



April 2001 Contemplation Theme

Self-Effort & Grace

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You must put up the sail in order to catch the wind. If you don't do your part, you won't get anywhere. Tapas is the Sanskrit word for self-effort. Tapas means you have to invest yourself. You get nothing unless you apply yourself. You cannot finish school without tapas. It takes tapas to buy a home or to have a successful relationship. You give up some things in order to get others. Just going through the motions is not enough.

A student asked recently, "You mean I should turn off my television when I do my yoga?" Yes. Yoga is more than poses – it affects your state of mind. That is yoga's real purpose! And most people already know that they need help with their minds. What kind of state are you in after a yoga class or yoga session, and how does that compare to your state after watching the news? Consider what it is that you really want. There are so many things you can do, and only a limited amount of available time. Tapas is making a choice. You are always giving up something when you are choosing something else.

Technically, tapas means heat, the heat generated by friction. This is the friction of your ego rubbing against God. My Guru recommended, when you are making a choice, choose that which will take you closer to God. You might find that you have to give up some old self-defeating habits, though it may be difficult because you are so attached to them.

Our culture worships self indulgence. Tapas is sacrifice. You give up some things in order to get others. Tapas makes you strong. Tapas gives you a strong body, a clear mind, the ability to make decisions and stick to them. Tapas is New Year's resolutions – how are you coming on yours? If you didn't make any, stop for a moment now. Take a good to look at yourself and see if there are any ways you would like to improve yourself. Make at least one resolution – if not for the year, at least try it for one week.

Grace is the wind in the sail. You have to haul it up, but you don't have to row. With tapas, you figure out which effort to put forth. You make the decision to raise the sail instead of taking out the oars. If the wind is light, you use a different sail than if it is strong. And you keep an eye on it as you move along, adjusting it to make the best use of the natural fuel – the wind is free. Grace is the ultimate fuel, both in the world as well as in your spiritual development. Grace makes things easy.

Yoga is a path of grace. In yoga, you open up your body and quiet your mind so that you can tune into grace, the force that flows from your own subtle and blissful inner Source. You know what it feels like to come up from the final Shavasana in your yoga class. There is more light shining in your eyes. Everyone around you benefits from that glow. You return home or go on with your day, powered by an inner force that shines through every activity and every relationship. Grace softens your edges and opens your heart. Tapas makes you able to hold the grace.

The milk of a lioness can only be held in a container made of pure gold. If you put the milk of a lioness in a cup made of any other material, it eats through the container and leaks out. Only gold can hold this strong milk. Tapas makes you into pure gold, so you can live your life full of grace.

Namaste,