

## Are You Attached? How Practicing non-attachment can enhance your life

By Alena Gerst

An acupuncturist at the wellness center where I work asked me to consult with a patient who would sob uncontrollably during her treatments each week. After talking for a while, the patient informed me that a loved one was gravely ill, and her spouse left her for another. She did not talk to her friends or family about her troubles, because she believed it made her seem weak, and she was supposed to be "the strong one".

This patient was experiencing tremendous loss, and understandably was having trouble letting go. I also heard her telling me that she had a notion of the person she was supposed to be, and felt ashamed that she wasn't living up to her expectations.

Attachment, to relationships, to things, or to ideas of who we are, who we should be, and to ways of thinking, **comes with being human**. Exploring those attachments, their meanings, their impact on our lives, and asking ourselves when it is time to consider letting them go, **comes with practicing Yoga**. Yoga turns life itself into a practice.

Many of you have heard me refer to the 8 limbs Yoga. *Asana*, or physical postures (and what comes to mind in general when we think about Yoga), is one of those 8 limbs. Another limb is called *Yamas*, and within the *Yamas*, we have a principle called *Aparigraha*, which directly addresses the idea of attachments.

In *The Eight Limbs: The Core of Yoga*, William J.D. Doran writes that *Aparigraha* (non-attachment) "implies letting go of our attachments to things, and an **understanding that impermanence and change are the only constants**." This is understandably not always easy to do! Especially if we have lost things, relationships, or abilities we once had and thought were ours to keep forever.

With any change in life, whether we consider it good or bad, we experience a loss. This is important to acknowledge and, whenever possible, accept. But when the practice (**practice** being the operative word here) of *Aparigraha*, or

non-attachment, becomes part of our daily lives, we can greatly enhance our own feelings of personal satisfaction, wellness, and pleasure.

## The Broader Concept

While working in a Yoga class on moving our shoulder blades down and in so that our chests could lift and brighten, one of my students said, "So this is how we're supposed to be?" It's not about how we're supposed to be, I answered. It's about **knowing how we are**. And only from there can we work towards a new direction.

As humans, we very often allow ourselves to think we are supposed to be a certain way (as a parent, employee, friend, Yogi), and become attached to these ideas. Practicing *Aparigraha*, or non-attachment, allows more space for us to recognize our patterns, adjust our expectations, and let go when the time comes.

© February 2012

---



**Alena Gerst, LMSW, RYT**, is a licensed social worker and certified yoga teacher. She provides private yoga instruction, individual cognitive focused counseling, and integrative mind-body work. Additionally, she facilitates mind-body workshops and educational seminars on reducing stress and promoting relaxation. She currently provides mind-body counseling in an outpatient wellness center at NYU Langone Medical Center, and yoga therapy on an inpatient general medicine and oncology unit at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York City. For more information, visit [www.yogalenatherapeutics.com](http://www.yogalenatherapeutics.com) and [www.IWDwellness.org](http://www.IWDwellness.org)