Interior Practices of Yoga: Moving into Awareness, Compassion, and Wisdom

Syllabus

Christiane Brems, PhD, ABPP, ERYT500, C-IAYT

Dates TBA; 30 hours (meeting 12:30p – 6p on six consecutive Saturdays)

Target Audience and Instructional Level

This is an intermediate-level course geared to students in the YogaX YTT300 and the following audiences:

- Psychologists, psychiatrists, and other mental healthcare providers interested in bringing pranayama principles and strategies into their clinical practice.
- Psychology, psychiatry, and other mental health-program students in graduate or medical programs interested in bringing pranayama principles and strategies into their supervised clinical practice.
- Yoga teachers interested in offering advanced pranayama practices, especially to students in healthcare settings.
- Yoga therapists providing offering advanced pranayama practices, especially in healthcare settings.

Training Pragmatics

- Cost: $800 tuition for this 30-hour workshop or YogaX YTT300 prepaid enrollment
- This training is delivered via online synchronous instruction and with fulltime contact with the lead teacher, Chris Brems
- (see Training Format below for specific details of training delivery)
- Yoga Alliance Continuing Education credits (30 hours) are included in the tuition cost; a CE certificate is issued upon request
- Participation (by entering the zoom link and/or making payment) implies that you have read and agreed to the Stanford Assumptions of Risk, Release of Claims, and Hold Harmless Agreement at [https://www.yogaxteam.com/healthandsafetyinformation](https://www.yogaxteam.com/healthandsafetyinformation)
- YogaX Refund and Payment Policy is available at [https://3de0fc17-ea21-4854-87c7-777a583c02cf.filesusr.com/ugd/37469f_73d3c9e8ebb14214a60e11d8b08baba1.pdf](https://3de0fc17-ea21-4854-87c7-777a583c02cf.filesusr.com/ugd/37469f_73d3c9e8ebb14214a60e11d8b08baba1.pdf)
- YogaX has no commercial support for this event and there are no disclosable conflicts of interest.
- The zoom link for this event is: [https://stanford.zoom.us](https://stanford.zoom.us) TBA

Instructor

Christiane Brems, PhD, ABPP, ERYT500, C-IAYT
Clinical Professor and Director of YogaX
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the Stanford School of Medicine
Patanjali’s yoga sutras’ definition of yoga is multifold. However, a central point about yoga’s essence is made in the second sutra which roughly translates as “Yoga is the stilling of the fluctuations of the mind.” Patanjali suggests that if we can still the mind, we have found refuge in our true being and our practice is complete. He then basically chuckles (if you can chuckle in writing…) and lets us know that if we cannot just sit down and still the mind (and who can?), we need to follow a slightly longer path to enlightenment. Enter the eight limbs. The first four limbs are the outward practices of yoga; the final four limbs are the inward journey of yoga. The inner practices are what we have been preparing for and what we embark on – knowingly or unknowingly – as we practice yoga ethics, discipline, movement, and breath. The inner journey begins with drawing inward, then invites deep concentration and meditation, and finally leads us to a sense of connection and absorption in a greater community and purpose.

This advanced training on the interior practices of yoga focuses on helping seasoned yoga teachers and healthcare providers integrate the practices of sense guarding, concentration, and meditation more deeply into their own personal practice and self-care as well as become more adept at using these strategies with healthcare clients or patients and yoga students.

The training is deeply rooted in an integrated holistic vision of yoga – a vision of inclusiveness, access, diversity, health, wellbeing, and resilience for all. **It is a practice of and for community; it honors human interdependence and co-regulation.** It is a yoga of wholism that honors the mind as much as the body, the breath as much as the calming of the nervous system, the individual as much as the collective, stillness as much as movement, and effort as much as ease. It looks at and addresses the needs and resources of whole people at all their layers: body, breath, mind, heart, and spirit – grounded in community and a complex interpersonal setting of biological, psychological, social, and cultural influences. It is particularly suited to applications in healthcare settings.

The training highlights several dimensions of each of the interior practices. Specifically, it discusses the following concepts for pratyahara, dharana, and meditation, while also exploring the deep interaction and co-arising of the three practices as one way of finding awareness, compassion, and insight:

- Etymological and practice definitions
- Practice intentions and research-based, documented benefits
- Practice principles
- Teaching elements, including central teaching principles, means for creating accessibility to the practices, and types of practices
- Practice applications and samples

These consideration of the totality of all of these components creates a holistic and accessible picture of the practice with particular applicability for healthcare providers and yoga teachers in healthcare settings. By considering all of these elements of the interior practices, as well as their relationship to popular mindfulness practices, will help trainees apply pratyahara, dharana, and dhyana in two ways:

- Application for personal self-care, resilience, and burnout prevention
- Application with a range of clients, patients, and students to support their resilience and wellbeing across all the koshas and within the context of any particular life challenges they may face

The training provides experiential practices of joint sitting and debriefing to help facilitate the development of a personal home practice. It provides ample didactics, based in the ancient wisdoms of yoga and Buddhism, as well as modern neuroscience and psychology. It provides opportunity for trainees to apply their learning in small group teaching sessions.
Learning Objectives

Learning Objective #1

1. Understand, analyze, and discuss the implications of the benefits, potential risks, contraindications, and intentions of the interior yoga practice (pratyahara, dharana, and dhyana), with the capacity to address each of these aspects within the following highly relevant human systems:
   a. emotional and energetic expression – self-regulatory
   b. cognitive, mental, and memory – resilience, down-regulation
   c. behavioral expression – relationships, actions,
   d. sensory expression – attention, intuition, reactivity

   Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #1
   • explain the emotional and energetic benefits of each interior practice (pratyahara, dharan, and dhyana) as you would voice it to a group of beginning students
   • explain the cognitive, mental, and memory-related benefits of each interior practice (pratyahara, dharan, and dhyana) as you would voice it to a group of advanced students
   • delineate the potential contraindicates or signs of risk about each interior practice as you would explain it to a mental health client or a yoga student with mental health vulnerabilities
   • outline and then cue a clear intention for a practice of pratyahara, a practice of dharana, or a practice of dhyana

Learning Objective #2

2. Define and understand pratyahara in terms of:
   a. etymological definitions (i.e., yoga sutras-based understanding)
   b. central intentions and benefits
   c. central principles
   d. essential teaching elements
   e. categories of sense guarding practices

   Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #2
   • develop an integrated pratyahara practice that has a clear intention
   • voice the underlying central principles that guided the structure of the practice
   • outline how each essential teaching element is addressed in the practice
   • lead the practice with at least two individuals
   • debrief the experience with the participants and yourself

Learning Objective #3

3. Define and understand dharana in terms of:
   f. etymological definitions (i.e., yoga sutras-based understanding)
   g. central intentions and benefits
   h. central principles
   i. essential teaching elements
   j. categories of sense guarding practices
Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #3

- develop an integrated dharana practice that has a clear intention
- voice the underlying central principles that guided the structure of the practice
- outline how each essential teaching element is addressed in the practice
- lead the practice with at least two individuals
- debrief the experience with the participants and yourself

Learning Objective #4

4. Define and understand dhyana in terms of:
   k. etymological definitions (i.e., yoga sutras-based understanding)
   l. central intentions and benefits
   m. central principles
   n. essential teaching elements
   o. categories of sense guarding practices

Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #4

- develop an integrated dhyana practice that has a clear intention
- voice the underlying central principles that guided the structure of the practice
- outline how each essential teaching element is addressed in the practice
- lead the practice with at least two individuals
- debrief the experience with the participants and yourself

Learning Objective #5

5. Be able to explain the relationship of the three practices to each other, how they may overlap and evolve into one another, and how they relate to samadhi:
   a. list, understand, and define the shared preparation for all practices
   b. differentiate attention and awareness
   c. define mindfulness (specifically its four aspects and its three gateways) and explain how it relates to the three practices
   d. define the four levels of contemplation and their relationship to the three practices

Evaluation Method for Learning Objective #3

- develop a mindfulness practice outline with a clear intention that grounds it as either pratyahara, dharana, and or dhyana
- explain to students how best to prepare for the practice within the session
- explain to students how to set up and prepare for a home practice
- teach the session to at least two students and invite comments and feedback

*If our sense of self is unhealthy, our spiritual work of self is initially a work of reclamation and healing. This means understanding and releasing a deficient or wounded sense of self and reawakening the lost energy and authentic connection to ourselves. When we have reclaimed some measure of ourselves, the next task becomes the further development of character, of our wisdom, strength, skill, and compassion.*

*Jack Kornfield, 1993, A Path with Heart, p. 207*
## Schedule and Continuing Education Hours by YA Category

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<td></td>
<td>7a – 8a</td>
<td>Meditation and debrief</td>
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<td>Day 1</td>
<td>9a – 11a</td>
<td>Interior practices of yoga – benefits, risks, indications, challenges, and intentions</td>
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<td>Pragmatics of the interior practices: preparing for and sustaining a practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9a – 11a</td>
<td>Meaning, intention, and principles of pratyahara</td>
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<td>Application of pratyahara – small group experiential practice</td>
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<td>Application of dhyana – small group experiential practice</td>
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<td>11:15a – 1:15p</td>
<td>Moving into samyama – continuing path into awareness, compassion, and wisdom</td>
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### 30 hours of YA CE or YTT300 in the following categories:

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**Notes:** YA=Yoga Alliance; CE=Continuing Education
TTP=Techniques, Training, and Practice; TM=Teaching Methodology; AP=Anatomy and Physiology; YH=Yoga Humanities; Prac=Practicum; Spc=area of program specialization

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*Meditation is choosing not to engage in the drama of the mind but elevating the mind to its highest potential.*

*Amit Ray*
Handouts Provided

Several handouts and the slide set for the workshop will be provided to registered and paid enrollees on the day of the workshop. These materials are provided with the understanding that students will not duplicate, distribute, or otherwise publicly use these materials without express permission and proper attribution and referencing.

Handouts to be provided include:

- Integrated Holistic Yoga – Koshas, Limbs, Biopsychosociocultural Context
- BioPsychSocioCultural Model
- Eight Limbs of Yoga
- Gunas –Fundamental Expressions of Nature
- Interaction of the Kleshas and Vrittis
- The Five Winds of Prana or Lifeforce
- Pathways of Sensory Processing Engaged in Integrated Holistic Yoga
- SANKALPA: Teaching with Intention
- Principles of Trauma-Informed Yoga
- Guide to Observing and Assessing Yoga Professionals
- Guide for Evaluating Research Methodology to Inform Practice
- Slide Set for the Training
- Content Manual for the Training

“Being present doesn’t mean being in a blank or thoughtless state. It means not needing to escape from where we are. Being present brings contentment. We don’t need to look for a better thought, a better emotion, or a better place to be. When we operate from ignorance – when we are daydreaming, carried away by thought, and unaware of our true nature - we have no presence of mind. We don’t even know such a state exists.”

Dzigar Kongtrul
Suggested Readings and Practices

It is recommended that in preparation for the workshop you **read all YogaX blogs**, especially the following:

[https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/innerlimbs](https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/innerlimbs)
[https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/blogbreath](https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/blogbreath)
[https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/polyvagaltheory](https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/polyvagaltheory)
[https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/koshas](https://www.yogaxteam.com/blog/koshas)

It will be helpful to have cultivated a regular sitting practice for at least 3 months, but it is not required. If you want to read a couple of nice beginner’s meditation books, check out Rinzler (2017) and Ricard (2010).

Also, peruse YogaX webpage resources and **try out some of the offered free practices** (asana, pranayama, meditation, and more) at yogaXteam.com and on the YogaX Team YouTube channel. Check out especially the following:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_OUtTF2HeI&list=PLzvkZpUGjwLg8f_tS-c-q8EwVnj7_HXQ&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_OUtTF2HeI&list=PLzvkZpUGjwLg8f_tS-c-q8EwVnj7_HXQ&index=6)
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiQgnXrE3j8&list=PLzvkZpUGjwLg8f_tS-c-q8EwVnj7_HXQ&index=5&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aiQgnXrE3j8&list=PLzvkZpUGjwLg8f_tS-c-q8EwVnj7_HXQ&index=5&t=2s)
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxKzItWFAQ7Q&list=PLzvkZpUGjwLg8f_tS-c-q8EwVnj7_HXQ&index=7&t=138s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxKzItWFAQ7Q&list=PLzvkZpUGjwLg8f_tS-c-q8EwVnj7_HXQ&index=7&t=138s)

The following readings will be helpful as you deepen your journey once you have completed the workshop.


Wilber, K. (2016). *Integral meditation: Mindfulness as a path to grow up, wake up, and show up in your life*. Boston: Shambala.

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_The day after completing a 9-day meditation retreat, Dave turns up for work at the zoo. Seeing how chilled out Dave is, the head keeper puts him in charge of the tortoise enclosure. Dave slowly walks over to the cages. At lunch time, the head keeper checks on Dave only to see the cage door is wide open and all the tortoises gone! He runs up to Dave and asks, “What happened with the tortoises?” “Well”, said Dave very slowly, “I opened the tortoise cage door and it was, like, Whoosh!” _Ajahn Brahm

😊 😊 😊

_Two people meet on the street. One asks the other: “Hi, how are you?” The other one replies: “I’m fine, thanks.” “And how’s your partner? Are they still unemployed?” “Yes, they are. But they are meditating now.” “Meditating? What’s that?” “I don’t know. But it’s better than sitting around and doing nothing!” _
Training Format

The workshop uses mixed pedagogical methods, ranging from didactics/lectures to discussion to experiential work, including small group activities. Lecture/didactic time invites discussion throughout and is accented by experiential exercises and activities. The experiential work is yoga-based and includes asana, pranayama, meditation, and guided imagery. To make sure that everyone can enjoy the yoga-based activities safely and with maximum comfort, please note the following (more personal) thoughts and requests.

- Stanford University requires that you sign the release form (link above) to be able to participate in the activities that are part of this workshop. It assumed that you have agreed to this document when you pay or use the provided zoom link for the workshop.

- Required training activities start promptly. To make sure that we can start on time and that you have ample opportunity to get settled or ask questions, it would be lovely if you could arrive as much as 10 minutes early.

- Participants provide their own props for the virtual training sessions. Minimum prop equipment includes 2 yoga blocks, 1 yoga strap (10 feet is preferrable), 1 yoga bolster, 1-2 blankets, and a yoga mat. Access to a clear wall space is extremely helpful (a closed door works). Prop substitutes are fine (e.g., a stack of books instead of blocks; a scarf instead of a strap, sofa cushions instead of a bolster, etc.). Please have all props at the ready for each training session.

- Yoga is best practiced on a relatively empty stomach but not starving. A sustaining but light meal prior to class will help you maintain your energy without having a full belly that makes bending and twisting difficult.

- Please ask questions – before class, after class, and during class. If you are wondering about something – whether it’s the reason for a particular shape or movement, an alignment question, or a more healthful way of doing something – someone else is likely to ponder the same thing.

- Always honor your own intuition and body wisdom – if something feels wrong, do NOT do it. We are all anatomically unique and we all express the same yoga shape, breath, or practice in different ways. What works for us, your teachers, or the person next to you, may not be optimal for you. Allow yourself the joy of using props and variations based on the feedback from your own body, breath, and mind. We offer both freely and demonstrate their use throughout.

- Yoga practiced in a group is inspirational. It is never competitive. Work within your own body limits and preferences; give yourself permission not to strive to do what others are doing. Delight in the pleasure of expressing each pose or breath in uniquely your way. If something comes easily, celebrate this state of pure joy; if something is a struggle, embrace the moment of learning.

- Thank you in advance for making me aware of any medical conditions that may affect your yoga practice. It is helpful for me to know if you are modifying practices for a particular reason or if you would like to have help in working with a particular concern.

- Thank for turning off all cell phones, beepers, or other noise-making or distracting devices before you settle in for any given training session.

- Thank you for keeping your cameras on during virtual sessions to the degree possible and appropriate.