

# Plugging In, Plugging Out: *Giving Your Mind a Rest*



By Paola Feher

“Yoga is the ability to direct the mind exclusively towards an object and sustain that direction without any distractions” (Yoga Sutra\* 1.2, translation by TKV Desikachar).

In today’s modern world where our attention is pulled in multiple directions as we plug into our ipods, ipads, laptops and cellphones, this type of focus can seem like a tall order!

A recent article in the New York Times ‘Hooked on Gadgets, and Paying a Mental Price’ (Matt Richtel, June 6, 2010) says that heavy multitaskers have more trouble focusing and shutting out irrelevant information, and experience more stress. Scientists are discovering that even after the multitasking ends, fractured thinking and a lack of focus persists. According to the article, “technology is rewiring our brains”. Stress, fatigue and overwhelm can be the price we pay for being too “plugged in” for too long.

The ability to unplug, to focus on one object completely and directly can be a

challenge if one is not used to such a mental exercise. The ancient yogis from 5,000 years ago knew this. But with technology as it is now, the challenge in staying focused is heightened.

Enter the yoga discipline. The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit word “yuj” which means to yoke, or unite. The implication, therefore, is that there are two things which are linked together and united. For example: the breath and movement, the mind and the body, our mind and our attitude towards our environment, our mind and our attitude towards ourselves, or other dichotomies of interest. When we delve deeply into something that interests us, our mind steadies. The deeper the internal delving we are willing to do, the more we are able to know and understand ourselves.

The consequence of achieving this directed mind is our ability to truly know ourselves (Yoga Sutra 1.47). For the more our minds are directed and steadied, the more we realize that our surroundings are only a mirror of who we are and how we interact. When we multitask and remain plugged in, we are robbing ourselves of the opportunity to understand who we are at a deeper level.

If you find that you have a difficult time “unplugging”, try some of these quick and simple exercises:

1. Stand with your feet hip width apart, and your knees softly bent. As you inhale, lift your arms overhead. As you exhale, drop your arms back to your sides. Attempt to link the movement of your arms with the length of your breath. That is, as you begin to inhale, begin to move your arms up. As you begin to exhale, begin to move your arms back down. Repeat 12 times.

2. Sit comfortably in a chair or on a cushion. Notice your breath. Pay particular attention to that place where the breath enters

and exits the body at the tip of the nose. What is the temperature of the breath on inhale? What is the temperature of the breath on exhale? Stay and notice for 2-5 minutes.

3. Sit comfortably. Notice your inhale. Notice your exhale. Which is longer? Which is shorter? Over the course of the next 12 breaths, begin to equalize your breaths so that the inhale and exhale are of equal duration. Count 6 breaths where they are equal, then release the breath (breathe normally) and notice the effect.

*\*The Yoga Sutras are a group of aphorisms based on Vedic texts, and were edited by the sage Patanjali in the 4th century BCE. They define the characteristics and problems of yoga in great depth.*

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