

PRATYAHARA

The 5th Limb of Yoga
Philosophy Workshop with Nina

The 5th Limb of Yoga: Pratyahara

- *Pratya* means to 'withdraw', or 'draw back' and *ahara* refers to anything we 'take in' such as the various sights, sounds and smells our senses are continuously seduced by. These distractions are not just limited to the outside world – sometimes the noise of our internal chatter can be just as deafening!
- According to Patanjali, at a certain point these distractions (*vrittis*) start to become a hindrance to our practice and to attain a level of introspection necessary for deep meditation we need to learn to ignore all of the external stimuli and internal chatter.
- This of course, can be quite challenging. We are so used to reacting to the continuous barrage of stimuli and to pushing our energy (*prana*) *outwards*, that it can be difficult when we sit in meditation to go IN.

Pratyahara – Withdrawal of the Senses

- *Pratyahara, or “withdrawal of the senses,” teaches us to mindfully filter what we experience in our outer world so as not to live in constant fear or become overwhelmed*
- By internalizing consciousness, pratyahara allows us to leave external circumstances in abeyance. What might otherwise be an annoying sound or smell is now just there.
- Without pratyahara, any external sounds would distract you.
- Pratyahara is our first step into meditation as it opens us to a state of focused concentration.

Teaching Pratyahara

1. Guide students to bring awareness to any sounds inside of the room.
2. Ask students to bring their attention to any sounds outside of the room, maybe they can hear cars out on the street or general chatter.
3. Then bring their awareness to their breath, how does the breath feel coming in and out of the nostrils.
4. As a final step, bring their awareness to how the air feels on their skin or maybe their clothing.

This allows the students to fully be aware of any sounds, sensations etc. whilst practicing not to be distracted by these sounds and sensations and therefor drawing their senses inwards.

Teaching Pratyahara – WHEN?

Beginning meditation

- Guide students to arrive in the space, noticing sounds but leaving anything off the mat that doesn't serve them.
- Bring attention to their breath.
- Create a sense of calmness.

Balancing Series

- Any balancing series is a great way to still the mind and withdraw the senses. Teaching tree poses for example, you could guide students to close their eyes.

Savasana

- As you move your students into Savasana, bring their attention to any

Further Teaching Tips

- Teach the *drishti* (gaze) of various asanas in class. Encourage the students to leave the eyes open while practicing. Teach students to focus the eyes in the required direction but to let go of what they see.
- Include inversions and include a finishing sequence that allows for a longer held shoulderstand and headstand. Turning the system upside down calms the mind and helps to change the perception, supporting less focus outward, making it easier to focus inward and concentrate without distraction.
- Teach *shan mukha mudra* or *paran mukhi mudra* from the ***Hatha Yoga Prapadika***(IV.68). Sit in a comfortable seat, closing the ears by thumbs, eyes by forefingers, nostrils by middle fingers, and mouth by remaining set of fingers. Focus and listen inside. First teach to hold the mudra as long as it feels comfortable while inhale retention. If students are advanced and used to *pranayama* and exhale retention you can introduce holding the mudra after exhalation, too. If both types of breath retention are practiced you can release just the fingers on the nose to inhale, hold, exhale, hold, etc.
- Challenge students to change their daily habits of consuming television and social media. Suggest taking this month to fast from television or committing to a social media-free weekend.
- Encourage students to identify and reduce one of their personal “addictions” such as chocolate, sex or work. The focus on the *karmendriyas* can be helpful. By knowing what type of person you are, you can realize where you unconsciously put your energy, and then make a conscious effort to change it.

A Diet for Your Senses

- **The sense of sight:** Start by keeping the TV off whenever possible. Don't read news stories with violent images or content. Reduce the number of ads you view in a day. Buy yourself flowers and place them in a space you are in often. Remove clutter and things that no longer serve you.
- **The sense of hearing:** Eliminate music with harsh, hateful, or violent lyrics. Turn off radio stories that are disturbing. If a family member or friends start to talk with negativity, tell him or her that you choose to talk about a more positive topic or quickly find a solution instead of ruminating on the problem. If you hear about a tragedy or someone in need, opt to say a prayer for the person or situation or send money to a cause that could remedy the problem.
- **The sense of touch:** Take time to pet your pet. Hug your family members and friends often. Allow the sun to penetrate your skin. Walk barefoot in the grass, sand, or a body of water.
- **The sense of taste:** Eliminate all unnatural or artificial foods from your diet. Opt for fresh fruit, vegetables, and whole grains. Eat some meals in silence and close your eyes while you taste your food to get the full sensation.
- **The sense of smell:** Burn aromatherapy candles or incense that makes you feel relaxed. Find a smell from childhood that brings back good memories and include that into your environment.

<https://chopra.com/articles/pratyahara-the-fifth-limb-of-yoga>

COURSEWORK

- What other ways of pratyahara can you practice for yourself? On and off the mat?
- Read <https://www.yogajournal.com/yoga-101/return-stillness>
- Write down an intro to how you would guide your students to practice pratyahara.