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## AFFIRMATIONS

An affirmation is a short, powerful and positive statement that helps to develop a mindset that allows us to flourish and thrive.

Affirmations:

- Generally begin with “I am” (but don’t have to)
- Are stated in the present tense
- Use positive and empowering words
- Are brief – so that they are easily remembered
- Are repeated regularly
- Are directed towards yourself and your wellbeing

They transform us from a negative mindset to one that is more encouraging and supportive – silencing the inner critic and replacing it with your own personal cheerleader.

An everyday example of this transformation could be while performing a difficult task at work or practising a yoga posture that you find particularly challenging.

Instead of saying “I can’t do this” switch the mindset to something that frees you from this stuck energy and helps your growth such as, “I am learning”, “I am growing”, “I am capable” or “.....(insert your own wonderful words here)”.

The brain is remarkable in that it can adapt and change – a feature known as neuroplasticity. We have the ability to actually change our brain.

*“The importance of neuroplasticity can’t be overstated.*

*It means that it is possible to change dysfunctional patterns of thinking and behaving and to develop new mindsets, new memories, new skills and new abilities” Psychology Today*

Dr Joe Dispenza explains the changes in our brain functioning in his book ‘You Are The Placebo’:

“Studies show that getting in touch with positive, expansive emotions like kindness and compassion... tends to release a different neuropeptide (called oxytocin) which naturally shuts off the receptors in the amygdala, the part of the brain that generates fear and anxiety. With fear out of the way, we can feel infinitely more trust, forgiveness and love....And as we embody this new state of being, our neurocircuitry opens the door to endless possibilities that we never could have even imagined before”.

By repetition of an affirmation, we allow the new state of being to filter through to our subconscious and into our physical make-up – changing the way our brains are wired. David Schechter MD describes this beautifully: *“Just as we do repetitive physical exercise to get stronger, affirmations can be thought of as exercise for our mind/brain”.*

### What do the Sutras say?

When bound by negative thoughts their opposite ones should be cultivated.

This is pratipaksa bhavanam

Yoga Sutra 2.33 (translation by Marshall Govindan)

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While this sutra refers primarily to the yamas and niyamas, I think it describes in a beautiful yet succinct way how we can release negative thoughts and invite the opposite thought or emotion to reside in their place. It suggests that we can grow in a different direction.

Reflecting on our study of the Sutras on Day 1, we explored how the true purpose of yoga is to still the fluctuations of the mind (the vrittis). The incorrect thoughts that we so often create about ourselves hold little or no basis in the truth. They are an unhelpful use of our imagination (vikalpa), resulting in a misconception (viparyaya). Instead, as we repeat our nurturing affirmation, we contain these negative and unhelpful thoughts and emotions and prevent them from spilling out of control.

### **Using your affirmation in relaxation**

Bring yourself into a comfortable resting position, using any props to support you.

Take time to allow the body to settle and to connect to the gentle flowing stream of your breath.

Imagine a wave of peace and gentleness sweeping through you.

As you take the slow mindful journey around the body, repeat your affirmation – gently dropping it into each place – sense it cascading into every cell, into your:

- feet
- lower legs
- knees
- upper legs
- hips
- both legs
- pelvis
- belly
- lower back
- upper back
- chest
- shoulders
- upper arms
- elbows
- lower arms
- hands
- both arms
- neck
- back of the head
- crown
- scalp
- face
- whole of the back of your body
- whole of the front of your body

Guide your awareness to your heart centre, and place your affirmation there

Repeat 3 times

Then send your affirmation to the whole body – infusing the whole body

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Rest for as long as needed, and gently return to activity when you are ready.

Eventually you may be able to coordinate this with your breath:

Inhale: drop the affirmation into place

Exhale: allow its energy to infuse that place

(If using the breath in this way makes you feel uncomfortable or as if you're reaching for breath, let go of this and allow the breath to flow freely as you use your affirmation).

### **Affirmations - some ideas**

When creating your affirmation, choose a quality that you would like to embody. Here's some ideas. Choose one that resonates or, better still, create your own...

I am healing

I am loved

I am enough

I am abundant

I am free

I am whole

I am strong, I am healthy

I am worthy

I am lovable

My light shines

Or you may prefer to use a single word:

Peace

Courage

Joy

Softening

Love

Calm

Strong

Energise

Calm

Expansion

### **Affirmations on and off the mat...**

On the mat: incorporate your affirmation into your asana practice. For example...

"I shine bright" at the start of each round of a sun salute

"I am strong, I am courageous" while in warrior postures

"I am steady" while in tree pose

Share other ideas with the WhatsApp group!

Off the mat: practice mindful awareness of your thoughts. Notice throughout the day when your mind is spiralling or when you're being drawn into negative internal chatter. As you notice your mindset, be sure to be kind to yourself with whatever you discover (ahimsa / non-harm). Notice what the negative chatter is saying, and replace it with something more useful and nourishing.

Off the mat: learn to nourish your mind. What do you feed your mind with? Is there something that triggers a negative mindset for you? For example, watching the news, or scrolling through social media. Be intentional with what you allow to take precious space and energy within your mind.