

Preparation for Philosophy Discussion

Sunday, June 14, 2009 (2:30 – 4:00pm)



STRENGTH
BALANCE
EQUANIMITY



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Finding the Way: Pairs of Opposites

Goldilocks did not set out on a quest for porridge. She happened upon the porridge, some too hot and some too cold, before she discovered that there was porridge that was just right, and ate it all up. Most of us are like Goldilocks, not looking for anything, in particular, sampling what comes our way. Yoga would say we are wise in our ignorance, that we cannot know what is right for us. But we can tell what is wrong. Too hot. Too cold.

So, finding our way in yoga is like traveling down a dark hallway. We cannot see the way (which is faultless, infinite and indescribable); we follow it by bumping into the walls. Too hot. Too cold. All the philosophy of yoga is based on this idea of duality. Physically, in asana we move parts of the body in opposition to other parts to understand their relation, their range and connection. Emotionally, we negotiate our path between sukha (comfort or softness) and sthira (steadiness or firmness) to understand our nervous system and connection to action. We proceed on the two wings of practice, abhyasa, and renunciation or detachment, vairagya. Yoga supports us with layers of opposites. I suggest that all these pairs of opposites are reverberations of the fundamental dichotomy of purusha (consciousness/energy) and prakriti (nature/matter).

Tapas, svadyaya, ishvara pranidhana

The day to day advice the yogis leave us is very simple. We must be attentive to three things. The acts of yoga consist of tapas (effort), svadyaya (reflection), and ishvara pranidhana (surrender or non-attachment to outcome). This is the total of our responsibility. We balance action and reflection. Ishvara pranidhana is the context for our activity, a deliberate surrender to the inevitability of change, neither grasping at the past nor the future.



This month, use the skills of *tapas*, *svadyaya* and *ishvara pranidhana* to explore the second of the five *yamas*: *satya* or truthfulness. As we discussed before, any meditation yields understanding on at least two levels. We learn about the object of our meditation and on a deeper level, we also learn about the *subject* of our meditation. The deliberate attention to action and reflection (regardless of the object of our focus) develops self awareness. This awareness itself places us firmly in between the great dichotomy: subject and object, observer and observed (*purusha*, consciousness and *prakriti*, nature). For this reason, awareness itself is transforming. Experiment with the following exercises.



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- Spend some time thinking about the second *yama*, *satya* (truthfulness). If you spent a day, working scrupulously to be entirely truthful, what sort of results do you expect? Imagine this clearly. Make some specific predictions (maybe even make a list). Then spend a day of regular activities focusing on truthfulness so that you are engaged in action as well as reflection. Did it turn out exactly as you'd expected? What, specifically, happened as you'd anticipated? Did anything surprise you?
- How did you recognize truthfulness? What is truth? Do you find that you recognize it clearly or do you find some grey areas?

Come to class (6/14) prepared to discuss your experiences. Also, give some thought to how these discussions will be of most use to you. We will not meet over the summer, but we can continue an on-line conversation if that is helpful. Are there specific questions or ideas you would like to investigate? I welcome all your thoughts and suggestions.