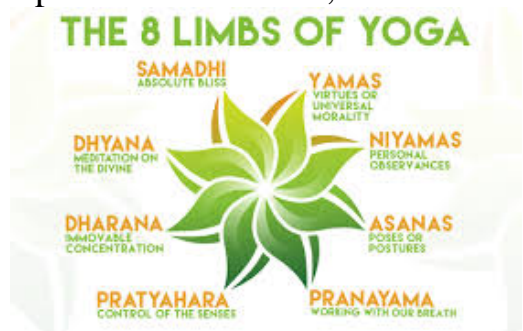


The Science of Upanishads – Part 51: Foundations of Modern Yoga Practice (Contd.): Description of Pratyahara (Withdrawal from Senses) as The Fifth Anga (Limb) of The Ashtanga Yoga (Eight Limbed Yoga) of The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

(March 7-March13, 2018)

For the past several weeks, we have been discussing the Ashtanga Yoga of Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, which consists of eight Angas (Limbs) as depicted in the following picturesque representation. So far, we have covered



four Angas, including Yamas, Niyamas, Asanas, and Pranayama. Today, we will discuss the Fifth Anga, namely **Pratyahara**. The latter is a Sanskrit word consisting of two separate words, Prati (away from) and Ahara (Senses), with an overall meaning of **Withdrawal from Senses**. The eight Angas can be divided into *external* and *internal* yoga. The first four limbs, including Yama (Self-Control), Niyama (Self-Discipline), Asanas (Physical Poses), and Pranayama (Breath Control) are considered as **External Yoga**, while the last four limbs, including Pratyahara (Sense Withdrawal), Dharana (Concentration), Dhyana (Meditation), and Samadhi (Complete Self Realization or Enlightenment) are generally believed to be **Internal Yoga**. The fifth Limb Pratyahara is viewed as the bridge between external and internal yoga. It moves the practitioner towards the more subtle art of concentration and meditation, and finally to samadhi (enlightenment). In a single sentence, **Pratyahara** can be defined as anything that takes your mind away from the external impressions and creates peaceful and positive inner impressions. In other words, Pratyahara is about withdrawing ourselves from any external information or interference so that we can hear the sounds from within. 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.

Demonstration of Pratyahara Anga Using Shavasana



Take for example, you are in a Shavasana mode, lying on a mat motionless like a corpse. However, you are still exposed to a wide variety of external stimuli, including sound, smell, touch, vision, etc. Now as a starter, invest all your energy in focusing your mind on just one thing, say for example, your left arm, and nothing else. Suddenly, your right hand floats off the floor, slips into your right pocket of your pants, and pulls out your iphone in order to respond to an incoming text message. Obviously, your mind was not focused enough on your left arm in

order to resist an insistent summons from the cyber world using your right hand! So, it takes enormous skill and practice to step back and disengage self from the surroundings so as to lead us to a profound state of perfect relaxation with the total control of both mind and body. The following audio teaches about how to practice

Pratyahara: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxHwKkusM3g>

Sensory overload with smart phones, e-mails, and 24/7 worldwide access is hardly unique to modern times. The *Katha Upanishad* uses a metaphor to describe how attachment to sensation can derail us. The body is a chariot carrying the Self as a passenger pulled by horses (the senses), and driven by our innate intelligence (buddhi), using the sensory mind (manas) as reins. The sense objects are the path on which the horses pull the chariot. If the horses are poorly trained or the chariot driver is inattentive or unskilled, the chariot careens off course. In other words, without a disciplined mind and right understanding, we suffer from the distractions of our uncontrolled senses, just as a charioteer suffers from trying to control untrained horses.

Read [Here](#) for more on [Pratyahara](#) Anga of Ashtanga Yoga