

How we Connect – Whether We Know It or Not

The cybernetic network of circuitry that connects us to each other

I. Introduction:

Today we talk about how our mind works.

To explain why I'm including this topic in our course, let's do a brief summary of where we've been so far.

First, the goal of this course is to learn how yoga practices and philosophy, including yoga's history, can help us attain a life of well-being. By now you know that we define a life of well-being as a life rich with positive emotions, engagement or flow, meaning, accomplishments, and nurturing relationships.¹

We very briefly looked at the history of yoga to get a sense of what yoga is about. We saw that historically yoga has been about connecting to God. While we discuss that objective in this class, we do so as part of our goal for this course of finding a way to connect to our own essence, our own strengths, and our own dreams. Yoga, as we study it, in this course is about learning to connect to our family, our friends, our community, to strangers, and even to our planet. It is about connecting to and celebrating life so that we maximize our time here.

We've already seen that our own patterns of thought and behavior can get in the way of such connection. We've talked briefly about how yoga practices offer a way to overcome this problem and, additionally, offer us ways to sharpen our mind's discriminatory abilities so that we can identify opportunities for connection and pursue them when we choose.

Because refining our thoughts is so critical to achieving a life of well-being, it is worthwhile to very briefly take a look at how the brain works. By doing so we get a better appreciation for why yoga practices work and, with that appreciation, hopefully a bit more inspiration to learn more about yoga and, most importantly, truly practice.

II. A brief overview.

Because of its focus on connection, yoga's lessons and practices are a fantastic way of creating a life of well-being. We know that in order for us to fully utilize what we learn from yoga, we have to develop a level of emotional resilience, the ability to move beyond our particular patterns of thought and behavior that block us from getting what we want

¹ See posted outline in this course: "What is Success?" Dorigan, William (2016).
www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

out of life. These patterns develop in any number of ways, for example: 1) childhood obstacles, such as abuse or poverty; 2) everyday stresses such as arguments with friends, problems at work, and financial pressures; 3) life-altering events such as death of a loved one, loss of a job, or a divorce; and 4) forms of resistance, such as bias, judgments, prejudices, fears, anger; pretty much, you name it.²

Yoga offers practices to still the mind and develop awareness of the traps and pitfalls that keep us enmeshed in ill serving thought patterns. Chief among those practices is meditation. Both Patanjali in his *Yoga Sutras* and modern behavioral psychologists tell us that meditation, among other things, helps us develop our brain's neural connections, gives us the ability to "observe" our mental activity, develop objectivity during that observation, bolster self-regulatory parts of our brain's circuitry, recognize negative thought patterns, and, as a result of all this, change unhelpful patterns of behavior.³

In addition to meditation, the mindfulness necessary to properly practice yoga poses (*Asana*), as well as practice with *Mantra* and *Yantra*, helps us develop the resilience of the mind necessary to find and engage in the connection needed to create a life of well-being. Two subjects we've already studied, the *Tattvas* and the *Rasas*, are fertile sources of daily practices for refining our awareness and the mind's ability to discriminate and refine thought and emotion.⁴

Once we gain the ability to observe and refine our thoughts and emotions, yoga provides tools tailor-made for creating connection. After all, that is what yoga is for, creating connection.

A. We've studied God's essence. We did so in part because in non-dual Tantric philosophy, we are manifestations of God, in limited form. As a result, we have that same essence. In non-dualist Tantric philosophy, we've discussed how God exists in everything, experiencing the world through each Divine creation. This includes you and me; and also the stranger we just passed on the street and the one up ahead on the corner.⁵

1. When we can slow our mind down long enough to remember this viewpoint, we recognize that we can create connection through experiences and relationships in the world because that is how we connect to God. It is also

² See, generally, Reivich, Dr. Karen and Dr. Andrew Shatte (2002). *The Resilience Factor, 7 Keys To Finding Your Inner Strengths and Overcoming Life's Hurdles*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press.

³ Bryant, Dr. Edwin (2009). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. New York, NY: North Point Press, at liv (yoga is about stilling thoughts and then extracting consciousness from "its embroilment with the mind and its incessant thinking nature."); Siegel, Dr. Daniel (2011). *Mindsight*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, at 89–95; 246.

⁴ See posted outlines in this course: "*Tattvas in the Material World*" and "*The Rasas*." Dorigan, William (2017). www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

⁵ See posted outline in this course: "Our True Nature." Dorigan, William (2017). www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html

how we discover more about ourselves and expand our own “consciousness.” It is how we become more interesting to others, more appealing. It is how we maximize our experience of life.

2. By making these connections we create an environment for positive emotion to appear, opportunities to do something meaningful, and for development of nurturing relationships.
- B. With a mind free of the constant intrusion of negative chatter, we can start making connections to our own heart, to the song playing within each of us.
1. Each of us is born with a special combination of our own signature strengths, our gifts and talents, along with our own particular physical and intellectual structure.
 2. The more we cultivate our strengths, the more we sing our “song,” the more the Divine’s creative expression as us can be experienced by others.
 3. Similarly, the more others are allowed the opportunities to thrive, through education, good health, proper nutrition, and a roof over their heads, the more able they will be to share Supreme Consciousness’ expression with us. Maybe they have an undeveloped ability to figure out how to cure disease, help the environment, or play music. When we look at people for what they might be able to accomplish if given half a chance, giving others a fair chance to manifest their strengths becomes a win-win for everybody.

To better understand how we can refine our thought patterns, let’s now turn our attention to a brief overview of the mind from a behavioral science perspective, including how what we think and feel actually affects those around us.

III. The Role of Memories and Experiences:

Every time we experience something, the experience etches an imprint in our mind. In yoga this is called a *Samskara*.⁶ These are our memories, our mental impressions. These memories, individually and collectively, forge how we view and thus experience the world. They are a source of our thoughts, which means they are the source of our patterns of thought, and the behavior springing from those thoughts. They either cause us to know what to say or do at just the right time or, conversely, they get in our way. In other words, memories lead to our successes or failures.

- A. Memories can be very powerful allies on our quest to create connection with our true essence and with others. In Chapter 5 of *Finding the Midline* I tell a story about how a long-forgotten memory of my grandfather’s support for me as a little boy came to me in a meditation. I had been pretty down on myself, but this memory of

⁶ *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, at 573.

how he loved and cared for me caused a dramatic change for the better in my attitudes.⁷ Such positive memories, from yesterday or from the distant past as this one was, remain stored within us, often sitting in cobwebs and forgotten.

1. Sometimes our mind fights hard to suppress these memories that would be helpful to us. We can suppress memories based on our psychological strategies, the way we cope to survive in the world. We do this if those memories are inconsistent with our strategy.⁸
 - a. For example, perhaps I choose to hold on to the belief I am unlovable because believing so keeps me emotionally “safe.” By “safe” I mean that I never let myself take the risk of being in a loving relationship. Holding on to the belief of being unlovable is vital to my emotional safety. So, my mind, without me even knowing about it, suppresses those times my grandfather told me he loved me. I suppress those memories because they are inconsistent with my strategy that I am unlovable. If I remember that I was loved, then I have less rationalization to run away from the risk of intimacy.
 - b. Some psychologists and therapists say that these strategies can often be traced back to when we were little kids, even babies. For example, if one or both of your parents or other people around the home were violent drinkers, you learn at the tiniest age not to make a fuss, not to even make a sound, lest they hear you and take their rage out on you. It isn’t surprising, then, that avoiding making a fuss and being an introvert becomes a strategy. If you are not aware of it, it will inhibit your ability to connect for your entire life, or until you figure it out and resolve it.
 - c. For some, these stresses as adults can feel like life or death, and they carry that much significance in the brain. Think again of the child that had to avoid being seen or heard to keep from being beaten by a drunken parent. It’s not hard to see why even as an adult, tremendous stress might be involved with drawing too much attention to himself or herself.
 - d. On a happier, encouraging note, the same process applies with positive memories. Memories of being loved, respected, and successful imprint themselves, building great strategies for connection.
 - e. If we feel hard pressed to find something meaningful to do, we might consider mentoring or teaching so we can help people wake up to their positive memories, or help them create some.

⁷ *Finding the Midline*, at 38–40.

⁸ See generally, Kurt, Ron (1990). *Body-Centered Psychotherapy*. Mendocino, CA: LifeRhythm.

2. The brain is a powerful machine. We can use practices to re-wire our patterns of thought, rescuing ourselves from old unhelpful strategies. As an example, when we are feeling happy or some other positive emotion, our brain activity inhibits negative feelings and worry.⁹ Just as negative emotions can pool within the brain, so too can positive emotions.¹⁰
 - a. Focusing on positive emotions strengthens existing past positive memories and even links similar positive memories together.¹¹
 - b. This linkage makes these linked pools of positive emotion powerful. With enough practice focusing on positive memories, our brain will start defaulting to such memories.¹²
 - c. Eventually, as we continue to practice in this way, focusing on particular positive memories, this default becomes a new habit. We've now created a positive pattern of thought.¹³
- B. The brain can, in times of stress, experience “neural hijackings.” This happens when we are faced with a sudden event that reminds us of some past experience. If the past experience was threatening, our brain, in order to protect us, will assume that the new event is also threatening and will make us respond to protect ourselves.¹⁴
1. This protective mechanism can be good for us. If we hear a rattlesnake rattle, it makes sense to jump. But, if our psychological makeup is dominated by memories of things that are negative and threatening to us, we will become programmed so that fear and other anxiety-ridden reactions will more likely be the default way we respond to most events.
 2. Fortunately, because positive memories can also forge connections and become the predominant reactive force in our system, we can learn to program

⁹ Goleman, Dr. Daniel (1995). *Emotional Intelligence*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, at 5–8.

¹⁰ *Emotional Intelligence*, at 5–8.

¹¹ Siegel, Dr. Daniel (2007). *The Mindful Brain*. New York, NY: WW Norton & Company, Inc, at 30–31; *Mindsight*, at 55–59.

¹² Lewis, Drs. Thomas, et al. (2000). *A General Theory of Love*. New York, NY: Random House, at 141–144.

¹³ *A General Theory of Love*, at 141–144.

¹⁴ *Emotional Intelligence*, at 4–20.

ourselves to interact in the world with an underpinning of confidence and a desire to connect.¹⁵

- C. We have the choice to seek out positive relationships, take time to experience positive emotions, and even find ways to create them. All these choices help build a wellspring of positive memory within us, making it far more likely that in times of stress our fast-moving mind will select something positive to fuel our response.

We will now discuss how, by building such a wellspring, we better contribute to the mental well-being of others by the energy we feel and project.

IV. The Neural Bridges Connecting Each of Us – the Outer World.

Mastering our emotional flow, gaining control over our patterns of thoughts, can lead to connection in the world. If that wasn't enough incentive, then consider this. Psychologists and neurologists have demonstrated that we affect each other by what we are feeling. This means that if we are harboring anger or irritation, we convey it, even if we try to hide it. The positive “flip side” of this is that we can also convey warm, encouraging feelings.

Scholar and author Dr. Georg Feuerstein described a “cybernetic network” of circuitry. This is the energy network quantum physicists refer to that connects all of us.¹⁶ Not only does this network exist within each of us, it also exists within the air all around us, literally. Behavioral psychologists have identified an energetic pathway that serves to transmit our energy to each other.

What are they talking about? Physicists, such as Albert Einstein, psychologists, and psychiatrists such as Carl Jung, have described the world as existing of energy. They suggest that we are all connected as part of this flowing, dynamic world of energy, which is always in flux. This is the cybernetic network of circuitry Dr. Feuerstein discusses.

Let's very briefly discuss this network.

- A. Notice how some people seem to have a sense of “knowing.” No matter how busy they might be they still seem able to pick up on the energy of others or the energy of a situation. In Chapter 51 of *Finding the Midline* I share a story about how Abigail, the three-year old daughter of some friends of mine, noticed my mood change when I was talking to her mom. We were all enjoying an outdoor rock concert and suddenly I felt sad because I was not part of a couple, like all my friends around me. Abigail was playing with her friends, looked up suddenly just after my sadness had descended on me. She saw me and ran over to give me a hug.

¹⁵ *A General Theory of Love*, at 128–132; see also, posted outline in this course: “What is Success?” Dorigan, William (2016). www.findingthemidline.com/midlinetalks/html (discussion and suggested resources for developing emotional resilience).

¹⁶ Feuerstein, Dr. Georg (2001 ed). *The Yoga Tradition*. Prescott, AZ: Hohm Press, at 348–350.

Then, she smiled at her mom and me and went back to her game.¹⁷ I was surprised but her mom wasn't. There really is something in the air, energies we express even when we don't know it. Some people, often little kids, are aware enough to pick up on these energies.

1. Good trial lawyers have this ability. They can tell in a deposition or trial when a witness is not telling the truth or is uncomfortable with a line of questioning. They have a way of knowing when and how to follow up to get the witness to open up. Where other lawyers will miss the signals, these top lawyers seldom miss them.
 2. We can learn to be this observant with each other. We can practice sitting inconspicuously someplace, like at a shopping mall, and watch people. We can watch their body language, their expressions; perhaps listen to the tone of their voice. These are all clues as to what they are feeling.
 3. Certainly we can do this with our family. Try saying something fun and complimentary to your young child and watch the change in facial expression and body language.
 4. This is a way to develop the skills necessary to create more friendships. This is a way to develop the sense of when somebody needs our help.
- B. Yoga philosophers and modern behavioral psychologists tell us that there is an overall energetic landscape within the universe, a vibrating, and living powerful energy.¹⁸ This energetic landscape pervades our body and mind because we are part of the universe.
1. Dr. Daniel Goleman in his book *Social Intelligence* discusses this landscape. He describes research in the field of social neuroscience, the study of how we engage with each other, how we connect or don't.¹⁹
 2. He describes how neuroscientists have been able to map the brain and figure out where within the brain we react to outside stimulus. Scientists use functional MRIs, a computer-generated video of the brain. In experiments people are connected to computers and a video is made of their brains as they observe a variety of emotional stimuli.²⁰

¹⁷ Dorigan, William (2013). *Finding the Midline*. Winter Park, CO: LuHen Publications, LLC., at 168–170.

¹⁸ *The Yoga Tradition*, at 348–350.

¹⁹ Goleman, Dr. Daniel (2006). *Social Intelligence*. New York, NY: Bantam Dell.

²⁰ *Social Intelligence*, at 4–10.

3. For example, a couple is brought into a room on the other side of a one-way mirror and the persons connected to the computer observe the couple as they go through a script. Behavioral specialists can actually see how certain parts of the brain react when the couple appears to be having a nice, intimate conversation but then other parts of the brain fire up when the couple begins to fight.
 4. From these types of experiments we have learned that we will pick up the energy of other people's emotions, whether those emotions be love, anger, fear, curiosity.²¹ Emotions travel over a "neural bridge."
- C. We are equipped with mirror neurons that allow us to sense another person's feelings, not only through reading their physical signs, such as facial expressions and body language, but also through these neural bridges. In his book *Biology of Belief*, Dr. Bruce Lipton describes a whole area of neuroscience called Epigenetics, which studies the link between body and matter.²²
- D. In summary, the research is clear. We can affect the emotions of those around us and also be affected by others the same way.
1. Think about that if you are a boss, a teacher, a parent, or in a relationship (or want to be in one). Think of the power you have to influence another human being.
 2. Then think about your choices as to what thoughts you allow to fester inside you, what you choose to think about and dwell upon. You are likely passing on those negative thoughts and attitudes to others.
 3. When we experience negative and unhelpful feelings, we can try to refine them down to their essence and transmute them into something helpful. This creates a positive memory, a *Samskara*, that helps power other positive memories in our brain. If, instead, we dwell on the negative and allow it to permeate our mind, we are creating a negative memory, a *Samskara*, which becomes etched in our mind and can join with other such negative memories to become powerful. This makes it more likely that in stress our mind will reach for this negative thought, this memory.
- E. When we realize that the moods and negative thought patterns of others can literally reach out and penetrate us, it becomes obvious that we want to spend time with upbeat, psychologically healthy people. If we are drinking from the same cup of cybernetic energies, we want what we drink to be positive. Otherwise, the chances

²¹ *Social Intelligence*, at 4-10.

²² Lipton, Dr. Bruce (2008). *The Biology of Belief*. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, Inc.

of experiencing more positive emotion and engaging in more meaningful activities are greatly diminished if we choose to take in the negativity of others.

- F. When we realize we can affect others purely by our thoughts, the tone of our voice, our facial expressions, and our body language, we realize how powerful we are in terms of helping others transmute their moods into something positive.
1. This again brings us back to Dr. Barbara Fredrickson's definition of love as being a resonance in which we share a positive emotion with another.²³ We have the power to share our feelings of joy, wonder, interest, and other positive emotions with others just by emitting our own positive feelings.
 2. In terms of creating new nurturing relationships and deepening existing ones, it is important to know that we "carry our emotions on our sleeve." We can practice refining feelings that bother us at the earliest possible moment so that we lessen the chance that when we encounter others we will leave an unfavorable impression, even when the other person isn't quite sure why!

IV. Conclusion:

We can transmute our patterns of thought, turning old negative habitual patterns into positive patterns.

To help give us incentive to do the practice required for this to occur, we remember that we transmit what we are feeling. If we are feeling disappointment, anger or aversion, it is that disappointment, anger or aversion that we will transmit to others, even if we choose our words carefully and think we are masking our feelings. If your little daughter walks in the room to show you something she made at school and you feel upset because she interrupted you watching a football game, she likely will know she made you upset. Conversely, we can cultivate positive emotion and resonate with others, helping them to get a "hit" of positivity. This can't help but lead to the creation of new relationships and the deepening of existing ones.

For these reasons, among others, we need to study what yoga has to teach us about changing our inner landscape. Our internal network in yoga is called our "subtle body." It is that part of the cybernetic network of circuitry that lies within us and processes our experiences.

We've seen something of how the brain processes, so next week we turn to the yogic subtle body. We will explore, for example, how the connective force of *Prana* moves into us, through, and out of us. In that process, we can see how we can make that *Prana* an energetic transmission that maximizes our opportunity to create a life of well-being.

²³ Fredrickson, Dr. Barbara (2013). *Love 2.0*. New York, NY: The Penguin Group, at 10.