



DO YOU HAVE EMOTIONS OR DO YOUR EMOTIONS HAVE YOU? *HOW YOGA CAN HELP YOU HARNESS THE POWER OF YOUR EMOTIONS*

TEXT: UWE VAMDEV FRANZ © 2002

Humans have emotions. Although this is everyone's experience, most of us are troubled by this fundamental human trait. Is it a blessing, a gift to be cherished, or is it a curse to be overcome, a great challenge, to face, to endure? Is it the pinnacle of our humanity or the source of our bestiality? Is it the reason behind human genius or is it our primordial stigma, a disease, forcing us to act crazier and more cruel than any other creature on this planet?

Western psychology has sought its own answers for the last 100 years through many forms of treatments, of techniques and drugs to help us cope with this enormous power of our emotionality. We have been taught to recognize, to express and to stop denying and suppressing it. We have learned to get it out, this primordial scream, we beat up on cushions, we have danced it out and tried to pray it away. For some people this has worked wonders. Often they go away from workshops or seminars feeling free to express themselves as they never were able to before.

But after some time all of this seems to wear off, and again, your emotions get hold of you (not you of them!), you once again become a captive of your own past, of this raging fire of feelings inside you – it just takes over and leaves you feeling out of control.

Of course, this dilemma is not a new one. Wise women and men have studied human emotions since the very beginning of history. Several great traditions have developed out of these studies. For many centuries yoga has been offering its very pragmatic solution. It addresses our emotionality mainly from three distinct angles:

First it looks at where you are right now:

Through various exercises you learn to calm down, to slow down the thought-feeling vortex of your mind. As it spins slower and slower you start to observe it, it is almost as if your thoughts and feelings untangle right before your inner eye.

I worked in prisons with many violent people who were physically hurting people because they could not control their rage. By learning to slow down their own mind, they edged out a wedge of time for themselves, giving them a chance to stop just enough so that they could get a grip on themselves and not hit, not explode. We did not look at the reason behind their rage, we did not analyze the roots in their childhood. But they were able to slow down, even after four, five hours of training.

But secondly, of course there is what is called »vicara« in yoga, self-inquiry. This is not »psychological brooding« as one of my teachers called it. Vicara means looking at who you really are. It probably is the most profound process I ever experienced. The Christian mystics in the middle ages propagated it as »contemplation.« By delving deep into your own mind, your own feelings, you get to a place where you can experience your own greatness, your own wholeness.

However, we are not used to look at ourselves without judgment, without a feeling of being incompetent, inappropriate or, just as sad, of being better than others. It is like looking at the sun with a naked eye. You cannot do it. You have to wear sun glasses. In the same way yoga offers you the glasses of a very different understanding about yourself, about who you really are, why you are here and what it means to be alive as a human being.

Many people work on this second approach all of their lives. It is a most valuable undertaking. You really can change how you see yourself in a profound way. You can learn to accept that there is no better you out there than you, that every time you judge yourself it is just the old patterns of your own mind limiting you. Vicara will eventually lead you to see that every idea you have about yourself is just an idea, not really you. So you can lighten up about yourself, you don't have to take yourself so seriously and with that your life gets so much lighter.

»As you think so you become.« This is one of the most startling truths you will explore in your yoga practice. If you focus on all that is wrong about you, that is what you experience. If you focus on your true greatness which does not put anybody else down, you will experience that. The choice is yours.

By having learned to slow down your thoughts, watch your feelings as they arise inside you without immediately becoming their captive, you can start to become aware of your inner state and you can start owning it freely, or change it, if you wish. That ability give you a good chance to be happy, to live your life, your very own and precious life to the fullest.



This text is a publication of Uwe Vamdev Franz. He practices and teaches yoga since 1977.
He offers talks and workshops in the USA and in Europe. If you want to know more about the work of Uwe Vamdev Franz
or want to read more of his texts, please visit www.svayoga.com.

svayoga | Uwe Vamdev Franz | 240 Tice Hill Road | Ghent, NY 12075 | phone 1-888-669-6691 | www.svayoga.com