



March 2003 Contemplation Theme

Letting Go Gracefully

I started teaching weekly classes in San Diego in 1987, at the Park & Recreation Department. We met one evening a week, right after the karate class. When the students came out, the room smelled like a poorly vented gymnasium and the floor was slick with sweat. While my yoga students were coming in, I cleaned the floor with a big dust mop, carrying a stick of incense around the room and chanting mantras quietly. Within minutes the whole feeling of the room had changed. Nonetheless, it was not the optimal environment, so I left after one quarter.

I opened up classes in my living room. Several students from Park & Rec came. Classes were fine there for a while, but then outgrew the space, so I opened up my own yoga studio nearby. We stayed there until I went to India to ask for my Guru's permission to train teachers. When I returned, many students helped me create Master Yoga Foundation and we moved into the property on Fay Avenue. That was over 10 years ago and we have been holding weekly classes along with Teacher Training ever since.

Now the weekly classes are ending. Master Yoga will not be offering weekly classes in La Jolla any more. We will be teaching workshops and occasional series classes, as you can see in the calendar inside. The weekly classes in North Park are continuing. We still also offer our semi-annual retreats, as well as Teacher Training. But the weekly classes in La Jolla end on March 7. It is time to let go. It is time for me to let go.

When I began training teachers, I was available for fewer and fewer weekly classes. Some of our graduates became our local faculty, forming the foremost *Svaroopaa*® teaching team in the world. But our class size kept dropping. We kept the big classroom going and committed

more and more Foundation resources to keep it going. Master Yoga's Board supported me in my continuing commitment to local classes long beyond the time it was reasonable or feasible. In January, we decided that we had to restructure and to consolidate the two facilities. Our teachers worked very hard along with the Board to try to make it work. But the truth is that it doesn't work. So, it is time to let go. It is time for me to let go. Another yoga lesson — how to let go gracefully.

Life is full of "letting go's." Yoga emphasizes it as a key principle and I thought I was good at it, but this one has been hard for me. Some students who began with me at the Park & Rec Dept. are still coming to class. There are also a lot of you whom I never met — but I still care. That's the trick — letting go without stopping the caring. Yoga calls it detachment. The Sanskrit word is *vairaagya*. It may be the most misunderstood word in the entire yoga lexicon.

Detachment is not distancing or withdrawal. It is not rejection. There is no malice or wrongdoing in detachment. It does not arise from aversion or avoidance. There is no shutting down inside — instead it creates a feeling of inner spaciousness and freedom. *Tyagac chantir anantaram*, Krishna says in the *Bhagavadgita* (12.12) — the true letting go results in an immediate feeling of inner peace.

Yoga demands unflinching self-honesty. Each time I have felt a wave of grief, I have gone into it. Diving into the inner turmoil — every time I found another layer I could let go of. Every layer is one that separates me from God. I sorted through grief and anger, as well as fear and blame — the self-blame was the worst. Self-blame is also called guilt or remorse. I learned it in my childhood. As a child, and even in our court system, if you show remorse, the punishment is lessened. That is because guilt

is self-punishment. Yoga is a spiritual science with no guilt.

Our weekly local classes have been an unanswered question that I have lived with for months. I participated in the decision-making process through many formal and informal meetings, with many different people. I have worked through my process of letting go, but yours is probably just beginning. It is time for me and for you to let go.

Anger would be too easy of a response. There's no yoga in that. Still, it is a choice — you can just blame someone else. You can even blame me. It is completely true that I turned my attention away from the weekly classes years ago, and put my whole energy into training teachers. But anger and blame are just a form of rejection. Rejection is not *vairaagya*, and it is not yoga.

Sadness is another cop out. Sadness is like nostalgia, a very fuzzy memory of the past, but it is a seductive mixture of past and future — thinking of the past and mixing it with a desire that the future be like the best of your past. You simply cannot be sad if you are in the present. Anytime you feel sadness, you have trotted off into the past again. Let it go. Arrive in your body, in the present moment, and there will be only joy.

Disappointment indicates that you had an expectation — another thing the yogi must let go of. Expectations are unwritten demands on another person, as well as a way of living in the hope of future fulfillment. It is a double whammy — you are not in the present, plus you are not looking inward — you are expecting that some other person will create your happiness at some ill-defined moment in the future. “All right,” you might say, “I’ll just practice detachment.” Now you really are in the danger

zone. Detachment is a very tricky word. What most people do when they try detachment is actually called withdrawal or distancing. This is another thing you learned in your childhood — how to run away and hide. You might even know how to do it while you stay physically present — you know how to split off from yourself and float around somewhere outside of your body. *Svaroopā*® yoga practice is all about getting back into your body.

So how can you really practice yogic detachment? Detachment means letting go while still caring. You let go of your expectations, let go of your desire that it go a certain way, and let go of your need and fear. You accept other people as they are instead of having remodeling plans for their personality. You accept what happens in the world and what happens in your life with an openness and willingness both to live in it and to live through it. There is no running because there is nowhere you can go to run away from yourself. So you stand and face it, and let go. In the letting go you find a deeper love, and a profound peace, just as Krishna promises.

You can continue your *Svaroopā*® yoga practice, and we hope you do. To help you connect with a local teacher, we have a list with all their contact information — or you can find them by looking at the Teacher Directory on our website: www.masteryoga.org.

To help with the letting go, we are holding a celebration and closing — it's called a “Wake.” This is an opportunity to celebrate all that Master Yoga has meant to you with all the others who still care. It is an opportunity to stand in the sadness, anger and fear — and to learn to let go into love and joy. I hope you will join us — think of it as another yoga class, a training in letting go.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rama". Above the signature is a small heart symbol containing the number "311".

To reach Rama Berch or to get more information about *Svaroopā*® yoga, contact:

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