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**The Eight Limbs of Yoga: Yamas (Restraints), Niyamas (Observances), Pranayama (Breathwork), Asana (Yoga forms), Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses inward), Dharana (Focused concentration), Dhyana (Meditation), Samadhi (State of balance).**

**Yamas: These restraints speak to our relationships with God, self and the world we live in. These restraints do not limit us but allow us to live our lives more fully.**

**Non-harming (Ahimsa). Truth (Satya). Non-stealing (Asteya). Moderation (Bramacharya). Non-attachment (Aparagraha).**

**Non-harming:** This is foundational. This has to do with our thoughts, words and actions. Noticing thoughts, which is where violence starts. Some of the greatest acts of violence are found in your thoughts about yourself. This often shows up when we feel fear rise and are disempowered, isolated and disconnected. In recovery, HALT (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired) are vulnerable states where we need to act with care and compassion to not willingly enter into those states. How can we connect and transform thoughts into skillful action before we would even find ourselves HALT? How can we continue to transform thoughts and invite skillful action from a solid, grounded foundation? One breath at a time. Inviting ourselves to notice that thoughts, emotions and physical sensations come and go. They fluctuate. Our minds race. Underneath all of that is a constant, unchanging spark of our spiritual nature. We are connected to our Creator from this place. We are held in a love greater than we can ever imagine and we are, yes, even in our brokenness, also a reflection of that love. We can remove the distortion from that reflection and transform thoughts of isolation and disconnect through the breath in our body. One breath at a time. We are part of a whole. There is a light that exists in every single one of us without exception. When we think, speak and act from this place of connection, we begin to experience life more fully.

*On and off the mat: Being aware of our bodies in space and time through grounding and breathing. Choosing skillful action from this place honoring challenges and limitations with compassion rather than judgement.*

**Truth:** This is about inner truth, not the stories of addiction or clinging that we tell ourselves to justify our unskillful actions, habits and beliefs but that deep inner knowing that is your truth. Truth that is both subjective and yours alone and that which is universal. This is felt in the body, specifically in the gut, also in the heart and throat. Bringing your awareness inward and connecting to your own truth. Maybe others have labeled you and been manipulative and dishonest. Maybe you have acted in this way yourself. This is owning and moving into your truth and connecting to universal truths of honesty, authenticity, speaking and living in integrity grounded in compassion in right relationship with God, yourself and the world.

*On and off the mat: Accessing inner awareness and making choice in the yoga form or in your speech and actions that is grounded in compassion and non harming and true for you in this moment in your body.*

**Non-Stealing:** This is about moving from scarcity to abundance. Moving from living in a world where there is not enough. Not enough time. Not enough money. Where you are told you are not enough. You will never be enough. We unpack this false notion of scarcity and let go over and over again these deeply ingrained beliefs we see everywhere in our consumer culture. This constant need for instant gratification and discomfort with boredom, etc...We unpack all this with the ability to cultivate gratitude. Yes, gratitude. Maybe the only thing you can be grateful for in this moment is the breath in your body. This is where we start. It doesn't even need to go beyond that. We may find at some point, we can cultivate gratitude for the ability to start over with each new day.

*On and off the mat: Cultivating awareness of breath, heart rate, heat in the body. Awareness of being alive.*

**Moderation:** This references the expansion of vital energy. The intensity of the longing of the soul. This can show up in cravings and the need to numb or invite excessive behaviors in sexuality, food, work, etc..Many addicts trade one addiction for another. Many of us have socially acceptable ways of filling the hole in the soul. This is the practice of harmonizing and channeling our life force energy in healthy ways. Understanding how the body can aid in emotional self regulation. Inversions calm the nervous system. Heart openers and lateral bends invigorate and twists release and detoxify. We learn to channel this life force energy in healthy practices which transform intensity into passion and enthusiasm. This is about walking with God.

*On and off the mat: Standing warrior forms with breath flow. Slow vinyasa opening the heart center from a strong, grounded foundation. Channeling intensity rather than fearing it into the creative force....cooking, gardening, painting, knitting, dancing. What feeds your soul? Find it. Do it.*

**Non-Attachment:** This is the opposite of not caring! This is truly about loving and caring.It is also about releasing the needs that provoke unskillful action. Often our needs that show up, the need to be loved is one of the biggest, when we search for it first outside of God and ourselves, lead us to make painful choices in relationships. Here, we connect and ground ourselves in truth and compassion, recognizing we have what we need in this moment, walking with God and letting go. Let go off the need to be loved and validated outside yourself. Letting go of the need to be right, first, accepted. Releasing our clinging and grasping onto old ways of thinking that lead to pain and greater suffering. The breath here can be a tool to inform us if we are holding onto something because we will notice it in the breath if we are holding on.

*On and off the mat: Breathwork with longer exhales. Slow exhales. Exhale.*

**Niyamas:** These observances invite us to go deep within and explore our relationship with God and self and invites us into the possibility of living freely, fully and joyfully. Purity (Sauca), Contentment (Santosa), Discipline (Tapas), Self Study (Svadyaya), Surrender to God (Isvara Pranidhana).

**Purity:** This is the invitation to declutter the mind, the body and environment. What are we putting into our bodies? Often we trade one addiction for another. Invite ourselves to consider the level of drama in our environment, what we watch on television, what we listen to? how does our nervous system respond to this? This is a practice we cultivate from the inside out.

*On and off the mat: breathwork with alternate nostril breathing. Yoga forms with twists that detoxify the body. Cleaning house! Getting rid of clutter!*

**Contentment:** This is about allowing what is in the moment. Even if that is boredom, anxiety, fear. Making space and allowing what is present. Anchoring into the moment with grounding and breathing. Life is complete in each and every moment, even in moments of great challenge.

*On and off the mat: Grounding. Balance forms. Visually and physically orienting yourself to space and time. Know wherever you are right now is where you are and cultivate presence through tools of grounding.*

**Discipline:** Being willing to show up and do the work of recovery in personal growth and transformation. Burning away impurities of the mind and body. This is not for the faint of heart! This is about accountability and ownership. Rebuilding core values and aligning thoughts, speech and action here. Making the commitment each and every moment to be healthy and use the tools you have to remain there in this moment.

*On and off the mat: Breath work that regulates the body temperature. Yoga forms that emphasize core strength, igniting the core, radiating from the core. Cultivate awareness of what you need daily to be healthy in mind, body and spirit and commit to being in right relationship with these actions.*

**Self Study:** This is about knowing the true self. The essence of our nature. Owning our actions and recognizing the roles we play, we unpack them to explore the core of who we are. This is about connecting to the awareness that we are a reflection of our Higher Power. We are part of the whole. We commit to this journey of self study and reflection also through sacred texts such as the Bible, Yoga Sutras, Vedas, 12 step literature and inspirational reading.

*On and off the mat: Slow moving vinyasa with pauses and emphasis on making choices in your practice that serve your greater good in each moment. Cultivating the witness, the ability to observe your own experience without judgement. Study and learn from Wisdom texts and grounded teachers.*

**Surrender to God:** Surrendering to the God of your understanding. Connecting to the awareness that there is something greater than us that has a greater wisdom and that we ourselves, are deeply loved here. This is also actively participating in the life we are privileged to be given. This is about connecting to the larger purpose of our being. This is about Trust. Acceptance. Devotion. Commitment.

*On and off the mat: In the breath, Finding the practice of engaging with life in an expansive inhale and with a full exhale surrendering into the flow of life. Dedicating our practice to this Higher Power. Inviting our lives to be a living, breathing prayer. Finding purpose in everyday life.*

### **Asana Third Limb**

The third limb of yoga is the study of the physical forms. Asana means comfortable seat. Memories and emotions are stored in body.

Intelligence of muscles...I access this by playing music.

Linking Asana with breath and conscious presence we bring to movement, a sense of inquiry.

The More we understand and examine the relationship between emotions and muscles...better we are able to make choices about feelings and design our own emotional intervention practices through yoga.....

In Yoga, the spine is the basis for our movement and is also the pathway of the emotions.

We generate movement here in the spine which houses the central nervous system, all the organs and glands..basic energy anatomy

Movement that opens the heart...back bends tend to energize, uplift

Forward bends tend to calm as well as inversions

Side body openings can be exhilarating, mood enhancing, increase body temperature.

Twists are detoxifying and cleansing as well as offer a new perspective

Breathing and movement

Brings presence

Repetition...muscle memory

With asana we use the physical to turn the mind inward to reflect on life's larger themes.

Core strength refers to the vital strength in the abdominal area.

This is also connected to our center of gravity.

Crucial to balance in any pose we do

Also refers to the spiritual, ethical and emotional essence of who you are.

Physical muscles hold us carry us and support the spine, so does this core strength of the values you hold near and dear, In a much more subtle manner, support your life.

It gives you the power to act on these values. Further realizing your potential in life.

We Practice yoga to learn what our core is and to be able to act from that center.

Yoga provides the process to integrate the physical, ethical, emotional, spiritual essence.

Our culture has a Dysfunctional obsession with abs and bellies. Fitness culture tells us it is supposed to look a certain way. We can also unpack this nonsense.

Our core represents the element of fire, when it blazes out of control, we are domineering, insensitive, and have difficulty maintaining relationships. When the fire is too dim, we are unable to take action, responsibility, we lack motivation, we are prone to self destructive behaviors, and are constantly questioning ourselves and our abilities.

When we connect and find balance here, in the power center, we have the courage to face difficult situations with an openness, humility and sense of humor. We cultivate an intensity to meet and follow through with challenges.

Balance of confidence and humility allows us to establish harmonious relationships. We can come to emotional balance even in complexity.

Moving and strengthening this inner fire of motivation, we embody a strong, yet soft way of moving.

## **Pranayama 4th limb of yoga**

4th Limb of Yoga

Pranayama: Breathwork

We seek to Understand the relationship between the breath and emotions. There are many ways of using the breath and our tool of grounding to support regulation of emotions. We are talking here about the Ratio of oxygen to carbon dioxide

Trauma and breath: Open mouth, shallow breath. Holding breath.= fear, flight, freeze response. Here Emotions are suppressed. Fear of feeling arises. Need to numb and distract. Crying and laughing and other ways of using sound are powerful, genuine emotional releases that can free and cleanse you.

Yoga Sutra: “Conscious Breathing is the awareness, regulation and modification of the various components of breathing.”

4th limb here and breath physically located in the pulmonary system, heart space. Associated with the element of air. Quality of spaciousness.

Breath is the evidence of our life force energy. First thing we do when we enter this world and the last thing we do when we leave.

Linguistically, breath and spirit mean the same thing in many languages. Hebrew - Ruach. Greek-Pneumas. Chinese- Chi. Sanskrit- Prana. Japanese- Ki.

Longer exhale can calm.

Longer inhale, short exhale can excite.

Alternate nostril create balance.

Agni Sara can stimulate digestion.

Using breath retention after inhale and exhale can also ground and calm.

Many ways to engage the breath.

Inhale through the nose and exhale through mouth can increase body temperature.

Inhale through mouth (like one was using a straw) and exhale through nose has a cooling effect.

Breath and emotions. Emotions are a powerful energy and can move through you. Learning to be honest with our fears and when we can engage our tools of grounding, breathing and witnessing, opening our hearts to ourselves.

## **Pratyahara**

The Fifth Limb of Yoga:

Checking in vs. checking out

Pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses)

Pratyahara is the 5th stage of sage Patanjali's 8-limbed Ashtanga Yoga, which we could refer to as “withdrawing the senses away from the external surroundings and distractions.”

It can also be thought of as the point of transition from the ‘external’ aspects of yoga, to the ‘internal’ yoga. In a deeper sense, we could even say that it is with this ‘controlled withdrawing of the senses’ that ‘Real Yoga’ begins.

All of the techniques, exercises and trainings in our yoga practice thus far, including the first 4 stages of yama, niyama, asana and pranayama, have been systematically designed to condition the body, the emotions and the mind for ‘yoga’, or the more subtle, inner practices of dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation) and samadhi (mystic absorption), the 6th, 7th and 8th limbs of yoga.

The senses are our conduits to the external world. They allow the world around us to come into

our minds, which obviously is important, especially if we want to make a sandwich, cross the street without getting run over, or otherwise successfully negotiate our way through our day-to-day lives.

But in this day and age, the onslaught of sensory input can be a dangerous affair too. We're all absorbing a startling amount of images and inputs at a relentless pace these days – many of which are projecting messages into our subconsciousness that are far from wholesome and nurturing.

The senses are like a mirror – turned outward they reflect the outside world; turned inward they reflect the purity and peace of the 'Higher Mind'.

Use pratyahara to work with the senses, withdraw them from the often relentlessly negative influences of our external environment, and turn them 'inward' toward 'Higher Consciousness'.

What does it mean to be in the present moment?

Our mind and our neurophysiology are in sync

Interoception in neuroscience

When we orient ourselves in the present moment by engaging with the felt sense in our body we are building robust neural pathways in the brain. The felt sense is located in the reptilian brain and is the part of our brain that is wired to survive. For survivors of trauma that haven't discharged the energy built up in the body after a traumatic event, this remains overactivated. Notice if you find yourself going to bed uneasy, waking up uneasy and finding this becoming your regular state of being.

Normalize low mid anxiety

When we talk about integrating our senses, we can use sensory practices to turn our attention away from distractions and the fluctuations of the mind.

Again, when we identify with the narrative of the mind, we suffer. We can observe the narrative is happening and find the tools to be present to life in this moment.

It is a strange and wonderful fact to be here, walking around in a body, to have a whole world within you and a world at your fingertips outside you. It is an immense privilege, and it is incredible that humans manage to forget the miracle of being here. Rilke said, 'Being here is so much,' and it is uncanny how social reality can deaden and numb us so that the mystical wonder of our lives goes totally unnoticed. We are here. We are wildly and dangerously free."

— John O'Donohue

- Emotional quality of pratyahara is harmony...bringing mind/body/spirit into a balanced relationship.

### **Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi**

6, 7,8 limbs of Yoga

Dharana: knowledge awareness...feel and process emotions but focus on present so emotions and feelings from past don't set up camp. Focus on present. Focus on breath. Object.

Dhyana wisdom hope for future continuing an uninterrupted flow.

Dharana is the ability to focus on one object to the exclusion of everything else. Have you ever been so focused on a book, television show or movie that the rest of the world seems to vanish?

Dharana is that same kind of focus but it is focused on a single object and it is voluntary instead of unintentional. The object itself is not important, only the ability to focus, to concentrate, is important. Some use a candle flame, others a favorite image or even a word or sound will do. Many confuse Dharana with Dhyana or meditation, while they are related they are not the same. Dharana is simply, hah!, taming our thoughts so we can focus on a single thought where Dhyana takes this one step further.

Meditation or dhyana is my favorite part of the practice. The asana practice is built as a precursor to open and condition the body and mind to be able to sit more comfortably in stillness and silence. The challenge of human nature is that we are caught in this endless cycle of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. We cling to the past or try to control the future. The only way out is a third option – learning to sit with everything exactly as it is. For this reason, I feel that meditation is the most important and profound practice we can do – relaxing into and loving ourselves and life. As Ram Dass says, “Your life is your curriculum.” It is not a glamorous or sexy practice – just sit, be quiet, and practice “being” with all the discomfort, uncertainty, chaos and joy that is life. Eventually, a deeper peace arises. The mind begins to soften its clinging nature.

The most-revered ancient sourcebook for yoga practice, Patanjali's Yoga Sutra describes how the mind works and how we can integrate yoga into our lives. Patanjali's ashtanga yoga includes eight components of practice (“ashtanga” means “eight-limbed” in Sanskrit), and dharana, or concentration is the sixth of these eight limbs. The seventh limb is dhyana, or meditation, and the eighth and final limb is samadhi, or enlightenment. These last three limbs are often studied together and are called antaratma sadhana, or the innermost quest.

In chapter III, verse one, Patanjali explains concentration as the “binding of consciousness to a [single] spot.” I like to honor this state of absorption whenever and wherever I find it. Sometimes I see it in a musician who is focused on the music to the exclusion of all else, or in an athlete in a tense moment of a crucial game. Of course, yoga practitioners actively seek out this depth of concentration in the practices of asana (posture) and pranayama (breathing exercises), as well as in meditation itself. But I believe that dharana can be found whenever a person is fully present and focused on an activity or object.

By definition, this focus cures the inner conflicts we so commonly experience. When you're completely focused, you can't be of two minds about something.

Like many people, I've found that when there's a disparity between my actions and my thoughts I become more fatigued and feel less joy in my life. But I don't feel conflict—even though I may encounter difficulties—when I'm truly focused on and committed to the moment.

This ability to focus all the mind's attention toward one thing is the foundation of the next limb—dhyana or meditation—and is absolutely necessary if the practitioner is to reach the liberation of samadhi. One way to understand the distinction between concentration and meditation is by using rain as an analogy. When rain starts, the moisture of clouds and fog

(everyday awareness) coalesces into concentrated moisture and becomes distinct raindrops. These raindrops represent dharana—intermittent moments of focused attention. When the rain falls to earth and creates a river, the merging of the individual raindrops into one stream is like dhyana or meditation. The separate raindrops merge into one continuous flow, just as individual moments of dharana merge into the uninterrupted focus of meditation. In English, we often use the word "meditate" to mean "to think," but in yoga, meditation is not thinking; instead, it is a deep sense of unity with an object or activity.

Yoga students are often taught to meditate by focusing on a mantra, on the breath, or perhaps on the image of a guru or great teacher. These practices are extremely difficult because it is the nature of the mind to jump around from idea to idea, from sensation to sensation. In fact, Swami Vivekananda called the mind "a drunken monkey" when he introduced meditation to the United States at the end of the nineteenth century.

Once you've taken the first step of learning to still the body for meditation, you can't help but notice how "un-still" the mind is. So instead of thinking of meditation as some dreamy state in which thoughts do not happen at all—instead of trying to quiet something that by nature is never quiet—I pay total attention to the agitations which are my thoughts. My thoughts may continue, but paying uninterrupted attention to my thoughts is itself the meditation.

I'm simply saying that there is a way to be sane. I'm saying that you can get rid of all this insanity created by the past in you. Just by being a simple witness of your thought processes.

It is simply sitting silently, witnessing the thoughts, passing before you. Just witnessing, not interfering not even judging, because the moment you judge you have lost the pure witness. The moment you say "this is good, this is bad," you have already jumped onto the thought process.

It takes a little time to create a gap between the witness and the mind. Once the gap is there, you are in for a great surprise, that you are not the mind, that you are the witness, A watcher.

And this process of watching is the very alchemy of real religion. Because as you become more and more deeply rooted in witnessing, thoughts start disappearing. You are, but the mind is utterly empty.  
(not sure who wrote this wonderful statement)

That's the moment of enlightenment. That is the moment that you become for the first time an unconditioned, sane, really free human being."

— Osho

**All of these are different ways of grounding and stabilizing the central nervous system, anchoring the mind into the present with the tools of the breath and the body.**

I share this with the content coming from the resources below and my own lived experience of the ongoing working with this framework. I will to the best of my ability, humbly be a lifelong student of this practice.

It is an honor to share with you and I do so with the utmost respect for the tradition of yoga, honoring the place of origin of the practice and the rich cultural context of the wisdom that emerged from the Indus Valley.

I strive to live in a manner that honors the planet and all life supported by this planet, this universe.

What an amazing thing it is to be here!

Lo Kah Samasta Sukinu Bhavantu

Resources:

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali: Translation and Commentary by Sri Swami Satchidananda

The Heart of Yoga by T. K. V. Desikachar

Emotional Yoga by Bija Bennett

The Yamas and Niyamas by Deborah Adele

Nourishing the Teacher by Danny Arguettey

Skill in Action: Radicalizing Your Yoga Practice to Create a Just World by Michelle Cassandra Johnson

Yoga is for Everybody by Dianne Bondy