

LESSONS FROM GRANDMOTHERS' GARDEN: CULTIVATING PATANJALI'S YAMAS IN DAILY LIFE

~ KATE VOGT

Growing up in what most would consider an austere landscape on the border of Kansas and Colorado in North America, I looked forward to the summer blossoms in my grandmothers' gardens. The yellow and pink snapdragons and peonies were my favorites, but I was delighted with the unique shape and fragrance of the different flowers. Each made its own special and colorful contribution to the overall garden.

My grandmothers, named Mary and Katherine, were fluent in the nature and needs of every plant. They attended to each plant in the garden with respect regardless of whether it was flowering plant or a weed that needed to be removed and composted. From early spring to late fall they lovingly tilled, planted, weeded, fertilized, pruned, and watered their plantings.

The gardening season began with the perusing of flower catalogues and a careful selection of a few packages of annuals to complement the perennials. The choices needed to suit the hot dry summer weather and fit my grandmothers' likings. Also, the collection needed to fit into some somewhat small areas since most of the available gardening space was reserved for growing vegetables. On a subtle level, the individual flower choices were symbolic of the timeless values by which both grandmothers lived their lives.

Pinks, chrysanthemums, daisies and violets made regular appearances along with the snap dragons and peonies. In garden lore, these flowers represent universally desirable qualities. Pinks symbolize the divine or pure love free from all violence. The botanical classification for pinks is *Dianthus* from the Greek *dios* (divine) and *anthos* (flower). Chrysanthemums are associated with truthfulness or honesty with our selves and others. Daisies, in the same family as the mum, often symbolize non-stealing or taking only our share. Violets have long been associated with non-spoilt love and used to remind us to covet less and be less greedy.

Likely my grandmothers would not have considered themselves as models of lifestyle. Yet, their gardens and the way they went about their gardening were not only examples of a value-based life but also in how to cultivate and nurture values. For example, just as when plants are given ample space to grow through thinning out the distance between plants, we can remove unbeneficial habits to foster a more favorable inner environment where truthfulness and non-greed flourish.

Much like the plants, my grandmothers respected and nurtured and helped their core values grow and blossom. They knew that in full bloom, the values bring beneficial affects to others around us. For example, pure nonviolence creates an aura of peacefulness. In truthfulness, our words always reveal the truth. In nonstealing, resources flow freely through us. With moderation in all things, our energy is rechanneled toward a higher purpose. And, in nongreed, we are freed from clinging to old habits and behaviors. As the values grow, our energy flows toward transforming our personality and gives rise to timeless love and respect for our environment and all beings.

This essay is dedicated in loving appreciation of all grandmothers and teachers, especially my grandmothers Mary and Katherine, and Patanjali's Yoga Sutra 2.30 which offers the five universal precepts: nonviolence (*ahimsâ*), truthfulness (*satya*), nonstealing (*asteya*), chastity or moderation (*brahmacarya*), and greedlessness or noncoveting (*aparigraha*).

(UK Yoga & Health November 2009)