

## Help for Letting Go

*By Carolyn Reynolds*

Do you remember how monkey-catchers catch monkeys? It seems that monkeys are very good at grasping and holding on. Their hands (and minds, evidently) are very adept for this purpose. It's how they travel above ground. You might call it their "personal best," grasping and holding on. Their personal best is also the reason they can be caught, more specifically, stuck.

Monkey-catchers make a hole in a coconut and place a monkey treat inside. The hole is large enough for the monkey to slip his hand in but once the hand is wrapped around the treat, the hole is not large enough for the monkey to remove his hand. Monkey mind will not let the treat go. Monkey gets caught. If the monkey could learn to let go, he could be free.

Same for us. Non-grasping is the flavor of the fifth yama, aparigraha. The yamas and niyamas are the first rungs on the path of yoga that lead to self-realization, which is the only true freedom. In how many ways do you grasp onto the patterns in your life and the stuff that surrounds you? The really quirky thing is that the thing of desire becomes the source of misery. It can range from simple discontent to really destructive behavior involving others. How many family members are murdered in our country every year because someone can't let go?

It's interesting how letting go brings with it such a feeling of peace. If you are driving and are in an equal position with another car for a merge into one lane, how differently do you feel when you slow down and wave the other driver on as compared to "holding on" to your position so you go first? The body is relaxed in the "let the other driver go" scenario and very tense in the "I go first" scenario. But even if you do win and go first, do you feel good about it? (Good and smug are not the same thing.) More than likely you're in a mood to cuss the road construction, even though you got what you wanted.

Look through your house and observe all the stuff you've gathered. How many of those things make you happy now? If you haven't used them in the last couple of years, maybe you'd like to donate them to a charity. It'll feel good, letting them go.

Tell your loved one that you choose to be with him/her because you think he/she is a really neat person and you enjoy his/her presence, not because you are afraid to be alone or need to have someone/**any**one with you. If you can't really mean it yet, keep this idea in your heart until it opens and you can mean it.

There is a restorative yoga posture called fish that you can do to enhance letting go. The heart center, or chakra, is the one that embodies the karmendryia (one of five active senses in yoga philosophy) of grasping/holding on. So, to open the heart, prepare a safe, quiet place. Gather a blanket, a few large pillows and a small one and something to put

over your eyes as you recline. The pillows will be positioned under your upper back as you lie down so that the chest opens and the heart is raised. Place a small pillow under your head if you need some support there. Cover your eyes with a cloth or eye pillow. Open your arms to the sides and rest them on the floor to open the chest even more. Be sure that you are so comfortable that you could actually fall asleep. Remember the monkey as you relax and open the palms of your hands as they rest on the floor in a symbolic gesture of letting go. Now simply observe your mind as it reveals to you the things you may have been needlessly holding onto. Feel the tension in the body disappear, the blood pressure return to healthy, and the sense of freedom wash over you.