

How Yoga Heals

by Cindy von Miller

According to the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, Yoga is the restriction of the fluctuations of consciousness. In other words, the aim of yoga is to still the thought waves in the mind. We often miss the beauty around us, because our minds are preoccupied with regrets of the past, and fears about the future. With steady practice of the eight limbs of classical yoga, we learn to change our consciousness. Changes in our material reality occur in response to our change in thinking.

The ancient yogis identified *samskaras* which are grooves or impressions in our consciousness created by thought patterns. Each time the thought pattern occurs, the groove becomes deeper and the likelihood of repeating the thought increases. Behavior is first a thought – although often a subconscious thought. We can reprogram our thinking and our behavior by changing our thought patterns - replacing negative thoughts with positive thoughts. Advances in neuroscience support this concept. We now know that when we perform a new action, we cause our nervous system to form new connections. (Contrary to popular opinion, we are never too old to learn new behaviors.) The more we perform the behavior, the stronger the connections become, and the more likely we are to repeat the action in the future. The trick is to become conscious of what was formerly unconscious. If we can become aware of the thought that motivates the behavior, we can change our behaviors and thus can change our lives. In the process, we also change subconscious patterns and shape our inner environment.

Remember Dr. Hans Seyle's definition of stress as *the non specific response of the body to any demand (stressor), whether it is caused by or results in pleasant or unpleasant conditions*. The stressor can be physical, mental or emotional. The stressor can be real or imaginary. Much of the stress in our lives is imaginary – in that we create it by dwelling on past or future events. If we can begin to train our minds to exist in present moment, we will do much to eliminate many of life's stressors.

These same practices that affect our conscious behavior also have the ability to affect the cells of our body. Dr. Bruce Lipton explains that in the presence of stress hormones (which flood the body in response to a *perceived threat*), cells go into a defense mode. In this defense mode there is no growth, no assimilation of nutrients – at best preservation of the status quo. In the absence of stress hormones, cells elicit a growth response. Eliminating stress and fear, while promoting safety and love promote health and healing, not only for ourselves but for our whole planet.