



May 2002 Contemplation Theme

Old & New

By Rama Berch, C.S.Y.T., E-RYT 500

Ten years. It is quite amazing to me. I never really thought about where this all might go when I began teaching yoga in San Diego. That was actually in 1986, more than 10 years ago. I started with a class at the Parks & Recreation Department. It followed a karate class that always ran late. The students left the room smelly and the floor slick with sweat. After only one semester, I moved the class into my living room. I rented the apartment because it had a living room that would hold six students. Some of those original students are still coming to classes at Master Yoga Academy!

In yoga time, 10 years is trifling. But right now, 10 years seems like a lot to me. When Master Yoga Foundation (MYF) began, I answered the phone and sent out the fliers. I taught all the classes. I created and taught the teacher training program. After a while, some of the teacher trainees wanted to teach with me. We added more classes to the schedule. The fliers became bigger — we started sending out newsletters. We moved into a larger facility and then a larger one. Now we have four facilities in San Diego — two offering local classes, one dedicated to Teacher Training and one for our administrative functions. Now we actually teach more workshops and trainings in other cities than in La Jolla. Old and new.

But some things don't change. We still begin and end classes with Shavasana. The phone gets answered and the newsletters are written and mailed out. The old continues in the midst of the new. This is also true of yoga through the millennia. The earliest record of yoga is in the Vedas, a collection of ancient hymns and teachings dating into prehistory. Scholars disagree on their age and origins, variously dating them from 2,000 to 5,000 years ago. Yoga's principles were restated at the end of the Vedic period in the Upanishads. Later texts have continued to present the unchanging principles in ever-changing language, relevant to the needs and interests of the people of the time. This continues in an unbroken flow up to yoga in America. Old and new.

When I came from India to San Diego, I had no idea that this would become my home, though I am glad that it is. Two new trends greeted me. The popular New Age books and teachers enthused over pseudo-truths, at least it looked that way to me when compared to the ancient texts I had been chanting and studying in ashrams for almost 11 years. In addition, the yoga styles that had sprung up in my extended absence looked like a sophisticated approach to athletics. It was all so new! What I had to offer was not new, it was old — ancient!

I made the rounds for the next couple of years, taking classes in the new yoga styles, reading and meeting the spiritual-types and teachers. I quickly figured out that I had no interest in those approaches. Not that they are wrong; they just don't suit me. Thus, I thought my teaching would just be this quiet little thing — offering a few simple yoga classes according to the ancient principles I had experienced and been trained in. I developed my teaching so the poses would open people up — not just in a way that would merely fix their body, but to open up the deeper inner dimension. I taught that way because I was trained that the purpose and the focus of yoga is an inner opening. I was trained that way because I sought out that

training. That was the reason I had spent years in ashrams and training centers, studying with a great Master.

My new book, Yoga in Every Moment, allows you to see how my ability to share these primary principles of yoga philosophy has grown through the years. Each time I describe the power and the purpose of yoga, I learn even more. These primordial principles show up in everyday life, not just in ashrams. They are there for you, no matter where you live or what you do. Truth doesn't change. The manner of presenting it must change, but the underlying principle is unchanging. Old and new. What I teach is the same old stuff — the ancient truths. Yet, I am constantly refining the ways I teach, finding new words to share the same old truths. I do my best to follow the command that every teaching must meet three tests:

- 1) It is documented in the texts. This is because my best understanding could be merely another form of delusion if it does not match the wisdom and teachings of the ancients;
- 2) The teacher has been empowered to share the teaching. If my teacher had not approved me, my purpose in teaching could be arising from selfish motivations, or (worse!) be incomplete or inaccurate;
- 3) The teacher has experienced it herself or himself. Even the highest principles can become doctrine or dogma if they are not enlivened by personal experience.

So, now we get to celebrate our 10th birthday. As a 10-year-old, MYF is growing up like most kids today, quite fast. Teachers that we have trained share *Svaroopā*[®] yoga with approximately 10,000 students per week, throughout eight countries. *Amaya*[®] yoga products distributes our music, props, videos and books to support Svaroopis (practitioners of *Svaroopā*[®] yoga) everywhere. Thousands of newsletters are mailed out each time, supplemented with monthly contemplation articles to all the teachers belonging to SAT, the Svaroopā Association of Teachers. We are excited to be holding our first Teachers Conference this year in October.

None of this would happen without you. Old and new. You are the new generation in the lineage of yogis that stretches into pre-history. You stand in the living lineage of yogis who explore inside yourself — to fulfill the deepest and most exalted capacity of the human being. You are the living experience, carrying the inner changes you get into your life. And it is all consistent with the wisdom of the ancients, whether you learned the Sanskrit words or not!

When you take the pillows out from under your head and stuff them under your knees to lie in Shavasana in bed, you are choosing to get a type of rest that is deeper than sleep. When you do the Magic 4, you clear away the tensions of the day. When you take a class or give yourself a longer yoga practice session, you are laying the foundation for the deeper experience inside. When you play chanting music in the background, you create an environment that supports your ability to carry that inner experience into your world. When you read a yoga book, you are developing your understanding, and when you share it with someone else, you are changing the world. Do more yoga.

Namaste,



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