



April 2010 Contemplation Theme
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Living in Shavasana

– Swami Nirmalananda

Right now, notice your body position — without changing it. As you remain in the same position, relax all of the unnecessary tensions. Allow your body to soften into the position you are still in. Turn this body position into a variation on Shavasana.

Notice how you feel after doing this. Your breath moves more easily. Your mind feels less pressured and your emotional state is more open and free. This simple practice provides profound benefits, and you can do it anywhere and any time. You can do it all the time. You can learn to live in Shavasana.

Your body has the habit of holding certain tensions. These habitual tensions come from your mind. Your mind creates most of your physical tensions, as well as many or all of your aches and pains. The purpose of the yoga poses is to work with your body in order to clear your mind. Once this change in your mind is accomplished, your body won't tighten up again, because your mind won't be telling your body to tighten. It all begins in your mind.

Every Svaroopa® yoga class begins and ends with Shavasana. This pose is so important that we emphasize it by doing it twice in every class. You should also include Shavasana in your own home practice. Take a few minutes to lie on your back with your knees raised. You will get that reliable deep relaxation and a much-needed respite from the world. When it is time to get moving again, both your body and mind will be deeply rested and deeply refreshed, even though you have been there for only a short time. But, even after a wonderful Shavasana, there are still physical tensions that have not cleared from your body. With the Guided Awareness, led by your teacher or a recording, you go through each area in your body in turn. You can feel the progressive release, but there are still some tensions that do not let go.

You can do poses to release the tensions that Shavasana didn't reach. We always start with poses that release muscles connected to the tailbone first, and then sequence through each area of your spine in turn. You need all these poses because Shavasana didn't release the core tensions for you. Why not? The answer is that you didn't let Shavasana touch your mind deeply enough. Those deep physical tensions, especially the core tensions, are actually caused by your mind.

Physical tensions are not merely physical. Even though many physical activities tighten and compress your spine, the things you do with your body are not the main problem. Your body is significantly more impacted by your thoughts. Absolutely every thought that goes through your mind affects your body. This is because your body is the outward expression of your mind. Your body is not separate from your mind — it is the tangible, physical expression of your mind. Those tight spots exist in both your body and your mind simultaneously. Even the tight spots in your life are expressions of the same inner tensions, which arise from more subtle levels within. By learning how to live in your body in a new way, you can melt the tensions in all these levels at the same time.

Once again, soften into the position you are currently in. Right now, relax the unnecessary tensions and allow your body to soften as though you were in Shavasana.

You can use your body to gauge the state of your mind. When your shoulders are creeping up around your ears, it is obvious that you are tightening up. But the process actually starts much earlier, in your tailbone muscles, which trigger a chain reaction of tension that climbs up your spine. By the time you notice your shoulders or neck, tension has been building for a long while. You can do a few

yoga breaths or even take a “yoga break” and do a few poses, but you are only addressing the symptoms, not the cause. In order to address the cause, you need to take a closer look at your mind.

Your body tightens up when you are objecting to what is happening. When you are enjoying what is going on, you don't tighten up. You relax. You smile. You feel quite happy when events are going according to your plan. But when they don't, you have an internal objection. It can take many different forms: anger, disappointment, frustration, blame, anxiety, guilt, etc. You may even consider several different courses of action — maybe you'll just go in there, take charge of the whole thing and tell them what you really think; or maybe you'll just give up and go home, or run away to somewhere far, far away. Whatever feeling or action comes next, it all started with your internal objection.

As a yogi, what you need to do is relax into the reality of what is happening. This won't make the situation change immediately, but nothing would make that happen anyway. If you simply relax your body, you will see that your mind is objecting. Your mind is silently shouting, “NO!” Let it continue to shout its internal negativity as you continue to relax into your body. Amazingly, your internal objection will begin to melt away. You can feel the letting go, just like in Shavasana. You haven't left the situation. You are still in it, but you are letting go of your reaction. By relaxing your body, you relax your reaction as well.

This makes you able to see everything more clearly. You can see the situation; you can see your reaction; you can see that there are many options for what to do next. You are no longer caught in the knee-jerk reflex — all because you decided to relax your body. You really can use your body to clear your mind. Use Shavasana, wherever you are and in whatever body position you are in.

You will still have to decide what to do in the situation that triggered a reaction. Even if you do nothing, you are making a choice to do nothing, and your choice affects the outcome. The wonderful thing is that your choice now comes from increased clarity. In addition, you can move through your next steps with more ease — you are living in Shavasana. You can keep your body open and relaxed as you go through what comes next. You will even be breathing. Events will continue to unfold around you, but your experience of them will have changed. Your experience of yourself will be different. And that changes everything. You truly can live in Shavasana.

Once you let go of your internal objection, you will find that you can embrace more of life. You will feel more alive and freer. Your body will change very quickly because it no longer has to express a constant inner negativity. You may even discover that some of the things you had been objecting to were the very best things for you. Most importantly, you can be present in your own life in a whole new way. All of this comes from just relaxing your body. Once again, soften your body — in the position that you are already in. Learn to live in Shavasana. Do more yoga.

With love & blessings,

Swami Nirmalananda

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

Website: www.svaroopayoga.org ♦ Email: info@masteryoga.org

1-619-718 -YOGA (619-718-9642) ♦ toll-free 1-866-*luyyoga* (1-866-588-9642)

Main Campus: Master Yoga Teacher Institute, 42 Lloyd Ave #A, Malvern PA 19355

Administration Office: 4406 Park Ave #C, San Diego, CA 92116-4046 (please send all mail here)