



PROGRAM E-27

**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

### **What is Pratyahara?**

*Pratyahara (sense withdrawal) is one of the most important stages in the practice of yoga. But, what is pratyahara?*

The term '*pratyahara*' is composed of two Sanskrit words, '*prati*' and '*ahara*'. *Prati* is a preposition meaning 'away', and '*ahara*' symbolizes anything we take into our mind-body complex.

Thus, pratyahara means literally 'the taking away of external influences from the mind states'. The term is most often translated as, 'withdrawal from the external sense organs'.

Pratyahara is a twofold process. It involves the withdrawal from *incorrect* impressions and erroneous associations, while at the same time, bringing in *right* impressions and *correct* associations.

Pratyahara's main function lies in controlling (dense) sensory impressions. This allows the seeker to enter into the inner mind, freely moving into all the areas of the mind.

By withdrawing one's awareness from external impressions, the seeker overcomes group karma, and strengthens the mind. Thus, one is able to attain deep Kriya meditation.

There are three key steps to pratyahara:

1. *Indriya-pratyahara* -- control of the dense, physical senses.
2. *Prana-pratyahara* -- control of the prana existing in the mind-body complex.
3. *Mano-pratyahara* -- withdrawal of the mind from the dense, physical senses. This necessitates controlling *one's* internal thought patterns.

Kriya Yoga is an immense system of spiritual practices for gaining inner, spiritual unfoldment.

Patanjali's classical yoga system has eight stages, each with its own function. Of these eight stages, pratyahara is the least known, and the least practiced (correctly).

Unless you understand and practice pratyahara correctly, you miss a key fundamental aspect of Kriya Yoga.

Pratyahara has a central place in the inner level of yoga and mysticism. Pratyahara is the crucial link between the outer stages of practice, and the inner stages of the practice of Kriya Yoga. Pratyahara is the method by which the seeker moves from the outer universe to the inner universe, wherein all 'things' begin -- where malfunctioning mind states can be corrected, and constrictive karma can be improved or totally corrected.

To make the transition from the outer world to the inner world, the breath and senses (which link the body and mind) need to be somewhat mastered. This is where some degree of pranayama mastery is needed in order to move to the next phase, pratyahara.

With the proper practice of pranayama, one gains some control over their vital-life energy. With pratyahara, one gains some mastery over the dense senses. These two key stages are required in order to concentrate deeply, and flow into effortlessly meditation.

### **Understanding Pratyahara**

Pratyahara is concerned with taking the seeker from the outer world to the inner world, by withdrawing the dense, physical, outgoing senses. Our senses 'look' outward with inquisitive fire, naming and owning what is seen.

The normal flow or movement of the dense, physical senses is 'outward'. Pratyahara's goal is to reverse this normal flow, and cause it, at will, to flow inward, into inner, deeper mind states.

This is not an easy task. It takes great patience and practice to learn how to do this. One of the keys is to daily learn to be detached about things and events.

The yogic purpose of pratyahara is to make the mind quiet and still, so that the seeker can learn to 'see' with inner, detached mind states.

Pratyahara is 'mano-vritti nirodha', as it directly works with the mind to change the normal flow of its direction. This enables it to penetrate into the inner core of the mind, seeing or realizing the Atma, or the Jiva-atma.

Thus, the path of pratyahara leads the seeker towards unveiling the Atma. In short, pratyahara helps the seeker to acquire awareness of the Atma.

An essential step in attaining pratyahara is detachment, with the ability to withdraw the dense senses; but doing this without any filters that distort what is seen.

One way to look at pratyahara is to realize that it is a platform for maintaining and retaining that which has been gained on the outer level from the practice of the previous stages.

Pratyahara is difficult if one has not somewhat mastered a key meditative asana and a few key pranayamas.

By attaining the stage of pratyahara, the seeker makes a giant step towards the liberation from past karma. It is at this moment that s/he is able to realize that the mind-body complex is a limited machine.

To repeat: 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. Wherever the mind goes, the senses follow. Thus, if the mind turns inward, the senses will follow and become active in the inward world of the mind.

The average person is controlled and 'dragged' around in the external world by their personality pursuing desires and 'running' from fears relating to job, name and fame.

It is through the daily practice of pratyahara that the seeker steadily gains control over the sense organs that are constantly being drawn toward these many different types of external objects.

I again feel the need to emphasize that in order to be successful in mastering pratyahara, the seeker must first establish mastery of a meditation asana. By mastery, I mean that the seeker is able to remain in a steady, comfortable meditation posture for a period of five to ten minutes. In this meditative asana, the body must be so relaxed (yet steady), that the seeker can totally forget that s/he inhabits a physical body for a short time.

The second requirement for mastering pratyahara is gaining some degree of mastery of the breath, so that during meditation, the breath becomes deep, quiet and smooth. Thus the senses are not held to the body state.

Without these two steps (asana and pranayama), sense withdrawal becomes difficult to obtain. Even with partial mastery of these two steps, pratyahara becomes a wondrous joy, wherein at a very deep level, one realizes they are well along the path.

Pratyahara suggests moderation in everything that we think, speak and do, so we do not become enslaved by the senses, as is sadly true for so many souls.

This yogic technique can be augmented by practicing Yoni Mudra. Yoni Mudra involves sitting in a meditative posture and shutting your ears, eyes, nose and mouth with your fingers. (See the last section of chapter 13 of the *Spiritual Science of Kriya Yoga*.)

OM

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