangle represents the *prithvi tattwa*, the earth element, the solidity of matter. Earth is the Shakti aspect of Prakriti, symbolized by the red Shakti yantra. Red is the colour of Shakti and the triangle is the elemental component. You are sitting on top of this Shakti yantra for meditation.

Imagine that your body is part of the floor, it is immobile, immovable, like a pyramid. Ensure your body is part of the ground, so that it will not shift.

Awareness of sensations: Feel the sensations of your body and create a mental image of your body in your mind. If there are any aches and pains, tension and stiffness, become aware of them. Do not move but be aware of the discomfort. Be aware of the aches, stiffness, tightness, pressure and sensations on the skin. Direct your awareness to the discomfort, if any, and be aware of nothing else. Let the pain, stiffness and the tension be the focus of your attention and awareness.

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

Observe the whole body. Feel the stability of 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 and relaxation. Recognize all sensations. Become aware of all sensations in the right leg.

Develop stability of the right leg.

Become aware of the left leg, the pressures, the stiffness, the contact, the relaxation, and the sensations. Develop stability of the left leg.

Observe the whole back and the sensations.

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

Observe the left hand and the left arm.

Intensify the awareness by observing the whole front, chest, throat, abdomen, head, and the whole body. Observe the whole body.

Resolve to remain still: Intensify your awareness as much as possible. If the awareness strays to other subjects, maintain the awareness of the body. Say or suggest to yourself mentally, 'I will not move my body, I will be still, I will not move.' The whole body must be like a statue, absolutely motionless.

If you have the desire or impulse to move a finger or a toe, adjust your clothing or scratch, try to overcome the urges. If you feel the need to move or scratch, you must say to yourself, 'I will not move my body until the end of the practice'.

Experiencing lightness: In some time your physical body will become stiff and rigid. As you observe the state of your physical body, which is now immobile, you will find yourself becoming increasingly detached from your body. You will begin to experience and see your body as something separate from yourself.

You will find that your body feels as though it is weightless. You will find that your inclination to move the body has lessened.

Be aware of the physical stability, the stillness and the silence. Become aware of the stillness which is physical and the silence which is mental. Become aware of the gradual disconnection from the physical experiences.

Externalization: Now stop the practice and take a few long, deep breaths and once again reconnect with the physical body and mind.

Externalize the mind by moving your awareness to the sounds and the environment. Bring your awareness to the wind against the clothes and the skin.

Slowly move your fingers and hands, toes and feet. Bring the hands together, rub the palms to create heat, place them over the closed eyes and slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Practical pratyahara

You practised the first part of the series of techniques known as *kaya sthairyam*. *Kaya sthairyam* begins with visualizing the triangle on the floor. The knees form the base and the back becomes the tip of the triangle. You are seated on this inverted triangle which is red in colour, representing the earth element, and it is also a Shakti yantra. You are seated on this yantra, and the torso forms another yantra, which you will experience in the next session.

At the first level, you became aware of the stillness and firmness of the body, and recognized the sensations in the body, including those of discomfort. Then you disconnected from the sensations, identifying once again with the firmness and stability. This practice is the foundation of *kaya sthairyam*, which progresses stage by stage. The first stage is the physical stillness, the second is the sensorial awareness, then it moves on to pranic awareness. Then it changes into the manas component. Pratyahara follows the same concept as the sheaths: *annamaya kosha*, the sensorial, *pranayama kosha*, the vital, *manomaya kosha*, the mental. In *manomaya kosha* it travels through different stages too.

Pratyahara is not simply one technique or one aspect of yoga but everything that you do in life, when it is done in the right manner, with restraint and control. When you drive perfectly, without any mishaps in changing the gear, braking or accelerating, it is because you are focused. That is a pratyahara. If the mind becomes dissipated, the brake, accelerator, clutch or gear may get out of sync; you may suddenly press or release the brake or the accelerator, which was unnecessary. Perfection in life comes with absolute pratyahara. From this perspective, pratyahara is not a meditative process; it is a process of self-recognition: “I recognize myself and I harmonize myself.” “I recognize myself and I balance myself.” This is pratyahara.

Awareness and Relaxation

18 September 2018



The different components of the mind that are used in pratyahara and the significance of chitta vritti have been our subject of discussion. Patanjali spoke of chitta vritti and not manas vritti or buddhi vitti, and chitta vritti has been wrongly defined as ‘modifications of the mind’. The mind here means the gross mind, which does not represent chitta.

When you begin to think in terms of ‘chitta’ vritti, your entire understanding and focus moves away from the mind and you look only at chitta. When you think in terms of ‘modifications of the mind’, you are ignoring chitta and simply looking at the gross aspect of the reactive mind. You are not even thinking of the knowledgeable or the relaxed mind; you are thinking of the reactive mind. This aspect has not been understood so far.

The deeper or higher mind is composed of vichara and bhava. *Vichara* means logic, *bhava* means feeling. Vichara controls the manas and the buddhi components; they are born out of vichara, whereas chitta and ahamkara are born from the bhava component. Therefore, vichara and bhava have to be understood in order to deal with manas and buddhi, and chitta and ahamkara.

When you enter the realm of vichara and bhava, that is pratyahara, and pratyahara has two definitions. 'Prati-ahara' is the first definition wherein the normal process of the senses guiding the mind is reversed: the mind now guides the senses. The senses do not dictate to the mind, but the mind instructs the senses to act in a specific manner. 'Pratyaya-hara' is the second definition. *Pratyaya* is the corresponding feeling that develops in any situation, which is retained as impression or memory. Pratyahara is a process used to remove the impressions or the feelings associated with an experience. Through all the different techniques of pratyahara, the lower nature of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara are observed and transformed. This entire subject is known as the pratyahara system.

Levels of awareness

Two attributes are important in developing pratyahara: awareness and relaxation. Imagine you are standing in a dark room with a torch. You turn it on pointing at a specific location in the room. That location becomes illuminated while the other parts of the room remain in darkness. It is the same with the aspect of mind called awareness. Nobody is homogeneously aware of everything. Everyone lives in the dark confines of self-perception. Where the light from the torch of awareness falls, you become aware of that situation, that thought or idea in that particular moment. The mind is aware of everything, yet you are not aware of everything. You are aware of only one thing, as awareness belongs to a different dimension of mind and does not cover the entire range of consciousness.

A research was done in the late 1970s in which a group of regular moviegoers of a particular cinema-theatre were selected at random, who went there at least once or twice every week. These people were asked several questions about the movie theatre: “How many windows does it have? How many are closed and how many are open? Is there any curtain there? How many lights? How many fans? How many rows of seats?” Nobody could answer these questions, even though they were frequent visitors to the place. They just said, “We don’t know.” After they had all confirmed that they did not know the answers to the questions, they were put under hypnosis. In the state of hypnosis, they were asked the same questions again. Everyone gave the exact description, accurate and precise to the last detail. Once they came out of hypnosis, they were asked the same questions and again they said, “We don’t know.”

This example indicates that awareness is a natural function of the subconscious mind, though not of the conscious mind. The moment you walk in here, your mind knows how many fans are there on the ceiling, how many bulbs, poles and pictures. Yet, if I ask you, you will look around, count and then give a number. Consciously you are not aware of the numbers, yet your mind, without you, in its natural state, picked up everything. If you are hypnotized, you will also tell the exact numbers.

There are two aspects to awareness. The first is the conscious awareness and the other is the subconscious awareness. In conscious awareness, all the senses are active, therefore what attracts or pulls your attention, becomes the main subject of your awareness, perception and recognition. This happens at the conscious level. To give you another instance: right now you can feel the wind on your body, but you are not aware of it, as your awareness is focused on the sound of my voice. If someone directed your attention to the fan, suddenly you will realize that the fan is running and you will start becoming aware of the wind blowing against your skin. Although the body has been feeling the wind, you

did not recognize that experience. Therefore, the conscious awareness is not an integrated or homogeneous awareness, it is a fragmented awareness.

The subconscious awareness is considered to be homogeneous. In yoga nidra you enter into the subconscious awareness where you are neither awake nor asleep. In this awareness you hear the first *Hari Om* and the last *Hari Om* and don't hear anything in between. You are not sleeping; you are awake yet you have not heard anything else. You have moved into that subconscious awareness where half an hour of yoga nidra felt like ten minutes and you say, "What happened? I did not hear anything. I only heard the first *Hari Om* and the last *Hari Om*." If you were able to verbalize that experience, you will realize that though you were not aware of anything, your mind still picked up everything.

Developing conscious awareness

You cannot move into that subconscious awareness at present, as you are not trained to shift from the conscious perception to the subconscious perception. You have to use the fragmented awareness and increase its span and duration. The attention span in people has gone down tremendously in the last few decades. In the 1980s, it was said that the attention span of the mind was seven to ten seconds. At present it is no more than three seconds and decreasing. It means that you are not able to remain focused for more than three seconds in normal situations. If you have to remain focused for more than three seconds, you become agitated. This also affects the span of your awareness. It is this awareness that has to be developed, beginning with the conscious awareness.

Yoga nidra is a classic example where you take your mind to different parts of the body, develop an intense awareness of those parts by visualizing, feeling and making an effort to relax. Making an effort to relax is the physical effort, visualizing the body parts in your mind is the mental effort, and becoming aware of the body part and the sensations therein, the heat, the tingling, the movement, is the

pranic awareness. You are continuously moving these three levels of awareness through different parts of the body by simultaneously feeling the body part, creating an image of the body part, and letting go.

In yoga nidra, though the mind is kept engaged continuously, still people go to sleep. Surprisingly, if you let the mind wander free, you will remain awake, since in this state you can fantasize, imagine and visualize anything. You will toss and turn, just as it happens at night when you cannot fall asleep. Sometimes people practise yoga nidra three or four times and yet they cannot sleep, as their mind is so highly strung.

It is important to develop the awareness component and it has to begin with sensorial awareness, not mental awareness. In meditation, most people start with mental awareness, therefore after some time when the senses become lethargic, they think, 'We need to shake this guy up little bit.' They become powerful and attract your attention, and the mental concentration is lost. You are starting from the head and regressing to the senses, and then again you start from the head and regress to the senses. There is no forward movement, and that is why the meditators have not achieved what they should have achieved in their forty to fifty years of meditation, due to the continuous regression. You aim high and you fall low for you have not stabilized the lower ground area. An acrobat places padding down on the floor in case he falls, but you do not. You think you are strong enough to deal at the mental level when you are totally weak in dealing with your normal day-to-day situations. Pratyahara begins with a basic understanding of how you can be aware of the sensorial, the muscular, the pranic and the cerebral functions, how to pacify them and then move into the mental dimension.

Creating relaxation

Awareness is the first component, the right arm of pratyahara. The left arm is relaxation. Pratyahara will only happen when, in a state of relaxation, you look at yourself. In the state of agitation, disturbance, confusion and conflict, the practice

of meditation is next to impossible. The agitated mind will never allow the energies to be pacified.

You have to make a conscious effort to relax. Relaxation is not sleep. Sleep is sleep and relaxation is a condition that you can develop. You sit down, apply a method to develop a relaxed condition in the body and mind, and in ten minutes you are relaxed. Sleep is another matter. Do not confuse sleep with relaxation. Do not combine the two ideas. Relaxation means letting go of all the tensions and tightness which are sensorial and physical, and stresses, anxieties and agitation which are mental. Relaxation has to take place at these two levels, and also at the pranic level.

Many times, you can relax physically yet the mind does not relax, and sometimes you can relax mentally but the body remains uptight. This indicates an imbalance in the koshas: in annamaya, pranamaya and manomaya koshas. You try to relax the mind and the body; however, you don't try to relax the pranas, and pranas are the fuel for the body and mind. The pranas keep pouring their fuel into the fire while you are making the effort to relax, become calm and peaceful. There is bound to be a struggle in yourself. Therefore, you should also be able to relax the pranas along with the senses and the mind. Then relaxation will take place instantly.

I had an experience of absolute relaxation once when I was in South America. I was flying from Colombia to Central America and the flight was over Panama. One hour prior, a military coup had taken place in the country, and all the aircraft flying over Panama were told to land. Once the flights landed, the passengers were thoroughly checked for their documents, luggage, destination, and so on. Our documents were taken away and we were herded to a bare room with iron bars on the windows; it looked something like the airport brick prison. All the passengers were highly-strung and nervous. Some were chain-smoking, some shaking and trembling, some pacing up and down. It was not the age of mobile phones or social media; it was the snail age. We were totally cut off from everything and nobody knew what was happening.

I was watching all the three hundred passengers of the flight, totally directionless, rudderless, brainless, mindless, engaging in one activity or the other to somehow manage their anxiety and fear. I just sat in a corner on the floor and practised ajapa japa: breath and *So-Ham*. I thought to myself, ‘Well, I don’t know for how long I am going to be here, so let me enjoy my time.’ I knew I couldn’t do anything by becoming nervous or anxious. I couldn’t change the environment, the people or their decisions. After a few minutes, people started looking at me and walking up to me asking, “Why are you so relaxed? Are you not tense? Are you not anxious about what will happen to you?” I said, “No, why should I be? If something has to happen, it will happen. It’s of no use to me to become tense and lose my clarity, willpower, energy and strength in speculation as to whether I will be shot by the firing squad or deported.” You never know the dictatorship. After about four hours, we were asked to leave and we boarded the flight. The sigh of relief from people as they collapsed on their seats was quite a sight.

Today, when I reflect on that situation and remember how everybody was responding and what my response was, I can definitely see a difference. The ability to relax gave me the strength and the wisdom to be peaceful and quiet. I had to relax not only the senses, which were getting tighter as the police read out the names of the passengers, one at a time, to give the passport, but I had to also relax the mental anxiety by letting go and reassuring myself, “The name will be called out, the time will come’.

This is how you do not allow situations to build into a state of tension. You have to release the symptoms as you notice them. If you find that your hands are clenched, consciously release them, let go. If you find your breathing becoming rapid, consciously lengthen it. Don’t allow the tension and stress to build up at the physical level itself, for what happens to your body affects your brain and mind too. In this way, pratyahara begins with relaxation, and not with meditation.

Yoga nidra is a classic example of the practice of relaxation, just as it is an example of developing awareness. In the early days, Sri Swamiji used to teach us two types of yoga nidra. One was for physical relaxation, which lasted for thirty to forty minutes, and the other was for spiritual awakening, which lasted for three to four hours. When yoga became public, the spiritual yoga nidra was not taught any more. Only the specific yoga nidra for physical relaxation was taught, which has now been modified by many people according to their own thoughts and ideas. The original yoga nidra is not practised by anybody, not even in the Satyananda Yoga group, and nobody remembers the original intent of the practice.

Relaxation with awareness

The two limbs of pratyahara are awareness and relaxation. Though relaxation begins with muscular and physical relaxation, this physical awareness also relaxes the brain.

All your body parts are represented in the brain, and that structure is called homunculus. If you see a picture of the homunculus, you will find that all the different parts of the body have a specific centre in the brain. The thumb covers the largest area along with other extremities such as the feet and toes. Other body parts have a comparatively smaller representation in the brain.

When you are relaxing the body by relaxing different body parts, for example, the right hand thumb, this feeling of relaxation also travels up to the area of the homunculus which is controlling the thumb experience. Therefore, while you experience relaxation in the thumb, the corresponding centre of the brain also relaxes. When you have covered the entire body, the entire cortex of the brain is relaxed. Due to this, you experience the mind moving into a drowsy state. If the brain centres remain active, you will not be drowsy. This state of drowsiness is what Sri Swamiji says is the subconscious mind, where you are neither awake nor asleep. In this state you can perfect pratyahara, find the balance between the sensorial and the mental.

Relaxation in pratyahara is engaging relaxation, it is not passive relaxation. The mind is constantly guided, “Visualize this, feel this, move there, move here, do this, do that.” Every instruction is to engage the mind. When you follow the instructions you engage the mind, you do not let the mind wander free. By engaging the mind in a specific activity you pull together the resources, the *shakti*, the power, from being dissipated and distracted. When the energies are focused and gathered, relaxation is experienced. When energies are dissipated, stress is created. Therefore, the yogic concept of relaxation is a dynamic relaxation, it is not sleep or passive relaxation. So, awareness and relaxation represent the two arms of pratyahara.

Practising pratyahara

The two practices which allow awareness and relaxation to take place simultaneously are kaya sthairyam and yoga nidra. With these two practices, you enter into pratyahara. They represent entry into the sadhana of pratyahara. After awareness and relaxation have been achieved to a degree, then pratyahara actually begins.

The journey begins with annamaya kosha, covering all the senses; then you move into pranamaya kosha, isolating the pranas from the sense objects; and finally you move into manomaya kosha. Through antar mouna you begin to work with manas. Then with other practices you work on buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. Through all these practices, the state of pratyahara keeps developing until all the points of attention, whether sensorial, pranic, mental or emotional, are ably harmonized and managed, allowing you to internalize and explore your inner nature.

KAYA STHAIRYAM STAGE 2: CHARMA (SKIN) PRATYAHARA PRACTICE

Preparation: Sit down in a comfortable posture. Body upright and straight, hands on the knees in jnana mudra or chin mudra. Eyes gently closed. With the eyes closed become aware of the whole physical body. Adjust and accommodate your body so you are physically comfortable and you can remain immobile for at least fifteen minutes.

Check each and every part of the body mentally. Look for any tension, tightness, pain, pressure. Adjust your posture. Become comfortable.

Body yantra: Once you have checked your whole body and become comfortable, then imagine or 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 and the tip of the triangle is the coccyx bone of your spine. The triangle is red in colour, on the ground, and you are seated on that triangle. The knees and buttocks make the triangle, the Shakti yantra.

The Shakti yantra represents the *prithvi tattwa*, the earth element, the solidity of matter. Earth is the Shakti aspect of Prakriti, symbolized by the red triangle. The red colour is the Shakti component and the triangle is the elemental component, and you are sitting on top of that in meditation. 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 a tilt, the balance of pressure and weight will change. Equalize the weight and pressure so you are seated firmly on the triangle. Now visualize another triangle going upwards, left arm, right arm, the spine. The tip of the triangle is the crown of the head. Your body is like a three-sided pyramid.

Feel the solidity, the stability of the body in the form of a pyramid. Imagine that your body is part of the ground, immobile, immovable, like a pyramid. Make sure that your body is part of the ground and it will not move.

Awareness of sensations: Become aware of all the sensations in the body. Create a mental image, a mental perception of your body and become aware of all the sensations that you can experience. If there are any aches and pains, if there is any tension and stiffness, become aware of them. Do not move but be aware of the discomfort, the pressure, the aches, the stiffness, the tightness, and direct your awareness to the source of this discomfort. Let the discomfort become the focus of your awareness. Remain alert.

Now direct your awareness to the right foot. Be aware of nothing else but the right foot. Create a mental picture of the right foot and feel the sensations in it, the pressure, the touch, the heat, the tingling. Whatever is the sensation, become aware of it.

Observe now the left foot. Transfer your awareness to the left foot. Observe and feel the sensations connected with the left foot.

Bring your awareness to the right leg. Observe the areas of discomfort, accept these, recognize these. Become aware of all the sensations in the right leg, and experience of stability in the right leg.

Awareness of the left leg, the pressure, the contact, the stiffness, the sensations, and experience of stability in the left leg.

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

Bring the awareness to the right arm and the right hand. Go into the experience of all the sensations in the right arm and the right hand.

Awareness of the left arm and the left hand.

Observe the whole front, the abdomen, the chest, the throat, the head and the face.

Observe the whole body.

Resolve to remain still: Intensify your awareness of the physical body as much as you can. Say to yourself mentally, “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. Even if there is a feeling to scratch, even if a mosquito bites, do not move. Just be aware of what is happening, the experience and the sensation, but do not move. Even if you have the impulse to move a finger or a toe, to adjust your clothing or to scratch, overcome the urge.

Whenever the thought crops up to move, whenever you feel the need to move, say to yourself mentally, ‘I will not move my body until the end of the practice’.

Awareness of touch sensation: Now, when you have developed the awareness of physical stability, we move to the next stage of the practice. In the following practice the body will not move, only the mind will follow the experience: awareness of the 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 at the maximum and also the minimum. Become aware of all those parts of the body where you feel the air flow. Move your mind from the top of the head into the mid-face region, into the neck region, into the shoulder region, chest, arms, legs. Feel all the places where the air is touching your skin, just the flow of air, not the clothes, only the air, the flow of air and skin. 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 due to the air. Expand and enlarge your awareness. Be firm, do not move. Do not focus on the airflow. 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, not the moving cloth but only the cloth that is not moving with air. Leave the awareness of the moving cloth and the air and the respective body parts. Focus on areas where there is no movement of the cloth. Focus on the sensation of the still cloth covering and touching the skin.

Now take your awareness to the legs and become aware of the parts that are touching each other, one body part in contact with another body part. Hands and the thighs, feet and the body, calf muscles and the body, all the different parts that are in contact with each other, become aware of the sensation of that contact.

The body and the floor, hands and the thighs and knees, feet and the thighs, the legs. Become aware of all the sensations that come with the contact of one body part with another. Become aware of all the sensations of pressure that you can experience with your body seated on the floor.

Externalization: Now stop this practice and externalize the mind. Externalize the mind, become aware of the external environment. Take a slow, long and deep breath in and while breathing out, chant the mantra *Om* three times.

(*Om* x 3)

Repeat after me: *Om Shanti Shanti Shanti. Hari Om.*

Slowly bring your hands together and rub the palms. Place the hands over the closed eyes and gently open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Go the extra mile

This was the second stage of *kaya sthairyam* in which you move to the touch sensation. It is at the physical level: experiencing the wind and the skin, the wind and the movement of the cloth, the areas where the wind did not affect movement, the touch of the cloth with the skin, the contact of the body with the floor, the contact of the feet and legs, the contact of the hands, and so on.

A little bit of effort has to be made. You have to push yourself. When people go to the gym to exercise, they do five rounds of push-ups on the first day, then six rounds the next day, then seven rounds the following day, and gradually they keep increasing. The same principle should apply in yoga.

Develop the ability to overcome laziness by pushing your body to do a bit more each day and avoid laying in *shavasana* to relax after each *asana*. If you have been doing ten rounds of *surya namaskara*, then do eleven rounds today to go that extra mile. Similarly, ten rounds of *pawanmuktasana* can be eleven tomorrow, twelve the day after, and keep increasing little by little.

Be it *asana* practice or meditation practice, each day you have to make the effort to go that extra step, either one extra round, or one extra minute of sitting still, or one extra minute to smile. If yesterday you smiled cumulatively for ten minutes, today you must smile for eleven minutes, tomorrow for twelve minutes. Always try to increase one minute or one round or one count every day and you will feel a definite and drastic change in your own practice and experience.

The habit or the urge to move the body has to be controlled. Once you have come into a place, a position, a condition, you must extend it a little bit more every time and this will help you a lot in your practice, in your own understanding of the *sadhana*.

Consciousness and Prana

19 September 2018



The two limbs of pratyahara are awareness and relaxation. When you think of awareness, it is important to understand that the conscious awareness is a fragmented awareness, as at the conscious level you are connected with the senses and sense objects. Different senses in association with different sense objects evoke a response of *raga* or *dvesha*, like or dislike. When like and dislike emerge, the awareness is focused on them. It is a momentary focusing of awareness, what you experience as reaction. When somebody says something, you like it; the awareness is there. You dislike it; the awareness there. The conscious awareness depends on *raga* and *dvesha*, and due to the many pulls of these

two responses, it is fragmented and not holistic or all-encompassing.

At the subconscious level, however, awareness is homogeneous. It extends to every nook and corner, in all directions. The more you stretch a fabric, the thinner it will become. The same happens with awareness. The subconscious awareness is softer, subtler, gentler than the conscious awareness. It works underground, unaffected by raga and dwesha of the senses and the sense objects, interactions and thoughts, expectations and projections. Therefore, this subconscious awareness knows, experiences, sees and hears everything. All the functions of the senses are inherent in the subconscious awareness.

The upanishadic concept of consciousness

The Upanishads describe four states of consciousness: *jagrit*, the waking state; *swapna*, the dreaming state; *nidra*, the dormant or the unconscious state; and *turiya*, the transcendental state. The Upanishads have also defined each state in terms of an individual. The *jagrit* state is known as *Vaishwanara*, which means existing in the world, somebody who lives or exists in the world. *Nara* means the person, the life form, the mortal existence, and *vaishwa* is derived from the word *vishwa*, global, universal. Therefore, *Vaishwanara* is one who is mortal, one who lives in the world.

How does one interact with the world? It is through the senses. With whom do the senses interact? With the sense objects. Who is experiencing this? It is the greater mind, the self. Self does not mean the soul. Soul or spirit is much higher, beyond your comprehension and experience in the waking state, just as you are far away from sleep in the waking state. When you are sleeping, all the senses become still; when you are awake, all the senses are active. It is the opposite. In the same manner, self here represents the greater mind which defines who you are, not the soul or the spirit.

Water consists of the elements H_2O , which is two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. However, you do not think

of water as H_2O . You think of water in a glass or a flask, in a lake or a river, in the ocean or in rain. You never think of water as H_2O . H_2O is the essence, the soul, the spirit, which is not looked at as separate components of H_2 and O , but as a contained composition. That contained composition is what defines the self.

In the case of Vaishwanara, it is defining the contained self. What is contained in the self that makes the self tick? It is the senses, the pranas, the greater mind consisting of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. The essence of all these, like H_2O , is in the form of the spirit which is not confined to a specific location but pervades every atom, every cell of your form. The Upanishads further state that Vaishwanara has nineteen mouths through which it feeds itself, *ekonavinshati mukhah*. The outer person, the individual, has nineteen mouths that feed it. They are: the five karmendriyas, the five jnanendriyas, the five pranas, the four aspects of mahat. The moment you become aware of one mouth, the awareness is focused on that mouth. It does not extend to all the other mouths, and therefore the fragmentation.

Tejas, the second level of consciousness, the subconscious state, also has nineteen mouths that it feeds from, but it feeds from 'invisible' objects, or those not perceived by the senses, according to the Upanishads, whereas Vaishwanara feeds from 'visible' objects, those perceived by the senses. These different mouths indicate what you are receiving or consuming. Even in sleep you are consuming. Only through sustained effort in turiya, when you are able to cut all the heads, do you become unified. Ravana, the demon king, had ten heads. He cut each one and offered it. You have nineteen external heads which you have to cut in Vaishwanara. You have to cut nineteen internal heads in tejas. Then the experience becomes one, unified. This is the union that people talk about, the union of spirit with God. It is in reality a theory of gradually evolving, stage by stage, and experiencing the universality of your existence.

The tejas consciousness

The underlying subconscious stage has been called tejas in the Upanishads. *Tejas* means the self-illuminated one. The consciousness here is uniform; it is not fragmented. It is self-luminous. It has all the qualities and abilities of the external senses and pranas. You have within your deeper mind the knowledge of how many leaves are on a tree and on the surrounding trees as well. If you ask somebody to hypnotize you to get the numbers out and later count all the leaves to see if they match with the number you described, you will be surprised at how accurate you are. What this indicates is that without your conscious knowing, your consciousness and awareness have already taken in everything.

This was the idea that guided Sri Swamiji to experiment with yoga nidra on me. I may not remember the words consciously if I read the scriptures, yet my subconscious awareness knows the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Bible*, the *Koran*, everything by heart. It is there. Even for you, whatever book you have opened in your life, whether on science and philosophy, or novels, comics and newspapers, it is all there. You can access any of them by going into the subconscious state and then extract the information.

The information in the subconscious forms the foundation of chitta; all the experiences of the past are accessible to you in the form of memory stored in chitta. That is why you are able to recall a beautiful scene you may have seen fifteen years ago during your travels. The image can still be most vivid in your mind, and it can still evoke the same response of joy, happiness, contentment, beauty, serenity, so that you say, “I really liked that place. It has left a deep imprint on me. I would like to go back there once again.” This is chitta, the subconscious awareness.

The critical agent

The sages realized that to perfect pratyahara it is not just the senses and the mind that have to be dealt with. In the first stage of pratyahara, you have to reverse the process of

the senses feeding the mind so that the mind then feeds the senses. In another stage of pratyahara, you have to become aware of the mental impressions and clear the negatives of those impressions. However, there is a third component which makes both the senses and the mind tick.

I once visited a morgue in a medical school. There were about twenty to thirty bodies lying on the table, all intact, looking healthy and well-formed. The guide who was showing me around said, “Swamiji, you want to try something?” Pointing to the heel of one of the bodies, he said, “Pull this nerve here and see what happens to the hands.” I pulled the nerve, and the fingers moved. The bodies were wired. You could move a part of the body, and that would trigger another part to move. They were maintaining the connection that exists between muscles, ligaments, nerves and the brain.

According to science, electrical impulses in the brain are the function of the mind, and the mind does not have its own independent existence. It is totally dependent on the cerebral functions of the brain. Therefore, if the brain is present, the mind should also be present. Why is it not active in a dead body? In a dead body, the sensorial inputs and outputs have ceased. There is nothing coming in or going out. It has a dead brain which is not functioning, and therefore the faculties of consciousness do not exist.

What is it that can be injected into this dead body to bring it to life? Prana. When prana flows in, the senses begin to function, the mind and the brain begin to function. Therefore, prana is the critical ingredient, not the senses or mind. You think of only the senses and mind, as you experience them more than you experience your prana. Prana is the critical agent. Everything is non-functional in the absence of prana. Nature becomes non-functional in the absence of prana. The trees dry up, turn brown and their leaves become brittle. If prana returns, a yellowing leaf will become green again, flowers will become beautiful, fragrant and colourful.

Prana is the vital agent and pratyahara of prana is the next level of pratyahara.

Prana pratyahara

Prana is life-force. Can you disconnect yourself from prana the way you can disconnect from the senses or the mind? Normally you cannot, however, in yogic practices you can have this experience; you can develop the ability to disconnect from prana. Pranayama is one practice that leads you to pranic disconnection, and this is also the ultimate purpose of pranayama.

The emphasis in the traditional system of pranayama is not on inhalation and exhalation, but on *kumbhaka*, retention of breath. In *kumbhaka*, the active pranas are stilled, the dissipated pranas are concentrated and focused. You are practising pranic pratyahara using the breath as the medium. You might have experimented with this when you were a child: you held the breath and the stamina or the strength increased.

When you exhale, the pranas are being expelled and the body loses its strength. That is why you cannot push something heavy while exhaling. Yet when you hold the breath and push, you can move an almirah which is twenty times your weight, as the prana shakti has become concentrated.

Holding the breath in concentrates the prana inside, while holding the breath out removes the prana from all its external sources, the senses and the organs, and only one type of prana remains, the fifth type called *vyana*. When you hold your breath for a long time, you begin to see lights and also feel light. This is the *vyana* effect, which leads to *kevala kumbhaka*, holding the breath out without any effort, the conclusion of pranayama. The scriptures state that with *kevala kumbhaka*, external retention of prana shakti, one attains *kaivalya*, the ultimate state of transcendence. This speaks volumes about the importance of prana shakti.

Though prana pratyahara had been spoken about in the classical raja yoga, Sage Patanjali omitted the idea from his *Yoga Sutras*. It is an important aspect if you want to develop immunity within yourself to the negativities that surround

you. It is also important to use this faculty as a connection with the positives to improve your own self.

Yoga nidra belongs to the prana pratyahara group. It does not belong to the pratyahara practices for the senses, manas, buddhi or chitta.

Vision as prana

The sun is composed of prana, and its seat in the body is the eyes. According to the tradition, the residence of the sun is in the eyes and vision is like the rays of the sun.

Vision is a form of prana. Just as sunlight reaches everywhere, there is light even under shade, in the same way the sight or vision reaches everywhere; everything is seen, nothing is left out. My vision is seeing everyone with the same intensity and feeling, there is no diminishing of any faculty. It is only the awareness that makes one focus on something specific.

Scientifically, the sense organ of vision has a large influence on the behaviour of the brain. When your eyes are open, you can see the shapes, the sizes, the colours, the clothes people are wearing, everything that is around you. If you close your eyes, the function of vision stops; the prana of the eyes due to which you were observing, seeing, experiencing, stops flowing. All the visual information going into the brain suddenly stops.

Visual information is the major percentage of information going into the brain. The information from touch, taste, smell and hearing is comparatively less. That is because you are seeing everything. The brain in fact filters out this information so that you can remain balanced, harmonious, centred and focused. If you were to become aware of all the things the brain is experiencing, you would not be able to function.

The visual faculty creates the connection of prana between the individual and sense objects. Through vision, you are connected with everything around you, not through smell or touch. Therefore, eyes or vision has been given an important

place in the yogic tradition and practices, as it represents a dynamic and active function of prana.

Vision pratyahara

Vision pratyahara is a technique that allows you to see your connection with a sense object, then disconnect and withdraw prana from it, to deaden it. Once you withdraw prana from an association, that object becomes dead for you. If you do not withdraw prana from the association, the object remains alive in you, for your entire lifetime. Usually the negative is retained and the positive is removed by the gross mind. All the good that people do for each other is never remembered, but one frown or bad word is always remembered. The bad becomes the *vritti* that causes tension and trauma in life. If the pranic association with this *vritti* is removed, then the crisis will not have any effect in altering the harmony of your nature and personality.

In vision pratyahara, *vichara* and *bhava*, thought and feeling, have to converge. For instance, think of somebody who is close to you, your son, daughter or any other member of the family. Through *vichara*, thought and ideation, you create the image of the person, 'My son looks like this. Whenever I think of him, the image of his face which I create is exactly as he is in reality.' This is the *vichara*, the *manas* and *buddhi* components forming the image. Then comes the *bhava*, the feeling and association component, 'My son, I love my son.' This is the pranic component.

When you look at a flower and feel attracted to it, your attraction is due to the pranic association and not due to its form. In a bouquet of twenty roses, one flower will attract your attention and you will pull it out. That particular flower pulled your prana; you associated with it and found some relationship, some attachment, some connection. That is why you pulled it out while the remaining flowers stayed in the bouquet.

The first component is the thought about an object, which is mental or logical, and the second component is the

feeling that is experienced towards it. The feeling that binds you is the pranic component. It is easy to be objective when you are observing your thoughts which are not connected to you deeply. It becomes difficult to remain objective when a thought comes with which you are deeply associated. You respond according to your feeling, not according to what you should do. That is why it is important to practise pranic pratyahara, for it allows you to be objective and appropriate.



KAYA STHAIRYAM STAGE 3: DRISHTI (VISION) PRATYAHARA PRACTICE

Preparation: Sit down comfortably. Both hands on the knees in jnana mudra or chin mudra. Spine upright and straight. Eyes gently closed. With the eyes closed become aware of the whole body. Become aware of your whole physical body and the state in which you find yourself. If there is any tension or tightness, discomfort or pressure that you want to release, then you can do so now. Make yourself completely comfortable and be at ease with yourself. Check each and every part of the body. Be comfortable, quiet and peaceful.

I am going to read a passage from one of the texts, *Gheranda Samhita*, which defines pratyahara. Listen to it, for it represents the instructions for the practice. After reading the text I shall guide you into the meditative practice.

*Yatra yatra gataa drishtirmanastatra prayachchati;
Atah pratyaharedetadaatmanyeva vasham nayet.
Puraskaaram tiraskaaram sushraavyam vaa bhayaanakam;
Manastamaannityamyaitadaatmanyeva vasham nayet.
Sheetam chaapi tathaa choshnam yanmanassamsparshayogatah;
Tasmaatpratyaharedetadaatmanyeva vasham nayet.
Sugandhe vaa'pi durgandhe mano ghraaneshu jaayate;
Tasmaatpratyaharedetadaatmanyeva vasham nayet.
Madhuraamlakatiktaadirasam gatam yadaa manah;
Tasmaatpratyaharedetadaatmanyeva vasham nayet.*

Wherever one looks the mind follows, therefore, withdraw it and put it under the control of the self.

Take the mind off words which are respectful or insulting, pleasing or displeasing to the hearing and put it under the control of the self.

Cold and heat affect the mind, through the sense of touch, therefore withdraw it and put it under the control of the self.

Take the mind from both the fragrant and the obnoxious odours that distract it and put it under the control of the self.

If the mind becomes attracted towards tastes which are sweet, alkaline, salty, sour, etc. take it away from these and place it under the control of the self.

This is pratyahara.

Chidakasha awareness: With eyes closed, become aware of the whole body. See the whole body mentally. See the whole body from the top of the head right down to the toes.

Final observation of the body, 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. Once you have become physically comfortable, bring the awareness to chidakasha, and observe chidakasha. Become an observer of 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 any conscious effort and then they dissolve back in the dark chidakasha.

Be an observer of everything that you can see in chidakasha. If you see colours, acknowledge them. If you see streaks of light, acknowledge them. If you see a shadow, a figure or a shape, acknowledge it and move your awareness, attention to the next experience.

Be a passive observer of chidakasha. Watch the dark screen like a movie screen. Whatever you see, acknowledge, and then move forward. 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 space of chidakasha. Develop a clear visualization, a clear image of the flame. If the flame dissipates and dissolves, if the image dissipates, let it dissipate.

Again wipe the chidakasha clean. Again visualize in the centre of chidakasha a dot, which moves towards you and takes the shape of a candle flame. Develop a clear visualization, a clear image of the flame. If it dissolves, if the image dissipates, let it dissolve and dissipate. When it is dissolving, wipe the chidakasha clean.

Wipe out everything from chidakasha. Clear chidakasha. Only the dark space remains. No image of the flame, no other form, figure, colour, light, streak, just the deep and dark space of chidakasha.

Chidakasha writing: Now visualize chidakasha as a blackboard. Visualize chidakasha as a blackboard. See yourself mentally standing in chidakasha in front of the blackboard. In your hand you will find a white-coloured chalk and with that chalk draw a small circle on the blackboard of chidakasha, a mental circle, 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. Visualize in your hand a silver chalk and under the circle draw a crescent moon. Another crescent moon, another crescent moon, another crescent moon, crescent moon, crescent moon, crescent moon.

Now visualize a red chalk in your hand and 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.

Again, with the red chalk draw a three-inch-wide inverted triangle inside the previous red triangle. Another triangle, another triangle, another triangle, another triangle, another triangle, another triangle.

Now clear the whole blackboard completely. Wipe everything clean.

We are going to draw a yantra. Listen carefully. With the red chalk, draw a triangle pointing up, a triangle that is about six inches in dimension. Now with the same red chalk draw a three-inch-wide inverted triangle in the middle of the first triangle. Above that inverted triangle draw another triangle bigger than the previous one, a six-inch-wide triangle. Above that a nine-inch-wide triangle.

So we have one normal triangle pointing up and we have two triangles pointing down in the middle of the first triangle and a third triangle pointing down, nine-inch-wide, over the first upward triangle.

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

The 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 space.

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

Open your eyes for thirty seconds. Look straight ahead.
(Pause for 30 seconds) *Om*.

Close your eyes. Keep the eyes closed and 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 in your mind, 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, in the canvas of chidakasha, look at the right side of the picture that has emerged and see if what you have created corresponds with what you know to be correct.

Look at 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?

Now clear the blackboard. This time once again you will open your eyes for thirty seconds, and without moving your head, look around, especially in the areas where you were fuzzy in the previous memory and sharpen that awareness.

Open the eyes for thirty seconds.

(Pause for 30 seconds) Om.

Close the eyes and once again allow the image to appear in chidakasha like a polaroid film. Look at the areas where you were fuzzy or hazy before and see if you can sharpen the image, clear the image. You are the artist. You are seeing the image appear in chidakasha. It is the same picture that your awareness has seen through the windows of the eyes. Try to recreate it.

Now clear the blackboard of everything, no more image, no more re-creation. 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. 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. Neutralize the feeling that was evoked when you looked at that image. Again, become balanced, centred, focused, objective.

Now search for another memory of something pleasant or beautiful that you have seen in the course of your life and which has created an impact in your mind. Recall that from memory. See that in chidakasha. Develop a vivid image. Develop a clear picture.

Now clear the blackboard. Wipe the memory clean. Remove the visual content as well as the feeling content. Remove the pranic content. Again, become neutral, balanced, harmonious, peaceful, silent, self-contained.

Externalization: Now externalize the mind. Drop the awareness of chidakasha. Once again connect with your environment. Slowly take a deep breath in and while breathing out chant the mantra *Om* three times with me. Breathe in. (*Om* x 3)

Repeat after me: *Om Shanti Shanti Shanti. Hari Om.*

Slowly move your hands, fingers, feet, legs. Bring the hands together, rub the palms and place them over the closed eyes, and slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Working with Prana

20 September 2018



There are two different trends of raja yoga. One is the original vedantic system, which was the lifestyle and culture of the rishis, renunciates and everybody else in the vedic times. The other is from the Samkhyan system, when an emerging new thought influenced an individual, Sage Patanjali, and he tried to understand the prevalent subject from this new mindset.

Vedantic and Samkhyan systems

In the Samkhya system, the tree of evolution depicts the evolution from nothing to composition of the physical body. There is no reference to prana here. Manas, buddhi, chitta, ahamkara and the gunas are mentioned among the thirty-

six elements of Samkhya, yet not a single word about prana. This means that the Samkhya system, to which Patanjali belonged, did not accept the idea and concept of prana, as it is not mental. The Samkhya system describes progression of the mental evolutes, and not of the pranic. The Vedanta system, which is the original system, recognizes the existence of the element of prana.

The Vedanta system calls prana one of the bodies or sheaths that the human personality is made up of: the pranamaya kosha. This system also perceives the self and the nature in the form of prana, as luminous sparkles. The vedantins view a human being as not composed of solid matter, but of sparkles which are self-luminous. The Samkhyan system states that everything is mind and matter, and there is no concept of luminosity or prana. The exposition of the subject differs, as one system describes the flow of life from matter into prana and prana into mind, while the other system has negated prana completely.

Pulling back

The focus of raja yoga is pratyahara, and pratyahara is self-absorption, not self-extension. Extension happens in the material and sensorial world. You extend yourself through your senses and your mind in all directions, and when you begin to pull back, they become absorbed in the self. It is like the genie coming out of the bottle and taking a giant gaseous form, which is the extension. When it needs to go back into the bottle, it dissolves from the giant form and contains itself back into the bottle. The extension has been withdrawn, it has been absorbed. In the same way, you have to withdraw the senses, the mind, the pranas.

The four components of the total mind are manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. Manas and buddhi represent logic, and the logic is given momentum due to prana. Chitta and ahamkara represent feeling, and the feelings are also given momentum due to prana. Prana is an integral part of the feelings you associate with attachment.

When you infuse prana into something, the mental response is that of attachment and identification. When you look at something and do not infuse your prana into it, then there is no attachment. An example: you have three children standing in front of you. One of them is yours and the other two are of your friends. With whom will you be connected? Whom will you be attached to? Whom will you call yours? You will identify your own child from the group of three and say, "This is my child." This identification, feeling or connection is not objective, whereas the association with the other two children is objective. That is because they are not yours, they are not extensions of your prana and attachment. If you can extend your prana into the other children, you will have the same feeling of love, belonging and oneness for them. The same feeling will be replicated. It is the prana that creates the idea of attachment and of belonging.

Another example. There is a family consisting of husband, wife and children. This family has been told to meditate daily on each other. They sit down, close their eyes and begin to meditate with eyes closed. They create a form of each other in their minds, look at the form with the ideation, 'They are my parents' or 'my children' or 'I am their mother, father, brother or sister', depending on the relationship. A feeling of empathy, closeness and bonding is experienced.

After about a month of practising this meditation, which they enjoyed as it developed a deeper bond, an instruction is given: "Now, detach yourself. This the next phase of the training." They struggle, thinking, 'How do I detach?' 'Will this detachment reflect in my household and social life?' Many such questions come up, and whenever they close their eyes, they still see the image of their family member, but the feeling is no more a happy one. It is a sad feeling, for now they must detach. They begin to feel the separation in their mind and heart. In this feeling of separation, there is suffering and pain, as they are leaving something they are attached to. When this happens, the intention of the

meditation is lost, for rather than maintaining objectivity, they have fallen into the experience of attachment.

It is the prana that holds them there and does not allow them to move out; it is the prana that makes them feel that they would lose everything if they move out of that zone. Now, another person might think, 'Okay, I know this person is my husband, wife, sister, son or daughter. I will continue to follow my dharma towards them, fulfil my obligations and duties. Yet can I reduce the pranic association, so that I become freer in my own heart and mind, and not be dependent on or expectant of what I can get from them. Can I release myself from that expectation? Can I release myself from the emotion that makes me suffer if there is a feeling of separation? Can I accept them as the individuals that they are, and at the same time recognize that they are an integral part of my life?'

By just changing the perspective in this way, you will be able to deal with the mind. You will be able to infuse positive prana into manas and buddhi by following logic and developing understanding, and connecting with positivity. By becoming positive and by not feeling threatened, you can withdraw your prana from the sense objects with which you are connected. The moment prana withdraws from the sense objects, whether it is the latest sports car, a five-million-dollar mansion, or a family member, the suffering is gone. The moment you are able to remove the detrimental pranic component by being positive, by acknowledging the relevance, by working to fulfil your obligations and dharma, a feeling of freedom follows.

Infusing positive prana

Manas and buddhi are the dimensions of logic. When you come to the dimension of feeling, *bhava*, you are dealing with chitta and ahamkara. The expressions of chitta are recognized as the six conditions or *svabhavas* of mind, which have a distinct identity, *guna* or attribute associated with them. The six are: *kama*, passion; *krodha*, anger; *lobha*, greed;

moha, infatuation; *mada*, arrogance; and *matsarya*, envy. These are the expressions of chitta beyond vrittis and samskaras.

Many times in meditation, when the vritti of arrogance, passion or greed comes up, it becomes intense and powerful. You might have heard stories of meditators who lost control and were unable to handle their own behaviour and actions, becoming like a mad person. The intensity is so strong that it colours the manas and buddhi. It does not remain separate from manas and buddhi.

Even the samskaras or impressions are coloured by one of the six conditions. The basic foundation of chitta are the six conditions, and the impressions and memories represent the extension of these six conditions. For instance, if you have a memory of some anger in your life, which you have not released, it is coming from krodha, an underlying foundation of chitta. You can forget a person, but you cannot forget krodha. That *shakti*, that power, remains within you. You can clear the memory of the person or the incident from the mind, but that is only one instance of the experience of krodha. Krodha exists as part of the nature of chitta.

For pacification of this nature of chitta, you have to withdraw the prana from krodha. You can then be angry at one person and smiling at the next person, both at the same time. It is possible when you are not holding on to something, rather you are making a factual statement. This is a method to deal with the experiences of chitta.

When you have a passion and zeal to do something, to achieve something, first analyze it. If you are doing it in the right manner, the outcome will be appropriate and correct, and then you follow the progress. If not, simply remove the prana from that idea and it will die a natural death. You don't have to feel, 'Oh because of this I can't do it now.' You don't have to go into the state of self-pity. If you do so, you are not removing the negative inside, instead you are giving more food to the negative feelings. By feeling sad or bad, you are giving more vitamins and blood to something that needs to

die. You are keeping it alive by moving into a state where the absence of something is making you sad.

From this perspective, the six conditions are expressions of chitta, and prana has to be taken from them for the mind to attain harmony. You then move into the realm of aham, where you simply experience your being at present, 'I know I am because I exist.' You experience this, which is the self-awareness, self-identity.

Working with prana

Pranas are many in number. Usually only ten are spoken about, the five major ones: prana, apana, udana, samana and vyana; and the five minor ones: devadatta, kurma, naga, krikara and dhananjaya. There are also other forms of prana: manas prana, buddhi prana, chitta prana, aham prana. Beyond these also there are other pranas which direct this dimension of experience and connection.

Prana is an important aspect of the raja yoga tradition. The chakras and kundalini also represent prana. The Samkhya system does not speak of chakras or kundalini. It speaks of the turiya state. This is one reason why people have not understood prana in the right context, and why their advancement in meditation is hampered.

You think of meditation as dealing with either the senses: inputs that you are receiving from outside, or dealing with the mind: what you are generating inside. You try to sort and solve these two areas, yet the connecting agent between the senses and the mind, which is prana, the cause of discontentment, continues to remain. You only avoid the symptoms, but the cause is strengthened by giving prana to it, by thinking about it. Just as soil is given nourishment by adding compost, any experience is given nourishment by thinking about it. This kind of thinking becomes brooding, brooding becomes worry, worry takes you into depression, and then a solution is hard to find.

The idea of prana pratyahara is to first awaken the pranas and then pacify them. In Sri Swamiji's satsangs and

lectures, he speaks of a system called nyasa, which is found in the tantras. In this system, different types of mantras are placed on different parts of the body, each intended to evoke a different pranic response. There are mantras for *shuddhikaran*, purification. When these are placed on specific regions of the body through touch, cleansing of the pranic centres and channels takes place. It is a process where mantras are chanted and simultaneously different parts of the body are touched to activate the prana shakti in those parts. There are practices of nyasa where only the mental process is used: different mantras are placed in different parts of the body by visualizing the part in your mind.

Sri Swamiji derived the practice of yoga nidra from the nyasa system. Placement of a mantra creates a response in the prana located in the region, and this idea was used in the past for spiritual realization. While most people know of the relaxation aspect of yoga nidra, Sri Swamiji in his original teachings used it for spiritual purposes. He gave two systems of yoga nidra: one, the short, forty-minute one for relaxation, which everyone practises; the other, the long, three-four hour one for spiritual awakening, which he taught to only a few people.

The glue of prana

Prana shakti is not just prana, apana, samana, udana, vyana, or devadatta, kurma, naga, krikara, dhananjaya, or even manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara pranas. It is a homogeneous experience of everything put together. Everything that is fragmented is put together and you see that as a form or experience. The agent that puts everything together is prana shakti, the active element. An example: you have a jigsaw puzzle and you are putting one piece at a time in its place. Who is doing it? The jigsaw puzzle is not doing it by itself. Somebody is putting it together and that is you. You are not the jigsaw puzzle; you are the maker of the picture of the puzzle. Prana shakti operates in the same manner, according to vedantic thought.

The universe and the cosmic self are seen as pulsations of prana. From the vedantic perspective, everything is pulsation of prana. In the absence of prana, destruction takes place. As long as the pranas are in the body, there is no decay. The body begins to decay the moment it dies. Why is it not decaying now while you are alive? Why does it wait for the prana to leave the body before it begins its decay? It is because prana is the glue, the agent that holds everything together.

Reaching the luminous chitta

The practice of prana pratyahara belongs to the original raja yoga tradition. You progress to it only after you have worked with the senses, manas and buddhi. When you work with the senses, you learn to detach them from their associations. When you work with your manas, you know how to direct your senses and mind to do the right thing. When you work with buddhi, you are able to bring luminosity to the dark areas of your own intelligence and cultivate special traits of discrimination, to know the difference between right and wrong, appropriateness and inappropriateness, correctness and wrongness of a situation, an event, an act or a thought. Buddhi allows the understanding of dharma to take place. Therefore, buddhi is an important component.

Chitta allows clearing of the six conditions. When chitta becomes luminous, you can say that it is the experience of self-realization, the absence of everything that was detrimental. There is luminosity of everything that is uplifting, positive and enriching. This is illumination of chitta. Even Patanjali has used this idea, by stating that when you work through the vrittis of chitta, you can experience samadhi, which is illumination.

KAYA STHAIRYAM STAGE 4: SHRAVANA (AUDITORY) PRATYAHARA PRACTICE

Preparation: We shall practice pratyahara of the auditory sense awareness. For this, you will have to sit in nad-anusandhana posture, placing the legs in front with the knees bent and elbows on the knees. With the palms you will cover your ears.

The practice will be done in two stages. In the first stage, while sitting in this position you will be following the instructions for listening to outer sounds. In the second stage, with the ears closed, you will listen to the inner sounds until I say *Om* three times. When you hear *Om*, remove your hands from the ears and wait for the next instruction.

Sit down comfortably, you can cross your arms, hold the fingers together, the way it is easy and convenient. You can keep your spine bent or straight, however it is convenient and comfortable for you. There is no hard and fast rule. The only rule is that you become the ears for the duration of the practice.

Make sure that you are relaxed and comfortable. Adjust your body so you can sit comfortably in this pose for at least 15 minutes.

Once you have adjusted your body, close your eyes. With the eyes closed, mentally visualize your present physical posture in your mind. The way you are seated right now, visualize that. In the visualization, move your awareness through different parts of the body.

Visualize in your mind how you are seated, with the legs in front, the knees bent, visualize the position of your hands, arms, elbows on the knees. Observe the whole body and the body posture.

Listening to external sounds: Now, listen to all the sounds that you can hear externally. The sound of the birds, the sound of hammers, the sound of people talking. Any sound that you can hear, become aware of it. Only the external sounds.

Controlling the sounds: Now, listen carefully. You will be plugging your ears with the palms, and you will practise five rounds of bhramari. When you are finished, bring the hands back down and identify the same sounds that you were hearing before.

So we begin. Plug the ears and perform bhramari pranayama five times. (*Practice of bhramari*)

Om Om Om.

Now identify the same sounds, as before, but this time with a difference. Pick one sound and see if you can gradually increase the volume of the sound. Then decrease the volume. If you are able to do this, then shut down the volume.

Then move to another sound behind the previous one. Again increase the volume, decrease the volume, shut down the volume, and move to a third sound. Pick up a third sound and increase the volume, decrease the volume, shut down the volume.

Pick up another sound. Increase the volume. Decrease the volume. Shut the volume.

Pick up the sound of the fan. Increase the volume. Decrease the volume. Increase the volume. Decrease the volume. Shut down the volume.

Listening to internal sounds: Now listen carefully to the instructions. Again you will be closing your ears with your palms, and this time you will listen to all the internal sounds, any type of sounds that you hear in your mind, and you will keep on listening to them until you hear me say *Om*. When you hear *Om*, again practise bhramari pranayama for five rounds. After that, become silent and again listen to the deeper, subtler sounds in your mind.

I will repeat the instructions once again. You will close your ears with the palms and listen to the sounds inside the head. After some time when I say *Om*, practise bhramari pranayama for five rounds. After that, continue to listen to the inner sounds. At the end, when I say *Om*, bring the hands down.

So we begin. Plug the ears and listen to the inner sounds.
(*Listening to inner sounds*)

Om.

(*Practice of bhramari*)

Om.

Clearing pratyayas: Once again you will close your ears, but this time you will have to recreate sound. You will have to listen to a piece of music or sound which you might have heard in the past and is in your memory. You bring out the best piece of music or an event where sound was prominent from your memory, and try to listen to it, recreate that sound in your mind. Recreate it, increase the volume, decrease the volume, and then shut the volume. When I say *Om* then you bring the hands down again. We begin. Close your ears and recreate the music.

Om.

Externalization: Bring the hands down and connect with the outside environment. Slowly rub the palms, place the hands over the eyes and then open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Hearing without sound

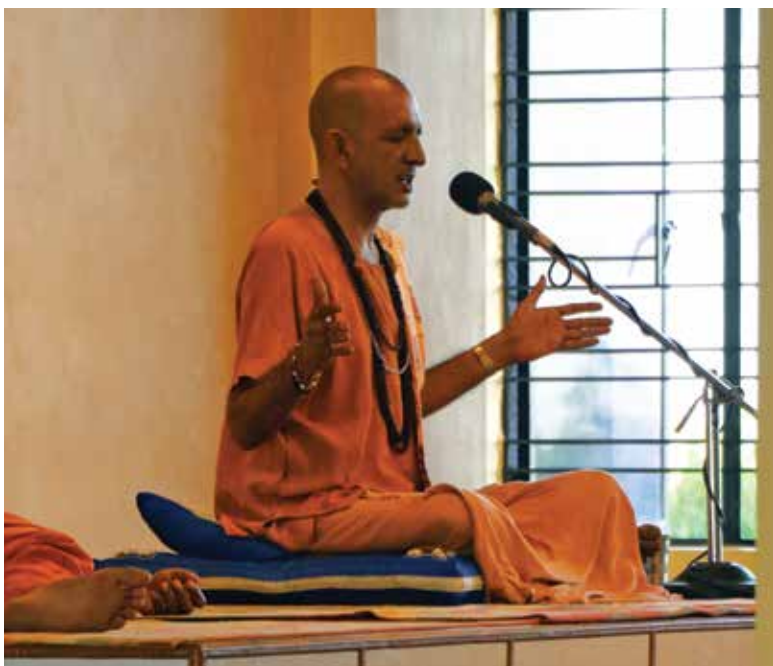
We practised a simple introduction to the different types of pratyahara techniques. There are four stages to each practice, and we have done only the first stage, so that you receive a glimpse of the systems, the techniques and the theories of pratyahara.

The auditory experience is often referred to in the higher sadhanas of yoga. The book by Baba Muktananda, *Chitshakti Vilas, The Play of Consciousness*, talks of the different experiences generated from inside, such as visual, auditory, tactile and smell. He speaks of the different sounds one may hear, such as that of thunder, flute, bells, gongs. In the scriptures too, particularly the Yoga Upanishads, these inner sounds are spoken of. These are sounds that are generated inside at the subtle level, and each sound indicates a level in your progress.

Similarly, in visual experience, Baba Muktananda speaks of the blue pearl. The scriptures also describe experiences of symbols and images that appear, and yantras that are formed. Many of these mental and psychological experiences indicate your progress, and therefore in the higher sadhanas of yoga, it is advised to maintain a spiritual diary. You don't have to write down how many hours you slept, what you ate, what you did, what you did not do, but make a note of any experience, any sound you hear in your meditation, any vision you see. A collection of these will indicate the path you are travelling upon. It will give an understanding of the progress and become an inspiration for you. Try to do this rather than being excited with new theories and concepts. For teachers also, this is useful material to decide what should be the next step for their students.

These things are not impossible. In satsangs in the past, I have shared my experience in relation to music and sound. Once I was staying alone in an isolated campground of one of the American National Forests. One night, after doing my sadhana, I went to sleep. I woke up suddenly to the sound of loud music. I thought some fellow in his caravan may have come to the next spot and was playing the radio on full volume. I peeked out of the tent, it was pitch dark and nobody around. I thought maybe the wind was carrying the sound, so I got in the car, turned on the headlights, and went around the campsite, but nobody was around. I wondered where the music was coming from. I then realized that it was coming from my own head.

Then, a thought came: 'If it is coming from my own head, can I control the volume?' I tried, and after some attempts, I was successful. That whole night I played with my volume dial, increasing and decreasing, enjoying the experience. It was a continuous experience, which lasted for three days. After that, I developed an ability where I could listen to any piece of music, Asian, western, classical, rock, jazz, and reproduce it the next moment on the organ. It lasted for three months, and I did not pursue that path after that.

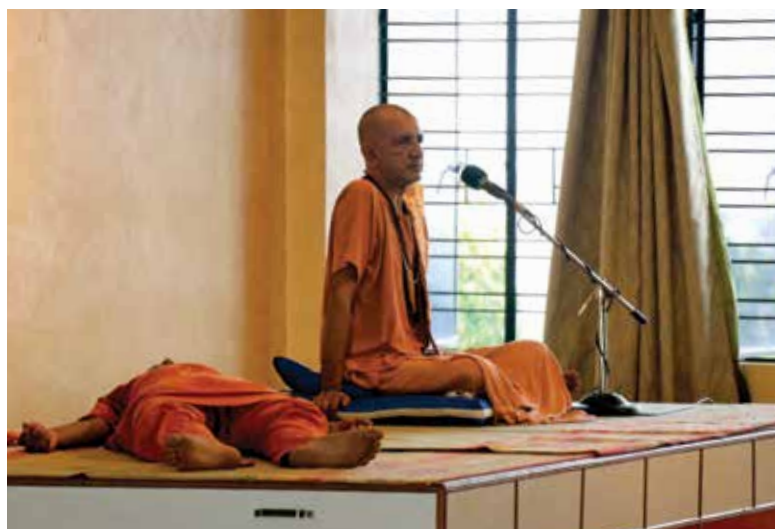


The experience of the sound, the volume increasing and decreasing, indicated a rewiring of the brain and prana to develop a natural ability to reproduce music. How does one develop creativity? It is not something that drops from heaven. It is a rewiring of the brain, of the pranic system and the mental system. The plug is put into the right socket according to the input needed, whether 3 volts, 6 volts, 12 volts, and the electricity flows.

When you practise sadhana, you will see inner visions, hear sounds, experience tastes. For instance, when you imagine you are sucking into a lemon, there is a natural contraction in the mouth. Just by thinking about a lemon, you feel that particular taste. Why does this happen? The memory is physical, so the experience is also physical: contraction of the muscles, activation of the salivary glands and the taste buds, and so on. Similarly, at other levels too, such reactions take place.

Open Your Heartbook

21 September 2018



The focus of raja yoga is not yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, dhyana or samadhi, but perfection of pratyahara leading to dharana. These are the two practicable components. Dhyana and samadhi are experiences. They are not something you practise to achieve. They happen when you have perfected pratyahara and dharana.

Pratyahara is generally understood as withdrawal of the senses, but with the practices we have done, you would have realized that the senses are only one aspect of pratyahara. The external inputs come into the mind and you react and respond to those inputs. The other aspect is the impressions you accumulate and gather, in the course of the day, in your

waking hours, sleeping hours, and throughout life. These impressions are called *pratyaya*. These are not sensory inputs. They are your sentiments, feelings, prana.

The play of pratyayas

The pratyayas begin as a simple impression and have the potential to become samskara and karma. Throw a bucket of water on the floor. If you clean it up immediately and dry up the surface, no trace will remain. However, if you leave the water there, it will leave a stain. To get rid of the stain, you will have to use a lot of soap and scrub hard. In the same way, the impressions that come into the mind, when not removed, become samskara. If you clean them up instantly then the surface of the mind remains dry.

The samskara becomes karma when water accumulates in a spot every day, dries there, gradually seeps into the earth, so that you always see a dirty patch. No matter what you do, you cannot clean it. Even when you remove the dust from the top, you still see the outline of the patch. Putting cement or tiles on top of the patch will not help, as in the course of time the water will come through the joints. The laziness or inaction in the initial stage to clear the spot of water, ultimately becomes karma, which cannot be covered with anything. The patch will always be seen. Pratyahara means removing or clearing the drops of water as and when they fall on the ground, and not allowing them to dry up naturally.

In order to clear the pratyayas, you must approach them from three different areas of pratyahara. First, the sensory input needs to be contained, redirected and guided by wisdom, *viveka*. The two components of wisdom are discrimination and objective analysis, which dictate the senses to act in an appropriate manner. This is the first level of pratyahara. The second is manas and buddhi pratyahara. This is the pratyahara of thoughts and logic. The third is chitta and ahamkara or asmita pratyahara. The four, manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara, cover the four aspects of the mind, and the practices are different for each group. The practices that

apply to manas pratyahara do not apply to chitta pratyahara. Similarly, the practices that apply to buddhi pratyahara do not apply to asmita or ahamkara pratyahara. The direction is different in each level of pratyahara experience for clearing the pratyaya, the impressions.

Working with gunas

You have to also recognize that each level and state of mind is coloured by the three *gunas* or attributes: sattwa, rajas and tamas. A thought can be sattwic, rajasic or tamasic, depending on which guna is highlighted at a given time. An emotion, a memory, a perception, each can be sattwic, rajasic or tamasic.

In every behaviour of manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara, you must be able to recognize the guna. If your manas is flooded with eighty percent tamas, you have to ask how to withdraw yourself from that guna. If your buddhi is filled with sixty percent rajas, you have to ask how to withdraw from it. To do this you have to develop the ability to disconnect. The connection has always been there, the effort is made in the disconnection. Once the disconnection takes place, you have to reconnect again, but now to the plug of *dharma*, appropriateness, and not to the plug of *vasana*, desire. This is how manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara enter the realm of appropriateness, where everything happens as it should, in the correct and appropriate manner. This eventually becomes a natural trait. From all this, the sattwa component in the four levels of the mind begins to increase.

Senses and prana

The next level of pratyahara is pranic. The senses and the mind are no heroes if prana is zero. For the senses and the mind to become heroes, prana has to be fully active and awakened. This means that wherever your senses go, your pranas should also go. If you touch an inert object, say a microphone, you get the experience of touch. At the same time you also get the experience of prana, the physical and

gross, in the form of heat in the hand and coolness of the object, sweat in the hand and dryness of the metal, warmth in the hand but no feeling in the object. In comparison, if you hold somebody's hand, the feeling is different, as you are holding something alive and not something inert. The feeling, the feedback and the sensations are totally different.

Wherever the senses go, the prana also goes. The awareness of the sense perception is due to prana. If prana is not there, you cannot be aware of the sense perception. Hot or cold to touch, sour or sweet to taste, pungent or fragrant to smell, pleasing or displeasing to see; without prana, there is no recognition of raga and dwesha. It is prana which gives you the recognition of like and dislike. The senses are only a medium for you to connect and the mind is only a medium for you to function. Your involvement and interaction are dependent on raga and dwesha, and these are given life by prana. Thus, the substratum of all connection is prana.

Memory and prana

Pranic pratyahara is not a simple thing. If pranic pratyahara happens, then even memories dissolve; they do not exist anymore. Memories in your mind exist as there is prana in those experiences. As long as the prana is there, the memory will be strong, powerful and vibrant. Something that happened to you in your childhood and left an impression, is stored in you as a memory. What you had seen, touched and experienced at that moment was with the senses, the mind and prana. Now, though you are not in that situation any more, yet the images created by your senses, mind and prana are retained as memory.

You can sit down, close your eyes, chose any event from the past and turn the photographs one by one. You will discover that there are more photographs in your mind than that in the hard drive of any computer. Just keep on turning the pages, in each page you can either see the whole event or every second of the event, depending on how sharp and clear your memory is.

Memory is known as *smriti* and absorption into memory is a *chitta vritti*. *Smriti* has been described as a *chitta vritti*. What you have retained, that memory, the *chitta vritti*, has all the subtle components, not the gross but the subtle components, of your experience that you have had sometime in the past with your gross senses and mind. Pleasant *vrittis* do not bother you, rather you like to identify with the pleasant, the good and the positive. You should identify with the good, the pleasant and the positive, but within limits. You should not develop an over-expectation of something grander. Whatever you are experiencing, that is you at present, so be happy with that. The moment expectation comes in, you forget the present and want something bigger, more pleasing and fulfilling. The experience of the present is gone. The realization of the present is gone. Instantly, the desire for more develops, which creates an imbalance.

In *pranic pratyahara*, it is the *pranic* component that has to be removed from the memory. The image can remain, but the *prana*, the vibrancy, the vitality, the life-force, the connection is taken away. The image will be retained or cleared, depending on where you want to go. If you want emancipation, then the image has to be cleared, the blackboard of the mind has to be wiped out, the hard drive has to be emptied. If you want creative participation in life, then retain those images, but without the *pranic* component, and use them as a learning experience. Appreciate that they improved your awareness, participation, understanding, knowledge and skill. Then they will help you develop creativity and grow in a positive direction.

Once the *pranic* component is removed, an idea, thought or experience becomes dead. Once an idea, a conditioning or a habit dies, a sense of fulfilment and freedom comes in.

Recognize and accept where you are

Habits are difficult to change, and something that is far more deeply rooted than habit is even more difficult to get rid of. You think that you can change these impressions with

logic and thinking? You cannot change a basic habit through continuous effort, despite your debate and discussion on 'How should I do', 'What should I do', 'What is the method?' You apply all the aspects of logic and make effort the entire day, yet the habit is not changed. Therefore, do not think that fifteen minutes of meditation at night will bring the dramatic change.

You do not even know what lies within. You cannot even control the external factors, so how can you manage the internal factors? You cannot control your sleep; in every yoga nidra you drift off into sleep, so how can you control and manage pranic pratyahara? Do not have high-flaunting ideas about yourself. You are unable to deal with the most basic components in the appropriate manner, and yet you expect to reach pratyahara. That is the unfortunate plight of spiritual aspirants.

The yogic and spiritual systems are clear; it is the aspirant who uses them wrongly. You may think, 'Why did we not know all this before?' Well, because previously you were not connected to vidya, you were connected only to the practices. You were too self-centred and engrossed in your own feelings and expectations from a practice rather than the experience.

This is the reality, therefore do not have high expectations of yourself or anyone. You are not aware of your strengths, let alone the flaws. In pratyahara all these things are seen and also how they are coloured by sattwa, rajas, and tamas. People say that managing sensorial and psychological traumas are difficult. They are peanuts compared to what you encounter as rajas, tamas and sattwa in manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. A trauma indicates a moment in your life; this indicates your entire life in a single moment. Pratyahara is an entire life in a moment. It is a big shift, therefore do not think of it in a light manner, 'Oh, wonderful, from tomorrow I can call myself a raja yogi and advertise myself on Facebook.'

Prana has to be withdrawn even from Facebook so that the attraction or the pull to Facebook is gone. Instead, try to open your Heartbook. Facebook is sycophancy and narcissism

at its best and Heartbook is connection and compassion at its best. So, close the Facebook, open the Heartbook. Take away the prana from the Facebook and bring prana to the Heartbook. Then you will become a yogi, not with the withdrawal of the senses, but by withdrawing the prana from the gross and the material and placing it where your true human nature lies. Then you will discover that by being a true human you have also become divine. This is what our paramguru Swami Sivananda says.

KAYA STHAIRYAM STAGE 5: RASA (TASTE) PRATYAHARA PRACTICE

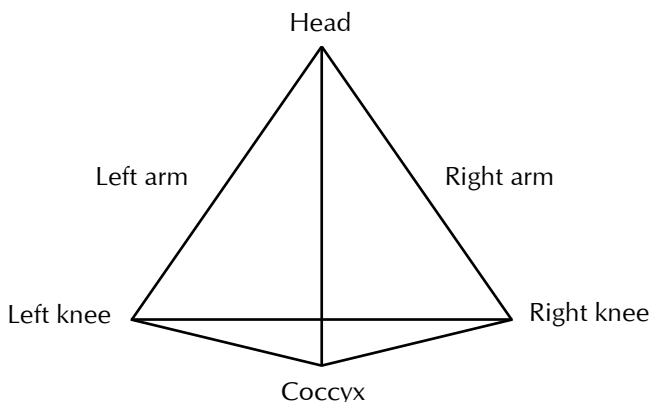
Preparation: Sit down comfortably, body upright and straight, hands on the knees in jnana mudra or chin mudra. Gently close your eyes and lips.

With eyes closed become aware of the whole body. Observe the whole body mentally. If there is any tension, tightness, discomfort or pressure in any part of the body, then release it. Be at ease, be comfortable, and be relaxed. Be happy.

Body yantra: See the whole body sitting on the floor. Imagine that you are seated on a triangle drawn on the floor. The base of the triangle and the two sides of the base represent the two knees, and the tip of the triangle represents the base of the spine. Visualize a triangle drawn on the floor and you are seated on the triangle.

Now, see another triangle, pointing up. Its apex is the head, the right arm and the spine form its sides. See yet another triangle pointing up: with the left arm and the spine forming the sides and the head the apex. See a third triangle pointing up in the front part of the body: the two arms are the sides and the head is the apex.

The legs and spine form one triangle on which you are sitting, the arms and head and spine form the other triangles, so that your whole body is like a pyramid.



Develop the awareness of solidity and firmness of the body. Just like a pyramid is unshakeable, in the same manner your body is unshakeable. Experience the firmness, stability, balance and motionlessness of the physical body. See the body in the shape of a pyramid. Feel the solidity, the stability, the firmness, the motionlessness, the balance of the physical body.

Experiencing present tastes: Now, take the awareness inside your mouth. Bring your awareness inside your mouth: the inside of the lips, teeth, upper palate, lower palate, tongue, the sides of the tongue, the surface of the tongue, the bottom of the tongue, the inside of the tongue where it goes down into the throat, the tongue touching the teeth or the palate, saliva in the mouth. Be fully aware of everything inside your mouth.

Now be aware of the taste in the mouth. Sweet, sour, salty, bitter, alkaline, acidic, pungent, spicy, minty, whatever be the taste, be aware of it. It may be light or it may be strong. Be aware of it, the taste that exists in the mouth. Identify the different tastes, one by one. If there is only one taste, remain focused on it. If you can evoke different tastes and experience them, do so.

Controlling the tastes: Now stop this practice of observing the taste, and practise khechari mudra, turning the tongue

backwards, with the tip of the tongue going back and the back of the tongue touching the upper palate. Breathe in khechari and just focus on the turning of the tongue. Do not think about tastes, just the practice of khechari and the awareness of breath.

Now release khechari and bring to mind one taste, the taste of lemons, in the mouth. The sour taste of lemons. Recreate that taste in your mouth. Imagine that you have sucked into a lemon and the juice is swirling around your palate and tongue. Intensify the awareness. Your mouth muscles will automatically contract if you are able to recreate the taste properly. The salivary glands will contract if you are able to recreate the taste properly.

Observe your raga and dwesha for the taste. Do you like the experience because you are developing it deliberately, or are you focusing on your natural response? You have to identify your like or dislike not to what you are experiencing right now, but to the natural response that you have always had towards this taste.

Now clear this taste and all associated feelings. Again practise khechari mudra. Focus on the breath.

Release khechari and recreate another taste, the sweet taste of chocolate, or tea, or coffee, or Coca Cola. Imagine a chocolate melting in the mouth. Imagine the liquid filling the mouth. Feel the liquid in all parts of the tongue and slide down into the throat down to your stomach. Feel the texture of whatever is in the mouth, the gentle release of the sweetness into the mouth. Notice your raga or dwesha towards this taste.

Clear this taste and all associated feelings.

Clearing pratyayas: Now search in your memory for a taste that you have experienced in your life, something that you did not like at all. Recreate that. Intensify the awareness and also notice your feelings towards this taste. Notice the intensity of your dwesha, and notice the taste that you totally dislike.

Clear this taste and all associated feelings. Withdraw the prana from it and let the memory dissolve completely.

Now search in your memory for a good taste that you have experienced in life. Recreate that. Intensify the awareness. Also notice your feelings towards the good, pleasurable taste. Notice the intensity of your like, raga.

Clear this taste and all associated feelings. Withdraw the prana and let the memory dissolve completely.

Externalization: Once again become aware of the physical body, the place where you are seated, the people around you. Breathe in deeply and chant the mantra *Om* three times with me.

(*Om* x 3)

Repeat after me: *Om Shanti Shanti Shanti. Hari Om.*

Hari Om Tat Sat. Slowly bring the hands together, rub the palms and place them over the closed eyes, and then gently open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Progressing through Pratyahara

22 September 2018

KAYA STHAIRYAM STAGE 6: GHRANA (SMELL) PRATYAHARA PRACTICE

Preparation: Come into manduki asana. If you feel discomfort in this posture, then you can also sit in vajrasana, however, this is the main pose.

Sit comfortably, body upright and straight, hands on the knees in jnana mudra or chin mudra, eyes gently closed.

With the eyes closed, become aware of the whole body. Awareness of all the aches and pains in the body. Visualize the whole body mentally.

Awareness of sensations in the nose: Once you have adjusted and accommodated yourself comfortably in this position, open the eyes and gaze at the nosetip for 30 seconds, practising nasikagra drishti. Then you will close the eyes and await further instructions.

Open the eyes and practise nasikagra drishti. (30 seconds)
Close your eyes and become aware of the nose. Become aware of the nose, the tip of the nose, the nostrils, the nasal passages, the soft cartilage separating the left and the right passages.

Focus on the breath flowing in and out of the nostrils. Observe the flow of air in the nasal passage. At the time of inhalation feel the two flows from the right nostril and the left nostril coming in and joining at the eyebrow centre.

Then, at the time of exhalation, feel the flow from the eyebrow centre coming down with the breath separating and flowing out through the two nasal passages.

Just focus on the nose and the breath in the nostrils. Two different flows enter at the time of inhalation and merge at the eyebrow centre, and one flow from the eyebrow centre divides into two flows and goes out through the nostrils at the time of exhalation. Each inhalation is from the nostrils to the eyebrow centre. Each exhalation is from the eyebrow centre to the nostrils. Feel the flow of air along the nasal passage.

Experiencing present smells: Now begin to notice the smells around you: the smell of the air, humidity, trees and plants, the smell of your own body, the smell of other people, any other smell floating in the breeze. If there is no smell that you can perceive, then just be aware of air flowing through the nasal passage.

Once again, practise nasikagra drishti for thirty seconds. Stop being aware of the smells, just focus on nasikagra, and with each breath, mentally repeat the mantra *So-Ham*. (30 seconds)

Close the eyes and again observe the smells around you. See if you notice anything different from the last time.

Controlling the smells: Now pick up just one smell from the environment. Identify that smell. Intensify that experience. And then drop it, dissolve it.

Pick up a second smell, identify it, intensify it and then dissolve it, drop it.

Pick up a third smell, try to identify the smell, intensify the smell experience and gradually dissolve it.

Again practise nasikagra drishti. Open the eyes, gaze at the nose-tip, and with every breath mentally repeat the mantra *So-Ham*.

Clearing pratyayas: Close your eyes and now search in your memory for a smell that you have experienced in your life, something you did not like. Recreate that memory, intensify the awareness, and also notice your feelings

towards this bad smell. Notice the intensity of your dwesha, repulsion.

Now clear this smell and all the associated feelings. Withdraw the prana from it and let the memory dissolve completely.

Now search in your memory for the best smell that you have ever experienced in your life. Recreate that memory of smell, intensify the awareness, and also notice your feelings towards the smell. Notice the intensity of liking, attachment, raga.

Now clear this smell and all the associated feelings. Withdraw the prana from the experience of smell and let that experience dissolve into nothingness.

Externalization: Once again, connect with the environment. Become aware of the outside environment. Slowly bring the hands together, rub the palms, place the hands over the closed eyes and then open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Five stages of pranic experience

The five meditations on the senses that you have done over the past few days are part of the kaya sthairyam practice. People translate 'kaya' as the physical body. It means that too, yet there is another meaning of the word *kaya*: what you are, what you represent, who you are. Therefore, *kaya sthairyam* is stilling who you are, not just the physical body. The physical body is made up of bones, muscles and blood, but it is not enough to make you aware of itself without the agency of the senses. Kaya sthairyam means stilling the whole persona, and the senses represent the first aspect. After completing the different levels of kaya sthairyam, we move into a different level of pratyahara, which is pranic pratyahara.

There are five stages to pranic pratyahara:

1. prana-yama, controlling and regulating the breath
2. prana-ayama, expanding the awareness and dimension of prana shakti

3. prana nidra, in which the activated pranas are relaxed and harmonized
4. prana vidya, utilization of that vital power to bring a qualitative change in your lifestyle and also to help others
5. prana pratyahara, where different pranas are merged into one another and into the higher pranas.

The sequence of the five represents: prana-yama, regulating, controlling the breath and the pranas; prana-ayama, expanding the dimension; prana nidra, relaxation; prana vidya, expression; prana pratyahara, dissolution. These are the five levels, systems or techniques through which you are able to move into the dimension of prana: experience the pranas, awaken them, use them, harmonize them, and convert them into a purer form of energy. Therefore, prana pratyahara is not a stand-alone practice. It is the fifth and last component in the sequence of prana management. After that you move into manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara pratyahara.

PRACTICE: PRANA PRATYAHARA THROUGH MARMA STHANAS AND MANAS 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 ensure 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 left leg and see the incoming breath enter through the left toes and come up to the perineum. Then exit through the right leg and out

through the right toes. Again inhaling through the right toes, see the breath come up to the perineum and at the time of exhaling, the breath goes out through the left toes. Continue with this 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 and then descending from the perineum to the left toes. Remain conscious of every breath.

Continue with this practice with total awareness 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 the second stage. Inhaling, feel the breath come up from the left toes 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 the 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 shaft of light, a blue ray of light. All inhalation and exhalation on the right side is to be seen as a movement of red light. Develop colour awareness with every inhalation and with 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 manner with total awareness. If you find your awareness dissipating, then bring it back to the instructions and continue. Do not allow yourself to be distracted, do not allow yourself to doze. 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 to the eyebrow centre, 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 cold sensation to the body. When you are breathing through pingala, the red light gives a warm sensation, warm feeling 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 this breath awareness.

Moving prana through marma sthanas: You shall be moving the pranas through the marma sthanas of the body. Focus your awareness and prana in the big toes of both feet. Focus the awareness and prana on the big toes of both feet. A blue ball of light sparkling in the left big toe and a red ball of light sparkling in the right big toe.

Now withdraw the blue and the red ball of prana from the toes and focus it in the ankles. The blue ball of light comes up to the left ankle and the red ball comes to the right ankle.

Withdraw the prana from the ankles and bring it in the middle of the lower legs, at the end of the calf muscles. See the blue and red balls come up to the calf muscles.

Withdraw the prana from the middle of the lower legs and focus in the middle of both knees, the blue ball in the left knee and the red ball in the right knee.

Withdraw the prana from the knees and focus it in the middle of the thighs. See the blue and red balls come up.

Withdraw the prana from the middle of the thighs and focus it in the perineum, in the rectum, at the root of the anus. See the blue and red balls converge here into one ball, which is half-blue and half-red.

Withdraw the prana from the rectum and focus it in the middle of the body, *dehamadhya*, below manipura and above swadhisthana, a point in-between manipura and swadhisthana. The blue-red sparkling ball moves up to dehamadhya.

Withdraw the prana from dehamadhya and focus it in *mutrakosha*, the bladder. The blue-red ball in the bladder.

Withdraw the prana from the bladder and focus it in the navel. Play of blue-red ball in the navel.

Withdraw the prana from the navel and focus it in the centre of the heart, *hridaya*. The sparkling blue-red light in the centre of the heart.

Draw the prana from the heart and focus it in the base of the throat. See the play of blue-red light in the base of the throat.

Withdraw the prana from the throat and focus it in the root of the tongue. Visualize the swirling red and blue light at the root of the tongue.

Withdraw the prana from the root of the tongue and focus it at the root of the nose. Visualize the base of the nose and experience the prana here, blue and red.

Withdraw the prana from the root of the nose and focus it in the centre of the eyebrows. See the play of blue and red in *bhrumadhya*, the eyebrow centre.

Withdraw the prana from the centre of the eyebrows and focus it in the forehead, the full length and width of the forehead. See the interaction, the play of blue and red light in the forehead.

Withdraw the prana from the forehead and focus it in sahasrara, the crown of the head. See the red and blue ball swirling, sparkling and playing in sahasrara while breathing normally.

Prana withdrawal from manas: Now stop this practice and simply become aware of chidakasha. Watch any manifestations here, colours, lights, streaks, dots. Watch the thoughts arising in chidakasha, spontaneous thoughts. Pick up one thought, it can be a spontaneous thought or you can create a thought deliberately. Watch this thought, not only the thought but also the prana in it. Give it a colour. Give a colour to your thought, depending on what kind of thought it is. Then withdraw the prana from the thought, withdraw its colour and let the colour dissolve in the infinite space of chidakasha. Let the thought become colourless. Let it have no prana, no strength, no intensity. Let it dissolve.

Pick up another thought, watch the thought and the prana. Colour the thought. Withdraw the prana from the thought. Withdraw its colour and let the colour dissolve in the dark space. Let the thought become colourless. There is no prana, no strength, no intensity in the thought. Let it dissolve.

Breath and body awareness: Now stop this practice and simply be aware of the stillness and silence. Be aware of stillness and silence.

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.

Once again become aware of the body. Observe the condition of your body, the relaxed and the peaceful nature of your body.

Externalization: Now become aware of the external environment, become aware of the sounds. Externalize the senses. Slowly begin to move the toes, the feet, the legs, fingers, hands, arms, the head from side to side. Take a deep breath in and stretch the whole body, and then gently sit up breathing out, facing this side, keeping the eyes closed. Once you are seated, rub the hands together and place them over the closed eyes, and then slowly open your eyes.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

Marma vidya

Prana pratyahara is done lying down, and it follows a specific marma path of the body. It is not yoga nidra where you say visualize the right toe, second toe, third toe, and so on. If you do that here, it will be just fantasy and imagination, for those body parts do not represent the marma points. The movement here has been through the marma points: the big toe, then the ankle, then the calf muscle, then the knee, then middle of the thighs, and so forth. These are specific points, and they are minor centres of prana in the body.

There are chakras, then minor chakras, and then marma sthanas. The marmas are like one dot of a chakra, yet they are considered very important. It was the marma points that later on became the acupuncture points. Indians did not develop the subject beyond marma; the Chinese developed it into acupuncture and acupressure.

Marma points have been used to activate the prana shakti. This is particularly done for children when they are born. In the past, there used to be qualified masseurs who would come every day and massage the newborn baby to activate the marma points. This would make it easier for the baby to stand up, walk and do other things, since the pranas were activated. Unfortunately, this tradition is now more or less dead.

The activation of the marma points has different purposes. It allows the sympathetic nervous system to become active. That is one effect, due to which children develop life skills faster: ability to stand up, walk, run, pick up things. Different kinds of treatments are given using the marma points, which has become more defined in acupuncture. In the yogic literatures, there are references to pressing the marma points to manage different physical conditions. The marma points also act as triggers for the minor chakras, which in turn act as triggers for the major chakras. The marmas belong to the chakra family although they are not chakras.

Progressing through pratyahara

To experience full pratyahara of prana, you have to go through the sequence of prana-yama, perfecting breath control; prana-ayama, awakening and enlarging the dimension of prana; prana nidra, harmonizing the hyper-agitated pranas; prana vidya, utilizing the prana creatively; prana pratyahara, withdrawing the pranas and merging prana with the mind. What you have done today is the first practice of the last in the whole system of prana.

You have also been introduced to manas pratyahara, which is mainly based on antar mouna. Buddhi pratyahara is through SWAN meditation. Then there are different meditations that allow chitta pratyahara to take place, by converting the negative conditions that you experience in the mind into positive conditions. If you are feeling hatred for somebody, can you convert that feeling into love? First, remove the prana from the hatred so you do not feel that negative connection. Second, convert that hatred into a positive quality such as love. Slowly, that hatred, envy or anger can be eradicated completely.

The techniques of chitta pratyahara have not been taught and they will not be taught for some time until people are ready. In today's time and age, people easily fall prey to mental and psychological traumas. They are not able

to maintain the strength and clarity of mind to overcome the situations and fall into the pit. Such people are not considered qualified to practise either chitta or ahamkara pratyahara.

To practise chitta or ahamkara pratyahara, the *sankalpa shakti*, the resolve, the willpower has to be strong and firm. You cannot allow the mind to sway the perceptions, rather the negative content has to be dealt with in the right manner. Therefore, for the time being, just confine yourself to deepening the understanding of pratyahara and experiencing it through your own practice.

Steps to develop the ability to visualize

Look at a picture, and then recreate the picture. In the 70s, experiments were done in schools where children were given a plate with different objects on it. They were asked to look at it, memorize how the objects were placed, and then draw it.

Visualization is a skill that develops from childhood. Sri Swamiji always used to tell me, “First see everything in your mind. Before you attempt to do anything, any work, see the whole thing in your mind. Visualize it and then do it.” Today people do not visualize anything. They only react to everything. An example: an area needs to be cleaned and somebody is told to take charge of the task. This person will not visualize what is required: how many people are needed, what kind of equipment and tools are needed, how the cleaning should be done. They should be able to organize everything beforehand by visualizing, then call the required people at a specific time, go in and finish the job. Nobody does that any more.

What do people do instead? They go into panic: “Where do I get the broom? Where do I get the sevaks? Where do I get the key? Where do I get this? Where do I get that?” Run here, run there, and spend three hours just chasing shadows, since there is no planning. There is no visualizing and that is why there is panic. Everybody does it.

From my understanding and training with Sri Swamiji, I realize that it is an ability that has to develop from childhood. Previously that ability developed naturally as people would do many things with their hands. It is lost in the modern generation as they do not have to do anything, everything is there as an app. There is even an app for childbirth and for mothering. How many times to feed the child? You type in the weight, height and other details and the app tells you, “Now wake your child up, now feed this, now feed that.” The experience of someone who has been through that experience is not asked for any more. You no longer ask your mother, “How did you manage?” since the app tells you everything. The creative aspect is gone and many of the natural abilities that people had are not there anymore.

Some time ago, a course was conducted on happiness in one of the UK universities. That was the most popular course. The largest number of students participated in that course, wanting to know how to be happy. In our childhood, happiness was just part of life. Even now happiness is a part of life, but what is the level of deterioration of human mind if you need a course on happiness? Now you have to learn how to be happy, and receive a degree and a certificate to say that you are happy and can make other people happy.

The newer generations are losing natural abilities and skills that we had taken for granted as a part and parcel of life. Visualization was a part and parcel of life. It is a natural skill of the mind.

Visualization is one of the greatest boons to human beings, however, its application has to be learned. You all visualize, yet they are fantasies. You think visualization is something to do with a mental journey rather than practical living. Visualization in practical living is much more important than imaginary journeys of the mind. Most of the yoga techniques involve visualization, whether the different meditations, yoga nidra, or other practices. If you do them properly, then with continuous practice it is possible that you will develop the skill to see, to visualize with your mind's eye.

The Path Beckons

23 September 2018



At the conclusion of the raja yoga program, let us go back a little in time to 2013 when we had the World Yoga Convention in Munger. At that time, it was announced that fifty years of yoga propagation are over and now it is time for us to look into the other aspects of yoga that can help the individual evolve and develop creative abilities.

When Swami Sivananda gave the mandate to propagate yoga to Swami Satyananda, he had made it clear that it was for the cultivation of the faculties of head, heart and hands, and not for emancipation or self-realization. Self-realization is a farfetched idea for civilians. It is distant idea for sannyasins too, but for civilians it is even more distant. The renunciates, the sannyasins, the sadhus, can devote eight to ten hours of their time to yoga and spiritual life, yet a normal

civilian can devote one hour at the most. Therefore, to have high expectations of yoga from your short practice is totally unrealistic and unreasonable. Swami Sivananda realized this, therefore he said, “No, the path of self-realization is open to those who have cut off from the world completely. However, the path of exploring one’s own potential and living it in life is open to all people in the world.”

This was the specific mandate he gave to Swami Satyananda, not to talk high philosophy or abstract ideas; to speak on topics that people can apply in their own life to improve their quality of thought, behaviour and action. Swami Satyananda followed this path. In the books many ideas have been written, yet his teachings were limited to the actual needs of people, and that is what you know as Satyananda Yoga. In his own life, however, he explored and lived yoga, and he inspired us to do the same.

In 2009, when I left the administrative and official duties of BSY and retired, he gave the mandate to establish Sannyasa Peeth and to continue to develop yoga. In 2013, the year of the Convention, the idea came that the Convention should be the launching pad for the second chapter and not just a gathering of yoga teachers who come together to talk about their achievements or the benefits of yoga. Now the subject of yoga had to be taken to another level.

In January 2013, I also started the panchagni sadhana as per the mandate. For five years the sadhana continued, and I utilized that time to think on how there can be progression in yoga, keeping in view the aspirations of our tradition, from Swami Sivananda to Swami Satyananda. It was during the panchagni time that the scenery unfolded, as I was practising and living yoga at that time. Yoga was no longer just a morning practice or discussion on a topic; I had to live it with great discipline and firmness. Panchagni is a sadhana where if one’s mind is not in control, one cannot do it. It is difficult to sit out in the sun for ten minutes when the temperature is thirty-six degrees, so it has to be much harder to sit in eighty degrees for five to six months, facing the heat, the sparks,

the smoke, inhaling carbonmonoxide. To be able to do that, to sit with total focus in eighty degrees, requires perfection of pratyahara.

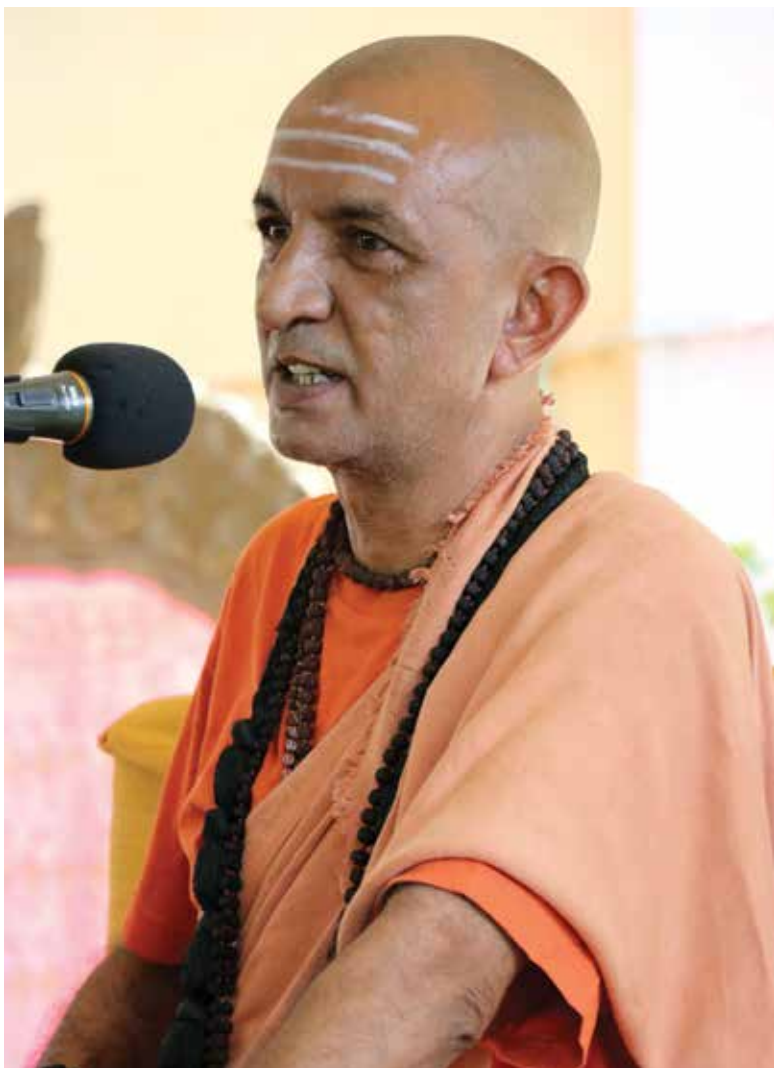
It was at that time that I realized the potentials of the different yogas. Until then yoga had only been a practice, one hour in the morning, like all of you do, and talk about it the whole day to different groups. I knew what everybody knows, maybe ten percent more. During the panchagni time, it was like a jigsaw puzzle falling together: the effects, the benefits, the role of asana, pranayama, hatha yoga, the technique of pratyahara, raja yoga, everything became clear. I came to understand the actual benefits and progression.

It was for this reason that Sri Swamiji had said, "Follow the path of sannyasa and continue to develop yoga." He knew that by following the disciplines of sannyasa, I would explore the potentials of yoga. That is how it happened, and the different courses and trainings that are taking place at Yogapeeth and Sannyasa Peeth emerged from that understanding. The yatras of hatha yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga, the understanding of karma yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga: their application and requirement to develop spiritual life and harmonize external life, have all come from the concepts that unfolded at that time.

As things started falling into place, we also started experimenting with the yoga programs and trainings, and we have been able to build a syllabus of yoga for the next twenty years. Yoga is now a subject of personal exploration for us. The teachers who teach Satyananda Yoga will continue to teach. There is not going to be any shift or change, for that was what Sri Swamiji had identified for society. Therefore, continue as you have been doing. There is no change in the system of what you teach. Here, however, through the trainings, we are deepening the understanding and the experience, and realizing the possible potentials of the yogic techniques.

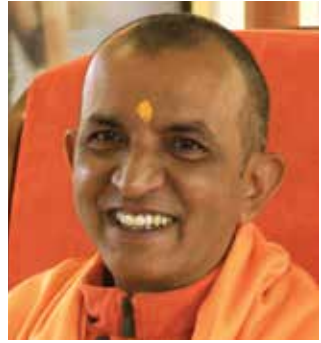
I will again suggest to all of you not to have ideas of self-realization or God-realization. That is a far-fetched reality. Let us work to improve our own natures, personalities and

performances, which are not only external but also internal. If you can do that, externally you will be creative, mentally you will be happy, and spiritually you will be fulfilled. That is the practical way of life that Sri Swamiji, our master, had shown. It is on that path that we need to start walking now.



Notes

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



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

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

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

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

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



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

At the World Yoga Convention held in 2013 on the occasion of the Golden Jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Niranjanananda announced: “The first chapter of yoga propagation is over. Now the second chapter begins, which is focused on consolidation of yoga and better application of yoga, with sincerity, seriousness and commitment.”

In writing the second chapter, a complete change in the training programs at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth has come about since 2016. The new programs are setting a standard of understanding the practices and principles of yoga from the perspective of the original intentions of yoga.

Among these programs was RajaYogaYatra 3: Practical Pratyahara, during which the focus was on further understanding the depth of pratyahara and its application in daily life. The difference between the original vedantic raja yoga and Patanjali's raja yoga was clarified and the participants were led to experience different levels of pratyahara.

This book presents the satsangs and practices given by Swami Niranjanananda during the program.



ISBN : 978-81-940805-4-1