

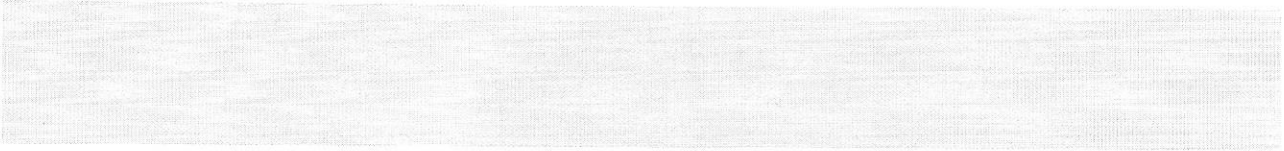
Growth in Bodymind

by Ken Dychtwald

The yoga perspective recognizes that each of us is made up of a great many forces, feelings, limits, possibilities, and passions. These aspects exist within my body and my mind and collectively define the boundaries that I usually identify as “me.” Physically, these limits are experienced as muscle tension, restricted movement, and pain. Psychologically, these limits are experienced as dogma, ignorance and fear. Most limits have the potential to continually change and restructure themselves.

Now, if I sit on the floor and try to reach over to touch my toes, I might notice that I can only stretch to about five inches away from my toes before I experience tension and slight pain. At this point, the muscles in my lower back and the muscles in the back of my legs are just too tight to allow me any further stretch. At this point I am experiencing one of my boundaries.

This point, this “edge,” is a highly important place, for within the yogic philosophy, this edge is considered to be my creative teacher from whom I can learn about myself. If I approach this teacher/edge with love, sensitivity, and awareness, I will discover that my teacher/edge will move and allow me a greater range of motion. If I shy away from approaching my teacher/edge, I will learn nothing new, and in time my own dogma/tightness will contract upon itself and I will grow even tighter. If I try to blast past my edge, I might fool myself into thinking that I have learned and expanded, but in fact what usually happens is that I am only impressing myself with a temporary surge of ambition and that this feeling will probably contract upon itself with fear and subsequent tightening, forcing me into greater confusion or potentially dangerous misunderstandings. Physically, when I approach my edge gently and consciously, my body responds by focusing energy and attention on this spot, encouraging the blood and energy to bathe the related muscles and organs with vitality and life, thus allowing me the experience of true growth and self-nourishment. But if I do not try to reach my edge, my body, having no point of focus, will find it difficult to isolate the place and nourish it, and little growth and improvement will follow.



To state the extreme: If I never explore my limits, my bodymind will gradually tighten and become unconscious. If I regularly explore my limits in a caring and adventurous fashion, I will expand and grow in a vital fashion. But if I try to push myself past where I am honestly able to go, I will no longer be practicing “yoga” but instead will be practicing “greed,” and I will probably be met by pain and disease.

The teacher/edge ... distinguishes the fine line that exists between self-destruction and self-improvement.

This perspective reflects the yogic nonviolent, noncompetitive, holistic approach to growth, education and health.

This perspective also suggests the most effective way to develop yourself is to be as mindful and as aware as possible, all the while being respectful of self-limits and appreciative of continually regenerating expansiveness.