



August 2004 Contemplation Theme

Patterns

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While your innermost nature is bliss and freedom, what you actually experience day-to-day is less wonderful. Your daily experience is based on your own unique internalized patterns. Your body has patterns of movement built into it, which are related to the patterns that your mind and emotions repeat over and over again. Fortunately, *Svaroopa*® yoga clears all three levels at once.

Physical Patterns

When you do *Svaroopa*® yoga to help your body, you get help very quickly. Your first class or private session makes you feel better immediately, and it usually lasts for two or three days. Then you need to come to class again or have another session. In recent discussions with *Svaroopa*® yoga teachers, I have discovered that most students are coming to class only once a week. If this is you, it means you probably spend the second half of the week feeling bad again, since the effects of the class usually only last three days. The tensions you have lived with for years are very familiar, but they are completely optional. You have a new option of feeling good all the time. "Do more yoga," is not just a cute phrase; it is a profound truth. It is actually a translation of one of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras! When you do more yoga, you feel better. It is a simple truth.

You actually get the best results if you take yoga classes in the same way that athletic trainers recommend you do an exercise program — every other day. (Of course, those of you that come to class every day get even more out of it.) For most people, every other day is a big commitment — that would actually be three classes per week! Realistically, even if you come just twice per week, you will experience a huge difference. Coming twice as often will more than double your benefits.

The ratio is really quite amazing: a 90-minute yoga class makes you feel good for three days. Exercise doesn't work the same way. When you start an exercise program, you may actually feel worse on the day after your workout. Even if you feel better, it doesn't last for three days. But *Svaroopa*® yoga works differently: the asanas release muscle tensions, very specifically in your deep spinal muscles, while exercise has the purpose of creating tensions, through the superficial muscles as well as in the muscles along your spine. They call it "core strength." We call it "core opening." *Svaroopa*® yoga's inner opening is radically different and incredibly good for your body!

The reason that the benefits of your yoga class or personal practice last for only three days is because of *muscle memory*. Professional athletes practice their sport every day in order to create muscle memory. The pitcher on the mound needs to be able to trust his body to throw the ball even when the crowds or the pressures of the game distract him. A pianist must train her hands to find the right keys, and spends hours reviewing the tricky passages until her fingers know their way through it on their own. It is all done with muscle memory. The reason you can get up on a bicycle after 20 years and still know how to ride is because of muscle memory.

The training that creates muscle memory is actually called *practice*. This is one of the reasons that yoga is called *yoga practice*. Practice means you do something with full focus, and you repeat it again and again, until it becomes so familiar that you don't have to think about it in order to do it. Like an athlete or a musician, a yogi practices and practices — until your body naturally reverts to the openness and freedom that you used to have to think about in order to create.

Muscle memory creates specific patterns of movement that your body "grooves" into. Even driving a car is done with muscle memory, as your foot finds its way around the pedals on its own. These patterns have

been grooved in you through many months of diligent learning and many years of continued practice. Unfortunately, most of those body patterns you have created for yourself are not beneficial. Right now, you may be actually compressing your heart and lungs if your shoulders are slumped with your head pushed forward. You also create tremendous neck and shoulder tension in this position, many hours of every day. Even the way you stand and walk may be creating knee and back pain, particularly if your toes are usually turned outward, whether you have it now or you are merely laying in the pattern that will create it in your future.

Svaroopa[®] yoga will teach you a new way to sit and stand. In class, you do poses to release the spinal tensions, and you discover this new way of standing or sitting feels wonderful. Unfortunately, when you leave class, your body reverts to the old unconscious patterns. Muscle memory. Fortunately, muscle memory is just a result of training, and yoga will retrain you and establish new body patterns for you. You will have the muscle memory of openness. Your body will revert to a natural quality of openness and ease when you are not paying attention. You can actually train your body to live and move this way.

In class, we pause between the two sides of a pose. This is so you can feel the difference that the pose has made, which is very tangible when one side is open and the other side is not. This is a powerful moment. In this moment, you are consciously creating new patterns: patterns of openness. We also help you establish these new patterns by using a Marker Pose at the beginning and the end of each class, so you can learn how your body feels in openness. Feeling these differences gives you a chance to consciously integrate the new physical sensations into your patterning. You are actually repatterning your patterning every time you notice the differences.

The best thing is that you are repatterning your mind and emotions while you are working with your body. Even if you have never heard about yoga's tools for the mind, the poses are making powerful changes on all levels for you — erasing the old mental and emotional patterns, and even establishing new ones based on ease and openness.

Repatterning your body means that you may go through a period of discomfort. When you first begin yoga, the aches and pains that motivated you to begin are just the tip of the iceberg. While you get immediate improvement, you also begin uncovering the hidden layers of tension that caused your back or neck pain, or your knee or wrist pain, or whatever motivated you to get started. The deepest layers of muscle are the ones connected to your spine. They have become numb if they have been tight for a long time. It is called "denervation."

Muscle tissue requires a lot of blood supply and nerve supply. Arteries and veins (blood vessels) weave through the tissues of your muscles, as do nerves. When your muscles are tight, they compress the blood vessels and the nerves, inhibiting their functions. Muscles actually cut off their own blood supply and shut down nerve conduction when they are contracted for a long period of time. Your ability to feel the tension diminishes progressively as you hold it longer. Thus, tight muscles don't hurt. They create lots of problems, especially when they are spinal muscles: compressing your intervertebral discs, internal organs and the nerve roots that branch out from your spine. But they don't hurt.

When yoga begins to release these deep tensions for you, the nerves begin to wake up. This is called "reinnervation." Yoga will hopefully open your body before you begin to feel these numbed out areas again, but sometimes you begin to feel these areas before they have fully opened. You can feel how tight they are and it doesn't feel good. However, it is very beneficial. Now that you can feel them, even if they are uncomfortable, you won't let them tighten up as much as you used to. Even more tangibly, you may be able to consciously relax those deep layers, which you could not do before because you cannot relax an area that you cannot feel. In addition, you are better able to use the poses to create the next level of needed release. You can tell which poses work for you and when you need to do them.

Little by little, you build the pattern of openness in your body. You train your body to live in openness, using the power of muscle memory to change the way you live in your body. Many things support this pattern of

openness, including your own conscious and frequent practice, plus a number of things that we do for you in class:

“Notice the differences between the two sides”

The Marker Pose at the beginning and end of class

Yoga Mudra at the end of class — which seals you in openness through balancing the energies along your spine

Teaching you what to do in your own home practice

Mental & Emotional Patterns

The tensions in your body have their related patterns in your mind and emotions. You create more physical tensions with your mind than through the things you do physically. There are a lot of things you can do with your body to tighten up your spine. They are often quite popular, like surfing, skiing, aerobics, jogging, etc. These types of physical activities undermine the spinal opening that you are working on with your *Svaroopaa*® yoga practice. If you still love to do them, at least do “equal time” — if you jog for 25 minutes, then do 25 minutes of spinal opening poses afterward. You will feel wonderful!

Regardless of how tightening some physical activities may be, you spend many more hours using your mind to tighten up your spine. You can think yourself into exhaustion, into tension and into pain. Your thoughts are repetitive, which is easy to notice. Your mind is obsessive-compulsive by nature. You can harness the power of this innate tendency by focusing your mind on the divine essence of your being, but for now it spends a lot of time in the swamp.

While psychology and many “new-age” systems will encourage you to improve the quality of your thoughts, yoga emphasizes the quieting of your mind. You know the feeling of a quiet mind very well, for you get a taste of it at the end of every yoga class. Perhaps your mind is even beginning to prefer the peaceful inner vastness to its perpetual motion machine.

In *Svaroopaa*® yoga, we use the opening of the spine to create an opening to the vast inner realms of your own being, which are Beingness itself. This takes you inward to a dimension that is far beyond your mind, and gives you that experience of inner freedom we contemplated last month.

We will look more closely at the mental and emotional patterns next month. For now, you can look at how you take care of your body, and the effect that it has on your mind and emotions. If you do yoga again BEFORE you tighten all the way back to the old patterns, you create a new pattern. Instead of allowing your body to revert to the old tensions and pains, you catch it early and reinstate the newly familiar openness. You add openness to openness. It is called *practice*. Practice means you open up again, consciously. Then you repeat it again and again, until it becomes so familiar that you don't have to think about it in order to live in that openness. This is why I say, “Do more yoga.”

Namaste,



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