



July-August 2006 Contemplation Theme

Generosity & Abundance

By Rama Berch, C.S.Y.T., R.Y.T.

All of the many branches of yoga agree on one primary teaching: happiness arises from an inner source. You are considered to be normal when you habitually block the inner flow and wait for external circumstances to trigger it. Then, when life brings you something you have been wanting for, you let down your guard and have an experience of joy.

Living with your guard always up is exhausting. Even worse, it blocks the ever-flowing current of inner bliss that is the source of your own happiness. When you let your guard down, your whole body relaxes, your eyes light up, your breathing opens up, and *udana prana* arises inside and fills you with joy.

Yoga offers so many ways to help you let your guard down. The core opening of *Svaroopa* yoga is so reliable that you may even wish you could spend the whole day on the floor! But life calls and you must answer. There are places to go, people to see and things to do. You have to leave your yoga blankets behind and move into the world. Your practice of abdominal activators and standing poses is important preparation to help you carry your yogic openness into your life, but you can also do practices that “yogify” life itself. One of these practices is generosity.

Generosity has a tremendous effect on your body and mind. You know how it feels when you help someone move into their new home, or you help them with their transportation needs during a car repair. Even when it is hard for you to create the time to help them, you walk away with a feeling of joy and fullness inside. By giving of yourself, you get filled up. It doesn't come from their thanks. It simply feels good to give.

Not all of your giving comes from a spirit of generosity, unfortunately. Sometimes you are giving a present because you are supposed to. You may be doing something for someone so you can impress them or to create their feeling of indebtedness to you. You may be giving a gift you would like to be receiving, rather than giving what the recipient would like to receive. In these cases, the giving doesn't open you up. It isn't coming from genuine generosity. Your personal agendas get in the way and block the flow – the inner arising doesn't arise.

True generosity opens your heart and quiets your mind. You can mindlessly put a few coins in the tip bowl at the coffee house, or you can pause for a moment to consider what you want to give and why. You can choose to uncover the spirit of generosity within yourself, and to give from that. Even if you put the same coins in the tip bowl, you feel better – because you found your spirit of generosity.

More importantly, the practice of generosity invites yoga into your relationship with money, as well as your relationship with time and with other people. The trickiest of all of these is your relationships with other people. Many yogis and yoga teachers tend to be so generous that they don't take care of themselves or handle the practicalities of their life very well. If you recognize yourself in this, it is possible that your motivation is something other than true generosity. If you deplete yourself by taking care of others, you may be motivated by your desire to get your sense of self-worth from their opinions of you or their gratitude to you. When your gift to them truly arises from generosity, you don't wait to see what the other person thinks of it.

As a yogi, you have so many ways you can practice. Your own home practice, classes with your teacher and/or the private sessions you receive are just the entry point into the profound and life-encompassing science of yoga. When you do yoga, the ever-arising inner flow overflows and you naturally want to share. You feel generous, organically. But, when you are not feeling spontaneous generosity, you can give anyway. Even a small gift changes the way you feel. You can run an errand

for someone, give an extra large tip when you eat out or let another driver onto the road ahead of you. You have the ability to “prime the pump” of your feelings of generosity.

The practice of true generosity is powerful in many ways. Generosity creates abundance. You might have thought that it was the other way around – that abundance creates generosity. However, many people with abundant resources live in constant fear and worry; they are unable to share their material blessings. The most generous givers often have normal finances; they love to share and prioritize it in their life. They give of their time and energy to others as well as their financial contributions.

I often see those who have less funding giving more generously than those with surplus funds – whether they are giving financial gifts or giving their time to others. These days, making time to help others may be harder than sending in a donation; being able to prioritize another’s needs is a great spiritual attainment. From yoga’s perspective, there is no problem with one person being less generous than another – it’s not about getting a grade for generosity. The problem is with the inner state that prompts those actions. Having abundant resources does not guarantee happiness. Sometimes it complicates life and family even more!

Abundance is attracted to generosity. “Abundance” is MahaLakshmi, the benevolent Goddess, the divine personification of the flow of material blessings. She is attracted to those who will use Her gifts appropriately. If you hoard your money or use it to fulfill an endless list of personal desires, She sees a stagnant pond. She is attracted to those who are respectful of Her gifts – yoga says you must manage your money well in order to attract MahaLakshmi’s blessings. Yoga gives very practical advice about money, just as with your body, mind, breath, etc. Live within your means while you save for emergencies and for your future, and tithe a percentage of your income in charitable donations. This how you yogify your financial life.

Most importantly, practicing generosity loosens your clenched fist. A stranglehold grasp is a sign of deep fear and insecurities. As your tailbone lengthens, you become progressively more and more free from anxiety. And it works the other way too – each time you give out of a spirit of generosity, your insecurities dissolve a little more, and your tailbone lengthens. Try it! You can simply take out the trash when it isn’t your turn, pay the toll for the driver in line behind you or share your stash of chocolate with someone.

The principles behind generosity are profound; the science of giving is a spiritual science. Yoga isn’t the only place you will hear these teachings, though yoga may help you understand them differently than before. These principles are clearly stated in every culture, every religion and every spiritual tradition throughout time. They all agree, when you cultivate a feeling of generosity and act on it, you create instant happiness for yourself, plus you attract a flow of abundance and blessings into your life. You open your heart and calm your mind, and even your body responds by opening up and relaxing. In this way, “Do more yoga” means you can extend yoga into every corner of your life – not just by spending more time on the floor.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rama". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a heart shape drawn above the letter 'a'.

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To reach Rama Berch or to get more information about Svaroop® yoga, contact: **Master Yoga Foundation**
Website: www.masteryoga.org ♦ Email: info@masteryoga.org ♦ 1-866-luv-yoga (588-9642)
Office: 5670 La Jolla Blvd., La Jolla, CA 92037
Training Facilities: 125 E Hawthorne, Fallbrook CA 92024 ♦ 56 Baltimore Ave, Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971