



July 2004 Contemplation Theme

Attaining Inner Freedom

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When I was a teenager, I often complained that this didn't seem to be a free country. If I was free, I should be able to go where I wanted, when I wanted, and do and say what I wanted. My mother, who carefully controlled all of those things, responded that was not the meaning of freedom. I knew that I didn't understand her or what I had learned in school about freedom in America.

Then I lived in Madrid during the time the Spaniards regained their freedom. I had gone to Madrid to help with the opening of a yoga center, and was living and working with Madrilenos. I particularly loved my daily commute by bus, surrounded by chatter in a language I could partly understand, driving through beautiful plazas with huge, incredible fountains. They were preparing for their first election in 40 years, and every day there were huge political rallies that lasted until the *madrugada*, the wee hours of the morning. In addition to the political fervor that I recognized from elections in the USA, there was an added element of infectious joy. They were so incredibly happy to regain the right to vote.

I began to question my idea of freedom. From the many years of schooling in American history to the many years of training in yoga philosophy was a big leap, yet they both spoke so movingly of freedom. I knew that I still didn't understand freedom. Only with two more decades of yoga practice am I beginning to get it.

The goal in yoga is an ultimate state, described in many different terms, the most important of which is "freedom." You get a taste of yoga's freedom in every yoga class. It might happen to you after Seated Side Stretch, when your opening is more than merely physical. Maybe you love Jathara Parivrttanāsana (Rotated Stomach Pose), because it seduces you into an irresistible inner depth. It could happen in a backbend, when the pose stops being such a struggle and you feel like you could lift off and fly. Or maybe one of those seated forward bends makes you melt into something bigger than the universe. One of the most reliable places to find it is in Shavasana, especially the closing Shavasana at the end of class. The whole class is a warm-up for the final Shavasana, so you can experience the freedom at the deepest level of your own existence. *Mukti* – Freedom.

The practices of yoga provide immediate results, which is very important in our hurry-up-must-get-it-now lifestyle. Even your first class makes you feel better than you imagined possible. In the beginning, it appears that the purpose of the class is to fix your body. Familiar pains disappear or are profoundly diminished, and you enjoy a new feeling of profound relaxation and ease. Most amazingly, you feel both relaxed and energized at the same time — a rare combination! The freedom of comfort and ease in your body is a great freedom, but the yoga's promise doesn't end with this first blush of success.

In addition to this feeling in your body, you experience an inner feeling of peace, from the very first class. You feel undeniably calmer on the inside. In the same way that the physical benefits develop further as you continue, this inner sense of peace develops progressively into *stithi*, an inner stability that supports you in all places and times. This yoga-feeling is inside you, supporting you wherever you go. This is more than just the physical feeling of freedom; it is freedom from the inner turbulence that most people live in all of the time. Yet, the promise of yoga is not limited to this level of freedom.

Most yogis who continue classes for more than a year become interested in the rest of the science of yoga. This article is one in a series for the purpose of introducing you to the breadth and depth of yoga, which is little known in the West. The opening of the spine in *Svaroopa*® yoga is especially effective in preparing you for the next level of inner exploration. The inner layers of obscuration fall away at a faster rate as you delve into yoga's subtle techniques for the heart and mind. Inner constrictions dissolve into expansiveness when you use yoga's powerful meditative techniques, which are distinctly different from other types of meditation.

Freedom is the only word for what you discover inside. Layer by layer, there is a lightening of your internal load. There are stages of this, and you might be surprised to recognize how many of them are working in you already:

1. The internal chatter becomes less constant. Though your mind is still quite active, it is not 100% of the time. There are many sweet moments of inner quietude, which continue to increase in proportion to the diligence of your yoga practice. Freedom from the noisy mind!
2. The content of your mind becomes less toxic. Your mind is surprisingly less negative about yourself as well as others. Freedom from negativity!
3. You begin to prefer “quiet mind” to “busy mind.” The things your mind used to do are not even interesting to you any more, and your sense of self depends less and less on the constant “doing.” Freedom to “be” instead of always having to “do!”
4. Your personality starts to lighten up, and you both laugh more freely and cry more easily. This is a freedom from having to be who you think you are, as you become more spontaneous and responsive to everything in life. Freedom to participate fully!
5. Your improved physical flexibility is an indicator of your increasing adaptability, as you become less dependent on having everything go your way. You can go with the flow, and even find beauty and meaning in things you had previously resisted. You embrace the whole of life, regardless of the form it takes. Freedom to embrace life!
6. You feel less anxiety and fear. You worry less because you know that you will bounce instead of break if you should fall. Like a cat, you always land right side up, so there is nothing to worry about. Freedom from fear!
7. You feel more generous. You can give of your time and other resources without feeling so miserly. That pinched miserly feeling used to arise from fear, and it is receding into a distant memory. Freedom to give!
8. Inner impulses of love arise and overwhelm you without warning. This feeling is not limited to family members and pets any more — anyone and anything can trigger this ecstatic inner arising. The iron bars around your heart begin to melt in the increasing fire of your inner knowing and being. Freedom to love!
9. You continue to expand into inner spaciousness, which extends inward to include the whole world within your being. Your love for others is a feeling of recognition of your own Self in All. Ultimate freedom!

OK — I confess that I simplified it a little bit. There are probably a few more stages in the process. Also, when you experience a new stage of it opening up for you, you might be in and out of it a few times before you attain stithi, steadiness at that level. But is happening to you already. It is inexorable, unstoppable, totally reliable. It is you — becoming more You. All you have to do is more yoga...

Namaste,



For more information on Ujjayi Pranayama, contact your local *Svaroopa*[®] yoga teacher (see the Teacher Directory at www.masteryoga.org) or contact Master Yoga Foundation to purchase the audiocassette, “Life’s Breath.”

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