



May 2012 Contemplation Theme

The Ultimate Practice

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The yamas and niyamas we've been exploring for over a year are invaluable practices, yet they are traditionally used as preparation for the other more powerful practices of yoga. In ancient times, a teacher of poses and meditation would not accept a student unless they had already mastered the lifestyle practices described in the yamas and niyamas:

5 YAMAS

ahimsa — non-harming

satya — truth-telling

asteya — non-stealing

brahmacharya — celibacy

aparigraha — non-greediness

5 NIYAMAS

shaucha — purity

santoshā — contentment

tapas — austerity

svadhyaya — chanting and study of texts

Ishvara-pranidhana — surrender to God

Modern teachers don't interview their prospective students about such pre-qualifications, relying on yoga to make the necessary changes. When you begin yoga, even if your lifestyle is not supportive of your own spiritual upliftment (or even your own health), yoga does make such changes. The yamas and niyamas may be describing a process that's been blossoming in you for some time, rather than a rigorous self-discipline you must embark upon. Yet any effort you make toward your own upliftment is beneficial.

Some texts list eight yamas and niyamas rather than ten, while others go up to 20, yet they all agree that this is only the beginning. Next yoga offers a series of practices that are more familiar, including yoga poses, yogic breathing and meditative processes. This sophisticated methodology works with distinctly human abilities to cultivate the ultimate human capacity — the capacity to know the Divine fully and wholly. This process is one of organic development, cultivating the subtlety of your inner awareness, for you are exploring the Divine Within. The Self.

Svaroopa[®] yoga excels at this process. Wherever you begin, with the poses or breathing practices, with the teachings I bring you from my years with my Guru, with the chanting or with the meditations, your experience of the Divine Within is guaranteed. This is the surprise. This is also what brings most new yogis back for more. It works because the Divine is within, so all you have to do is open your core and you will find what lies there. You can think of the human as being like a donut with a hollow center; just enter into that interior space and you experience the majesty, the mystery and the Divinity Within.

The famous sage Patanjali returns to the final niyama several times in his text, ultimately describing it as the ultimate practice. He dedicates over 150 sutras to describing an arduous process of mastering your mind and cultivating subtle perceptions, but four times he tells you how to make it easy, "Just surrender to God."

Ishvara-pranidhaanaad vaa. — Yoga Sutras 1.23

[The highest state of consciousness] is imminent for
those who surrender to God.

To understand the importance of this repetition, imagine that you were tackling the project of summarizing the entire science of yoga in 186 short phrases, as succinctly as possible. Would you repeat one teaching four times? Patanjali did. Beyond this, he only gives three sutras to the practice of poses, without giving any promise of such great results. Obviously this surrender is very important.

To help with your surrender to God, Patanjali defines God as "purusha, without kleshas or karma." The significance of this is found, not in the technicalities of Sanskrit, but in the fact that Patanjali also describes who you are: you are purusha, but you have kleshas and karma. While the binding

forces of kleshas and karma keep you from knowing who you are, you are the same purusha — for there is only One.

This is the teaching that captivated me from the very beginning. When my Guru said, “Worship your own Self. Your God dwells within you, as you,” something happened inside me. It was like something inside me flip-flopped. It wasn’t butterflies in my tummy — I knew what that felt like. It wasn’t heart palpitations — I knew those too. It wasn’t fear or excitement. It wasn’t desire or passion. It was like something deep inside me was saying, “Yes. I always knew that! Except while I didn’t know.” I wanted that flip-flop to happen again and again. I went back for more and more. I did more yoga.

Yoga clearly states that the goal of the practices is for you to live in the constant knowing of your own Divinity. The ultimate practice is to surrender to God on the inside, to surrender to your own Self. It is easier said than done. You need some preparation, so you do yoga. You do need to do more yoga.

Along the way, of course, yoga takes care of many aches and pains. Yoga naturally frees you from your self-destructive habits and grows you out of your old limiting sense of self, so you enjoy a remarkable inner peace and joy. Even if you never achieve the goal the sages had in mind for you, yoga is pretty good stuff!

Our year-long series on yamas and niyamas gives you a sense of how far-reaching the teachings can be. Yoga leaves no stone unturned. Turning over the stones over is an interior process that exposes the crawly critters in the hidden corners of your mind and emotions: you unmask your inner demons and outgrow your fears and obsessions.

You’ve been practicing for this in all the yoga poses you do. You’re using props and alignment to access the tightest spots in your body, opening them up for movement and breath. You are opening them up so you live in an interior spaciousness that is profoundly physical while it is significantly more, all at the same time. Your ability to dig into those tensions contributes to your ability to dig into the hidden recesses of your mind and emotions, clearing out the stuff that keeps you contracted and in pain.

This inner excavation exposes more. Each time you open your spine, you remove a little more of what was blocking the flow of consciousness. You predictably experience the tangible flow of life, of joy, of bliss, and of knowingness of your own presence at the deepest level of your being. Your spine is that powerful. This is why we practice core opening, to get all these benefits on all these levels, but most importantly to experience *svaroupa*, your own Self.

A yogi told me that she had the honor of attending the death of a family member who said, three or four days before departing, “I now know that I am a child of God. I always have been. And so are you.” This family member lived in a state of grace for those remaining days. Yoga says you can live in this state of grace all the time. This is the goal of human life. This is the reason you were born. This is why you do yoga, whether you understood it or not when you decided to take a few yoga classes.

This is embodied divinity. You are not merely a child of God — you are God in a human form. Everyone is, but not everyone wants to look in the mirror and see this truth. You might prefer to live in your shell and to hide the light of your own being, but yoga is going to make you shine.

Surrender to God is not an external process. The surrender is an internal process, and the God that you are surrendering to is inside as well. To find your Divinity Within, because your own Self (capital-s Self) is so well hidden from your usual sense of self (small-s Self), you must have help. That help is called Grace; Divine Grace gives you your own Divinity. *Svaroupa*® yoga is the yoga of Grace, another topic worthy of exploration on another day. Do more yoga.

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

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