

MARRIAGE: THE MOST COMMON FORM OF YOGA

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Yoga means “union.” Yoga as physical exercise is something I don’t do enough of, although I know it is good for me. But marriage, the most common form of yoga or union, is practiced all over the world. And it too is a discipline that is not always easy to do properly. I have practiced the yoga of marriage, like it or not, for at least some 41 years now.

I have also counseled couples for many years, so I know firsthand that marriage can be a most difficult dharma practice indeed. There is nothing like the unconditional nature of new love. When first we meet our life partner there are no conditions. Everything is free and wide open, and being loved unconditionally is just that... unconditional love.

The conditions come later, as we get to know one another, as we move closer in. And getting in close is just part of love, and the only way to put it to the test. In fact we constantly move from being more open to closing down and then opening again. In the esoteric literature this is called going in and out-of-the-body. And we do it all the time.

Driving on a country road on a crisp spring morning with nothing on our mind is an out-of-the-body experience, one of unconditional freedom. Nothing could be freer. When we come to a roadblock and a detour sign, that is a condition that brings us back down a bit into the body. And condition can follow condition until we are in a traffic jam with too many conditions and little freedom at all.

As mentioned, we constantly move in and out of our bodies. Sometimes we want to evolve, get out of whatever confines us, and be free, while at other times we want to get more involved, and get more into whatever seems appealing to us at the time. We incarnate in each thing we do and we chose how involved we want to be. We try to anyway.

Relationships, including our love life and marriage, are the same way. We not only build a body of relationships, we fluctuate in and out that body, sometimes feeling more free and at other times wanting to get right down into it. This is how it works, but it also has its own problems.

New relationships tend to have no conditions. It is unconditional love or unconditional friendship at first glance. It is wonderful and a confidence builder to be loved and accepted as a lover or friend unconditionally. There is nothing like it. The conditions seem to come later, and are laid on, one by one until they define the specific gravity of the relationship. And conditions are not all bad.

There are good and bad conditions. For example, we choose to be conditioned when we kiss our loved ones. We chose to come in close and touch. And that kiss takes a light touch. These

are conditions we accept. But we can also get touchy when conditions get too much, too heavy. Then we want to remove some conditions until we have a comfortable sense of freedom once again, until we are out of the body and free enough. We move in and out of the body. We lay on and take off conditions like we do sports clothing.

Sometimes we move in real close, like when we make love. How close is that? At other times we avoid touch and touchy-feely conditions entirely. It is up to us, but we are not all experts at this, so we frequently have too little or too many conditions, too little if we want to be still closer, too many if we start to feel confined or too close. We are always searching for the right conditions.

So while you may not find time to practice sitting meditation or even yoga asanas, if you are married you can't avoid yoga practice. Marriage is about as serious and dedicated a mind practice as there is, so if there is an interest, let's talk about the yoga of marriage for a blog or so. Interested?

MARRIAGE: THE MOST COMMON FORM OF YOGA – Part 2

June 13, 2012

Marriage is a vast topic, one that probably deserves a perpetual blog. Here I am just touching on it, and rather lightly at that. Every marriage, like the old game of Pick-Up-Sticks, has conditions we have created that may be uncomfortable, but that can be removed if we work on it.

Life lays some conditions on us that either cannot be changed or are difficult to change, like the color of our eyes. Those are not the conditions being pointed out here. I am talking about conditions that we lay on ourselves or on our partner, ones that we 'can' change. And laying down conditions is quite natural and necessary. Life is conditioned.

For example, conditions of closeness and touch are fine when we choose to be close, make love, and what-have-you. But being in-close with a loved one when we are angry is not so cool for either partner. We can be inflammable. In that case, we want to remove some of those close conditions and get a little space. Easier said than done.

It is unfortunate that training the mind is not offered in schools as kids, like we do algebra, so that we learn something about how the mind works. We are constantly zooming in and out of closeness, but are so used to doing it that we are mostly unaware of it. And my point is simple. We have a comfort zone of space, a buffer or a firewall that isolates us (when we wish) from too much contact, our own personal cocoon, if you will. When things get too tight, we can step away from 'it all' out into the mind, and we do this some every day. The reverse is also true.

We can sail down from our private space and involve ourselves in more of the nitty-gritty at will and in a flash. You have all heard the stories of people in dire straits popping out-of-the-body

and seeing everything as if looking down from somewhere on the ceiling above. That is what I am talking about, but this also happens day-to-day on a much smaller scale. We do a less-total version of getting out-of-the-body on a daily basis. My point here is that we can have some control over being in or out, close or distant. Now I want to move on to how this relates to relationships.

When we take a marriage partner, someone to love, there is no one closer to us than that. We throw caution (and conditions) to the wind and open up the windows of our mind and self. We offer total entry into us to that very special other person. They have an all-access pass, one with no firewall. We actually share with them (show them) where all our buttons are. That is on a good day. But life is cyclic; it goes up 'and' down.

On a bad day, those same buttons are still all exposed, but we may not be feeling so open. Yet their all-access pass still works, so we begin to lay down conditions to protect our self. Laying down conditions with someone we love unconditionally is not a good sign, and of course it does not work well. Unconditional love does not have conditions. Quite the reverse. It is like taking back our vows. And there you have it.

We know how to soar with one another when the times are good, but not so much when rough seas set in. At the hard times closeness can hurt. And heaven forbid if one partner is soaring and the other is sinking, which is like two trains going in opposite directions, and with all those exposed buttons just waiting to be pushed, accidentally or on purpose.

When we are in-close with someone, trust is assumed. When we are making love, friction is good; it is needed. Physical contact is sought and savored. We are involved and incarnating; we want in, want more of it. However if things are tight, then the least amount of friction can hurt. When things go south, the friction of being in close can irritate and inflame. At those times, we need some space and want out, quick. But seeking space from a loved one is somewhat of an oxymoron.

Marriage is an extreme discipline, the closest of the close, a mirror only inches in front of our face. As mentioned, marriage is the most common form of yoga, a discipline so exact that infractions are whatever you imagine. I know many married couples who cannot manage to make time to study meditation and mind training practices like letting the mind rest. I understand how busy life can be.

Marriage is a complete practice in itself, something you have committed to and must do every day, like it or not. If this is what we have to do, then it can be useful to make marriage our mind practice. That being the case, a little more awareness may be required and it can help to learn some of the basic tools of mind practice. You have all heard this refrain from me before, so I won't say more here.

Marriage is like a mirror in which we see ourselves. Our partner mirrors us. If the mirror is not perfect, we get a warped image of who we are. That is why would-be meditators seek out

meditation teachers or 'gurus' who are skilled meditators. Good teachers can reflect our image like a perfect mirror without adding their two-cents. We can see ourselves in them.

A marriage involves the same kind of reflection as in meditation, only the marriage partners are usually not trained to mirror that well. They don't know how to let the mind rest properly. Instead of a clear reflection, we get something similar to the mirrors we see in a fun house at the circus, all kinds of distortion. It is the distortion (our biases) that makes marriage arguments so long and difficult. We can't see ourselves clearly in the other. It is like the tar baby in the Uncle Remus tales. The more we struggle, the more stuck we are. Marriage arguments can be endless and very, very rough. Those of us who are married know this.

If the reflection of our self we see in a teacher or our partner is perfectly clear, we can recognize our self and own it. Owning it (acknowledging it is true), we know it is our responsibility to change it. However, if the reflection we get from our partner is untrue, warped, and a distortion of what we (somewhere inside) know to be us, then we don't own it. It is not us, and we have no instant responsibility to accept it. This is a Catch-22.

With a poor reflection by both partners, marriage fights become a perpetual attempt to off-load blame on the other, like musical chairs. Someone is left holding the blame, when obviously it takes two to tangle. Our personal biases and attempts to avoid blame distort the image we reflect, so it is unacceptable to our partner. They can't see themselves in us. And the takeaway?

We are all reflectors, mirrors of other people, those who look into our eyes. If our mind is calm and at rest, we are good mirrors for others. They can see and recognize themselves in us, in our eyes. If we are troubled, have an agenda, or are not at rest, this only muddies the waters and others can only partially see themselves in us. They get a distorted image and this often leads to disagreement over what is seen. When we see ourselves clearly in mirror of the mind, we can accept what we see, including the things we have to change. But when the image is distorted, as it usually is, this leads to argument and further suffering.

My point of course is that being able to offer a calm mental mirror when someone gets upset with us allows them to accurately see themselves as they are. A clear reflection is always taken in and noted.