

## HARMONY

### BALANCING THE PARTS

**H**armony is the action of bringing things into balance and putting a problem into perspective. As Limb Five of Emotional Yoga, it means stepping back and revealing a broader view. But harmony isn't about seeing the larger external landscape; it's about seeing the larger internal landscape. You have to draw your attention to the inner realm in order to find it.

If there is a painful emotion indicating that something is out of harmony, it becomes like a lump in the back of your throat. Once you feel it, it's up to you to find out what's causing it, and it doesn't take a sophisticated attunement to do this. You need only to withdraw within and explore, even for a moment.

Nature has already endowed your body with the proper instincts for creating emotional harmony and balance. You know when you are uncomfortable or out of sorts. You simply need to focus in and learn how to listen to what you need. Like the jet pilot navigating the skies, continuously guiding and steering his plane up, down, and in various directions, you can navigate your emotional balance.

Every day the influences of your life change. Your food, exercise, sleep, and emotional states continuously move you into and out of balance. Everything you feel, smell, hear, see, or taste has an effect. Once you recognize you are out of balance and can identify how, you can do something about it.

If you wake up in the morning and still feel hurt from a disagreement you had the night before, the quality of harmony within you recognizes it. Harmony tells you whether you are too hot or too cold, if you need more or less of something, if you feel joy or sadness.

Harmony keeps you in tune. It's like a scale that gives you a sense of your balance or imbalance. But you are the one who needs to check and double-check, to find out what feels amiss and where. Then you can ask yourself: What do I need to get back into harmony again?

You can't stay in a state of perfect harmony all the time. You must expect cycles of confusion and clarity and realize that obstacles will appear. Very often, without knowing it, you will slip out of sync again. At times like this, stop for a moment to notice and reflect on the imbalance: How have I been affected? How does it feel? This strategy of making the unconscious conscious reduces the impact of imbalance and prevents it from throwing you off. With harmony, you can always settle within and find out what you need to feel more comfortable and whole.

### HARMONIC REVIEW

Set aside a few minutes before bed. Casting back over your day, review the forms, the shapes, of your experiences. Do this exercise with the intention of discovering any unresolved issues or nagging feelings.

This is a free-form exercise. You cannot do it wrong. Made conscious, the obstacles for harmony can be actively faced down:

- ◆ Let everything about your day cross your mind. Except, do it backward. Walk back through the instances of your day from now until the moment you woke up this morning. Observe and recall. Don't judge. Feel the flow of your thoughts and emotions running through you. It's like a good rain clearing the air.

- ◆ Go back and review your day to see if anything is out of balance or impacting you emotionally. Is there anything you have overlooked, or blocked, or not dealt with? Are you ill at ease about something? Feel your way clear of anger, frustration, and emotional negativity. Take time to contemplate.
- ◆ You may find moments of excitement and thrill, or find what is shimmering on the horizon. What things have occurred to make your life better?
- ◆ If you find something that's troubling, ask yourself:
  - What am I feeling? Allow me to know.
  - What steps can I take to resolve this issue?
  - How can I cooperate with myself to deal with this?
  - How do I discern the situation? Do I need to join with it?
  - What are the key issues I need to focus on for a balanced perspective?
- ◆ If you are too tired, resolve to deal with it tomorrow. Ask for guidance while you sleep. Invite the answers in. Intend to discover what you need to know. You can still bring harmony to yourself even if some issues are unresolved. Make a plan for resolution and clarity.

Harmony develops emotional balance, directing your attention toward deeper levels of awareness.

or deadening them in any way. Directing the senses is a process of intentionally focusing them toward what you want to do, or feel. For example, if you look at a beautiful piece of sculpture, like a Rodin, and you want to use it as an object for uplifting your emotional state, you would intentionally direct your feeling awareness to its color, size, texture, and form. In this case, your senses act as your mind's focusing tool, keeping your mind free from outside distraction.

The fifth limb of yoga teaches you how to direct your senses within to stay vividly aware. This technique of gazing within helps you refine your senses, shift your emotional energy—by either calming or stimulating it—and make choices from the finest level of feeling.

### Withdrawal of the Senses (Pratyahara)

Yoga Sutra, ch. 2, v. 54:

*When the senses disregard everything but the nature of the mind, one has complete control over sensory awareness.*

The fifth limb of yoga is the bridge from the “outer limbs” to the “inner limbs.” Its practices train your mind to move inward and prepare you for deeper emotional inquiries. When you use your senses as preparation for meditation, they reduce the distractions within your body and mind. Distractions such as worries, thoughts, and emotional memories produce restrictive feelings. Preparation changes your physical, mental, and emotional energy so you can move from the external to the internal. This movement is what makes meditation possible.

In yoga, the metaphor of a cup is frequently used. It is said if you want to fill a cup with something, it first has to be empty. If your mind is full, there is no room for anything more. This is why you prepare before you meditate. You create a space so something new can come in. Sometimes you have to clean the vessel before filling it. You prepare for all types of personal meditation in the same way. Eliminate and purify first, then fill yourself with something good. You can even keep the cup empty if you like. As Mother Teresa said, “Let us remain as empty as possible so that God can fill us up.”

### DIRECTING THE SENSES (PRATYAHARA)

**T**HE FIFTH LIMB OF YOGA is pratyahara, the “withdrawal of the senses.” Pratyahara occurs as a result of turning the mind inward; it doesn't happen by itself. You have to do things beyond the practices to achieve a meditative state. Pratyahara is a process by which your senses progressively withdraw from external stimuli, settle in their source, and come alive in the inner environment of your mind. Yogic texts compare this process to a tortoise drawing its limbs into its shell.

In Emotional Yoga, the senses are important tools for emotional self-healing. But it's a mistake to think that withdrawing them means controlling

The truth is that once you empty the cup, if you don't consciously refill it, the cup will probably fill by itself—with distracting thoughts, old habits, and archives of emotional memories. So, in preparation, you take charge of both emptying and filling the cup. Of course, in order to do this, you must first empty and fill the cup. This idea provides the foundation for all meditation practices.

T. K. V. Desikachar uses a metaphor that his father, T. Krishnamacharya, often used: In order to cook rice, you first have to find the pot and examine it to see if it's clean. If it's not, you have to clean it. *All these steps are significant.* And they are the same steps for meditation. You prepare the mind by deciding on a time, going to a quiet place, and directing the mind to something positive. You make the mind ready and fit. You cleanse, refine, or sharpen it like a knife. This refinement process is looked at in three ways: as an active practice, as an *inquiry*, and as an *attitude*.

**Practice:** Practicing refinement means that you perform actions to change the condition of your body, your mind, and your sensory perceptions. You can focus, inquire, breathe, perform postures—anything that will settle you emotionally.

**Inquiry:** Classically, pranayama, or conscious breathing, precedes meditation because it refreshes your mind and makes your system fit for inquiry. By observing your breath, you can know your state of mind. Observation becomes a way to inquire and find out where you are emotionally, and this brings you deeper. All the steps of withdrawing your senses inward are important in managing and healing your emotions.

**Attitude:** You must be conscious of something if it is to exist for you. Therefore, in preparing to meditate, you must also have a bhavana, or attitude, in order to fix your attention. Anytime you intend to look at something, you can do it in a number of ways: with a sense of humor, gratitude, or sacrifice, or perhaps with an awareness of a higher source. These are emotional attitudes that intentionally draw you inward.

Put simply, meditation depends on the internal state of the meditator. If you set up the initial condition first, you create a momentum, and the state of meditation takes over and happens by itself.

## RHYTHMS OF REST

We live in an age of terrifying speed and haste, working fast, commuting fast, gobbling our food down fast. Even the fast-time cycle of Silicon Valley systematically shortens our every step from product to delivery. Computer programs have a "streamlined interface." Clothes are called "rushwear." We've become a quick-reflexed, channel-flipping, fast-forwarding species. We've discovered all sorts of quick devices. And when we use them, another fraction of a second is saved. But does making things go faster really add meaning to our lives? It seems that the more we fill our lives with time-saving devices, the more we rush, and the more anxious, tense, and emotionally stressed we feel. Why? Because our attention is still on *time*.

We must slow down and take time to savor this life. We can go fast sometimes, as long as we take the time regularly to . . . pause. The truth is, our work is never completely done. If we stopped only when we were finished, we would *never* stop. Taking a moment, an hour, or a day to rest liberates us from the compulsion to finish, and gives us a moment to reflect, to really think about a problem or emotional issue, and re-energize.

Without some form of rest, without slowing down, we go into survival mode, where everything we meet assumes prominence. When we move faster and faster, every detail inflates in its importance. Everything seems more urgent than it really is. Often we react in a sloppy way, sometimes with desperation, which leads to anger, anxiety, or depression.

There is deep emotional wisdom in the traditional Jewish Sabbath, which begins exactly at sundown every Friday night. "Sabbath is not dependent upon our readiness to stop," says author Wayne Muller in his book *Sabbath, Restoring the Sacred Rhythm of Rest*.<sup>2</sup> "We do not stop when we are finished. We do not stop when we complete our phone calls, finish our project, get through this stack of messages, or get out this report tomorrow. We stop because it is time to stop." Sabbath says: Stop *now*.

If you stop and rest, you give yourself the opportunity to check in with yourself and your emotions. Stopping may be your emotional meditation for the day. Notice the difference between stopping and letting yourself con-

time to be busy. If you keep jumping around, it's hard to find any kind of emotional harmony within.

Surrender to rest. Turn your mind gently inward and allow the tensions to leave. Then you can hear what is most deeply true. This is pratyahara, choosing freely to accept or leave the external situation and direct your attention inside. It is as the psalm says, "Be still, and know."

Take an evening, light a candle, sit quietly in your living room, and appreciate the beauty around you. Reflect on your day, your week. Remind yourself that your presence has really mattered and you have touched people. Listen to the silence and enter into what feels like a subtler dimension, where you feel connected and blessed. The time of rest has come. Let your mind rest gently in your heart.

## SENSING THE MUSE

Controlling your senses cannot be a strict discipline. Control is not suppression but rather proper coordination and motivation. It is better to restore dignity and enthusiasm to your senses than to restrain them. If you see, hear, or feel the impulse to connect with one sense, then stay in that sense. It will more naturally help you to balance your emotional state. The senses have deep emotional qualities. They know what they're doing. Trust them. They are faithful and will serve you well.

Use the following five sensory practices as emotional tools for directing your attention away from distractions. If you appreciate the sensual life around you and let your senses be your muse, they will inspire and heal you. Make controlling your senses a refreshing form of emotional play.

### EMOTIONAL MEDITATIONS FOR THE FIVE SENSES

The following meditations can be emotionally tonifying or reducing, depending on the quality of the sensory experience. For example, high-pitched sounds are more energizing and expanding, while low-pitched sounds are more calming. Bright colors are expanding, and muted colors are settling. Deep, vigorous touch is energizing, while light, continuous touch is soothing.

ing. Spicy, warm smells and tastes are stimulating, and bland, sweet, or cool smells and tastes tend to be comforting. You can perform these exercises alone or use them as themes or intentions, fitting them into your overall practice.

↳ Also All Senses (Sensory)

Our eyes see only what is on the surface, but to hear is to *be*. Hearing is the purest of the senses. It has the most direct contact with our emotional being. When we learn to use our sense of hearing fully, we can reach a deeper consciousness. According to Joachim-Ernst Berendt in his book *The World Is Sound: Nada Brahma*,<sup>3</sup> the "ear person" has a better chance of penetrating the depth of his experience than does the "eye person." The new man or woman, he says, will be a "listening" man or woman. Besides, you can't close your ears, so you might as well listen. Ask yourself now: How is my hearing sensitivity?

Musician and composer John Cage said, "There is no such thing as silence. Something is always happening that makes a sound." You hear mostly noise. When you ignore it, it will disturb you, but when you listen to it, you'll find it fascinating and emotionally stimulating.

### Lesson 1. Listen (No, listen carefully.)

Listen to the sounds of a truck cruising at fifty miles per hour, a mason cutting bricks, the static between radio stations, the rain. Capture and control these sounds and use them, not as sound effects, but as instruments to make you *feel* deeper. Listen to the wind, your heartbeat, a car motor, a wave lapping on the shore. Discern the difference between stimulating and relaxing sounds, between sounds made by living beings and those made by nonliving things.

There is always something to hear. Call it a musical meditation, if you will.

### Lesson 2. Experimental Music

Effects: Relaxing; soothing; settling.

The following is an example of a sound meditation. Use it as a guide. Adapt it, and experiment.

- ◆ Sit in a comfortable position and breathe 12 times, gradually increasing the length of the exhalations. Then sit quietly for a moment.
- ◆ Repeat the two-syllable sound *Ah - Ha* mentally, not verbally.
- ◆ Increase the length of the sound in your mind, using the following lines below as a reference. Increase the length of the sound progressively until you get to the longest length of the sound, and then progressively decrease it back to the shortest length. Take your time.
- ◆ It's okay if you find yourself breathing as you mentally repeat the sound. You can make this a longer meditation by increasing the number of repetitions.
- ◆ Use any number of sounds. For example, use the Hebrew word for love, *Ah - Ha - Va*.

Or try, *Ra - Ma*, or *Na - Ma*, or *Ah - Men*.

LENGTH OF REPETITION

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SHORTEST

LONGEST

END

## 2. Show Me (Sight)

Absolute color occurs only in the mind, not in the outside world. The red of an apple remains in our minds, but think of how different it looks in the moonlight, or on the branch of a shady tree, or under a fluorescent light. When the light hits a gorgeous red rose, only the red rays are reflected into our eyes. What happens when we close our eyes? What do we see?

Have you ever tried to see without looking? Close your eyes and stay

awhile behind your closed eyelids. Let a smile be born behind your lids. Detach your attention from the outside world. Arrive in inner space behind your eyes, and *lose your sight*. In inner space, you don't see things in the way you are accustomed to seeing them on the outside. Give all your attention to this *feeling* of seeing.

## A COLOR MEDITATION

**Effects:** Soothing and settling, as well as inspiring and enlivening.

The first meditation book I used was *Colour Meditations*, by S. G. J. Ouseley,<sup>4</sup> and it was filled with exquisitely described visualizations. I dedicate the following meditation to the author of that wonderful book.

Sit quietly and read the following description. Then close your eyes and allow the colors and images to come into your conscious mind.

- ◆ Picture the freshness of a meadow of young grass after a rain shower. The grass gleams like a carpet of emerald velvet: bright, tender, and soft. The turquoise-blue morning sky is flushed with white and rosy-gold billowing clouds. Nearby, two tall white birds, pale and slim, walk gracefully in the clear morning light. The fresh air is delicious and full of life.
- ◆ *Feel* the images and colors. Feel yourself surrounded by light and life. Let the images lead you to other feelings, sensations, thoughts. As your vision begins to fade, sit quietly and rest with your eyes closed. Feel the colors embodying you completely.

## 3. Touché (Touch)

In fencing, the word *touché* means that we've been touched by our opponent's foil. We also say *touché* when someone has delivered a point well made, or touched the core of someone's being. Touch affects everything we do. Life itself could never have evolved without touch. The chemicals that make up our world touch one another and form liaisons. Without touch, there would be no species, parenthood, or survival. Touch is not only basic to our species, it is the key to it.

Mothers and their babies do an enormous amount of touching, and this first emotional comfort remains with us all our lives. Oddly enough, touch doesn't have to be given by another person or even by something living: Premature babies placed in a lamb's-wool blanket for a day will gain weight.

Skin is the key organ of our sense of touch, and since skin stretches over our entire body, touching affects our whole organism. Touching increases tactile stimulation and decreases stress. It makes you feel more alive. So, *don't lose touch*. Make touch a daily emotional-balancing discipline.

### AN EMOTIONAL HEALING MESSAGE

This Ayurvedic self-massage technique will prepare you for the coming day. Do it before you bathe in the morning, and prior to practicing asanas, pranayama, and meditation. Abhyanga is part of the Ayurvedic daily routine, preventing the accumulation of toxins in the body as it lubricates the muscles, tissues, and joints. In Ayurveda, skin breathing is as necessary as breathing with our lungs. According to the classical Ayurvedic texts, a daily sesame-oil massage rejuvenates the skin, lets it breathe, and promotes youthful luster. This practice is both emotionally energizing and settling.

Use cured sesame, olive, or coconut oil. To cure oil, heat it to about 100 degrees. Do not allow it to come to a boil. To test the temperature, put in a drop of water; when it pops and crackles, the oil is ready. *Never, ever* leave oil unattended while heating. Let it cool down and keep it stored at room temperature. You may rewarm your oil by putting the bottle under hot running water.

Sit in a comfortable position, and use a towel to cover the floor, carpet, or chair. Then, begin your massage.

- ◆ **Head:** Apply only a little oil to your head and massage vigorously with both hands. Make sure that your scalp is well lubricated. Use the flats of your fingers and your palms to massage your head with circular motions. You may skip the head massage if you don't want to wash your hair afterward.
- ◆ **Face:** Apply a little oil to your face, neck, and ears. With both hands, massage your face using gentle pressure, making a circular motion

over your entire face. Massage the folds of your outer ears but not inside your ears.

- ◆ **Neck:** With both hands, massage both the front and back of your neck, up and down in long strokes. You may use more vigorous pressure on your shoulders and the upper part of your spine.
- ◆ **Apply oil** to the rest of your body: arms, back, chest, abdomen, legs, hips, and feet, so that your entire skin surface is covered with oil.
- ◆ **Arms:** Using the flat of one hand, make circular strokes at your shoulder joints, repeating the circle anywhere from 2 to 20 times. Then make straight strokes down over the long bones of your arms, back and forth. Do this on the outsides of your arms first, followed by the insides of your arms, beginning with your left arm, then your right. Create a rhythm of circular strokes and then long back-and-forth strokes. Finish by massaging the small bones in your hands and fingers.
- ◆ **Chest and abdomen:** With both hands, make a very gentle circular motion over your chest and over each pectoral area; straight up and down over your heart and breast bone. In the same way, make a gentle circular motion over your abdomen, following the colon from the right lower part of your abdomen, moving clockwise toward the left lower part.
- ◆ **Back and spine:** With both hands, massage your upper and then lower back muscles gently, then go deeper. Massage the sides of your torso.
- ◆ **Hips and legs:** With both hands, massage your hips using a circular motion, then straight strokes down and up your thighs. Massage your knees, calves, lower legs, and ankles with a circular motion around your joints. Spend more time massaging your feet, ending the massage with a vigorous motion back and forth on your soles.

This oil massage can take anywhere from a few minutes to twenty minutes. When you're finished, simply take a shower and wash off the oil. Do

this every morning as part of your daily routine, and it won't be long before you decide to continue it permanently.

#### 4. Eau d'Ambiance (Smell)

Smells are immediate. They have a mysterious power to them, triggering emotions and images: childhood memories of summer family dinners of barbecued chicken and succulent corn, the first day of school, riding horses with your dad on Saturdays. In one moment, unexpected emotional memories explode: the scent of past lovers, houses we used to live in, a church we used to attend. But how do we describe the features of a scent? There are floral, fruity, musky, and acrid smells. There are sour, salty, burnt, putrid, and pungent smells. Odors are hard to describe, but we can detect more than ten thousand different ones.

- ◆ If you go to the country, you can learn the inner nature of things through smell. You can have a sense for something sprouting, growing, and coming into being, or something fading and dying away. Smells can cultivate satisfying emotional experiences.
- ◆ If there isn't a farm nearby, go to a botanical garden, park, or an orchard and sniff the ripening peaches on the tree. Get drenched with the perfume of luscious wet flowers. Experience the fruity smell of tart green apples. Go to a farmer's market and pick up a spicy tomato oozing with deep, succulent, dream-inducing scents. If you can find it, fresh-cut hay smells wonderfully sweet and earthy. Combine the damp and musky odor of a barn, the fresh warm milk from the cow, the sweet rich manure, and the pungent root vegetables. Call it Rural No. 5. Pure smell and pure pleasure!
- ◆ Try out your olfactory skills in various places: go to a farm, a zoo, the mountains, the forest, the sea. Smell an approaching rainstorm. Sit in a rose garden, a coffeehouse, a pizza parlor, a chocolate store. Go to a perfume shop, a delicatessen, a bar. Sit down wherever you are and close your eyes. Smell the mélange of sensory delights. Allow the

various scents to flood and bathe you. Notice how different smells make you feel and how they affect your emotional state.

#### 5. Slow Food (Taste)

**Effects:** Calming; settling; balancing.

Allowing yourself to be slow means that you govern the rhythms of your life. Today, you might want to go fast. Tomorrow you might want to go slow. You decide. This makes the difference. We all crave a sense of slowness. Ease up on your speed and consciously create islands of slowness. Ultimately, *slow* means to take the time to reflect, to think, or simply to be. Emotional Yoga is about learning how to give time to each and every part of yourself. This is impossible with speed. With calm, you arrive everywhere.

- ◆ Try practicing slow food. Take the time to taste. Eat more slowly. Instead of frozen vegetables, instant coffee, microwave pizza, or Chinese takeout, make the time to prepare your food in the kitchen. As you cook, taste the food. Drink a cool glass of water with lemon. Chill out. Relax. Enjoy the simple things, like cooking, and eating and tasting.
- ◆ Try eating in silence. Don't watch television. Don't read. Chew for a change. How about practicing slow food for just one meal a day? Make it a celebration for your senses and your soul. Slow down. Sip slowly. Taste deliberately. Pay special attention to the smallest details, and experience the six tastes—sweet, sour, salty, pungent, bitter, astringent—and their myriad combinations. Is the food spicy and hot? How does that make you feel? Is it dry or cool? What does the food feel like in your mouth? What is its texture? Is it light, oily, viscous, heavy?
- ◆ What kind of taste impressions do you take in every day? Every taste has an effect. You might try fasting for a day. Then, when you take your first sip or bite, let the taste linger in your mouth. Experiment with different flavors. Have some lavender or lemon-grass tea, a dou-

ble cappuccino. And in the middle of your meal, stop. Put down your knife and fork, and breathe. Let some moments pass in silence. Then pick up your fork again, slowly. . . .

### 6. Have You Heard? (Withdrawing the Senses)

**Effects:** Reducing; calming; settling.

Have you heard the songs and silences inside your body? Sit down and get ready for a musical performance. (Read this first, then follow the instructions.) Practice this exercise sitting comfortably in a chair or seated on the floor.

- ✦ Shut both eyes carefully with your index and middle fingers, using both hands, one for each eye. Close your mouth, cover your lips with your little fingers, and close both ears with your thumbs. (If you can't see or hear, that's the idea.) Don't close your nostrils completely, since you have to breathe! Allow your attention and energy



to move within. When the outer senses are quiet, you can hear the sounds and silences of your inner life.

- ✦ So, what do you hear? Listen to the inner noises your body makes: the flow of your blood, the whoosh of your breath. Notice the melodies flowing inside your body. You are the maestro. You are guiding your awareness inside. This is not an attempt to understand anything, just a quiet attention to your self.

This practice, known as Sanmukhi Mudra, is one of the most important classical pratyahara techniques for withdrawing the senses. Do this for short periods of time, after pranayama or before you meditate, or when you wish to free yourself from the normal sensory bombardments, or for calming emotional and mental agitations and distractions.