

Pratyāhāra: Learning to Turn Inward

Reflections from the Yoga Sādhana Program | June–July 2025

YogaVahini's most recent *Yoga Sādhana* program brought together 22 participants from India, the Middle East, Australia, and the US. Held over three weekends and supported by daily practices through the week, we explored **Pratyāhāra**—not as theory, but as something we can live and embody, right in the midst of our daily responsibilities.

Why Pratyāhāra? Why Now?

The spark for this program came from a lived question: *How can we stay grounded in our practice while navigating the full intensity of daily life?*

As one participant shared:

“Pratyāhāra is not about withdrawing from life. It's about learning how to stay connected—without being pulled in every direction.”

Three Weekends of Deep and Gentle Exploration

Weekend 1: Who is the one that experiences?

We began with a quiet inquiry into perception. What truly sees, hears, feels? Is it the body, the sense organs, or something subtler? As we explored this, we began to see how our inner state shapes the way we engage with the world—and how deeper connection arises when we loosen the grip of *rāga* (attachment), *dveṣa* (aversion), *asmita* (sense of separateness), and *abhiniveśa* (clinging to survival or control).

Weekend 2: Mapping the inner world

This weekend turned the lens inward, to the functioning of *manas*, *asmita*, and *buddhi* (discernment), all riding on the currents of *prāṇa* and consciousness. We explored the causes of restlessness and unease—those we inherit, absorb, and those unique to us—and how recognition opens the door to change.

Weekend 3: Honouring the senses

Our final weekend turned to care for the senses through *indriya paricharya*—simple, reverent practices drawn from Ayurveda. Rose water rinses for the eyes, warm oil for the ears, *abhyanga* (self-massage), tongue scraping, and gentle routines reminded us that the senses are not to be numbed or shut down, but lovingly tended to.

We also explored the **four forms of Pratyāhāra** as doorways into deeper presence:

- **Prāṇa Pratyāhāra** – Regathering scattered breath during transitions
- **Mano Pratyāhāra** – Drawing the wandering mind inward with care and steadiness
- **Karma Pratyāhāra** – Creating space between impulse and action
- **Indriya Pratyāhāra** – Entering into a sacred relationship with the senses

Sādhana in Daily Life

Throughout the week, participants practiced mindful eating, silent walking, āsana with internal focus, and small pauses between tasks. These simple, repeatable moments became anchors—what we called *micro-withdrawals*—reminding us that presence is always available, if we remember to return.

Walking the Householder's Path

One of the most resonant parts of the program was seeing how Pratyāhāra can be practiced without needing to step away from life. Like the turtle that draws in its limbs—not to hide, but to return to center—we, too, can learn to turn inward and respond to life from a place of steadiness.

What Participants Shared

Participants spoke of subtle shifts—in their energy, their interactions, and their awareness of what nourishes and what depletes.

Many appreciated how accessible the practices were—even amidst demanding work and family lives. There was a sense that this *is* “do-able”. *This can be lived!*

There was no rush. No pressure to “get it right.” Just a gentle, steady space to inquire, explore, and experience.

And that is the essence of sādhanā—one pause, one breath, one quiet turning inward at a time.