



## PROGRAM E-28

**OM SRI SURYA VA NAMAH  
OM SRI CHANDRA VA NAMAH  
OM SRI BUDDHA VA NAMAH  
OM SRI SHUKRA VA NAMAH  
OM SRI MANGALA VA NAMAH  
OM SRI BRI-HAS-PATHI VA NAMAH  
OM SRI SHANI VA NAMAH**

### THE AWAKENING

#### **Stages of True Pratyahara**

*Many* seekers are confused about the *practice* of *pratyahara*, and what it means to truly withdraw from the dense physical senses, and thus the external world.

Pratyahara is most often stated as the conscious withdrawal of energy from the physical senses. Thus, I have drawn up a process using 'asana' to help you understand more clearly what pratyahara is, and what it is not.

The process begins by focusing on an asana, while deeply relaxing. In this case, I will use *savasana*.

While in savasana, in the beginning stages of this process, there is an awareness of a physiological relaxation, of becoming comfortable. There is awareness of the muscles relaxing, and at the same time awareness that the breath is slowing down.

In the second stage of savasana, the seeker engages the mind sheath.

You most likely will remember that each Jiva-atma is enclosed in five sheaths:

1. The food sheath (the physical body)
2. The prana sheath (the energy body)
3. The mind sheath (the mind body)
4. The knowledge sheath (data body)
5. The bliss sheath (the causal body)

These five sheaths or 'bodies' can be thought of as layers of consciousness – from the densest to the subtlest vibration.

Now, in the second stage of savasana, the seeker withdraws from the external world, but without losing contact with the outer world. *This type of withdrawal is the first level of experiencing pratyahara.*

This first level of withdrawal is a state of non-reaction that could be seen as the first stage of pratyahara. At this stage the seeker's mind is aware that the mind is still registering input from the dense, physical sense organs, however, the mind **does not react** to the sense organ's input.

One way to look at this early stage of pratyahara is to realize that there is a *space* between the sensory stimulus and your mind's response.

Life involves interactions with the external world, which includes people. This often brings about conflicting factors. However, people don't need other souls in order to produce conflict, because most souls are almost continuously in conflict with themselves.

During these times, the seeker tends to withdraw from the world in order to avoid these conflicts. This is not what true pratyahara is about.

True pratyahara means that when the seeker participates in the world, he/she has created a sacred space between the world and their consciousness so that they do not automatically react to sensory stimuli, but have time to choose wise actions.

The practice of true pratyahara enables the seeker to *choose* a response instead of merely reacting to stimuli. In other words, practicing pratyahara means remaining in the middle of a stimulating environment, yet consciously *choosing* how to respond, and *not just reacting to life's stimuli*.

In my practice, when I begin to realize how busy my mind really is, I begin to practice pratyahara by withdrawing my pranic energy from the dense sense organs, and focus upon a beautiful thought. This turns into a beautiful feeling. I then wash my mind and aura with that beautiful feeling state. It might be helpful to remember to practice pratyahara in this way.

Most people escape into their thoughts during boring times, and during repetitive daily tasks. This type of withdrawing takes you further away from the higher self -- the Atma. This has the opposite effect of any spiritual practice, which should always bring you closer to your true nature.

During the practice of pratyahara, the seeker becomes aware of the mind's need for 'stimulation' as a form of escape, as the mind becomes bored.

Dream your dream and the mind will never be bored, nor need to seek out added stimulation.

When practicing pratyahara, the seeker will notice that when the mind wants to escape from its life, it will seek highly stimulating environments. Thus, remember what was said about the dangers of one's environment being an activator of past karma.

(Remember, also, that simply attempting to flee from difficulty is not pratyahara.)

Use pratyahara as a spiritual tool to improve your mind and your daily life by understanding the difference between 'withdrawing' and 'escaping'; between 'pratyahara' and 'forgetting'.

There are other, deeper levels of pratyahara:

Pratyahara is the withdrawal of the physical sense organs of cognition from the external world, as well as from the impressions or images in the mind stuff caused by the senses being activated.

Only when the seeker is freed from external distractions will s/he be successful at taking that inward path to self-discovery.

Pratyahara, or sense withdrawal, is not about dealing with pain or negative sensations. It is about your ability to withdraw the life prana, at will, from the dense sense organs, so that they do not distract your inward journey. This is the essence of pratyahara.

Pain is just one aspect of the senses. Pleasurable sensations are an even greater distracting force, and thus, pose a greater menace to the serious seeker.

*Attention* magnifies pleasure, and this presents a problem, because there is usually no motivation to withdraw from pleasurable sensations. Thus, pleasurable sensations glue themselves to the sense organs much more strongly.

Why would one wish to escape from pleasurable sensations? The clear and simple answer is that if one can control the prana to the sense organs, both pleasurable and painful, one will be able to move into the higher, pre-time realms, which allows one to soften 900 units of negative karma in one unit of time.

In simple terms, this means that negative karma that has been accumulating for 900 years can be neutralized in one earth year.

Thus, the only question remaining is, "How does one withdraw from the sense organs?"

One of the better ways to practice pratyahara is to focus on sounds. No, not mantric sounds, just ordinary sounds.

In a safe place, close your eyes, or sit in a dark room, and just listen to all the sounds in your environment. Now, from all these various sounds, concentrate the mind on the subtlest sound.

As you begin to focus your mind on this subtlest sound, you will begin to realize that this subtlest sound becomes louder.

After you have practiced this method for a while, you can extend it by asking if there is a subtler sound beneath the one you were focusing upon. Search for that subtler sound, and when it is found, shift your awareness to it. Focus on the new sound until it becomes louder.

In this practice, is it important not to try to block out the louder sounds. Let the louder sounds come and go. Pay no attention to them. Focus only on the subtler sounds.

This method is the essence of pratyahara: do not block out anything, just stay focused on your goal, whatever it may be.

As you keep seeking out subtler and subtler sounds, you eventually will hear your own breathing. Still later, beneath that, you will hear your heart beating. Who knows what else you might hear?

I repeat, this method will give you the secret to learning *pratyahara*: you are not trying to block out anything, but simply focusing upon what is vital to you, at that moment.

On a psychological level, the process of *pratyahara* causes the prana to leave the sense organs and thus the sensations from the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste), so they do not reach the relevant centers in the brain. This makes deep kriya concentration possible.

There are two key types of *pratyahara*:

1. *Indriya pratyahara*, and
2. *Prana pratyahara*

*Indriya pratyahara* entails withdrawal of the sensory inputs coming from the five senses, namely organs that for most souls produce a sensory overload, and consequently hinder the mind from focusing or concentrating. We have already discussed this in detail.

*Prana pratyahara* is the control of the senses requiring a mastery over the flow of prana. Without prana the senses will not function.

Because of sensory overload, and data overload, along with all the mind's desires, it becomes impossible for the mind to focus or concentrate.

Thus, to stop the scattering of the mind, one needs to gain control of the vital prana in the body. One needs to seek control over the flow of prana. One of the key ways of doing this is the practice of bringing the mind to a single point, and holding it there with exertion.

This leads to the final form of pratyahara: 'mano pratyahara', the withdrawal of the mind from everything, except the subtlest state of consciousness.

In practical terms, pratyahara is primarily a result of the practice of pranayama and mindfulness. Thus, pratyahara is the bridge to Samadhi and the Eternal Cosmic Mind.

Sri Patanjali uses the word 'nirodha' to explain how cosmic union is achieved. Nirodha is more of a channeling than a controlling. The means to attaining nirodha is by repeated practice with non-attachment.

It is kriya pranayama that truly brings about the state of pratyahara, which when perfected, concentrates the maha-prana at the base of the spine in the saturn chakra. Then, even without any further outward stimulation, the seeker is able to have a deep internal experience called 'concentration'.

Your 'universe', your life, consists of the things with which you have come into contact. To what degree you are affected by them will cause you to sense whether you are free or trapped, or whether you are feeling happy or unhappy.

Reaching the stage of pratyahara, the seeker masters the ability to indulge in the world, via the senses, and has gained inner maturity.

In the early stages of pratyahara, deep focus or discipline is required, however, over time there is an internal centering due to prolonged practice that will make distraction almost impossible.

The practice of pratyahara is really a practice of awareness, mindfulness, and self-discipline, as well as how the seeker lives and manages the pranic energy in their body.

Thus, if you make an effort to live peacefully and honestly, along with the daily practice of a routine of techniques, the result will be a marked increase in your level of awareness.

When this happens, the concentration of energy within your astral body will cause a marked concentration that will bring about an awakening of the potential, divine energy.

Daily do your practice with a connection to your goal, and throughout the day observe your thoughts, desires and actions so you are sure that these thoughts help, and do not hinder your goal.

OM

Shanti & Prem,

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