



April 2012 Contemplation Theme

Surrender to God

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We have reached the culmination of Patanjali's lifestyle practices. Each of the preceding yamas and niyamas have prepared you for the next one, now leading to the finest and fullest way to live your life, in the moment-to-moment surrender to God. There are only two tricky terms in the name of this practice: "surrender" and "God."

A yogini came to speak with me after I taught a workshop, "Thank you for talking about God. I've never heard a yoga teacher talk about God before. I was beginning to think that yoga didn't have God in it. I was missing God!" This part of yoga's teachings has not been well described in the West, but figures prominently in the land of its origin, India. Many of yoga's texts go into great detail about God, using different Sanskrit words for the many different approaches to such a huge subject, but these texts are not often translated into English. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras is a text on the mind, yet he does include a few sutras about God, even defining what God is and crediting God with being the teacher of yoga's ancient sages.

Many yogis are drawn to yoga so they can get away from the way God has been presented to them and don't appreciate my use of the "G-word." Please consider that this practice is the culmination of the ten lifestyle practices, so it can be hard to understand what's going on if you haven't done the needed preparation in the previous nine:

1. Ahimsa — you've become free from harmful impulses; others are affected by your state
2. Satya — you speak only truth; all your words come true
3. Asteya — you don't steal; all riches present themselves to you
4. Brahmacharya — you're free from sexually-driven motivations; you have gained tremendous power and vitality
5. Aparigraha — now free from greed, you understand why you were born
6. Shaucha — having practiced physical and mental purity, you understand the nature of the body, mind and senses, and enjoy a constant cheerfulness
7. Samtoshā — from practicing contentment, you've upgraded from cheerfulness to superlative happiness
8. Tapas — you tackle the hard stuff in life, applying yourself to even greater goals, so you are enjoying the gradual perfection of your body and senses
9. Svadhyaya — your chanting and study of the Sanskrit texts gives you the reliable experience of communion with God.

Once you've worked your way through the steps, you have no problem with the word "God" because you are already experiencing communion with God on a regular basis (#9). It's so fulfilling, you want to have the experience of God all the time, so your next step is:

10. Iishvara-pranidhana — surrender to God.

I'll let you come up with your own definition for "God," perhaps drawing from the 12-step programs that leave you a lot of latitude, simply pointing you to "your higher power." Patanjali offers you a similar freedom, saying you choose what name and form of God to be in relationship with. You don't even have to use the name "God;" it's completely up to you. You can even wait until yoga gives you the experience of that-which-you-don't-call-God, and then you can decide what term to apply to your experience.

Instead, let's look at surrender, another tricky word. We teach surrender twice in every *Svaroopa*® yoga class — the Guided Awareness in Shavasana is a surrender practice. That's why yogis love it so much. Everyone yearns to surrender. Movies, books and popular music are alive with the theme of surrender, whether it is framed as a spiritual quest or as falling in love. The culminating moment, when the heroine or hero merges into the light or melts in love, always gives you goose-

bumps. Maybe it makes you cry. That's because you yearn to surrender. You fight to be independent while you look for opportunities to surrender. It's called the human conundrum. The sages call it the human condition.

"Surrender" does not mean you were losing an important battle so you had to give up, and now you'll pay the price and it will be painful. There are no white flags involved. It's not giving up, giving in or giving over. Yoga's surrender is a melting or dissolving, like ice melting in water. You stop holding yourself in a hard, tight little cube and melt into what you always have been and already are — the whole of consciousness. You need to practice melting so you can get good at it. Fortunately, you already are practicing the melting: in every Shavasana — "Become aware of your toes, all ten toes, all at the same time..."

Svaroopa[®] yoga excels at teaching the art and science of surrender. The whole process of core opening, tail to top, is a process of melting your resistances and dissolving your fears. From your very first class, it isn't only your body that becomes more open; your breath opens up, your mind and heart are opening, your eyes are opening, and the light of your own being shines through you more freely. Every class melts you a little more.

Patanjali promises great results from your practice of surrendering to God:

Samaadhi-siddhir iishvara-pranidhaanaat. — Yoga Sutras 2.45

Perfection of meditative absorption from surrender to God.

He's saying it is the short-cut, the quickest path, which he emphasizes by recommending it in three different places in his text. Instead of the other processes he describes, stair-stepping through the eight limbs, the twelve levels of samadhi and the 23 different meditative practices, his millimeter-by-millimeter process of gradual mastery spanning decades or lifetimes of self-effort. Or he offers you the path of grace — iishvara-pranidhana.

Most translators render "pranidhana" as surrender, but it's not really what the word means. Technically surrender is a non-doing; it's what you do when you stop resisting, so it is the ending of doingness. But this is a niyama, something that you actively "do." Commentators from over 1,000 years ago give a more thorough explanation:

...dedicate all [your] powers to God. — Vyasa

...by making God the motive of all [your] actions — Vachaspati Mishra

This means that you continue to do what you do, but you do it for God. Instead of doing it for your own enjoyment, or to make another person happy, or to complete an important task, do it for God. An athlete described it to me this way, "When I'm running a marathon, it makes a difference when I'm running for world hunger."

Dedicate your ordinary daily efforts to a higher purpose. This moment-to-moment breath-to-breath process is a thought, a mental practice, an intention or attentiveness. It engages your mind and heart together. You keep focused on the greater purpose even while you handle the mundane details.

Just like a lightning rod draws lightning, applying yourself in this way draws grace. Whether you believe in God or not, it works. I know. This is why I gave my life to yoga and this is how I've been teaching and living for decades. As a result, my life is filled with grace. Thus I know Patanjali's promise is true. Do more yoga.

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

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