Advanced Yoga Practices

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Easy Lessons for Ecstatic Living

Volume 2

More Original Internet Lessons with Additions by the Author

Yogani

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Yogani is an American spiritual scientist who, for nearly forty years, has been integrating ancient techniques from around the world which cultivate human spiritual transformation. The approach is non-sectarian, and open to all. His books include:

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Lesson 382 – Is Ecstasy a Prerequisite for Enlightenment?

Q: Is ecstasy a prerequisite for enlightenment?

A: It depends on what we mean by ecstasy, and also on what we mean by enlightenment.

If by ecstasy, we mean the energetic flow of stillness through the human nervous system, and by enlightenment we mean the unfoldment of stillness in action expressing the unity experience, then, yes, ecstasy is a prerequisite for enlightenment. Without the energetic component, there can be no divine outpouring, no stillness in action, no unity.

On the other hand, if by ecstasy we mean the so-called ecstatic sensations created by energy flowing through still purifying nerves, then this is not a prerequisite for anything, except a continuation of the purification process, which can be an ongoing dramatic experience, according to the matrix of obstructions being dissolved within us. In time, such symptoms will refine and become very subtle, residing on the border between physical ecstasy and the bliss of abiding inner silence. In describing this borderline, we have used the term "ecstatic bliss," and here, distinguishing between the two is not possible. For more on this, see Lesson 113.

Likewise, if we define enlightenment as blissful abiding inner silence, which we call the first stage of enlightenment in AYP (see Lesson 35), then ecstasy is not a prerequisite for that either.

Ecstasy comes into the equation in the second stage of enlightenment, which is the awakening of ecstatic conductivity and the refinement (introversion) of sensory perception. This is necessary before the unity stage can happen, as mentioned above. But the degree to which this stage will be experienced as "ecstatic" or not is a function of inner purification and opening. If the purification is advanced, there may not be many ecstatic fireworks at all. This is certainly the experience later on the path. And so there may be cases where "ecstasy" is not much noticed at any point in the second stage of enlightenment. But something will be moving, and that something is stillness, which refines our perception of inner and outer objects toward a realization of *Oneness*. This stimulates the flow of divine love, which leads us to service.

The real question is whether we can be enlightened and not engaged in service for others in some way. Not that service is a prerequisite for enlightenment. Rather, it is a symptom of it. By definition, enlightenment is not a personal attainment, including the garnering of ecstasy or any other kind of personal experience. It is a condition of universality. Ecstatic bliss is a natural byproduct of that. So, it is enlightenment that is the prerequisite for ecstatic bliss, not the other way around. And practices are the prerequisite for enlightenment.

Clearly, nothing can happen in the world without a flow of energy. If we are to define enlightenment as something occurring in the world, then it will, by definition, have an energetic component. Whether we call that energetic component stillness in action, outpouring divine love, an expression of unity, or ecstasy, will not matter. It is all the same thing. For stillness to move, a vehicle is required. That vehicle will have different faces under different conditions. All symptoms of purification are this also, including the unpleasant ones that inspire us to self-pace our practices.

Ultimately, the many experiential distinctions are not that important, except to inspire us to carry on prudently with our practices to the end. Then we will not be dependent on external designations anymore, and can describe our experience first hand with any words we choose. This is why we do not make such a big deal of enlightenment prerequisites, milestones, etc. It is all in

each of us, and that is where we will find it. External prerequisites, milestones and definitions are merely props to keep us going until we unfold the reality within ourselves. The human nervous system is the doorway to the divine. This is what we are discovering through direct experience.

The main thing is to keep going, not getting hung up on prerequisites, preconditions, or preconceived notions about what we think enlightenment is supposed to be. For each of us, the scenery along the way will be a little different. We will know it when we see it, and can carry on, favoring the procedure of our practice over whatever symptoms are occurring, including any tendency we may have to be over-analyzing symptoms, or the lack of them. The journey to enlightenment is about the consistency of our daily practices over time, not about the scenery we may encounter along the way.

The guru is in you.

Lesson 383* – Yoga Asanas – Traditional or Modern? (And the Enhanced AYP Asana Routine)

Q: I have been practicing various forms of yoga asanas off and on for about five years, and have found myself drawn increasingly into more fitness-oriented applications of postures. It seems to be all I can find in the classes anymore. Having recently begun meditating, I am curious how the rigorous yoga posture routines many people are doing these days fit with your teachings? Thank you.

A: Yoga postures have become big business, and it is a good thing. This was discussed in some detail in Lesson 71.

It is the physicality of asanas (postures) that have provided an entrée for yoga into the mainstream of our physical fitness obsessed culture. Overall, it has been very beneficial, because sooner or later everyone who discovers the benefits of yoga postures will find themselves being drawn to the other seven limbs of yoga, including meditation, pranayama, etc. Such connections are wired within our nervous system, and this is why engaging in part of yoga naturally leads to all of yoga. So I am all for the yoga postures boom. It is leading everyone toward more peace, joy and energy in life, in ways that most of us could hardly have imagined even a few years ago.

However, at the same time, there has been a divergence in the field of yoga postures, as you have implied, and it will be good to explore that for a clearer understanding of what is going on, and how that relates to the kinds of practices we are using in the AYP system.

We can make a distinction here between "traditional" and "modern" approaches to yoga postures. The divergence can be found in the differences between these two, and in how these may relate to building a balanced practice routine that includes all eight limbs of yoga. To simplify it in this discussion, we can say that a balanced routine has two parts – asanas (postures) and sitting practices (pranayama, meditation, mudras, bandhas, samyama, etc.) It is the relationship between these two components we'd like to focus on here.

While, even in ancient times, there have been approaches to asanas that have been intense, there has always been a recognition that asanas are part of the whole picture of yoga – one of eight limbs. Such routines were done with postures performed for a spiritual benefit. Pranayama and meditation (sitting practices) have always been part of the routine, as have the elements of bhakti, self-inquiry, and other aspects of the tree of yoga. So even in cases where asanas seemed to be nearly an end in themselves, they were always a preparation for sitting practices.

This is the traditional approach – asanas as a preparation for sitting practices. In the AYP system, 5-10 minutes of easy asanas with posture holds of 10 seconds or so has been found to be a good preparation..

Modern asanas have some conspicuous differences from the traditional approach. They are usually stand-alone, not a preparation for sitting practices. And even though many of the postures may be similar or the same as the ones found in a traditional routine, the intensity and speed with which they are done may be more akin to an athletic workout than an easy routine of systematic bending and stretching. The modern routine may be much longer than is necessary for sitting practices preparation. The room temperature may also be raised to "work up a sweat." Clearly, such rigorous asana routines are not a preparation for sitting practices. They are not designed to be.

So this is the main difference between traditional and modern asana practice. One is designed as a preparation for sitting practices, and the other is designed as a stand-alone fitness workout.

These two modes are not nearly as far apart as might appear on the surface. For example, a modern asana routine can be slowed down and shortened to be an excellent preparation for sitting practices. So all is not lost. But let's save the long strenuous routines and "hot yoga" for at least an hour before sitting practices, or any time after. That kind of routine comes under the category of physical exercise, and we know that this is not a preparation for sitting practices. It doesn't mean we can't do it if we enjoy it. Just not as a preparation for sitting practices.

Whatever asana routine we are using before sitting practices, it is suggested to end it with shavasana (corpse pose) for several minutes, to settle the body/mind down. This is the traditional transition between asanas and sitting practices, and it can be used at the conclusion of any set of postures we may be doing.

As a rule of thumb, if our asana routine lowers our metabolism (relaxation of respiration and heart rate), it is good preparation for sitting practices, if not taken much beyond 5-10 minutes. More than 10 minutes done daily for an extended period of time could lead us into an energy overload, due to cumulative doubling up of the energy effects between asanas and our sitting practices. We would not do pranayama for half an hour, would we? Or meditation for an hour? Any of these excesses pursued in combination over time, could lead us into uncomfortable symptoms of energy overload. Asanas are no exception. A half hour of asanas followed by sitting practices is far more powerful than a half hour of asanas with no sitting practices. This is a lesson many asana practitioners have learned the hard way when adding powerful sitting practices.

Balance is the key in building an effective integrated practice routine. Each of us is somewhat unique in this respect. This is why we place so much emphasis on self-pacing in the AYP approach.

The arrival of open source full-scope yoga practices on the scene has raised some interesting possibilities for the yoga postures industry. It used to be that one had to go off and follow a sectarian teaching to learn sitting practices. This was rarely compatible with the modern teachings of asanas, which have continued to diverge in their own direction, becoming increasingly a part of the fitness industry. Due to these structural divisions, the pieces of yoga have been scattered all over the place, with little chance of connecting them, except by breaking sectarian rules and going against a major market trend in the postures industry. However, things are changing, and signs of a lessening divergence are appearing, at least in some quarters. The situation is quite different from only a few years ago. The tide is shifting toward the *integration* of yoga practices. It is what many practitioners want, and open source systems of practice will help fulfill this rising need.

Even with the separations and divergences that have occurred in yoga over the years, practitioners have continued to benefit greatly, and many feel the internal pull toward the integration of practices in their daily routine. These days, with a few adjustments, any modern asana practitioner can add sitting practices with relative ease, with good results. Likewise, those in sitting practices have reasonable guidelines here for adding asanas from just about any teaching source, without taking on excessive risks. With self-pacing and some common sense, it can be done by anyone.

The guru is in you.

Addition – In the first volume, a basic "Asana Starter Kit" with about a dozen postures was offered to do for 5-10 minutes before sitting spinal breathing pranayama and deep meditation. With the popularity of yoga postures these days, many have been wishing to do more, while maintaining a traditional approach that does not upset the balance between postures and the other limbs of yoga. So here we are offering an "Enhanced Asana Routine" with about 20 postures, which can also be completed in 10-15 minutes before sitting practices.

This enhanced routine is not intended to be the be-all and end-all of asanas with respect to preparation for sitting practices. Just about any gentle routine that does not exceed 15 minutes or so, or increase metabolism (breath and heart rate), can be suitable preparation for our pranayama, meditation and other sitting practices. With thousands of hatha yoga teachers around the world, and dozens of systems of practice, the possibilities are practically endless. If is up to us to keep a balance in our overall routine of practices. This is an essential aspect self-pacing – keeping our practices in balance.

We will also provide a review here of the "Abbreviated Asana Routine," which can be done while standing if location and time are not suitable for our normal asana routine.

Enhanced Asana Routine

We will look at twenty or so basic postures here, which are done on the floor. If you have a mat, great, but there's no need to run out and buy one. A soft carpet with a large towel or blanket laid out will do just fine for this routine. Make sure you have your comfortable meditation clothing on before you start.

It is important that you do not force any of these postures. If a posture calls for a toe touch and you can only reach your shin comfortably, stop there. That is the perfect posture for you. Never strain in a posture. In fact, that is the rule for everything in advanced yoga practices. It is the essence of self-pacing, and of all progress in yoga. The sequence of these postures is designed so that each posture flows fairly easily into the next one, without extensive repositioning of the body being necessary. Here are descriptions for the postures in the enhanced routine. Illustrations follow the descriptions:

1. **Heart Centering Warm-up** – Sit on the floor cross-legged. Gently massage your head with both hands as you move your hands down toward your heart – first down the front of your face and neck to your heart, and then down the back of your head and around your neck and down the front to your heart. Those two movements can be done in 15 seconds or so. Not too fast and not too slow. Now do the same thing with the left arm, starting with the left hand, using the right hand to gently massage all the way back to the heart – first along the top of the arm, over the shoulder and down the chest to the heart, and then along the bottom side of the arm, through the arm pit and to the heart. The left arm is done with the right hand like that. Now switch to the right arm and do it with the left hand the same way. Now do both legs from the toes all the way up to the heart – just a gentle moving two-handed massage on each leg. As you come up from each leg press in gently on your belly and solar plexus region with both hands on the way up to the heart. Finally, reach in back with both hands and do one moving massage from the buttocks, up your back and around to your chest and heart. All of these heart centering warm-up movements can be done in a minute or so. If you are wondering what to do with your

attention during this heart centering, just let it be easy, going with your hands as they gently massage your energy toward your heart. Let your breathing be easy also. This is how we handle attention and breathing in all these basic postures, easy and relaxed with whatever we are doing physically, unless instructed otherwise.

2. **Knees to Chest Roll and Bicycle** – Lie on your back and bring your knees up far enough so you can grasp each upper shin with each hand. Or, if you can reach, clasp you fingers together around your upper shins, near the knees. Let your knees come toward your chest. Now roll from side to side, about five times each way, right to left, letting your head roll from side to side on the floor along with your torso. Roll as far to each side as is comfortable. Next, lie on your back with arms on your sides with palms on the floor. Then lift your legs off the floor a bit with bent knees and rotate your feet in the air as if peddling a bicycle. Do about 20 revolutions of this, or to a count of about ten seconds. These easy exercises are part of warm-up and help loosen up the spine, hips and knees for the postures to follow.

3. **Kneeling Seat** (Vajrasana) – Get up straight on your knees with legs nearly together. Put one big toe over the other behind you, and then sit down on your heels, keeping your torso up straight. Let your hands rest on your thighs or in your lap. Sit like this for about 10 seconds. (Use a mental count until you get a good feel for the 10-second hold on all of these postures.) Then go up straight on your knees again for a few seconds and back down into the seat for another 10 seconds. Go up again, and then relax.

4. **Camel** (Ustrasana) – Still up on your knees, separate your legs and feet a bit, come down with your buttocks toward your calves and reach behind with your arms and rest your hands on the soles of your feet with thumbs on the outside. Then lift up the buttocks up and arch your back as far as comfortable. Let your head go back as far as comfortable also. Do not strain. With a full arch, your weight will be resting on your arms behind you, with hands clasping the soles of your feet. Hold this position (or whatever degree of it is comfortable for you) for about 10 seconds. Then release the arch in your back while bringing the head back up and letting the buttocks come down. While coming back down, keep the knees apart and bring the feet back together with one toe over the other again, so the buttocks will come to rest on the calves and heels.

5. **Child** (Balasana) – Keeping the buttocks on the calves and heels, lean froward and place your brow on the floor. Bring your hands forward around your head as if praying. Hold this position for about 10 seconds.

6. **Sitting Head to Knee and Both Knees** (Janushirshasana and Paschimottanasana) – Come to a sitting position on the floor. While sitting, put your left leg out straight and bring your right foot in toward your crotch. If it will go comfortably all the way, then let your right heel rest against your perineum. If the right foot won't go all the way in to the crotch, then just let it rest however far inward it will go with comfort. Now lean forward while extending your hands toward your left foot. If you can reach, then grab your left big toe with both hands. If you can't reach your toe, then just let your hands rest on your left shin however far you can comfortably

go. Let your torso and head come down as far as comfortable. If you are very limber, your head may end up resting on your left knee. If it won't go that far, then just stop at your comfortable limit as you lean forward. Hold that position for about 10 seconds. Now reverse the whole thing and do it with your right leg extended and your left leg in toward your crotch. Hold it again for 10 seconds. Finally, do it with both legs out straight. This time, grab your left and right toes with your left and right hands, respectively. Or, if you can't reach, just let each hand rest on its corresponding shin at your comfortable limit of stretch. As with the other head to knee positions, let your torso and head come down toward your knees to a comfortable limit, and hold for about 10 seconds. Then relax. A more advanced version of the left and right head to knee posture involves sitting up on the heel, putting more pressure on the perineum, and holding a full breath inside (kumbhaka) while doing the posture. The breath is taken in and expelled using spinal breathing, and sambhavi, mulabandha and abdominal lift (see below – done while full with air in this case) are used during the posture. This advanced version of head to knee is called "**Maha Mudra**."

7. **Shoulder Stand** (Viparitakarani or Sarvangasana) – Lie on your back with your hands at your sides. Bring your knees up and roll your buttocks up in the air, while bringing your hands under your upward curling back. Keep going up and straighten your legs and back out above you. Use your hands to support your back by propping them up with your elbows on the floor. Find a comfortable balance in this posture, and hold for about 10 seconds. It doesn't have to be straight up. The idea is to achieve inversion of your body. That is the main purpose of the shoulder stand. Before you come back down, go to the next posture.

8. **Plow** (Halasana) – While in the shoulder stand, let your legs and torso come down over your head, going toward the floor. Continue to support your back with your hands with elbows on the floor, as necessary. If you can, let your feet come all the way down to the floor with your legs straight, and let your arms down to lie flat on the floor behind you. Hold this posture for about 10 seconds. If the legs and back will not come far enough to let your feet touch the floor, then stop at your comfortable limit. In that case you can let your knees bend toward your shoulders for comfort, as if you are curling into a ball while propped up on your shoulder blades with your arms supporting your back as in the shoulder stand. If you end up in that curled up position, hold it for about 10 seconds. Whichever degree of the plow you come to, after the 10 second hold, uncurl yourself gently back down to lying flat on your back with your hands at your sides.

9. **Sitting Head to Both Knees** (Paschimottanasana) – This is a repeat from "6" above (head to both knees only), and natural to come into from the Plow posture. Hold comfortably for about 10 seconds.

10. **Seal of Yoga** (Yoga Mudra) – Sit on the floor cross-legged. Clasp your hands comfortably behind your back with arms hanging loose. Lean forward with your head and torso to your comfortable limit. If you are limber, your head may touch the floor. Hold this posture at your comfortable limit for about 10 seconds, and then sit back up. If the legs cannot be crossed comfortably, this posture can be done with legs out straight on the floor, or even while sitting in

a chair. The degree of leaning forward we can may be limited, but that is all right. It is not the degree to which we do postures that counts. It is the comfortable stretch we can do that today that matters, not matter how much or how little that may be.

11. **Fish** (Matsyasana) – After we complete Yoga Mudra (on the floor), we lean back while supporting ourselves behind with our hands and elbows. If we can comfortably go all the way back, arching our back, we can support ourselves on the floor with the back of our head, while placing our hands in the lap. Hold this position for about 10 seconds. Both the Yoga Mudra and the Fish can be done with legs out straight, with crossed legs, or in the lotus position (advanced).

12. **Sitting Head to Both Knees** (Paschimottanasana) – This is a repeat from "6" above (head to both knees only), and natural to come into from the Fish posture. Hold comfortably for about 10 seconds.

13. **Cobra** (Bhujangasana) – Roll over onto your stomach, lying flat on the floor. Put your hands under your shoulders as if you are going to do a push-up. Lift your head and shoulders up using your upper back, with a little help from your arms. Your belly should not leave the floor. You will have a good arch in your back. Hold this posture for about 10 seconds, and come back down gently.

14. **Locust** (Shalabhasana) – Still on your stomach, lying flat on the floor, extend your arms with both hands, palms up, under both sides of your pelvis. Keeping your legs straight, lift your knees up using your lower back. Hold this posture for about 10 seconds, and come back down gently.

15. **Bow** (Dhanurasana) – Still on your stomach on the floor, reach behind and clasp your ankles with your hands. Then lift your head and arch your back and legs. Do not strain. Hold this posture for about 10 seconds. Then return to lying flat on your stomach on the floor.

16. **Wheel or Bridge** (Chakrasana or Setu Bandha Sarvangasana) – Roll over to be lying flat on your back. Bend your knees so your feet are flat on the floor. Place your hands with palms on the floor on either side of your head, with fingers pointing toward your feet. Then lift the buttocks and back up, while leaving the shoulders on the floor. This is the simple Bridge posture. If comfortable, also lift the shoulders and entire body up with back and neck arched. This is the Wheel posture. Whichever posture can be assumed without strain, hold that for about 10 seconds. Then relax lying on the floor again.

17. **Peacock** (Mayurasana) – Get up on your knees with legs separated a bit. Lean forward while placing the palms on the floor with finger pointed toward the feet, and the elbows together in the area of the solar plexus. See how much of your weight you can comfortably support in this way. If only a little, then just lean on the forearms, with palms on the floor and elbows supporting your weight in the front of the torso like that. If the weight supported, see if you can lift your legs off the floor and extend them in the air behind you, so your whole body will be

parallel to the floor. This posture can also be done in full lotus posture (advanced), with the locked legs extended out vertical to the floor. To whatever degree this posture can be performed without strain, it can be held for about 10 seconds. Then relax and sit on the floor.

18. **Spinal Twist – Advanced** (Ardha Matsyendrasana) – The basic Spinal Twist is done with one leg straight and one leg bent, as described in the Asana Starter Kit instructions in Lesson 71. The advanced spinal twist is done with both legs bent and with hands clasped underneath the raised leg to accentuate the twist of the torso and spine. Begin as with basic Spinal Twist by sitting on the floor with your right leg out straight. Then bend the leg, bringing the right heel near the perineum and buttocks, keeping the knee on the floor. Then place your left foot on the floor just outside your right knee. Your left knee will be sticking up in front of you. Reach with your right arm to the left side of your left knee and twist your torso to the left, so you can reach under your left leg with your arm, not stretching more than is comfortable. The upper right arm against the left knee can be used to help twist your torso to the left. With your left arm, reach around behind you, further twisting your torso to the left, and clasp your two hands underneath the left leg. Turn your head to the left also, looking as far around to the left as you can. Hold this twist for about 10 seconds. Don't strain in the twist, or in trying to clasp your two hands. Whatever degree of twist you can do with comfort will be perfect. With daily practice, the degree of twist will gradually increase over time. This is true of all yoga postures. Only twist as far around as is comfortable. Now, switch legs and do the same posture the other way, twisting to the right, again holding for about 10 seconds. Then relax.

19. **Abdominal Lift/Nauli** (Uddiyana Bandha or Nauli) – Stand up, with feet shoulder-width apart, leaning with your hands on your knees. Take a deep breath and expel as much air from your lungs as you can. With air expelled, suck your belly in and up using your diaphragm. Hold your belly in and up like that for about five seconds, and then release your belly, but do not breathe in yet. Pull the belly in and up again for five seconds. And again for five seconds more. Now relax and take a deep breath. This posture is called uddiyana bandha. As part of this enhanced set of postures, it is suggested to do nauli instead, for about 20 repetitions on each side. Detailed instructions for Nauli are covered in Lesson 129.

20. **Standing Back Stretch** (Urdhvasana) – Standing with feet a little apart, reach with your straightened arms over your head and back as far as you comfortably can. Bend back with your spine as you do this, being careful not to fall over backwards. Hold this posture for about 10 seconds. Then stand up straight again and relax.

21. **Standing Toe Touch** (Padahastasana)– Standing with feet a little apart, reach down toward the floor with your hands while keeping your knees straight. Touch or grab your toes if you can without discomfort. If you are limber, you can let your palms rest flat on the floor. In doing this posture, your head may come close to your knees, or even touch them. If you can't reach, that is okay. Let your hands and head come down to whatever your comfortable limit is. Hold this posture for about 10 seconds.

22. **Corpse Pose** (Shavasana) – Lie down on your back with arms and legs spread a little, and

relax. Let your mind relax completely. Remain in this posture for about one minute. Longer if you like. Now you are ready to take your seat for pranayama and meditation.

All of these postures can be done in about 10-15 minutes. If you are in a hurry, you can do them in less time, but that is not recommended. If time is short, consider going to the Abbreviated Asana Routine at the end of this lesson addition.

See the illustrations for the Enhanced Asana Routine on the following pages. Don't press too hard. Rome was not built in a day. Just do what is comfortable for you. In time, you may tend toward more advanced versions of postures in this routine, and perhaps add postures into the mix according to other training and your personal preferences. Or you may decide to stick with the Asana Starter Kit provided in the first volume. Whichever way you decide to go with asanas, you have enough alternatives from AYP, and self-pacing guidelines, for some good bending and stretching that will aid you in settling into your sitting practices. Enjoy!

1a. Warm-up, Head to Heart

1b. Warm-up, Arms to Heart

1c. Warm-up, Legs to Heart

2a. Knees to Chest

2b. Roll, Left then Right

2c. Bicycle

3. Kneeling Seat

4. Camel

5. Child

6a. Sitting, Head to One Knee

6b. Sitting, Head to Both Knees

7. Shoulder Stand

8. Plow

9. Sitting, Head to Both Knees

10. Seal of Yoga

11. Fish

12. Sitting, Head to Both Knees

13. Cobra

14. Locust

15. Bow

16. Wheel

17. Peacock

18. Spinal Twist (advanced)

19. Abdominal Lift - Nauli

20. Standing Back Stretch

21. Standing Toe Touch

22. Corpse Pose

Abbreviated Asana Routine (a review)

For those who are short on time, there is still the opportunity to do some limbering up before sitting practices. The trick is to do some twisting, abdominal lift, backward bending, forward bending and inversion. These are the essential elements that lie at the core of most asanas. Together, they flex and manipulate the spinal nerve, preparing it for spinal breathing and deep meditation. For that purpose, the following abbreviated all-standing routine is offered that can be done in a couple of minutes.

1. **Standing Spinal Twist** – Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and reach around behind you to the left as far as you can with both arms wrapping around your torso in that direction. Let your torso and head twist in that direction as far as comfortable. Hold this posture for about 10 seconds. Relax, and then do it in the other direction.

2. **Abdominal Lift** (Uddiyana or Nauli) – Stand with feet apart and do this the same as posture #19 above.

3. **Standing Back Stretch** – Stand with feet a little apart, and do this posture the same as posture #20 above.

4. **Standing Toe Touch** – Stand with feet a little apart, and do this posture the same as posture #21 above. Besides flexing the spinal nerve forward, this posture also provides inversion, though not to the same degree as a shoulder stand.

From here you can go straight into your sitting practices. If you have the time and space to lie down for a minute (corpse pose – posture #22 above) before beginning pranayama, that is good too. These four postures can be compressed down into a minute or so if time is very short, or stretched out to several minutes. If there is not enough time for a full set of asanas, this abbreviated session will be much better than no asanas. It does not require getting down on the floor, and can be done in street clothes just about anywhere.

Time is our most precious commodity in this life. Often, we find ourselves with too little of it. The topic of time management in our practices is visited periodically throughout the lessons, culminating with Lesson 209, "Fitting Daily Practices into a Busy Schedule." There you will see how asanas fit into the pecking order in relation to all the other practices when time is short. We would like to do a full routine twice each day. This is how we speed our way along on the road to enlightenment. In this busy world, we are sometimes faced with having to make compromises. So we try and be as efficient about it as we can, prioritizing our practices and reaping as much spiritual benefit as possible from the time we have available.

Self-Pacing and Physical Practices

What we are talking about here is the application of good common sense. Self-pacing applies in many aspects of our life. The successful application of yoga practices is no different than anything else. If we overdo, we pay the price.

Not surprisingly, self-pacing in yoga practices applies across the board, whether we are talking about deep meditation, breathing methods or anything else, including the level of our devotion

(bhakti), the intensity of our spiritual studies, our dietary preferences, or measures we might take to purify our body by physical means (shatkarmas). Wherever we happen to be working on the tree of yoga, the principles of self-pacing apply.

In modern times, many are coming to yoga through training in physical postures (asanas). When considering asanas, or related physical practices like mudras and bandhas, if there is some stiffness, injury, or discomfort, then we just go to our natural limit and test it a little. Never to the point of pain or strain. Just to the point of the limit of movement, and then be there for the time of our posture. This may be nowhere near the full posture, which is perfectly fine. We do what we can comfortably in the direction of the posture without strain, knowing we will be doing gradually more in subsequent sessions. If any degree of stretch becomes uncomfortable, we back off to a comfortable level. Or, if it can go a little further without strain, then we let it. This is what we have talked about many times as we have gone through the many AYP practices.

It is the same with all yoga practices – physical, mental, breathing, etc. All practices produce purification and opening in our nervous system, and we are obliged to accommodate whatever is happening on our journey to enlightenment. It is the principle of self-pacing. It is the fine art of progressing in yoga – never forcing, always using gentle persuasion. With this approach, the body, nervous system, heart and mind move slowly but surely to more flexibility, purification, and greater experiences of inner peace and bliss.

There is the old saying, "By the yard, life is hard. By the inch, it's a cinch." It is easy to become advanced in yoga if we know how to handle self-pacing.

Lesson 384 – Baseline Systems of Practice and Research on Modifications

In modern times we are seeing the emergence of "open source" systems of spiritual practices. There are two key elements associated with this new trend: The "baseline" and the "modifications." Without recognized baselines of knowledge, we are like small boats being tossed about on the high seas, with no safe port to call home. Without modifications to suit our individual needs, we may find ourselves stuck in a rigid system that can suffocate our wellbeing and spiritual progress.

The AYP system of practices is a "baseline" that can be used as a stand-alone approach for cultivating human spiritual transformation, or to supplement any other approach with components of practice that may add to the overall effectiveness of any spiritual path.

While the AYP system may at times seem to be immovable and monolithic, it is not intended to be that. It is intended to be an effective foundation of practices that can be adapted according to individual needs. If AYP is not working as it should be, even with self-pacing, then modifications and alternatives should be considered. When this is done, it is very helpful to share the results so many might benefit from our collective experience. This is what the AYP online support forums and community are for.

There are endless variations on practice, and it is not possible to cover them all in one core teaching while maintaining a cohesive baseline at the same time. And it is not possible for one person to cover every conceivable variation on practice either. However, as a community of practitioners, we can look at many experiences across a wide spectrum and tweak applications of the baseline according to individual need. For self-directed practice, this is a viable model going forward – a baseline with flexibility according to each individual situation. This is essentially what self-pacing is about – individually adjusting our practice times to fine-tune results for good progress with comfort. It also applies to variations in the nature of the practices themselves, as we have discussed in the lessons on under-sensitive and over-sensitive meditators (see Lessons 365-367).

While a baseline system of practice may be useful to many, we should always be careful about the "stature" we assign to it, or to the one who has devised it. The perception of stature tends to undermine independent exploration and innovation. At its worst, undue stature leads to a belief-culture of "haves" and "have-nots," also known as "sectarianism," which is a great obstacle to progress. That is why I hope the concepts of "horizontal transmission" and "peer-to-peer" sharing of knowledge will always be associated with AYP.

On the other hand, doing independent exploration and innovation is not about trying 50 things in rapid succession and benefiting little from any of them. Neither is it about adding excessive variations and complexity into a baseline system whose purpose is to provide simple and effective means for practitioners to activate the essential principles of human spiritual transformation. Upon such basics, and a stable daily routine of practice, the explorations and modifications can occur in a careful and fruitful way, not much before. Beginners deserve some clarity. This is why I always suggest newcomers review the AYP lessons before delving too much into variations on practice, other than self-pacing as needed. In spiritual matters, less is usually more, and it is up to each of us to craft our own approach in concert with our unique process of purification and opening.

Proposed modifications and alternative approaches have been plentiful since AYP began in 2003, in great mountains in my email, and similarly in the online support forums ever since they started in 2005. Many times, modifications, alternatives, and even entire alternate systems have

sought validation from me, the community of practitioners, or from the AYP system itself, sometimes to the point of insisting that the baseline AYP system be rewritten to suit!

This is a tricky business, because a practice or system of practices seeking external validation is often doing so at the expense of finding its own internal validation through direct experience and the observation of cause and effect. With the latter, no validation from outside is necessary. Once shared, the results will be self-evident to many.

So there is no need to seek external validation, or to cram anything down anyone's throat. If we share our explorations and experiences openly and honestly, letting go of the need for external validation, then some practitioners will resonate with what we share and others will not. That is how it is, even for the AYP system. One size does not fit all. So, we begin with the basics and go from there, connecting with knowledge, practices and experiences in ways that best suit our nature. We will know it when we see it.

Everyone who engages in self-directed spiritual practices is a researcher in consciousness. In the past, this has been a lonely profession, reserved for the few, often done in secret, with little shared with the general population. For those who wanted access to the secret knowledge, a pledge of body, soul and bank account was often required. For this reason, much of spiritual knowledge has been called arcane and esoteric. Perhaps there were good reasons. Knowledge was not very portable in centuries past, and there was much superstition surrounding the process of human spiritual transformation. Even those who spoke clearly about it did not find a large audience. It is only through the centuries that recorded knowledge on spiritual practices has slowly become more accessible and utilized more widely.

In our time, we have a great opportunity. This is the information age, and we are in the midst of an explosion of applied knowledge in all fields of human endeavor. It is happening in the field of human spiritual transformation also.

Now we have open access to many more practices, and are in the process of integrating and applying the means that directly cultivate purification and opening within us on an accelerated scale. The eight limbs of yoga, presented by Patanjali centuries ago, are no longer only a list of the possibilities and interrelationships of practices and experiences, but are also a list which we can apply using real resources for transformation. We are expanding from the philosophical into the practical, and every day is a learning experience by which we can make adjustments in practices leading to ever more direct knowledge of who and what we are.

The journey we each are on is our research, and it should be shared. In this way, we can find out what we have in common in our development and what may be divergent from the norm. In fact, we are finding the divergences to be less than have been believed. The divergences have been mostly man-made. The human nervous system is the same everywhere, and the principles and capabilities for purification and opening to divine experience are also the same.

So what do we not have in common? Perhaps our culture and religion, and the variations in methods that have been handed down to us. But, in the end, we are all working on the same project, no matter where we have come from or what tools we are using. Our inner obstructions (karma) may vary, but the means for purifying and opening our nervous system are essentially the same. The eight limbs of yoga cover the full range, and if we are focused in one limb, we will surely find the others through the connectedness of yoga, alive within us.

By practicing daily, self-pacing, and open sharing, the truth will continue to emerge in modern times. This is the road to the future. It is in our hands to sustain the advance of *applied spiritual science* for all time.

There are plenty of spiritual pioneers emerging these days who are marching forward with the systematic application of spiritual practices in ways that have not been tried before. Modern institutions of research and higher learning will catch on eventually, and then lead the way in thoroughly researching the methods of human spiritual transformation, supported by an ever-growing segment of the population engaged in daily practices.

Why will the institutions eventually take the lead? Because there are great issues of the public welfare at stake – the health, well-being and happiness of all the nations and cultures of the world. As we unfold the full potential of the individual, so too will we unfold the full potential of societies everywhere around the world. Just as industrial and information technologies have changed life on earth, so too will spiritual technologies enhance the quality of life everywhere. This is why the large institutions will become deeply involved in uncovering the specific mechanisms of human spiritual transformation, and the means for optimizing them on every level.

As in all other fields of human endeavor, ongoing research and development for the practical application of spiritual knowledge will carry us forward to a quality of life we can scarcely imagine today. It all has been contained in seed form within each of us. Now we are bringing our full potential to fruition, and everyone will share in this.

This will not be knowledge based on the charismatic personalities that have come and gone in every generation. Rather, it will be knowledge applied by each of us, recorded and continuously evolving to more efficient applications, which can be verified, improved upon, and utilized in practical ways by everyone for generations to come.

It is the truth we are looking for here. The AYP system can be a useful baseline, but it is not going to be the perfect answer for everyone in every time. This is true of every system of spiritual practice. The key is ongoing research and the development of practical knowledge, based on real time cause and effect.

The guru is in you.

Lesson 426* – Enlightenment Time Line (Bar Chart)

Q: Has following the AYP program led anyone to enlightenment? If so, how long will it take for the average person to achieve the same?

A: This question keeps coming up, and perhaps rightfully so. If we are considering undertaking a journey, it is natural to ask where we are going to end up, and how long it will take to get there. These considerations are within the realm of time and space. There are many factors that may influence the answer, including the fact that the journey we are talking about here is beyond time and space, in the realm of *That* which is beyond all destinations and time measurements. It is the infinite eternal, possible to be lived here and now in our everyday life. When we find ourselves entering this realm, life continues in the ordinary, even while we enjoy extraordinary freedom and the spontaneous power to quicken the awakening in everyone around us.

But to answer your question directly, has anyone arrived in that state while utilizing the AYP approach? Well, yes, I think so. There is mounting evidence in the community of practitioners. But not necessarily because of AYP alone. Each of us must bring our own bhakti (spiritual desire) to the table. Furthermore, many who have made good use of the AYP system have been involved with other approaches in the past, and also in the present, particularly with variations of self-inquiry, which are driven largely by personal choice. So who can say exactly how much AYP has contributed? Nevertheless, there is little doubt that many are making much progress utilizing AYP, whether they have a background with other systems or not.

It depends so much on the person. Not only their bhakti and prior background in practices, but also on the condition of the nervous system at the deepest level. A few are born to become enlightened in this life, while for the rest of us it may be only a possibility. Yet, for all of us the possibility is clearly there, and that is very significant. Where there is the possibility, there will be means that can be devised to bring it into manifestation. It is a matter of having good tools available, and having the desire and willingness to put forth the effort toward the goal through daily practice.

The factors affecting our journey have been discussed throughout the lessons. As these relate to enlightenment specifically, Lesson 390 provides a pretty good summery, including some of the cautions associated with proclaiming enlightenment. What each of us is doing about it in the here and now is infinitely more important than what someone else claims to have done. This is why discussions about "the attainment" of others are largely a distraction. Likewise, so is proclaiming our own attainment (real or imagined) a distraction to ourselves and others. Enlightenment never proclaims itself. It only does, in a perpetual divine outpouring for the benefit of others in ordinary living.

Regarding the time line for enlightenment, this is greatly affected by the factors mentioned above, and as further discussed in Lesson 390. AYP is still a young approach, about seven years old as an open source teaching at this writing, though tested here for several decades beforehand. At this still-early stage of large-scale application, we can say that a few years of practice yields noticeable results, in some cases dramatic, approaching a "ripeness" of inner silence and ecstatic awakening, and their joining, paving the way for relational self-inquiry (see Lesson 328). Beyond a few years of practice, up to five or more years (approaching the full period of AYP's public

availability so far), we are seeing clear evidence of some practitioners going beyond ripeness, falling from the tree so to speak, into a life experience in unity/non-duality.

This is not a guarantee that everyone will become ripe in a few years, and fall into a full time experience of unity/non-duality in five or so years. What it does indicate, is that anyone who is consistent in practices with prudent self-pacing, while keeping active in the world between sittings, is going to make a lot of progress. How far that goes is a function of our sincere bhakti in relation to inner karmic obstructions to be dissolved/transformed. Our bhakti will surely overcome the karmic obstructions. AYP provides a useful tool set to aid in that.

So it isn't mainly about the practices, though it certainly helps to have good ones. It is about our earnestness in approaching our own spiritual journey, and our prudent management of daily practices over the long term.

In the old days, the quest for enlightenment was measured in lifetimes, sometimes thousands of them. In the 20th century, it became clear that, with applied effort, at least for a few, the journey could be traversed in several decades. Now, in the 21st century, we are looking at the same being accomplished in a few years. Or at least putting a major dent in it. The applied technologies of yoga and spiritual practices continue to improve, becoming openly available for millions. Times are changing.

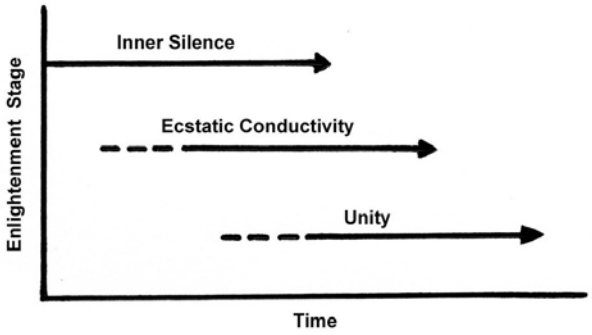
Is this level of acceleration in human spiritual transformation realistic? Well, there is no promise of instant enlightenment, not coming from this corner anyway. And neither is there a promise that AYP will deliver all of us into the enlightened state in a few years, though there have been some encouraging accounts. What is promised is steady progress for those who are earnest and apply themselves in the manner suggested.

It will be interesting to see where this open source approach to spiritual practice leads in 10-20 years, and more. It is still very early in the game, and there is much yet to be discovered, both on the individual practitioner's level, and in relation to the ongoing process of human spiritual transformation occurring in the global family of humanity.

Everyone is welcome to join in the experiment. Just sit down and meditate twice each day, diving deep into stillness, and enjoy the results.

The guru is in you.

Addition: It has been said that "a picture is worth a thousand words." So, at the risk of being redundant, a bar chart has been prepared that shows the basic relationship between the milestones, or stages, of the enlightenment journey as first presented in Lesson 35, and returned to many times since from various angles in relation to practices and resulting experiences arising in the community of practitioners. Here it is:



Enlightenment Bar Chart

As always, we are keeping it as simple as possible. Some might argue that it is too simple, given the complex maps to enlightenment that are found in some of the traditions of the world. They are so much fun to play with!

Our reasoning is that it is much better to stay focused on daily practices, rather than to get caught up in maps. The journey has enough wrinkles of its own that we will find cropping up in our experiences, and we prefer to manage the practices and experiences directly with self-pacing, grounding, and other means. It is the fastest and surest way forward. There is no substitute for the direct experience we gain with a hands-on approach to practices.

With a little "reading between the lines," it can be seen that there is much to consider in the above enlightenment bar chart. Let's look at it from the perspective of practices, which is the only way any spiritual map can represent something real:

- Inner Silence – Cultivated with deep meditation and enhancements.

- Ecstatic conductivity (kundalini awakening) – Cultivated with spinal breathing pranayama, asanas, mudras, bandhas, etc.

- Unity – Cultivated with samyama, self-inquiry, and increasing karma yoga in daily activity.

So we begin with the cultivation of inner silence. The dotted lines at the beginning of the ecstatic conductivity and unity stages indicate that experiences of these stages may occur intermittently at an earlier time. In the case of ecstatic conductivity, in some individuals it may occur *before* cultivating inner silence, particularly if there has been a history of engagement in energy practices prior to learning meditation. Then the result may not be so ecstatic, but more problematic, contributing to various kinds of sensitivity that have to be dealt with along the way. We have called it "premature kundalini awakening," and this is not part of the AYP approach. Nevertheless, it happens (we see people coming into AYP all the time with premature kundalini), and it is still possible to get back on track by introducing deep meditation and spinal breathing pranayama, with good self-pacing, grounding and additional remedial measures, as necessary, that are discussed in Lesson 69 and elsewhere in the lessons (see "kundalini" in the Topic Index).

Each of the three stages, and their corresponding practices, rely on the previous stage. All of the practices after deep meditation are dependent on the cultivation of abiding inner silence to assure progressive and stable unfoldment. Without that, all bets are off.

Fueled by our underlying spiritual desire (bhakti) and a balanced approach to practices, each of the stages will be ongoing, indicated by the arrows on the bar chart pointing to continuing development and refinement over time. Inner silence will grow to be more abiding and more pervasive as we continue to meditate daily over the long term. With the daily utilization of spinal breathing pranayama and related practices, ecstatic conductivity will evolve past its dramatic (kundalini) expressions to become more refined and fluid, providing a vehicle for inner silence to "move" in the form of ecstatic radiance and a natural flow of divine love through our actions in everyday living. Then we will have "stillness in action" occurring, a merging of inner silence and ecstatic conductivity, leading to a releasing of identification of our awareness with the objects of perception, including all thoughts, feelings and sensory stimuli, even as we remain fully engaged in our activities in the world. This is the unity stage, which can also be described as living as a conscious expression of the non-dual nature of existence. The three enlightenment stages continue to mingle and refine as we continue with practices, and living our daily life as we see fit.

Even with all of this going on, we will find ourselves living the simple joys of an ordinary life. It has, after all, been about finding peace and happiness in our life, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in. While the journey to enlightenment may often be thought of as extraordinary, it is really quite ordinary. It is simply moving beyond the suffering of attachment, into *That* which we are behind the ups and downs of life. It is a journey to *extraordinary ordinariness*. And we need go nowhere to do it. It is a coming home to our *Self* which has always been here. It is a journey from here to here.

Lesson 427 – Taking the Leap to Direct Experience

Q: While quite a few have told me, "This way is the only way to achieve enlightenment," I find the AYP teaching to be refreshing in that it makes no exclusive claims like that. Ironically, this strength of AYP causes me some doubt about which system of practices I should follow. There are so many alternatives, all vying for my attention with grand promises. I find myself somewhat paralyzed on how to proceed.

What I'm looking for is confirmation from direct experience that AYP indeed works, rather than theoretical explanations. I'm sure that the AYP following wouldn't be as large as it is if it didn't provide meaningful results, but I thought it could save me more research on practices if I could get a definitive answer on what is absolutely the best approach. I shall not rest until I find it!

A: You have really answered your own question with your reference to a "confirmation from direct experience." That can only mean <u>your</u> direct experience, because there is no such thing as direct experience for you coming from another. Doing something yourself is the only way you will find out what works for you, no matter what anyone else may say about it.

We can investigate approaches to spiritual practice until the cows come home. But we will have nothing we can rely on until we take the leap to direct experience. That means picking an approach to practices and getting started. From that point onward we will be on the journey, and able to adjust our course as necessary along the way, based on actual results in our life.

A certain amount of analysis on the front end is necessary. However, if it becomes our primary and on-going mode of approaching practices, we will find limited results. Once we have gotten under way with an actual practice routine, we can base all analysis on our actual experiences, rather than second and third hand experiences that may be claimed by others. The game is here in us, and nowhere else. The sooner we get in the game as a direct participant, rather than continuing as a spectator, the sooner we will be managing actual causes and effects in our process of human spiritual transformation, instead of just imagining what it is all about.

While we can't say that AYP is "absolutely the best approach," we can say that it offers an effective sequence for taking on practices, with a strong likelihood of finding life-enhancing results in both the near term and long term. This is done in a way that affords flexibility for building and pacing our practice routine to accommodate personal sensitivities and inclinations. This kind of approach is not so easy to find in sectarian teachings, where there may be fixed rules on how to proceed with practices, regardless of personal needs. In that sense, AYP is somewhat unique, putting the practitioner in charge of building and managing the practice routine, with support available as may be needed.

Is this the best approach? Who can say? Is this a practical and effective approach? Definitely. The flexibility found in AYP does not mean it is watered down or weak. Quite to the contrary, the practices offered are among the most powerful (and simple to do) available anywhere, especially when integrated together in a twice-daily practice routine. Plus, they can be taken on at a rate determined by the practitioner, producing more than enough oomph to challenge our ability to absorb rapid rates of inner purification and opening. That is why "self-pacing" is at the heart of the AYP approach. We use powerful practices, and we self-pace them for maximum progress with comfort There is no such thing as maximum progress with discomfort, because this leads to

repeated forced discontinuations of practices – a much slower approach in the long run. So self-pacing is essential.

Having said all that, it really boils down to something very simple for any would-be practitioner looking at the AYP approach. Just begin deep meditation according to instructions provided in the lessons (see Lesson 13), and take it from there. Once a comfortable twice-daily practice of deep meditation is in place, additional options will open to us. When we are consistently cultivating abiding inner silence, all the rest will come. There will be less analysis and more doing. This is what we mean by taking the leap to direct experience. It is very easy, but we have to take that leap ourselves, and continue with a consistent daily practice.

Your direct experience with practices will be the most reliable and useful feedback you will get on your path. That is the formula. It is about your results, not anyone else's. Everything is going to work out fine. Just do it.

The guru is in you.

Lesson 428 – The Transformation of Ego

Q: After several years of practices, my perception has become that "ego" is a sense of self separate from my inner witness (the real me). While I know that there is no such thing as a separate self, still, I keep running across it in my life, mainly in the form of "I, me and mine." I can't help identifying with this and, while it is not always present, it crops up often enough. There is no amount of intention I can have that is able to get rid of it. Moreover, this ego thing seems to have a mind of its own, sneaking into my life in ways that I do not want, trying to limit the natural happiness that is in me. I can see now why some teachers say that the ego is the source of all misery in the world. My question is, how do I get rid of the limiting ego so I can enjoy the full benefits of enlightenment? Is it too early for me to be engaging in self-inquiry?

A: There can be no "getting rid" of the ego, because ego is a product of the mind, and so too is the act of getting rid of something an act of the mind. We can move things around in the mind, but we cannot get rid of them, except by transcending the mind altogether. This is what meditation is for – cultivating abiding inner silence, that which is beyond the mind. But in doing so, we are not getting rid of the mind or the ego, we are only illuminating them with our inner light of pure bliss consciousness. In this way both the mind and the ego are *transformed* in their role in the expression of our life, which radiates more and more from the infinite source of peace and creativity within us.

After a few years of practice, you are finding inner silence and the divine flow emerging in your everyday life, and it is natural to want to get on with it so it can become a full time experience. It is your bhakti that is driving you forward. Inner silence tends to amplify our bhakti, and it also moves us toward self-inquiry. It is normal. When our thoughts and feelings, including the ego, or "I thought," are becoming objects of perception on the screen of our abiding inner silence (witness), we are naturally inclined to do something with them, particularly when they are influencing our perceptions and actions in life in negative ways, like those acts that are driven by the "I, me, mine" reflex. We'd like to get rid of that for sure. But doing so is not a doing. It is an undoing, and that is the trick.

If you are being drawn to self-inquiry, then it is time. But, like with all practices, self-pacing will be necessary. Self-inquiry can be very helpful once we are able to release our inquiry in stillness (samyama effect), no matter what procedure of inquiry we may be using. That requires some abiding inner silence, obviously. We will know our self-inquiry is gaining traction in stillness (relational) if we feel the identification of our awareness with objects fading when we engage in inquiry. If we are feeling strain, frustration, confusion, headache, etc., then we can be pretty sure we are getting ahead of ourselves in mind outside inner silence (non-relational), and it is time to self-pace. Lesson 356 provides additional perspective on relational versus non-relational self-inquiry, and technique suggestions as well. We will know self-inquiry is working when we find our sense of self gradually expanding beyond the limits of I, me and mine. This is not an elimination of the ego, per se, but an expansive transformation of it – not an expansion of I, me and mine, but an expansion of pure bliss consciousness radiating out through the personality.

What is the ego anyway, but identified awareness? It is the same awareness that we find in enlightenment when identification has faded. Same awareness – much happier situation. We have sometimes used the example of the nervous system being like a window that needs cleaning. On the

inside is pure bliss consciousness and on the outside is the distorted view of that purity seen through the dirty window. With the methods of yoga, we are cleaning the window, so what is seen through it becomes steadily more clear and pure. In this example, the "ego" is the view of pure bliss consciousness seen through the dirty window. As we clean the window, the view becomes more clear, and perception and conduct become illuminated. There may still be some distortion, but in time even that will go. Our sitting practices will take care of it, and our entry into self-inquiry will clarify remaining misperceptions. We come to find that we never were the distorted view coming through the window, only identified with it.

Is that getting rid of the ego, or a transformation of it? Because it will be a gradual process for most, viewing it as a transformation may be more practical. Also, seeing it as a transformation is less judgmental. If we see the process as a gradual transformation, we can accept the so-called ego at whatever stage it may be, without feeling like we have to shove it out the door, which will only strengthen it in the realm of the mind. Making an enemy of the ego is as fruitless as making an enemy of the mind (see Lesson 354). Instead, we gradually illuminate the ego from within by cleaning the window, and one day we realize that it has been pure bliss consciousness expressing in that impure form all the while. We gradually illuminate it from within by cleaning the window, and one day we realize that it has been pure bliss consciousness expressing in that impure form all the while. That "realizing" stage is where self-inquiry has its greatest value. Not much before. Abiding inner silence and the process of inner purification and opening lead to this condition where self-inquiry becomes highly relational (in stillness). We have called this stage "ripeness," the point where we are only a few steps away from falling off the tree into unending peace and happiness, no matter what may be going on in our surroundings. There can be regressions at any stage, but once the nervous system (our window) reaches a certain level of purity, there is little chance of losing it. By then, the natural momentum of outpouring divine love and stillness in action are working 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

Let us not forget that the ego is our primary vehicle to enlightenment. Who else besides the ego would be sawing the limb of ignorance, while sitting on the part that will fall? For those who might worry about this, the fall is into infinite peace and happiness. In spite of the "I, me and mine" impulse, the ego is always looking to expand its power and its view. Once it becomes clear that all power and knowledge are found by going within, the ego will lead us there. Nothing else can do it. If ego were not the one cutting the limb of ignorance off while sitting on it, there would be no limb, because limitation is what the limb is. We must operate from limitation to move beyond limitation. That is the rationale for spiritual practices, and it works. Odd as it may seem, the ego is our vehicle to enlightenment. We have to operate from where we are. It is not possible to operate from where we are not.

Someone wrote me recently asking if it was okay to meditate to be more successful in business. I said, "Sure, go for it." Meditating for business will be sure to lead to a broader view. If that person were discouraged from meditating for business, how would he ever get beyond that need? Meditating and engaging fully in life is the fastest way to do it, not by condemning or trying to ignore the attachment to business.

It is the same thing for health. Millions take up yoga practices for health. Why not? It works, and it leads to much more than physical health.

It is the ego that wants to meditate, and that is great. It will lead beyond whatever the imagined reason is – even the concept of enlightenment. Hard as we may try, we cannot imagine our way

much beyond the fact of what it is for us today. We can only purify the vehicle (this nervous system – the window) and become a fuller expression of our essential nature, which is pure bliss consciousness. If the ego seems to be sabotaging us at times, it is only a lingering habit, something that will fade over time as we continue with daily practices, like so many of our negative behaviors have.

Honestly, I can think of nothing that would want to meditate besides ego (identified awareness). If that were not the case, there would be only pure awareness, and meditation would not be about purification and opening, but about basking in the infinite. Even then, it is the person (the shadow of our transformed ego) who sits down to meditate. Or is it stillness in action sitting to meditate? Does it even matter?

We can only operate from where we are, and there is no practical reason to divide ourselves into good and bad, ego and non-ego. It's all one thing (one awareness) in the process of transformation from expressing with identification to expressing without identification.

When we talk about human spiritual transformation, we are talking about illumination from the inside. That is illumination of the heart, the mind, and all our actions in the world. This transforms the role of these elements of our nature, including the aspect that connects us consciously with our expression of body/mind in time and space. And that is the ego, even if only a faint remnant of the duality it was before it became permeated with inner light. The result is abiding inner silence, ecstatic bliss, and outpouring divine love for the benefit of all on this earth plane, and beyond.

The guru is in you.