Pandit Rajmani Tigunait's Commentaries on Sutras 2:46, 2:49-51, and 2:54-55
from *The Practice of the Yoga Sutra*

SUTRA 2:46

स्थिरसुखमासनम् ॥४६॥

sthirasukham āsanam ||46||

A stable and comfortable posture is asana .

At first glance, this sutra does not seem particularly significant—simply by being steady and comfortable we accomplish the third limb of yoga. This appears to indicate that there is a disconnect between the rigors of the yamas and niyamas—especially tapas, svadhyaya, and Ishvara pranidhana—and asana, which is characterized by steadiness and comfort. We are steady when resting on the couch and comfortable when asleep in bed. Is Patanjali including asana in the system of yoga as casually as it sounds in this sutra? What about Vyasa, who confines his comments to listing a few sitting postures by name without bothering to explain what asana actually is? What are we missing?

As he did in sutra 1:36 of "Samadhi Pada," here Patanjali compacts a thousand years of collective experience into a single sutra. Over millennia, the yogis have developed hundreds of techniques to master their body and mind, and used that mastery to accomplish life's purpose. Some of these techniques remained narrow in scope, while others expanded to such an extent that they came to be treated as an independent discipline. That is how various schools—such as kundalini yoga, tantra yoga, laya yoga, mantra yoga, bhakti yoga, karma yoga, jnana yoga, and hatha yoga evolved. They all adopted the fundamental techniques of hatha yoga. In fact, it is the inclusion of hatha yoga techniques that defines the physical, mental, and spiritual disciplines of all these schools as yoga. Patanjali's system of yoga is no exception.

Asana lies at the heart of hatha yoga. The simplest meaning of *asana* is "posture." Within the context of hatha yoga, posture means arranging our limbs and organs so our body becomes acutely aware of the forces of ha and tha. In yogic literature, ha and tha stand for solar and lunar, or masculine and feminine energy, respectively. When combined with other techniques of hatha yoga—such as pranayama, bandha, mudra, and pratyahara—the practice of postures increases our sensitivity to solar and lunar energies while unblocking, balancing, and further nourishing these energies. There are hundreds of postures in the hatha yoga tradition.

When Patanjali adopts the asana component of hatha yoga as an integral part of his *ashtanga yoga*—the eight-limbed yoga—he is assuming his readers have a fundamental knowledge of hatha yoga and are fairly well established in its practice. Vyasa lists only sitting postures, because here asana is introduced in the context of yoga as a means for reaching samadhi, which requires sitting in meditation for a prolonged period.

The most popular term for the eight-limbed yoga set forth by Patanjali is *raja yoga*, "the royal path of yoga." Raja means "royal, stately." Its lofty status is due to its

balanced and highly evolved inclusiveness. All meaningful philosophies and practices belonging to other schools of yoga are included in one or another of the limbs of *raja yoga*; the entire range of hatha yoga practices is subsumed in three of these limbs: asana, pranayama, and pratyahara.

According to tradition, when asana, pranayama, and pratyahara are practiced in the light of the yamas and niyamas, hatha yoga emerges as a fully developed spiritual path. The transformative power of hatha yoga engenders a positive change in our worldview as well as in our body and mind. When the techniques for meditating on the chakras are added, hatha yoga assumes a new identity—kundalini yoga. But when hatha yoga embraces the techniques of dharana, dhyana, and samadhi, it emerges as *raja yoga*. In other words, raja yoga is the full expression of hatha yoga—and much more. Thus, in the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Svatmarama proclaims, "It is not possible to master hatha yoga without raja yoga or raja yoga without hatha yoga. Therefore, one should practice them together." (HYP 2:76).

In this and the next two sutras, Patanjali describes the dynamics of asana, which builds the foundation for the practices of pranayama and pratyahara. In conjunction with pranayama and pratyahara, the practice of asana prepares the ground for the practices of dharana, dhyana, and samadhi, the last three limbs of ashtanga yoga.

The practice of asana described in this sutra is grounded in the philosophy outlined in sutra 2:18. According to that sutra, the objective world is composed of elements and the senses that enable us to perceive them. The objective world is imbued with the powers of illumination, action, and stability and has a twofold purpose—fulfillment and freedom. The objective world made of matter and energy is unimaginably vast. In contrast, our personal world is made of our body and mind, which are relatively small and easily accessible. For all intents and purposes we are our body and mind. Nothing in the universe is nearer and dearer to us. All the great powers and privileges described in sutra 2:18 are buried in our body and mind. By discovering that wealth and investing it wisely, we accomplish life's purpose—lasting fulfillment and ultimate freedom. The science of discovering and reinvesting the inherent wealth of the mind is described in the third chapter of the Yoga Sutra, "Vibhuti Pada." But how to discover and reinvest the intrinsic wealth of our body is the subject of this chapter.

The discovery of the infinite wealth buried in the body begins with asana. The technical term for this wealth is kaya sampat. Patanjali describes the vast range of kaya sampat in four major categories: rupa, beauty; lavanya, charm; bala, vigor and vitality; and vajra-samhananatva, inner healing power (YS 3:45–48).

The first category of bodily wealth is rupa, beauty. All of us have an innate sense of beauty and so we are naturally drawn to beauty. Our urge to be beautiful has no limit. The evolution of our physical form stretches far beyond the Darwinian demands for survival and procreation. At different stages of life our body expresses its innate beauty in different ways. In response to this expression we make various gestures, assume different postures, and adorn ourselves with various garments and ornaments. Landscaping, architecture, interior design, and the fine arts are all extensions of our inherent beauty. This intrinsic

passion for beauty and the desire to be acknowledged as beautiful set us apart from the rest of creation.

The second category of bodily wealth is lavanya, literally "the essence of salt." Lavanya refers to the quality of tastefulness. It is a quality that brings out our inner charm, which has an insatiable urge for continued refinement. It motivates us to envision and create an environment that offers more than what we need to sustain our day-to-day existence. This is the quality that enables us to form and maintain a family, society, culture, religion, and other socio-political groups. Because of this quality, our scope of betterment is continually expanding.

The third category of bodily wealth is bala, vigor and vitality. Like beauty and charm, our vigor and vitality are limitless. Our body is smaller than that of many other creatures but the strength, stamina, endurance, patience, enthusiasm, and courage we embody are far more expansive. Our vigor and vitality are highly refined and full of intelligence. This intelligent, vital force has an irresistible will to express its limitless capacities. For example, it gives us the vision and the courage to move faster than any other creature, and to fly higher. Compelled by this force we invent machines and transfer our vigor and vitality into them. Just as our hands, feet, and sense organs are an extension of our inner intelligence and operate in response to it, so are our machines. There is no limit to the expressions and functions of this vital force.

The last category of bodily wealth is vajra-samhananatva, inner healing power. All of us are imbued with vajra-samhananatva, adamantine indestructibility. Like vigor and vitality, this healing power is extremely refined and intelligent. It is amrita, the elixir of immortality. The antidote to decay and death, it keeps disease and old age at bay. Our finite body is the container of this infinitely vast healing power. It pervades every nook and cranny and supports all our physical and biological activities. The functions of our internal organs all the way to our mitochondrial and biomolecular functions are expressions of this inherent healing power. Like our vigor and vitality, this healing power has the irresistible urge to express itself in a limitless manner. In response to its calling, we continuously discover and refine healing modalities. Herbal formulas, antibiotics, nuclear medicine, and spiritual healing techniques, such as mantras and rituals, are a few examples of the invincible character of our inner healing power. It sustains our love for life and fills us with trust that one day we will defeat disease, old age, and death.

Even though we are born with an infinite wealth of beauty, charm, vigor, vitality, and healing power, we suffer from self-denigration, loneliness, physical and mental depletion, and fear of disease, old, age, and death. According to Patanjali, all this suffering is avoidable provided we discover the cause and delete it. We are living in a body imbued with vast potential, and yet our mental faculty is so dull and dense that we are only dimly aware of its internal dynamics.

We have become disconnected from our body's intrinsic intelligence. This dims our recognition of our inherent beauty, charm, vigor and vitality, and healing power, and eventually blocks their flow completely. As a result, our ability to be happy with what we are and what we have, our ability to embrace all and exclude none, our ability to cultivate and retain a robust and energetic body, and our ability to heal ourselves and each other

plummet. This disconnection also disrupts the incessant flow of information among the body's various systems and organs, and so they begin to function chaotically. This is how we become unhealthy and succumb to disease. A diseased body demands constant attention—we busy ourselves caring for it and have no time or energy to enjoy living in it. But as soon as we restore our connection with our body, our inner balance and harmony return. We become healthier, and we have ample time and energy to discover the purpose of having a human birth.

Restoring the natural connection with our body and reestablishing inner balance and harmony begin with the practice of asana. Stability and comfort are the hallmarks of yoga postures. Stability arises when a limb, organ, or system is not disturbed by the functions of other limbs, organs, or systems. In an overtly frightening situation, for example, our sympathetic nervous system triggers a rush of adrenalin. The heart beats faster to meet the demand for increased blood supply in the area actively engaged in countering the threat. If this situation continues for an extended period, we hyperventilate: the heartbeat accelerates, the nervous system becomes shaky, and the endocrine system is thrown out of balance.

Fear is pervasive. No human is absolutely free of fear. As long as it does not manifest with overwhelming force, we may pretend it does not exist. That is why there is always some degree of instability and shakiness in our body, breath, senses, and mind. As soon as we restore our inner balance and harmony, a large range of physical conditions no longer pose an obstacle to our spiritual quest.

Similarly, comfort comes when a particular limb, organ, or system is not stressed by the functions of other limbs, organs, and systems. For example, when lung capacity declines, the volume of oxygenated blood flowing from the lungs to the heart also declines. The heart must pump harder and faster to meet the demand of the body and brain. This stresses the heart, causing general discomfort in the body. A pose that removes this stress and enables us to experience the pleasure of having a comfortable body is considered to be a yoga posture.

Over millennia, yogis invented thousands of postures—some highly significant and others less so. Eighty-four are considered classic. Commenting on this sutra, Vyasa enumerates only thirteen postures, and all of them are sitting postures. This is because the goal of raja yoga is samadhi. Samadhi begins with meditation, which can be practiced only in a sitting posture.

However, it is important to remember that the qualities of stability and comfort, which make a sitting posture a yoga posture, are cultivated by the practice of asana as taught in the tradition of hatha yoga. In order to cultivate a steady and comfortable sitting posture, we must take our body through a range of postures—including standing, bending, sitting, reclining, twisting, and inversions. Only then does the practice of asana energize and restore the harmonious functions of all our limbs and organs. And further, we must practice asana methodically, in the proper sequence, and after meeting all the prerequisites.

SUTRA 2:49

तस्मिन्सति श्वासप्रश्वासयोर्गतिविच्छेदः प्राणायामः ॥४९॥

tasminsati śvāsapraśvāsayorgativicchedaḥ prāṇāyāmaḥ | |49| |

Complete mastery over the roaming tendencies of inhalation and exhalation is pranayama; it is to be practiced only after mastering asana.

This is one of those sutras where the nature of language prevents us from deciphering the precise meaning without help from a living tradition. According to the rules of Sanskrit grammar, *pranayama* means "expansion or stretching of *prana*, the life force." The process of expanding our life force, according to this sutra, is accomplished by gati-viccheda, stopping the movement of our inhalation and exhalation. By following another equally valid grammatical formula, the expansion of the life force could also be accomplished by disconnecting the movement of inhalation from the movement of exhalation. Both interpretations are counterintuitive. After all, when inhalation and exhalation stop, we die. When the movement of inhalation is disconnected from the movement of exhalation for a prolonged period, we die. Death and expansion of the life force are mutually exclusive. What are we missing here?

The first two words of this sutra, tasmin and sati, solve the riddle. Together, they mean "only then." "Only then" refers to the content of the three preceding sutras, which are dedicated to the practice of asana. In other words, the dynamics of pranayama described in this sutra and the practice of pranayama elaborated on in the upcoming sutras can be comprehended only after we have mastered asana.

Perfection in yoga comes from attaining mastery over the mind and prana. Mind and prana are twin and mutually dependent laws—they go together. When one is disturbed so is the other. The stability of one stabilizes the other. Mastery over the mind does not mean arresting our mind, nor does mastery over prana mean arresting our prana. In sutra 1:2, Patanjali says that we attain mastery over the mind by arresting its roaming tendencies. Here he tells us we attain mastery over prana by arresting its chaotic functions.

Prana is the fundamental principle of pulsation. It is the primordial ripple of the life force—beginningless and unending. It is self-intelligent. Like primordial prakriti, prana is both unmanifest and manifest. In its unmanifest state, it is referred to as *kundalini shakti*. Prana manifests in response to Ishvara's will—it is the vibrant, intelligent force that breathes life into matter. Prana is not our creation—we are its creation. It is as pervasive as Ishvara and as omniscient. Following divine will, prana manifests in us in different grades and degrees. As humans we have been given the power and privilege to further awaken and gather *prana shakti* and thus fill ourselves with a higher degree of vigor, vitality, strength, stamina, and intelligence. We accomplish this through the practice of pranayama.

Pranic pulsation fills every nook and cranny of our body. The functions of our cardiac muscles, lungs, and diaphragm are its expressions. The movement in our limbs and organs and the functions of our senses are reflections of pranic pulsation. However, the most tangible and identifiable movement of prana is the breath. From the physical and

biological standpoint, *prana* means "breath." Every aspect of our body is directly connected to the breath. We are able to sustain our body and bodily functions only as long as we breathe. Even a minor fluctuation in our breathing pattern disrupts the body's normal functions. According to yoga shastra, by regulating our breath we regulate all our biophysical processes.

Working with the breath is subtler than working with the body, which is why pranayama requires a higher degree of training than asana. By the same token, pranayama is far more rewarding. However, pranayama can be practiced only after we are established in asana. It is also important to remember that the scope of asana is limited if it is not accompanied by pranayama. In tandem, asana and pranayama mature into the higher stages of yoga, which culminate in samadhi.

The practice of pranayama begins with arresting our irregular breathing patterns. The breath is the link between the body and the mind, as well as the balancing factor. When a disturbing thought arises in the mind, our breathing pattern becomes erratic—shaky, noisy, and shallow. Erratic breathing triggers a chaotic response in our nervous system, gastrointestinal tract, endocrine glands, and heart. If left unchecked, the chaotic response intensifies, throwing us into a state of physical and mental turmoil. This process can be checked only if the breath summons its innate wisdom and the power to calm itself. Calming the breath involves breathing deeply and evenly, without jerks or noise. Deep, even breathing restores the body's natural equilibrium. However, if the breath fails to summon its innate wisdom and power, we breathe mechanically. The heart and brain will still attempt to meet the demands of our limbs, organs, and systems, but because mechanical breathing is bereft of inner intelligence, the healing and nourishing functions of breathing will be highly compromised. According to this sutra, arresting the mechanical movement of the breath and infusing the breath with conscious awareness is pranayama.

The heart of pranayama practice is prana samrodha, methodical restraint of prana. This is the process by which we identify, capture, and pull pranic movement to a designated area of our body and confine it there. Because prana is so subtle as to be imperceptible to an untrained mind, we begin by developing sensitivity to our breath in a particular region of our body, such as the navel center, heart center, or the region between the tip of the nostrils and the eyebrows. The yogic term for cultivating sensitivity to the subtle counterpart of physical breathing is prana samvedana.

The practice of prana samvedana entails learning to feel the breath's natural movement and experiencing how the breath is affecting a particular region. Prana samvedana enables us to identify and pinpoint the details of subtle breathing, which in the normal course of life remain imperceptible to our mind. The process of identifying and pinpointing these subtle details is technically known as prana anusandhana. The practice of prana anusandhana consists of a set of seven pranayamas: aharana pranayama, samikarana pranayama, dirgha-prashvasa pranayama, nadi shodhana pranayama; anuloma pranayama, viloma pranayama, and pratiloma pranayama (see Appendix E.)

These seven pranayamas are not designed to arrest the movement of our breath and confine it to a particular region. Instead, they help us become friends with our breath, strengthen our breathing apparatus, identify the baseline of our comfort in breathing,

approach the threshold of our discomfort, and at some point—just as in the practice of asana—enable us to cross the threshold of discomfort comfortably. These seven pranayamas help us cultivate the vigor, vitality, stamina, and endurance we need for the more advanced pranayama practices, all of which include breath retention. These advanced practices are the subject of the following sutras.

SUTRA 2:50

वाह्याभ्यन्तरस्तम्भवृत्तिः देशकालसङ्ख्याभिः परिदृष्टो दीर्घसूक्ष्मः ॥५०॥

bāhyābhyantarastambhavṛttirdeśakālasaṁkhyābhiḥ paridṛṣṭo dīrghasūkṣmaḥ ||50||

[Pranayama with breath retention could be] threefold: external, internal, or stopping the breath wherever it is. Each is monitored by space, time, and number, and each is characterized by its length and subtlety.

Patanjali describes three kinds of pranayama: bahya, external; abhyantara, internal; and stambha, immobilizing. Each involves *kumbhaka*, breath retention. Holding the breath after completing an exhalation is external kumbhaka; holding it after an inhalation is internal kumbhaka; and holding it suddenly in the midst of either an inhalation or an exhalation is stambha vritti kumbhaka.

These three advanced pranayamas are steps toward meditation and samadhi. Patanjali assumes that aspirants who have reached this level of yoga sadhana are familiar with the practice of the seven pranayamas, which together constitute the practice of prana anusandhana (see Appendix E). Therefore, these aspirants have built a strong foundation for practicing the three advanced pranayama techniques he is presenting here. Let us see how to practice them.

We will begin with external breath retention. Establish yourself in a comfortable sitting posture. Exhale gently and slowly, without noise or jerks. When your exhalation is complete, close the nostrils with your fingers and hold your breath to your full capacity; then release the nostrils and inhale gently, slowly, smoothly, and soundlessly. At the end of the inhalation, exhale slowly and repeat the cycle. This process must be monitored by space, time, and number.

Monitoring by space means becoming aware of the region of the body where you feel your exhalation begin. As you continue exhaling, your breath moves away from the place where it began until it reaches a particular point in the space outside your body. Maintain awareness of that point in space while retaining your breath. At the culmination of the retention, begin inhaling from the exact point in space where you confined your breath outside your body, and continue until you reach the space inside your body where your exhalation began. At the completion of your inhalation, begin the next cycle of external retention. This is how external breath retention is monitored by space.

Practicing external breath retention while observing the area covered by the practice, both inside and outside your body, is easy for those who have practiced the seven prana anusandhana practices, but difficult for those who have not. If you have not mastered

these seven pranayamas, you will merely be imagining the space. Traveling through this imaginary space will compromise the efficacy of the practice or nullify it completely.

Monitoring by time means timing the movement of your exhalation, retention, and inhalation. In other words, in addition to maintaining awareness of where in the body your exhalation began, how much space it covered before it reached its destination point outside your body, and then how your inhalation returned to the point of origin, you also pay attention to the time involved.

As a general rule, you retain your breath twice as long as you exhale, and inhale for one quarter as long as you retain—a ratio of 2:4:1. For example, if it takes 20 seconds to exhale, retain the breath for 40 seconds, and while inhaling, cover the same space in 10 seconds. This is to be done without noise, jerks, or discomfort.

Monitoring by number is the next step. Even though Patanjali mentions number as a tool for monitoring the breath, in practice, counting is used to measure the time of the inhalation and exhalation. To preserve the 2:4:1 ratio, you could count from 1 to 20 while exhaling, from 1 to 40 while retaining, and from 1 to 10 while inhaling. However, using numbers will cause two problems. First, the words representing numbers are not of equal length. For example, it takes longer to pronounce "seven" than it does to pronounce "one," and pronouncing "twenty-seven" takes even longer. So using numbers to measure the time covered by the exhalation, retention, and inhalation will disrupt the 2:4:1 ratio. In subtle practices like these, failing to preserve the ratio can be detrimental to your health and mental clarity. The second problem with using numbers to monitor time is that no matter how silently you count, the mental articulation of the words corresponding to the numbers will create jerks in your breath, compromising its smooth, even quality and distracting your mind from its total engagement with space and time.

The solution? Coordinate the exhalation, retention, and inhalation with your mantra. Every mantra has a specific number of syllables. Therefore, if you remember your mantra four times while exhaling, eight times while retaining the breath, and twice while inhaling, you will preserve the 2:4:1 ratio. However, you must be so well practiced with your mantra that the sound flashes in your mind effortlessly and thus causes no fluctuation in your breathing.

The second pranayama described in this sutra is internal kumbhaka. This is similar to the external kumbhaka described above, except here you inhale first, retain, and then exhale, while following all the rules laid out for external kumbhaka.

The third pranayama, stambha vritti kumbhaka, is the most complex and difficult. In this practice, you retain your breath in the midst of the inhalation or the exhalation. Retaining your breath in the midst of an inhalation is easier than retaining it in the midst of an exhalation. Retaining the breath in the midst of both inhalation and exhalation is extraordinarily difficult, but mastery of it—as yogis proclaim—enables an adept to conquer death.

Let us see how to do the simplest version of stambha vritti kumbhaka. Make sure that you adhere strictly to the standard rules for monitoring your inhalation, retention, and exhalation by space and time. As always, inhale gently and smoothly, without noise or jerks. In the midst of inhaling, stop your breath and retain it four times longer than you

inhaled. Then inhale again, filling your lungs fully, and retain again, four times longer than the second inhalation. At the end of the second retention, exhale twice as long as both inhalations combined. As you can see, monitoring your breath by the number of mantras is crucial in the practice of stambha vritti kumbhaka. This entire process must be accomplished without exertion. Take a few normal breaths, then repeat the cycle again.

Practicing these three kumbhaka pranayamas expands the field of inhalation, exhalation, and retention. We are able to inhale, exhale, and retain our breath for a longer period of time (dirgha) without discomfort. Furthermore, as the practice becomes refined (sukshma), we are able to feel and touch our pranamaya kosha, the pranic sheath that supports our body internally. We become aware of the deeper dimensions of our existence. Using the power of prana shakti, which rules our inner world, we are able to take our mental clarity and concentration to a new height.

The three pranayamas described in this sutra constitute a complete practice leading to the awakening of kundalini shakti and are the exclusive domain of kundalini yoga. When kundalini shakti awakens, our limited pool of prana shakti expands spontaneously. It renders even the deepest karmic impressions inert. Our karmic impurities are burned, the energy channels are purified, and the mind enters sushumna, ever-pulsating divine luminosity. We are submerged in the primordial pool of kundalini shakti. This is what the practitioners of kundalini yoga consider samadhi. It is an extremely demanding path.

As a student of raja yoga, our goal is to cultivate a clear, calm, tranquil, and one-pointed mind. We then turn this calm and one-pointed mind inward and allow it to bathe in the luminosity of our core being. The longer our mind is infused with the luminosity of our core being, the less chance we have of being affected by our deep-rooted habits. We recapture our innate power of discernment and gain the strength to face and conquer our most dreaded samskara—avidya. To help us accomplish this, Patanjali prescribes a simple, yet highly potent, pranayama in the next sutra.

SUTRA 2:51

वाह्याभ्यन्तरविषयाक्षेपी चतुर्थः ॥५१॥

bāhyābhyantaraviṣayākṣepī caturthaḥ ||51||

The fourth pranayama transcends the domain of external and internal pranayamas.

The pranayama described here is far more potent for a meditator than the three pranayama practices described in the previous sutra, because it evolves directly into pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi. This pranayama is simple—anyone can do it. However, those who are convinced that an advanced practice must be complex and strenuous will fail to grasp the advanced and highly refined quality of this pranayama.

Patanjali and Vyasa do not give this pranayama a name but simply call it chaturtha, which means "the fourth." In the philosophical literature of India, "the fourth" is highly significant. Other terms for chaturtha are turiya and turya. In philosophical literature, chaturtha has been used to denote the reality or state that transcends the triangle of

waking, dreaming, and dreamless sleep; Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva; Kali, Lakshmi, and Sarasvati; the powers of will, knowledge, and action; earth, heaven, and the space in between; the three states of the power of speech: pashyanti, madhyama, and vaikhari; and the three universal processes of creation, maintenance, and destruction. In short, chaturtha means "transcendental, the highest." By calling this technique *chaturtha pranayama*, Patanjali is sending a clear message: its effect transcends the vigor, vitality, and transforming power engendered by the three pranayamas discussed in the preceding sutra.

As we will see in the following pages, success in chaturtha pranayama depends on our ability to become aware of our breath and the subtle force of prana that propels it. Those with a body free of toxins and a mind free of roaming tendencies will find it easy to become aware of the flow of prana shakti in their body. But most of us commit ourselves to yoga sadhana only after we have disrupted the natural ecology of our body and thrown our mind into turmoil. A sluggish body and a dense mind are not fit to practice yoga. And yet this is where most of us begin. Thus even though chaturtha pranayama is not dependent on what we gain from the three pranayamas described in the previous sutra, they have an important role to play in preparing many of us for practicing it.

The human body can be compared to an ocean. The ocean is saturated with life-supporting nutrients, most of which are available only where the water is not stagnant. Thousands of undercurrents churn the nutrients and carry them from one part of the ocean to another. Our body and mind are like that. Nature has deposited enormous sustenance—prana shakti—in us. It is available to every cell, because numberless undercurrents—nadis—churn our prana shakti and carry it to all our tissues. When this process slows, our limbs, organs, and mind suffer from diminished prana, and the vitality of our body and the sharpness of our mind decline. Many of us, especially those beset by sloth, inertia, fear, uncertainty, confusion, and purposelessness, are so cut off from the flow of prana that our senses and mind have lost much of their acuity. Feeling the flow of prana shakti as part of the practice of chaturtha pranayama is therefore out of reach. In these cases, the pranic force inherent in the body has to be churned and the nadis have to carry it throughout the body so that the senses and mind regain their natural acuity.

When we commit ourselves to a disciplined practice of one or more of the three pranayamas discussed in sutra 2:50, prana shakti begins to churn throughout the body. This churning is most palpable in the region stretching from the perineum to the center of the forehead.

The inhalation and exhalation portions of these pranayamas energize and unblock the energy channels and pull prana shakti out of its inertia. Upon awakening, prana shakti rises upward. The retention portion of these pranayamas gathers the fire of prana shakti and fills the region of the body directly interacting with the retention. As we repeat the practice, the fire of prana shakti intensifies in the region of the body where the breath is being retained. As soon as we resume normal breathing, the process of equalization begins. This is a natural physiological response—the concentrated prana shakti in the region where the breath was retained rushes into parts of the body where it is less concentrated. If we are vigilant, we will feel the movement of prana shakti along the

prominent pathways of the energy channels. Because the prana shakti is concentrated, it flows with greater intensity, strength, and velocity, pushing aside impurities.

When we repeat the practice after an interval of a minute or two, prana shakti is churned, awakened, and flows toward the region of the body where we intend to retain the breath. This time, the prana shakti moving toward the region of breath retention is much freer and more forceful, so the concentration of prana in the region where the breath is retained is greater than before. At the end of the cycle, the prana shakti will flow into the rest of the body with even greater strength and velocity. In this way, these advanced pranayamas churn our physiology and biochemistry, burn impurities, and supply nutrients to every limb and organ. But these are only the physical benefits.

According to the yogis, the true benefit of these advanced pranayamas is that they engender a highly captivating energy field, which pulls the mind toward it like a magnet. Upon entering this highly charged pranic field, the mind begins to take on the intrinsic qualities of prana shakti. Prana shakti is the life force—the intrinsic power of Ishvara. In its unmanifest form, it is kundalini shakti. Intelligent and self-luminous, it is the source of all healing power. It is the inexhaustible elixir of life. The Yoga Vasishtha calls it brahma-spanda, pulsation of the absolute (YV 25:3). When united with prana, our mind begins to move in conformity with the pulsation of the prana. This enables us to become aware of the space our body occupies and of the limbs and organs comprising our body. We become acutely aware of the deeper dimensions of ourselves. The mind and body are no longer strangers to each other (YV 11:52).

The churning and concentration of prana shakti is best accomplished with the practice of pracchardana vidharana pranayama described in the commentary on sutra 1:34 in The Secret of the Yoga Sutra: Samadhi Pada. As we saw there, because pracchardana vidharana is one of the most advanced pranayamas, it involves a number of prerequisites and preparatory practices. Students of meditation will get the same or similar results by practicing chaturtha pranayama, provided they make an ardent effort to grasp its subtlety and simplicity. In regard to chaturtha pranayama, how long we practice makes very little difference—what matters is how precisely we practice. Here is a brief description of how to do chaturtha pranayama.

Assume a sitting posture suitable for you. Withdraw your mind from every direction and become aware of your body and the space it occupies. Make sure your spine is straight, your shoulders are relaxed, and there is no arch in your lower back. In an attempt to keep your head, neck, and trunk in a straight line, do not stretch your spine to the point where your head tends to tilt backward. Place your hands on your knees or in your lap.

Breathe slowly, gently, and effortlessly, without noise or jerks. Close your mouth, relax your jaw, and allow your lower and upper lips to gently touch. Rest your upper row of teeth against the lower row, but do not exert any mental effort to bring this about. Rest your tongue on the floor of your mouth, with the tip gently touching the ridge just above your upper teeth.

Now bring your attention to your breath. Breathe in and out smoothly and effortlessly. In chaturtha pranayama you pay attention only to your inhalation and exhalation. Breath

retention is not part of the process but rather a naturally occurring phenomenon, which arises effortlessly. Like the previous pranayamas, chaturtha pranayama is monitored by space and time; however, this monitoring is done only during the inhalation and the exhalation, and even that disappears when a naturally occurring retention takes over.

Inhalation and exhalation have a beginning point in both time and space. When you are inhaling, there is a particular moment when you feel the touch of incoming air at the threshold of your nostrils. In this pranayama, the threshold of your nostrils is the space where your inhalation begins; time is identified by exactly when the incoming air touches that threshold. Monitoring by number is omitted because if you attempt to keep track of the number of breaths, the counting will disturb the peaceful quality of this pranayama. Within a minute or two, the mind and the breath blend into each other so perfectly that attention to time quickly fades. Therefore, in reality, this pranayama is monitored only by space, and even that quietly and effortlessly.

Be sensitive to your breathing. Mentally register the instant when the incoming breath touches the threshold of your nostrils and identify the precise spot where you feel that touch. From here, continue inhaling and allow your mind to follow the flow of the breath. Your breath travels deeper into your nostrils, passes through the space between the eyebrows, reaches all the way to the center of the forehead and far beyond. Do not imagine anything—simply let your mind feel the flow of your breath as it moves upward. Let your mind go as high and deep as your breath goes. Do not push your breath or your mind to go higher than they tend to go naturally. Then, without pausing, begin exhaling. Let your mind follow the movement of your exhalation as it travels downward, until it reaches the precise point where your inhalation began. One inhalation and exhalation constitutes one breath. Take 3 to 5 breaths.

The next step requires feeling the flow of your inhalation and exhalation closer to the ceiling of your nasal passage. The goal is to cultivate sensitivity to the movement of the subtler counterpart of your breathing in the space in front of your face, the space occupied by your frontal lobes, and the space just in front of your forehead.

Physiologically and anatomically, air travels through your nostrils in the form of breath, but here you are training your mind to sense breath as prana as it travels through the pranic field housing the entire region of your face, forehead, head, brain, and sense organs. To accomplish this, at the first instant of your inhalation, transport your awareness from the threshold of your nostrils to the tip of your nostrils. Mentally, you are now in front of your face rather than in the space inside your nostrils. Continue breathing upward just as you did before. Mentally, go as high as the breath goes. Then, without creating a pause, immediately start exhaling and come down all the way to the lowest reaches of the space in front of your face. Take 3 to 5 breaths.

Then begin the next cycle of chaturtha pranayama. Inhale and exhale as you did before, but this time pay attention to the unique experience unfolding in the space corresponding to the region in the inner corners of your eyes and between the eyebrows. This experience is joyful and captivating, especially during the inhalation. The mind tends to stop here, but also has a tendency to continue traveling upward with the breath—it is pulled between two sweet experiences. Let your mind stop for a moment to observe and

embrace the sweetness filling the space corresponding to the inner corners of your eyes and between the eyebrows. The process of attending to this joyful feeling does not disturb the gentle and smooth upward flow of your inhalation.

Because the breath and the mind are accustomed to moving as one fully unified stream of awareness, the mind will identify and capture the joy of this space in an instant and resume its journey to the center of the forehead. Do not make an effort to stop your mind in this space filled with joy. And do not attempt to create this experience, nor be anxious about when and how it will arise. Do not use your imagination. When this experience is there, you cannot ignore it, and when it is not there, you cannot create it. Your job is simply to breathe in and out absolutely effortlessly, and let the mind accompany the peaceful flow of your breath. The experience of joy unique to this space will arise in your mind of its own accord.

Each time the breath and mind reach the space corresponding to the center of the forehead, your sensitivity to that space increases. You are able to feel and touch that space and you are able to identify its furthest frontier. There is a unique joy in observing that your inhalation reaches all the way to this furthest frontier—it is here that your inhalation terminates and your exhalation begins.

As you continue your practice, the experience of joy in the space corresponding to the inner corners of the eyes intensifies. In proportion to the intensity of that joy, the space in the center of your forehead becomes clear and well defined. Eventually, these two spheres blend and there is only one space covering the entire region of your eyes, inner corners of your eyes, eyebrows, center between the eyebrows, and forehead. As you continue the practice, this space expands. You feel its existence in front of your face and forehead—a uniquely lit space filled with joy. The center of this self-luminous space is the area known as ajna chakra, which corresponds physiologically to the inner space of the forehead.

At this stage, the awareness that you are breathing through your nostrils has faded. You are aware only that you are breathing. You are experiencing your breath as a wave of awareness moving up and down in the space just in front of your face. You are no longer aware of the movement of inhalation and exhalation, but rather of the subtle movement of consciousness in this space. The mind has stopped associating with the physical dimension of the breath (gati abhava) and instead is fully absorbed in the breath's subtle counterpart.

In this state of mental absorption in the subtle pranic movement, the physical dimension of breathing slows drastically. You may be taking only 3 to 5 breaths a minute and the length of both the inhalation and the exhalation is significantly reduced. According to Vyasa, this happens due to bhumi jaya, which means "victory over ground." This means you have attained such a high degree of effortlessness that physical activity has dropped to a minimum, along with your metabolic rate. All your limbs and organs are almost completely at rest. This restful condition extends all the way to your mitochondrial activity. The body's need for oxygen has dropped significantly; Thus the breath is almost suspended. This natural suspension of the breath is chaturtha pranayama.

Chaturtha pranayama is completely different from the pranayamas mentioned in the previous sutra and in all other texts. Unlike other pranayamas, here the suspension of the breath occurs neither before, after, nor in the midst of the inhalation and exhalation. As the body, mind, limbs, and organs relax, the need for oxygen diminishes, thus reducing the length of the inhalation and exhalation. This natural shortening of the breath bears no resemblance to shortness of breath; rather, it is the refinement of breath. In chaturtha pranayama we do not gasp for air. On the contrary, we fill our body with vajra-samhananatva, the body's innate capacity to heal and nourish itself from deep inside.

As we progress in our practice, we reach the pinnacle of chaturtha pranayama more quickly. For example, in the beginning stages, it may take 5 to 10 minutes before we experience the joy in the space surrounding the center between our eyebrows. After three months of consistent practice, we may experience the dawning of the uniquely lit space in front of our countenance in a few minutes. As stated earlier, the longer we observe the movement of the subtle counterpart of our breath in this space, the brighter the space becomes. The impurities hidden deep in our body and mind are destroyed in proportion to this brilliance. How this happens is the subject of the next sutra.

SUTRA 2:54

स्वविषयासम्प्रयोगे चित्तस्य स्वरूपानुकार इवेन्द्रियाणां प्रत्याहारः ॥५४॥

svaviṣayāsamprayoge cittasyasvarūpānukāra ivendriyāṇāṁ pratyāhāraḥ ||54||

Lacking contact with their respective objects, when senses assume the nature of mind it is pratyahara.

Pranayama leads to pratyahara. A simplistic translation is "sense withdrawal," but this is only partially correct. In practice, pratyahara involves withdrawing the mind. Pratyahara is composed of prati, a, and hara. Following the grammatical rules of Sanskrit, it is translated from back to front: hara means "to pull, to withdraw, to bring, to carry"; a means "from every direction in every respect"; and prati means "toward." Thus *pratyahara* means "pulling the mind from every direction and in every respect to a focal point." Withdrawing the mind is a purposeful and methodical process, and the process of focusing it on a given object is even more purposeful and methodical.

Before analyzing pratyahara, we need to understand the relationship between the mind and senses. They work in unison: the mind cannot perceive an object unless it is presented to it by the senses; unless they are accompanied by the mind, the senses cannot sense an object. Our nostrils, tongue, eyes, skin, and ears are able to smell, taste, see, touch, and hear only in the presence of the mind. These organs are connected to our cortex, the physical seat of the non-physical mind. The cognitive power flowing from the cortex to these organs infuses them with the capacity to sense the objective world.

The organs themselves are not senses; rather, the power residing in them is the senses—and that power is the mind. The mind needs the sense organs. Without them, it cannot comprehend the subtle details of its cognitions. The unique design of the sense organs enables the mind to comprehend these subtle details in five broad categories. Drawing on its numberless impressions, the mind then fabricates the rest of the details.

Unless the senses have laid the groundwork, the mind will not succeed in experiencing the world to its full satisfaction but will drown in the sea of abstract cognitions regarding the content less existence of the objective world. This experience is immensely tiring and utterly fruitless. That is why the mind has invested so much of itself in the sense organs.

Once the sense organs are formed and the relationship between the mind and the brain and between the brain and the sense organs is fully established, we busy ourselves with experiencing the world. Except when we are sleeping, the sense organs and their corresponding centers in the brain are constantly at work, relentlessly consuming sensory experiences. With each experience our desires grow, so we repeat those experiences. Repetition strengthens the memories of those experiences; those memories, in turn, create deep grooves in our mind called samskaras. The physical correlates of the samskaras are stored in our amygdala in the form of memories; memories manifest as habits, which inspire the mind to employ the sense organs to experience the world once again. This process fuels our craving for sensory experiences and causes the mind to be overly dependent on the senses. Lacking vigilance and self-mastery, the mind chases desires and cravings, and the senses make this possible.

Every sensory pursuit takes a toll on our body, mind, and senses. The mind, working under the influence of desires, cravings, and entrenched habits, justifies its sensory pursuits. We are so smitten by sensory allurements that, for the most part, we are oblivious of the far-reaching consequences. We seek a remedy only when we find ourselves in the grip of exhaustion, and we seek it with the help of an incapacitated mind. This is where the practice of pratyahara comes in.

Pratyahara is a two-part practice: withdraw the mind from all sensory engagements and then focus it on an object that transcends the ordinary realm of the senses. Here is how it is done.

Begin by sitting in a meditative pose. Withdraw your mind from the external world—resolve to be aware only of your body and the space it occupies. By simply paying attention to your body, you will be able to withdraw your mind from all other places and concerns. While paying attention to your body, do not mentally outline it or survey your individual limbs and organs. Simply become aware of your own existence. The greater your awareness of the space related to your physical existence, the weaker your awareness will be of everything else. This is because the mind, which uses the senses to travel in the objective world, has returned to its workplace—the nostrils, tongue, eyes, skin, and ears. From these sense organs, it withdraws to its physical home base—the cortex.

The mind's journey from the objective world to the cortex constitutes only half of the practice of pratyahara. The remaining half is accomplished by leading the mind to a state where it resumes svarupa-anukara, its essential nature. Awareness of its intrinsic luminosity is the mind's nature. Subtle impressions and the roaming tendencies arising from them block this intrinsic luminosity. Once the mind is disconnected from sensory objects, it has an opportunity to pay attention to its intrinsic nature. The process of attending to and becoming absorbed in its pure nature is the final step of pratyahara.

This final step consists of a methodical practice involving more than simply resolving not to be aware of the objects of the senses. As stated earlier, prana pervades every nook and cranny of our body. It is inside our body as well as 12 finger-widths outside it. There is a greater concentration of prana shakti at certain spots within this space. Each of these spots is known as a marmasthana, a concentrated pranic field. The final step of pratyahara involves entering these pranic fields one by one, focusing the mind there for a while, then moving on to the next pranic field. In the context of surgery, ayurvedic texts list 107 or 108 marma-sthanas. The yoga tradition lists 28 and emphasizes only those most significant in the practice of pratyahara. The physical correlates of these significant pranic fields are the nostrils, the inner corners of the eyes, the center between the eyebrows, the forehead, the crown of the head, the heart, and the navel area.

The practice of the final step of pratyahara begins with chaturtha pranayama, as described in sutra 2:51. When you have become fully aware of your body and the space occupied by it, pay attention to your breath. Inhale and exhale gently and smoothly, without noise or jerks. As you go deeper into the practice of chaturtha pranayama, a pranically charged space emerges in front of your face. This space is intrinsically filled with profound joy and tranquility. As you allow your mind to accompany the pranic movement in this field, your breath becomes further refined.

This refinement is characterized by two factors: the number of breaths per minute drops, and the mind's roaming tendencies subside dramatically. For example, if in the normal course of life you are accustomed to taking 15 breaths per minute, at the peak of chaturtha pranayama you may be taking only 8 breaths per minute. Similarly, if you were only able to concentrate on an object for a minute, in chaturtha pranayama you are able to concentrate for two minutes or more. You are taking fewer breaths because your limbs, organs, and systems are resting deeply. Your mind is stable on an object for longer because the senses are no longer in contact with their respective objects and, further, they are absorbed in the cortical brain. There is no awareness of smell, taste, sight, touch, or sound. The mind is so absorbed in the self-lit pranic field that it has become aware of its own inner luminosity, jyotishmati. This awareness is intrinsically accompanied by pure joy, vishoka. Luminosity has destroyed the darkness of ignorance, and joy has quelled all craving. The mind has reclaimed its innate vibrancy and joy.

Then what is the difference between chaturtha pranayama and pratyahara? Brahmananda explains this clearly in his commentary on the Hatha Yoga Pradipika. Referring to the Yoga Chintamani, he says, "The advanced stages of pranayama are known by the terms *pratyahara*, *dharana*, *dhyana*, and *samadhi*" (HYP 2:12). When we are able to hold our mind on a given object for the period of time required to take 12 normal breaths, it is defined as pranayama.

According to Brahmananda, the length of a normal breath is measured by the time it takes for a healthy person to complete one inhalation and exhalation while sleeping. While sleeping, a healthy person breathes 15 to 20 times per minute. Thus one normal breath takes 3 to 4 seconds. When the mind disconnects from its roaming tendencies and remains focused on a particular pranic field for 12 breaths, it is defined as pranayama. In other words, pranayama is characterized by our mind's ability to remain focused on prana for not less than 48 seconds. A minimum of 48 seconds is required for the bonding

between prana and mind to fully mature. Thus pranayama is not defined by how long we hold the breath but rather by how long we hold our mind on the subtle movement of prana in the pranic field.

When mental concentration is 12 times longer than the period of concentration defining pranayama, it is pratyahara. In other words, when we are able to hold our mind on a marma-sthana for not less than 576 seconds (12 x 48) or 9.6 minutes, we have entered the realm of pratyahara. Dharana, concentration, is 12 times longer than pratyahara. Our capacity to concentrate increases with practice, allowing dharana to mature into dhyana and samadhi.

Describing the details of this process (HYP 2:12), Brahmananda claims that lower-grade pranayama is when we are able to stay focused on prana for a period of time required for 12 breaths (approximately 48 seconds). When concentration is extended to 84 breaths (approximately 5.6 minutes), it is medium-grade pranayama. When concentration is prolonged for 125 breaths (approximately 8.5 minutes), it is the highest-grade pranayama. We transition from this highest-grade pranayama to pratyahara as soon as our concentration stretches beyond 8.5 minutes. Remember, however, that this is an approximation of our inner experience, not a rigid formula.

According to the tradition, it takes 8 to 10 minutes for the mind to charge itself with the intrinsic vigor, vitality, strength, stamina, and endurance of prana to recognize, face, and conquer the deeply rooted samskaras which churn our mind and senses and force them to run after long-cherished habits, cravings, and addictions. This conquest is the subject of the next sutra.

SUTRA 2:55

ततः परमा वश्यतेन्द्रियाणाम् ॥५५॥

tataḥ paramā vaśyatendriyāṇām ||55||

From that [pratyahara] comes the highest level of mastery over the senses.

The senses are powerful and to some extent autonomous. There are occasions when they do their job whether we want them to or not. For example, when there are loud sounds we do not want to hear, the ears sense them anyway. And, in some instances, the senses exercise their autonomy indiscriminately. For example, drug addicts know drugs are destructive and disempowering yet cannot stop from indulging. The practice of pratyahara enables us to attain mastery over these powerful and autonomous senses. This mastery is twofold: victory over the addictive behaviors of the senses, and unfoldment of their extraordinary power.

First, let us look at the dynamics of conquering the addictive behaviors of the senses. As we have seen, every action creates an impression. Impressions become strong and deep either when actions are repeated again and again, or when the intention behind them is intense. In some cases, impressions become strong when the actions are propelled by powerful forces and substances. This is what Vyasa calls vyasana, addiction.

Addiction is a strong craving—powerful enough to crush our determination, forcing our mind and senses to engage in actions we know to be harmful.

When, with the practice of pratyahara, we withdraw our mind from sensory realms, unite it with prana, and maintain this union for more than 8 to 9 minutes, the mind becomes strong enough to recognize, face, and conquer powerful sensory cravings. Even the strongest sense cravings are weaker than our willpower and determination. With the help of this newborn willpower we can calm and eventually stop sensory turmoil. However, the rise in willpower and determination is always in proportion to the degree of perfection in pratyahara. We do not become perfect overnight. As we continue the practice, the duration of pratyahara increases. Coupled with the power of repetition, the ever-increasing duration of the practice infuses the sensory centers in the cortex with the vigor and vitality of prana, freeing them from the dominance of sensory habits.

Addictive behavior makes an impression on our sense organs and brain, as well as on our mind. As this process advances, our body chemistry is affected. By the time this process matures and causes a chemical imbalance, there is little hope of fixing it simply by summoning our willpower. The repeated and prolonged practice of pratyahara reverses this process and eventually heals the damage caused by the addictive behavior of our sense organs, brain, nervous system, and endocrine system.

The reason pratyahara reverses the addictive behavior of our senses and heals the damage it causes is simple. As part of the practice, the mind is brought back to the body from all corners of the world. Then it is led point-by-point from one *marma-sthana* to the next. This allows the mind to become familiar with the intrinsic quality of those pranic fields and develop a loving bond with them. Finally, the mind is led to the center of the forehead, where it is united with one of the most concentrated pranic fields, the ajna chakra.

As we repeat the practice again and again, the pranic field covering the entire space above our shoulders becomes charged with the united forces of mind and prana. The joy engendered by this union engulfs the mind's roaming tendencies. The cortex, which is the seat of manas, the thinking mind, stops brooding on the future. This leads to freedom from anxiety. The amygdala, which is the seat of *chitta*, the storehouse of memories, stops interacting with emotions associated with past issues. This leads to freedom from sorrow.

The space housing the cortex and the amygdala also houses other parts of the brain, such as the medulla oblongata and the pituitary gland. The medulla governs the functions of the heart, the lungs, and the diaphragm. A pranically charged medulla becomes acutely alert and starts working more efficiently. Similarly, the pituitary gland becomes more perceptive and begins to regulate the endocrine system skillfully. In general, the brain, which is the seat of all mental faculties, becomes tranquil and no longer bombards the body with false and confusing signals. We are completely at rest. In this state, the innate wisdom of the body accelerates the healing process. We are energized by prana shakti. This revitalization results in the unfoldment of the extraordinary power of our senses and mind.

Normally, we perceive objects when they are in direct contact with the senses. But as soon as the power behind the sense organs becomes established in its point of origin—the mind—we begin to comprehend objects imperceptible to our senses. This is because the entire field of our brain is energized and lit by the combined luminosity of prana and the mind. The vast information stored in the various parts of the brain is at our disposal. The mind, which is both calm and alert, is able to string together a long chain of information and use it to intuitively understand what we could not have understood with the help of the senses alone. For example, we cannot hear the sound of an exploding star, and yet with the help of a one-pointed, sharp mind, we can comprehend it and thus discover devices that enable us to experience it. Like our sense organs, these devices are tools invented by our mind. The fields of mathematics, quantum physics, and genetics, to cite only a few examples, are the work of our highly potent and perceptive mind.

This same mental capacity helps us earn the qualifications we need to discover our core being, which exists outside the domain of the mind's normal capacity. In order to comprehend the essence of the inner being, the mind has to cultivate two qualities: it must learn to turn itself inward, and it must rise above its habit of identifying things as objects of its cognition—it must transcend its habit of clinging to subject-object awareness in relation to everything it perceives. The practice of pratyahara, which is a continuation of *chaturtha pranayama*, trains the mind to cultivate these two qualities. The intrinsic joy (vishoka) and luminosity (jyotishmati) of prana shakti capture the mind so completely that it stops traveling into the external world and begins to travel toward the core of prana shakti. The joy and luminosity of prana shakti are the ever-radiating *svabhava* of Ishvara. They are the source of everything that exists, including ourselves.

Once we reach this far, the mind drops its long-cherished habit of identifying and possessing the objects of its cognition. The joy of losing itself in this inner awareness far exceeds the joy of maintaining subject-object awareness. At this point of realization, the mind is totally free from all fears. It spontaneously and effortlessly drops all its defenses and begins to take on the qualities of prana shakti. The mind soaks up primordial joy and luminosity. It becomes prana shakti and, as such, experiences itself as an expression of the sankalpa of Ishvara. The mind no longer perceives Ishvara as an object of its perception. In sutra 2:41, Vyasa describes this as atma-darshana-yogyatva, the qualification of having the experience of atman. As the Upanishads say, the knower of truth becomes truth. At the maturity of the process engendered by pratyahara, the mind dissolves (so to speak) into atman and becomes atman. In yoga shastra, prana shakti and atman are one and the same. And it is in this respect that the individual self is the manifestation of the divine, Ishvara.

The longer and more frequently we attend our union with prana, the more established we become in our essential nature. This mental absorption in prana shakti wipes out our moha—our confusion regarding who we are, where we come from, why we exist, who sustains us, and who guides us at every stage of life. We are free from doubt. This leads us to recapture our most primordial experience—the experience of being in the full embrace of the divine. The fear of losing our possessions, including the most precious one—life in the mortal world—vanishes. We are free of fear. Free of doubt and fear, the mind spontaneously surrenders to divine will. In sutra 4:34, Patanjali calls this svarupa

pratishtha, establishment in one's essential nature. As the Bhagavad Gita tells us, this is when we truly hear the voice of our soul and have the capacity to heed it (BG 18:73).

As soon as we are able to hear and heed the voice of our core being, our thoughts, speech, and actions begin to resonate with divine will. Sensing this, nature begins to resonate with our thoughts, speech, and actions; she turns into our mother and we turn into her children. This relationship is not an intellectual construct—it is completely experiential. To nurture her children, nature manifests her extraordinary powers and offers them as gifts. This is what Patanjali describes as siddhis in "Vibhuti Pada," the next chapter of the Yoga Sutra.

Nature's ever-unfolding gifts strengthen our realization of how fortunate we are. We realize that our good fortune has its source in divine grace. We are not born through our own effort—divine grace makes all the arrangements for our birth. This is also true of our achievements—we are successful only because nature has given us an extraordinary body and a perceptive mind. These realizations fill us with a deep sense of gratitude. This is true love. The instant it dawns, pratyahara effortlessly grows into dharana, dharana into dhyana, and dhyana into samadhi.

In concluding this chapter with pratyahara, Patanjali emphasizes that dharana, dhyana, and samadhi are not possible without pratyahara. When we are fully established in the practice of pratyahara, the remaining three stages of yoga sadhana walk into our life effortlessly. Patanjali elaborates on this in the next chapter, "Vibhuti Pada."