

DHARANA

Recently we explored *pratyahara* as a transitional phase in the practice of yoga. It is the choice we make to turn inward. In this article we look at *dharana*, or concentration. *Dharana* is the intense focus we're seeking when we turn away from external distractions. *Pratyahara* is the choice to walk through the door; *dharana* is the precious time you spend inside.

Many yogis first experience *dharana* during asana practice. On the mat, on blissful occasions we are fully focused on the breath as we move through postures. Off the mat we can opt for an external object to help train the mind toward one-pointed focus; candles and other neutral objects are useful tools for calming the mind without generating positive or negative thoughts and emotions.

Once we have grasped the essence of *dharana*, we may begin to fine tune it. The point of focus itself is taken inward. We can center our attention on an area of the body, a chakra, or an abstract concept. The object itself is not important, as long as it lends itself to creating mental ease, not distraction.

This step along the 8-fold path is paramount to calming the fluctuations of the mind. Regular practice improves the quality and duration, as well as the side effects of a calm and easy mind in daily life. *Dharana* will be intermittent, like water dripping. Over time it gives us access to *dhyana*, an uninterrupted state of awareness that's smooth like honey.

We're keeping this one short and sweet. If you'd like to learn more, read Nicolai Bachman's *The Yoga Sutras*, Rolf Gates's *Meditations from the Mat*, and B.K.S. Iyengar's *Light on Life*.