

29th Episode – Significance of Pratyahara

Following 28th episode of “Forms of Shiva” towards Maha Kumbhabhisekam of Panching Gua Charas Jalalingeswarar Shivan temple, with good intention and thoughts for all devotees, the following write-up is prepared.

As discussed in the previous 28th episode, we looked at Forms of Shiva and mantra. Unquote “In the Indian tradition, **Shiva has many forms**, each representing a **powerful possibility for inner evolution**. Shiva has numerous forms that encompass every possible quality that the human mind can and cannot imagine. Some are wild and fierce. Some are enigmatic. Others are endearing and charming. From the naïve Bholenath to the fearsome Kalabhairava, from the beautiful Somasundara to the terrible Aghora – Shiva embraces every possibility, remaining untouched by it all. But among all these, there are five fundamental forms”, Unquote.

In this 29th episode, we will look at the significance of Pratyahara and it helps us to turn inward. In last two episodes (i.e. episode 27th and 28th), to overcome invisible adversary, COVID19, we have shared two significance mantras to help us to turn inward with creating concentration when we chant those mantras and turn-inward and be meditative.



First of all, let's understand the details of 8 limbs in yoga which is known as “Ashtanga”. Ashtanga means ‘*eight-limbed yoga*’. These eight limbs of yoga are known as: **Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi**. The simplest possible way to describe **Yama** and **Niyama** is that it is a series of **what to do's** and **what not to do's**. What kind of actions creates the necessary atmosphere for one's spiritual possibility? What kind of actions could become an entanglement or a barrier? The very human nature knows what to do and what not to do. If the compassion within you is overflowing and the divinity within you has come to the forefront, you do not have to be told what to do and what not to do. You would know.

1. Yamas

- Ahimsa- compassion for all living things.
- Satya- commitment to truth in speech and action.
- Asteya- non stealing.
- Brahmcharya- path of the divine
- Aparigraha- no desire to acquire and hoard wealth.

2. Niyamas

- Shaucha - purity and cleanliness (Inner and Outer)
- Santosha- joy.
- Tapas - sadhana.
- Ishvarapranidhana - laying all action at the feet of the Guru or Lord
- Svadhyaya – meditation

3. Asana

It is the third limb of yoga. There are innumerable postures that your body can manipulate. Among these, certain postures have been identified as “yoga asanas” or yogasanas. “Yoga” means that

which takes you to a higher dimension or higher perception of life and asana means posture. So, that kind of posture which leads you to a higher possibility is called a “yogasana”. You may have noticed that as you pass through different mental or emotional conditions, the body tends to adopt a certain posture. One can figure out the emotional state that you are in just by watching your posture - whether you are happy, angry, sad or peaceful.

The science of asana is based on this and at the same time, it is completely contradictory. Guiding your body into certain postures with some level of awareness, you can change the very way you feel, think, understand and experience life. It is possible to elevate your consciousness through your posture. The science of yoga is that deep. **Asana is not an exercise**; it is a way **kneading the body to a higher possibility**. Asana is very subtle process of manipulating your energy towards a certain direction. It needs to be done with a certain level of awareness. Asanas can be practiced merely as a physical exercise or if you go deeper, by being aware of the **breath**, by being aware of the **nadis** or with **appropriate mantras**. You can even practice asana without moving a limb, just by focussing with your senses.

4. Pranayama

Pranayama is referred to as the path of fire and light because it is both purgative and enlightening in its nature. In yoga, anything that has the **cleansing property** is referred to as an element of **fire** and anything that has the **illuminating property**, that is referred to as an **element of light**. When we talk about these eight limbs, the **first three limbs of yoga** are referred to as the “**fire**” aspect of yoga; the **rest are known as the “light” aspect of yoga**. The first five are outward bound, whereas the **last three are inward bound**.

5. Pratyahara

For today’s human beings, **pratyahara is one of the most important limbs of yoga** and also the most challenging. **Pratyahara literally means “turning inward”**, taking your **attention off from the outside world and directing it inward**. Probably never before in the history of humanity did people have as much as distraction as the people of this generation. If you had been living with nature you wished to view the myriads of colour variations, you would have had to go out at dawn or dusk and sit there watching the sunset of the sunrise for about an hour.

You would have had the inclination too and you would have found the time too. But today, you just sit in front of your television; you will see multitudes of colours swaying before your eyes. So the level of external stimulation being bombarded into the human senses is like never before.

When excessive stimulation is there, to take your attention of that, to close your eyes and turn inward becomes a real challenge. So, when we talk about **turning inward**, we are considering the **physical body and the mind also as outward**, taking your attention of all these things and turning inward is not something that you can do, because there is nothing to turn inward to. **It is impossible for you to turn inward, so what you do is to try to cut off the outward flow. That is pratyahara.**

Understand this.... if you want to see something, you have to throw some energy out; otherwise you cannot see it. It is the same when you want to hear something or feel something.... you have to throw some energy out. The sense organs are constantly draining you of your energies; the more active you keep them, the more they drain you. So pratyahara means shutting down all these five gates so that slowly energy builds up in your system.

Imagine going to sleep without having your dinner. Though you slept on an empty stomach, when you wake up in the morning, you wake up with tremendous sense of energy, which was actually not there when you went to bed. All that you did was conserve your energy by closing off all the sensory gates, everything else was on, your body, your mind, the world, everything was on. All that happened was that you **shut off the five sense organs**.

So, the **first step** that you need to take is, you stop the **outward flow of energy**. If you do not let it out, the energy will naturally turn inward. When we say inward, we are talking beyond the body and the mind, because even this body and mind are external accumulations.

Hence for this reason, devotees can simply chant consecrated mantra of Bhairavi Mantra and Shiva mantra, which has been provided in 27th and 28th episodes and or simply sit, and shutting off the five sense organs.

6. Dhrana

You will see that if you pay attention to anything for a substantial amount of time, you develop a strong connection with that thing. But in this present age, a large number of people seem to be suffering from attention deficiency syndrome. We learned the art of print; we produced books, with the result that without even being aware of it, people learned a way to focus their attention on something. Let it be a thriller or a love story; you're totally there. So, while you are reading, dharana takes place without your awareness. But now that the electronic media has taken over, we are once again losing that capability that we had. Whatever you pay attention to; slowly you become connected with that - more 'intuitively'. Generally, women are more conscious of this. Whenever it becomes evident that whoever is supposed to pay the necessary attention to them, when they're not paying enough attention, they are the ones who become alert first. Men wait until a calamity takes place because they don't realize that when somebody is not paying attention, the connection is being broken. It is only by paying attention, a connection is being established. Whatever you don't pay attention to, that contact is gradually broken. Whatever you pay attention to, there you have contact. **This is dharana.**

7 & 8. Dhyana and Samadhi

If you can simply pay attention, slowly you become connected. These are two, there is you and me, but these two can be connected. If this attention becomes focused... one-pointed... after sometime this contact or this connection becomes so strong that there'll be no two - there'll be only one.

When that happens, we say, '**it is dhyana**'. There were two; because of paying attention they got connected, that is dharana. They got so connected you cannot say they are two; they have become one, this is dhyana. Now if this continues, if this can be sustained over a period of time, then there will be no one; they get dissolved into each other and then both get dissolved. Something of the beyond becomes prevalent because these two have become one and then, disappeared. If that happens, we say "**this is samadhi**".

Sama means 'equanimous', dhi means buddhi, the 'intellect'. When you are in samadhi, your intellect becomes equanimous. If your attention is absolutely unwavering, over a period of time the two will get connected initially, then two will become one, and then eventually, that one will also disappear. Something of the beyond becomes a reality. That is the state of samadhi.

Because of this undivided attention, your intellect became equanimous; it lost its discriminatory capability. Right now, modern science is proving to you that this whole existence is just one single energy. Accordingly, to modern physics and also according to modern neurosciences, your ideas of this and that, here and there, now and then, you and I – none of this is a reality.

Time and space is the creation of your intellect, because your intellect is dividing everything constantly. It is too powerful an instrument to be used just for your survival. If you are able to keep this tedious fight for survival aside, you can sublimate your intellect to turn something like a mirror.... not discriminatory. A mirror just reflects everything; nothing sticks to it, no residue is left and it never inquires the quality of what it reflects. It doesn't make anybody beautiful or anybody ugly; it simply reflects. When your minds become like this.... when your intellect becomes like this.... you are in a state of samadhi. One you are in a state of samadhi, there is neither this nor that.... but something else prevails. Hence, let us try to turn inwards by switching of our senses, which is basis of **Pratyahara**. All we need to do is to sit still and chant the mantras revealed in 27th and 28th episode.

Shiva Shambo
Om Nama Siva Ya Om
Help Ever Hurt Never
Service to Society is Service to Almighty
Master Ir. Sivabalan - Temple Trustee
30th March 2020