

# The Cycle of Samskāra

A saṃskāra is a deep impression in our memory that can influence our future behaviors. Saṃskāras are our patterns, habits, or tendencies. They are impacted by our deepest fears, our ego identities, and our defense mechanism. Freedom from saṃskāras leads us towards freedom from suffering. Breaking the cycle of saṃskāra occurs through the practices and teachings of yoga.

**The cycle of an unexamined samsakāra looks something like this:**

**UNDERLYING FEAR (avidyā) >> EGO IDENTITIES (asmitā) >> PATTERN OF SUFFERING (triggering events, perceptions, emotional responses) >> DEFENSE MECHANISMS (rāga and dveṣa) >> STRENGTHENING OF THE UNDERLYING FEAR**

## **Example:**

Underlying Fear: I am not good enough

Ego Identity: Perfect parent

Suffering:

- Triggering Event: I am late to pick up my kid from school
- Perception: Not responsible, Selfish
- Emotional Response: Guilt, Shame

Defense Mechanism: Gossip about other parents who are "always late" which supports my ego identity of "perfect parent" and strengthens my underlying fear that I am not good enough

**Use the examples of the following pages to work through your own limiting life patterns:**



### **Common Underlying Fears:**

- I am not good enough
- I am unworthy
- I am alone
- I am unlovable
- I do not belong

### **Common Ego Identities (I AM...):**

- Perfect parent
- Great employee
- Good friend
- Independent person
- Trustworthy person
- Responsible person
- Successful person
- Smart Person

### **Suffering:**

#### **• Examples of Triggering Events:**

- I am late to pick up my kid from school
- My coworker gets promoted and I do not
- My partner appears not to listen when I speak
- My mom criticizes how I parent
- My friend does not respond to my text messages or calls

#### **• Examples of Perceptions (either I think about myself or towards someone else or perceive that someone else is thinking about me):**

- Not responsible
- Selfish
- Not professional
- Taken for granted
- Micromanaged
- Disrespected
- Patronized
- Unseen

#### **• Examples of Emotional Responses:**

- Guilt
- Worry
- Anger
- Numbness
- Loneliness

- **Examples of Defense Mechanisms:**

- Gossip
- Judgement of self or others
- Withdrawal
- Avoidance and denial
- Addictions/Numbing
- Blame

**Your turn! You are invited to use the framework below to examine some of your own limiting life patterns:**

**Underlying Fear:**

**Ego Identity:**

**Suffering**

- **Triggering Event:** what happened (objective)?
- **Perception:** what did you perceive to be true about yourself or someone else (subjective)?
- **Emotional Response:** how did the event make you feel (felt experience)?

**Defense Mechanism:** what did you do (action or inaction)?

*According to the yoga sutras, the path out of suffering is the path of yoga. Yoga is the path of self-reflection, self-knowledge, and wisdom in action.*