



EMOTIONAL RELEASE THROUGH YOGA Putting The Spider In The Glass

*Do you remember what you were like when you started yoga?
After we have established a regular yoga practice we can feel more balanced and whole. It can be easier to pinpoint the physical and mental benefits we have experienced than it is to articulate the emotional development that has unfolded us. There are at least three forms of release that support us emotionally as we move closer to our true self, the 'I AM' that exists independently of our mind, our body, and our feelings..*

I came to yoga with a mind that worked (I thought) and a body that tagged along reluctantly. What I didn't know about myself was that I was swamped by an emotional fog so familiar I had no sense of the internal knots that distorted me. There was something I was missing - a significant part of myself that lay buried under my addictions to nicotine, chocolate, sugar and familiar, rigid and safe patterns. Gradually, as I have slowly trodden my path through yoga, experiencing my mind, body and feelings more fully and sampling the potential balance between them, the fog has been clearing. Standing in this clearing as a teacher I can see the specific processes that help us release blocks created by repressed emotions.

There are at least three ways we can release emotional blocks through yoga: simple spontaneous release; consciously and often painstakingly working through feelings or sitting with a nebulous fog of emotional tension until confusion gives way to clarity.

1/ There can be a **simple spontaneous release** that we may or may not be aware of. In a stretch of a tense muscle or a twitch in relaxation, in the training towards meditation or in the process of a breath we can release an old trapped feeling without knowing what it was. Simple as 'here one day, gone the next'. Well maybe not quite. Although it is a simple form of release it often comes about because of a regular practice: stretches repeated a few times most mornings, regular conscious breaths before going to sleep, a weekly yoga class, or a daily quiet/meditation time. Something that gives our subconscious a sense of safety and security and allows it to do some sorting and releasing with or without our awareness or approval.

What does this kind of release look like? After I had been doing yoga for about three years it occurred to me that I no longer had a fear of spiders. I used to find myself becoming quite anxious if I saw a spider on the wall and I had to go near it. I'm not sure when the shift happened, but all at once, it seems, I was looking at spiders and wondering about them. I became the one in the household who would use a sheet of paper and a glass to catch spiders and take them outside. Now I might wince a little if one runs over my hand, but I'll move myself out of its way, my breath will quickly settle and I'll watch it with interest to try to understand what it is experiencing. I have no idea what led to the fear nor exactly what allowed me to release it. There is no doubt in my mind, though, that it was regular yoga that supported the release.

2/ At other times we might be **fully aware of the feelings we are working through**. When we stretch, especially through our hips or solar plexus, or when we are attempting a quiet meditative moment by bringing our mind constantly back to a chosen focus, feelings of anger, for instance, can come to the surface. It can be quite a shock in contrast to the quiet calm we become accustomed to in our yoga practice. We might not be conscious of where the feeling came from or when it was 'laid down' within us. On the other hand, it might be accompanied by a flash of memory, a glimpse of an experience we have turned away from. The very nature of a yoga class or practice and the deep breathing that is an integral part of yoga allow us to bring feelings to the surface, when we are ready. We can let the feelings sit within us, watching them with a detachment that fosters understanding and helps us harness the energy or motivation our emotions offer us. Instead of allowing the emotions to control or consume us and losing our mental focus as we get hooked into the drama or story, we can harness the power of the experience by remaining our own independent observer and then move on in a climate of acceptance, growth and distilled wisdom.

3/ Those of us who have kept a lid on our emotions are likely to be familiar with a third process. We can become aware of a **nebulous, confusing, stultifying fog of emotional tension that we cannot define, label or articulate**. We may have spent a lot of our life trying to keep our head just above the fog, without realising it. Then at some stage as we deepen our yoga practice we find that a certain confusion, a sense of dread or gloom engulfs us, defying all of our containment measures and we can no longer pretend it doesn't exist.

What to do? Spend some time learning to like the fog. It might be close, overwhelming and stifling but if we keep working rhythmically with our breath, it can be an exciting challenge to walk through the distorting mists and accept our fogginess. We can practice telling ourselves and others, "I am not sure what I feel about that", "I'm feeling ambivalent", "I'm feeling a bit confused at the moment ... and that's OK, I know it will clear at some point", "I am going to give myself some space". Sooner or later as we work with our yoga we find our way to a clearing, with renewed respect for both confusion and clarity. We'll have a more sensitive understanding of the land we are traversing and our internal resources will have come to the fore.

When my wise and compassionate yoga teacher suggested it was **who** I am and **how** I am that was important, not so much what I *do*, I realized I didn't have to do anything about the fog. I just needed to learn how to *be*. I have gradually learnt how to use my breath and let the feelings, or the fog that confuses them, come up as they need - no judgements, no right or wrongs, no shoulds or mustn'ts. The fog is in me but it is not of me. I exist independently to my feelings, to my mind, to my body.

"I AM".

For a long time it was hard for me to say 'I AM' with any strength or conviction ... they were hollow words but words that gradually filled themselves with power. Every time I breathed a little more consciously, every moment of release in relaxation, each time I brought my mind under control and into focus even for a split second, every time the postures brought my systems into alignment and balanced me hormonally - every part of me, every cell, was tuning in to who I am.

'I AM'.

When you allow those words to have a genuine power within you – *your* power, not someone else's suggestion - then you can sit back and look at your feelings, your fog and your thoughts, in a simple act of respect and observation. Watch, ponder and then move on. Like the spiders in my house. Now I understand them enough to let them be but not to let them run all over me. I no longer have to waste any energy avoiding them. There's less need to run away or even

look the other way. Fear and confusion are more specific experiences that soon pass and resolve into new, clear pathways.

Through it all, the power of 'I AM' endures.

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