

# CYBERSENSE

## KARMA YOGA @ MEDIA HYGIENE

**KARMA YOGA—THE YOGA OF WORK AND SERVICE.** In an increasingly sit-down, keyboard-focused, stare-at-the-screen workplace, good cybersense can help you stay whole and healthy. So I could write about ergonomic chairs, good monitor placement, frequent stand-up-and-stretch breaks. Those are all important. Care for your body. Do your asanas. But you can look up ergonomics easily elsewhere. Let's talk here about what you are exposed to on all those screens, and in print as well.

In his book, *Karma-Yoga*, Vivekananda says, "The aim of all work is to bring out the power of the mind... to wake up the soul." My last CyberSense essay (in the previous issue, or at [www.makecybersense.org](http://www.makecybersense.org)) contrasted reading with video. Too much video, especially with the prevalence of "eye-candy," actually dulls the "power of your mind." Attention span, and imaginative focus on the mythic journey of your own soul—these are more likely strengthened by reading.

But with all the material your mind consumes, via whatever media, at work or play—there is this other, deeper issue. What kind of messages are pouring in? And what are you doing with those messages? Even if, or especially if, most of what you consume is "entertainment," Vivekananda's statement suggests that there is work, and service, to be done around that consumption. Are the predominant messages you receive these days helping to "wake up" your soul and the souls of your loved ones? If they are not, what can you do about it?

Most of us are immersed these days, like it or not, in a sea of "content." That's the modern word for stories, lessons, ads, what-have-you. Technology helps content, especially advertising, creep onto every available space. Video screens now blare at us from the tops of gas pumps and come installed in new cars. Animated promotions dance annoyingly across TV programs you watch, or splash across the text you're reading on web pages. All this goes double for the younger ones—plugged into their iPods, trading text messages and videos. And the outpouring of paper junk mail is just simply an ecological crime.

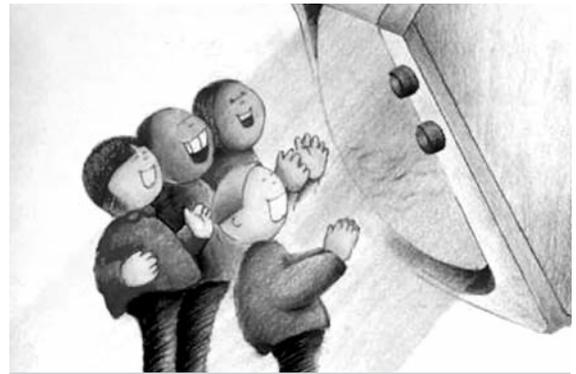
Now, in fact, it is both very easy and profoundly distressing to distill out the main messages carried along in this flood. *Message*

*one is:* consumption of manufactured products, including more content, is what beautiful, successful, fulfilled people do in life. Doing this well—acquiring more wealth to buy more, spending more time plugged in so that you know more sooner than your neighbor—these things will make you like the ghostly icons of happiness dancing so seductively on those screens. *Message two is:* disease and mood disorders lurk everywhere, and the sooner you accept your need for the latest drugs and the finest hospitals, the safer you will be. Your body does not have profound healing powers. Big science and big pharma are now your best hope.

*And message three, conveyed mostly by the selective choice of what is newsworthy, is:* do not trust your fellow humans—other races, other nations, criminals, crazies, splinter groups, even people right there in your own community—they are a constant threat to you. We might broaden this one slightly and just say—fear. Fear earth catastrophes, infrastructure breakdowns, failed political systems, and your own dying, disease-prone body.

I could add another two themes around sex and violence—but there's not space and you get the picture. **All these themes are all dreadful, dead-end, self-fulfilling lies.** Joseph Campbell says Western culture is in free-fall and you can see it here very clearly. How would it feel to be surrounded by a flood of artistically beautiful content implying the opposite of these messages. "Remember—wholeness lies within, on the unique path of your own heart." "Always trust your own body first." "Learn and teach others to trust humanity."

Of course I am sketching here with a very broad brush. There are many exceptions (this magazine, for instance; the Christian media perhaps). But many of the exceptions are small and under siege. "I don't pay attention to the negative stuff," you may say, "It doesn't affect me." Excellent. But be very aware of how much harder avoiding it gets every year. That brings us to our candidates for *niyama* (yogic observance) and *yama* (yogic restriction) in this area. There is mental work necessary to stay aware of what kind of mes-



sages are being pumped at you, and how they are affecting you and your loved ones. The *niyama* is: do that work, cultivate message awareness. The *yama* is: find ways to limit your exposure to toxic messages and replace them with honest and healthy ones. The service here is: help your loved ones do this also. Think of these as "media hygiene."

There is so much that could be said here about HOW to do this. I can only hint here at a few possibilities. If you don't have technology to remove commercials from what you watch, shut the sound off. Stand up and stretch, maybe, during those moments. In general, make up anti-commercials, wherein you use your own imaginative powers to sell a positive truth that is being denied by the ad you are exposed to. Instead of, "beer brings me beauty and friends," make the affirmation, "yoga, meditation, and really honest communication bring me beauty and friends." Be aware that "product placement" (writing brand name products into the scripts themselves) is becoming a preferred form of advertising. If it fits your taste, watch John Stewart and Stephen Colbert skewer with humor the absurdities of the news media.

Finally, I would remind you of something that Dion Fortune explains in her book, *Psychic Self-Defense*. An incantation is an artistically powerful affirmation that works best when experienced over and over again, entering the sub-conscious most easily as the conscious mind stops paying attention to it. Whether you think of it as magic, or simply hypnosis, today's media creates extremely powerful, really toxic incantations. Letting them run on, as background noise, is not healthy. ▲