



PRATYAHARA

The Forgotten Limb of Yoga

Abstract

Asana practice is often seen as the main element of yoga although it is only one part of it. The classical yoga system, as described in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, has eight steps that can be divided into external and internal yoga

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Abstract:

Asana practice is often seen as the main element of yoga although it is only one part of it. The classical yoga system, as described in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, has eight steps that can be divided into external and internal yoga

Patanjali defines yoga as having eight components (अष्टाङ्गं aṣṭ āṅga, "eight limbs"): "The eight limbs of yoga are yama (abstinence), niyama (observances), asana (yoga postures), pranayama (breath control), pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses), dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (absorption)

Patanjali describes yoga as “the progressive quieting of the fluctuations of the mind.” He then explains that through dedicated practice and the cultivation of detachment, we will stop identifying with the thoughts, feelings, and sensations that can cause us so much emotional pain—and we will open to an experience of our true self.

Yoga is the neutralization of ego-directed feelings, because once these become stilled, the yogi realizes that he is, and that he has always been, one with the Infinite – that his awareness of this reality was limited only by his infatuation with limitation

As the fifth of the eight limbs, pratyahara occupies a central place. Some yogis include it among the outer aspects of yoga, others with the inner aspects. Both classifications are correct, for pratyahara is the key between the outer and inner aspects of yoga; it shows us how to move from one to the other

Pratyahara itself is termed as Yoga, as it is the most important limb in Yoga Sadhana.

Swami Shivananda

In this Study I will share some basic Ashtanga yogic practices and which will help you proceed further for future practices.

Need For the Study

Pratyahara is beginning stage for entering advanced stages of meditation.

It is not possible to move directly from asana to meditation. This requires jumping from the body to the mind, forgetting what lies between. To make this transition, the breath and senses, which link the body and mind, must be brought under control and developed properly. This is where pranayama and pratyahara come in. With pranayama we control our vital energies and impulses and with pratyahara we gain mastery over the unruly senses — both prerequisites to successful meditation.

Yoga is a vast system of spiritual practices for inner growth. To this end, the classical yoga system incorporates eight limbs, each with its own place and function. Of these, pratyahara is probably the least known. How many people can define pratyahara? Have you ever taken a class in pratyahara? Have you ever seen a book on pratyahara? Can you think of several important pratyahara techniques? Do you perform pratyahara as part of your yogic practices? Yet unless we understand pratyahara, we are missing an integral aspect of yoga without which the system cannot work.

As the fifth of the eight limbs, pratyahara occupies a central place. Some yogis include it among the outer aspects of yoga, others with the inner aspects. Both classifications are correct, for pratyahara is the key between the outer and inner aspects of yoga; it shows us how to move from one to the other. It is not possible to move directly from asana to meditation.

Objective of the Study:

All thoughts can be classified as either memories or desires. When your mind is active, you're either thinking about something that happened in the past or you're anticipating something in the future. The Sanskrit word for memory or past impression is samskara, while the word for desire is vasana.

Impressions give rise to desires. If you see an advertisement for a flashy car, tropical vacation spot, or designer suit, an impression is born in your mind that may give rise to a specific desire.

As a result of this desire, you are compelled to take action, such as going to the car showroom, calling your travel agent, or visiting your local boutique. The action that emerges from the desire is called karma. This endless cycle of impressions giving rise to desires, giving rise to actions, resulting in new impressions, is the circuitry that keeps your mind perpetually active.

We can think of this circuit of samskara, vasana, and karma as the software of your soul. As long as you are thinking, your mind is churning through the cycle of action ... impression ... desire ... action ... impression ... desire. People frequently get caught in habitual ruts of thinking, believing that they're stuck in a situation because they can't imagine any other possibilities.

Meditation is a practice that enables you to temporarily escape this cycle.

In path of yoga from making the transition from physical aspects of the body to mind, one should practice pratayara.

By withdrawing our awareness from negative impressions, pratyahara strengthens the mind's powers of immunity. Just as a healthy body can resist toxins and pathogens, a healthy mind can ward off the negative sensory influences around it. If you are easily disturbed by the noise and turmoil of the environment around you, practice pratyahara. Without it, you will not be able to meditate

Introduction:

What is Yoga?

Yoga is a system of exercise, but yet it's so much more. Considered a physical, mental, and spiritual discipline, yoga is an ancient belief system, a science of exploration, a process of self-discovery, a method of personal development and spiritual evolution, and an art of transformation. It is a complete approach to total well-being, and, for many, yoga is a way of life. Yoga is an all-encompassing approach to physical health, mental clarity, emotional balance, and spiritual attainment — whatever that means or looks like to you

Originating in ancient India, yoga was developed as a pragmatic science by seers who sought answers to life's toughest questions, the type that are not easily answered: What is the meaning of life? Who am I? Why am I here? Through careful inquiry, experimentation, and constant observation, these seers were able to produce codified conditions that were particularly beneficial for self-realization. With a large emphasis on direct experience, such conditions became principles to help guide seekers on their individual journeys of self-discovery.

A fundamental tenet of the broader yogic tradition is that there is one universal consciousness. Call it supreme consciousness, the Divine, Brahman, God, Shiva, Buddha-nature, Allah, whatever, there is a "oneness" that encompasses everything, including you. However, we become so caught up in our individual experiences of embodied consciousness (that is, our lives) that we tend to see ourselves as separate entities operating independently from one another. Yoga, therefore, is designed to shift individual perceptions of ourselves and the world in which we live, helping us to recognize not only our inherent oneness with everyone and everything but also our union with the Divine. How that union is understood and arrived at varies from one yogic school of thought to the next but for all intents and purposes, yoga is the method by which we realize our innate nature and highest Self inseparable from supreme consciousness and completely supported by the universe.

What is Pratyahara?

The term pratyahara is composed of two Sanskrit words, prati and ahara. Ahara means "food," or "anything we take into ourselves from the outside." Prati is a preposition meaning "against" or "away." Pratyahara means literally "control of ahara," or "gaining mastery over external influences." It is compared to a turtle withdrawing its limbs into its shell — the turtle's shell is the mind and the senses are the limbs. The term is usually translated as "withdrawal from the senses," but much more is implied.

In yogic thought there are three levels of ahara, or food. The first is physical food that brings in the five elements necessary to nourish the body. The second is impressions, which bring in the subtle substances necessary to nourish the mind — the sensations of sound, touch, sight, taste, and smell. The third level of ahara is our associations, the people we hold at heart level who serve to nourish the soul and affect us with the gunas of sattva, rajas, and tamas.

Pratyahara is twofold. It involves withdrawal from wrong food, wrong impressions and wrong associations, while simultaneously opening up to right food, right impressions and right associations. We cannot control our mental impressions without the right diet and right relationship, but pratyahara's primary importance lies in control of sensory impressions which frees the mind to move within.

Four forms of pratyahara:

There are four main forms of pratyahara:

1. Indriya-pratyahara — control of the senses;
2. Prana- pratyahara — control of prana;
3. Karma-pratyahara — control of action;
4. Mano-pratyahara — withdrawal of mind from the senses.

Each has its special methods.

1. Control of the Senses (Indriya-pratyahara)

Indriya-pratyahara, or control of the senses, is the most important form of pratyahara, although this is not something that we like to hear about in our mass media-oriented culture. Most of us suffer from sensory overload, the result of constant bombardment from television, radio, computers, newspapers, magazines, books — you name it. Our commercial society functions by stimulating our interest through the senses. We are constantly confronted with bright colors, loud noises and dramatic sensations. We have been raised on every sort of sensory indulgence; it is the main form of entertainment in our society.

The problem is that the senses, like untrained children, have their own will, which is largely instinctual in nature. They tell the mind what to do. If we don't discipline them, they dominate us with their endless demands. We are so accustomed to ongoing sensory activity that we don't know how to keep our minds quiet; we have become hostages of the world of the senses and its allurements. We run after what is appealing to the senses and forget the higher goals of life. For this reason, pratyahara is probably the most important limb of yoga for people today. The old saying "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak" applies to those of us who have not learned how to properly control our senses. Indriyapratyahara gives us the tools to strengthen the spirit and reduce its dependency on the body. Such control is not suppression (which causes eventual revolt), but proper coordination and motivation.

Right Intake of Impressions

Pratyahara centers on the right intake of impressions. Most of us are careful about the food we eat and the company we keep, but we may not exercise the same discrimination about the impressions we take in from our own senses. We accept impressions via the mass media that we would never allow in our personal lives. We let people into our houses through television and movies that we would never allow into our homes in real life! What kind of impressions do we take in every day? Can we expect that they will not have an effect on us?

Strong sensations dull the mind, and a dull mind makes us act in ways that are insensitive, careless, or even violent. According to Ayurveda, sensory impressions are the main food for the mind.

The background of our mental field consists of our predominant sensory impressions. We see this when our mind reverts to the impressions of the last song we heard or the last movie we saw. Just as junk food makes the body toxic, junk impressions make the mind toxic. Junk food requires a lot of salt, sugar, or spices to make it palatable because it is largely dead food; similarly junk impressions require powerful dramatic impressions — sex and violence — to make us feel that they are real, because they are actually just colors projected on a screen. We cannot ignore the role sensory impressions play in making us who we are, for they build up the subconscious and strengthen the tendencies latent within it. Trying to meditate without controlling our impressions pits our subconscious against us and prevents the development of inner peace and clarity.

Sensory Withdrawal

Fortunately, we are not helpless before the barrage of sensory impressions. Pratyahara provides us many tools for managing them properly. Perhaps the simplest way to control our impressions is simply to cut them off, to spend some time apart from all sensory inputs.

Just as the body benefits by fasting from food, so the mind benefits by fasting from impressions. This can be as simple as sitting to meditate with our eyes closed or taking a retreat somewhere free from the normal sensory bombardments, like at a mountain cabin. Also a "media fast," abstaining from television, radio, etc. can be a good practice to cleanse and rejuvenate the mind.

Yoni mudra is one of the most important pratyahara techniques for closing the senses. It involves using the fingers to block the sensory openings in the head — the eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth — and allowing the attention and energy to move within. It is done for short periods of time when our prana is energized, such as immediately after practicing pranayama. (Naturally we should avoid closing the mouth and nose to the point at which we starve ourselves of oxygen.)

Another method of sense withdrawal is to keep our sense organs open but withdraw our attention from them. In this way we cease taking in impressions without actually closing off our sense organs. The most common method, shambhavi mudra, consists of sitting with the eyes open while directing the attention within, a technique used in several Buddhist systems of meditation as well. This redirection of the senses inward can be done with the other senses as well, particularly with the sense of hearing. It helps

us control our mind even when the senses are functioning, as they are during the normal course of the day.

Focusing on Uniform

Impressions Another way to cleanse the mind and control the senses is to put our attention on a source of uniform impressions, such as gazing at the ocean or the blue sky. Just as the digestive system gets short-circuited by irregular eating habits and contrary food qualities, our ability to digest impressions can be deranged by jarring or excessive impressions. And just as improving our digestion may require going on a mono-diet, like the ayurvedic use of rice and mung beans (kicharee), so our mental digestion may require a diet of natural but homogeneous impressions. This technique is often helpful after a period of fasting from impressions.

Creating Positive Impressions

Another means of controlling the senses is to create positive, natural impressions. There are a number of ways to do this: meditating upon aspects of nature such as trees, flowers, or rocks, as well as visiting temples or other places of pilgrimage which are repositories of positive impressions and thoughts. Positive impressions can also be created by using incense, flowers, ghee lamps, altars, statues, and other artifacts of devotional worship.

Creating Inner Impressions

Another sensory withdrawal technique is to focus the mind on inner impressions, thus removing attention from external impressions. We can create our own inner impressions through the imagination or we can contact the subtle senses that come into play when the physical senses are quiet.

Visualization is the simplest means of creating inner impressions. In fact, most yogic meditation practices begin with some type of visualization, such as "seeing" a deity, a guru, or a beautiful setting in nature. More elaborate visualizations involve imagining deities and their worlds, or mentally performing rituals, such as offering imaginary flowers or gems to imagined deities.

The artist absorbed in an inner landscape or the musician creating music are also performing inner visualizations. These are all forms of pratyahara because they clear the mental field of external impressions and create a positive inner impression to serve as the foundation of meditation. Preliminary visualizations are helpful for most forms of meditation and can be integrated into other spiritual practices as well.

Laya Yoga is the yoga of the inner sound and light current, in which we focus on subtle senses to withdraw us from the gross senses. This withdrawal into inner sound and light is a means of transforming the mind and is another form of indriya-pratyahara.

2. Control of the Prana (Prana-Pratyahara)

Control of the senses requires the development and control of prana because the senses follow prana (our vital energy). Unless our prana is strong we will not have the power to control the senses. If our prana is scattered or disturbed, our senses will also be scattered and disturbed. Pranayama is a preparation for pratyahara. Prana is gathered in pranayama and withdrawn in pratyahara. Yogic texts describe methods of withdrawing prana from different parts of the body, starting with the toes and ending wherever we wish to fix our attention — the top of the head, the third eye, the heart or one of the other chakras.

Perhaps the best method of prana-pratyahara is to visualize the death process, in which the prana, or life-force, withdraws from the body, shutting off all the senses from the feet to the head. Ramana Maharshi achieved Self-realization by doing this when he was a mere boy of seventeen. Before inquiring into the Self, he visualized his body as dead, withdrawing his prana into the mind and the mind into the heart. Without such complete and intense pratyahara, his meditative process would not have been successful.

3. Control of Action (Karma-Pratyahara)

We cannot control the sense organs without also controlling the motor organs. In fact the motor organs involve us directly in the external world. The impulses coming in through the senses get expressed through the motor organs and this drives us to further sensory involvement. Because desire is endless, happiness consists not in getting what we want, but in no longer needing anything from the external world.

Just as the right intake of impressions gives control of the sense organs, right work and right action gives control of the motor organs. This involves karma yoga — performing selfless service and making our life a sacred ritual. Karma-pratyahara can be performed by surrendering any thought of personal rewards for what we do, doing everything as a service to God or to humanity. The Bhagavad Gita says, "Your duty is to act, not to seek a reward for what you do." This is one kind of pratyahara. It also includes the

practice of austerities that lead to control of the motor organs. For example, asana can be used to control the hands and feet, control which is needed when we sit quietly for extended periods of time

4. Withdrawal of the Mind (Mano-Pratyahara)

The yogis tell us that mind is the sixth sense organ and that it is responsible for coordinating all the other sense organs. We take in sensory impressions only where we place our mind's attention. In a way we are always practicing pratyahara. The mind's attention is limited and we give attention to one sensory impression by withdrawing the mind from other impressions. Wherever we place our attention, we naturally overlook other things.

We control our senses by withdrawing our mind's attention from them. According to the Yoga Sutras II.54: "When the senses do not conform with their own objects but imitate the nature of the mind, that is pratyahara." More specifically, it is mano-pratyahara — withdrawing the senses from their objects and directing them inward to the nature of the mind, which is formless. Vyasa's commentary on the Yoga Sutra notes that the mind is like the queen bee and the senses are the worker bees. Wherever the queen bee goes, all the other bees must follow. Thus mano-pratyahara is less about controlling the senses than about controlling the mind, for when the mind is controlled, the senses are automatically controlled.

We can practice mano-pratyahara by consciously withdrawing our attention from unwholesome impressions whenever they arise. This is the highest form of pratyahara and the most difficult; if we have not gained proficiency in controlling the senses, motor organs, and pranas, it is unlikely to work. Like wild animals, prana and the senses can easily overcome a weak mind, so it is usually better to start first with more practical methods of pratyahara.

Relation of Pratyahara with other yoga limbs

Pratyahara is related to all the limbs of yoga. All of the other limbs — from asana to samadhi — contain aspects of pratyahara. For example, in the sitting poses, which are the most important aspect of asana, both the sensory and motor organs are controlled. Pranayama contains an element of pratyahara as we draw our attention inward through the breath. Yama and niyama contain various principles and practices, like non-violence and contentment, that help us control the senses. In other words, pratyahara provides the foundation for the higher practices of yoga and is the basis for meditation. It follows pranayama (or control of prana) and, by linking prana with the mind, takes it out of the sphere of the body.

Pratyahara is also linked with dharana. In pratyahara we withdraw our attention from ordinary distractions. In dharana we consciously focus that attention on a particular object, such as a mantra. Pratyahara is the negative and dharana the positive aspect of the same basic function.

Many of us find that even after years of meditation practice we have not achieved all that we expected. Trying to practice meditation without some degree of pratyahara is like trying to gather water in a leaky vessel. No matter how much water we bring in, it flows out at the same rate. The senses are like holes in the vessel of the mind. Unless they are sealed, the mind cannot hold the nectar of truth. Anyone whose periods of meditation alternate with periods of sensory indulgence is in need of pratyahara.

Pratyahara offers many methods of preparing the mind for meditation. It also helps us avoid environmental disturbances that are the source of psychological pain. Pratyahara is a marvelous tool for taking control of our lives and opening up to our inner being. It is no wonder some great yogis have called it "the most important limb of yoga." We should all remember to include it in our practice.

Why is it important to practice pratyahara?

We receive a constant stream of information through our five senses. Needless to say in today's digital age, the flow of stimuli can be overwhelming, and it starts to get harder and harder to take a moment of sensory rest.

When we instantly react to the information our senses feed us, we are being pulled away from our inner peace into the fluctuating external world. The senses can easily take over, and we end up running from one impulsive reaction to the other, forgetting our higher goals in life.

How to prepare for practice Pratyahara

Every stage of yoga, every step in its practice, is a healthful growth and not any kind of pressurisation from any source. Therefore, it is a very gradual ascent because the natural inclination does not arise quickly, due to the presence of other impressions in the mind. So, if we properly bear in mind the significance of the earlier steps mentioned – right from yama onwards, up to pranayama – we will be able to understand the types of preparation that we have to make for this readiness of the mind to concentrate. Most of us are not ready for concentration, and if we ask the mind to concentrate when it is not prepared, how will we take to that practice? We cannot even take our meal when the stomach is not ready for it. Nothing can be done when the system is not prepared. Neither can we walk, nor can we sleep, nor can we eat, nor can we speak if we are not ready for these things. For every action, function or conduct, there should be a readiness of the system – preparedness, a mood, a tendency, an inclination.

It is difficult to find all things working together. This is a great difficulty, indeed. What can be called a difficulty in life, if not this? If everything went well, we would be in heaven by this very moment – but, unfortunately, this does not happen. Something or other will not click properly, and then the machine will not move. But it has to move and everything has to click in an orderly, spontaneous manner – that too, not by force or pressure.. Body, mind and spirit are all together in preparedness for action – in completeness, in full force of aspiration; that is one thing.

‘Yogata’ is the term used very wisely by Patanjali. Yogata means that there should be fitness for concentration. Are we fit? What is the meaning of ‘fitness’? Are we spontaneous in our action? That is one question. Or are we being compelled by somebody? If there is a motive of compulsion that is behind the sitting for meditation, there will be a counter-urge of the mind to come back to its original position from where it started. If we are forced to work in an office, we know how long we will work. We will be looking for the first opportunity to get out from that place. As early as possible we want to be out when the pressuring influence is lifted. Also, the quality of work falls because of the pressure. Quantity is less, and quality is nil; this will happen in meditation if we force it.

How To Do Pratyahara Techniques

Pratyahara yoga is a big subject. It is one of the most complex parts of yoga (which is one reason many yogis make the mistake of not practicing it).

Because Pratyahara yoga is such a big subject, it involves many different techniques. Some of those techniques are easy and suitable for novice yogis, and others are more complex and suitable for advanced yoga practitioners.

Yogic practices to follow Pratyahara

Yoga Nidra: The Ultimate Pratyahara Technique:

While this makes for some fine imagery, Patanjali and his commentators did little to clarify how exactly to practice pratyahara. Thankfully, there are a few concrete techniques. One of them is recorded in the Yoga-Yajnavalkya-Gita ("Yoga Song of Yajnavalkya"), which takes the form of a teaching dialogue between the sage Yajnavalkya and his wife, Gargi.

Yajnavalkya's technique, called *vayu pratyahara* (wind withdrawal) or *prana pratyahara* (life force withdrawal), involves fixing your awareness and your breath sequentially on 18 vital points, called *marmans*, in your body. Varying sources highlight different points (traditional Ayurvedic sources name 107), but Yajnavalkya's 18 *marmans* are the big toes, ankles, midcalves, "roots of the calves," knees, midthighs, perineum, "center of the body," generative organs, navel, heart center, "throat well," root of the tongue, root of the nose, eyes, spot between the eyebrows, forehead, and crown of the head. Yajnavalkya suggests following the sequence from the crown to the toes, but many of my students prefer climbing from toes to crown.

The pratyahara techniques practiced in Yoga Nidra systematically guide your body and mind into deep peaceful states of consciousness that facilitate the awakening of the full potential of your mind. In this heightened state of awareness, you develop the ability to witness and understand the preconceptions, emotions, the flow of thoughts, past memories and limiting beliefs that are holding you back in life. You

begin to witness the inner world of your mind and understand the link between conscious, subconscious, and the unconsciousness mind.

How Yoga Nidra's step-by-step procedure that guides you into a state of pratyahara.

Yoga Nidra in its own right is a complete pratyahara practice. Each step is designed to



systematically withdraw your senses inwards from all external stimuli so it is completely withdrawn to a point where it is only operating through the auditory sensory channel. When the mind is completely internalized from the outside worlds external stimuli, evolved states of consciousness are more easily accessed from the deeper layers of your mind.

Here are the 8 stages of Yoga Nidra Practice.

Stage 1 Internalization:

This stage of our Yoga Nidra practice is where your attention is taken consciously to the surroundings, the mind is saturated with the senses, ie touch, taste, sight, smell and sounds until the mind becomes

naturally disinterested and internalizes. This process systematically disengages the mind from the immediate impact of the senses so that interaction with the world temporarily subsides and the mind can begin to internalize.

Stage 2 Sankalpa:

The positive resolve repeated during the initial Sankalpa stage calms the mind and deepens pratyahara by concentrating your awareness with positive statements of change. (In yoga, a Sankalpa can be defined as a resolve—a kind of resolution that you'd like to intend for your own evolution on the spiritual path, or any goal for example that is preferably aligned with your life's purpose)

Stage 3 Body Rotation:

Pratyahara is again deepened by re-engaging your consciousness to follow the flow of prana to the physical dimensions of the body. In this stage of Yoga Nidra, you are taken on a journey from neural pathways of the brain throughout the entire nervous system of the body. Your awareness is so saturated with physical sensations that it disengages and internalizes.

Stage 4 Breath Awareness:

In stage four your awareness is shifted to totally focus on your breath, further guiding the mind inwards, as conscious awareness of the breath is a process of your more evolved brain. The state of pratyahara is deepened and complete physical and pranic relaxation is achieved at this stage.

Stage 5 Sensations of opposites:

In stage five your awareness is directed to witness opposite feelings and emotions. The process of detached mental recognition and awareness of opposite feelings and emotions harmonizes and balances your nervous system. Equilibrium of the mind is achieved as feelings and emotions are cleansed of their emotional charge. The effect of this deep emotional release and relaxation deepens pratyahara even further as the mind relinquishes its need to focus on feelings and emotions.

Stage 6 Visualizations:

By stage 6 the mind is in a deeply internalized calm state where is very receptive to change and transformation. The visualization techniques introduced in this stage further deepen pratyahara, purify the subconsciousness mind, and train the brain to envisage positive outcomes for the future.

Stage 7 Repetition of Sankalpa:

In stage seven the mind is in an even more deeply internalized state of pratyahara where it is directed again to repeat the same positive affirmations recited in stage two. This repetition enhances the effects of the original Sankalpa's recital and is an efficient technique to train your brain to focus on transformation and spiritual development.

Stage 8 Externalization:

This final stage progressively externalizes your awareness from the deep pratyahara state and re-engages the senses so the interaction with the outside world can recommence.

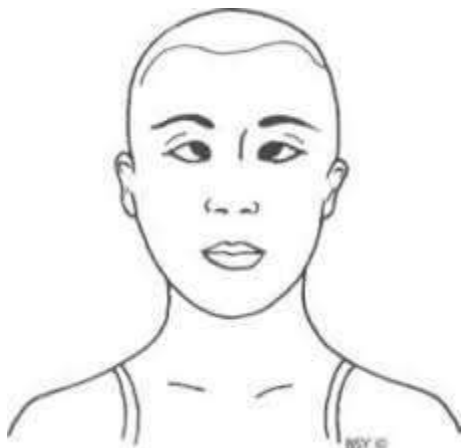
Yoga Nidra: The perfect tool for transformation.

The systematic pratyahara techniques practiced in Yoga Nidra are powerful tools to access the deeper layers of your mind. Once the depth of your mind is intelligently witnessed and analyzed, purification of karma's takes place, unleashing the full potential of your mind to focus on transformation and consciously living your life's purpose

Mudras help in pratyahara

In today's world more than ever, the biggest problem that human beings have is dissipation of energy, because our sensory system is stimulated more than ever before in the history of humanity. For example, today we can sit the entire night with bright lights on. Your eyes were not prepared for this – they were made for twelve hours of light and twelve hours of darkness or a very subdued light. Now your visual apparatus is stimulated like crazy.

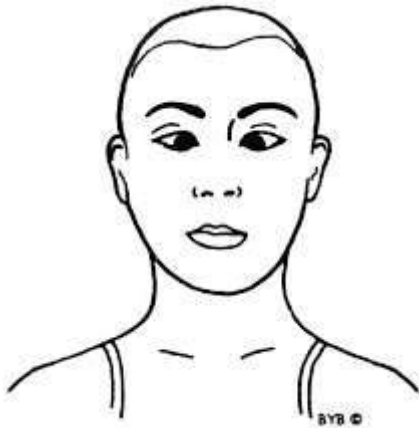
1) Shambhavi mudra



Looking towards the eyebrow centre strengthens the eye muscles. And it removes the tension in the temples. It calms the mind, develops focus and nurtures a state of thoughtlessness.

Mahamudra/ Shambhavi mudra, it is a seal. Once you put the seal and lock it, your energies will divert themselves in a completely different direction. Now things will happen. Rarely does any practice blow up people right from day one as Shambhavi Mahamudra does. This is simply because if you apply the Mahamudra right, your own energies are turning in a direction that they normally never do. Otherwise, your energies dissipate in reaction to various sensory inputs. It is like if you keep looking at something, you get tired after some time. Not just the eyes – you get tired.

2) Nasikagra drishti



Nasikagra Drishti or Agochari Mudra means “Nose tip gazing”. In Sanskrit, ‘Nasika’ means the nose and ‘agra’ means the end or the tip. ‘Drishti’ means the sight. Thus, Nasikagra Drishti literally means gazing at the tip of the nose. Nasikagra Drishti is a powerful practice to develop concentration and is used in conjunction with many meditation techniques

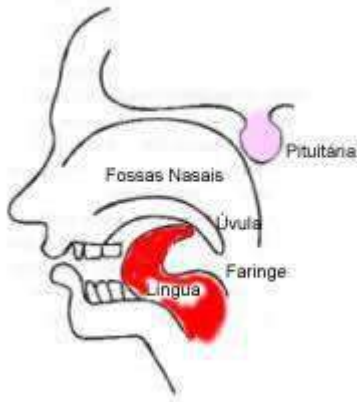
Nasikagra Drishti helps to develop concentration and is used as part of many meditation techniques.

It helps to strengthen the eye muscles. Initially, the eyes may pain within few seconds of practice. Later you can maintain it for hours.

Nasikagra Drishti can activate the Mooladhara Chakra.

Nasikagra Drishti takes the practitioner to a higher state of consciousness during meditation.

3) Khechari mudra



Touching the tongue to the upper palette stimulates the prana. The practice reduces the sensations of hunger and thirst. Thereby, helps in sitting in meditation for long periods. Also, this mudra is associated with the nectar of elixir that keeps a person rejuvenated.

4) Kaki mudra



While looking at the nose tips, purse the lips together. It is a cooling practice. It soothes the body and mind. On the other, people with depression, constipation, low blood pressure should avoid this.

5) Bhoochari mudra



How to do it:

- While sitting in a **meditative asana**, raise the right hand in front of the face.
- The elbow should point to the side of the body. Hold the hand horizontally, palm down with all the fingers together.
- The side of the thumb should be in contact with the top of the upper lip.
- Focus the eyes on the tip of the little finger

Benefits:

- Increases memory power and sharpens the brain.
- Enhances concentration and prevents insomnia.
- When practiced regularly, it relieves anger and depression.

6) Akashi mudra



While sitting in a meditative asana, using shambhavi and khechari mudra. Look up and use **ujjayi breath**. This Mudra influences the Vishuddhi Chakra, activates the thyroid gland and balances the Nadis. As this Mudra blocks energy coming from lower centres. While it guides energy down from the **Sahasrara Chakra**, it calms and uplifts the thoughts.

7) Shanmukhi mudra



This mudra is known for closing the seven gates. That is two ears, eyes, nostrils and one mouth. The aim is to listen to the inner sounds and look for whatever appears in the darkness. This mudra induces the state of pratyahara or sense withdrawal. This is relaxing and calms the nervous system.

These mudras generate a loop of energy which moves around the brain. Next time, you sit in meditation try these mudras for sure.

We can adopt Pratyahara in all the asanas we do, if we focus on the alignments and visualize the body part on which we are doing asana we turn our focus inwards and all our senses will not take the external inputs we will be completely in the asana, we achieve pratyahara.

Applying Pratyahara in Asanas

Ashtanga Yoga Physical Practice

While the Spiritual benefits of yoga are central to this ancient path, the physical aspect is what draws most students.

Ashtanga Yoga asks you to work on the spiritual through the physical. You begin by sweating your way through some yoga poses.

Doing the asanas right way includes concentrating your mind on your body, breath, and gaze

Which includes controlling your senses and consciously observing the changes happening is the best to start applying Pratyahara.

Ashtanga Yoga practice is broken up into six groups of poses. The first group, called the Primary Series, is a pretty strenuous routine. Most people will spend their entire lives working on elements of this set of seventy-two poses. Known in Sanskrit as *yoga chikitsa*, this practice cleanses your organs, tissues, and glands of toxins, fat, and other harmful substances. The Primary Series contains all the necessary elements for establishing health and purifying your body, including Surya Namaskara (Sun Salutation), forward bends, twists, backbends, powerful lifting, headstands, and many other movements that stoke the inner fire. The specific nature of Ashtanga Yoga is that you repeat the poses in the same order until you have mastered them. You do not move on until you have made some sort of progress where you are. When you repeat a series of poses over and over, you move away from an intellectual understanding of them to a kinesthetic intelligence that connects movement to a place deep within.

The Ashtanga Yoga Primary Series builds sequentially in terms of flexibility and strength to prepare you for some of the gateway poses in the practice. Gateway poses test a student's understanding of technique and asana. These postures are the most challenging in the set of related poses. Starting with Surya Namaskara, which is aimed at both steadying the mind and warming up the inner fire, the practice lengthens the hamstrings, stretches and strengthens the back, increases core development, and purifies the entire body. Surya Namaskara is where the student of yoga begins to develop devotion (*bhavana*).

We will see how to apply pratyahara in Surya Namaskara.



Step 1. Pranamasana (Prayer pose)



Stand at the edge of your mat, keep your feet together and balance your weight equally on both the feet. Expand your chest and relax your shoulders. As you breathe in, lift both arms up from the sides, and as you exhale, bring your palms together in front of the chest in prayer position.

Step 2. Hastauttanasana (Raised arms pose)



Breathing in, lift the arms up and back, keeping the biceps close to the ears. In this pose, the effort is to stretch the whole body up from the heels to the tips of the fingers.

Tip to deepen this yoga stretch:

You may push the pelvis forward a little bit. Ensure you're reaching up with the fingers rather than trying to bend backward.

Step 3. Hastapadasana (Standing forward bend)



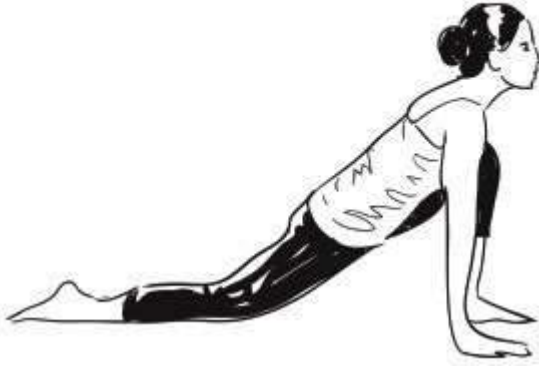
Breathing out, bend forward from the waist keeping the spine erect. As you exhale completely, bring the hands down to the floor beside the feet.

Tip to deepen this yoga stretch:

You may bend the knees, if necessary, to bring the palms down to the floor. Now make a gentle effort to

straighten the knees. It's a good idea to keep the hands fixed in this position and not move them henceforth until we finish the sequence.

Step 4. Ashwa Sanchalanasana (Equestrian pose)



Breathing in, push your right leg back, as far back as possible. Bring the right knee to the floor and look up.

*Tip: How to deepen this yoga stretch?
Ensure that the left foot is exactly in between the palms.*

Step 5. Dandasana (Stick pose)



As you breathe in, take the left leg back and bring the whole body in a straight line.

*Tip to deepen this yoga stretch:
Keep your arms perpendicular to the floor.*

Step 6. Ashtanga Namaskara (Salute with eight parts or points)



Gently bring your knees down to the floor and exhale. Take the hips back slightly, slide forward, rest your chest and chin on the floor. Raise your posterior a little bit. The two hands, two feet, two knees, chest and chin (eight parts of the body) should touch the floor.

Step 7. Bhujangasana (Cobra pose)



Slide forward and raise the chest up into the Cobra pose. You may keep your elbows bent in this pose with the shoulders away from the ears. Look up at the ceiling.

Tip to deepen this yoga stretch:

As you inhale, make a gentle effort to push the chest forward; as you exhale, make a gentle effort to push the navel down. Tuck the toes under. Ensure you're stretching just as much as you can and not forcing your body.

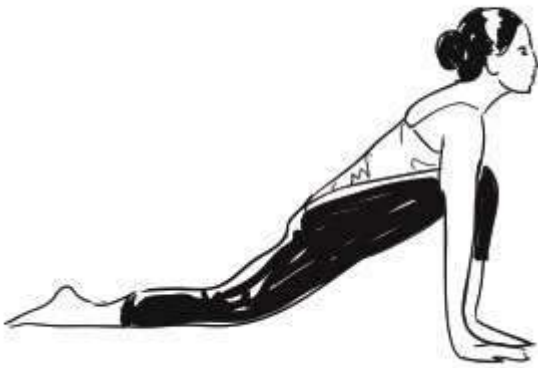
Step 8. Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward facing dog pose)

Breathing out, lift the hips and the tailbone up to bring the body into an inverted 'V' pose.

Tip to deepen this yoga stretch:

If possible, try and keep the heels on the ground and make a gentle effort to lift the tailbone up, going deeper into the stretch.

Step 9. Ashwa Sanchalanasana (Equestrian pose)



Breathing in, bring the right foot forward in between the two hand floor. Press the hips down and look up.

Tip to deepen this yoga stretch:

Place the right foot exactly between the two hands and the right calf perpendicular to the floor. In this position, make a gentle effort to push the hips down towards the floor, to deepen the stretch.

Step 10. Hastapadasana (Standing forward bend)



Breathing out, bring the left foot forward. Keep the palms on the floor. You may bend the knees, if necessary.

Tip to deepen this yoga stretch:

Gently straighten the knees, and if you can, try and touch your nose to the knees. Keep breathing.

Step 11. Hastauttanasana (Raised arms pose)



Breathing in, roll the spine up. Raise the hands up and bend backward a little bit, pushing the hips slightly outward.

Tip to deepen this yoga stretch:

Ensure that your biceps are beside your ears. The idea is to stretch up more rather than stretching backward.

Step 12. Tadasana (Mountain pose)



As you exhale, first straighten the body, then bring the arms down. Relax in this position and observe the sensations in your body.

This completes one set of Surya Namaskar. Complete the round by repeating the steps. Only this time, start with taking the left foot behind in step number 4 and bringing the right foot forward in step number 10. Once done, you would've completed one round of Surya Namaskar.

Adopting The Pratyahara practices in our daily routines

Detox from the media.

We can start by withdrawing from the things that work against us, such as unhealthy food and toxic relationships. The mind cannot be healthy and strong if we are surrounded by unhealthy things, and this includes the media we choose to consume.

What kind of impressions are you feeding yourself through TV or social media? Is it inspiring, or is it junk-food for the mind? To distance yourself from this sensory overload, spend some time without media. Even if just a few hours every other day, switch off the mobile, TV, and laptop, and turn your focus inward.

Move yourself into peace.

During asana practice, we release physical tension. This is vital for the mind to become quiet and is perfect preparation for the next phases of yoga. Cultivate elements of pratyahara by leaving the external world behind, and being fully present on your mat. Be aware of your senses and observe your reactions to them.

We cannot change what we are not aware of, and asana practice provides the perfect platform for self discovery. ~Kaisa Kapanen

Focus the mind and the senses will follow.

The mind can only take in a certain amount of sensory input, so the energy flows where the mind goes. We can use this in pratyahara, and intentionally direct the mind inward, away from external stimuli. If the mind is controlled, the senses are controlled also.

You can start by directing your mind to one sense only, such as hearing. Next time you are in Savasana, allow your mind to focus on all the different sounds around you, far away and close by. Try not to judge or label the sounds, just listen. Once the mind gets used to the sounds, it will naturally focus more on the inside.

Patience and practice

Yoga is a process of discovery and growth. Just as asana practice takes time, so does practicing the mind. We cannot jump into Crow Pose on our first day of asana practice, but this doesn't mean we can't eventually get there. We should allow our mind the same freedom to grow and develop. Be patient, practice, and take each day as it comes.

Discussions:

When the inclination for concentration arises in the mind, a great change will be felt in one's own self. A new type of mood will rise within, and it will look like the whole world is changing its colours and relations. There will be a total confirmation of the nature of one's feelings when this inclination to concentration arises in the mind. We have to bear in mind the importance of this sutra, *dhāraṇāsu ca yogyatā manasaḥ* (II.53), which means that there should be the mind's preparedness or readiness for concentration, as a mere pressure of the will cannot bring about concentration.

Every stage of yoga, every step in its practice, is a healthful growth and not any kind of pressurisation from any source. Therefore, it is a very gradual ascent because the natural inclination does not arise quickly, due to the presence of other impressions in the mind.

So, if we properly bear in mind the significance of the earlier steps mentioned – right from yama onwards, up to pranayama – we will be able to understand the types of preparation that we have to make for this readiness of the mind to concentrate.

Most of us are not ready for concentration, and if we ask the mind to concentrate when it is not prepared, how will we take to that practice? We cannot even take our meal when the stomach is not ready for it. Nothing can be done when the system is not prepared. Neither can we walk, nor can we sleep, nor can we eat, nor can we speak if we are not ready for these things. For every action, function or conduct, there should be a readiness of the system – preparedness, a mood, a tendency, an inclination.

While this is so in the case of various other functions of life, it is much more so in the case of concentration where the readiness is not expected merely from one part or aspect of the system, but from the total system. How is it possible that everyone will agree to a single point? Rarely is this found. The majority may agree; the minority may not agree. But, here, we do not want a majority merely. The total group of the forces of the system should be ready. The whole army should be up for action; not one soldier should malingering. Not one cell in the body should be reluctant. Such is what is called the preparedness for meditation. If the intellect is ready, the emotion is not ready. If the emotion is prepared, the intellect is not understanding. If both are ready, the will is not working. If everything is okay, we are sick. If this is the case, how will we meditate?

It is difficult to find all things working together. This is a great difficulty, indeed. What can be called a difficulty in life, if not this? If everything went well, we would be in heaven by this very moment – but, unfortunately, this does not happen. Something or other will not click properly, and then the machine will not move. But it has to move and everything has to click in an orderly, spontaneous manner – that

too, not by force or pressure. See how many conditions are laid. Everything has to be prepared. Body, mind and spirit are all together in preparedness for action – in completeness, in full force of aspiration; that is one thing. The other thing is that it should be free from pressure. We may not take a drug to cause a readiness of the system for meditation, because then the system is not ready – we are whipping it. Whipping cannot be called ready. If we give a blow to the horse which is unable to pull the cart, it jumps up due to the whipping, but do we call it spontaneous action? The result would be that the cart is turned upside down due to the kick given in resentment by the horse.

If we apply force with a drug or any kind of stimulant – even a forced will is a kind of stimulant only, and even such stimulants are not allowed. If we apply these vacuum brakes to a fast-moving train, there will be catastrophe following. Therefore, 'yogata' is the term used very wisely by Patanjali. Yogata means that there should be fitness for concentration. Are we fit? What is the meaning of 'fitness'? Are we spontaneous in our action? That is one question. Or are we being compelled by somebody? If there is a motive of compulsion that is behind the sitting for meditation, there will be a counter-urge of the mind to come back to its original position from where it started.

If we are forced to work in an office, we know how long we will work. We will be looking for the first opportunity to get out from that place. As early as possible we want to be out when the pressuring influence is lifted. Also, the quality of work falls because of the pressure. Quantity is less, and quality is nil; this will happen in meditation if we force it.

Hence, there should be a willingness on our part due to the satisfaction we feel on account of the recognition of the value of the step that we are taking. First of all, it is difficult to see the value, whatever be our aspiration. We cannot recognise or visualise the entire value of meditation, because if the entire value is seen, it would be unthinkable how the mind can come back from that. How could we explain the mind coming back from a resourceful treasure which it has dug up and possessed? But it is unable to recognise the value. It is like a monkey seeing a huge treasure trove; it does not know the worth of it. It is simply like a huge weight of material; it has no meaning. Likewise would be the attitude of an unprepared mind, and there would be, therefore, a consequent repulsion. There would be no yogata, or preparedness.

Svaviṣaya asaṁprayoge cittasya svarūpānukāraḥ iva indriyāṅgāṁ pratyāhāraḥ (II.54). When this significance or value in the object of meditation is properly recognised, there is an automatic disconnection of the senses from their objects. The vehicle of the object is severed from its relation with the engine, which is the senses, and then the objects will not move, because there is no movement of the senses in respect of the objects. 'Vaviṣaya asaṁprayoge' is the term used in the sutra defining pratyahara, which is the beginning step of the central court of yoga. It is the severance of the senses from contact with objects, which is something very strange indeed, because it is not easy to understand the meaning of 'contact'. Contact is different from the union that is the aim of yoga. The ultimate purpose of yoga is a kind of merger of consciousness in the object which it contemplates. That is the

true union that is aspired for. But the senses, when they contemplate an object, are not supposed to be in union with the object; this is the difference. If the senses are in union, what is it that we are trying to do by severing them from the objects? There is no union of the senses with their object when they are contacting it.

‘Contact’ and ‘union’ are two different things. When sunlight falls on a pot kept outside in the sun, the pot is illumined by the light of the sun and so we are able to visualise the presence of the pot in the sun. The pot shines on account of the light that has fallen upon it, and becomes one with it, almost. We cannot separate the light of the sun from the pot on which it has fallen and which it illumines. Nevertheless, we know that the light has never become the pot; it is quite different from the pot or the object which it illumines. Can we say that the light of the sun has entered the pot and become one with it in union? No, not at all. There is only a contact – though it may look like an inseparable contact, which is really the case. So intimately is the contact of the light with the object that we cannot differentiate one from the other. We begin to say that the pot is shining; this is what we generally say. What is shining is the light, not the pot. But the identity is such, apparently, that it looks that the object itself is shining, and so we are able to perceive the presence of the object in the daylight of the sun.

Similar is the case with the contact of the senses in respect of their objects. They do not unite themselves with the object. If there is a real union, how can there be separation? How can there be bereavement? How can there be sorrow that one is dispossessed of the object which one liked? There has never been union – there was only contact. And this contact is, really speaking, the opposite of what the senses are aiming at through that means which they adopt in the cognition of an object.

The intention of the senses is not the same as what is really happening there. The intention of the senses in respect of its object is that it wants to grab the object, to assimilate the object, to digest it, and to make the object part of its own being. Though this is the intention, this will not take place for certain reasons. What actually happens is that the senses are repelled by the structure of the object. We may call it an electrical repulsion, if we like, just as there is the repulsion felt by the tactile sense when there is contact of the sense with the physical object. What we call the touch sense of the fingers, for instance, on account of which they feel the solidity of an object, is not really a union of the tactile sense with the object, but it is a kind of repulsion that is produced by the particles of matter which constitute the object and are electrically charged – as also are the particles which constitute the structure of the tips of the fingers, or the nerve-endings. This produces a different type of reaction altogether, like positive and negative joining. But here, positive and positive are repelling. There is a kind of electrical repulsion produced by the nature of the object and the workings of the senses, though this repulsion itself sometimes looks like a satisfying condition due to a mistaken notion about what is really happening.

Suppose we are kicked and we fall down into a pot of honey; do we call it a great satisfaction? Well, we have fallen into a pot of honey; but we have been kicked and, therefore, we fell down into it. Likewise, these senses are being kicked by the object. But they think they have fallen into a pot of honey; and they

are licking it, not knowing that it was very undeserved, really speaking. The intention was quite different.

The union that is aspired for in yoga is not of this nature. Therefore, inasmuch as union is not achieved in the contact of senses with objects, the defect, which is the cause of this repulsion and the mistaken satisfaction that arises on account of this contact, is to be recognised. For this purpose the senses have to first be weaned back from the objects. This process is called pratyahara.

What happens in pratyahara is mentioned in the sutra: svaviṣaya asaṁprayoge cittasya svarūpānukāraḥ iva indriyāṅgāṁ pratyāhāraḥ (II.54). There are two changes that take place in this action of the senses in their abstraction from the objects. Firstly, they are disconnected from contact with the object due to the withdrawal of the consciousness which is animating the senses. Secondly, which is more important, the senses turn back to the mind and assume the character of the mind. 'Cittasya svarūpanukarah' means 'the senses accompanying the mind in its essential nature'. They become almost one with the mind. In the usual activity of the senses, they are not one with the mind. They drag the mind out from its own chambers and then compel it to contemplate an external object, in which case the mind is something like a slave of the senses; the master has himself come under the subjection of the servants. But in pratyahara, this is not what is happening. The master is recognised – and his worth is known. The senses return. They do not return of their own accord. If the gas in the engine is completely removed, the vehicle will not move. The gas is the motive force, and that motive force is the consciousness that is attending upon the activity of the senses. If the supply of energy behind the movement of a vehicle is withdrawn, the vehicle cannot move. And, as long as the supply is there, the vehicle cannot be stopped. The vehicle may be said to be the senses which are running towards some objective. They cannot be stopped in their activities unless the energy is withdrawn. That energy is the consciousness.

Therefore, first and foremost, what is required is a severance of the attention of consciousness in respect of the movement of the senses towards objects. The attention is diverted. That is why sometimes, when we are deeply thinking over some important matter, even if we may be looking at some object, we may not see it. Our eyes may be open; it may appear that we are gazing at something, but we are seeing nothing at all on account of the fact that the energy that is necessary for the cognition of an object is withdrawn. There cannot be perception when the attention is diverted in some other way. Thus, in pratyahara there is first a diversion of attention from one place to another place. We have to find out what that place is, which is the object of meditation.

In this withdrawal of the consciousness from its movement along the lines of the senses, what happens is, it returns to the source from where it started. It will be difficult for one to distinguish between the senses and the mind at this moment. The senses and the mind become one. Here, the mind becomes powerful because when we turn off all the lights, turn off all the fans, and all the expenditure of electric energy is cut off on account of the turning off of all the switches, we see that the power station feels the surge immediately. The energy returns to the power station because we have turned off all the

switches; there is no expenditure of energy. All the sources of the external movement of energy are severed on account of the turning off of the switches; naturally, the energy has to increase at the source, and we will see the indication of the increase in kilowatts recorded in the meters of the power station. The engineer in the power station will find out that people have turned off all the switches, because consumption of energy has gone down.

So is the case with pratyahara. It is the turning off of all the switches of action through the senses by which there has been expenditure of energy. The senses coming in contact with objects is like turning on the switch – the fan is working, the light is working, the fridge is working – everything is working, and so all the energy is spent. Sometimes it may be impossible for the power station to supply the requisite energy on account of the intense activity of the senses. When this happens, the connection is severed. What happens to that energy which was being spent through sense-activity, which was being utilised for perception, cognition of things, and enjoyment of objects? What happens to that energy? It goes back. It goes back to the source from where it was generated, from where it was conducted outward through the media of the senses. Then there is a rise or a swell of energy within – suddenly coming up and overflowing, as it were. The mind will feel a new type of health within itself on account of the exuberance of energy that it has due to the reversion of the energies through the channels of the senses from the points of objects towards which they were previously moving. This is the meaning of the term ‘cittasya svarupanukarah’: the energy returning to the power station on account of the severance of contact with the points of expenditure. Then one becomes powerful, strong, indefatigable, energised – charged with a new kind of buoyancy of spirit, and brilliant in one’s expression, on account of the energy being stored within oneself rather than its being outwardly directed for expenditure through contact. So the senses are disconnected from contact with objects – that is one thing that is expected here, and that is done. Secondly, the energy returns on account of this disconnection – this is pratyahara. Svavishaya asamprayoge and cittasya svarupanukarah are the two essential points mentioned in respect of the practice of pratyahara.

Tataḥ paramā vaśyatā indriyāṇām (II.55). We then become supreme master of the senses and can direct them wherever we like. The senses no more compel us to act against our wish, and do not any more make us puppets in their hands, on account of the control gained over their activities. But this parama vashyata, the great mastery one gains over sense activities, is gained with great, hard effort. A very intensely strenuous effort is necessary – for years, perhaps – to gain this sort of mastery over the senses. We think that the senses will automatically come back from their objects; but, they will not listen to us. They are very powerful, and they will simply show their thumbs before us if we talk to them. It requires persistence, tenacity and untiring effort – day in and day out – doing the very same thing, even if we may fail in our attempt. It does not mean that every day we will succeed. One day they will listen, and for ten days they will not listen. Then it will look like our effort has been a failure. We will complain, “What is the matter with me? For ten days I am struggling; nothing is happening.” But, on the eleventh day they may listen. This is the peculiarity of these senses and the mind, so one should not be dejected.

It was already mentioned on an earlier occasion that this melancholy mood is a great obstacle in yoga. Duhkha daurmanasya are the two things mentioned – sorrow or grief, and dejection of spirit – on account of not having gained mastery, or not having achieved anything. This should not come, because not even an adept can know what mastery he has gained, where he is standing, and what are the obstacles preventing him from achievement. Nothing will be known even to an expert. Even such a person will be kept in the dark; such is the mysterious realm that we are treading and walking through. But, the great watchword of this practice is: never be diffident. We should never condemn ourselves or be dispirited in our practice. It may be that for months together we may not achieve concentration, which is also possible due to the working of certain karmas. Even then, one should be tirelessly pursuing it.

There is a story in which it is told that Robert Bruce saw a spider falling down many times – climbing up and falling down and climbing up. Robert Bruce was defeated in a war. He was sitting in a cave somewhere, crying. He did not know what to do. Then he saw a spider climbing up the wall and falling down – again it went up and again it fell down. A hundred times it fell, and finally it got up and caught the point to which it wanted to rise. Then he said, “This is what I have to do now. I should not keep crying here.” So, he went up with the regiment that he had and the forces available, and launched a frontal attack once again, and won victory in the war. The moral of the story is that we should not be melancholy, dispirited or lost in our conscious efforts, because the so-called defeatist feeling that we have in our practice is due to the operation of certain obstructing karmas. Otherwise, what can be the explanation for our defeat in spite of our effort to the best of our ability?

We have been struggling for days and nights, for months and years – and we are getting nothing. How is it possible? The reason is that there is some very strong impediment, like a thick wall standing in front of us, on account of some tamasic or rajasic karma of the past lives. All our time is spent in breaking through this wall. The achievement is something quite different – that will come later on. So why should we weep that we have achieved nothing? We have achieved; we have pierced through the wall. It is like Bharatpur Fort which the British wanted to break and could not, due to the thickness of the wall. Somehow or other, after tremendous effort, they made a hole and went in. We can imagine what indefatigable effort and what kind of persistence was required in breaking through the fort. Otherwise, one would give up and go back. It was impossible to break in because the wall was too thick – fifty feet thick and made of mud. One could not break it by any kind of bullet – such was Bharatpur Fort. They did not succeed, but they were very persistent. Somehow or other they made a hole and went in, and the fort was captured.

Likewise, the first day's effort need not necessarily bring illumination because of the great efforts that are necessary to break through the fort of the veil of ignorance and karma, which is itself sufficient and weighty. Even if we spend three-fourths of our life in this work only, it should not be regarded as a kind of defeat. Often it so happens that the major part of our life is spent only in cleansing and in breaking through this veil. Once this negative work of cleansing and breaking is effected, then the positive achievement will take place in a trice. How much time do we require to see the brilliance of the sun? We

have only to remove the cataract veil that is covering our eyes and immediately we see the sun shining. The effort is to remove this veil. Hence, this vashyata, or the mastery over the senses which the sutra speaks of, is gained with very hard effort, and no sadhaka can afford to lose heart in the attempt. It is declared in the scriptures on yoga that the only thing that works, and succeeds, in this noble endeavour is persistence. If we go on persistently doing a thing – again and again, whether we succeed or not – we will succeed eventually.

Summary:

The pratyahara process is a healthy and positive process. It is not brought about by compulsion, or due to certain impediments that present themselves in the form of those things which are other than the ones which are desired by the mind. The mind sometimes does not think of objects when it is not concerned with them. This is another kind of pratyahara, but it is different from yogic pratyahara which is a philosophical withdrawal and not a negative kick that the mind receives or a complete oblivion or ignorance of the presence of a thing. It is a conscious attitude, and nothing unconscious should be allowed to interfere with it. We are aware of everything that is happening in the process of pratyahara. We are not ignorant of any aspect, and are not unconscious of anything. Even the things that we like and the things that we do not like – both these are objects of analysis. The withdrawal is not merely from the negative side of experience – namely, the objects which one does not like – but also from the positive objects which one really likes. Both the likes and dislikes of the mind are two aspects of an involvement, and what pratyahara endeavours to accomplish is precisely the relief of the mind from involvement. Involvement is a kind of illness that has taken possession of the mind, from which it has to be freed, of which it has to be cured. Whether we have a positive like for a thing or a negative dislike for a thing, we are equally involved in either case. And both these are defects – very serious impediments from the point of view of yoga.

Why this involvement has taken place, and what is the defect that is there behind it, cannot be understood as long as the mind is impinging upon the object and clinging to it. The proper direction of the mind in a requisite manner can be effected only in a higher stage, which is called dharana, or concentration. But prior to this there is the need for bringing the mind back from the wrong direction that it has taken. Before we direct it in a proper way, we have to bring it back from the improper way it has taken. This is the meaning of pratyahara – the mind has taken a wrong direction of action, and so we have to bring it back from that direction. It has taken a wrong course, and after we bring it back to the point from where it started on the wrong course, we direct it on a proper course.

The bringing of the mind back from its improper course is pratyahara, and the directing of the mind in a proper course is dharana, concentration. We can now appreciate the necessity for pratyahara. When you are persistently doing something wrong, and I expect you to do the right thing, first I would enlighten you as to the mistake that has been committed, and then inform you about the way of rectifying the situation: stop doing that which is improper, and then start to do that which is proper. The cessation of doing that which is improper is pratyahara, and the actual doing of the thing which is proper is dharana. But, as I mentioned, this is a painful process. Though we may philosophically argue with the mind that it has taken a wrong direction, it will not listen to this argument because it has got involved emotionally in that particular object towards which it is moving in a wrong manner. Though it is wrong in an ultimate sense, it also has to be noted, with sympathy in respect of the mind, that it has become one with the object due to its recognition of a peculiar twisted value in that object, for the purpose of the fulfilment of which it is moving towards it. There is a need for viveka, a proper understanding of the

whole circumstance under which the mind has got involved in this manner. Then only is it possible to wean the mind from the object and bring it to the point of right concentration, which is real yoga.