



January 2008 Contemplation Theme

## Tortoise & Hare

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

What you do every day has the strongest effect on you. Like a drip of water wearing a channel in stone, your daily yoga practice wears away the densest layers, through your body, your mind and more. When you are in pain, it's easy to remember to do your yoga breathing and poses; pain is a great motivator. It's harder to keep on track when you are feeling better or when life is over-full, like during the year-end holidays or when the normal craziness starts up again.

It all comes down to the tortoise and the hare. You have to remember that the tortoise won the race. Doing your own yoga poses is taking those tortoise-size steps toward the healing, transformation and illumination that *Svaroopa*® yoga provides. Of course, if you take a weekly or twice-weekly class, you can get by without doing any yoga at home. It's like the hare — you take a giant leap forward every time you take a class. Your classes make you feel better and give you the juice you need to make it through the next few days. You can count on your inner state of grounded peacefulness to carry you through the next two or three days. It's really a pretty good deal; for a few dollars and 90 minutes of your time, your tank gets filled enough to get you through the next three days. Maybe that is why so many yoga students take classes twice a week.

But consider what would happen if you weren't "needing" a class when you went. By doing a little yoga every day, you can actually feel good every day, and still take your yoga class anyway. The benefits you receive increase exponentially when you aren't dragging yourself in the door, exhausted and in pain. You might even hear all the words in Shavasana, which could open up a whole new inner experience for you, to be resting deeply within yourself and to be aware that you are there, while you are there! Ultimately yoga is not really about rest, relaxation or healing; yoga is about awareness itself.

All of this is part of the underlying message in those words I use so often, "Do more yoga." You could call this a *Svaroopa*® sutra, which means it is a short little code phrase, specific to the *Svaroopa*® yoga practice, and it has multiple layers of meaning within it. This phrase is actually a short summary of one of Patanjali's sutras, *mrdu-madhy-aadhimaatratvaat tato'pi visheshah* (1.22). The full meaning is that your progress in yoga depends on how much practice you do: *mrdu* — mild, *madhya* — medium, or *aadhimaatratvaat* — intense. This is not a surprise. It's the way everything works. When you want more of something, you have to do more to get it. It's a law of karma, the cause-and-effect relationship that underlies your experience of the world.

In order to get more of what yoga promises, you simply do more. What does "doing more" mean? You have so many choices!

1. Do more yoga-time — Do daily practice or lengthen your own daily yoga session, or simply take more classes every week. I know many people who take a daily yoga class. Imagine how you would feel if you made time for that in your life!
2. Work at a deeper level — Graduate to Deeper Yoga or one of the other advanced levels of *Svaroopa*® yoga practice (Vinyasa or Bliss Yoga). Or deepen your daily practice by doing an extra tailbone pose every day, or by learning some of the deeper variations on the poses. You could receive *Embodiment*® or *Svaroopa*® Yoga Therapy sessions; each session gives you the benefits of multiple classes.
3. Do more types of practices — Include chanting or meditation in your life, or begin reading some yoga books (*jñana yoga*, the study of the teachings and texts). Practice *karma yoga* by giving your time and work to support others, or bring yoga into your relationship with money by practicing *dakshina*, giving financial donations to support the work you want to see being done in the world. You can practice *bhakti yoga* by cultivating yoga's devotional practices, to build your relationship with the Divine, in whatever name or form you find That most easily.

4. Bring yoga into your mundane activities — Chant while you are driving, showering, cooking, etc. Stand in Tadasana whenever you are standing. Practice contentment in every moment, even now. Bring your head gently back in line with the rest of your spine, right now (and 100 or more times today). There are so many opportunities to practice yoga-bits in the middle of your day.
5. Cultivate a yogic perspective — Do vichara sessions (guided self-inquiry) with one of our Senior Teachers or practice the other teachings of yoga to help you dissolve the most knotted-up parts of your mind and emotions, and to free yourself from the way you have been projecting them into your life. These contemplation articles often introduce you to these profound teachings and how to make them a living reality.
6. Immerse yourself — Dive into the teachings and practices. When you take time away from life, by giving yourself a yoga weekend or yoga training, the freedom from life's daily-ness enables you to race ahead, like the bunny in the race. You cannot sustain this pace every day; neither could the hare. You have to go back to your "tortoise-hood," but the insights you gain in your yoga immersion gives you a whole new YOU to take home with you.

As you embark on a new year, you begin another year of yoga practice. Consider, how many years do you think you will continue to do yoga? Is this a passing fancy for you, or does it offer you something more? I can absolutely guarantee you, whatever you have found that yoga offers you — it is only the tip of the iceberg. As you keep doing yoga, you will discover it gives you more than you ever imagined possible. Whatever you thought that life could possibly offer, at its most glorious and most extreme — yoga offers you more, much *much* more.

I can say this because I have just returned from my own Yogimmersion. I give myself two or three yoga retreats every year, in addition to my own daily practice. This time, I had three weeks in sacred sites in the land of yoga's origin, India. Each time I dive in, my well gets deeper and I have more to bring to you. However, what you get isn't really coming from me; it's coming from within yourself. That immersion gets me out of my own way, so I can help you dive into your source — and get more and more saturated each time.

You don't have to leave home to give yourself a yoga day or a yoga weekend. You can easily fill your day with yoga poses and practices, wonderful yoga music, yoga readings and healthy yogic vegetarian meals. Go to bed early and get up before the sun. Do the guided Shavasana (Corpse Pose, Relaxation Pose) and Ujjayi Pranayama (Yoga's Sounding Breath) three times in one day — or even five times! See what happens!

When you do this, you combine the best from both the tortoise and the hare. Your daily practice keeps you in a mode of continual progress — the tortoise. Your yoga immersion gives you a chance to do the bunny hop.

Yes, your body will change. Yes, your mind will change. Yes, the old emotional wounds will heal. Yes, your heart will open. And more will happen as well. Much much more. All you have to do is more yoga. Now it's up to you to figure out when and how. Maybe we can do the bunny hop together!

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rama". Above the signature is a small heart symbol containing the Sanskrit word "Om".

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