



July 2012 Contemplation Theme

Upliftment: Yoga's Guarantee

by Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

You continue to change and grow throughout your life, whether you want to or not. Life makes sure you get the lessons you try to avoid; it's a karmic truth. Yet yogis do it differently. Yogis are generally proactive about change, a specific type of change called upliftment.

Many people actively seek out self-improvement through the arts, travel, continuing their education, therapy or introspection, or an ever-expanding circle of people and experiences. As wonderful as these growth experiences are, they are not the same as upliftment. The upliftment of your own consciousness is yoga's promise, even when you are simply doing a few poses to improve your physical condition. Yoga sneaks up on you.

The physical changes of core opening do have a profound effect on your body, but also on your mind and psyche.

- While increased flexibility protects you from injury, even making your tissues healthier and younger, it also makes your mind more flexible, more adaptable and resilient.
- As your muscles lengthen and become less dense, your mind and heart are becoming more open.
- Your breathing capacity expands as your core opens up. This physical change makes you feel less contracted as a person, more expansive, even generous and compassionate.
- As your spine lifts and lengthens, you stand taller in the world, more willing to be authentically you, as well as to speak up for yourself and others.
- As your rib cage opens, your heart opens. You become more understanding of others and more compassionate, even to those who have hurt you in the past, whether you are in communication with them or not.
- As your tailbone lengthens, you become free from fear. Anxiety cannot take over your mind anymore, so you have lots of extra energy and enthusiasm for life. What is there that you cannot do?

When I meet a stranger, for me this is often on an airplane, they usually ask what I do. I give them an easy answer, "I teach yoga." Twenty years ago they answered me, "Yogurt?" Now they say, "I should do that." They all know they should be doing yoga. They all know that yoga would be good for their body. They even know that yoga offers something more, which they prove to me by saying, "Yoga is good for stress, right? I need to learn how to relax." What they don't know is that yoga is doing more to you, with every yoga-breath and every yoga pose. It's a sneaky system: it will make you spiritual even if you didn't want to be.

Your religion may be deeply satisfying for you, so you don't need the spirituality that yoga provides. How fortunate you are! Your yoga will still offer you spiritual benefits as it deepens what you get from your church or synagogue. However, many yogis feel their religious background was unsatisfying, yet they still have the innate human hunger for the experience of the divine. Our modern world reinforces nature as a place to go to be touched by God. Maybe music does it, or maybe for you it's art that does it, or you get it through visiting ancient sites or monuments. Yoga does it too. Yoga specializes in divinity — yours.

When you are touched by the raw power of a lightning storm, the quietude of a forest glen or the softness of a deer's eyes, you are using something in nature to effect an internal change. It's like a switch is flicked inside. You are suddenly stilled. You are deeply still and profoundly aware. Yoga says you don't need an external trigger to experience this deep inner beingness-awareness-bliss — it is your own Self.

Every time you have an experience of the Divine Within, you are irrevocably changed. It's not just a change; it's upliftment. One Sanskrit text describes it this way,

Tajjah samskaaro'nya-samskaara-prati-bandhee. — Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, #1.50

After an experience of The Self, your mind bears an impression
of consciousness within it, which prevents other
impressions from taking hold.¹

You must imprint your mind with more experiences of consciousness! It already has too many imprints that lead you in other directions. Your mind has the accumulated imprints of all the things you've experienced in this life as well as powerful impressions from your previous lifetimes, all impelling you toward repeating the same things again. To get off the karmic merry-go-round, you must actively intervene in the process or it becomes a "Willy Wonka" tunnel with no escape:

There's no earthly way of knowing
Which direction we are going
There's no knowing where we're rowing
Or which way the river's flowing...²

Upliftment is the key. Yoga is the science of upliftment. But you are not being lifted up into another realm; you become more present in this realm, on this earth, in your own body, in your own life. You become radiant with your own Divine Essence. The way upward is inward.

This is a different direction than most systems, even most religions, teach you. There are even meditation systems that say you must transcend this earthly plane, you must be lifted up into the light and that you will only arrive once you leave your body. Years ago I flew into my then-home in San Diego, arriving to the news that 31 people had killed themselves so they could ascend to a higher level. This is not yoga.

The yoga poses come from the Tantric Sages who practiced in the Himalayan caves, far away from the mainstream spirituality of the time, partly because mainstream spirituality said you had to reject the body in order to find God. The tantrics said, "Your own teachings say that Shiva has brought forth all that exists out of His own Divine Beingness. Thus, everything is holy, even my own body."

Their spiritual endeavors began with Grace, in the form of a transmission of energy from the Guru, which awakened the yogi's inner power of upliftment, Kundalini. As this sacred energy unfurled from tail to top, different yogis had different experiences depending on their personal readiness and individualistic nature. Those who were more kinesthetic, rather than visual or auditory, experienced physical movements. Others copied their spontaneous movements, which are today's yoga poses. Some yogis believe the forest sages made up the poses, having their disciples stand like a tree or move like a cobra, but the origin of these sacred body movements is in the sacred — not in the mind.

Doing the poses invokes the experience that those initiates were having, the inner experience of your own Divinity. *Svaroopā*[®] yoga excels at this because it is the yoga of Grace. I have devoted my life to the force of Grace, as did my Guru and his Guru before him. We focus on core opening so that your spine becomes open and breathing and your spinal energy moves freely. In other words, as you get the physical benefits that *Svaroopā*[®] yoga promises, described above, you are getting more.

Yoga guarantees the upliftment of your own consciousness while you live in your body, a body that is being purified and made sacred through your breathing and your poses, a body that makes you able to see and to be the Divine Reality, in a Divine World made of out one thing: Shiva. Do more yoga.

To reach Swamiji or to get more information about *Svaroopā*[®] yoga, contact: Master Yoga Foundation

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¹ rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

² Except from "Wondrous Boat Ride," song from the 2005 movie "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory"