



September 2004 Contemplation Theme

Mental & Emotional Patterns

By Rama Berch, R.Y.T.

Because yoga classes work on your body, you might think that yoga is about your body, while much more is actually going on. The tensions in your body are completely entwined with related patterns in your mind and emotions. In fact, your thoughts and emotions create more of your physical tensions than the things you do with your body.

There are a lot of physical things you can do to tighten up your spine, and many are quite popular, like aerobics, jogging, surfing, skiing, etc. These types of physical activities undermine the spinal opening that you are working on with your *Svaroopa*® yoga practice. If you still love to do them, at least you can do “equal time” — if you jog for 25 minutes, then do 25 minutes of spinal opening poses afterward. You will feel wonderful!

However tightening some physical activities may be, you spend many more hours using your mind to tighten your spine. You can truly think yourself into exhaustion, into tension and into pain. While psychology and many “new-age” systems encourage you to improve the quality of your thoughts, yoga emphasizes the quieting of your mind. You know “quiet-mind” very well, for you get a taste of it at the end of every yoga class. Perhaps your mind is even beginning to prefer the peaceful inner vastness to its perpetual motion machine.

Your mind and emotions are both located in your subtle body, which is called “*sukshma sharira*” in Sanskrit. The subtle body is your energy field, which extends through your physical body and slightly beyond the edges of it. Some people can see it and call it an “aura”; some scientists call it the “morphogenic field.” It is the energetic field in which the acupuncture meridians are found, as well as the chakras and nadis described by yoga’s ancient sages. It is also the location of your mind. Your mind is not a physical object. It is both more subtle and more powerful. Thoughts and emotions are movements of energy through your subtle body. There is just the one thing: your “mentalemotionalstate.”

Your subtle body pervades your entire physical body. Energy is always moving in your subtle body. When you experience energy moving through your head, you call it a thought; when you experience energy moving through the rest of your body (below your neck), you call it emotion. You cannot separate the two, because the moving energy actually goes through your whole subtle body. The differentiation into thoughts and emotions is completely artificial, like calling the air in the room by two different names if it is above or below your line of sight. It is impossible to separate thoughts and emotions. There is only one thing, your “mentalemotionalstate.”

Consider your own experience of thoughts and emotions. When you experience an emotion, there are always the related thoughts. It is impossible to experience a feeling without having related thoughts. If you are feeling really anxious, you will always find that your mind is caught up in a web of worries and fears. In that moment, if you begin to think about happier things, your anxiety will abate. Similarly, if you are feeling really, really happy — your thoughts are happy thoughts. In the midst of that happiness, if you begin to think that it couldn’t possibly last, your happy-feeling will begin to deflate. You actually create your emotional state with your thoughts, and your body is affected very powerfully.

Whatever thought (and related emotion) you are having, your body is experiencing it as though it was actually happening. If you are worrying about something that might happen in the future, your body is experiencing it as though it were real. If you remember a painful experience from the past, your body relives it as though it were happening again. You get the same spinal tensions, the same nerve impulses in your nervous system and brain, and the same chemical responses from your glands. This is very important to understand, because it is the key to changing your body — your thoughts and emotions have a more powerful effect on your body than your physical activities. They are more powerful, and you spend many more hours of the day thinking than you do in physical activities.

Repetitive thoughts, especially the ones that you are reluctant to admit to anyone, have the most significant effects on your body. They create your most persistent aches and pains as well as the image you project to the world through your habitual facial expression, your posture, and the way you walk and breathe. You are aware of some of those repetitive thoughts, but many of the most toxic thoughts go on under the surface of your awareness, unconscious mental patterns that affect your body, your life and the lives of everyone around you. This is one of the reasons why yoga describes itself as a science of the mind instead of a science of the body. You must clear your mind in order to improve the condition of your body.

All yoga practices are for your mind. Even when you think you are working on your body, you are working on clearing the patterns from your mind. In addition to clearing your thoughts, you must clear an even more powerful level: the subtle patterns that drive your mind to its repetitive behaviors. These subtle patterns are called samskaras. Every thought you have ever thought, every word you have ever spoken, and every action you have ever undertaken has left *samskaras*, subtle seeds that will sprout into future thoughts and emotions.

Samskaras are not your thoughts — they are the hidden patterns that cause your thoughts. Samskaras are your software, the internal programming that runs in the hardware of your body and mind. In any situation, your samskaras sprout into mental content that you add to the situation and use to create your own personal, individual experience. For example, if you have sadness samskaras, you can go to a big celebration and you will feel sad while everyone else is happy. Your samskaras create mental sunglasses that tint everything you see.

Your body and mind are custom designed to handle this programming that you brought in with you — samskaras are your karmic inheritance from prior lifetimes. You wrote the internal programming that brought you into this life, and you can rewrite it. You can even redesign the hardware — your body and mind. *Svaroopā*® yoga specializes in this by unraveling the tensions in your spine.

Your samskaras are stored in your spine. Each time you take a class or do your own practice, you are working directly on your spine. While this improves the condition of your body, it simultaneously works on the subtle level to clear out samskaras. This is why, in a pose that reaches deeply into your spine, you may suddenly feel anger or fear, or find tears spilling out when there is no external reason. You are clearing out samskaras, and the mental content that blossoms from them.

Changing your body may be the thing that gets you started into yoga. Yet these changes are more than mere physical healing; they are a profound rewiring of all the levels of your own being. This rewiring changes your body and your mind, and can even change your personality. You will become happier, friendlier, more compassionate, more optimistic, more accepting and loving. Yoga guarantees this.

Yet, more is happening. While you are doing the rewiring, you are also creating yoga samskaras. These seeds continue to blossom into an ever-expanding inner sense of self. It begins as an inner sense of peaceful competency that makes you able to handle anything that happens. You can face all that life brings to you without the inner churning and second-guessing. You begin to see life more clearly and enjoy your experiences more fully, while you are moving progressively toward liberation — truly! It's a magical process that takes advantage of the multiple levels of consciousness within you, with every pose you do. This is why I always say, "Do more yoga."

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rama". Above the signature is a small heart symbol containing the number "361".

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