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July 2004 Focus of the Month

Eight Limbs of Ashtanga Yoga cont. The last four limbs deal with the internal work:

Pratyahara

Yoga Sutra II:54-55
The 5th Limb of Yoga,

Withdrawing our senses from the external world allows us to disconnect our energy from what is swirling around today and direct it inward for personal development.

We have a limited amount of energy within our bodies. When we are holding on to past negative emotions, or worrying about what other people are doing, or what other people think about us, and even just living our daily lives we are expending our energy. There are times to send our energy out and there are times when we need our energy in our body. For example:

- 1) in times of pain or sickness we need our energy to heal
- 2) If we are giving birth to a project, an idea, a child
- 3) to work on ourselves mentally, physically, spiritually

Practicing Pratyahara will help us disconnect our energy and withdraw it back to ourselves to work inside and to heal ourselves. We can then emanate our clear energy outward and share it.

Pratyahara is the start of meditation, however you can do it any time any place. You can start in a meditation; find a comfortable seat, to practice pratyahara settle in and “be quiet”:

- ॐ Try to pull away from your thinking mind and listen to the sounds going on around you. Just listen.
- ॐ Next step is to not judge those sounds. Just listen to them. Try to love each sound — even if it is a sound most would consider annoying. Realize each sound makes this present moment.
- ॐ Now be aware of the sounds, but don't think about them — don't label them as good or bad. Don't even try to love them — just be aware of them but keep in your own meditative space.

Now take this with you as you walk out the door! Try to remain in this nonjudgmental but full of awareness space as you go throughout your day.

Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi

Concentration, Meditation, Bliss Superconsciousness

YS III:1-11

In a sentence these last three limbs = “Quit obsessing about whatever is swirling around in your mind!”

Destructive thoughts vs. Constructive thoughts

Yoga puts emphasis on controlling our thoughts because we identify with what is in our mind. We become that. And our mind swirls around and makes up stories that are not true, imagines scenarios that will never happen yet we still believe they might and get upset . . . We do not simply have destructive thoughts, we become our thoughts, destructive and define ourselves through these destructive thoughts.

We take control of our thoughts learning a meditation practice. Once we get a comfortable seat meditation begins with concentration. So we choose either something inside us or outside us. Ideas for something inside us could be your breath, a chakra, 3rd eye center, heart, navel (power center). Concentration should be on something positive. An object outside of the body for concentration should have some significance in symbolism. Something that makes you feel higher minded; for example the sun, a tree, an om symbol or other symbol of divinity for you. Remember we will identify ourselves with what is in our minds, focus your mind on something higher minded.

This will make the destructive thoughts disappear.

Destructive thoughts dominate the “material” mind; generally destructive thoughts materialize through materialistic wants. As materialistic thoughts are replaced with pure thoughts, we develop constructive thoughts with ease.



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Concentration will lead to meditation and meditation — Meditation is simply the mind staying one pointed focus on your object of meditation without any other thoughts slipping in! And this leads to the final limb, *samadhi*, or bliss :) . . . where we are at peace with all.

Not only will a strong mind keep your focus on paths of virtue, having the power of concentration will help you in your daily life, at work, and at play. Have you ever spoken with someone who's eyes are darting about the room? Feel like they were "there"? or listening or paying attention? Have you had something in your personal life distract you from an important job you are trying to do? The power of concentration will help you focus when you need it no matter what is swirling around in your life.

Weak minds consist of the following symptoms:

- ☪ Wandering mind
- ☪ Dull mind
- ☪ Preoccupied or Distracted mind

Concentration and meditation strengthen the mind. Wandering, distracted minds result in dissatisfaction, disappointment, frustration, and anxiety. A focused mind creates satisfaction, peace, happiness, and serenity.

As you sit and try to focus your mind, remember you can not stop thoughts from entering your mindstuff. What you can do, is not "hop on and ride them". You can pull your attention back to your object of focus. The trick is not to stop the thoughts, the trick is; did you catch it? And the let it go. Over time you "catch" yourself sooner and sooner to the point the catch is no longer necessary.

Metta Meditation

Below is a mediation you can use when you are finding it difficult to focus or when you are dealing with emotions. My teacher, Nancy Gilgoff, teaches this in her workshops and she shared how she has used this in times when her teenage daughter was out late . . . and being a mother of a teenage daughter I have used it in much the same way to help calm my worries. Here is a link from her website where she is collecting translations in all languages:

<http://www.ashtangamaui.com/loving-kindness/>

The story of this meditation comes from the Buddha. When he was training the monks to meditate he sent them to the forest to meditate. The monks worrying about wild animals and critters cried out with fear about meditating in the wilderness. The Buddha then gave them this meditation to send to all beings so the animals and critters would not bother them.

Loving Kindness Meditation

May I be filled with loving kindness

May I be well

May I be peaceful and at ease

May I be happy

How to use this:

- ☪ Take a deep inhale, as you exhale say the first line and think of yourself or other person you are meditating on. Repeat with each line. Repeat the entire meditation 3x in this manner.
- ☪ Repeat the entire meditation 3 more times replacing "I" with "we" and think of someone you love and have NO conflict with. Imagine them in your mind as you exhale and send each line to that person;
- ☪ Repeat with someone you see often but do not really know.
- ☪ Repeat with someone you highly dislike, have conflict with or find very difficult to send loving kindness to.

Try it for yourself :)