



TOPIC OF THE MONTH

April 2016

Mind Stuff – Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi

If we are not aware of our thoughts, our minds can use a tremendous amount of psychic energy toward destructive forces in our thoughts and actions. Yama and Niyama, the first two limbs of the 8 limbed path of classical Ashtanga yoga, give us basic do's and don'ts to help us utilize this energy more positively to develop our minds and bodies. It begins with awareness.

Asana, Pranayama, and Pratyahara, the 3rd, 4th, and 5th limbs in classical ashtanga yoga focus on helping us purify our thoughts and actions. They are a kind of work for us — a discipline we can work to “perfect” human natures — although each of us is perfect as we are :) With a little direction, life's ups and downs become easier to navigate. **These practices calm our nervous systems; when our nervous systems are calm it is easier for us to access our higher spiritual selves where the big picture becomes visible.** The physical work of these limbs calms our nervous system — this is one of their biggest benefits; they help us develop awareness of the unity and synchronicities in life which can help with our personal development and direction.

Much of the Ashtanga Yoga system of asana is this work. After 10 years or so of this physical labor it is hopeful that the last three limbs of the Classical Ashtanga Yoga start to develop naturally . . . The last 3 limbs are basically control of your mind thoughts. For some reason the mind has a mind of its own . . . it likes to conjure up stories and thoughts of what other people think of us that just are not true. As we grow in our awareness of this, we learn to not believe everything we think . . . our mind lies to us! There fore, sometimes some effort is needed on these last 3 limbs, although the effort is more watching and less doing. More directing of the mind.

And this can be useful and beneficial at any stage of your yoga practice, even if you are just a beginner on the path. You don't have to wait until you have been practicing the physical practices of yoga for 10 years to adopt a meditation practice; you can let them develop together. Early in our practices we may want to direct more effort to the physical, but saving 10-20 minutes of your yoga time for meditation can be quite a beneficial use of your time.

This became evident to me teaching yoga to a wonderful group of teenagers with special needs through the Arc of Dauphin County (arcofdc.org). The classes last 1-1/2 to 2 hours of time, this amount of time can be challenging to move a group of teenagers through without breaking it up, so over the years I have added some components of the last three limbs of Ashtanga Yoga and found them to pay much attention to it and seem to enjoy it! It was an eye opening experience for me. In teaching the not so tangible aspects of yoga to teenagers with little experience in yoga I had to do some research of how to make it simple to understand why we do this and access it. Below are my notes on how I went about this — the Loving Kindness Meditation was a big part of the success of the classes

Dharana, Dhyana, Samadhi
Concentration, Meditation, Bliss Superconsciousness
Yoga Sutra Chapter III:1-11



“Quit obsessing about whatever is swirling around in your mind!”

Destructive thoughts vs. Constructive thoughts

Yoga puts emphasis on controlling our thoughts because we identify with what is in our mind. We slowly become that which we think about. We do not simply have destructive thoughts, we become destructive with our words and sometimes with our actions. Let's take the word sarcasm for example; the root of sarcasm means “tearing flesh”, so literally when you speak with sarcasm in your voice you are attempting to tear someone's flesh even if only with your words.

We take control of our thoughts beginning with the 6th limb, concentration. When you work with this limb you concentrate on something internal or external. Internal objects of concentration can be such as a chakra, your breath, 3rd eye center, heart, navel, etc. Concentration should be on something positive. An object outside of the body for concentration should have some significance in symbolism to you or a way of connecting to a higher mind or your deity. Remember we will identify ourselves with what is in our minds, focusing our mind on a higher entity will help us behave more in this way. For example, WWJD?

When concentrating on something you still notice other mind thoughts coming in. The lesson with this practice is learning to not “hop on and ride the thought”, meaning keeping thinking about it or build a story around it. We learn to laugh at it and let it pass through our mind stuff without giving it any more time. Hopefully and usually one starts to catch their self “thinking” sooner . . . meaning you stop thinking about the thought quicker and quicker. For example maybe the first few months you try to meditate; you sit down and after about 30 seconds a thought pops in your head — you build a story around that thought for 3 minutes before you catch your self spinning a story that will most likely not happen . . . after a while you may hop on a thought and ride it for 1 minute before you catch yourself and bring yourself back, and after many years of meditation practice you may only ride the thought for a second or two before you catch yourself and pull yourself back.

This will help the destructive thoughts disappear.

Destructive thoughts dominate the “material” mind, generally destructive thoughts materialize through materialistic wants. Money, power or job position, shelter, cool clothes, new smart phone, etc. . . . As materialistic thoughts are replaced with pure thoughts, we develop constructive thoughts with ease. When you find your mind “wanting” something it gets easier and easier to turn those thoughts into developing an attribute within yourself to better serve humanity. Loving more, understanding more, not getting upset at what others need to do to walk in their shoes (or walk in their barefoot ;), less controlling, having faith in the turn of events in your life that your Dharma is kicking in . . .

When you are able to do this you may notice your concentration can sometimes lead to meditation. Meditation the 7th limb is where our thoughts are not interrupted by destructive thoughts. We can keep our focus on the higher good.

Concentration will lead to meditation and meditation to the final limb, samadhi, where we are at peace with all. The official “samadhi” state is mostly reserved for those super yogis who live in caves and meditate all day . . . or so it is believed. It is my hopes that this state can be reached — even if only in glimpses — by us mere mortals.



As you work with concentration and meditation, you develop a stronger, more focused mind. Having the power of concentration will help you in your daily life, at work, and at play. Have you had something in your personal life distract you from an important job you are trying to do? The power of concentration will help you focus when you need it no matter what is swirling around in your life, keeping your center, keeping your wits about you amidst the storms of life that occasionally come at us.

When I teach meditation classes, it is certainly nice to have the perfect room, the perfect ambiance, the perfect sound, perfect temperature, etc. etc. In this case though the room kind of meditates for us. In learning meditation it is helpful to have the calm room, you learn and practice something under ideal circumstances so later you can recall it easier when the circumstances are not so ideal . . . Being able to meditate amidst the chaos that we all face from time to time — now that is real meditation!

To know if your mind could benefit from short meditation practices here are some symptoms of a weak mind:

- ॐ Wandering mind - hard time focusing on a task at hand
- ॐ Dull and Preoccupied mind. Lethargic. Watching TV frequently. Wanting to be “mindless”.
- ॐ Distracted mind, worrying or preoccupied often.

Concentration and meditation help strengthen the mind. Wandering, distracted minds result in dissatisfaction, disappointment, frustration, and anxiety. A focused mind creates satisfaction, peace, happiness, and serenity.

Many people get frustrated with meditation; they think they can actually stop the mind from thinking these thoughts. We can not, we can only let them go and bring our attention back to what is real. You can pull your attention back to your object of focus. The trick is not to stop the thoughts, the trick is; did you catch it?

There are times when we are very emotionally charged over a situation, during these times it can be helpful to another tool available to help us clear these thoughts from our mind. Mantra is a another meditation tool; kind of like singing or chanting you choose or are given a word, sentence, sentence or even an entire paragraph to repeat in your mind. This can be useful.

Below is a type of mantra mediation you can use when you are finding it difficult to focus or when you are dealing with emotions, not only will it help you practice meditation — in the process you are sending good thoughts and energy to different people, this is very powerful on our emotions. My teacher, Nancy Gilgoff, teaches this as part of her workshops, I have come to use it in similar ways as she talks about over the years.

As you settle in to a comfortable meditation position (any position that is comfortable for you while keeping your back and neck aligned fairly straight or in their natural anatomical state), you will repeat 4 lines. You take a deep inhale, as you exhale you send the line to yourself or another person.

Metta Meditation

Loving Kindness Meditation



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May I be filled with loving kindness
May I be well
May I be peaceful and at ease
May I be happy

- ॐ Repeat the entire phrase 3 times sending this to yourself. Then,
- ॐ Repeat replacing “I” with “we” and think of someone you love and have NO conflict with. Repeat this 3 x.
- ॐ Repeat with someone you see often but do not really know 3x.
- ॐ Repeat with someone you highly dislike, have conflict with or find very difficult to send loving kindness to 3x. If you struggle sending loving kindness to someone you personally are in disagreement with it may be helpful to send it to a public or political figure you disagree with?

Here is a link with the loving kindness meditation translated to many different languages from my teacher's website www.ashtangamaui.com , <http://www.ashtangamaui.com/loving-kindness/>

May you be filled with loving kindness.

