



March 2008 Contemplation Theme

Cultivating Awareness

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Become aware of your toes, all ten toes, all at the same time... Your *Svaroopa*® yoga class begins with these words, your teacher guiding you progressively through each area of your body until you are fully embodied and fully aware. You'll never hear your teacher say, "Relax your feet and ankles," or "Let your legs soften." This is because what you are doing is not a guided relaxation. It is a guided awareness, a training in consciousness.

Yoga is the science of consciousness, with predictable stages of inner development. Our short description of *Svaroopa*® yoga summarizes those stages: *healing, transformation and illumination*. Let's look more closely at each, especially illumination.

Healing

At first glance, yoga appears to be the science of the body. Your rapid physical improvement in *Svaroopa*® yoga proves the astounding difference between core opening and core strengthening. Our methodology is quite different from other ways of working with your body, even different from other styles of yoga practice as well as physical therapy. Arising out of the *Kashmir Shaivite Tantra*, core opening provides much more than mere physical health, strength, flexibility, vitality and resilience, though there is certainly nothing wrong with these!

It can be hard to see past yoga power of healing when you need help with your body. If *Svaroopa*® yoga were merely a way of working with your body, it would be fantastic. As a sophisticated methodology that heals your body and maximizes your physical experience, it is unparalleled – I get miracle stories from teachers and students every day! Of course many styles of yoga *asana* practice abound, as well many wonderful healing therapies, but *Svaroopa*® yoga ranks up there with the best.

Whether you are just now starting into yoga, or you take a moment to remember those pivotal first few months, you can see how quickly and easily your body responds. The core opening that decompresses your spine also opens up your breath and takes pressure off your internal organs. It simultaneously relieves or banishes pain, usually within a few classes or private sessions. Once you discover the power of daily practice, your body begins a complete reversal of the aging process, progressively stripping out the layers of tensions and toxins. If you brought a lot of physical problems or pains with you, the rule of thumb applies – it takes one month of consistent core opening to dissolve one year's collection of problems.

Yet, as wonderful as the physical benefits are, they are the tip of the iceberg. Yoga's goal is to introduce you to yourself, through all levels and all aspects of your being. I sometimes describe it this way – if you don't want to change, don't do yoga.

Transformation

Your yoga classes relax you, yet you also have more energy – an unusual combination. While this is physical, it is also a state of mind. In addition, you begin to be more patient and more peaceful. You enjoy an increasing clarity of mind and a new ability to focus. All these combine to make you able to accomplish more in your day, yet you feel less driven to perpetuate the nonstop activity.

Yoga also makes you more positive and optimistic, even friendlier and more helpful to others. At the same time you know when to say no, and develop the ability to take care of yourself along with taking care of others.

Your personality is transformed into a new-and-improved version of yourself. It's like you were hidden under a layer of mulch, and the seedling of yourself sprouted and grew up into the world. Your process of self-discovery continues to be fueled by your core opening practices, yet it becomes clear that the results are more far-reaching.

Illumination

As your body opens up, you are able to feel more of it. This is an increase in your ability to be aware. Your awareness expands both outside and inside. You see your life more clearly, which can bring about exciting breakthroughs or can be disconcerting when you realize what is really going on around you.

Most importantly, your awareness is simultaneously expanding inward. You see yourself more clearly, from the surface levels of personality and personal history through to the divine undercurrent that brings you into existence. When you discover the essence of your own unique individual existence, you discover the whole of existence-itself.

Knowing yourself at this level changes everything. What you want out of life and what you want to give back expands dramatically, out of gratitude and love, and out of joy and peace. This is the power of awareness. Once your physical changes begin, all the other levels of your being are being opened at the same time. Core opening is not limited to a physical opening – it is an opening of your mind and heart, all the way through to your soul level and (according to yoga) beyond.

Within a short time you begin to get flashes of inner knowing. You become attuned to an inner sense that keeps you in synch with life itself. You get insights and answers about needs and problems. You suddenly know something about a situation or about another person, especially about the most important people in your life. You begin to get these flashes of knowing in your work and other activities.

People sometimes call this intuition. Yoga calls it *mudha*. What happens is that you have been mentally wrestling with a question or problem, and suddenly an answer flashes forth. It's like a cartoon drawing with a light bulb over your head. While the knowledge you get this way is true, unfortunately it is a limited type of knowledge. It is limited and it is limiting.

Technically, *mudha* is not intuition or even a sixth sense – it is a complete knowing about this one small thing. It comes from the expanding power of your awareness; consciousness is like a bright light shining through the window of your mind. As the window pane of your mind gets cleaned up, the light shines through more brightly. You may not realize that is what is happening. You may feel that you got your answer by doing some hard thinking, but it does not really happen that way. The answer doesn't even come from your mind – it comes from the light shining through your mind. The source of that light is within you. That source is you.

Yoga does not value *mudha*. The texts and oral tradition warn against using *mudha*. When you use your expanding awareness to accomplish things in the world, like knowing which driving route will have less traffic or where the closest parking space is, you are looking outside of yourself for happiness. When you use it to become better at making money or even to help or heal other people, you are saying that the most important thing in your life is external results – it is more important than finding the source of the light within you.

As long as you remain externalized like this, you are not a yogi. Yoga is a way to turn your search inward so that you find your Self, which is the source of light, the source of love, the source of joy. If you continue cultivating your awareness and opening to your own essence, then even deeper levels of inner knowing develop. *Mudha* is only the beginning, but you must restrain yourself from using it in order for the two to develop: *pratibhaa* and *prajña*.

Pratibhaa is best described as a flash of insight, a moment of revelation. In that flash, you know something about life or the nature of things. This is how Newton could see the law of gravity in a falling apple and how Einstein saw the physics of the universe while watching a spoon drop from his knee.

This type of inner knowing is still about external things, but it is about bigger things. For example, with *pratibhaa*, you know about human nature instead of about a specific person. You see the purpose of life instead of seeing something about your own life. It could be that you get the answer that would solve global warming or bring about world peace. It may be that you suddenly understand the power of love in all its glorious forms.

Pratibhaa is a knowing of something bigger than your own interests. It comes from the inner source of light, flashing into a mind that has been cleared of its narrow focus on personal issues, needs and desires. This expanded mind is the result of your yoga practices as well as the ever-present flow of grace.

The best kept secret in yoga is that teachers get these flashes of *pratibhaa* all the time. This is one of the many reasons that yoga teachers love to teach. In order to become a teacher, of course you must learn poses, anatomy and yoga philosophy, plus you must learn how to communicate. Once you have these basics, they become the tools of your trade, like a carpenter with his tools.

But the carpenter's focus is not on his tools; it is on the wood. As a teacher, your goal is not to do the poses; your goal is to take your students to an experience of consciousness. You can do this only when you get out of the way. Every yoga teacher is delighted by the amazing teachings that come out of her/his mouth in the middle of a class. She/he learns from these flashes of *pratibhaa*, which further inspires her/him to continue practicing in order to dive deeper into the source of that inner knowing.

The knowing of the highest Reality is called *prajñā*. It is a direct cognition, a flash of illuminative knowing of the ultimate truth. *Prajñā* is not relational. It has nothing to do your life or the world. It is the knowing of your own essence. It comes through yogic surrender, when your mind surrenders to the flash of light. If we return to the example of your mind being like a pane of glass with light shining through, *prajñā* happens in the moment that the glass dissolves. Nothing remains but the light. This is the surrender.

In *Shavasana*, your teacher's words guide you through your body, providing both a deep relaxation and a training in awareness. Yet *Shavasana* is more – it is a training in the yogic art of surrender. You begin with surrendering to the floor that you are lying on, and surrendering to the moment you are present in and the body that you live in. Ultimately you learn how to surrender to your own Self, which is consciousness-itself.

This surrender takes you beyond the three types of illuminative insight, for *mudha*, *pratibhaa* and *prajñā* are merely flashes of illumination. You must clear out the density from your body and mind because density limits knowing, both outer and inner knowing. By opening up your body, you clear that density from your heart and mind, so that you may have what yoga promises.

Yoga promises that you will become more aware. You will experience flashes of illuminative insight, until you are able to live in the continuing flow of that inner knowing. You will embody that knowing in your body and your life. This is truly yoga.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rama". Above the signature is a small heart symbol containing the Sanskrit character "Om".

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