



April 2013 Contemplation Theme

## The *Svaroopa*® Yoga Difference

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Clarity, ease, spaciousness. Calm. Happiness. Joy. You need it — yoga provides. Any style of yoga provides these benefits, but *Svaroopa*® yoga does it differently. Let's explore the difference.

Rukmini remembers her first-ever yoga class, "I had done yoga at home with a used copy of Richard Hittleman's Yoga: 28-Day Exercise Plan, so I was awed to encounter a group of acrobatic, athletic yogis wearing spandex and using towels on their mats to catch the sweat. I wanted a peaceful, quiet mind, and I found it — the intense physical effort made me focus on my body, so there was little room for other thoughts. The class pushed me to exhaustion, so then I was too tired to think. Ahh, peace..."

*Svaroopa*® yoga provides a reliable experience of peace as well, but brings it about in an entirely different way. You don't become exhausted; instead you are filled from your own Inner Source. You are "blissified," In India, the land of its origin, the poses are only 10% of yoga's technology. The other 90% is about your mind and getting beyond your mind, to experience *svaroopa*, your ever-blissful Divine Essence. Body-centered practice goes by the generic *hatha yoga*. The West offers many brand names, including *Svaroopa*® yoga.

The generic *hatha* has two translations, literal and mystical. Literally "effort-filled," it is even translated as "forceful" and "violent." It doesn't mean you should hurt yourself! It means you can propel yourself towards enlightenment through rigorous self-effort. You can push yourself. Hatha yoga is DIY<sup>1</sup>.

Contrast this with 90% of the yogis in India. They are sitting: sitting to listen to their Guru expound on the teachings, sitting to contemplate the teachings they've heard, sitting in meditation, sitting to watch the sunrise or sunset, sitting as they participate in traditional ceremonies, sitting and waiting for their own Divinity to fill into the stillness they've created in their mind.

Hatha yogis keep busy. They don't sit and watch the sunrise; they do Sun Salutations. They don't listen to teachings or contemplate them; they practice the poses and try to make their body measure up. They don't regulate their breath in order to quiet their mind; they pump their breath in order to sustain continual movement. They don't create stillness in their mind; they keep moving.

Swami Nirmalananda describes a yoga therapy conference she attended, "I arrived fresh from a yoga retreat in India. I'd been sitting for long sweet hours of meditation and traditional ceremonies. I joined 2,000 other yoga teachers and yoga therapists for the first plenary<sup>2</sup> session, a full two hours of PowerPoint presentations by medical researchers, showing how they proved that yoga works. I arrived a little late so I sat in the back of the hall and watched the drama play out.

"Within 30 minutes, the 2,000 yoga teachers and therapists were squirming in their seats. They couldn't pay attention to the presenters. They were wiggly, noisy and distracting. After another 30 minutes, the moderator announced, 'I know it's hard for you to sit, so we're adding in a break after our next presenter.' I was shocked. They couldn't sit! They think yoga is about movement."

Yoga has been growing in the West since 1893, so much that yogis now compete for championships and even Gold Medals. Google it; yoga is a sport. This is a different direction than the sages intended. Hatha yoga is described in the texts as efforting practice, a way to apply yourself physically, but for progress toward Enlightenment, not towards mastering a pose or perfecting your body. Ultimately your physical mastery gives you the ability to apply yourself to more subtle and interior practices.

Let's look at the second meaning of *hatha*, the mystical meaning, found in every Sanskrit word. The syllables *ha* and *tha* name the energies that flow along the two sides of your spine: *ha* — along the right side of your spine; *tha* — along your left. When you open and balance these two flows, the energy shifts and flows through the center of your spine. In the beginning, this flow is *prana*, your body's own healing power. Grace invokes a stronger flow: the transformative power of Consciousness, the power of your own upliftment. This is Kundalini. This is the *Svaroopa*® yoga difference.

<sup>1</sup> Do It Yourself

<sup>2</sup> "...the part of a conference when all members of all parties are in attendance." — <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plenary>

In this mystical meaning, *hatha* doesn't mean effort-filled or forceful. You won't get any spinal release if you're forcing. You have to ease off. You have already experienced the difference: working, pushing and trying in a pose compared to propping, softening and settling into the precise angles. More change happens when you effort less. When you combine precision with compassion, something happens. This is Grace, the power of inward expansion.

To summarize, *hatha* has two meanings:

- Effort-filled or forceful, meaning your progress towards Enlightenment is self-propelled through first cultivating physical mastery, then applying your highly developed will to subtle practices.
- Opening and balancing the energies flowing along the two sides of your spine, so the flow of Consciousness can arise from tail to top, revealing your own Divinity to you.

One is a path of self-effort, and the other is a path of Grace – two radically different paths.

*Svaroopa*® yoga is a path of Grace. Everyone else is on the other path. In Rukmini's first yoga class, the movements of those athletic, acrobatic yogis were graceful. But the Grace of *Svaroopa*® yoga is completely different. Swami's beloved Guru, Baba Muktananda, gave her Shaktipat initiation, awakening the dormant energy called Kundalini. Kundalini is your own Divinity in a seed form that grows and blossoms within. That transmission created *Svaroopa*® yoga and enlivens it today.

Swami Nirmalananda says, "After Baba sent me back to America, I could see that my students were not getting the openings that the poses are meant to provide, the openings I knew so deeply and so intimately. So I taught variations, using angles to target their spinal tensions, providing the core opening that is now named *Svaroopa*® yoga. It surprised me when people started getting Shaktipat. Now I realize that I was carrying my Guru's gift of Grace to the next generation. Over the last two decades, I have watched a few teachers take the poses out to teach under a different name. While the poses are still enjoyable, their students don't get Shaktipat. That flow of Grace doesn't enliven their teaching or their students' practice."

Yet *Svaroopa*® yoga is a hatha yoga, so there still is self-effort involved. This is a path of both self-effort and Grace. Self-effort is very important: you must apply yourself to the practices. Yet, on a path of Grace, you have to remember to make space for something more to happen.

Patanjali pairs self-effort and surrender in Yoga Sutras 1.12, promising that your churning mind will be stilled by *abhyasa* and *vairagya*. *Abhyasa* is persistent practice. *Vairagya* is surrender, a profound letting-go. Patanjali puts the two together: self-effort and surrender. Why?

- Self-effort is very important; you must persist in order to accomplish anything. But self-effort alone makes you prideful and arrogant, or you become mean and self-punishing.
- Surrender is essential. In *Svaroopa*® yoga, we surrender to *svaroopa*, your own Divine Self, which is found through Grace, the gift of Freedom. Yet surrender alone makes you into a doormat, without any clarity or will, and leaves you stranded in helplessness.

You must have both: self-effort and surrender. You already know about self-effort, so we teach surrender in every class. When Rukmini tried out her first *Svaroopa*® yoga class, she was used to doing Shavasana in other styles of yoga — flat-on-your-back, flat-on-your-mat, 90-seconds of ticking clock at the end of class. She grudgingly accepted two zeds and a roll under her knees. And that final Shavasana was a revelation! She says, "It felt like coming home. I felt a deep comfort and ease in my body, a calm and peace in my mind. I felt bliss."

The surrender and Grace are there in the final Shavasana; they are in every pose. *Svaroopa*® yoga arose out of Grace. It's suffused with Grace in the same way that ice is made out of water. How can you take the water out of the ice?

*Svaroopa*® yoga is unique, a hatha yoga that's full of Grace. You put forth effort. You make time to attend a class or have a private session. Or you practice Ujjayi Pranayama, do the Magic Four, meditate, or you do it all. Grace supports you every step of the way. But where are you going? There's really nowhere to go. You're not travelling to your Self because you already ARE the Self. You already ARE Consciousness-itself. Do more yoga.

To reach Rukmini or Swami Nirmalananda or to learn about *Svaroopa*® yoga, contact: Master Yoga Foundation

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