

## **The Health Series: #9**

### **THE YOGA OF MIND (PART 1):**

### **HOW THE 5 ELEMENTS AFFECT OUR MIND & EMOTIONS**

It gives me great pleasure to introduce Amanda Ings, International Tantra Yoga & Meditation teacher based on the west coast of Canada.

Amanda's been leading classes, workshops, retreats & online courses for over 10 years, and "teaches with a true passion and a great authenticity. As a student, she is bound to inspire you!" Amanda's offerings are rich in the philosophy and experiential practice of non-duality, delivered with a teaching style that is grounded, deeply somatic, spontaneous, & organic. She has a soft, gentle, maternal & welcoming nature, yet her presence summons an immediate embodiment of your own presence, power, and wisdom. "Her compassionate and peaceful presence are a deep embodiment of the tantric teachings she shares so beautifully," says a past student. When she's not studying with her teacher, Yogini adept Maa Parvathi Nanda Nath, or teaching, you'll find her communing with one of her other 3 main loves in life: being with children, frolicking in the forest, and spending time with her two gentle giant dogs!

### **THE YOGA OF MIND (PART 1): HOW THE 5 ELEMENTS EFFECT OUR MIND & EMOTIONS**

I could sit here and speak to you for days about the physical benefits of Yoga - but, that's certainly been (over)done already, right? Yes. In the western world, in all our preoccupation with looking good & feeling great, we have surreptitiously exploited a 7000+ year old spiritual path to moksha (liberation) and conveniently packaged it into a handy-dandy prescription of yoga postures for the physical body. Now... while I am all for looking good and feeling great... this is just the very tip of the iceberg in the conversation about the deeper benefits of Yoga - mentally, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually.

Today, I am going to focus on one aspect of Yoga, the 'yoga of mind' (mind - you know, that thing you think you are?) Mind, with all its thoughts, mental formations and emotions. For the purpose of this article, let us define the word "emotion".

What are emotions?

a) emotions are, simply put, thoughts that we feel

b) e-motions = energy-in-motion, meaning that emotions are not part of a spectrum swinging from positive to negative. They are neither good nor bad. They are merely forces of energy in motion. (It's our personal identification with them that gives them connotations of being 'desirable or undesirable' expressions of our experience.)

What are thoughts, and where do they come from?

If you've ever attended a mainstream meditation class, or even your local yoga class, you've likely heard this before: "Let your thoughts pass by like clouds passing through the sky." (And

you've probably thought, "Yeah, right. Like that's so easy.") The thing is - it actually is that easy! In the sense that if I can actually catch the moment of a thought as it arises, and trace it back to where it came from, I find that it came from nowhere - or, from 'the sky of your mind'. Moreso, if I watch that same thought disappear, rather than 'jumping on that thought train and running with it' (into a whole stream of thoughts connected to it), I will find that it goes back where it came from, which is, seemingly, nowhere. All of this is a very quick synopsis to point us in the direction of a very fundamental and important truth: our thoughts arise from space, and dissolve back into space (if we let them.) This is revealing of an underlying intrinsic quality to the mind - it is comprised completely of space. It is the sky. From this space, thoughts arise, and thoughts dissolve. If you were to sit long enough, or simply remain in a meditative state while engaged in whatever activity you are doing at the time, eventually, there would be some experience that points you to this implicit spacious nature of your mind and its consequent thoughts or 'weather patterns'.

Now, while I'm an advocate in the modern health industry and current spiritual environment that we are not broken (thus, there is nothing here to 'fix') - if we were to point to some of the basic occupational hazards that come with having a mind, the main one is the mind's capacity to trick us into thinking that we are it. It does so by building up thought structures and belief systems so sturdy that we eventually come to 'live in' them. These thoughts and beliefs become our house - they are the walls we look at each day, and the windows we peer out of as we view the world around us. Because we spend so much time in this little inner house we've built, we naturally start to identify with our thoughts. This perpetuates them, of course. What began as one thought (stimulated from our 5 senses interacting with the peripheral world) then gets propagated as true, and is used as a reference point for our experience of our 'self', and it goes on and on from there; each thought propagating the next in a never ending stream of thinking, thinking, thinking. Each thought telling us in some way or another that we exist in the ways we think we do, and that we are the mental constructs we make up. Without concentrated effort and mindful enquiry, we miss the little moments of space inside ourselves. We miss the little gaps, the spacious bridges between the thoughts; the moments that point us back to our intrinsic nature. This 'house' is really just sheltering a pure and empty space of consciousness itself, or a basic underlying formlessness, which is a very alive field of consciousness that gets covered up with thoughts, ideas, and concepts.

What is emptiness?

This is where all the zen, tao, Tibetan buddhism, Tantra and other non-dual traditions come in with their impressive body of teachings on 'emptiness'. Let us for now define 'emptiness' not as nothing, but as no-thing - unidentified, void of subject and object; vast, and full of potential; formless, yet ever-ready to manifest into some form or another, into some expression of its potentiality. So, from here, we could say that our cardinal nature is one of emptiness (and if this isn't your everyday experience of yourself: firstly, you aren't alone! And secondly, bear with me... we're getting to that.) So now, our groundwork has been laid.

However, if you're anything like me (and you're a human, so I'm assuming you are), this basic ground of my being, this 'emptiness', is not always how I experience myself. More accurate would be to include the sensational array of experiences through which I gather and integrate my

sense of self: through experiences of great loss and great joy, times of deep loneliness and profound connection, moments of spectacular rage to sharp crystal clarity, passageways of great arrogance and pride to deep humility and generosity, to moments of debilitating ignorance, wakefulness, and absolute love. All of these brilliant displays of our emotional range give shape, form, definition and volition to the rudimentary emptiness at lies the core of our character.

Yoga falls under a wider branch of ancient study and practice called Tantra. And from a ‘tantric psychology’ point of view, the vast array of emotional experiences we have the capacity to feel arises from the play of the 5 elements (earth, water, air, fire, & space), at the level of the mind. Each of these elements co-arises from one most primary element: space. So, just as the thoughts arise from the ‘sky’ or fundamental spaciousness of the mind, so too do the 5 elements spontaneously and simultaneously co-arise from the space element. Each of these elements serves to bring forth the empty field of potentiality of our minds into the manifest realm through our life experiences. Through each splendid display of emotion, we are somehow wonderfully and mysteriously pointed back to the space of free energy and vastness from which the display arose from. Remember, emotions are just energy in motion, so re-cognizing what our emotions are made of and where they are coming from also means the pathway back to accessing our endless well of free energy. However, this isn’t the only possibility. If we do not consciously work hand-in-hand with our mental and emotional bodies, that source of free energy gets blocked - like a kink in an otherwise very powerfully flowing garden hose. Pressure builds up while perspective breaks down. It is so easy to get lost in our emotions; over-identifying with them, perpetuating them, building stories around them, and then crafting tall towers to protect those stories that protect the identities we have that are based upon our emotional experiences... rather than seeing them for what they truly are - movements of pure energy!

How do the 5 elements show up mentally and emotionally in the body-mind?

So, let’s now dive into the psycho-emotional qualities and expressions that each element gives rise to in the mind...

The earth element gives the mind its stability. In its wisdom aspects, when the energy of the earth element is unobstructed and unimpeded within us, it expresses as equanimity and generosity. We know we have enough, and there is an inner orientation of feeling supported. We are grounded, nourished and sustained, and from this place, we are able to give freely to others. When the earth energy is obstructed (think like an earthquake, having ‘the ground pulled out from beneath you’), this energy comes out as arrogance and pride, being competitive and judgmental, or as greed, materialism, neediness, and fears of not having enough and not being enough; feeling unworthy.

The air element gives the mind its definition and movement. It tells us what to do, how to do it, and when to do it, when its energy is moving freely. When this internal energy becomes obstructed, it moves much like the physical aspect of the air element in its most obstructive force; like a hurricane, blowing and spiralling around the same terrain over and over and over. We know this experience emotionally as feelings of jealousy, paranoia, extreme busy-ness, perfectionism, and having to do everything ourselves all the time so that ‘it gets done right’ and so we can be ‘in control’. By contrast, if the air element energy is healthily functioning in the

mind, we are able to trust the free and spontaneous flow of life and our actions within it. Feelings of joy, spontaneity, creativity, accomplishment and self-confidence become accessible to us because the mind isn't busy trying to validate itself with its cyclical thought processes, making us doubt our own and others' actions and intents.

The water element gives the mind its permeability and penetrative qualities. It's what gives us our ability to see or not see our realities clearly; it gives us clear-seeing, mirror-like awareness, or blinding rage and fear. One raindrop upon a calm surface of water completely distorts the reflection of the sky above - in this way, so too do I have a tendency to see reality as a reflection of how I am rather than how it is. And much like the actual physical qualities of the water element, when the waters of the mind are calm, we can peer down into them and see with depth, vision and clarity. We receive insights and intuitions. Similarly, we are able to be soft and fluid in ourselves, and vulnerable with others - we can reveal to ourselves and others' the depths of our being and inner experiences. There is an intrinsic stillness that we can touch inside ourselves. If the energy of the water element obstructs, however, our emotional energy either 'goes under' (i.e. diving to the bottom, gets pushed down, avoidance techniques), 'rages' (i.e. like a tsunami), or freezes (i.e. giving silent treatment, ignoring, not seeing/not looking in order to 'get to the bottom of things'). This results in emotional expressions of pervasive sadness, depression, unhealthy (unboundary-ed) anger or rage, hate towards self or other, defensiveness & hardened boundaries, avoidance techniques, and fears of always being attacked or having to be on the attack; fears around not being safe.

The fire element inside gives us our liveliness, radiance, and magnetizing qualities. When this element burns brightly and is healthily sustained in the body-mind, we hold the wisdom principles of compassion, passion and connection - belongingness. We are able to burn in such a way that our inner fires remain 'tended to' and provide a warm, steady source of light, warmth and comfort for ourselves and others. Our fires create a warm embrace for others to take refuge in. We are inclusive of others, have healthy attachments and appropriate boundaries in relationship (to anything). On the other hand, if this energy force goes unregulated in us, it begins to burn, burn, burn, and consume everything in its sight. This manifests in our emotional realm as addiction, seduction, lust, endless need for stimulation, distraction, fantasy or drama, or, feelings of loneliness, rejection, isolation and disconnect. If the inner fires aren't maintained with healthy boundaries, we simply get burned out. Fears of abandonment, being alone, or being rejected may arise from here.

The space element, being the element that all the other elemental expressions co-arise from (and dissolve back into), holds the wisdom of unity, absolute consciousness & of vast, impersonal love; feelings of being an intrinsic, irremovable part of a whole. When this element functions freely and its energy is unobstructed, we are awake, aware, connected and integrated in ourselves. We can hold the dynamism of life without becoming overwhelmed by its many respective individually functioning parts, and we can assimilate the greater mystery of life with wonder, relevancy and absorption. There is a prevailing quality of omniscience to our beingness; not that we 'know' everything, but an inner state of knowing that we will know what we need to know, when we need to know it. There's a deeply subtle yet central connection to the greater web of life, and feeling our place within it. When this element 'goes out', and its energy becomes impeded, interrupted, stuck or blocked, our fundamental 'knowing-ness' or

remembrance also gets blocked; and there is a fundamental denial or ignorance, a lack of willingness to 'see the greater picture'. Or, perhaps more commonly experienced expressions of this basic desire to remain ignorant, 'not to see', can be: overwhelm, complete emotional shut down, feeling fragmented, disassociated, disembodied, extreme paranoia, numbness, or the inability to feel and hold all the parts - i.e. 'it's all just too much', or, feeling spaced out, unlocalized and disoriented, or experiencing extreme confusion.

The path of the Yoga of mind...

The path of the yoga of mind is to follow our emotional patterns back to their source, to trust them as a path all on their own, rather than see them as something we must avoid, nullify, dampen, change, or be rid of all together. The 5 elements together create the impeccably perfect range of this human experience. Each element holds a primary wisdom that reflects us back to our innate state of unity within. Earth gives rise to equanimity; water gives rise to stillness. Air gives rise to joy, while fire illuminates our capacity for deep compassion. Space gives rise to wisdom itself - of which the equanimity, stillness, joy, and compassion are all a reflection of.

Following our emotional patterns along this Tantric Yogic system with the 5 elements helps us to map out 'the weather patterns' of our mind at any given moment. Is there an inner tsunami about to happen, with fear and anger crashing in in waves, or are the waters still and calm, giving rise to clear-seeing? Is the inner ground trembling and shaking, giving way to feelings of insecurity, grasping and poverty-mentalities, or is the inner ground steady and solid, giving stamina, support, and ease? Is the inner fire burning in a balanced way, giving radiance, warmth and an interestedness in all of life, or is it burning so low that there is no warmth, no comfort, and no connection to be found here? Or, is it burning so out of control that it consumes everything in its periphery with its bottomless needs and desires?

We can follow our emotions to trace the dance of the mind, and how our inner landscape - that which is ultimately formless - is brought into form through this play of the elements. This teaching would tell us that this 'play' between the formless and the form is merely about experience and being in relationship. The open field of consciousness that is spacious, timeless, empty, formless and full of potential, wishes to experience itself. And so it gives rise to the 5 elements, which give the us our solidity (earth), our fluidity (water), our definition (air), and our radiance (fire).

Ultimately, this understanding can heal a fundamental rift, the one that thought perpetuates. Entering and absorbing fully into the free energy of our emotions helps point us back to our spaciousness; our inner presence and vastness. As these experiences increase, the experiences of feeling small, limited and separate from the whole decrease. The thoughts are needed less and less as references points to remind myself I exist, and what remains is a beautiful play between space and its devoted allies, the elements. They dance together in a grace-filled dance that reminds us that in fact, we have come here to dance! We arise from a field of unified consciousness, and we dissolve back into that field. This is the yoga of mind - to foster the growth in ourselves of an experiential-knowing (knowing that is grounded by actual experience) that the boundaries of self the mind creates do not actually exist. Over time, this allows the mind

to rest, by virtue of its very nature, while enjoying the magnificent play and display of the 5 elements as they ‘dance in the space’.

If you are interested in learning more about this the path of the Yoga of Mind, the author, Amanda Ings, is offering her 7-month intensive online program for a 3rd year, beginning on Jan 1, 2018: “The Yoga of Mind: 5 Elements & Emotions Mandala.” Go to [amandaings.com](http://amandaings.com) to find out more, book a private Skype consult with Amanda, or email her at [belight@amandaings.com](mailto:belight@amandaings.com) to discuss if the program is a good fit for you!

Thank you, Amanda!

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