



November-December 2007 Contemplation Theme

## Connection

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Connection is important. This article is an important way of staying connected. Cell phone calls are too, which is why I am never bothered when someone's cell phone rings — it means someone wants to stay connected to the student in the classroom, even though it is an inconvenient time. The importance of connection is especially apparent during the year-end holidays, with everything centered on spending time with those you are most connected to. Your holiday celebrations with these people may be deeply fulfilling or quite frustrating; the way you handle yourself makes a difference. To work with that, you need to understand what happens when you connect with someone.

Your family and closest friends are the people you are most connected to. You nurture that connection through your words and actions. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, every time you saw them, that connection was vibrant and meaningful? That is what you want, because something happens inside you when you make that connection with them.

You can make that connection with anyone, anywhere. Sometimes your eyes will meet a stranger's eyes, when you are shopping, standing in line, riding on a bus or walking down the street. It is disconcerting because you are used to limiting yourself to this type of connection with a short list of pre-qualified people. And here is this stranger getting on the elevator. You make that connection in a quick look, and then you don't know whether to say something or not. But it was a real moment, a moment out of space and time, a connection.

Electricity flows when you connect. The wiring in your home is an excellent metaphor for this connection and flow. When there is a loose wire, the light might work sometimes and not others. The loose connection can even explode and create a fire. Similarly, when your relationship connections are tight and well maintained, you can rely on the people around you to make you feel that inner flow. If the connections are loose, the flow is unreliable, and the relationship can even explode into difficulties of all types.

Unfortunately, there is no one in your life with whom you can consistently connect, every time. Even if they are 100% open and available, sometimes you aren't. Since only an enlightened being is 100% open and available, and your family and friends aren't yet enlightened, then you have to deal with the unenlightened parts of them. And they have to deal with the unenlightened parts of you.

Even when you want to connect, sometimes they don't want to. Perhaps you want a deeper connection than they do, or maybe you are trying to avoid that connection with one person in your life while you are developing it with another. There are so many variables. The only thing you can count on is that you cannot count on that connection happening. It is reliably unreliable. Yet it is so important!

Several years ago, when the reality shows first began, scientists reported that the parts of the brain that are stimulated when the group voted someone off the island are the same areas that are stimulated when you experience severe physical pain. This means that rejection hurts just like breaking your toe or being in a car crash. Baby monkeys raised in social isolation became mentally ill and unable to interact with other monkeys when they grew up. Premature babies in incubators thrive and grow faster when they are touched and stroked. Previously, many of these infants failed to thrive and even died before the importance of touch was discovered. Patients in a coma have an increased chance of coming out if a loved one holds their hand and speaks to them. What is going on that makes connection so important?

Yoga says that your need for connection is a spiritual need, not a social need. The superficial conversations about the weather and traffic conditions are entertaining, but they don't fill your need for connection. You make a connection in that shared moment of frustration over the traffic jam or the shared joy during the first snowfall. Even if it is only a moment of connection, a whole hour of superficial conversation is worth it. When the connection doesn't happen, you think that person is a waste of time and you try to avoid them in the future.

Here's what happens. When you share an experience with someone else, you have an understanding of the other person, while they understand you. This understanding is a type of validation, making you feel that you are worthwhile as an individual — you are understood and accepted, in your frustration with the traffic or joy of the snow. Yet that is still superficial. If you both agree that snow is a big hassle, and there's all that scraping and shoveling to do now, you have a shared experience, but you don't yet have a connection. It is only a shared experience.

But if your eyes meet or there is a silent pause, that shared experience turns into connection. In that moment of connection, something happens inside of you. Something opens on the inside. You may feel physical tensions unraveling or a warmth in your gut or your heart. Your face softens; your eyes begin to glow. Your shoulders widen away from your neck and ears. That outer connection with the other person prompts an inner change in you.

Yoga makes you experience this inner change without waiting for an outer connection to spark it. There are two reasons to make this inner change for yourself. The first is that the outer connection is unreliable. If you wait for serendipity to strike, with a stranger or with the familiar cast of characters, you may wait a long time. And your waiting keeps your intestines in a knot, your heart tight, your breath shallow, your shoulders and neck scrunched inward, and your eyes dull and flat. This is not a worthwhile way to live.

More importantly, when you use yoga to make these inner changes, you make yourself open and available. You don't wait for someone else to open you up, like they are using a can opener or crowbar. You are already open when you step into the encounter, which makes the other person open up easily, so more connections happen with more people, more reliably. By opening yourself up, you open up your relationships and your life.

You can use a few Ujjayi breaths or a few poses to create this inner opening for yourself. You can take your yoga with you by standing in Tadasana when you are talking with other people, or repeating your mantra in the midst of conversations and other activities. You can remember what Shavasana feels like. There are so many ways to be a yogi in the midst of life. Any of these will make you more open and will make connections with others happen more often.

But there is more — yoga says that more is happening than just connections with others. It comes down to figuring out what your priorities are. Are you using yoga to make your life and your relationships better? If so, then you still expect to get your sense of meaning and fulfillment from outside of yourself — in the situations and relationships. You are using yoga to prop up your shaky inner foundation. Instead, you can choose to use yoga to give you access to an inner connection — this means a shift in your priorities. Your innermost connection with your own essence becomes your priority, and then your life and your relationships are where you share the richness that you get from your inner experience.

In other words, is your yoga a coping mechanism or is your yoga a lifestyle? Any answer you give is a good answer; just see what is true for yourself. What are you looking for?

When you connect with another person, that outer connection triggers an inner opening in you and in them simultaneously. For a moment, both of you allow an inner opening into your own divine essence. That is the deep connection. The other person is a catalyst to you finding your own Self — this is why connection is so important in our lives. This is also why, if the other person is being a jerk, you get mad at them, because their jerk-ness is blocking your access to your own Self. Everything that happens after that is called manipulation and control. You try to get the other person to say or do what you want, so that you can get reconnected to your own inner Self. Your ability to connect with your own divine essence is controlled by the other person's mood and behaviour. This is a problem.

What can you do about this? Do more yoga. Especially during the holidays. I remember one student who said, "I'll be having a lot of family during the holidays, so you won't see much of me." I said, "OK." The next year she said, "I'll be having a lot of family during the holidays, so I will need my yoga more than ever. You'll be seeing a lot of me!" I asked her about the change from the previous year and she said, "I have to find me before I have anything to give them."

The first and most important connection you can make is with your own essence, your own Self. Then the connections you make with others are easier, more frequent and more satisfying. But there is one more

connection that is very important: your connection with other yogis. You have many family members who are not practicing yoga. While you love them and share yourself with them, they don't all understand what you are getting from your yoga practice. It is important to connect with the other yogis in your life, as you share something really special — the shared experience of the inner connection. Together you can connect inside and outside at the same time. Time with your yoga buddies is a yoga practice, called *sangha* (community). That was one of the most meaningful parts of our recent *Svaroopaa*<sup>®</sup> yoga conference, "Outside & Inside." Along with all the wonderful teachers and teachings, great food, divine music, inspiring talks, updates on Master Yoga's growth and progress, we had all that time together with all those Svaroopis! It was better support than lying back into a mound of blankets.

This is also one of the reasons that Master Yoga announced our new Corporate Vision Statement at the conference:

*As the source of Svaroopaa<sup>®</sup> yoga education, Master Yoga cultivates and supports conscious community.*

We remain committed to providing you with the highest quality *Svaroopaa*<sup>®</sup> yoga experiences. We do this in a wide variety of trainings and immersion programs, held in a broad range of locations so it is easy for you to get to us. We work deeply with our Trainers and Teachers to guarantee a consistent quality of experience — for your physical improvement, your mental and emotional healing and growth, your transformation and the inner experience of your own divine essence. We have always done these things and will continue to do so. We are delighted to be able to serve you in this way.

In addition, our vision statement now names the other thing we have always worked to do for you – create and support community. We know that your experience at a Master Yoga program makes a difference, but your experience of the other Svaroopis in your life also makes an important difference. In addition to your local classes, many *Svaroopaa*<sup>®</sup> yoga teachers now offer regular Discussion Groups for you to meet with other Svaroopis and talk about your experiences and your understanding of yoga's profound teachings.

In 2008, Master Yoga is doing two things to make this community connection even better — you can become a Master Yoga Member. Our January catalog will tell you how to join, and the information is coming to our website — we'll let you know as soon as it is available. Your member benefits include getting these contemplation articles directly from Master Yoga, as well as a discount on all our programs held in our facilities, including Fallbrook CA and our new facility in Malvern PA.

We have also given our "Programs for Everyone" a new name: "Yogimmersions." The new catalog lists 50 programs that anyone can take, from weekend immersions to week-long immersions, throughout the USA as well as Australia and Canada. Take advantage of your membership discount to plan your yoga year — 2008 is coming soon. Stay connected. Do more yoga.

Namaste,



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