

YOGA OFF THE MAT:

Motivating Clients to Surrender to Discomfort

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Abstract: Inability to endure discomfort drives compulsions to eat, drink, spend, worry, and overwork. Clients come to therapists asking for relief from rage, addiction, exhaustion, frustration, and self-destructive acting out. They want skills for moving away from discomforts or strategies for moving discomforts away. Because an unquiet mind is the source of their discomfort, what is needed is a way to quiet the mind. Understanding the principles of yoga (the postures being a useful form of discomfort) without ever going to a class or practicing at home on a mat can help motivate clients to learn to hold still in the presence of discomfort. Storytelling, poetry, and the use of metaphor to demonstrate the advantages of holding still while experiencing discomfort are powerful tools to motivate clients to go deeper to touch a stillness that is there beyond the discomfort.

As professionals working with people in distress, therapists are well aware of how valuable it is to help clients develop the capacity to endure discomfort. I have selected a yoga metaphor to explore this vital matter because yoga postures can be so uncomfortable. Being asked in a yoga class to fold in half over a belly still feeling full of last night's meatloaf, one asks oneself why yoga seemed so attractive that morning. You think, "This discomfort is voluntary! I am actually paying for this agony!"

Key Words: yoga, surrender, discomfort, metaphor in therapy

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After studying this article, participants should be better able to do the following:

1. Understand the importance of encouraging clients to explore their relationship with the experience of the present moment.
2. Know how to use storytelling, metaphors, and poetry to motivate clients to endure discomfort.
3. Realize that suffering is so prevalent because the ego gains solidity and security from dissatisfaction.

Yoga, a Sanskrit term loosely translated as union (referring to union of body, mind, and spirit), is a tool intended for (among other things) stopping fluctuations of the mind. The resulting peaceful inner experience deepens the capacity to endure uncomfortable emotions. The terms peace, stillness, silence, presence, happiness, truth, emptiness, spaciousness, and aware aliveness are interchangeable terms in the literature of yoga.

In yoga philosophy it is taught that transcending shifts in the mental and emotional tides lead to the experience of union of the personality (the small self, ego, or personality, seen as a wholly fictional construct) with the true Self. Yoga is a system for allowing access to a happiness that is always indwelling but becomes obscured by "clouds" of conditioned thought and emotion embedded in our personal histories. We identify our "self" with these personal dramas or "clouds" (our wounds, needs, dissatisfactions, moods, fears, and hopes).

"Clouds in the Sky" Metaphor

What yoga teaches is that we are not those "clouds" of experience; we are the spacious, clear "sky" in which the clouds arise. Ancient teachers right up to wisdom teachers in our own time agree that that "sky" is clear and within us. Dissolving one's identification with one's personal "clouds" can occur when the fluctuations of the mind are stilled and we can see more clearly within, so that we are able to feel the more spacious, sky-like interior depths.

In our work we are trained to help clients change their stories (change the shape and density of their clouds in this metaphor). We assist them in transforming an unhappy marriage into a happy one; we support a self-loathing woman in developing self-respect; we help the addict become sober and the bulimic become abstinent. A proponent of yoga philosophy would commend us for our compassionate work but point out that unless we had encouraged the client to explore the questions of who is having this



marriage, who is exhibiting this bulimia, and what is true about them beyond their story, we will have only helped our clients change the furniture in their prison cells.

We believe that our personalities define us, and we believe the same thing about our clients. We continue to identify others as who their Halloween costumes tell us they are. We wonder why no one can get close to us or why significant others feel unknowable.

Even with the better marriage, the abstinent lifestyle, the positive self-regard, the mind will continue to fluctuate on the emotional tide. The very definition of ourselves as a “self” reduces our space-like being-ness to an object, and the nature of an object is that it encounters obstacles. This identification of the self as the personality is itself an obstacle to the realization of one’s own spacious nature.

Halloween Metaphor

In yoga philosophy, the ego is seen as the Halloween costume one puts on and forgets one is wearing. One’s personal story is seen as an illusion, a wholly fictional overlay masking the nature of the true Self, which is inherently peaceful. Seekers of enlightenment are compared to fish that are thirsty. There is no seeking necessary. The journey does not need to begin; there is no need for one. We have already arrived.

Yoga and meditation teach us to sink our awareness deeper than the Halloween costume of the personality, to train our awareness to rest in the space beyond the thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and physical sensations. There we find spaciousness and peace.

This experience can be startlingly boring at first. The ego hates that sense of nothingness and recoils. The ego likes to know there is something there and to know that it is something. Therefore, there is enormous resistance by the mind to the experience of the vast and empty space within. The yogis teach that it is this space in which all phenomena arise that is our true nature; access is possible by letting go of control and manipulation.

This article offers an opportunity to explore the use of folk tales, metaphors, and poetry

to motivate clients to soften into the discomforts that they believe are the source of their distress. These less linear forms of communication can sneak up on the ego, provoking fewer resistances to disarming it. Defenses are less likely to be mobilized when one has been lured into a tale with strong imagery. We can encourage “dropping the storyline,” or “going deeper,” explorations a client may not otherwise be ready to accept. There is a subtle re-parenting piece occurring when we tell the client a teaching story. As the clients listen, they regress; their defenses are lulled and they become receptive to a willingness to let go of the desire for control in spite of themselves.

Millions of pages have been written about self-realization, and no words can express it accurately, making a printed page the most difficult place to explore this. Buddha said that the finger pointing at the moon is not the moon. These consonants, vowels, and syllables are merely the “fingers” pointing at meaning. Believe nothing you read here. None of it will feel quite true.

Folk tales, metaphors, and poetry are a non-preachy way to guide the client to go beyond changing their stories from unhappy to happy, a way to teach that discomfort, greeted in the spirit of surrender, could be spiritually beneficial. A happy story does not lead to true happiness, because it is just the changing of one Halloween costume for another. At some point it will wear out, or the client will outgrow it or become bored with it, or someone else in his or her life will disapprove of it. It still does not allow the client access to lasting peace. Placing awareness deeper than uncomfortable feelings allows a glimpse of oneself as the space within which all experience arises. A single glimpse of this truth brings access to the realization of no more discomfort or strife.

In Western psychology, a therapist might ask clients questions relevant to their history or interpersonal relationships. “What happened to you as a child? Where in your life now is the source of your pain? What are your sources of support?”

A yoga or meditation teacher might ask a student, “Where is the source of the impulse to exhale? Where is the origin of the impulse to inhale?”

In considering these questions in yoga class, my experience was that the source of these impulses to inhale and exhale was not in the lungs, the chest, the diaphragm, or anywhere in the solar plexus. It wasn’t anywhere in the body. The question itself was a means of transport to another dimension of self-inquiry. “Who am I really—who is actually breathing?” was the real question. The answer that came was, “I don’t know.” This is the answer that comes when you realize that you are space itself. Because space is not an object, there is no word to describe it. It is not even an it.

In contrast to Western psychological tradition, where a course of therapy over time is the current prescription for unhappiness, wisdom from the East teaches that unhappiness is an accumulation of mental constructs that can be dissolved in an instant, resulting in the peace that comes with the realization of ourselves as the aware space within which thoughts and feelings arise, remain for a while, and then dissolve.

The physical aspect of yoga, only one aspect of this vast body of teachings that I have chosen to use as a metaphor, also has a spiritual purpose. In a yoga pose, you are as present as you can be. You focus on letting go and on breathing. You watch yourself breathe. You feel yourself breathe. You notice how you breathe (or don’t breathe) when you are uncomfortable. Partnering your awareness with your breath, you are focusing awareness outside of your mind.

From that mindless position, you can know all phenomena, including emotion, simply as moving energy: tension building or tension releasing. There needn’t be a storyline to the trembling, the tingling, or the deep ache in the chest. There needn’t be fear about the sudden sorrow or an explanation as to its source. There is no need for a memoir of your ankle. You breathe into tightness without the necessity of reviewing its biography (every time I



think of my ankle, I remember when I was 9), without assigning blame (that was when we had that picnic where my brother tripped me). You witness your forms of reactivity. Do you stay and soften into the discomfort? Do you get angry with the yoga instructor? Do you mutter to yourself, but still stay? Do you roll up your mat and go next door for a muffin and a latte?

In developing familiarity with the yoga teachings, you begin to understand that when you drop the storyline about discomfort and experience, it innocently, purely as the sensation of energy moving or energy getting stuck—tightness, coldness, fear, aching—the emotions or sensations quickly neutralize. They self-eradicate. This works the same way with emotion as it does with physical sensation. Attaching a story to an emotion perpetuates it. The anger continues to ignite with each repetition of the story of injustice or betrayal, and the sadness returns with each instant of tragic narrative applied to it.

If the sadness is allowed to be felt as what it is, a heaviness in the chest and a burning in the eyes, without the story of how terrible the loss is, we can watch those “clouds of sadness” arising in the sky, remaining for a while, and then dissolving. There is nothing to trigger their reformation. This is naked awareness stripped of mental constructs and conditioned points of view. This is where innocent, mindless attention is devoted to each moment, one breath at a time.

The physical postures, and especially yogic breathing, are aimed toward bringing the body, mind, and spirit into alignment. The physical postures are beneficial in more than only musculo-skeletal ways. While the stretching creates flexibility at the level of muscles and

joints, it, along with the breathing, helps also to unblock the nadis, the yogic word for the invisible channels that carry the flow of energy, or prana, the life-force itself, throughout the body. The nadis are synonymous with the meridians in Chinese medicine, pathways that allow the flow of qi or chi. Unblocking the channels is accomplished in yoga postures, or asanas, and in yogic breathing.

When energy is flowing smoothly throughout the body in a balanced and rhythmic way, the physical body functions optimally. Additionally, the emotional body feels most balanced, calm, and positive. We are in good spirits.

Yoga Metaphor

If a client has some experience with yoga (even if only having seen it on TV or at the gym), using yoga as a metaphor for life itself is invaluable. Encouraging a client to view each moment of life as a yoga pose—sometimes uncomfortable, but needing to be softened into in order to allow energy to flow, instead of hardened against, which only blocks energy—makes immediate sense to the client.

Because energy itself is invisible, it is difficult to demonstrate flow vs. blockage. Breathing is an excellent example of something that flows, and most everyone who has ever had allergies or a cold has experienced what blocked breathing feels like. If you sit and breathe with a client, allowing yourself to sigh deeply on the exhale in demonstration of a surrendering breath and encourage the client to breathe with you, it feels positive 100 percent of the time. Taking a few moments in a session for an experiential workshop in breathing with clients can prove very fruitful. They learn first hand (first breath!) what flow feels like, and they sense how flow feels better than blockage.

Blockage of energy flow is what happens when there is thinking. Thoughts almost guarantee energy blockage because there are so many contracting responses to thoughts, reactions that result in the breathing becoming shallower and the muscles more tense.

Train-of-Thought Metaphor

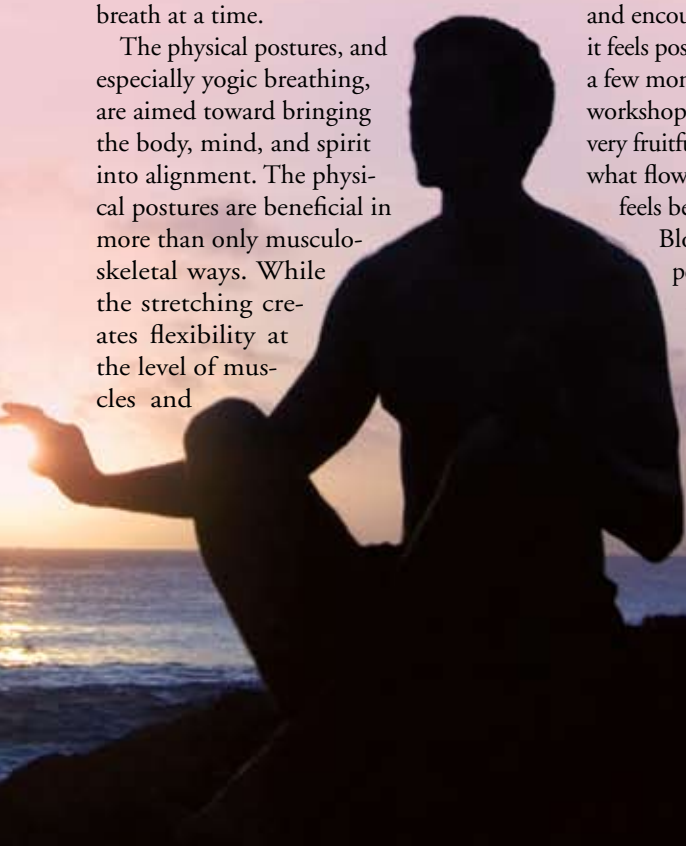
In yoga class, trains of thought intrude: “My hip hurts! This teacher is crazy to think we can stretch this far! I’m going to roll up this mat and go home. What was that item on my to-do list that I need to pick up? Oh yes, and I have to call Jane. I can’t go home, it’s only 15 minutes into the class! I’m sticking it out. I haven’t breathed once since the class started! That woman next to me has gorgeous legs—I hate my legs.” In microseconds, dozens of muscles have tensed, and the breathing has become shallow.

The trains of thought come rolling in, as thoughts will. And they go. And we stay put—on the floor in a forward bend, or in mountain pose, standing straight and strong, feet parallel and firmly planted on the ground, head reaching upward—each thought, feeling, and physical sensation is witnessed without assigning a good or bad to it, without grasping at the good ones or recoiling from the bad.

We wait “on the platform,” watching the trains of thought go by, making note of their (often pointless, though sometimes enticing) destinations without getting on any of them. We refocus on the task at hand, inhaling when unbending, exhaling when folding over.

Similarly, it is useful when talking to a client, even one with no experience with yoga, to encourage the watching of the trains of thought using the metaphor of a station platform, with which most everyone is familiar. Hundreds of trains (of thought) may roll into the station, some with quite a bit of allure. If they practice just watching them go instead of getting on a specific one (and riding it to the very end of the line!), they can come to an experience of peace even in the midst of their distress, because just watching the mind from a position of stillness brings a sense of equanimity.

Naturally, if a client has no experience with yoga, other metaphors, and/or the telling of a different story than one involving yoga, will prove more efficient.





Wall Metaphor

For a more graphic demonstration of this theme, I often indicate the wall of the office beside which the client and I are sitting, remarking that the wall is there. I push against it hard, observing that the wall isn't going anywhere no matter how hard I push against it, and observe that if I continued to push against that wall (or situation) it still might not budge and my efforts would result in my exhaustion with no reaction whatsoever from the wall.

The client might argue that the wall deprives him of tranquility. But if the wall is just allowed to be there, feelings can soften about it being there and with the inner yielding there is a bit more peace, even though the wall situation is still in place. This example seems simplistic, but the concreteness of the demonstration can be very powerful.

Sofie had quite an "aha" experience that did lead to a softening of her experience of the most challenging situation of her life after the demonstration with the wall. (Until that time, I'd experienced my work with Sofie herself as a kind of wall I was pushing against.) As I pushed hard against the wall beside us, I suggested that the wall was her husband's non-responsiveness, against which she had been pushing since the beginning of their marriage almost 3 years prior.

"Does Carl show you he loves you?" I asked.

"Oh, he tells me he loves me a lot. He sends me online cards. Sometimes he tells me I look beautiful. But after he comes home from work and tells me how happy he is to see me, I have to pry him away from the computer. Mostly I get to see the back of his head illuminated by the light from the computer screen all evening."

Sofie insisted that Carl was addicted to the computer the way men were addicted to two martinis when they came home each evening. This may have been true, but her pushing against the situation was creating two upset people instead of just one, and no change in the situation. I encouraged her to go to Alanon meetings to see if they could help support her in her experience of what she referred to as Carl's addiction. She refused to go to Alanon because she didn't understand how useful Alanon could be in the absence of alcohol use.

The arguing resulting from Sofie's insistence that Carl relax in some way other than in front of the computer led to Carl not telling Sofie that he loved her as often. He was perfunctory. He became irritable when the children's toys were on the floor when he'd never been so short tempered before toward them.

Movie Metaphor

Because Sofie was not a student of yoga, I chose another way—the movie metaphor—to help her witness herself and soften into her discomfort. I asked Sofie what she'd think about this couple if she'd been in the audience watching a movie about them. There they were in the evening, the wife glaring and the husband's back to her, clicking away on his keyboard.

I suggested that we knew a few things about these characters from earlier scenes in the movie as well, such as that the movie Sofie had had an extremely self-centered mother who lavished attention on her only son but was dismissive of Sofie, who only wanted to please her. The movie Sofie had a father who was unavailable, an undemonstrative man whose work required long periods away from home. We knew from earlier in this imagined movie that the computer-absorbed husband had come from a family of 12. In his childhood home with so many siblings there was never a possibility of a moment's solitude.

Sofie considered this question about the movie and responded quickly. She said that if she were watching a movie about this couple's distress, she would realize that the wife was reacting to a situation from her childhood in which she needed more attention from both parents and that the husband needed some solitude. She said that the husband character in the movie just needed some time to himself because he'd come from such a big family, and that, in addition, he now worked all day among people.

Suggesting a movie script in which the client's challenge is the central theme makes it possible for clients to more easily assume a witnessing role in their own distress, removing themselves from being so fully identified with their own unmet needs. They can see the other characters' motives and empathize with their inner lives exactly as one does as a member of a movie audience. Compassion can arise so much more easily in this context.

Carl continued to cling to his computer in the evenings, but Sofie's laments about him eased off. She contented herself with various projects in the evening until Carl was ready to pay attention to her. He was still sitting with his back to her in front of his computer, but their inner experience was far more tranquil and openhearted.

Not in the Mood for Yoga Metaphors or Meditation

Chris, a 46-year-old accountant with extremely high blood pressure, was not in the mood

for yoga metaphors. He had come for therapy at the recommendation of his cardiologist, who'd encouraged him to seek some further assistance in lowering his blood pressure because the medications had not been very effective so far (and had uncomfortable side effects as well). And the benefits of meditation for lowering of blood pressure are widely known.

Chris was not in the mood to practice meditation right there in the session with me, and I remembered that I had to surrender! Of course it was our first meeting, and I have found that men especially tend to be self-conscious in unknown territory. Once I had yielded to his unwillingness to at least be receptive to some psychological exploration, I introduced the topic of surrender to him.

Chris asked what surrender meant. I asked him how the experience of no feels.

"I tighten up inside."

We explored what a yes feels like.

He said, "It feels like relaxing, letting go of being annoyed by things. Like after having a beer."

"That's surrender," I said. "But without the beer being necessary."

Other clients have likened surrender to the sense of sinking into a bathtub full of warm water, or of savoring the sensation of swallowing sweet hot oatmeal.

I discussed with Chris the probable relationship between an inner no and his high blood pressure. He agreed, reluctantly, that there had to be some connection, as the cardiologist had explained that the vascular system does get tense. We discussed other words to describe surrender, terms such as letting go, accepting, relaxing one's grip, and yielding.

To my surprise, Chris agreed to listen at home to a meditation CD, Jack Kornfeld's "Meditation for Beginners," which I loaned him. He said he would listen to it once and let me know how it went the next time we met, at which time he did not seem at all as resistant.

He had indeed listened to the CD (while he was waiting to have a root canal procedure) and said he'd found it most helpful. I secretly thanked the therapy gods that he'd needed medical treatment because a dental waiting room experience is a very vulnerable one where prayers, long-forgotten, are suddenly unearthed. I doubted he would have listened to the CD had he not needed extra help that day.

Only a few weeks later, Chris decided he'd gotten all the help he wanted once he'd become friendly with the CD (by then he had his own copy). After listening to the CD twice a week and reminding himself of its sugges-

tions between listening, his blood pressure, while not having dropped to completely normal, had stabilized so that the highs were no longer as high.

Chris had been using each moment as a means to an end—each moment was a hurdle to be gotten through so that he could arrive at the next moment. He had described to me his stressful work schedule and the rush from one task to the next, the need to promote himself in a competitive environment, and his wish that he could finally be done with his working years so that he could retire to his house in Barbados.

His belief that his blood pressure would be lower in Barbados, that his days would be full of peace there, was not something I had an opportunity to explore with him. I would have pointed out that it is impossible to learn to float if one keeps trying to swim. I would have suggested that this lovely quality of life was calling to him now, but it kept getting a busy signal. Constantly needing for the next moment to come was the experience with which he had the most familiarity. I would have explored with him the idea that the peace of mind that he sought was already present within him, if he could quiet down enough to find it. I hope that the meditation was something he continued with, as it could have gotten him there.

Had he come back for more sessions, I would have told him the story called, "The Diamond in Your Pocket," adapted from the one told by the American spiritual teacher, Gangaji. I have found this story is an excellent one to tell to an individual or to a group as a metaphor for the happiness and peace located within. It is memorable and makes its point powerfully. Stories are, of course, quite enchanting, having a semi-hypnotic effect upon the listeners, which serves to sneak past resistances.

Fear of Surrender

Among other obstacles to surrendering to what is present in the moment, especially to a moment of discomfort, is the ego's fear that if one surrenders to something painful or threatening, the pain or fear will never go away, the situation will never resolve, or the moment will never change.

The experience of surrender is itself so soothing that it affords an immediate sense of peace. Therefore, the practice of accepting the moment without an effort to control or manipulate it, no matter what that moment holds (no matter in what yoga pose one finds oneself) is valuable.

If a client is willing to explore the practice of surrendering to the moment, one moment at a time, encourage the client to begin this practice with moments of smaller discomforts, such as being stuck in traffic, or having a headache, things over which we have no control but which are not extreme, so that when the dramatically unsettling moments arise, there is already some skill.

The inner dialogue of surrender, to a traffic delay, for example, might be, “This is my entire life, right now, in this car, on this road, going three miles an hour. There are cars in front of me as far as I can see. I am sinking into the seat beneath me with all the softness that I experience when I sink into a bathtub full of nice warm water. I am relaxing into this moment as though I am going to spend the rest of my life in it. My body is relaxing. I am going to spend the rest of my life in my body. Even though my back feels a bit achy, I am feeling relaxed. What feels wonderful is that I have great music to listen to. The light is sparkling off the hood of my car right now. Right now this is my entire life.”

Other Resistances to Surrender

We are conditioned to fight discomfort. To the ego, surrendering to anything feels to it that it is a nothing, a nobody. It is a softness in the presence of which the ego feels unprotected and unprotective, and it will fight hard and with cunning weapons to dissuade you from standing quietly on the station platform and watching the emotion, thought, or situation pass. It will produce brilliantly seductive arguments about why you should definitely get up and go home when the pose is too difficult. (“I could dislocate my shoulder! My knee could be damaged! This is much too hard; I can’t let this happen to me. How dare they!”)

The mind will present evidence of past wounds in excruciating detail to demonstrate that one should indeed be afraid and resistant. (“Remember the ex-husband—how horrible it was that he betrayed me with that affair, I can’t ever trust anyone again!”) The mind is clever and convincing, and we have deeply ingrained conditioned responses to its pleas.

The ego needs complaint in order to feel itself. What spiritual teachers sometimes refer to as the “small ‘s’ self” (what we designate as the ego) is bolstered by disagreement. In order to feel secure, the ego needs something that helps it feel solid. The ego experiences more and more solidity the more disagreeable it feels, because a) disagreement is a form of muscle-building “resistance” exercise, and b) it feels it is superior to that with which it is in disagreement.

In the same way, the ego can use suffering to feel strong. It relishes lament and indignation, which bolster and help it know itself more crisply. Because it would rather survive than allow us to be free of it, it will find any reason to be displeased. The cause could be as small as a mosquito or as large as a war. There could be extreme displeasure about too much traffic, or extreme displeasure about a terminal diagnosis. There will always be something. Winston Churchill said, in response to the question of how he would describe human history, “It’s one damn thing after another.” The same could be said of our way of relating to each present moment, as though there are too damn many of them, as though each one was an obstacle in the way of our future, or a means to an end until finally it’s all over, and we have not been present to any of our life.

Eckhart Tolle, author of *The Power of Now*, and *The New Earth*, and presenter of workshops with the single theme of embracing the present moment, was asked during an interview to summarize the entirety of his teachings in one sentence. Without a second’s hesitation, he said, “All my teachings can be summarized in a single line: ‘What is my relationship to the present moment?’”

One hundred percent of our clients come to us because their relationship to the present moment is adversarial. The present moments in their relationship, their body, their work, their health, their thoughts, and feelings are not acceptable. They want change and they want strategies. They want to justify why what they are experiencing is unacceptable. Being in the moment, at peace, feels boring at best and frightening at worst, because the ego has nothing to push up against and cannot as easily feel itself when it has no adversary.

Doing less about the moment, or doing nothing except changing a point of view about it, is not an appealing option. It is difficult to do less rather than more. In a yoga practice, doing less leads to deeper benefits, but it takes most practitioners years to realize this. In a meditation practice, striving for a result is the quickest way to get nowhere. Realizing the moment you have embarked on a journey that you have already arrived—this is difficult.

To sit still, to allow the mind to rest and do nothing, requires patience. It’s a practice. I have found that a gentle reminder to a client to be patient is not received with as much attentiveness as this same reminder delivered in the form of a story. It is a story I tell to both individual clients and to groups, and I tell it in meditation classes also, because people often share their impatience with themselves in these contexts.

The wisdom teachings in every tradition emphasize that peace is not something you make happen. It has already happened and takes patience to access. It is the allowing of “nothing” to be there, the allowing of “nothing” to happen that allows the discovery of the diamond in the pocket of the heart.

In yoga class, the teacher may say, “Work less hard at this. You will be much calmer after.” In meditation class, the teacher may say, “If you want peace, stop looking for it. If you want to meditate perfectly, just sit here with no expectation of outcome.” In therapy, we may someday wind up saying, “Let’s just sit here together in the silence, without words, and see what happens. Or doesn’t.”

Conditioning has taught us that who we are is the ego. We are our needs, our lacks, our eccentricities, our personalities, our wounds, our history. When the ego = the self, we reduce the whole to a part. This self-reduction is the source of much of our pain. Learning this (unlearning that) takes practice as one keeps forgetting; so deeply forged is the habit of controlling and manipulating outcomes.

Conditioned responses to discomfort keep us in bondage. This was emphasized for me during a month when two new clients came to see me, each one a woman in her 40s whose husband had left. Both of the women admitted to not having been demonstrative partners. They shared, each in their own way, that opening their hearts to another person would make them more vulnerable to hurt. Pondering her new life as a single woman, one of them said, “I don’t know if I can stand to be alone for the rest of my life.” The other client jumped to the same conclusion. When I questioned those assumptions, suggesting that there might very well be another partner, each of them recoiled, saying something like, “I can never let my heart get broken again!”

In the same week that I saw these clients for the first time, I discovered two observations about broken-heartedness that I felt might encourage some exploration into the intuitive tendency to self-protect in relationships. The first was the following piece of wisdom (attributed to “Anonymous”): “The heart must be broken over and over again until it stays opened.”

The second one was a story of a rabbi addressing his congregation on the subject of the Holy Scriptures. He said, “When you read the scriptures, their wisdom lays on top of your heart.” A woman in the congregation asked, “Why do you say the wisdom teachings lay on your heart?”

“Because,” the rabbi answered, “then, when your heart gets broken, they fall in.”

I find it very pleasing to witness the expressions on the faces of clients when I recite these remarks to them. A sense of great relief is immediately apparent. We are all so afraid of being broken-hearted, because we think we should be afraid, that we do not even question whether it is wise to continue to keep one's love under wraps. If the heart is never broken, how else can one reach in through the crack to find the precious gem?

The following poem illustrates the beautiful necessity of suffering. Compare how much more powerful a teaching this is when presented in the form of this poem than saying to a suffering client, "Loss opens your heart. It's important, it's good."

Kindness

By Naomi Shihab Nye

Before you know what kindness really is
you must lose things,
feel the future dissolve in a moment
like salt in a weakened broth.
What you held in your hand,
what you counted and carefully saved,
all this must go so you know
how desolate the landscape can be
between the regions of kindness.
How you ride and ride
thinking the bus will never stop,
the passengers eating maize and chicken
will stare out the window forever.

Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness,
you must travel where the Indian in a white poncho
lies dead by the side of the road.
You must see how this could be you,
how he too was someone
who journeyed through the night with plans
and the simple breath that kept him alive.

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
You must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.
You must wake up with sorrow.
You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.

Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters
and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say.

It is you I have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

Conclusion

In the same way as we can learn to open to the discomforts of the heart's spurned affections, to the desolation of grief, we learn, in yoga, to open to discomforts of the hamstrings, the hip flexors, the shoulders. We breathe into the ribs and loosen their cage-like rigidity. We open, one breath at a time, to what is there in the depth of the discomfort. We voluntarily stay in positions of agony and we can't explain why in words it feels so right. No one can. Storytelling, poetry, and metaphor get closest to doing the job.

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