

heartfulness

DAAJI

Transcending
indecision,
carelessness &
laziness

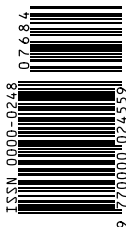
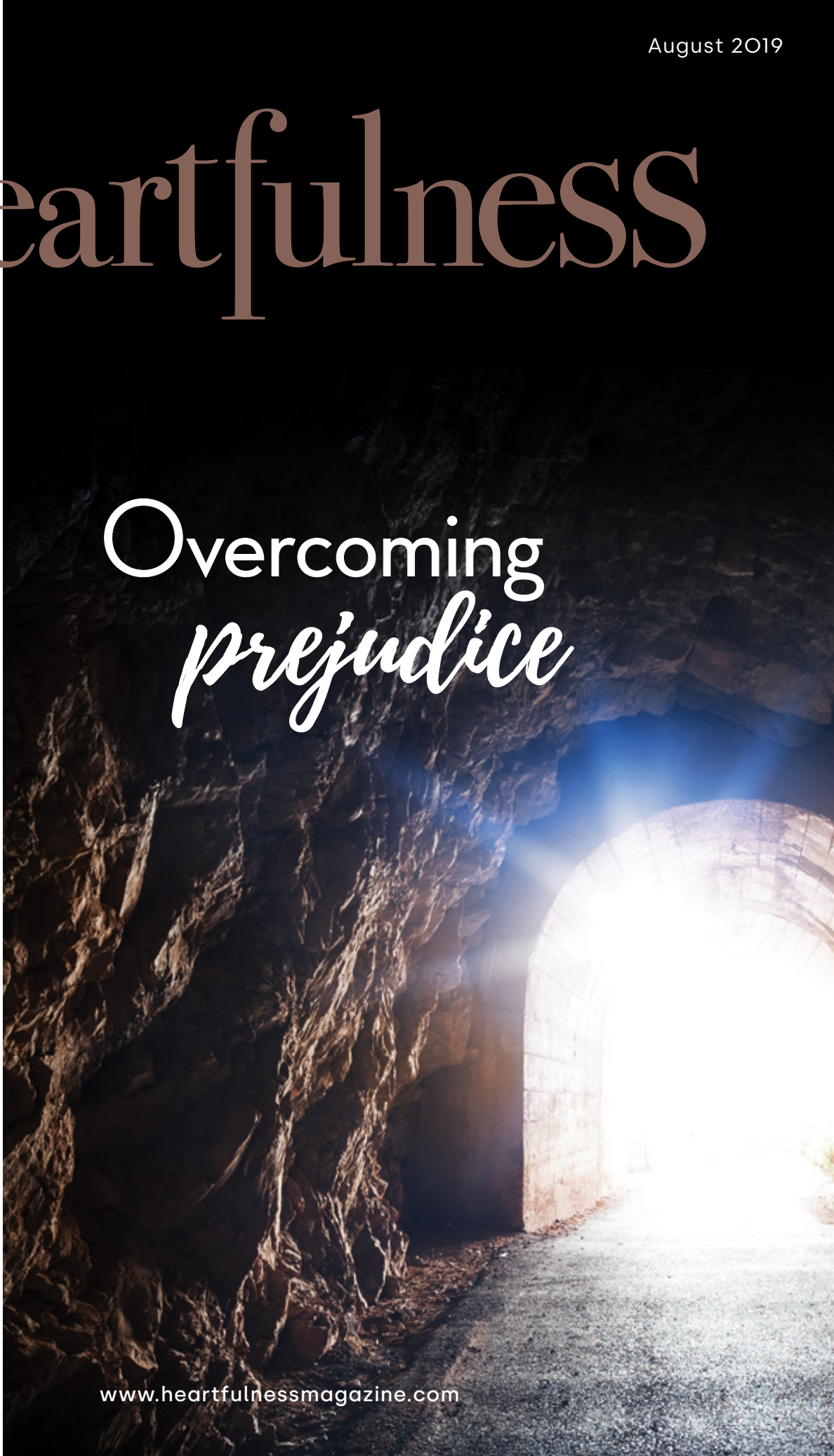
SAKI
SANTORELLI

Insight of
the heart

PETER
KATER

Ambassadors
of the sacred
& the free

Overcoming
prejudice



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How Can We All Get Along?

Dear readers,

In Harper Lee's classic novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Scout says, "I think there's just one kind of folks. Folks." Her older brother Jem responds, "That's what I thought, too, when I was your age. If there's just one kind of folks, why can't they get along with each other? If they're all alike, why do they go out of their way to despise each other?"

Our consciousness may be evolving as our meditative practices open up new inner dimensions, but do we get along with each other? What causes the hidden prejudices that stop us being together? In this edition we tackle these universal issues that continue to afflict humanity.

Daaji explains how to cultivate the open-mindedness to prevent the seed of prejudice growing into the tree of injustice, Saki Santorelli invites us to awaken the insight of the heart, Rosalind Pearmain observes the steady work of evolution, Peter Kater experiences the essence of true freedom on his paddle board, Michael Lewin offers tips on slowing down, and we explore a Himalayan Retreat. Daaji's Yogic Psychology series continues to explore some of the more difficult mental obstacles and how to overcome them. As always, we hope these insights accompany you on your journey.

Happy reading,
The editors

contributors



Kamlesh Patel

Also known as Daaji, he is the current Heartfulness Guide. He offers a practical, experiential approach to the evolution of consciousness that is simple, easy to follow, and available to people of all ages and walks of life. Daaji is also a prolific speaker and writer, and his two books, *The Heartfulness Way* and *Designing Destiny*, are both #1 bestsellers.



Rosalind Pearmain

Ros lives in Abingdon near Oxford, UK, and has worked with groups of all ages during her working life. She has always been interested in how we can change and transform. In recent years she has been teaching psychotherapy and qualitative research and is a Heartfulness trainer.



Saki Santorelli

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Jonas Jödicke

Jonas Jödicke, aka JoJoesArt, hails from Berlin, Germany. He has been

creating and imagining fantastic worlds ever since he can remember. In 2010 he started uploading some of his artworks on the Internet and growing more and more of a fan-base. What started as a hobby has now become his profession. His works are appreciated and purchased all around the globe and have been featured on countless well-known blogs, websites, magazines and book covers.



Peter Kater

Peter is said to have the 'gift of melody'. His love and enthusiasm for the creative process, self-exploration, the healing arts and the natural world continues to inspire his composing and recording. In a career spanning over 3 decades, he has recorded over 60 albums, has written scores for over 100 television and film productions including 11 On- and Off-Broadway plays, and has received many awards and honors, including 13 Grammy nominations and a Grammy Award for *Dancing On Water*. His music has uplifted, soothed, healed and inspired the lives of millions.



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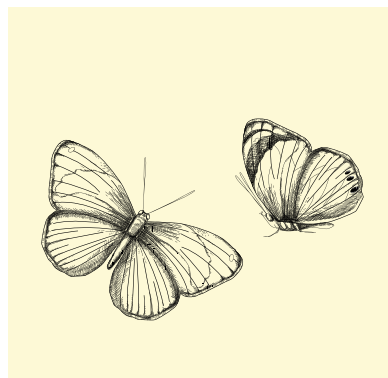
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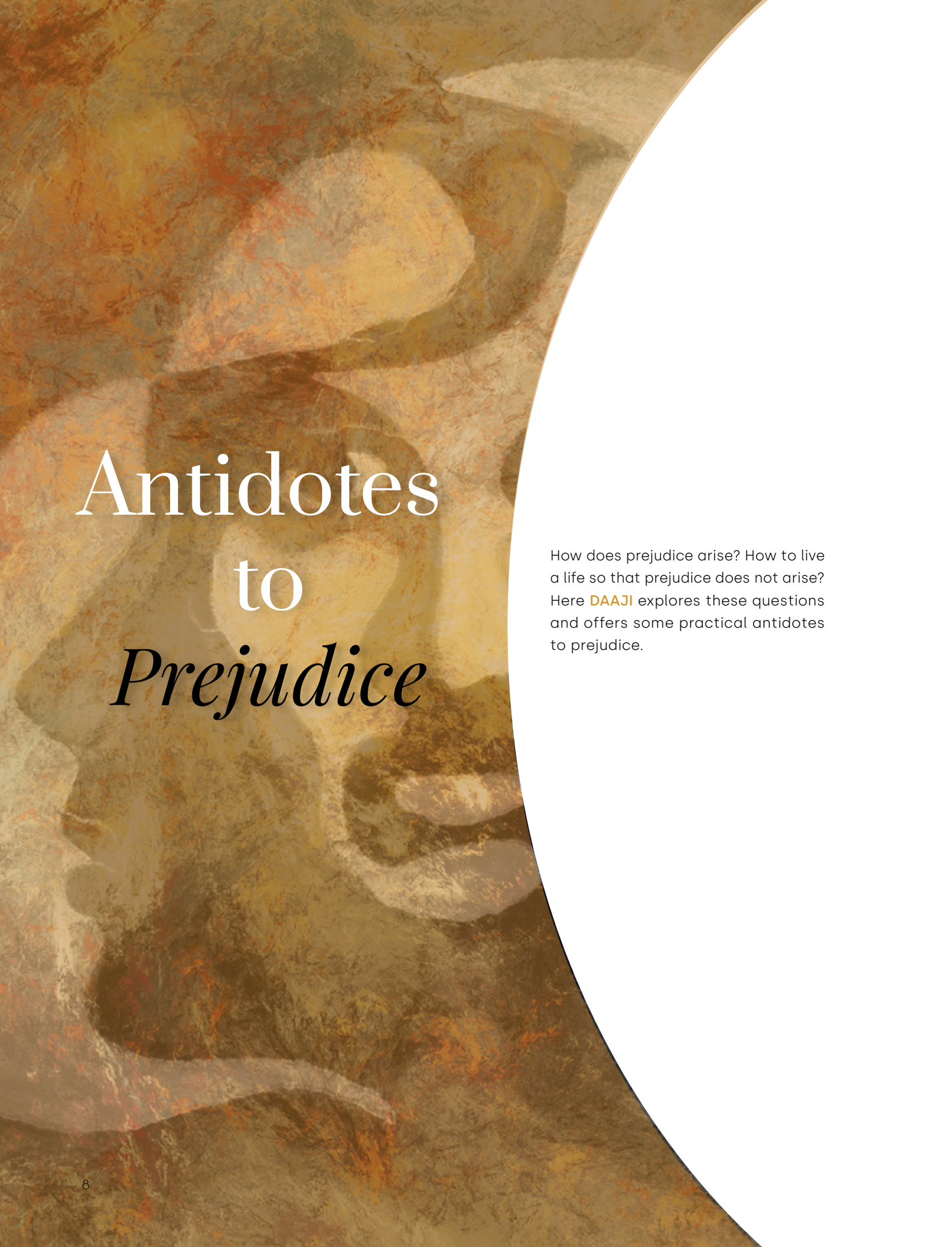


focus

OVERCOMING PREJUDICE

Look on a person in this instant as a fresh, unknown entity, unconditioned by any past. Penetrate beyond the external veils and see the truth within.

PARTHASARATHI RAJAGOPALACHARI



Antidotes to *Prejudice*

How does prejudice arise? How to live a life so that prejudice does not arise? Here **DAAJI** explores these questions and offers some practical antidotes to prejudice.

In 2003 my son gave me a copy of the American classic, *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Nelle Harper Lee. I stopped reading after Tom Robinson was arrested, as the whole episode was so sad. Then ten years later I had the opportunity to watch the movie in which Gregory Peck acted so brilliantly. Coincidentally, 2003 was the same year Gregory Peck died, and one of the eulogy-makers was the actor who played the role of Tom Robinson. He said that Gregory Peck may have died, but Atticus Finch still lives on in our lives, for he represents something not many could: he was the sole fighter in the entire village.

The story shifted my awareness so much. It's all about racial prejudice, injustice, children losing their innocence, and the courage to overcome all these weaknesses and social evils. What we require is courage. The book title is also brilliant. What is the author trying to say in the title? We all have that innocent mockingbird in our heart, always singing, "Do this, don't do that," and if we kill the mockingbird that guides us from within, we kill our inner voice, and that is as bad as committing suicide. We may be living on in physical form, but we have destroyed the inner conscience.

We all know the words "discrimination", "prejudice" and "injustice." Sometimes we are defenders, at other times silent bystanders or witnesses, and sometimes offenders. We often use the word "discrimination" in a negative sense, but in yogic philosophy "discrimination" has a very profound meaning. It has a purpose.

Yoga has four fundamental *Sadhanas*, and the first is *Viveka*, meaning discrimination or discernment, our innate wisdom to differentiate right from wrong. When are we able to differentiate right from wrong? When are we impartial and open. Prejudice carries the idea that we have made up our minds. We have a preconception without seeing reality, facts and figures.

How to conduct our lives in such a way that we rise above prejudice? Recognizing the problem is not enough. I may write in my diary, I may talk to my friend, I may ask for help, and I may want to change, but much more needs to be done. Wishes are not enough. It is only through hard work that we achieve goals. If we don't act we can't blame anyone else. And once we think that we have made it, we often stop growing. That's the tragic part of a little success. When we feel that we have made it, we lose our center, we lose our focus, so again it becomes spiritual suicide. The spiritual journey is all about how well we lose ourselves; the higher we grow, the smaller we become. Humility and purity are the keys. Purity brings about openness of heart. Openness creates free interaction with all. Without purity there is no unity, and without unity there will always be prejudice.

Prejudice always arises out of setting aside proven or observed facts, despite oft-repeated experiences. This fatal attitude is displayed in order to preserve self-respect or honor, and its origin is in the mind. It is purely ego-based.

FOCUS

There is no race against others on this inner journey. The journey is infinite. We are racing only against ourselves. We would like to do better than yesterday, and we can humbly submit, “I need to change. Guide me in some way. In which direction must I go? Where must I correct myself?” Every one of us knows only too well our weaknesses, but out of habit we look at the weaknesses of others. Instead of looking at our own baggage, we keep looking at the baggage of others, and in the process we miss out.

Prejudice always arises out of setting aside proven or observed facts, despite oft-repeated experiences. This fatal attitude is displayed in order to preserve self-respect or honor, and its origin is in the mind. It is purely ego-based.

And what about the desires that drive us to make certain decisions, despite the clear and overwhelming facts? Desires unfulfilled lead to restlessness and inner turbulence. At times they provoke anger if things are not done as per our whims. Anger promotes fear and fear won't let us exercise discrimination. In a state of fear, it is very difficult to discriminate right from wrong. This is the result of desires from the heart.

Ego-based superiority takes its toll on our ability to discriminate, because we have already made up our minds that “I am superior,” and ipso facto that all others are inferior, whereas the most beautiful weapon is to always think that the other person is greater, no matter how great we may be. Ego-based prejudice is removed by this one simple prescription.

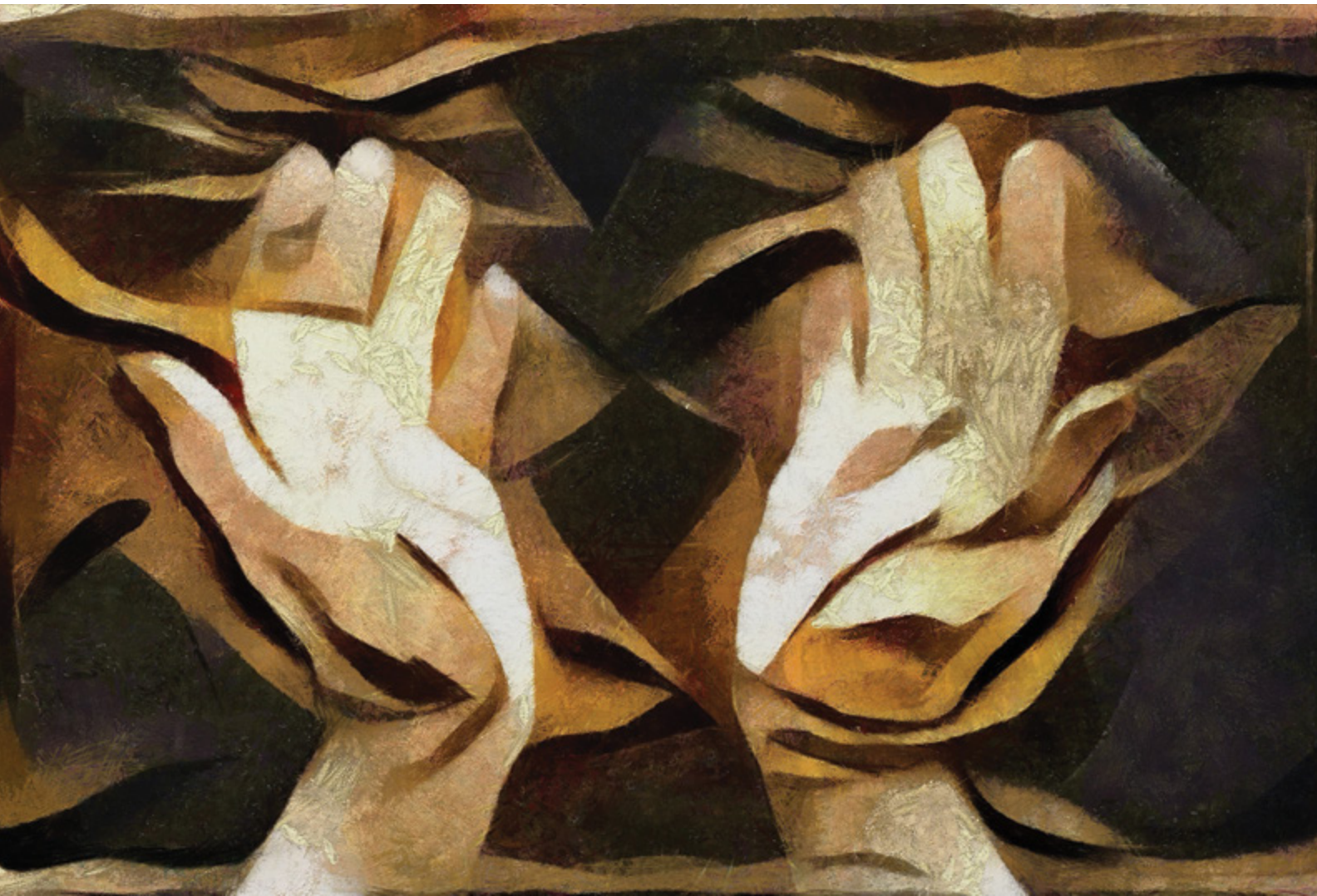
By and large there are only two types of prejudice – positive and negative. What happens when we put Mr. X on a pedestal? “He is such a good person, he can do no wrong.” That is a positive form of prejudice. You have ennobled a person without any basis. Then there is the scenario where a negative form of prejudice prevails: a person may be so good, but you have already decided that she is useless.

What is the opposite of prejudice? Let us focus on the ability to judge correctly without any bias or any preconceptions. This is where the importance of discrimination comes in, *Viveka*, which is the first step in Yoga. If we cannot discriminate, we will remain prejudiced all our lives. So we have to cultivate that gem, that value, in our psyche, and it demands a sufficient level of openness of heart and conviction.

When do we stop judging? Ask a mother. Will she judge her child? The trick is hidden in the affectionate arms of a mother's hug. It is only to love. And then having the courage to follow our own convictions. It is simple to talk like this, but when we are actually facing real-life situations often our courage fails. Openness arises out of conviction; in turn, conviction has its origin in positive discrimination, and that too has its origin in a pure heart. If we reverse this process, it is the same heart that can become a fertile ground for prejudice.

Fear plays its role, especially when it comes to discrimination. Who can discriminate when they are fearful? Open-mindedness promotes freethinking, whereas dogmatism or prejudice cannot. What is open-mindedness? In the beginning of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the three children were so happy, conveying the message that prejudice is dissolved when you become childlike. Those children lost their innocence when they were exposed to racism. Until then they were blissfully enjoying life. So the exact opposite of prejudice is a childlike attitude of freshness towards all the approaches in life, a positive attitude – open-mindedness.

Children have no prejudice. They are simple and pure in mind and heart. They receive any and every impression, whether good or bad, from the world outside. It is only when they grow older that they sort these impressions, and try to retain only the pleasurable or good ones. At such a time, prejudice sets in and open-mindedness bids farewell. If somehow we are able to retain the former attitude of wonder throughout life, we may be called open-minded.



*Humility and purity are the keys. Purity brings about
openness of heart. Openness creates free interaction
with all. Without purity there is no unity, and without
unity there will always be prejudice.*

There are three main categories of discrimination:

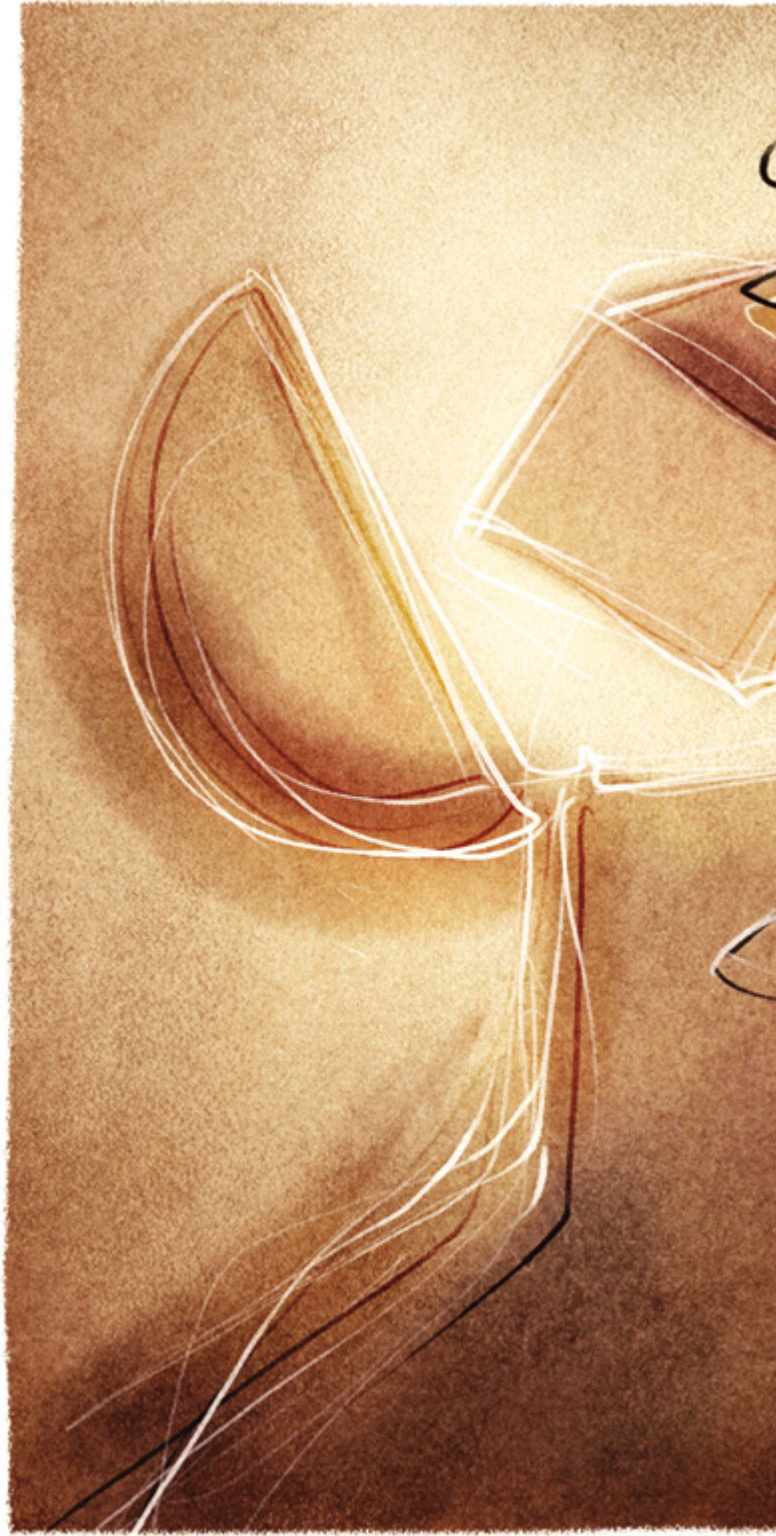
Discrimination of the correct type is inspired by the heart, as the heart cannot give wrong signals. When something is not right, the heart becomes slightly heavier. You must have felt it. The heart is able to determine what is right and wrong, what is to be done or not done, and what is one's duty or *dharma* and what is non-duty or *adharma*.

Self-willed, desire-based discrimination is always erroneous, because it discriminates with a prejudiced mind, in order to serve its own egoistic purposes.

Perverted and obstinate discrimination is not only erroneous but looks foolish and stands in the way of real progress. Everything is seen with the wrong perspective, ignoring the real value of things. We often refer to such discrimination as perverted intelligence, timidity and fear. Shirking one's responsibility is also an indication of this type of discrimination.

Prejudice is nothing but an offspring of superiority. A prejudiced mind reflects non-acceptance. What is the end result? It is called injustice. In a way, prejudice and injustice are directly related. One is the seed and the other the tree: Without the seed called prejudice there is no tree called injustice. One who ignores the heart's voice is actually putting a massive stone over the heart and becomes deaf to the signals of the heart; so the whispering mockingbird keeps mocking when we go wrong.

We lose familiarity with the terms and conditions written in the manual of our hearts. We become self-centered, and full of the fear of losing apparent short-term benefits. We lose the courage or will to discriminate and act, and ultimately we develop guilt, which does the rest of the damage. That is why Ram Chandra of Fatehgarh once said, "Prejudice is a synonym for weakness of the heart."



Antidotes to prejudice:

These are powerful remedies. Even if we assimilate just one of these, we shall achieve a lot.

- ✦ *Cultivate love and prayer in the heart.*
- ✦ *Imagine peace pervading everywhere.*
- ✦ *Develop empathy.*
- ✦ *Develop tolerance.*
- ✦ *Develop mutual trust and respect.*
- ✦ *Immerse yourself in the deepest core of your being.*
- ✦ *Abandon all tendencies based on rationalism.*
- ✦ *Be open, receptive and determined.*
- ✦ *Think others to be greater.*
- ✦ *Resist the impulses of a critical mind.*
- ✦ *Know that prejudice is a heavy handicap.*
- ✦ *Practice well – it is a good beginning.*
- ✦ *Work on yourself all the time for more and more refinement.*
- ✦ *Imagine a future time when an outdated lifestyle based on prejudice is absent.*
- ✦ *Develop a universal vision.*

How to escape the trap? By acceptance and love. Once we accept things as they are there is no judgment. With love and acceptance, even antagonistic things become favorable in the long run. Nothing fogs the mind like prejudice. Instead remain serene with an open heart. These two qualities are of paramount importance in keeping prejudice at bay.

Excerpts from a talk given in August 2013 in a seminar for North American Heartfulness practitioners. Edited for publication.





The Minefield of **PREJUDICE**

Is there a survival value to prejudice? **ELIZABETH DENLEY** explores how this destructive human behavior may have arisen, why it is so hard for us to let go of our prejudices, and what we can do to transcend them.

Most of us don't think of ourselves as prejudiced, yet collectively we have created a world of judgment, family and community conflicts, religious differences, war, hatred and a glaring lack of global harmony. It is a world where fear is palpable in the atmosphere in many places.

Why and how does prejudice arise? According to yogic science, its roots are in the original *samskara* of fear that arose at the time of creation – fear of separation from the original state of oneness. As a result, we developed survival mechanisms to protect the individual 'I'. We learnt to protect ourselves and shy away from threats, whether real or perceived. That is how the mammalian brain developed over millions of years. We learnt to exercise caution. We used the functions of the mind like intellect and thinking in order to make choices, based on the dualities of 'right and wrong', 'good and bad', 'likes and dislikes', 'evolutionary and non-evolutionary', 'life and death'. Based on past experiences, we decided what was good and bad etc.

Is there is a survival value to prejudice from an evolutionary perspective? After years of observing, both as a biologist and a yogic practitioner, I would say the answer is yes, but only because we are not able to use our inner faculties, the full inner potential of our subtle bodies. The more we can use their potential through meditative practices, the more prejudice can be transcended.

Prejudice is pre-judgment. It is a deviation from a neutral response, where we pre-judge in a positive direction as partiality, or we pre-judge in a negative direction as prejudice. These 'likes' and 'dislike' towards situations and people

are based on cognates we have formed from our past experiences. If we are able to observe these reactions, we will recognize the deviations and adjust ourselves. It is like a tightrope walker who is constantly adjusting back to the state of balance.

It all hinges on our ability to discriminate wisely. Another word for this is discernment. Without a pure field of consciousness, discrimination is not possible. It doesn't matter how intellectually great, how much knowledge we have, or how hard we try, it's not possible to discriminate without purity. This is a very important clue to understanding why we develop prejudices – when we are not able to discriminate in the moment, instead we have to follow rules, and these rules are our pre-judgments.

Say you have never experienced fire before. You might experiment by putting your hand in the fire, and you will very quickly learn not to do it again. Or if your mother once stuck her hand in the fire, she will teach you that fire is dangerous, and you will not have to undergo the experience yourself. This wisdom is passed down from generation to generation. We also have a collective consciousness that extends beyond us as individuals. In fact, over millions of years, the midbrain, which we share with other mammals, evolved to protect us from environmental danger. We learned to interact with the world through a negative lens. Our ancestors survived because they anticipated danger and stayed safe.

We are also connected at a deeper level through the heart, and so collectives of human beings have the ability to absorb knowledge from each other – by osmosis if you like

Prejudice is pre-judgment. It is a deviation from a neutral response, where we pre-judge in a positive direction as partiality, or we pre-judge in a negative direction as prejudice.



Wisdom emerges in a pure field of consciousness, offering decisions that are relevant and useful in the present for survival and well-being, whereas prejudice is colored and distorted. Wisdom depends on the whole process of cognition: from gathering information through the senses, to processing it through the subtle bodies, to the soul's response.

– in the collective unconscious. And our minds go into patterns very, very easily. Our minds easily learn from collective experience. On one side we call that wisdom and adaptation, just as it is wise not to put your hand in the fire a second time.

But imagine now that your ancestors were at war with another community, and many of your family members were killed. Over generations the dislike has been passed down from generation to generation, even though the war was hundreds of years ago. You could still have a prejudice against this other community, even if they have changed since that time. Perhaps they are now loving and harmonious. Or what if your ancestors had actually been at fault and started the war, and the others were simply defending themselves? Would your prejudice be justified? There are many ethical dilemmas in this minefield of prejudice!

So what is the difference between using the past cognates of experience in a wise way – e.g. not putting your hand in the fire – and using the past cognates of experience in a prejudicial way – e.g. hating a group of people because of a war that happened hundreds of years ago? The process of retrieving past cognates as a reference is the same, and the body responds to the mind's learning process in the same way. If I am afraid of others without any real basis, the same hormonal responses and the same sympathetic nervous responses occur in my body as if I am afraid of a real threat. The body responds in the same way. So how to discriminate between useful pre-judgment and prejudice or partiality?

Wisdom emerges in a pure field of consciousness, offering decisions that are relevant and useful in the present for survival and well-being, whereas prejudice is colored and distorted. Wisdom depends on the whole process of cognition: from gathering information through the senses, to processing it through the subtle bodies, to the soul's response. When the field of consciousness is pure, we can listen to the soul's response through the heart, without the filters of emotion coloring our decisions. When the field of consciousness is turbulent and murky, can we trust that voice?

Listening to the voice of the heart takes courage. And if we don't have that courage? Then it's easier to follow a set of predetermined rules to feel safe – our prejudices – even if they are not relevant. Those rules come from our library of *samskaras*. Why is a person terrified of snakes? Perhaps in a past life he was bitten by a snake and died. It doesn't mean that all snakes are bad or dangerous, but the person has created a rule to stay safe.

Spiritual evolution is all about change, about letting go of the rules and the boundaries that define our own creation. So spirituality dismantles prejudice. In fact spiritual progress is the antidote to prejudice, because we cannot hold on to fixed beliefs when we grow spiritually. We're dismantling our belief systems.

This is the basis of prejudice. And it is probably why we resist and fear change so much, because with change the rules change, and we no longer feel safe and secure. And of course spiritual evolution is all about change, about letting go of the rules and the boundaries that define our own creation. So spirituality dismantles prejudice. In fact spiritual progress is the antidote to prejudice, because we cannot hold on to fixed beliefs when we grow spiritually. We're dismantling our belief systems.

Yet it is difficult because our minds are patterned with very deep *samskaras*. We can sometimes feel as if our very survival is threatened, because many of these tendencies have been created over lifetimes and in our early childhood. There can be so much resistance to the process of change. Tolerance, patience and, most of all, love are needed to get through it, because this is our evolution.

To explore the idea of spiritual progress being the antidote to prejudice, let's look at what happens as we practice Heartfulness:

Meditation teaches us to become aware, to dive deeper into the heart, the feeling level of existence, and to observe the inner world. Meditation allows us to listen to the heart, which allows us to discriminate and develop wisdom. This is essential for removing prejudices.

Cleaning removes complexities and impurities from the field of consciousness, allowing discrimination to emerge.

Prayer creates a vacuumized field in the heart, in which wisdom can emerge from a neutral superconscious state. Prayer negates the 'I', as we are connected. We can't feel superior or separate from anyone else in a prayerful state of being.

The Ten Maxims are a simple prescription to remove prejudice. They are designed to replace earlier cognates. One that exemplifies this beautifully is Maxim 9: "Mold your behavior and way of living to such a high order as to rouse a feeling of love and piety in others." Ram Chandra explains that, on one hand, there is unity in Nature. We all have the same essence of Divinity. On the other hand there is diversity, where we are all different, we all have our various attributes, our genius. And anybody who can accept the unity and diversity in Nature will rouse a feeling of love and piety in others, effectively canceling out prejudice.

Constant Remembrance keeps us connected in a meditative state throughout the day and night. It is preventative, as the field of consciousness cannot accumulate complexities and impurities.

These spiritual practices allow us to look inward and purify the heart. Otherwise how will the heart discriminate? And when it can't discriminate it resorts to pre-judging.

Over the years, I have learnt to see the dismantling of my prejudices as a barometer of my evolution. And when I can't see my own patterns, other people are there to help – what I don't like in others is a mirror of myself; what I am partial to in others is also a mirror of myself. That is a boon from Nature that allows me to change. It's an opportunity for growth. In this, there is hope and vision for humanity.

Excerpts from a talk given in August 2013 in a seminar for North American Heartfulness practitioners. Edited for publication.

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*Listening is the
oldest and perhaps
the most powerful
tool of healing.*

RACHEL NAOMI REMEN





THE HEARTFUL LEADER

- part 7-

Extraordinary outcomes through inspiration

OUTER BEHAVIOR SHIFTS FROM MANAGING INNER STATE



In previous articles **RAVI VENKATESAN** has introduced the Heartful Leader framework and explored Reputation, Trust & Relationships, and Outer Behavior. He also explored what constitutes our Inner State and how to manage it by reversing negative cycles and triggering positive cycles. In this article he dives deeper into specific shifts that we can make to our behavior, and also learn a simple 3-step process that we can use for this.

One of the most important shifts we can make is to not imagine things going wrong in our heads. Too many times we tend to make up stories in our minds about how an upcoming meeting or interaction will go negatively, and our mind will exaggerate this over multiple cycles of repeating the same thoughts.



Take the example of Pooja, an accountant at a consulting company. She always dreads her conversations with John, the head of client services. John tends to be dismissive of Pooja's concerns about how the company invoices customers. Pooja wants to ensure that everything is done by the book, so that the company doesn't get into trouble with audits. John is always in the mode of being "flexible" for clients and believes that Pooja should handle the details later without bothering him. Pooja has an upcoming meeting to discuss the way invoices for one of the company's largest clients have been pre-paid, even before services have been rendered. The proper way to do this would have been to bill after services were rendered. At the very least the revenue should be amortized over a longer period, but John always tends to want to recognize the revenue sooner.

Even ahead of the meeting, Pooja starts building up anger about how John will be dismissive of her concerns. She feels unfairly treated, and falls into the negative cycle of discontent, restlessness, anger, fear and lack of clarity. The anxiety of this upcoming meeting disturbs her to such an extent that she loses sleep over it.

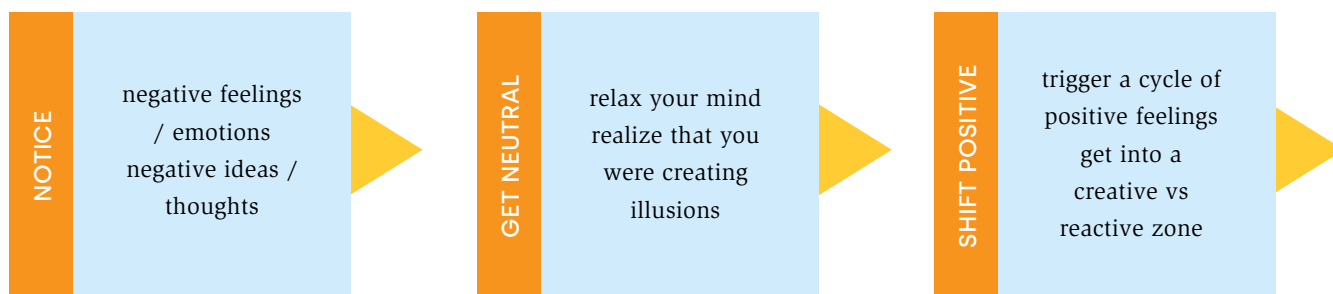
She mentions the situation casually to Sylvie, the HR head of the company. Sylvie realizes that she is falling into a trap of assuming that things will go badly without giving them a fair chance to go well. She suggests that Pooja try to approach the conversation very positively, with a couple of options and assures her that if John is dismissive of her concerns then she will address it from an HR perspective.

Pooja decides to approach the meeting with an open mind and prepares carefully. She creates a couple of options to deal with the situation.

Her conversation with John ends up going very positively. Initially he comes across defensively, because he believes she is going to raise concerns and place roadblocks before him. However, once he realizes that Pooja has options for him and is trying to constructively address the situation, his tone changes, and he starts appreciating her help. In this case an external agency, Sylvie, intervened to shift Pooja's inner state, and consequently her outer behavior. Instead of feeling angry and coming across frustrated, she came across as calm and constructive.

THOUGHT IN ACTION

This shift can also be self-triggered. All we need to do, is to follow a simple 3-step process:



Taking the same example as above, with the benefit of this process, Pooja would have noticed that she is assuming negative outcomes. She would have purposefully shifted herself to neutral by relaxing herself. She would have then put herself in a positive mindset, triggering the positive cycle of contentment -> peace -> love -> courage -> clarity.

As an exercise, observe yourself for the next few days. Catch yourself falling into negative feelings and emotions and apply the above 3-step process. Over time, this will become a habit, and you will find your outer behavior reflects a positive inner state, which leads to positive interactions.

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HIGHLIGHTS

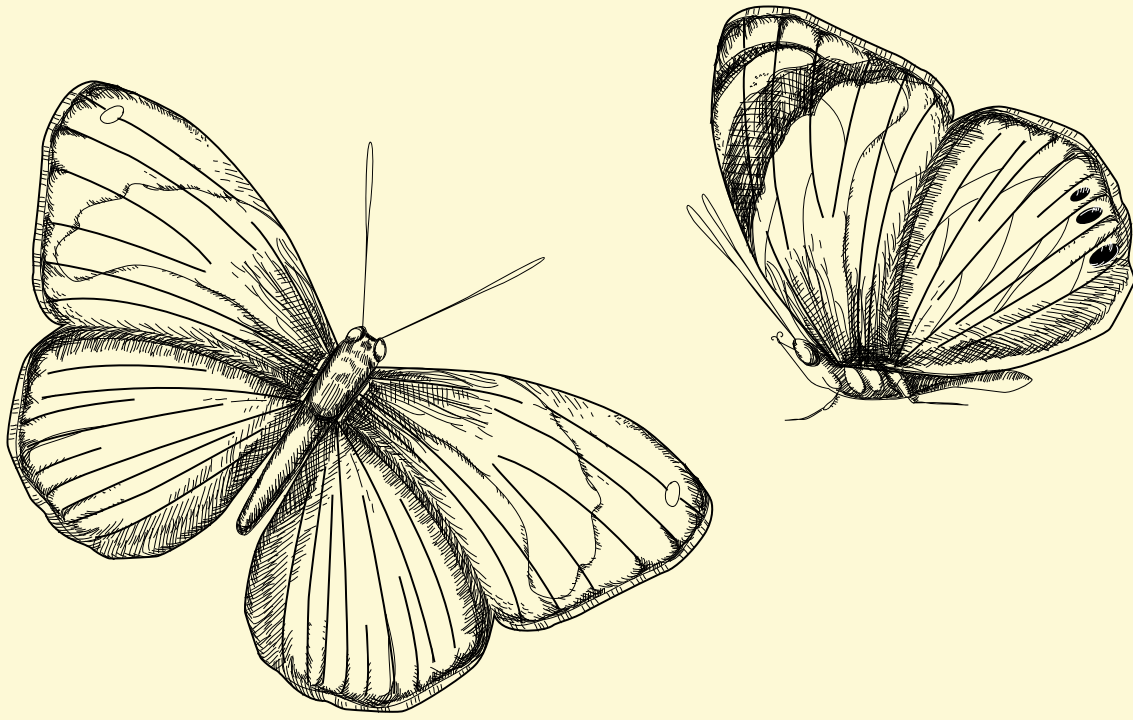
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Patience:

The Spiritual Path to Personal Growth

MICHAEL LEWIN explores the expression of patience in Nature, and how easy it is to learn lessons from the natural world around us.

Nikos Kazantzakis, the author of *Zorba the Greek* and *The Last Temptation of Christ*, once wrote about a chrysalis that he came across nestled in an olive tree. The infant butterfly, within its cocoon, was just starting to break through to greet a new life when Kazantzakis, anxious to shorten the natural process, breathed intensely on it. The butterfly eventually emerged, but because it was prematurely induced, its wings were insufficiently formed. Unable to take flight, the butterfly soon died. This intervention, in nature's slow unfolding of a life, gave Kazantzakis a stirring lesson to reflect upon. If he had let nature take its own course, if he had been more mindful and patient, the small butterfly would have felt the expression of life through its wings, but because Kazantzakis impatiently intervened in a process that he did not fully understand, he had unintentionally denied this butterfly a life.

Impatience seems to enter into all our lives. Sometimes it surfaces in a small act of unconscious intervention, such as Kazantzakis'; at other times it changes form into an explosive, blind rage, where people get physically and emotionally hurt. But in whatever way it finds expression, in whatever way it manifests itself, it's all impatience, it's all about letting our frustration get the better of us.

Responding to situations in a considered, reflective manner brings out the best in us, and reacting to situations in a hasty "let's get it over with" approach invariably brings out the worst in us.

WHY HURRY?

Impatience seems to be a growing modern malaise that we all have to contend with in our lives, either as perpetrators or recipients. I have often felt in myself, and seen in others, the welling up of irritation, annoyance and frustration that can change peoples' personalities in an instant. The feeling of exasperation that keeps us away from being present in the moment, calm and attentive to the unfolding of life as it is, and not as we want it to be.

Responding to situations in a considered, reflective manner brings out the best in us, and reacting to situations in a hasty "let's get it over with" approach invariably brings out the worst in us. Impatience rarely gets us the results we want. It just forces its way forward with an "I know best" attitude that tangles us up in irritation and disappointment.

My impatience is something that I constantly work with in order to cultivate a more relaxed state of mind, a more relaxed state of being, where I'm fully attending, fully accepting of the present, fully engaged with the now. But it isn't easy. Whether I'm waiting for the kettle to boil on the gas ring, or delayed in traffic congestion, if I'm preoccupied with the thought that I'm far too busy to be wasting time, that I should be elsewhere, then my impatience is winning.

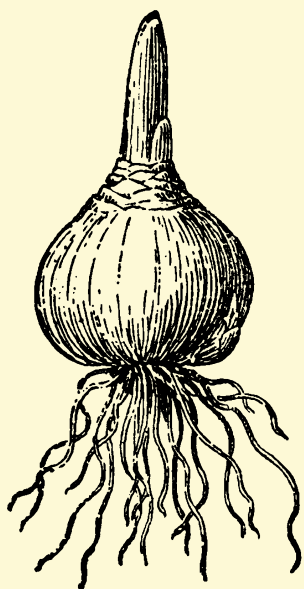
Even when I'm writing, I can sometimes feel the company of impatience gnawing away in the background, pressurizing me to quickly form appropriate sentences and paragraphs, to move the writing along, to reach out for closure. But this rather forceful way of operating only stifles creative flow, which has its own rhythm to effectively deliver what is needed. My only obligation is to listen attentively to this rhythm, place myself within its presence, and patiently work along side it. I have to constantly remind myself that the writing is in charge, not me. All I really have to do is attend, with a concentrated but relaxed mind, and wait.

THE SEASONALITY OF LIFE

Impatience can be a sign of something much deeper, not just a distracting mind that keeps us away from the present, but an anxious and sometimes neurotic one as well. Impatience cannot change anything for the better; it only makes us feel worse. It tries to rush us swiftly into the next moment without due regard for experiencing the present one.

Giving up our sense of urgency and frustration – “I want it now” – is the road to relaxed awareness that can offer us so much in terms of appreciating what life, in all its infinite richness, can offer. On the contrary, quick fix, quick solutions, quick results, with no intervening incubation period for reflection, are increasingly gaining a strong foothold in our culture and closing down our potential for deeper, fuller possibilities.

The Greek origin of the word patience is *pathos* – suffering.



I vividly recall, at the age of nine or ten, my class taking hyacinth bulbs to school on the instruction of our teacher. The bulbs were placed on the tops of narrow-necked glass jars, full of water, and then placed on a shelf. The class was told to wait until shoots started to appear. Days came and went, but there were no signs of any shoots. Boredom quickly set in as we waited and waited. Finally, when we all had started to really lose interest in this process of “looking and not seeing,” we suddenly started seeing.

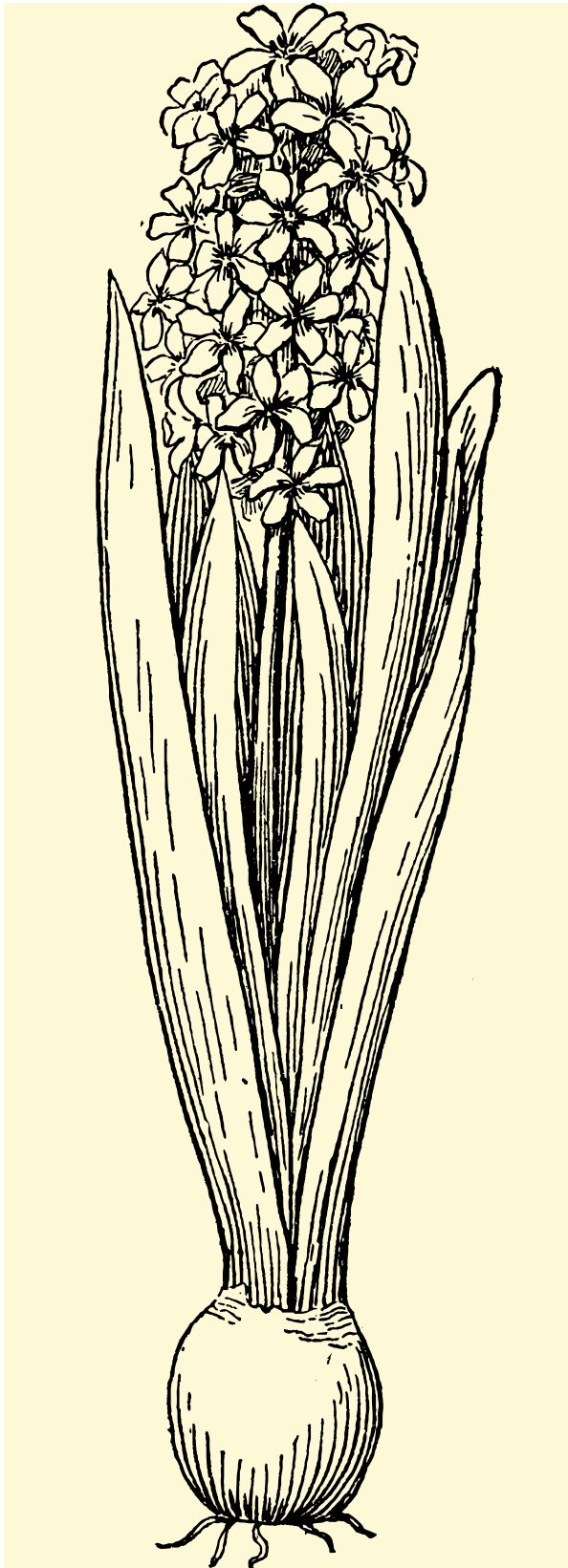
Slowly at first, but very much visible, were small, white tendrils growing out of the base of the bulbs, stretching out in order to reach the water. In time the tendrils grew so long that they curled around the base of the jars in loops. Top growth also came, giving birth to full, scented blossoms that make me heady even today as I continue to grow hyacinth bulbs.

Through my experience at school I learnt a valuable lesson about patience and letting nature unfold in its own time. Much later I realized that the blooms of the hyacinths were in the bulbs all the time, just waiting to find expression.

Spring comes and the grass grows by itself.
—The Zenrin

In our technological, postmodernist world, where we even get agitated over the response time of the fastest computers, we run the risk of missing out on a valuable lesson about waiting. In the natural world there is no rushing. The sun never tells the moon to hurry up to complete its cycle, because it’s busy and needs extra time to do so many things. It just follows its natural path of slow awakening into the new morning according to the set laws of nature.

Are we any different? It is in nature that we must look for guidance, not in technology. Aren’t we all sentient beings, flesh of nature, instead of printed circuit boards?



PATIENCE FOR PEOPLE

People may irritate and aggravate us, but how do we respond to those self-generated feelings? By allowing a sense of bitterness and anger to develop, we are the ones who really suffer. If we could accept with an attitude of equanimity, where we are prepared to offer a tolerant space for others (as we seem to make available for ourselves), we may avoid slipping into an entrapment of corrosive feelings that cause us untold damage, psychologically speaking.

Perhaps we do not have such an all embracing, clear, informed perspective on things as we may think we do. Perhaps we are prone to misinterpreting situations and individuals.

Perhaps we are, at times, too insensitive to other peoples' feelings, too judgmental.

Perhaps we need to relax more around certain issues.

Opening up, and expanding an inner landscape on which we can accommodate the faults of others and our own faults, is important for our spiritual growth. But we do need to recognize where there are serious problems to overcome. Patience, per se, cannot heal them. It just provides the necessary space in which compassion and forgiveness can hopefully surface, so that the healing can take place.

Opening up, and expanding an inner landscape on which we can accommodate the faults of others and our own faults, is important for our spiritual growth. But we do need to recognize where there are serious problems to overcome.

LISTENING

On the road to developing patience for others, as well as ourselves, we automatically begin to awaken a listening within us that can uncover and reveal deeper truths. A listening that pays attention to not only what is said but also what is not said. A listening that absorbs verbal communication as well as non-verbal communication, into a deeper understanding. People then start feeling comfortable and relaxed with us, may be for the first time, because a ground has been prepared for them to be themselves. Too often we keep other individuals at a distance from ourselves, on the periphery of our lives, and consequently we deny ourselves the opportunity to know them better. And without fully engaging with others, without fully listening to them, how can we claim to be fully alive?

*Listening is the oldest and perhaps
the most powerful tool of healing.
It is often through the quality of our listening
and not the wisdom of our words
that we are able to affect the most profound
changes in the people around us.
When we listen we offer sanctuary for
the homeless parts within the other person.
That which has been denied, unloved,
devalued by themselves and others.
That which is hidden.
When you listen generously to people,
they can hear the truth in themselves
often for the first time.
—Rachel Naomi Remen*

NO ACTION

The pace of modern life can push us all over the place, insisting that agendas are prepared, decisions are made, actions are taken, and we may get lost amongst it all. We may get confused and frustrated about our responses.

In these moments, never be afraid to pull back and wait a while, allowing an acceptance to form around the process of letting go. Good, well-understood decisions can never really flow from pressurized feelings, self-imposed or otherwise. It can only flourish when we are relaxed and reflective, drawing on our inner wisdom to arrive at the best judgments.

Pavlovian, knee-jerk responses (which we all tend to make at times) run the risk of working against us, of bypassing our deeper thought processing, and throwing us into anxiety and regret. Waiting does not mean doing nothing. It means reflecting, relaxing and seeing what develops. Perhaps things can work out fine without our interference, without our intervention, if we make the decision not to make a decision!

*Do you have the patience to wait until
the mud settles and the water is clear?*

*Can you remain un-moving until
the right action arises by itself?
—Lao Tzu*

Perhaps we should be patient and leave things alone. Learn from the lessons of nature, of which we are all an integral part, and let everything unfold as it should. Nature has its own time, but it's not the time of ticking clocks and flashing digital readouts.


Perhaps we should be patient and leave things alone. Learn from the lessons of nature, of which we are all an integral part, and let everything unfold as it should. Nature has its own time, but it's not the time of ticking clocks and flashing digital readouts. It's not the time of busy schedules and set agendas. It's the time of seasonality, where everything has its own internal breath of life, which we have no right to influence or change because we haven't the patience to stay present and wait.

Patience is deeply embedded in nature, and we do need to honor this. If Kazantzakis had shown more patience, and not interfered with the natural cycle of life, there might have been 10,000 more butterflies flourishing in this world of ours. So next time that you feel called to respond in a given situation, think deeply about the possible outcomes that might develop, and act mindfully, act patiently, for all our sakes.

Journey long. Journey well.

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A serene beach scene with waves breaking on a sandy shore. The sky is filled with large, white, fluffy clouds, and several birds are seen flying in the upper left portion of the frame. The overall atmosphere is calm and peaceful.

*Our work as teachers is to follow,
to walk that path.*

Saki Santorelli



INNERVIEW

Insight of the



PART-1

The Non-Instrumental Dimension of Mindfulness

SAKI SANTORELLI is interviewed by **AMIR IMANI** as part of a webinar series about mindfulness, love, compassion and the way of the heart.

Q: Today we are very delighted to have my dear friend, mentor, teacher, Dr. Saki Santorelli, with us. Saki was the Executive Director of The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health and Society at the University of Massachusetts, USA, for 17 years. I have been a witness to his deep contribution to bringing mindfulness to the public and the profession, globally.

Saki has been one of the main pulls for me into the mindfulness practice, through his loving presence and brotherly support from afar. He will be speaking to us on love, compassion and the heart in this way.

Thank you Saki, and welcome to this session with us.

Thank you so much, Amir and Samaneh. It's lovely to be with all of you.

Today I would like to begin by offering you the deepest sense of gratitude and appreciation for the work that you are doing in your part of the world, wherever you are. So how about if we begin by, each of us in our own way, setting an intention for what we hope for in this next hour together?

You know there are often surface reasons, then there are deeper reasons, and then there are deeper than that reasons. For example, you might feel at a professional level, which is a good thing. But if you drop down a little further into your heart: What's really brought you to this, to give yourself over to this for an hour of your life, when you could be doing so many other things? And it's that deeper seed that I'm suggesting you attend to.

People come for a whole range of reasons, but then there is some deeper reason for being there as well. For example – we never did a formal study about this – all of the 37

years that I was at the Center for Mindfulness, we saw people with cancer and heart disease and a huge range of medical and psychological issues. And while they came certainly for some relief from the psychological or physical suffering associated with those conditions, the single-most frequently stated goal was peace of mind.

So they knew something deep inside themselves, even in the midst of whatever they were suffering with, physically or psychologically, that was quite different than the symptoms that they were experiencing. So it's that deeper reason that I am asking, or suggesting, that you invoke or intend and attend to as we continue.

Even right in this moment I feel that we are dear, dear companions, that we are joined together by a certain commitment, a certain dedication, and a certain view of human beings: in some very real way, the view that human beings are actually filled with a certain kind of genius. They are capable far more than they might imagine or certainly far more than most cultures would suggest is possible. It's as if there's a treasure that they are, that





they have forgotten. You know what I mean? You know that in yourself how easy it is to forget?

So you could say that in a very real way the true and real work of any of us, as teachers of mindfulness-based programs, is to remember. And that remembering is deeper than the intervention. In fact I don't even like to call MBSR an intervention; we avoided calling it an intervention from the beginning. And we avoided calling it a therapy as well. Rather we said it's an approach or a path. I don't know what the word is in Farsi, but I think in Arabic it is *tareeq*; it's a way.

That doesn't mean all of the competencies that have been described as central to MBSR or MBCT teacher development

are not important. They are important. I'd read the paper by my dear colleagues, Rebecca Crane and Mark Williams, when it came out years ago, about the competencies, and I asked myself, "Are these competencies all an aspect of MBSR?" My answer was yes. Then I asked myself another question, "Will these competencies be enough to walk into the classroom and teach?" My answer was no.

That doesn't make them unimportant. It's just that the central competency in my view, in my experience, is the cultivation of the human heart. And that has everything to do with the quality of embodiment. And every one of us will embody it in a different way. And it expresses itself probably universally as a kind of sympathetic nature, a kind of tenderness and softness – not passivity, but softness – and a kind of mercy.

So maybe for a moment you can just be attentive to that part of yourself. It's right here. You might say it actually shows up as a kind of assertive kindness, warmth and friendliness towards oneself and one's experience. In a very real way we're asking the people that we work with to come to our courses or classes, to cultivate the same quality towards themselves and their experience.

In that, of course, on one hand we're talking about the quality of tenderness or softness of the heart. On the other hand, you probably know well that that the heart is fierce, it can take everything, and it can keep giving. I'm not talking about something romantic, but it takes just that kind of an organ, if you will, of sensitivity and sensibility, to actually help people meet and in some way be relieved from their own suffering and their own pain.

So if we look a little more deeply into mindfulness itself, there are two dimensions to it. On one hand there is what's often called the instrumental dimension. It has

to do with the development of skills and competencies, in a sense of effort and improvement over time. Maybe in our modern vernacular we'd say that has to do with acquisitional learning. For example, if I have to learn Farsi, I'd learn from the very beginning. I'd have to go very slowly, and I would probably feel like a failure or that I'm not getting it. If I learn to play the piano, I go slowly. I learn the notes then the scales before I can play any music.

It's the same with learning to practice mindfulness. It is a practice in the sense that it has its own progression, and over time people often report changes. And if you're a mindfulness practitioner, you discover that there are changes that take place over time. And it's the same with the various competencies that have been identified in the development of MBSR teachers: over time people get more skillful at those competencies.



Then there is this other dimension of mindfulness practice that is non-instrumental. There's nothing to get. There's nothing to improve upon. There's nothing to gain. It's already complete. And you can see that instrumental is nested in the non-instrumental. For example, how could you love another human being if love wasn't already a part of you? How could you appreciate beauty if beauty wasn't innate? How could you appreciate the light of the sun if light wasn't an innate part of you as a human being? This is what Rumi was talking about, several hundred years ago, when he talked about two kinds of intelligence: one acquired, one already complete.

So what's it like to walk into the classroom knowing that you're sitting in front of 10 or 15 geniuses, who are already complete but they don't know it? You can't tell them that, you can't give them a lecture about that. You can't tell them, "Just believe me, because I know." Our job is to embody that in some way, and then help them over time, simply assist them to become familiar with the depth that's already a part of them.

That's why I have written – and I continue to know more than simply believe – that the central risk in MBSR or MBCT is that we'll become blinded to the non-instrumental and the instrumental will take over.

The central competency in my view, in my experience, is the cultivation of the human heart.

INNERVIEW

So maybe we'll take a moment and just sit with this question: How is it inside me to hear this, to feel it in some way? Not because I've said it, but how is it for you?

This really means that our job is to be students. To listen. To serve. To see if we can meet every situation, or many situations, in a way that they provide us with a certain kind of learning, a certain kind of insight and understanding. We become kind of intoxicated, so we're a little drunk. You could say in some real way that mindfulness, in its most universal form, expresses itself in a deep and powerful way in remembering that we're actually sober. That our senses serve us. That our mind serves us.

And then, more centrally, the cultivation and the development of the human heart happen. It becomes the central characteristic of mindfulness, because it has everything to do with a slow disillusioning of this thing we call 'myself'. So we move from that position of inhabiting and strengthening the self to recognizing that all human beings suffer, all human beings have the capacity to be free and liberated.

So thank you for letting your beauty shine out into the world. We know that there's a lot of uncertainty in the world, a lot of darkness, and a lot of fear. And there's no value in pretending otherwise. But in the middle of all of that, there is the capacity for us to shine forth, to feel this indelible bond between us, to touch deeply and know the deep, deep resources that we have within, and that the world has changed through very small numbers of people doing very radical things. By radical I mean fundamental. This is fundamental: the reality of what mindfulness is in the life of human beings is fundamental.

*There is the capacity for us
to shine forth, to feel this
indelible bond between us,
to touch deeply and know
the deep, deep resources
that we have within.*





I would like to end with a few lines of Hafiz, as he's dear to me. The soil of Iran has given the world a universal voice through this human being. At the end of one of his poems he says the following lines:

*Be strong, Hafiz!
Work here inside time,
where we fail, catch hold
again, and climb.*

So that's what we're all doing here: working inside time, failing, catching hold again, and climbing. And I thank you for climbing. We'll reach out and help one another.

Q: Thank you, Saki, for showing us how to climb, just by sitting still and feeling.

To be continued....



it changes
everything



*We are part of the
natural scheme of things.*

Pema Chodron



The Steady Work of Evolution

ROSALIND PEARMAIN has been a Heartfulness practitioner for over 40 years. Here she shares some tips from her own experience that can help deepen meditation and take us further on the journey of evolution.

A true spiritual practice does not impose dogma or an authoritarian approach to spiritual exploration. This places the responsibility on each one of us to sustain a constant interest and motivation in our experience and to try to increase our capacity to perceive subtle changes in our evolution. Our consciousness is able to stay attuned to inner sources of nourishment during Heartfulness Meditation because of the Transmission we receive.

The focus is to become one with the Source, with the beloved within, with love itself, and to disentangle ourselves from the complexities of wishes, desires and deep tendencies, which create resistance and reaction to change and to our harmonious relations with others around us. Everything can teach us more, help us learn more, change ourselves and enable us to give more.

We can change our prejudices, reactive patterns and negative emotions. A wonderful tool is a diary to record everything that we observe in meditation and daily life, with a curious, open and honest approach, like a mirror for ourselves over time. The Heartfulness approach completely embraces living in the midst of life, accepting partners and families, work and community, facing all manner of challenges.

Here are some practical ideas that may support a deepening of your experience in meditation. You can also discover your own to share. The most important key is just to take interest:

Pray for help if you feel stuck or unmotivated.

If it is a difficult day, bring this also into your meditation.

Find some inspiration from messages, books or talks, perhaps in just one sentence. Read and absorb and then bring this quality into your meditation and see what happens.

Cultivate an inner loving and truthful witness of yourself within.

Take time to be grateful and appreciative of what you have received or learned.

Take time at the end of the meditation to note how are you feeling, and try to keep it as a whole sense to which you can refer during the day.

Experiment with keeping attention in your heart during the day and observing thoughts vigilantly.

Approach each meditation as an entirely new experience rather than one that you expect to be in a certain familiar pattern.

Write down in your diary whatever you discover as a pioneer researcher.

Include in your prayer at night a request for a deeper meditation in the morning.

Take a good amount of time to find and feel your heart. Don't rush. Then, after a while, make the suggestion that the Light is already present in your heart, and slowly focus awareness on this with openness, waiting to receive gladly whatever comes.

Try recalling the profound core of longing in your soul that has brought you to this moment and opportunity.

Try consciously putting your heart completely wholeheartedly into the meditation.

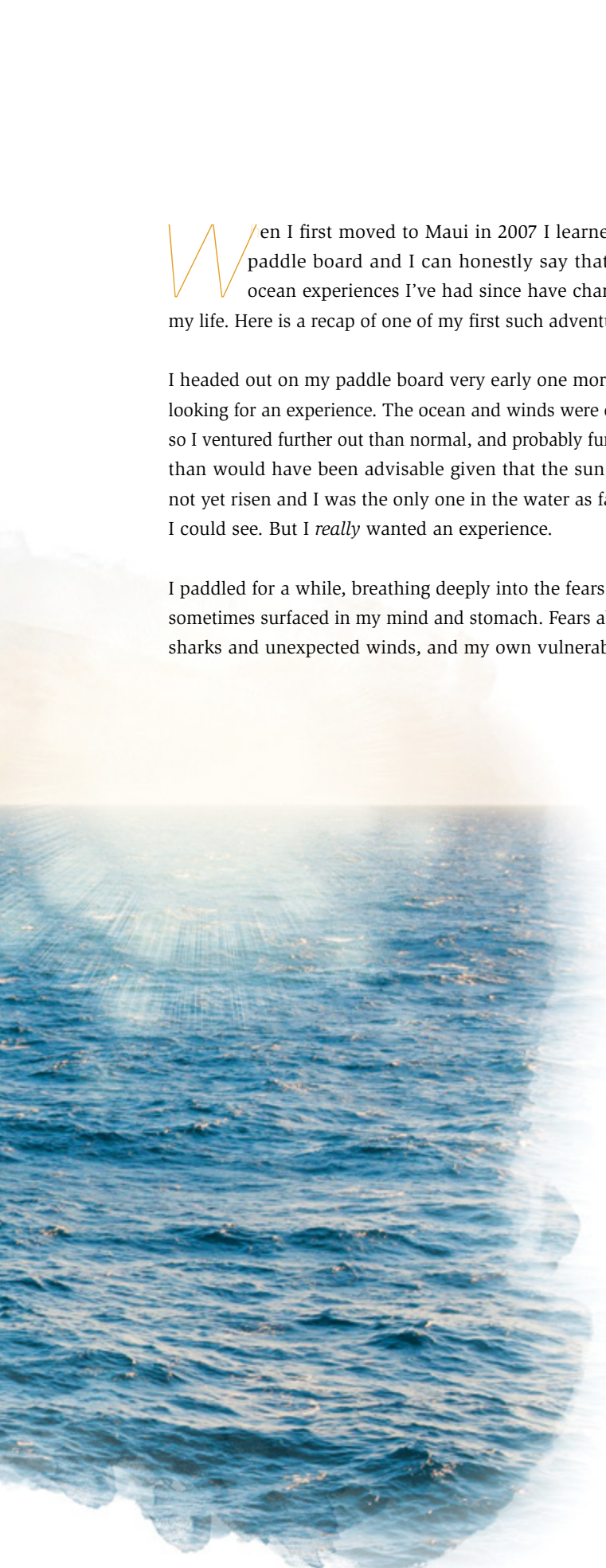
Try anticipating your opportunity to meet the Divine within with joy and eagerness and a sense of discovery and wonder.



Something Sacred, Something Free

PETER KATER experiences the essence of true freedom while on his paddle board in the early morning off the island of Maui. His first of many encounters with a humpback whale, an ambassador of the sacred and free, is for him a wonderful opportunity to explore the unknown.





When I first moved to Maui in 2007 I learned to paddle board and I can honestly say that the ocean experiences I've had since have changed my life. Here is a recap of one of my first such adventures.

I headed out on my paddle board very early one morning looking for an experience. The ocean and winds were calm so I ventured further out than normal, and probably further than would have been advisable given that the sun had not yet risen and I was the only one in the water as far as I could see. But I *really* wanted an experience.

I paddled for a while, breathing deeply into the fears that sometimes surfaced in my mind and stomach. Fears about sharks and unexpected winds, and my own vulnerability

and mortality. As soon as one set of inner disturbances or ripples of fear dispersed, another surfaced. But I kept breathing into them and relaxing my body and mind. Setting my sights on the horizon as I paddled forward, I kept breathing, waiting patiently for the layers of thoughts to disintegrate so that I could simply be present. Finally the thought surfaced: "But I'm so far from shore!" Then I looked down at my feet standing on top of my beautiful red striped board and I thought: "But I am here, standing on my board!"

Life isn't on the shore. Life isn't elsewhere. It's here. Like it or not, wherever we go, there we are. And I was here, simply standing on my board, holding my paddle, somewhere out on the ocean with Maui's shore far in the distance. That is all. And that was the last of my distracting thoughts for that morning.

I asked myself, "What was I searching for out here in the ocean, alone, so early in the morning? And the thought occurred to me, "Something sacred, something free."

I wanted to touch on something that was intrinsically just it-Self. Something completely free and wild. Something that was not defined by its productivity or assigned some relative value or worth based on what it did or didn't do. Something that didn't need to practice being.

*Something completely
free and wild.
Something that was not defined
by its productivity or assigned
some relative value or worth
based on what it did or didn't do.
Something that didn't need to
practice being.*

FOCUS



I wanted an experience that could remind and reconnect me with the essential part of myself that existed before all the concepts, ideals and values were layered upon me. I wanted to experience the part of me that transcended even the loftiest and most well-meaning of spiritual aspirations. Spiritual ideals, values and concepts are merely vehicles to guide and transport us to a place where they are no longer useful or relevant. They are only stepping stones, not a destination. I wanted to experience something natural. I wanted to feel true freedom. I wanted to experience my essence.

We hug our concepts and beliefs close to ourselves, like a favorite soft blanket protecting us from the cold. We hug it so close that we don't realize we've not only blanketed our eyes but our hearts as well. Even the most comforting, well-meaning thoughts and intentions can blind and separate us from what is present and right in front of us. It's like forgetting it is spring and still carrying the blanket and snow boots needed in winter. Being here was very different than anywhere I'd ever been so far in my life. And being here required a lot more breathing and letting go.

True inspiration comes from venturing into the unknown, a new territory. It comes from letting go, into a new awareness.

A new breath. You have to be willing to let go of what you know, of what is familiar, to relinquish control and experience something new with open eyes and open heart.

I'd started paddling out on my board, hugging my identity, concepts, fears and aspirations close to me. One by one I dropped them into the ocean, and they submerged. I became more and more vulnerable and present as I disarmed myself of my illusion of separateness and identity.

Finally, as I stood alone on my board a mile or more offshore, watching the sunrise shimmering brightly over the crater peak of Maui, I heard it. A huge, wet exhale. The sound of water and air spraying out with one giant breath into the atmosphere. Compared to the quiet lapping of water on my board, this new sound was like a freight train blowing its whistle into the dawn. As I heard it again I turned to look, and I saw it! It's dark long rolling back, surfacing up along the water and then many yards later, rolling back into the ocean. It rolled and rolled, submerging like a giant sea serpent from some mythological fairytale. It gracefully sliced through the water until it completely submerged with a playful slap of its tail fin. This beautiful humpback whale, less than 30 feet away, was now heading directly towards me.

This is what I was looking for: first an encounter with myself, and then with a living, breathing ambassador of something sacred and free. The whale just is. A giant symbol of the unknown, from a world I could only peer into for a few seconds at a time. Yet, at that moment, we shared the same water and breathed the same air.

I saw it's huge amazing body slice through the water over and over again. In between paddling hard to keep up with it, I also sat patiently, quietly, waiting for it to resurface again for the air that we both shared. In some ways the waiting and listening was my favorite part.

The air was thick with mystery and anticipation. I submerged my head into the water to listen to its whale song and couldn't believe how loud and clear it was. The whale surfaced and submerged a few more times before heading further out to sea. I had gone as far out as my mind could tolerate and slowly paddled back to shore.

That was one of my very first experiences with the humpback whales that migrate from Alaska to Maui from December to April every year, to mate and have offspring. Since then I've had dozens and dozens of amazing experiences with them. Their ancient intelligence is palpable, as is the

beautiful aloha energy of Maui. I am grateful to live in a place where their presence is so strong and frequent. It has changed my life.

Excerpts from the author's blog <https://peterkater.com/something-sacred-something-free/>. Reprinted with permission.





Meaning and the Sacred

LLEWELLYN VAUGHAN-LEE & HILARY HART celebrate the sacredness and beauty of all life, challenging us to reconnect with that source of meaning and appreciation.

*You've traveled up ten thousand steps in search of the Dharma.
 So many long days in the archives, copying, copying.
 The gravity of the Tang and the profundity of the Sung make
 heavy baggage.
 Here! I've picked you a bunch of wildflowers.
 Their meaning is the same but they're much easier to carry.*

—Hsu Yun (Empty Cloud)

Waking early, hearing an owl call from the trees, I feel part of something stretching out all around me, a deep vein of life's meaning running through all that exists. How could I live without this heartbeat, this feeling of connection? Life speaks to me in so many ways: from a simple human exchange at the post office counter or at the bakery – a smile, a hello – to the evening clouds forming and reforming, pink against the setting sun. This is real meaning woven into my days – life's story telling itself anew every day. It is the sacred alive in every moment.

We are surrounded by the sacred; it is in the core of our being and in the Earth's. It is the essential nature of everything that is. The "sacred" is not something primarily religious, or even spiritual. It is not a quality we need to learn or to develop. It belongs to the primary nature of all that is. When our ancestors knew that everything they could see was sacred, this was not something taught but instinctively known. It was as natural as sunlight, as necessary as breathing, a fundamental recognition of the wonder, beauty, and divine nature of the world. From this sense of the sacred real

meaning is born, the meaning that makes our hearts sing with the deepest purpose of being alive.

Tragically, our present culture appears to have lost sight of this vital quality. Instead we live on the surface, separated from the real substance that has always given everyday life a depth of meaning. We are told to find meaning in our individual life, but all around us life itself tells us a different story – that we are part of the Earth, that we belong to the community of all of life in its myriad forms. Only through recognizing and living this

sacred unity can we find and experience the real meaning that life is offering to us. And so we have to find ways to remember, to reconnect, to feel again what is all around us.

Meaning is what calls from the depths of the soul. It is the song that sings us into life. Whether we have a meaningful life depends upon whether we can hear this song, this primal music of the sacred. Sadly, today so much of life is covered in distractions, in the addictions of consumerism. Just as the infinite majesty of the stars has become hidden by the lights from our cities, the soul's music is being drowned out amidst life's constant clamor. Wonder and mystery have become less and less accessible. As a culture we seem to have lost the thread that connects the inner world, from which meaning is born, to the outer world, where we spend our days. The stories of the soul are no longer told. Instead, our dreams have become the desires of materialism. Even spirituality is often sold in the marketplace, another drug that promises to placate us, to cover the growing anxiety that something essential is missing.

To find meaning we have to reclaim our sense of the sacred, something our culture appears to have overlooked or forgotten. The sacred is an essential quality of life. It connects us to our own soul and the Divine that is the source of all that exists.

The sacred can be found in any form: a small stone or a mountain, the first cry of a newborn child and the last gasp of a dying person. It can be present in a loaf of bread, on a table, waiting for a meal, and in the words that bless the meal. The remembrance of the sacred is like a central note within life. Without this remembrance something fundamental to our existence is missing. Our daily life lacks a basic nourishment, a depth of meaning.

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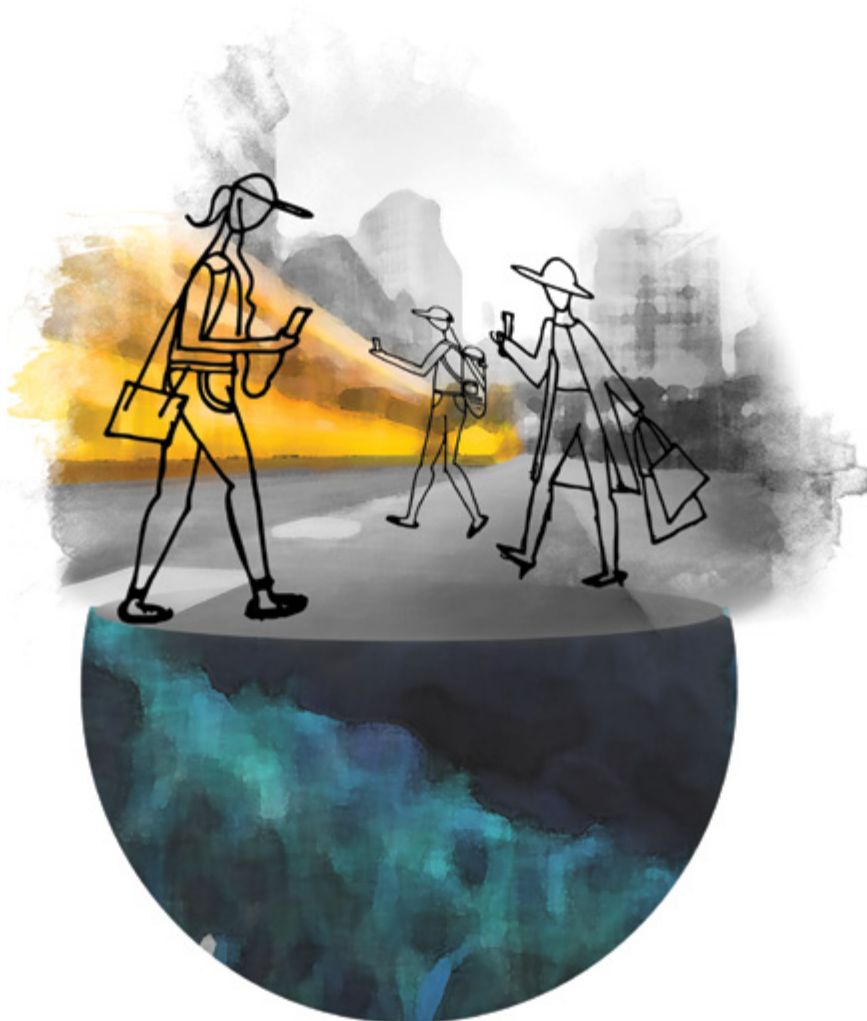
When we feel this music, when we sense this song, we are living our natural connection with the Earth and all of life. Meaning is not something that belongs to us. Rather, our life becomes "meaningful" when we live this connection, when we feel it under our feet as we walk down the street, in the scent of a flower, in rain falling. I am very fortunate in that I live in nature. Early each morning as I walk, sensing the day awakening, I feel this simple connection: how the Earth breathes together with me, how It speaks the language of the soul and of life's mystery. Here meaning is as simple as apple blossoms breaking open; as a young hawk, its feathers still downy; as the fog lifting across the water.

The chapters and practices in this small book are simple ways to reconnect so that we can once again feel the music, the song of our living connection with the Earth. They encourage us to slow down, to listen, to sense, to feel, and to be attentive. They draw our awareness from fantasies and desires to what is, where meaning waits. There are of course many other ways we can reawaken to the sacred in everyday life, feel the meaning that is present in everything, like blood flowing through us and through the Earth. As Rumi says, “there are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground.” It is this sacred ground that is calling to us, that needs our living presence, our attentiveness.

We are all part of one living being we call the Earth, who is magical beyond our understanding. She gives us life and Her wonder nourishes us. In Her being the worlds come together. Her seeds give us both bread and stories. For centuries the stories of seeds were central to humanity, myths told again and again—stories of rebirth, life re-creating itself in the darkness. Now we have almost forgotten these stories. Stranded in our separate, isolated selves, we do not even know how hungry we have become. We have to find a way to reconnect with what is essential—to learn once again how to walk in a sacred manner, how to breathe with awareness, cook with love and prayers, how to give attention to simple things.

We need to learn to welcome life in all its colors and fragrances, to say “yes” again and again. Then life will give us back the connection to our own soul, and once more we will hear its song. Then meaning will return as a gift and a promise. And something within our own heart will open and we will know that we have come Home.

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be inspired

*The whole darkness of existence is
impotent before a small candle.*

OSHO





YOGIC PSYCHOLOGY

PART 8

VIKSHEPAS: SAMSAYA, PRAMADA AND ALASYA

In this series of articles, **DAAJI** explains the fundamental principles of yogic psychology, with its foundation in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. He explains Patanjali's descriptions of the human mind and the various mental imbalances, and furthermore gives us solutions to regain mental well-being through yogic practices. In this article he continues to explore the *vikshepas*, the obstacles to mental well-being that arise because of the accumulation of samskaras in our system. These 9 *vikshepas* describe so many of the maladies of modern humanity. Here Daaji focuses on *samsaya*, *pramada* and *alasya*.

VRITTIS

Instinctive
thought patterns
or tendencies

Pramana – means of right or valid knowledge

Viparyaya – false or wrong knowledge

Vikalpa – fantasy, imagination

Nidra – sleep

Smriti – memory

KLESHAS

Colorings or
impurities in the
thought patterns

Avidya – ignorance, veiling

Asmita – mine-ness, egotism

Raga – attachment, addiction

Dvesha – aversion, repulsion

Abhinivesha – clinging to life, fear of death

VIKSHEPAS

Obstacles and
distractions

Vyadhi – disease, illness

Styana – mental laziness, dullness

Samsaya – doubt, indecision

Pramada – carelessness, negligence, haste

Alasya – laziness, sloth

Avirati – lack of abstaining,

absence of non-attachment

Bhranti-Darshana – false perception

Alabdha-Bhumikatva – failing to attain
stages on the journey

Anavasthitattva – inability to maintain
the stage, instability

VIGHNAS

Disturbances
resulting from
the obstacles

Duhkha – pain, mental and physical

Daurmanasya – despair, depression

Angam-Ejayatva – trembling of the body,
nervousness

Svasa – inhalation (irregular)

Prasvasa – exhalation (irregular)

VIKSHEPAS

So far, we have seen how complexities and impurities accumulate in the field of consciousness and contribute to mental imbalance. As these layers accumulate, and we move progressively towards a state of entropy, it leads to all sorts of ailments. Yoga calls these ailments or obstacles the *vikshepas*. Patanjali described 9 of them in his Yoga Sutras a few thousand years ago, and in today's world we can add a couple more to the list. In this article we will focus on three of them: *samsaya*, *pramada* and *alasya*.

When consciousness is attuned to the soul, all the entanglements, sufferings and afflictions gradually fade away. This inner attunement happens in Heartfulness when we meditate on the source of light in the heart, and when we connect with the divinity within. Without that inner connection and stability, we are like leaves tossing about in the wind, and the afflictions that are there in our system become more complex. Eventually they manifest as the *vikshepas*, the obstacles to further progress. Patanjali described these obstacles as follows:

*1.30: Vyadhi styana sanshaya
pramada-alasya-avirati bhrantidarsana-alabdha-bhumikatva-
anavasthitatvani citta-vikshepah te antarayah*

Vyadhi - Disease

Styana - Languor, mental dullness, apathy

Samsaya - Doubt

Pramada - Carelessness, haste, indifference

Alasya - Laziness, sloth

Avirati - Absence of non-attachment, sensuality

Bhrantidarsana - False perception, blindness

Alabdha-bhumikatva - Not attaining the destination or stage,
lack of determination

Anavasthitatvani - Instability, not retaining the condition

In the modern context, we can add:

Fear of missing out (FOMO), and

Digital distraction

These are the obstacles on the path that distract the mind.



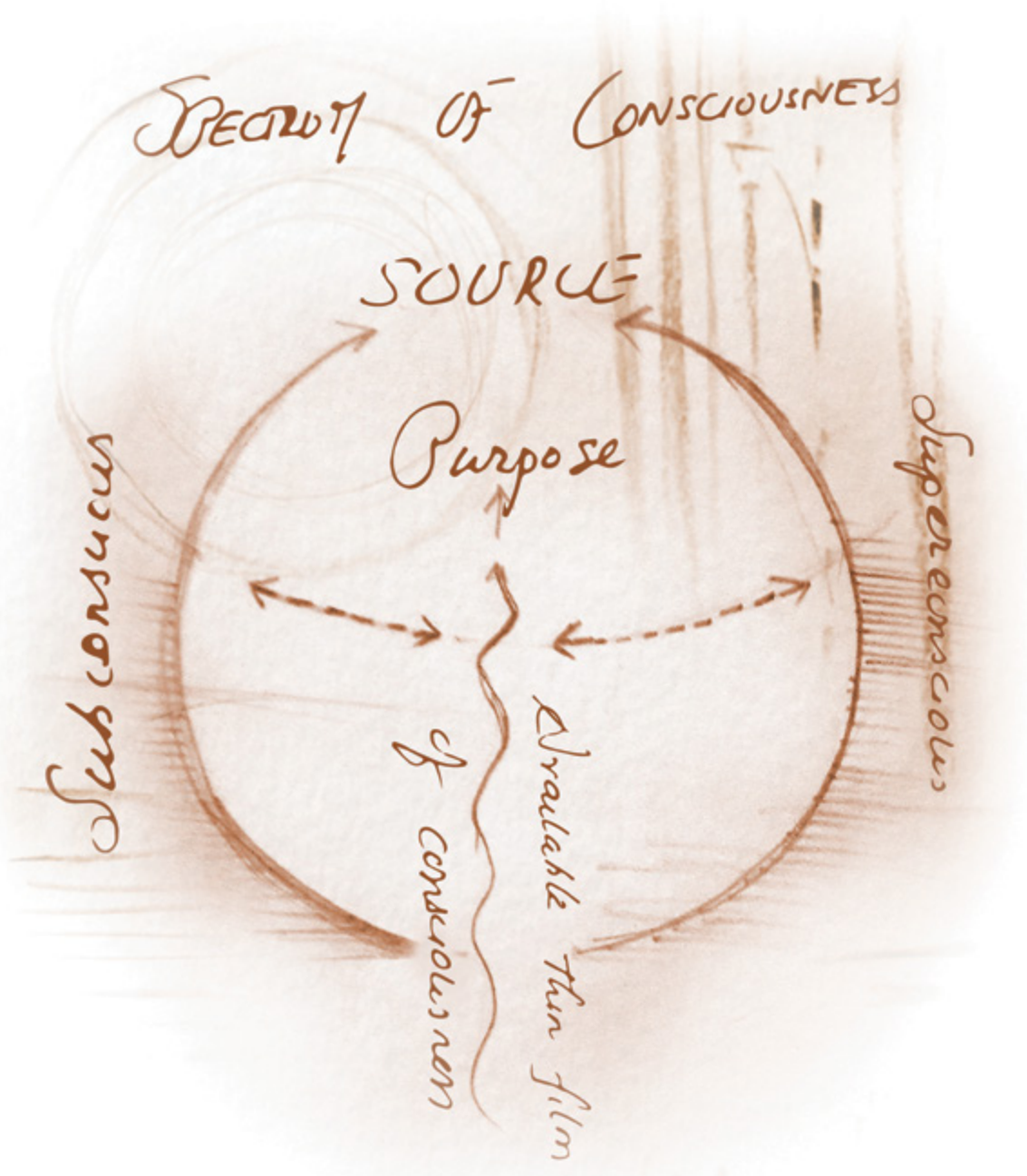
SAMSAYA

The third *vikshepa* is *samsaya*, which is usually translated as ‘doubt’, but there are many words for ‘doubt’ in Sanskrit, *shanka* being the most common. A more appropriate translation of *samsaya* is ‘dilemma’ or ‘indecisiveness’. It is the state where we are not clear in our own judgment and decision-making ability. Why? Because our field of consciousness, the heart-mind field, is not calm. We are unable to listen to the heart and trust its wisdom.

We all know that feeling of sitting on the fence, unable to make a decision; the confusion, the weighing up of pros and cons. We still use the same the faculties of the mind – thinking (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*) and ego (*ahankar*) – that function within the canvas of consciousness (*chit*), but we use them at a superficial level because we cannot go deeper. We skim the surface because there is too much clutter in the heart, and the mind is turbulent, like an

ocean during a storm. This is the common state of consciousness of most of us, and because of this many issues become dilemmas. The mind is not fine-tuned enough to perceive to any depth, and so we are left with confusion and so many challenges. “What to do?” is the question we often ask. In this condition, our available consciousness is only a very thin film. Most of the spectrum of consciousness is unavailable to us, in the realms of the subconscious and the superconscious. We do not have the skills to access it, and so the mind remains very limited.

We can only evaluate and make decisions from a superficial perspective, within that thin film of data, because we cannot see from a higher and deeper perspective. Simultaneously, the mind is pulled by charged emotions, likes, dislikes and prejudices, so there is little clarity – only turmoil and drama.



Compare this with pure consciousness, uncluttered, light and infinitely expansive. Diving deeper into the heart, especially in meditation, we access a much greater spectrum of consciousness. Other dimensions open up that we are unable to use at the surface level. For a start, as well using rational deductive thinking, we also use the faculty of feeling to make decisions, where the heart gives signals of a more direct and subtle nature.

The heart is our barometer for how we feel about everything, including the choices we make in life. When we are happy with those choices, the heart remains a silent witness and there is natural contentment. When the heart is not convinced, we feel restless. The heart sets our direction like a rudder, and tells us when we need to change direction.

Listening to the heart's signals is the first step. The second step is to make use of those signals, to ask the heart questions in such a way that we get clear indications. The more we listen, the clearer the messages become. As in neuroscience, the more we use the pathways, the stronger they become. The third step is then to have the courage to follow the heart's guidance – the guidance from our own divine source. In essence, we are allowing the soul to guide our lives.

The heart is not static. Our inner environment is constantly changing, as our consciousness expands and contracts, and is purified or filled with complexities and impurities, as the case may be. Consciousness is fluid like the ocean, so the reference point of the heart is dynamic. And everything about us is tied to this state of consciousness: the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the habits that slowly adjust to our changing level of evolution, and the environment we are in. We are always in a state of continuous improvement, a work in progress.

And when we don't listen to the heart, when we go against our conscience because we follow our desires and mental justifications, what happens? We keep on recycling those experiences and habits, and creating more and more complexities and impurities, leading to more and more entangled *vikshepas*.

The heart is our barometer for how we feel about everything, including the choices we make in life. When we are happy with those choices, the heart remains a silent witness and there is natural contentment.

Which way we go is actually a choice, especially when we have the simple Heartfulness Cleaning practice to remove complexities and impurities on a daily basis.

There is also a complementary method to resolve dilemmas and confusions: After offering the Heartfulness Prayer at night before sleep, offer your problems, challenges and dilemmas also. There is no need to seek an answer right away. Often, by the time you wake up, the answer is there, although the answer may come in a form other than words.

Samsaya arises particularly in the choosing of a spiritual path and a teacher who will support us on that path, as blind faith is not the way to choose – some level of testing is needed to establish that it is the right path and the right Guide. There is an initial need to question and use a scientific approach in order to experience and decide. Then, once we are satisfied, trust comes, which eventually transforms into acceptance and gratitude, love and surrender. If *samsaya* is still present as an obstacle at a later stage, something is wrong. Maybe it is our inability to surrender and accept, or may be it is the Guide who is not up to the mark. So vigilance is required, and a lot of discernment and discrimination, known as *Viveka*, the first step in the path of Yoga. *Viveka* is the antidote to indecision and dilemma, and it is directly proportional to the purity of the heart, of consciousness. *Viveka* allows us to listen to the 'Voice Real' within.

PRAMADA

The fourth *vikshepa* is *pramada*, which translates as carelessness, haste and indifference. When do we become careless? When do we do things hastily, without caring for the details? When we do not take interest. It is the opposite of being careful, the opposite of excelling in whatever we do, from cleaning the bathroom to becoming one with the Ultimate. It is the opposite of putting our hearts into everything we do. When we act without enthusiasm, we have not 'put God into' whatever we do. In other words, we are disconnected from the source.

Once again, this happens because of the layers of complexities and impurities that fill our consciousness. We cannot penetrate to any depth, we are operating within the thinnest film of consciousness at the surface level. We are not able to feel connected. The simple antidote is a three-fold process: meditate in order to dive deep, purify the field of consciousness, and connect with the source. These are the 3 practices of Heartfulness – Meditation, Cleaning and Prayer.

Through Heartfulness Meditation we become so aware, so sensitive to everything within, as well as in the outer world. Our observational skills become fine-tuned, especially with the aid of Transmission or pranahuti. In stillness, it is so much easier to be careful. We are infused with God through Transmission. We first discover God within ourselves, and also then in everything and everyone. In this state, how can we be indifferent to those around us? How can we remain careless? Life becomes more alive and vital, and *pramada* is negated.

There is also a Heartfulness Suggestion that can help with this:

Think that everything surrounding you – the air particles, people, the birds, the trees – everything around you is deeply absorbed in Godly remembrance. All are in osmosis with the Source, and developing increasing peace and moderation.

Start by feeling absorbed in Godly remembrance yourself first, so its echo is felt outside. A time will come when you notice that you don't have thoughts at all. Little by little the mind becomes fine-tuned. This simple suggestion keeps your mind focused. As Yoda says in Star Wars:

"Luminous beings are we, not this crude matter. You must feel the Force around you. Here, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere. Yes, even between this land and that ship."

And there is another benefit: wherever you go – to the theatre, a shopping mall or college – the feeling in the atmosphere around you will be affected.

Try it as an experiment when you have some free time. Slowly the absorbency will expand around you. If you also think of a friend who is living somewhere else, you will send these vibrations there also. Allow this feeling to expand. There are no limits to this expansion. Even the Universe will be too small when you allow a consciousness packed with love to expand.

Today there is so much talk of compassion fatigue, burnout and indifference, and we often blame the media for showing us so much negativity and horror in the news, making us numb to empathy, compassion and love. We blame stress and lack of sleep for hyping up our nervous systems so that we are irritable and unable to pause long enough to care about others. We blame our workplace environment for always rushing us and causing us to be hasty in everything we do, including decision-making. These are all examples of *pramada* – carelessness and indifference, rushing around, unable to pause and dive deep into the heart in order to feel and make wise decisions.



BE INSPIRED

Is this the life we want to lead? We all know Aesop's fable of The Hare and the Tortoise, and there are numerous proverbs in all languages about haste. Here are just a few:

Haste is the enemy of perfection.

Portuguese proverb

Patience is the key of joy; but haste is the key to sorrow.

Arabic Proverb

Haste and hurry can only bear children with many regrets.

African Proverb

People fated to be happy need not haste.

Chinese Proverb

Of hasty counsel take good heed, for haste is very rarely speed.

Dutch Proverb

Mulla Nasruddin also demonstrated this quality with his peculiar brand of humor. One day, while seated on his donkey, rushing through the marketplace, followers and friends tried to stop him to chat every few meters. He kept going faster and faster, replying, "I can't stop to talk now. Can't you see I am busy? I'm looking for my donkey!"

This captures the human predicament. It is critical to slow down, have time for those around us, enjoy the beauties of life, and become conscious of the search and ourselves as seekers. So pause, remain poised, especially when everyone else is rushing, go into your heart, feel your Center and recalibrate yourself. Try to approach every task at hand with poise and grace.

Pramada results in sloppy thinking, sloppy action and sloppy work, so even in the worldly sense we will not achieve excellence in any field while this *vikshepa* is still creating obstacles. That is one of the many reasons why successful people meditate. Excellence depends on removing this obstacle of *pramada*. And in the spiritual field it is even more critical to transcend it. Spiritual growth is all about refinement – removing negative tendencies and cultivating noble qualities. It is all about becoming more God-like every day. It is all about becoming the best we can possibly be, and then unbecoming – removing every conceivable obstacle to oneness with the Ultimate. There is no room for *pramada* or any of the *vikshepas* in that equation.



ALASYA

The fifth *vikshepa* is *alasya*, which translates as laziness and sloth. There are different types of laziness. One type is the laziness that arises because the soul becomes more prominent, as inactivity is the quality of the soul whereas activity is the quality of the body. But that is not the type of laziness Patanjali is referring to here. He is talking about the laziness that comes from giving up.

Laziness results when the other *vikshepas* become crippling. For example, when we are indifferent, careless and hasty, it is symptomatic of the fact that we have lost our faith and confidence in life. We no longer see the point of being enthusiastic and putting our hearts into whatever we are doing. We are living without really being alive. This can also happen in a spiritual practice when we go through the motions of meditating or praying without real interest. It becomes mechanical rather than heart-felt. It takes us nowhere.

If you observe small children, you will notice that they are full of wonder. Life is a playground, filled with energy for life. They are living in the flow of the *prana* of the universe, the bliss of the inner being, and they are not jaded or blocked by frustration, negativity, disappointment, failure and hopelessness. Everything they see is wonderful. They

are not competing with anyone else, they are not bogged down by complexities and impurities, and they are still in touch with their feelings and their truth.

As the Heart Region of a human being fills with complexities and impurities in the form of *samskaras*, all the *vikshepas* come into play, leading to a negative spiral which eventually results in lack of motivation, incapacitation and inactivity. Just like a car that has broken down because it has never been serviced, our whole system eventually breaks down. This is *alasya*.

Imagine when a person in this state has their first taste of Heartfulness Meditation, and feels the 'life-in-life' of yogic Transmission being infused into their system. There is an immediate effect. It is as if a lifeline has been thrown to them, a transfusion of motivation, to bring them back from sloth towards a zest for living, and the courage and confidence to move forward. Hope reappears. Renewed interest creates the will to be disciplined and have a purpose. That is something life-changing.

In the next article, we will take up the *vikshepas* of *avirati*, *bhrantidarsana* and *alabdha-bhumikatva*.

TASTE OF LIFE

*It is through symbols
that man consciously
or unconsciously
lives, works
and has his being.*

Thomas Carlyle





Symbols of Life

An Art Essay by JONAS JÖDICKE

Art has always been a crucial part of who I am. It's as though art chose me, not the other way round. Pablo Picasso once said, "Painting is stronger than me, it makes me do its bidding."

I can only attest to that. The urge to let my inner feelings and thoughts become reality has always been very strong, especially growing up in a creative family with six siblings, two of which are also full-time artists.

When I turned 14, I stumbled upon a video on YouTube of someone painting on their PC. I was immediately hooked and asked my parents to gift me a graphic tablet and a student version of Adobe Photoshop for my birthday. Digital Art quickly became my favorite medium.

After finishing high school I decided to go on a two-year missionary trip with my church, which was a crucial time of self-discovery and spiritual growth. I think the spiritual dimension I added to my fantasy art after that journey really struck a chord with many people, and within a year I was able to fully sustain myself as an artist.

I choose animals as the subject of most of my pieces because, weird as it may sound, I feel it is easier for us to relate to the depiction of animals on an emotional level than it is to relate to the depiction of humans. Unconsciously we tend to judge people by their looks, skin color, proportions, gender, and so on, which can prevent us from focusing on the essentials. I give my animals slightly human traits such as deep, emotional eyes, and it almost makes the viewer feel as though they are looking into a mirror. It makes them realize that they themselves are divine beings.

I am especially fascinated by the interconnectedness of light and dark, portraying the bipolar relationship between the forces that govern our universe: cold and warmth, day and night, good and evil, body and spirit. Portraying both sides of the spectrum in one piece of art creates a tension that the viewers can feel inside of them.

In my 'Symbols of Life' series, these two poles, represented by animals, are actually bound together in a mix of affection, love, necessity, and also pain. My belief is that each of them cannot exist without the other: stars could never shine without the dark of the night. The same applies to relationships between humans. We may be as different as day and night, but still we can and ought to be bound together in love.

Many of my pieces also evolve around the theme of guardians, those heavenly beings who watch over us. I believe in God, and through my art I try to express what His presence feels like to me.

Art is more than a hobby or a profession to me. It is a means of giving voice to the thoughts, feelings and truths I carry inside, which can't be expressed any other way. It helps me access the peaceful space of divinity inside myself and all around me. When I create, I feel as though everything but me and the piece I am working on disappears for a while, almost like during meditation.

I believe we were all made to create in one way or another. Whether it is through art, music, cooking, writing or photography, being creative connects us to our deeper consciousness and to our fellow human beings. It brings the unconscious to the surface and teaches us a lot about ourselves.

Many of my pieces have helped me better understand certain issues I was having at the time I was working on them. They contained messages that were meant for me. But when others looked at them, they saw something totally different and interpreted them in their unique, personal way. That is the magic of art – one and the same piece can tell a million different stories to a million different people.



Brotherhood

*We may be as day and night,
as different as black and white,
yet there is no reason here
to fight a war because of fear.*

*Cause you're just you and I am me,
come, open up your eyes and see,
that no matter how different,
it's love that binds us in the end.*



Yin and Yang

*Balance is a state of opposition,
a state of two forces facing
each other.*

*There is no light without darkness,
no peace without pain.*

*It is our choice which way we face
and in the end that choice*

...determines our eternal destiny.

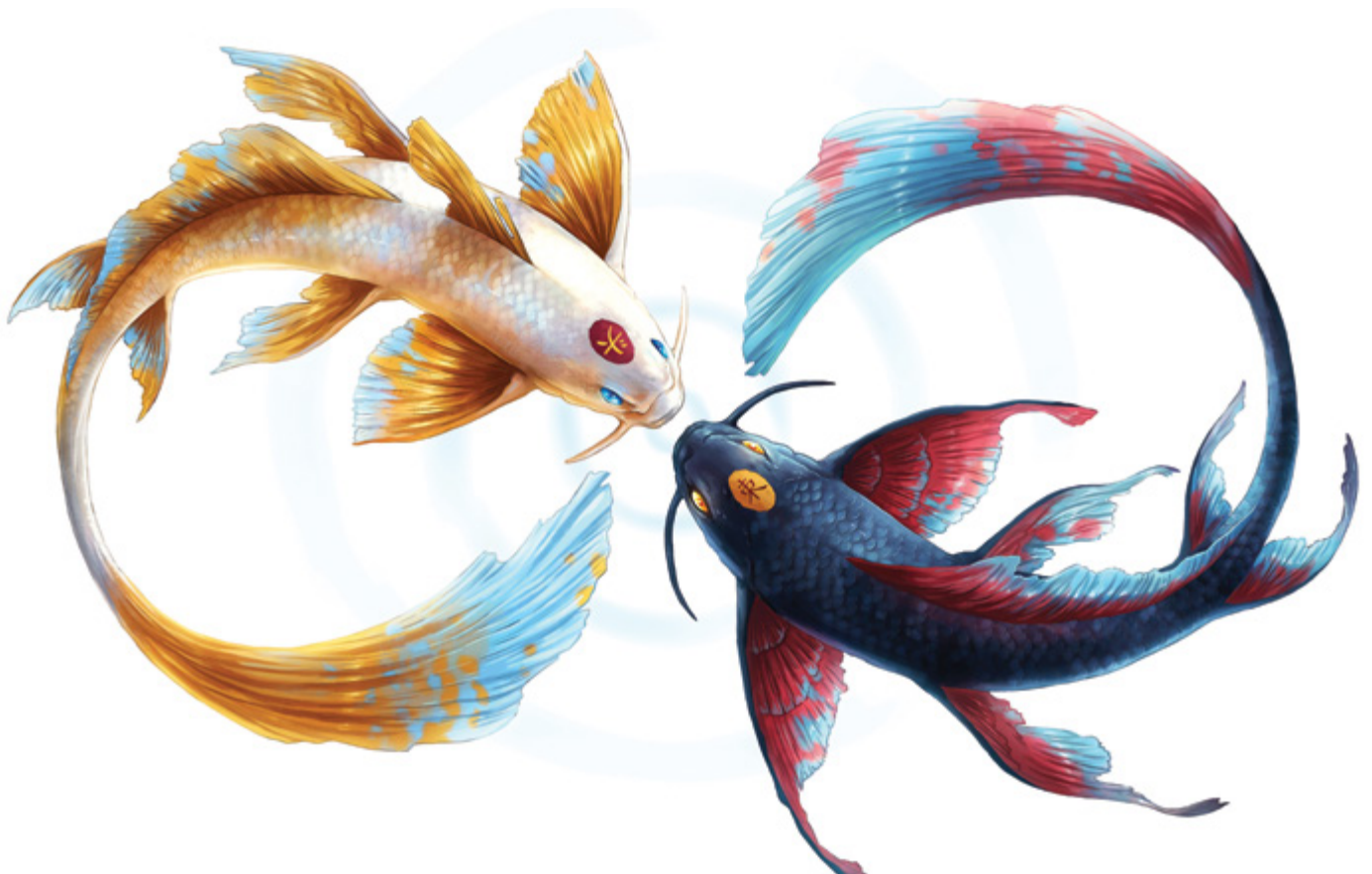
Eternal Bond

*We live, we die,
we laugh, we cry,
we're low, then high,
we fail and try.*

*We hope, we doubt,
we breathe, we shout,
we're soft, then loud,
we're meek and proud.*

*Eternity is meant to be
a never ending harmony
of dusk and dawn,
nor split nor torn,*

*for as we die,
we'll be reborn.*





Circle of Life

*In life we face both low and peak,
we fail and sometimes we succeed
to gain fulfillment, joy and peace,
until we find that missing piece:*

*Someone to hold, someone to feel,
someone, who makes our joy so real,
a lover, friend, a child, our God,
someone we can truly love.*

Peace

*Is war the answer, put down your weapons
is hate the way? and let us make peace.
Is life just a game
of predator and prey? For we both know,
we can't hide,
Give me your hand, we might die together,
feel my heart beat, if we chose to fight.*



📷 <https://www.instagram.com/jojoesart/>
📘 <https://www.facebook.com/JojoesArt/?ref=settings>
📺 <https://www.youtube.com/user/PeeGeeArts>

Heartfulness Yogasanas

BHUJANGASANA

Prone Postures

Initial Prone Posture

Lie on your abdomen with legs together, toes point outward and soles of the feet facing up, chin or forehead touching the floor.

Stretch your hands straight above the head, biceps touching the ears and palms resting on the floor.

Close your eyes.

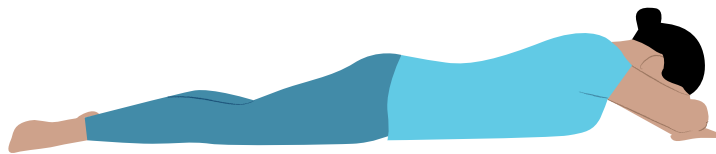
Prone Relaxation Posture: *Makarasana*

Lie flat on your abdomen, feet wide apart and toes pointing outward.

Bend both your hands and place right palm on the left shoulder and left palm on the right shoulder.

Rest your chin at the point where the forearms cross each other.

Gently close your eyes and relax.



Bhujangasana

Stage I

Lie flat on your abdomen with legs straight, and forehead on the floor.

Bend your elbows and place hands beside the chest with palms flat on the ground beside the shoulders.

Close your eyes and relax your whole body.

Breathe in and, while inhaling, raise your chin off the floor and look toward the front, stretch the neck forward.

Hold and stay with gentle long breaths, in and out, six times.

Stage II

Breathe in, raise your chest off the floor and look upward.

Slowly bend your head backward so that your chin eventually points forward and the back of the neck is compressed. Feel the stretch in the front part of the neck.



Close your eyes. Hold and stay with gentle, long and deep breaths, in and out, six times.

Stage III

Slowly raise your head and shoulders off the ground by straightening the arm.

Feel the flexion of the back roll down the spine, starting from the neck region and working towards the lower back. (Try to feel the flexion of each individual vertebra throughout the movement.)

Keep your navel in contact with the ground.

Arch your back as far as possible.

Close your eyes. Hold and stay with gentle long breaths, in and out, six times.

Release your posture and relax in *Makarasana*.

Benefits

Increases the flexibility of the back and massages the abdominal organs such as the pancreas, liver and gall bladder. It tones the ovaries and uterus.

Bhujangasana loosens the spine, removes impure blood from the back region and tones the nerves. It reduces stiffness in the body, and strengthens the arms and shoulders.

Bhujangasana expands the chest, which improves breathing habits.

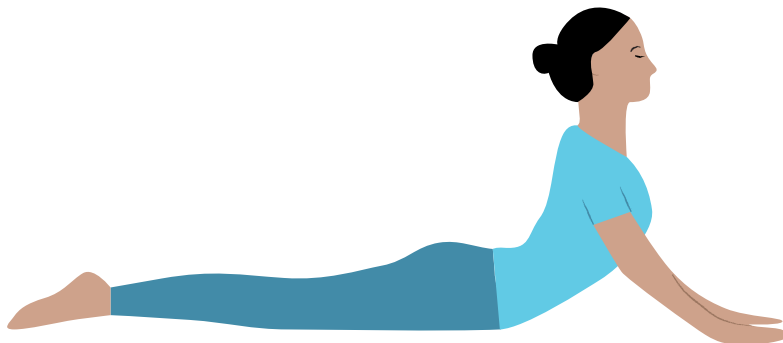
It improves the functions of the kidneys and adrenal glands by massaging them. The kidneys are compressed during *Bhujangasana*, thereby moving stagnant blood and providing them with a fresh supply of blood.

Bhujangasana helps to maintain and encourage the correct secretion of hormones by the adrenal glands. (Adrenal glands secrete hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisone, which influence the functioning of the mind and body. Adrenaline affects the degree of tension or relaxation in the body, while cortisone is found to be associated with the occurrence of rheumatism.)

Strengthens arms and shoulders.

Improves blood circulation throughout the body.

Provides stability to the spine and reduces sciatica pain.





IN THE FIELD

A HIMALAYAN *Retreat*

DEVI SEKAR, SHARON GRAFFAGNINO, MIKE MCCLEARY and **MARK DAUGHTRIDGE**
from North Carolina, USA, traveled to the Himalayas for a Family & Friends
Retreat. Here they share their experience.



For millennia the Himalayas have been the abode of saints, sages and spiritual seekers, a place where the high peaks and deep valleys are so conducive to the inner journey of the soul. Satkhol is situated near the foothills of the mountains, at an elevation of almost 6,000 feet. The Satkhol Retreat Center is a very special place in this holiest of environments. Its penetrating silence, charged vibrations, and deep peace all contribute to the inner journey, the inner yearning of the soul to reach its highest potential. Over the past 20 years more than 25,000 spiritual seekers have stayed here to deepen their practice in the lap of its profound silence.

This beautiful ashram was established in the year 2000, the sole purpose being to provide a place for seekers to focus wholly on their spiritual path without the distractions of daily life. The Friends and Family Program is offered four to six times a year. Each session starts on a Wednesday and ends on a Sunday, lasting four days, with 50 to 60 participants selected for each session, which includes a mixture of experienced Heartfulness practitioners and newcomers.

The four of us traveled from North Carolina to Satkhol in the month of April 2019 to join one of these programs, and for two of us it was the first time traveling to India. We would like to share our reflections on this wonderful retreat.

Devi, a longtime Heartfulness practitioner

It was a six-hour train ride from New Delhi and an hour-and-a-half car ride through scenic mountains to reach the Satkhol Retreat Center. Participants were arriving from as far as China, USA, the Middle East and all over India.

Each day started with a wake-up bell at 4 a.m. We did our individual meditations for 30 to 40 minutes, hiked around the mountain trails and watched the sunrise. At 6:30 a.m. there was a Yoga class and breakfast was served at 7:30 a.m. Group Meditation followed from 9 to 10 a.m. after which we went on a nature walk as a group. Afternoons were free, so we would read books in the library, and spend time in contemplation and introspection. The activities were very well organized, and coming from different parts of the world we bonded together and there was a deep sense of oneness. The silence was astounding. Meditation sessions were very deep and profound. It was not only a delight for our senses but also for the soul. Sitting amongst mountains, valleys and trees, looking at nothing, was an

experience in itself. There was a deep sense of peace and contentment being in that place.

Simple and nourishing vegetarian food was served, and most of the vegetables and fruits were from the organic gardens in the Retreat Center. Natural resources are very limited in the Himalayas, especially water. Water for day-to-day activities comes from rainwater harvesting and natural springs, known as nullas in the local language. These nullas are the main source of water in most of the hill villages, as there are few rivers.

Satkhol Retreat Center has a meditation hall, a library, offices, a dining hall, a kitchen, a canteen and accommodation buildings. There are so many trees and flowers, which are home to many birds. There is a very friendly and loving dog, Delphi, who never barked or disturbed anyone.



There's something wonderful about coming together with a group of like-minded people practicing Heartfulness, which can only be known by experience.

Sharon, new to Heartfulness

I enjoyed my train travel to Satkhol very much. I knew I had arrived in the real India. Several hours looking out the window of the train admiring the agricultural farmland and seeing the families together in the field working showed me everyday life. Along with the beauty of the prospering crops was also another reality, as we saw what poverty looks like up close. Seeing children begging for food and tent villages is very hard and yet I believe it is very important not to miss. Upon arriving at the train station, our driver took us on very scenic mountain passes, where we saw monkeys and exotic birds that I have only ever seen in books. I was overjoyed at this part of the travel.

The environment at Satkhol was perfect. The people were welcoming, informative and friendly, and our accommodation was more than adequate. The homemade meals were delicious, and I truly admired the non-carbon footprint of the community. The system of dealing with waste and food scraps with composting, and the five-part system of washing our own plates and cutlery were so simple.

I also enjoyed the opportunity to eat in silence. Whether I was under a tree surrounded by beautiful birds or at a table next to others, it was all so comfortable and nourishing.

The scenery was beautiful no matter which direction you looked. To be at the foot of the Himalayas was breathtaking! It was a treat to the eyes and nose to be surrounded by beautiful gardens with flowering bushes and trees. Each winding path was special, including the wonderful walking trails that took us alongside the cow barn and past the organic gardens that were growing our food. I never expected to see such birds. I've been in many different parts of the world that claim extraordinary birds, but Satkhol took first place for me.

I enjoyed the different activities, especially the Yoga classes in the mornings. Having access to the library was delightful also, and it was very helpful to attend the classes in which the details of Heartfulness were explained.

The meditation sessions were perfect for me, as we never meditated for more than one hour at a time. Having the comfort of sitting in a chair was also helpful. There's something wonderful about coming together with a group of like-minded people practicing Heartfulness, which can only be known by experience. More than once I found myself with tears rolling down my cheeks as I felt such a deep connection to Divinity. That is not something I have experienced much during the last 30 years. Overall I felt that the calm and spiritually rich environment held a great value for me, and continues to enrich my days even though I am back in the US. I feel extremely fortunate to have had this wonderful experience.

Mike, first time in India and new to Heartfulness

Satkhol Meditation Retreat Center was a very beautiful and peaceful place. Everyone we met was inviting, warm and loving. I felt very welcome and a part of the community soon after arriving. The grounds were well maintained, with special attention given to the gardens. There was a seemingly endless variety of flowers that are expertly planted to create color at every turn.

Mealtimes were especially enjoyable. It was a time to meet with others who had made this journey and share

experiences. The food was simple and always delicious. Everyone took part by doing their own dishes and keeping the area clean, adding to the sense of community. We went on several hikes that provided stunning views and fascinating facts told by our amiable hosts. The treks were much more challenging than I had expected and I was pleasantly surprised. Destinations included Daaji's residence and a high mountain forest where we communed with the trees. We were also treated to herbal tea halfway through each hike, which was welcome.

People often have profound spiritual experiences at Satkhol. I found that it is not necessarily how I felt during meditation but what I took away from the experience and how I felt afterwards. Satkhol has so much to offer and it is possible to become a little overwhelmed in the moment, but once I could step away and digest the experience I found my practice took on more meaning and my commitment deepened.

Mark, first time in India and new to Heartfulness

Exploring Satkhol and meeting new people was a joyous meditation in itself. I had come with no expectations about the place, the people, the food etc., only a confidence that whatever we found would serve as part of the meditation experience and that anything is survivable for 5 days! I was pleasantly surprised at the hundreds of beautiful flowers everywhere, the solar panels and a sustainable water-supply system. I walked up the hill to see construction going on for more accommodation; Satkhol seems to be thriving and growing, both physically and spiritually.

Fellow seekers from around the world had their own fascinating stories, and I was pleased to see that a few children had come with their parents. Everyone seemed very friendly and outgoing, especially for a group that had come here for silence and introspection. I had been worried that it might be five days of strict silence but everyone ignored the 'maintain silence' sign in the dining hall for the first few meals.



The education sessions about meditation, the Yoga sessions and nature walks were a great addition to our meditation experience. I also enjoyed the library, with many interesting titles, though a few texts I would expect to find were absent, and it was confusing trying to understand how the books were organized. I found myself missing the ability to look up references, but it worked fine to meditate on them on my own, write them down, and look them up later when I got back to the digital world.

At first, I was surprised to find meditation sessions starting with no introduction or instruction, and no discussion afterwards. These sessions were helpful and uplifting for me, as well as deeply spiritual experiences. Others had hoped for a deeper spiritual connection than they felt and seemed to benefit from talking through some of their past spiritual journeys that led them to the ashram. There was a sense of grace in accepting everyone wherever they were at, and encouraging everyone to experience the path that they are on.

In part, my own sense of connection blossomed from seeds of faith that I carried with me in my heart. In the first session, out of the quiet of the meditative state, I felt that God loves us, and therefore we are worthy of God's love. That thought expanded in later sessions to the realization on a deeper level that we are truly loved, that we also have the power to love, and that we ourselves are in fact the Love that God has planted in the world. We can choose to respond in love to any situation the world may present, and we can always be assured that we are loved and offered grace, even when we choose otherwise. I did not come away so enlightened as to be immune to the emotions or irritations of the world, but I came away knowing myself better as a spiritual, emotional, mental and physical being in the vast universe, and happier and more at peace understanding even more deeply how we are all connected to every other living being, thing, and the Divine.

It is wonderful to go from the unique shelter of an ashram and days filled with meditation back into the busy world again, seeing with new eyes. The contrast of the world, which at times is harsher than one expected, with the peace one has felt within, helps to define further the perspective gained in meditation. Meditation alone, without participating in the world, could prove merely a form of escapism, but in the world we are challenged to help spread

the calm, awareness, love, and grace that we feel in meditation.

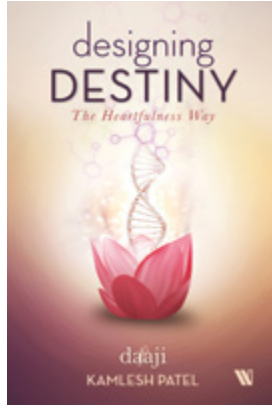
I am very thankful for those who introduced me to Heartfulness Meditation, invited me to this experience in India, and guided me along the way. None of us will ever have a straight and smooth journey throughout life. Taking time to clear the mind and reflect will help us ride through the highs as well as the lows, and the seemingly mundane times in-between. With reflection, I think we can find that all those times were times of growth and being loved.

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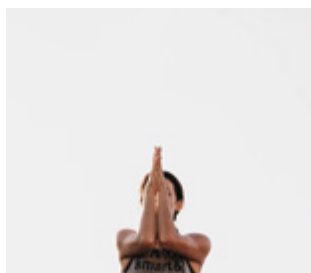
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