



March 2006 Contemplation Theme

## Naming the Experience

By Rama Berch, C.S.Y.T., R.Y.T.

When you experience the deep inner absorption that Shavasana can provide, you don't have a word to describe it. Since English has no word for this experience, you may think you fell asleep. Yet you know it was somehow different. Many people describe this inner absorption as being "better than sleep." This is why yoga uses Sanskrit words, technical terminology that makes us able to talk about things that English does not name.

This inner experience, whether it happens in Shavasana or in meditation, is deeper than sleep and at the same time more open and spacious. It is deep, yet it has a quality of lightness and it is easier to surface from. Coming out of this state, you feel profoundly rested — more rested than after a full night of sleep. Without words in English, you cannot name it, and you cannot even conceive that it is other than something you can name — sleep. The words you already know leave no room for you to acknowledge that something entirely different is happening. This is one of the reasons that I write these articles — to help you recognize that the things you are experiencing are beyond your concepts of what can happen. You need new vocabulary for this. You need words that describe the subtle and the profound.

There are Sanskrit words for all the different types of inner experiences you have. In Shavasana, that deeper inner experience is either yoga nidra or tandra (pronounced "tun-dra"). If your experience is a very deep inner absorption that seems like sleep, it is *tandra*. When this inner depth is new to you, you are unable to recognize where you are inside. It is a profound inner immersion into consciousness, which is your own essence. I like to call it, "going unconscious in consciousness." It is like a scuba diver who has gone so deep that there is no light filtering down to that level, but the diver is there nonetheless. Next time, that diver might plan to bring an underwater light along. As you become more accustomed to this inner depth, you become more able to see and know where you are, which is a profound inner level of your own being.

*Yoga nidra* feels more like floating. It is an inner immersion, but not as deep. You can hear the things going on around you, but they seem very far away and you are not much interested. You may have experienced this briefly while falling asleep at night. In fact, nidra means sleep, so this is a state of "yogic sleep," which is restful without being heavy. The ancient tradition of yoga describes that the masters give their body three hours of rest each night by resting in yoga nidra. This way, they do not go unconscious nor do they tighten up. In sleep, your body tightens — you especially recognize this when you do poses in the morning. In yoga nidra, your body doesn't tighten up. Most importantly, the rest your body needs is easily available and very time efficient.

When I started yoga, I began with reading some yoga books. I did TV yoga, saved magazine articles and even took a few yoga classes, but I was not inspired to continue with any regularity. Then I took a meditation training and knew that I had found something I really wanted. I began a daily practice of meditation, an hour every morning before my day began. The thing that amazed me was that I needed less sleep. I had always needed nine or 10 hours a night, but when I meditated for an hour, I only needed five hours at night. I gained an extra four hours of productive time every day. I loved it!

The most important thing *Svaroopa*® yoga gives you is that deep inner immersion. It completely replenishes you — it is like the time you need to recover from life. That can happen in many different ways. Most people recognize it first in Shavasana, as it eases you into yoga nidra or tandra. You get even more from Ujjayi Pranayama (Yogic Breathing), as you tap you into the inner source of replenishment as if you were pumping water up out of a well, smooth and slow. When you do poses for

that reliable spinal release, beginning at your tailbone, you remove the blocks that keep you from living in the ever-arising inner source of life and vitality. Ultimately, the fullest potential that human life offers becomes available through this inner opening, specifically through opening of your spine.

Sanskrit offers different names for the different experiences that unfold with this core opening. You may already know how core opening relieves the spinal tensions that cause all (or most) physical pains and problems. No special Sanskrit term is needed for this, but *sukha* would be appropriate as it means ease and happiness. To be able to move and breathe in a pain-free body is truly *sukha*.

The related change in your mind and emotions is not only freedom from pain; it is *shanti* – peace. The way you feel after a class or your own personal practice makes you able to handle life more easily, because the inner turmoil and anxiety is pacified (made peaceful). As important as the physical improvements are for you, this quality of mind and mood has a much more powerful impact on your life. Your sense of who you are becomes based in *shanti*, an inner peace and surety that translates to you having more confidence in your life and in yourself.

The energy that is always flowing through your spine is called *prana*. This is the energy of aliveness; it makes your body a living body instead of a corpse. When you feel energized, optimistic and generous, you have more *prana* flowing. When you feel tired and drained, you have less *prana*. Many things can affect how much *prana* is flowing, including your thoughts as well as spinal tensions. Each time you do *Svaroopa*<sup>®</sup> yoga, you dissolve more of the pranic blocks, which is why you begin feel more alive.

Even more is happening when you begin at the tailbone, which you may have already discovered. The next level of opening is a flow of *udana prana*, an upward flowing energy that makes you feel light and happy. This is the upwelling inside that is familiar to you, as you experience it every time you laugh: it precedes laughter. It is easy to identify when you do Pawanmuktasana (Seated Side Stretch) — after you bring your arm down and return to an easy seated pose, the feeling of lightness and joy continues to flow. This is *udana prana*. You have to have your spine upright for it to flow since it flows upward. This means that it doesn't happen when you are lying down. A wonderful as *Shavasana* is, it doesn't offer you everything.

Once you get enough opening at your tailbone, a more powerful current of energy begins to flow — a higher frequency is moving through your core. It may begin as a periodic surge, and with more opening it becomes a smooth flow. You may experience it as an inner heat that climbs your spine or as beautiful experiences of inner colors or sounds. It may blossom as inner visions or profound realizations, or even spontaneous physical movements. This energy has a name as well, *Kundalini*. It is the emerging of the most powerful of your own inner forces, the energy of your own transformation. It is the fire of yoga. It is yoga's promise fulfilled — the ancient sages gave us the practices and teachings so that each of us could open up this profound potential within. Yoga says that once *Kundalini* begins to flow, you are on the path toward enlightenment. You can make it in this lifetime, or you can wait for a few more — it's your choice. You decide by deciding how much yoga you will do. This is why I often say, "Do more yoga!"

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rama". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small heart symbol above the letter 'a'.

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