

Faith with a Twist: The Season of Lent

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The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

This supplements the practices featured in *Faith with a Twist* (Forward Movement, 2018). During your Sabbath practice in the season of Lent, follow the eight limbs of yoga for your Sabbath practice. You do not need to engage in the *asana* portion of the practice on Sundays as traditionally you are called to a full day's rest from the practice every week.

Sabbath Day One: *Asana* Sunday

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, whose blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan; Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations; and, as you know the weaknesses of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.¹

Meditation

Today is our first Sunday Sabbath in this journey of Lent. We will be using Sundays as a chance to rest in God's presence by leaving the physical practice behind for a day and connecting with God through prayer, attending a worship service, and exploring one of the other eight limbs of yoga. Our first one is *asana* or the "postures" found in yoga. The postures that make up a practice are carefully designed to help align the body, build strength, heal, and to help focus the breath and soul. They are both physically engaging and serve as moving prayers or metaphors for the way we approach life. For example, if we continually come to our postures lacking any energy or drive, we might want to examine our life off the mat. Are we too worn down to practice? Have we become complacent in our work, home life, or prayer life?

The way we move our bodies can tell us something about the way our heart is moving. And the reverse can be true. If we add more zeal to our practice, hoping to gain strength and flexibility, then we will notice our drive for the same growing in all parts of our life. It may seem strange to consider the postures and movement on a day when we are setting them aside to follow God's call to Sabbath rest. However, following God's call to keep a Holy Sabbath is critical to also keeping a Holy Lent. It allows us to notice the changes that are occurring in our lives by taking these forty days to draw closer to God. Yoga likewise prescribes taking a pause from practice on every seventh day to let the body rest and to soak up all of the gifts from the other six days. This mandatory rest is counter to "our culture, [where] results get all the attention and the process is overlooked. [Sabbath allows us to] approach both life and postures with an eye to the process, and let go of the results."² In this way, we will let God move our hearts even when our bodies are still.

Exercise

Rest today and spend the time in prayer or in church.

¹ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 218

² Gates, Rolf, *Meditations from the Mat*, Anchor Books, NY, 2002, 145.

Sabbath Day Two: *Pranayama* Sunday

Prayer for the Day

O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy: Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word, Jesus Christ your Son; who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. ³

Meditation

Today on this Sunday Sabbath, we consider the fourth limb of yoga, *pranayama* or “the breath” as it is normally translated. The yoga sutras describe this limb as “the regulation of the incoming and outgoing flow of breath with retention.” This kind of very intentional (as opposed to automatic) breath control is the bridge that brings the physical and the spiritual parts of our nature together as a bridge.

Rolf Gates describes the way *pranayama* is used in yoga as “training the mind in one-pointed concentration while radically improving our ability to accrue, store, regulate, and use the energy we receive from the air we breathe...To begin, simply do what you have already been doing. Pay attention to your breath while practicing *asana*. Your breath should be calm and deliberate, but flowing without force or effort.”⁴ This breath helps us to calm the mind, focuses the heart, and feed the body.

The concept of the breath is also very important in Christianity. Indeed, we can see the work of the Breath and Spirit of God working all through salvation history. In the beginning, the breath of God moved over the face of the earth, calling it into life, and then breathed the breath of life into Adam in Genesis. In John 20:20 Jesus meets with his disciples before his ascension and says, “Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he **breathed** on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Indeed, even the word “‘spirit’ finds its root in the Latin word for ‘breath.’ And there in all its simplicity and depth [the knowledge that God’s breath is always with us], we find the connection between prayer and the life-giving breath of God. Just as breath constantly renews the body, filling the lungs with oxygen and emptying the lungs of carbon dioxide, so also our prayer constantly opens us to God’s life within us and helps us to empty ourselves of those things which are alien to fullness of life.”⁵

Exercise

On this Sabbath, spend some time in breath and prayer. As you sit and let your mind quiet, follow your breath as you let it fill you. Think of each breath as the Holy Spirit filling you up and letting you release all the pain and hurt that binds you. Let the life-giving breath of God be your breath.

³ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 218

⁴ Gates, Rolf, *Meditations from the Mat*, Anchor Books, NY, 2002, 299.

⁵ Roth, Nancy, *The Breath of God: An Approach to Prayer*, Cowley Publication, Cambridge, MA, 1990, 9.

Sabbath Day Three: *Pratyahara* Sunday

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.⁶

Meditation

On this Sunday Sabbath we turn briefly to the fifth limb of yoga, *pratyahara*, which is normally translated as "turning inward." This is a fitting aspect of yoga to consider on a Sabbath day when we are asked to turn away from outside distractions to dwell in the peace and comfort that comes from God alone. As the yoga sutras tell us, "withdrawing the senses, mind, and consciousness from contact with external objects, and then drawing them inward towards the seer is *pratyahara*."⁷ In other words, in *pratyahara*, we strive for an eternal awareness that helps us strip away the masks and distractions that fill our outward lives so that we can better hear God's will and call for our lives.

Understanding how to achieve this state of inward focus is not a matter of having a perfect state of mind or performing the perfect set of yoga postures. Rather, it is a decision to turn inward and let go of drama—to release the grip of the external world and our attempts to control it and focus our minds entirely on the internal. In *pratyahara* we stand astride two worlds, breathing with one foot firmly planted in physical sensation and technique and the other planted in the internal world of concentration and meditation. Since this is such a hard practice, today simply bring it into focus. Begin with your *asana* practice and then consider: At what point do you draw away from the outside world and get in the "zone" as it is sometimes called.⁷

In the Christian view of *pratyahara*, we turn to Jesus as our guide. In his letter to the Philippians 2:6-11, Paul talks about the way Jesus stripped himself of all power and glory to be one of us. It was the ultimate "letting go." He writes, "though he was in the form of God, Christ did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross." Paul is describing how turning inward helps us to be empty enough to be filled with humility and understanding of our true nature, our identity as children of God. This is especially important in Lent, a time for humility and confessing our sins as a way of setting down the bonds that hold us captive.

Exercise

As you follow Christ's example and begin to separate from outside distractions, take time in prayer today to notice moments in your practice and meditation when who you truly are comes forth.

⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 218

⁷ Gates, Rolf, *Meditations from the Mat*, Anchor Books, NY, 2002, 332-333.

Sabbath Day Four: *Dharana*/Concentration Sunday

Prayer for the Day

Gracious Father, whose blessed Son Jesus Christ came down from heaven to be the true bread which gives life to the world: Evermore give us this bread, that he may live in us, and we in him; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.⁸

Meditation

This week's Sunday Sabbath focuses on the sixth limb of yoga, *dharana*, which is translated as "concentration." Rolf Gates describes concentration as "fixing our attention to one point, as we train our minds to stay there. The point of concentration can be external, as in *asana*, or it can be internal as meditation.

On the mat we experience *dharana* quite often during those moments when we lose track of time, when our minds become so absorbed in the physical experience of a posture that we are no longer connected to everyday concerns. In *dharana*, the past and the future have dissolved, and we are simply existing in the now."⁹ In other words, concentration comes when we get into the "zone" and everything else falls away.

However, it is important to remember that the "zone" is not a passive state. For example, there can be times when you arrive at your house after driving home from work unsure of how you got there because you had "zoned out." Those moments are not only scary but also they are not the kind of active concentration that we are describing in *dharana*. Rather, *dharana* is a kind of concentration with a focus that is unwavering and exploitative. It is full of wonder and is absorbed in learning and joy of the present.

This is the kind of full concentration that we hope to bring in our prayer and meditation time with God. We often see in scripture that Jesus would leave the business of everyday ministry to "go to a quiet place to pray." By doing this, Jesus is setting an example of how concentration can be an important element to our conversations with God: We must seek out quiet moments so that we can only focus on God.

Exercise

Today, dedicate time to go to a quiet place and turn your concentration fully to God. Try lighting a candle and gazing into the flame. This point can help focus the inner eye of the soul to gaze toward heaven.

⁸ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 219

⁹ Gates, Rolf, *Meditations from the Mat*, Anchor Books, NY, 2002, 352.

Sabbath Day Five: *Dhyana*/Meditation Sunday

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.¹⁰

Meditation

This week's Sunday Sabbath focuses on the seventh limb of yoga, *dhyana*, which is translated as "meditation." The yoga sutras tell us that "a steady continuous flow of attention directed towards the same point or region is meditation." Rolf Gates describes meditation as flowing out of the previous limb, *dharana* (concentration), by letting our "attention become effortless. There is no longer a seer, only the seen. We experience this kind of effortless absorption in love when our love for our child or partner transcends all thoughts of our personal safety or comfort."¹¹ In other words, meditation differs from concentration because it stops being the hard work of concentration and becomes a source of smooth focus.

In the Christian tradition, meditation is often known as centering prayer. Notice how similar the description of this form of prayer is to the one that the sutra describes: "Centering Prayer is a method of silent prayer that prepares us to receive the gift of contemplative prayer, prayer in which we experience God's presence within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than consciousness itself. This method of prayer is both a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship."¹² This form of prayer is an invitation to let our focus flow into the love of God that is not remote or achievable though hard work. Rather it is as close to us as breath itself.

Exercise

Today, spend some time (start with five minutes and then as the days go by, try to work up to twenty minutes.) being still and quiet and listen for God's presences. As thoughts arise that distract you from God, let them pass by like ripples on the water and then return to your intended focus. It might be helpful to have an object (cross, picture, painting, etc.) to rest your gaze upon. Or, if you prefer to close your eyes, chose a mantra or piece of scripture to help you return to your intention if you start to wander. I have found that yoga helps me to get to a state of meditation by giving my body enough effort to be calm at the end of a practice. This can be a great way to begin meditation. No matter how you begin you journey into *dhyana*, remember to be gentle with yourself. It is supposed to help you feel a joyful effortless, not stress you out. Let it wash over you like water.

¹⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 219

¹¹ Gates, Rolf, *Meditations from the Mat*, Anchor Books, NY, 2002, 375.

¹² <http://www.centeringprayer.com/>- Accessed June 2014.

Sabbath Day Six: *Isvara Pranidhana*/Devotion to God Lives of Devotion & Discernment

Prayer for the Day

O God, whose blessed Son made himself known to his disciples in the breaking of bread: Open the eyes of our faith, that we may behold him in all his redeeming work; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.¹³

Meditation

Today we are going to consider how to make your entire life a devotion to God. As we keep reminding ourselves during Lent, we are not simply trying to spend a season dwelling in our wretchedness. We are also seeking to know God's very call for us, his beloved children. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us that we will live into this identity when we "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Thus, every part of our life—every action, every step, and every thought—should be done in love and devotion to God.

Exercise

Today's task then is actually the task of our whole life because today you will spend time asking yourself how God is calling you to live. What is your particular gift for loving God, others, and yourself? How can you discern your vocation? There are many ways to think about this, but I invite you to pick one situation that you are currently facing and ask God's guidance on that situation as an example of how you are to be devoted to God. Saint Ignatius offers us three questions to help guide our way through these kinds of moments:

1. What advice would I give a friend in this situation?
2. At the end of my life (on my death bed), what will I wish I had done?
3. On the Day of Judgment, what will I want God to see?

Let these questions shine light on how you can follow God's call to you with devotion and grace.

¹³ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 223

Sabbath Day Seven: *Isvara Pranidhana*/Devotion to God, Postures of Devotion

Prayer for the Day

Grant, O Lord, that the course of this world may be peaceably governed by your providence; and that your Church may joyfully serve you in confidence and serenity; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁴

Meditation

Often times, we forget that *isvara pranidhana* is a gift of true peace and refreshment rather than being heavy and laborious work. When we remember that, resting and peaceful relaxation can actually be an act of worship.

Exercise

Try this routine today, which promotes relaxation as a way of entering into a Sabbath-like sense of devotion.

- Do the following sequence, staying in each pose for five deep inhales and exhales.
- Down Dog
- Down Dog Split
- Low Lunge
- High Lunge
- High Lunge with a Twist
- Single-leg Forward Bend
- Warrior 3, hands on shins
- Half Moon
- Standing Shin Hug
- Standing split
- Down Dog
- Childs Pose
- Now repeat this routine once on the other side and rest. ¹⁵

¹⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 229

¹⁵ Stiles, Tara, *Slim, Calm, Sexy Yoga*, "Relaxation", Rodale, 2010, 178-179.

Sabbath Day Eight: *Isvara Pranidhana*/Devotion to God, Postures of Devotion

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, you have built your Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone: Grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their teaching, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁶

Meditation

On this, our last day considering the lifelong work of *isvara pranidhana*, we switch our focus from our devotion to God to consider how devoted he is to us. As Jesus says farewell to his disciples before ascending into heaven, he reminds them that, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). This is the kind of God we are devoted to—the kind of God who loves us so much that he would even die and live again so that we might never be separated, even by death.

In our baptisms, we are told that the “bond that is established between God and ourselves is indissoluble.” Nothing can break them. I take that as good news since it seems through sin and selfish wants, I am always finding new ways to separate myself from God. Yet, God is faithful, slow to anger, and full of mercy.

Exercise

On your mats today, spend time in thanksgiving for this God who is with us no matter what, who loves us and is devoted to us. Let your practice today be an expression of gratitude for this kind of love.

¹⁶ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 230

Sabbath Day Nine: *Samadhi*/Union with God/Palm Sunday

Prayer for the Day

Almighty and ever living God, in your tender love for the human race you sent your Son our Savior Jesus Christ to take upon him our nature, and to suffer death upon the cross, giving us the example of his great humility: Mercifully grant that we may walk in the way of his suffering, and also share in his resurrection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁷

Meditation

Today is Palm Sunday, the day when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on his way to meet his death. It is fitting that this week's Sunday Sabbath focuses on the eighth limb of yoga, *samadhi*, which is translated as "Union with God." The yoga sutras tell us "when the object of meditation engulfs the meditation, appearing as the subject, self-awareness is lost. This is *samadhi*." Rolf Gates describes this union as "dying to the condition of separateness."¹⁸ In other words, when we are at one with God, we are no longer letting the false separations that we erect to divide us from him stand in the way of his love—we are one. And through Jesus' death and resurrection, he is offering just that kind of invitation to death—death that will lead to true life.

As he describes this oneness, Jesus says, "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 'Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them'" (John 17:20-23,26). As Jesus begins the final march toward his ultimate act of love—his death on the cross—we remember that in all ways he does this so we may have union. This means that it is not only possible to achieve *samadhi*, but it's what God desires for us!

Exercise

Write down your heart's deepest desire and ask God if it matches his desire for you.

¹⁷ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 219

¹⁸ Gates, Rolf, *Meditations from the Mat*, Anchor Books, NY, 2002, 397.

Sabbath Day Ten: Monday in Holy Week

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, whose dear Son went not up to joy but first he suffered pain, and entered not into glory before he was crucified: Mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross, may find it none other than the way of life and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.¹⁹

Meditation

During Holy Week, our journey will take a quiet turn as we let the drama of the next few holy days unfold. This guide will offer some suggestions for mantras or prayer prompts to join you on your mats and in your devotions.

- The Lord is my light
- He will come to save us
- Thank you, Jesus
- Where have you seen Christ this Lent?
- What needed to change so that you might move back toward God?

Sabbath Day Eleven: Tuesday in Holy Week

Prayer for the Day

O God, by the passion of your blessed Son you made an instrument of shameful death to be for us the means of life: Grant us so to glory in the cross of Christ, that we may gladly suffer shame and loss for the sake of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.²⁰

Meditation

"Jesus said to them, 'The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.'" (John 12:35-36)

- Christ is the world's true light
- Guide me and lead me
- Hope
- What needs to be forgiven in your life?
- What change do you hope to carry forward from this Lent?

¹⁹ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 220

²⁰ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 220

Sabbath Day Twelve: Wednesday in Holy Week

Prayer for the Day

Lord God, whose blessed Son our Savior gave his body to be whipped and his face to be spit upon: Give us grace to accept joyfully the sufferings of the present time, confident of the glory that shall be revealed; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.²¹

Meditation

"The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced...and I know that I shall not be put to shame" (Isaiah 50:7).

- Consider fasting today as an act of devotion
- The Lord helps me
- I shall not be put to shame
- As the collect reminds us, we are called to follow Jesus in joyfully accepting sufferings of our present time. How can you do that today? How can you help stop the sufferings of others?

Sabbath Day Thirteen: Maundy Thursday

Prayer for the Day

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.²²

Meditation

"And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean." (John 13:3-11).

- Take an opportunity to wash the feet of someone else as an act of servanthood
- Consider finding a eucharistic service to attend
- How can you be a servant? How can you let others be a servant to you?
- If you were at the last supper, what would you have asked Jesus?

²¹ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 220

²² *The Book of Common Prayer*, 221

Sabbath Day Fourteen: Good Friday

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, we pray you graciously to behold this your family, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and to suffer death upon the cross; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.²³

Meditation

“Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, ‘You are not also one of his disciples, are you?’ He denied it and said, ‘I am not.’ One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, ‘Did I not see you in the garden with him?’ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed” (John 18:25-27).

- Remain here with me
- Stay and pray
- Where in your life have you denied Christ?
- Where have you fallen asleep spiritually?
- What would it have been like to stand at the foot of Jesus’ cross?

Sabbath Day Fifteen: Holy Saturday

Prayer for the Day

O God, Creator of heaven and earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the tomb and rested on this holy Sabbath, so may we await with him the coming of the third day, and rise with him to newness of life; who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.²⁴

Meditation

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits.” (Psalm 130)

- On this day of holy waiting, consider all the ways the Lord waits for you to return to him.
- Spend some time in stillness and quietness today.
- Consider attending the Easter Morning or Vigil Prayer today.
- Light a fire at sundown to symbolize the light of Christ returning to the world.

²³ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 221

²⁴ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 221

Sabbath Day Sixteen: Easter

Prayer for the Day

Almighty God, who through your only begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God, now and for ever, Amen²⁵

Meditation

"He is not here. He is risen and is going ahead of you" (Matthew 28:7).

Alleluia!! He is Risen! The Lord is risen indeed! During this Lent, we have explored the way God invites us to enter into the cycle of letting the things in our life that keep us enslaved die away and then be restored to newness of life. Today is the day of resurrection! This is the day when we celebrate Christ's victory over the grave and our gateway into eternal life! Take all of the lessons of this journey with you into the life beyond remembering, that God will be with you in every moment—both on and off the mat. Greet the day with joy! *Namaste!*

²⁵ *The Book of Common Prayer*, 222