



November 2005 Contemplation Theme

Practice and Discovery

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You are doing yoga right now — reading this article is an important yoga practice. This yoga practice is called *jnana yoga*, the yoga of study, which is done for the purpose of refining your understanding and reprogramming your mind, so your mind can help you live in openness. This reprogramming of your mind is actually the purpose of all the yoga practices, including the poses (*asanas*) as well as chanting, meditation, *satsang* (community), *seva* (selfless service) and many others.

One word features strongly in the paragraph above — practice. You are not “doing” yoga, you are “practicing” yoga. When you practice, it means that you do the same things over and over again, like the Magic Four. It also means you get better, because you get better at anything that you choose to practice. In yoga, you can accomplish something, usually starting with improving your physical condition. You can approach yoga as a subject to study, and you will begin with learning how your body works, which is very differently than you had previously thought. You can use yoga as a way of working on your body, and you will find that yoga conditions your body to youthfulness, to suppleness, to vitality, to openness, to joy. A joyful body is very different from an angry body. A joyful body is different from a sad body; a body of someone who is grieving is a very different body than a body of someone who is happy. It is not just your mind that experiences these feelings — your whole body has the experience. *Svaroopa®* yoga conditions your body to vitality, to openness, to joy, to consciousness.

Actually, the practice of yoga is not dedicated to your physical condition, even though it is tremendously beneficial. Yoga focuses much more on your mind and heart. Yoga considers the opening of your spine to be important because it opens your heart and mind. As this happens, an inner experience opens up and you attain yoga’s promise: you attain health, you attain peace, and you attain profound inner happiness, all at the same time. The fruit of your practice is called your “attainment.”

Even though I am describing what you attain from your yoga practice, yoga is not about attainment. It is about discovery. Yoga is not about learning something — it is about discovering something. When you are learning something (even yoga), you are adding to what you already had. This comes about because You feel incomplete and needy, so you want to add to what you have, which motivates you to learn something, which then fulfills you. Once you have You learned or attained something, you feel you have become better than you were before.

Instead of being about learning, yoga is about discovery. Discovery means you are uncovering something you always had. You are not adding onto yourself and you are not becoming better than before — you are discovering something that was already there inside you, even though you didn’t know it. Yoga removes what was blocking your inner knowing, so you discover that you have always been great, you have always been full, you have always been complete and whole and perfect. There is nothing to learn, nothing to attain, nothing to gain — all you have to do is discover the hidden truth, to uncover the mystery inside. Yoga is not about attaining something; it is about discovering your own inner essence.

For this inner discovery, you need to do two things:

- 1) Clear away what obstructs your ability to perceive what is already there
- 2) Explore what is there, within you, and come to know it fully

Clearing what obstructs your perception — this is a process of unlearning. Yoga begins with unraveling the tensions in your body, in your mind and your heart. The old conditioning and concepts are unraveled, bit-by-bit. This inner opening is not the mastery of yoga — it is a sweet inner surrender. Yoga is not about attaining something you don’t have, or gaining something new, or even growing into something greater than you are now — it is discovering the reality of your own presence, the greatness hidden within you.

To discover this essence, you need to be able to perceive, outside and inside. We teach perception in every Shavasana, beginning with, "Notice your toes." The reason we work with your body is because it opens up your power of perception. The changes in your body are important and beneficial, but yoga is really about your ability to perceive. Perception itself is awareness itself; it is consciousness-itself. You are not the one who is being aware — you are awareness itself, you are consciousness-itself.

Once you experience the power of your perception, you have truly begun the inner process of discovery in a new way. You can explore what you find inside. When you start at your skin and go inward, you find tissue, blood, organs and bones. Reading about it or studying the anatomy of the body is not the same as actually experiencing your body. For example, when you do a pose to open along one side of your spine (like Seated Side Stretch), the increased breathing space you experience is something you will never find in an anatomy book.

As wonderful as it is, what you find in your body is only the starting point. In fact, it is the least important of all that you will discover inside. The body is the outermost level of your own being — a superficial level of your own individual existence. The goal is to explore your own individual existence at all levels. You become aware of your own presence in a way that takes you to the knowing of your own individuality as a form of the One Divine Reality, *Shiva*. This is *svaroopa* — your own individual self is The Self. You are *Shiva*.

The goal of yoga is to live in the constant inner experience of the blissful knowing of your own existence. You live in the recognition of your own self, and see that in all that exists, in everyone and everything, all the time. Then you live in an embrace of life, an embrace of individuality, an embrace of everyone and everything — even the hard stuff, which is (of course) not hard stuff any more. It's just another life experience — all of which is *Shiva*. All of which is you, in all the many forms.

For this, you need to be able to explore the inner realms of your own being, without running into your own inner blocks. If you don't embark on this process consciously, life will do it to you. Your inner blocks show up in your life as outer events that are designed to push you through the inner process. In yoga, you choose to do the process consciously. You don't wait to be pushed into it; you choose to do it.

Yoga practice is not about attainment; it is about process. Yoga is about discovery, but the discovery is not a goal. To fully understand this, simply consider what happens when you do a few poses. It is not finishing the Magic Four that matters — yoga is what happens while you are doing the poses. It's like dessert: is the goal to finish it, or is the goal to experience it? It's like life: is the goal to finish it, or is the goal to experience it?

So, you practice in order to discover — not to learn, not to attain, not to master something or to become something. You practice yoga so you can discover something you have never been without, but you didn't know was there inside you. You practice yoga to discover how to live life. You practice so that you can discover how to be fully alive — fully enlivened, fully embodied, fully empowered consciousness.

Your practice will give you this, even if you didn't know that was where you were going, or how to get there, or what you would find. Even when you don't understand what you are experiencing along the way, you can trust your own inner experience. Your yoga practice gives you something you didn't even know how to ask for, the most important thing in the world — your own Self.

Do more yoga!

Namaste,

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