



September 1992 Contemplation Theme

Discipline

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In yoga, discipline is not the same as “spare the rod and spoil the child” —punishment and enforcement. Yogic discipline is the means by which you are uplifted and transformed. It is how you can get the highest and the best from your yoga practice. Continued application of your own effort, on a regular basis, is what makes you successful at anything in your life: yoga, art, business, relationships, etc.

The best athletes and musicians must practice daily, yet they do not consider it an onerous duty. Top musicians love to do the scales! True discipline is doing regularly what makes you feel best. Regularity is the key, and it is what ultimately makes it easy. Consider who creates this regularity? Your job may require you to keep certain hours. This then determines when you eat, get up, go to bed, and have free time. A newly self-employed or retired person often has difficulty organizing these things, because they are used to an externally imposed discipline. Yet, even enforced discipline can yield great benefits. A woman in her ‘60’s told me she hated her mother for sending her to piano lessons and making her practice every day. Now the piano is one of the greatest joys in her life. In yoga class you experience the benefits of externally imposed discipline when you do Uttana Padasana (Leg Circles), which I often describe (tongue-in-cheek) as “everybody’s favorite pose.”

External discipline can be imposed by force, or it can be by our own choice, like belonging to a sports team or having a very demanding job. You have the interest and you choose to participate, but others still get you moving. The team practices are set up by the coach or your boss assigns your responsibilities. This is one of the main reasons yoga is offered in classes. The day and time you come to class creates regularity for you, as an externally generated discipline. You choose to participate and you get yourself there which is sometimes the hardest part. Then the teacher gets you into poses you might not do at home. In addition to learning more about yoga, you are actually doing it. This is the secret to discipline, and the secret to getting benefit from anything. Just do it.

This is what internally generated discipline is — Just do it! You already do this with many things in your life. Why do you bathe or shower daily? No one checks on you. No one sets the time for you. You could skip a day or just do a light sponge bath. No one would even know. But you bathe. Why? This is discipline, also called habit. Internally generated discipline, or self-discipline, is the same as habit. It is not “forcing yourself” to do the things you know you should do. It is doing these things because they are a part of your life.

How did you develop these self-disciplines, these habits? This is the important part. You learned them. You were taught to bathe daily. You may have objected to it at some point in your childhood, but you internalized it. Now you even enjoy it. Everything you do, you learned. The things you do regularly actually determine the quality of your life.

You can learn (or unlearn) anything, if you choose to. You already know how you feel after doing some yoga. So how often do you do it? I frequently get phone calls where the caller says, “I never felt better in my life than when I was in yoga classes two years ago. I need to get back.”

Perhaps the real question is, “How good are you willing to feel on a daily basis?” To establish a daily habit, you need only to do some yoga every day. It takes just a little effort. Yoga always stresses the importance of discipline and regularity. Participation in any yoga class, regularly or irregularly, is good. The results are obvious by the end of class, and they last for hours or days. But these results increase over time when you come on the same day each week. Your body and mind both love that kind of regularity. Your body and mind get accustomed to their regular Monday night (or whenever) — opening-up, tuning-up, and deep relaxation in yoga class.

This also explains why our classes are structured on a thematic basis. When you work through the theme for the whole month, you get even more results. After a month of abdominals, one student confided, “I have been constipated for thirty-seven years, and now I am not.” While working on the

month of standing poses, another student shares, “Now I’m noticing how I stand at work. It makes a real difference.” Our theme handouts describe the specific goals and benefits for each theme. You can recognize the benefits as you are getting them, and seeing the results motivates you to keep going.

When you cannot attend your regular class, you can always go to another. It is better to come to any class than to miss it completely. But regular practice means both coming to class on regular days and times, as well as doing some yoga on your own. Then see for yourself how much you get out of it!.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kama". Above the letter "a" is a small heart symbol containing the number "31".

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