

TRANSCRIPT

Inner Peace University Lesson 2-2

[00:00:00] This lesson is all about the brain, specifically, those patterns that live in the brain that control what we look at, they control what we make what we look at mean, and they control how we feel. As I mentioned in the last lesson, these patterns are something that we call in yoga samskaras, Western psychology might call them schemas, but it really doesn't matter what you call them.

You just want to think of them as little bits of programming, little bits of learning that the brain has picked up as you've made your way through life. The image that comes to me a lot, when I think about how we are always accumulating more programming is those old cartoons where you would see a little teeny snowball start at the top of the mountain and it'll get bigger and bigger and bigger as it rolls down the mountain, picking up little bits of everything that it rolled through.

We are a lot like that in many ways. I mean, if you think about a little girl who maybe at the age of three, got bit by a dog, [00:01:00] that's a bit of programming that could leave her as someone who's afraid of dogs for her entire life. Now, the truth is she could also have gotten maybe a pet dog when she was five, which changed that programming and then left her as a dog lover, even though she had bit by a dog when she was three.

So all of these little pieces come together. You know, one example that comes to me to come to mind is when I was 17, many of you know, this, I was attacked. Um, it was a pretty vicious mugging in a parking garage in Sacramento, California, and it left me pretty beaten, bruised up, um, nothing horribly life-changing.

Although I will say it left a mark more on my psyche than it did on my physical body. It left the samskara. And from that point forward for about 15 years tight enclosed spaces that maybe feel like a parking garage where there [00:02:00] wasn't an exit made me feel really anxious and people who looked like my attackers would send me into a low grade panic.

And even certain smells like gasoline or oil that I could smell in that parking garage would also set me off. And like I said, this went on for 15 years. As a result of a single event that was programmed into my brain. So these, samskaras can be super powerful and they can come from well, and they do come from, all of our different experiences.

And here's the thing that we want to really keep in mind. In the same way that they were programmed into us they can be programmed out of us. The fact is the brain is a programmed mechanism, but it's also a programmable mechanism. And the more that we understand how it works, the more that we can participate in our [00:03:00] own programming so that we can begin to change the bits of programming that are pulling us down, that are causing unwanted emotions like anxiety or fear or anger, anger, and we can support and nourish those samskaras that are lifting us up and giving us feelings of happiness and joy and safety and calm. And that's what this process is really all about. And

it's all made possible by something called neuroplasticity. And I have a few slides that are going to help illustrate that point. So let's jump right in now.

Neuroplasticity is a term that refers to something the agent yogis knew about, well, thousands of years ago, that the brain is a plastic entity. That is to say that brain patterns, the patterns that drive what we look at, what we make what we look at mean and what we do, [00:04:00] they all can be changed. And many of us may be familiar with a phrase that describes this process.

It's neurons that fire together, wire together. It's something called Hebbian Theory, named after a Canadian psychologist, Donald Hebb. Now what we need to know is that neurons are really brain cells. It said that the average human has about 86 billion of them in their brains. And our every thought and impulse is actually created by a connection between a specific set of neurons.

And the shape of the thought depends on the shape of the network of connected neurons. One set of connections might yield the warm nostalgia for your childhood home, and another might yield at craving for a hamburger. [00:05:00] And what neurons that fire together, wire together means. Is that when we repeatedly fired together a group of neurons, that is a group of neurons that creates a specific thought or a specific impulse, may become more and more strongly wired together.

The more strongly they're wired together, the more often they tend to fire that is the stronger that habit of thinking becomes. This strongly wired together network is a habituated brain pattern or something that we've been calling a samskara. Now what's important here is that as certain samskaras become more and more powerful, they can sweep us into a destructive pattern of thinking or behavior or emotion that can seem nearly impossible to break.

And let's take a look at how this can work with a common trigger: feeling overwhelmed. Now it all starts [00:06:00] when I think about how many things are on my to do list and how little time I have to do them. And when I do, that thought fires a specific set of neurons. And because I think this thought repeatedly, these neurons get wired together.

This is the samskara, but it gets worse. The more strongly the neurons get wired together, the more often I have the thought. And the more often I have the thought, the more strongly the neurons get wired together. It's a vicious cycle. And I get stuck in this vicious cycle, and before I know it, I feel like my entire life is consumed by anxiety producing feelings of stress and overwhelm. But it's not all bad news because of neuroplasticity.

We can change the samskara and rewire the brain into a different and more helpful pattern that actually frees us from the cycle. Even, and this is important, [00:07:00] even in the midst of the very same circumstances. Now to do this, instead of firing the samskara about stress and overwhelm, I began to repeatedly fire a new network by thinking thoughts that recognize the many ways that I am supported.

I focus on the loving friends I have around me. I focus on the members of my family that lend me a helping hand. And I focus on the things that I have been able to accomplish. And

as I think these more positive thoughts, the new network of neurons becomes wired together. And just like before, the more that I think the thought, the more strongly the neurons get wired together and the thought happens more and more often.

Now even more important, the old samskara about stress, anxiety, and overwhelm. Well, it begins to weaken because it's being ignored and eventually it might even disappear. And the same [00:08:00] process holds true for any unhelpful or sabotaging samskara or pattern of thought or behavior. Whether it's chronic negativity, low self esteem, or even persistent anxiety caused by trauma, we can affect meaningful change at the samskaras and therefore affect changes over our experience of life, which is what we're going to be all about in this module, and in fact, future modules as well.