

JOY: The Journal of Yoga

Spring 2006, Volume 5, Number 2

In the Shade of the Yoga Tree: A Living Context for Practice

M.L. Youngbear Roth

"The living context for practicing various yoga branches is not to flee one's existence, but to realize the profound experience of one's path."

"Namaste". Without false modesty, pride, or preconception we greet kindred spirits along the path, meeting them eye-to-eye and toe-to-toe because we are all concurrently students and teachers. While individuals experience life through different personalities, we share weighty truths allowing us to recognize one another. I know you as I know myself; all of us wish to give and receive respect; all of us hope to lead lives of security, not only in the material sense, but stepping forth into this universe secure in who we are and the works we accomplish; all sojourners desire love. My first teacher - poet, yogi, and mystic - Eden Ahbez, gifted the world with his song, Nature Boy. Many listen to the song failing comprehension that his lyric, "The greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return,¹" is the call of a mystic who refers to 'love' in its broadest sense – the ability we have to recognize and value our connection with others and our universe. Realizing these truths, we bond across great divides of land and sea transcending culture and language. "Namaste", meaning to say, "Your energy and my energy, honored as one energy."

Our multifarious existence proceeds from a single subtle energy force, and the yoga tree, planted and nurtured by this energy, manifests itself through varied branches. Over five thousand years ago in northern India, the universe gave birth to the yoga tree blossoming into Buddhist branches, Hatha, Kriya, and Pranayama branches, Bhakti, Gnani, Kundalini, and Tantric branches, and fresh branches of Power Yoga developing in the West as we speak. Each branch evolves as an offshoot of the tree, and every branch exhibits its own style or energy frequency. Which branch do you practice?

Whichever style you find yourself committed to, you are practicing 'subtle energy manipulation'.

Like my adventurous friends and teachers before me, Eden Ahbez and Arleta Soares, I am an energy maverick – a shaman learning and practicing styles from all over the great tree. Studying for thirty-five years accustoms one to leaps of faith in the nature of a single underlying spiritual energy or as Buddhists say, "one's true face."

The foundation of all yoga is energy. Understanding The Law of Subtle Energy Return is imperative and of great aid in the quality of our practice. Subtle energy return is that tie which binds us to an infinite universe unborn as the one undifferentiated energy and born as the manifested variety of energy frequencies composing our world.

Refining individual energy frequencies and accomplishing a living return to the undifferentiated source is the purpose of yoga practice. Applying The Law of Subtle Energy Return, we seek to balance and evidence our individual energy frequency to reflect that energy of which we are manifest – the one original energy: our higher self or infinite mind, that which whispers to us when we are alone, ineffable spirit. The Law of Subtle Energy Return states that the energy frequency we manifest in our lives is the frequency of energy the universe returns to us. Through yoga we arrive at the notion that standing alone in front of our cave in the Himalayas and shouting any strange sound, that sound is precisely what will be echoed back; we learn energy manipulation, as those hermits in their lonely spiritual mounts learned and practiced for thousands of years. The Law of Subtle Energy Return refines The Mind, Body, Spirit Connection, and with practice this connection grows clear, direct, and powerful. The Mind, Body, Spirit Connection allows us to form a completed cycle of communication between the finite and infinite.

"Yoga is an art, a science and a philosophy. It touches the life of man at every level, physical, mental, and spiritual. It is a practical method for making one's life purposeful, useful and noble. ..."

...Yoga helps to keep one's body and mind in tune with the essence, the soul, so that all three are blended into one. ..."

B.K.S. Iyengar, *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*²

If you're sensing karmic law peeking around the tree, you are correct. However, I find the term karma largely misunderstood and incorrectly practiced. I believe this is in part due to 'karma', the word's, superficial western definition of "As you sow, so shall you reap." The Law of Subtle Energy Return, as a title, gives us a brief description and an immediate sense of arena. The title does not originate with me, but arrives via ancient Taoist doctrine.

Learning The Mind, Body, Spirit Connection, we appreciate that yoga, as a wholistic lifestyle, affords us space to practice through our material bodies and mundane individual minds a linking with infinite mind, the spirit. Grasping a single branch, Hatha Yoga is not merely a series of asanas - yoga postures - for the body. Each asana issues a direct command utilizing the body in a two-fold manner: first, by purposely performing, using full consciousness, a new movement the body is unaccustomed to, we establish a break from our personal history of heretofore limited movement. Sustaining a back-bend with chest thrown upwards and outwards, our limbs stretched and head upside-down, at that moment we are - as a side benefit to our conscious activity - feeding our unconscious mind a groundbreaking picture of its world. For this reason, it is critical that we practice Hatha yoga with our eyes open.

Yoga is freeing one's self of history.

Secondly, along with this amazing upside-down picture, the unconscious mind receives the command information that we are capable of this expanded experience. The difference between the unconscious and the conscious mind is that the unconscious is not capable of making a judgment call; it accepts what it is given at face value. This acceptance is the first step in the process of refining energy through The Mind, Body, Spirit Connection because the unconscious reports to the conscious mind this new truth, which in turn reports this truth to the body, and the body seeks to balance the energy picture by establishing different parameters fitting its new knowledge. Taking this knowledge of the two laws – energy return, and mind, body, spirit connection – outside of the yoga studio and into our lives expands our abilities to meet goals and impact our world. Yoga is finding one's power to be at home in the universe.

“Yoga takes the doing out of our spiritual quest ... BEING present thru a daily practice of yoga brings us balance of body, mind and spirit. Yoga is ‘everymans’ path of transformation to wholeness.”

Reverend Arleta M. Soares, U.R.M.³

Mind and body evolving together refine energy - they manifest that energy frequency born of the one original universal energy, the infinite mind. The universe returns infinite mind energy and spiritual communication succeeds. Practicing yoga asanas is an expansion of consciousness meditation. Indeed, all yogic movements, controlled breathing, visualization, and mantra follow The Mind, Body, Spirit Connection accomplished through The Law of Subtle Energy Return.

If "Namaste" is yoga's spoken greeting, "Sah aham," is yoga's interior attitude. This piece of hoary Sanskrit means, "Eternal spirit I am."

Through a balanced yoga practice of physical and mental meditation, and seeking to maintain an intelligent, responsible, and compassionate bearing that deep truths connect us all, we arrive at an understanding that the mind does not reside in the brain, but rather throughout and beyond the body extending itself further than the manifested universe to the infinite. Existence, as an event of The Mind, Body, Spirit Connection, and The Law of Subtle Energy Return, even while alive in the body, is a constant cycle of return to the source; while our bodies are not immortal, our true natures are eternal. Sikh master, Yogi Bhajan, and lecturing author, Dr. Wayne Dyer, have both expressed the timeless truth that we are not human beings seeking a spiritual experience, but actually spiritual beings having a human experience.

In this excerpt of The Sunflower Sutra, a poem by Allen Ginsberg, the poet sits by a dirty, rat infested riverbank, one imagines poor, hollow-eyed, and downtrodden by the almost impossible task of a commitment to spiritual, poetic survival under the weight of an overbearing steel and concrete metropolis. Allen forcefully delivers his sermon on this condition of remembering the spiritual in the midst of the human experience to the ghost of his deceased best friend, Jack Kerouac:

"...Poor dead flower? when did you forget you were a flower? when did you look at your skin and decide you were an impotent dirty old locomotive? the ghost of a locomotive? the specter and shade of a once powerful mad American locomotive?

You were never no locomotive, sunflower, you were a sunflower and you Locomotive, you are a locomotive, forget me not!

So I grabbed up the skeleton thick sunflower and stuck it at my side like a scepter,

and deliver my sermon to my soul, and Jack's soul too, and anyone who'll listen,

-We're not our skin of grime, we're not our dread bleak dusty imageless locomotive, we're all golden sunflowers inside, blessed by our own seed & hairy naked accomplishment-bodies growing into mad black formal sunflowers in the sunset, spied on by our eyes under the shadow of the mad locomotive riverbank sunset Frisco hilly tincan evening sitdown vision."

Allen Ginsberg, Howl and Other Poems⁴

We are all microcosms of the macrocosmic infinite energy. We contain all of the elements, qualities, and possibilities of the infinite. However, we are wrapped up simultaneously in the throes of an often earth shattering human experience. We forget our true eternal nature. Living a complete yoga life does not mean escape from our condition. One does not practice a yogic lifestyle with attachments such as creating good karma. Through yoga, the infinite bud within each of us is encouraged to flower, and by this blooming process, we naturally return to the source. Yoga practice, in the context of our mortal journey, is the art and science of standing steady yet unattached with one foot in the finite world and the other foot in the infinite world of spiritual energy; realizing the infinite through the finite, the absolute through the relative, the spiritual through the mundane is our condition. That nirvana – final liberation - is found in the midst of samsara – the cycle of existence - is a given across the panorama of Eastern thought.

"The meaning of our self is not to be found in its separateness from God and others, but in the ceaseless realization of yoga, of union."

Rabindranath Tagore⁵

The living context for practicing various yoga branches is not to flee one's existence, but to realize the profound experience of one's path. Practicing in this fashion is the art of grounding one's self, sometimes referred to as centering, and pragmatically speaking, taking the time to learn this bit of sobering philosophy is balancing and invaluable in all areas of our journey.

Finally, yoga imparts natural balance in our lives through The Universal Law of

Homeostasis; both the infinite and manifest aspects of creation proceed because homeostasis demands energy seek refinement through establishing a direction towards balance flowing within limitations. Hatha Yoga expresses this balance by repeating asanas equally on both sides of the body, while Pranayama Yoga seeks to increase the collection and flow of prana (refined energy) by equalized breathing exercises through both nostrils simultaneously or consecutively, and sitting meditation devotes a portion of practice to balancing or clearing the chakras (energy centers or blockages depending on your school of thought) and equalizing energy meridians flowing within the body or issuing from the body. All of these yogic modalities are practiced as an east-west force crossing the planet's natural north-south energy lines. Completing a yoga session where we have created statements of balance to the unconscious mind, The Mind, Body, Spirit connection responds and we feel relaxed and balanced. As our practice matures, we carry this natural balance into our daily lives.

"...Who fasts and sleeps under the stars

Who wears ashes sitting in eternal meditation

So long as this one doubts, he will not find freedom. ..."

Buddha⁶

Yoga is a leap of faith in the one energy - from what we know of the finite to what we do not know and cannot say about infinity. Namaste'.

References

- 1 Nature Boy by Eden Ahbez/recorded 1948 by Nat King Cole.
- 2 Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali by B.K.S. Iyengar/pub. Thorsons.
- 3 Rev. Arleta M. Soares, U.R.M./www.reiki-master.com
- 4 Howl and Other Poems by Allen Ginsberg/pub. City Lights Books.
- 5 Selected quote by Rabindranath Tagore/ source text unknown.
- 6 The Dhammapada by Gotama Buddha/excerpt tran. Youngbear Roth, U.R.M.