

## The need to be special

When I first met Swami Rama in 1970, I was so awe struck I could hardly talk to the man. He was quiet if you left him alone, and he talked if you asked him a question. But whether talking or silent, you felt his presence. All the thoughts buzzing in my mind just seemed to grow still next to him.

I remember standing with him in the yard at tea and seeing my father's face come out of him in a hologram come out of him and hover there between us in a real three dimensional form, then return into him. We see this all the time in movie special effects, but I had and have never since then seen this phenomena in reality. I asked him what it meant, and he chose to be silent. This was for me to find out was his answer.

And so began my path to find out who I was. Now I can look back and see that all I really wanted was to be special and to get my father's approval, something I never felt I had growing up. And the hologram was a vision of my projecting my physical father onto this holy man of God, and then seeking his approval. Somehow I was grafting a need for approval on a personal level with a need for approval on a spiritual level. But first, I had to become special. Doesn't one have to earn approval?

So how does one become special to a yoga master? Become a yogi, obviously. And what does a yogi do? Teach yoga, obviously. And not just the hatha yoga of physical postures, but the spiritual yoga of meditation and self realization. Somehow all this was tied up in my driving idea of being special.

The whole point of being special is to have the idea that one is doing something special, being something noteworthy, something that gets attention, recognition...and love.

Looking back over my life with all its twists and turns, moving here, moving there, I was always hungry to arrive at someplace—not externally like in a social position—but a position within where I would know God's love.

But there is no real difference between an external special position and in internal special position. In both cases, one wants to become a special person in order to be loved. If there is a difference, it is this: it is harder to see the ego in an internal form than it is in an external form. One can become a celebrity and see the emptiness in it much easier that one can when you think you are a spiritual person and God's chosen.

It is not easy to let go of a spiritual posture because one builds into its rationale for existence a world that doesn't accept you. "I know I'm spiritual because the fallen world doesn't accept me. God loves my sacrifice," the spiritual ego says to itself. The food of the spiritual ego is having a plate full of enemies.

I don't know when the struggle for father-God's approval ended. Perhaps it was when my father died at 94 in Blackston in 1996. It was a week before his death, and I had come to the hospital earlier than my mother, so I walked into his room when he was alone. Her turned to me and held out his arms in such a loving reach, as if I was the most special person on earth. I hugged him so completely and I cried, saying I loved him. I know this was the first time I had ever said that with my whole being.

He told me he wanted to die. And a week later he did, with my mother and I standing by his side as he sneezed, drew his last breath, and let is go gently with a soft sigh. One touch of love is all I had from my father...but that was enough. I am a lucky son.

## The black hole of meditation

Those familiar with cosmology have heard about the “black holes” in space where matter simply dissolves into itself. These holes are like the eye of a hurricane with space objects being pulled into orbit until they slowly lose their velocity and take a nose dive into the hole and oblivion. Or maybe a flushing toilet is a better analogy. You decide.

But this “black hole” is also a good metaphor for meditation. When we sit and practice silent awareness, we are creating an anti-thought hole in our interior space. Thoughts and even feelings will orbit through our inner space, and as we keep our silent “black hole” awareness, the thought and feeling forms dissolve into the hole. This is like turning on a vacuum cleaning in our head, but without the noise.

As we practice “black hole” meditation, we begin to carry our “black hole” with us into the galaxy of our waking day. Each of us lives in a personal galaxy called “me.” Our me comes wrapped around a star, which we call our story. And around this star our planets of pain and comets of thought revolve.

Everything has an orbit and a predictable path in our universe, and we can even look on our calendar and say, “Well, it’s about time I started feeling depressed.” We believe this personal universe is real because our “me” says it is real. And we constantly check with other “me galaxies” to verify our own realness.

But put a black hole in our universe and right away things begin to change. Comets disappear. Pain bodies begin to dissolve. Old personal dramas don’t come back for a rerun. Old ways of looking at the world no longer filter our sight, and our universe brightens.

Our inner space becomes still. Awareness deepens. The bright light in intelligence makes the light of our star look like the moon. We are happy all the time, and for no good reason.

A black hole can sure clean up a messy universe.

Ever since I started practicing yoga I've had a Dancing Shiva in my house. In India spiritual wisdom is given protection from time in the statues of the gods, who in the shape of their bodies and what they are holding teach the wisdom of the ages to new generations. The statues of the Indian gods keep safe the eternal wisdom teachings that are universal to all the great religions and philosophies. An Indian statue of a god is not an idol or something to believe in, but a pointer to the universal truths that cannot be spoken or written down. Of course, people do bow and worship these statues in India, but that is just their way of incorporating the spiritual truth into their lives.

The Dancing Shiva is such a statue. This fierce figure has four arms, wild long hair, a huge snake, and it dances in a cosmic ring of fire with one leg on a gnome and one leg moving free. This is the dance of creation with forms coming and going, where nothing is permanent, where everything dies. Imagine a dream where one's eye opens up on this cosmic fire where everyone we know, and ourselves are being consumed by death. What a frightening vision. Is there any escape? Do we live just to die? What meaning is there in this?

Shiva's four arms each have an answer. Two extended arms hold cymbals and fire, time and death, but the middle arms hold up his palm in the sign of "fear not," and the third arm, almost unnoticed in the fiery dance, points to the liberated foot swinging above the gnome upon which the other foot holds to the ground. This gnome is the mind's ignorance or the illusion of a separate ego identity or "little me." It is the "little me" that fears its death. Shiva, who in India is the lord of yoga, puts his foot on the ego and liberates the yogi from the fear of death.

But the most significant part of the statue is the unmoving face of Shiva. In the middle of this cosmic dance the center is unmoved and free of time. Like the eye of the hurricane, Shiva's face embodies absolute consciousness before it takes a form in time. Out of stillness come noise, out of space come objects, out of God comes us. Forms come and go, so don't identify with form, with your body, with your mind's little me...keep to the center, says Shiva.

Shiva is also saying that our true face, our original consciousness before it became our "little me," is God, or absolute Consciousness. There are so many religious names for this absolute, and none have any meaning in themselves.

The face of Shiva cannot be seen or thought about or even known by the mind. Little me must die in order to see Shiva. But, here is the lifted leg: to see the face of Shiva is to see our true Self. When we are our true original Self, we just are..just here...in this present moment. And we are happy..for no reason. The mind is still and we feel...that we are a part of this ocean of being..we are life aware of itself! Shiva tells us that true life is being in balance with creation and death by staying centered in God, the unmoved mover within. When we are centered in this way, we can let go of fear and just dance with life, and let the music swing our arms and our hair as our heel keeps its beat on our ego pinned to the ground.

Shiva is inviting us to be Him. "Dance as I do," he says, "and you will be free." In the dance of Shiva we are just the dance.

## A hole in time

There is one thing that all the yoga classes being held here at BYC have in common: everyone is very happy and peaceful when they leave. This morning as I begin to write, I wonder why is that?

We can answer this question from many directions, but the one I choose now is this. We enjoy being present. When we come to a yoga class, we leave our shoes and our worries outside. And what is worry but the thinking mind and its “little me” and its story. We all have a “little me,” and that me is forever running about in thought trying to fix the world so its story will come out right. “Where is my happy ending?” little me cries.

We don’t realize this, but when we come to a yoga class we surrender our little me to the yoga routine and the teacher who tells us what to do next. Little me doesn’t have to worry for awhile.

It is such a relief to not have to worry about what is coming next. So a yoga class—and our yoga practice, when we practice yoga at home—becomes our oasis from the arid landscape of our problematic mind and its search for fulfillment. We drink from the clear water of presence and are refreshed.

So what is being present? Some one calls the roll and we answer: “Present”. Or we may say, “Here.” Of course, we are just stating that we are physically in this place, but are we actually in this moment? This moment is flesh and blood. This moment has feeling, sounds, smells, sights; this moment is alive. This moment is life. This moment is where we live. This moment has no time. This moment is always now. This moment is eternal because it has no beginning or end. One can’t think about this moment; one can only BE this moment.

When we are not in this moment, we are “lost in thought.” We are in psychological time, which is either past or future. This is not the time the train runs on, but the tracks the mind runs on. We are playing over in our mind what happened in the past, or we are projecting ourselves into the future where we hope something will happen or are afraid something will happen. We think this is normal, this train of thought we all are riding on. We are all riding through life looking out the window at the present moment.

So we come to yoga and are told that we don’t have to think for awhile now. Just focus on the breath and the inner body, just be present and accept yourself as you are right now. Suspend all judgment and comparison. Just be in this moment.

In this yoga “hole” in time, the energy and consciousness of life comes rushing through the relaxed and still mind, and we find relief from the grinding weight of time. We feel peaceful and happy.

Yoga is being free from the suffering of being trapped in time, and it is our door into this present moment. This is one reason yoga class makes people feel good. Life is good.

## Heading our own story

This morning at 7:30 on the edge of the year's first frost, my wife and I were carting boxes of books from inside the Blackstone library to yard tables where the books would be sold today in the library's annual fund raiser. My left back muscle had been strained a few days ago, and I could feel it waking up and complaining. "This was not good," thought said, and it brought up the image of my afternoon wedding and the camera I would be hanging from my neck for six hours.

This was the perfect set up for the writing of a story about how irritating this book sale was. "I shouldn't be here," thought went on, adding the next page.

So here is the moment of choice in yoga practice: Do I write the story and lose myself in it, believing that I am the character in the story that is irritating and complaining about having to help his wife? Or, do I focus on my breathing and what my body is doing while noticing what thought is writing, but not identifying with it? Do I accept my moment or resist it? That is the question: To be or not to be.

We all know what hauling boxes of books is like when our mind is in a complaining story. Not only do we make ourselves miserable, but we probably make others read our sad story too.

But what happens when you choose just to notice the story being written without becoming the story? First, my back didn't get worse because by focusing on my breath and body posture, I prevented any injury. Second, by observing thought like it was a pen writing a story, the resistance to carrying books never became my resistance. The story of my suffering never went to press. The story did not have any emotional content, so it became an unfinished story. By focusing on my breath and body, the books were moved without my even noticing the time, and my peace was never disturbed. And I was able to read a very interesting story about the story that never got written.

But best of all, my wife was not burdened with a complaining husband. Yoga is so good for a marriage.

Surfing the present moment

Some jobs go smoothly, and some seem plagued by one mishap after another. Just when you think you are clear, another mistake appears. Being aware of how we ride this wave of mishaps is good for the practice of yoga. For this practice, one needs a rough wave in order to test our skill. If life was smooth all the time, we would never make any progress in conquering the mind.

In this particular wave of mishaps, first four out of the six frames ordered were damaged. Then two of the replacements were also damaged in shipping. Add to that a broken sheet of non-glare glass, and multiple defects in the prints, and you have a beautiful wave of mishaps to practice surfing.

When we start on a wave like this, the first thing to note is that we always have a choice: do I accept the wave or do I resist it. This choice determines what our mental posture is during the ride. Is our posture fluid and adaptive to each turn of events, or is it rigid and off balance?

The next thing to note is what we choose to surf on. Am I standing on my plan of how things should be, or am I standing on how things actually are? If the actual events are not matching my plan, then I am in resistance to what is. This resistance is like putting your hand in a stream of water. You can feel the resistance your hand is creating. In mental terms, this resistance is what we call stress. And stress will increase our inability to focus on what is, and most likely create more mistakes. Most surely, stress will drain our energy, so at the end of the ride instead of feeling exhilarated, we feel exhausted.

Proper surfing occurs when we surrender our plan and our resistance and relax into the wave and let the wave carry us to the shore. We call this the joy of living.

Needless to say, the portraits were finally framed and picked up, and our ocean became calm again. Looking at life this way, as just more opportunities to sharpen our practice, we can transform every so called negative into a positive.

In the Middle Ages, this was called the Philosopher's Stone, which was the elusive formula that would turn base metal into gold.

Today, we just call it yoga.

To be here is enough

A Zen saying describes Zen life as “chopping wood and carrying water.” That’s it. Simplicity. We all want simplicity in our life, but without having to wash the clothes by hand or ride a bike to work. But just getting rid of clutter and stress is not what Zen is pointing to. The simplicity of Zen is much more profound and simple.

When I wash the dishes, am I just washing dishes or am I thinking about who else in the house should be washing these dishes? When I am walking, am I just walking or am I thinking about a job I have to do? When I am talking to someone, am I just talking or am I wondering if what I’m saying is getting through to that person? In other words, when we look directly, we notice that we are never just doing what we are doing. We are always thinking about what we are doing or about something else while we are doing. We are never one with our action.

The only time we are really one with our action is when death threatens. When life is threatened, as in extreme sports or some pending accident, all our attention is on survival. Then we are one with our action. When the threat is over, then we start thinking about it, and most likely have a very difficult time forgetting about the incident. We can’t forget that time when we were most alive.

So how can we live so that we are most alive? This is what Zen is talking about. To live in Zen is to be most alive just carrying the water and chopping the wood, two of the most common acts. I am reminded of Hamlet’s “To be or not to be.” To carry water or not to carry water. To be just carrying water or to think while carrying water.

Animals, in fact, all of nature is being what it is doing. But we humans are not outside of nature, different from life, and separated from existence. We may perceive and feel that we are, but we are not. So, just like the rest of nature, we are being what we are doing. But we don’t experience ourselves that way. We experience ourselves as being split into action and thought, and we invest our sense of self in thought, not in the action. “I think therefore I am,” said Descartes, the French philosopher who set the tone for the modern age.

Zen and yoga are the practice of being who we are at this moment and nothing more. When I am washing dishes, that is all I am, just the washing of dishes. There is no “I” doing the washing, which is splitting me into a subject and the object, the me and the dishes. In reality there is only the washing. There is no division in life. But in my head there is a separation which gives me the sense of me as an individual entity that is against the whole of nature, separate and alone.

In Christianity, this split is called original sin, and when this “sin” is forgiven or accepted through the seeing of meditation, the separation dissolves and at-one-ment occurs. We are like a child, innocent and purely just what it is.

One can call this the Kingdom of God. Zen would just call it “carrying water and chopping wood.”

Watch the cat

A Zen master was once asked how he got enlightened. "By watching my cat," he said to the student. This morning my cat reminded me of this teaching that I had read some time ago.

When we have tea, we use the posing table from photography to hold the tea cups and saucers. With the tea and laptop and my wife's book, there was not much open space on the table from where I sat.

But from my cat's perspective on the floor, all she could see the the edge of the laptop and one side of the cup the was on the corner of the table. I watched her walk around the table with intense open eyes as she mapped out a possible layout on the table top. The she coiled her body into a spring and leaped. As she arrived on the table top, she filled in the layout of the table top and adjusted her feet so that all four feet landed in the one open space on the table, which was about three square inches. Then she carefully picked her way across the table, never touching a cup or anything else, and walked over onto the sofa's arm and sat down to lick her fur.

Fascinating! Cats are stillness in action. And we humans can sense this presence when we become like them. Cats are here to teach us how to be still and present. A cat is never disconnected from the present moment, like we are when we are lost in our thought. A cat is perfectly here. They are in the Buddhist state of no mind, which one could say is the state of nature. Nature has no thinking mind. Nature is prior to thought, like stillness is prior to noise, or the sky that is prior to clouds. No mind is the consciousness that hold thought and our identiy like the space that holds the stars.

So our cats invite is to be like them by always being who they are. Cats sit in their catness and nothing we can do will move them out of it. Oh, and we try. "Here kitty, here kitty," we call with beckoning gestures, and the kitty just sits there looking at this strange behavior. Babies are the same. We kill ourselves trying to get the baby to leave it babyyness and be like us. But a baby just remains seated in who it is, watching us from its seat in stillness.

So if we truly want to be with our cat, then we must get like the cat, because the cat is not going to get like us. We have to change.

To be with the cat we must become a still watcher like the cat. Watch the cat with the same attention that the cat watches a mouse hole. Move like the cat that adjusts its feet in the instant before landing. Hear the cat noiselessly walk across the room. Be the silence the cat is the master of.

This must be what the Zen master was pointing to. Buddhism calls it "suchness." Yoga calls it samadhi. Jeus calls it the Kingdom of God. All fingers point to the same pace.

A cat can show us where it is.

What is our mental posture?

We practice hatha yoga, that is the yoga of putting our body in specific postures called asanas, for the most part as an end in itself. Make your body fit this specific asanas perfectly, and you will get some benefits, this belief says. So we struggle and strain, give up other pastimes, and if our belief is strong enough to overcome the pull of our habits, we arrive at a limber and peaceful body that is full of energy and free of tension. Nothing wrong with that.

But that is not the ultimate goal of yoga. As we train our mind to become aware of our asanas by being the silent witness to our body, we prepare our awareness to venture into a new frontier, the unknown country of our own mind.

When we are in relationship with the world—and we are always in some relationship with the world—what is our mental posture? In the midst of an argument with our spouse, can we be silently aware of our mental posture, which is not only shaping our mind but the whole relationship? This silent awareness rises suddenly like an insight and grasps the totality of a situation by seeing all the fragments, me and the other, as a whole. One can't will this awareness. One can only surrender to it by letting go of our mental posture. A mental posture is a tension in the mental body that can be released through silent awareness.

Mental postures are no singular objects like a physical posture, but encompass both the subject and the object. A mental posture is both our "me" and the "other." Our mind creates the world into its own shape or posture. The world appears to be many when there is only One.

Being aware of this "world posture" is being aware that we are creating and holding this posture. We are the world we are living in because we are creating the world we are living in—yet we remain unconscious of our own kingdom.

Becoming silently aware of this world posture is also being free from this world. In the moment of being aware, we create a hole in space where something entirely new can happen. We can actually experience the creation of a new world where the past is not repeating itself in reruns of our old postures.

With the total silent awareness of our world posture, we open the door to the unknown. What world that is born out of this silent awareness will be a new possibility, one that we have not experienced before. But whatever it is, one thing is certain. The action that rises through the hole of still awareness is correct for that situation. And it will restore peace and love to your world.

How? Simply because peace and love is the true state of existence. This is the posture of God. He is perfectly seated in love, and when we become silently aware of our mental posture that divides our world into "me" and "them" or "it," that posture just drops away, and we become God's asanas.

What the Bleep do we know?

What the Bleep do we know is a movie that has not appeared on our media radar screens, as far as I know. We watched it last night, and it certainly won't be an oscar contender, but it is a movie that can transform the way one looks at our world and ourselves.

Briefly, the movie is a documentary in story form on how modern quantum physics has finally brought western scientific thought into alignment with Eastern spiritual teachings, such as Buddhism, Yoga and New Age concepts that are currently reshaping the world we think we live in.

Humanity is in a cosmic paradigm shift, the movie says, and by that it means the conditioned model or myth through which we interpret our reality is changing. And this shift is being led by quantum physics, which in its investigation of the sub atomic world has discovered that there is nothing there except the energy consciousness.

This is exactly what Buddha discovered in his awakening in 600 BC. The introversion of the East has met the extroversion of the West at the same place; existence is the emptiness of consciousness. At the beginning and at the end is just the eternal I AM. In fact, there is no beginning or end. There just is I AM.

Our conventional model of space-time, which Newtonian science rested on, has been long thrown out, starting with Einstein, who said time-space was relative to the observer. That observer is.....us. When we turn within and dive deep through meditation, we come to the center of the universe. We come to God....and we discover that we are That.

The new paradigm that is emerging reveals that existence is like an organism and every form is part of the whole. Therefore, the current paradigm which tells us that we are separate from the external world, that there is a subject and an object, is an illusion. The observer and the observed are one; the separation of one into two, me and it, is merely the way we choose to see the world. Reality is relative to my perception.

The other strong point the movie made is that each of us creates the reality we live in. Our world is our choice; only we don't know we are choosing it. We believe that our external world is chosen for us and that we are condemned to struggle with it. And furthermore, our very sense of self becomes grounded in this struggle with existence. We need conflict with the world in order to be who we are, Our ego identity only knows itself by what it is not, by what it resists or is attracted to.

In the new paradigm, identity is grounded in consciousness that is prior to form, (one could say God) and is not dependent upon the external world for its sense of being complete. And identity seated in itself is not moved by fear or desire, and needs nothing in future to complete itself. We are already complete and whole. As Buddha said, life is suffering because we choose it to be.

Modern physics is now able to describe the consciousness of Buddha nature and Christ consciousness and all the saints and yoga masters that have followed. But science can only point to what it postulates. What is cannot be known by conceptual thought.

And if one asked a Buddha, "What the bleep do you know?" He would smile and say.....nothing.