



March 2012 Contemplation Theme

## Svadhya: Chanting Yoga Texts

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I always loved to sing the blues. The blues made me feel alive somehow, the words and tunes voicing the pain I lived in. The blues made me able to find myself in the pain. It was a long time before I found something even more fulfilling – singing to God.

I wasn't moved by the songs I heard and learned growing up in the religions of my parents. The first song to God that pierced me was from the rock opera JC Superstar. It was the blues ratcheted up to a new level: Divine Blues, carrying the pain, the love, the loss, the hope... Yet it was expressing something more, what yoga calls yearning, both the yearning to know God and the yearning to know your Self. That yearning was deeply familiar to me, yet it was clear to me that it had nothing to do with the church that offered me the song. Soon after, I found yoga.

Yoga's many practices include those that are interwoven into mainstream culture, yet svadhya is still a hidden practice. Kirtan has come out of the closet, call and response chanting of repetitive lines, evoking a profound feeling of devotion and bliss. You can try it out in a live concert or with a CD, and may want to make it part of your life in the quiet of your yoga-space or the moving temple of your car. Svadhya ups the ante significantly, chanting the ancient yoga texts in their original Sanskrit language. You have to keep your eyes open!

My first experience of svadhya was in the pre-dawn darkness in my Guru's Ashram, turning the pages as everyone else chanted this ancient poetry from a book. I followed along for a while, finally turning pages, looking ahead to see how long this was going to last. We were not even halfway through the 50 pages; I was dumbfounded. By the end, I was intoxicated and wanted to do it again.

We use a few verses from this chant to begin every program. Visit our website for a free recording: [www.svaroopayoga.org](http://www.svaroopayoga.org).

I continued to chant Baba's morning text for years before I found out why I loved it. Patanjali promises:

*Svadhya ishta-devata-samprayogah. Yoga Sutras 2.44*

Svadhya gives you communion with God.

It's a big promise: through the chanting and study of yoga's texts, you will experience communion with God. This word "communion" does not refer to a ceremony with bread and wine, but promises your experiential merging into the Divine, so there are no longer two of you, but only one — the One (by whatever name you usually use).

*Ista-devata* means you already have a way of conceiving of God. I recognize that the "G-word" can be a hot-button but, even if you don't like that name, the One Reality hasn't gone away. You have some way of naming, reaching out to, thanking and thinking of the-reality-that-is-greater-than-you. Chanting yoga's texts in Sanskrit will give you the experience of the Divinity that you name (or avoid naming). Different texts are devoted to different names and forms, giving you many experiences to explore. It doesn't actually matter which Divine name you use, because *svadhya* is the study of the Self. Notice the "sva" at the beginning of the word; just as in "svaropa," sva means Self — your own Divine essence.

My Guru spoke frequently about the value of chanting, all chanting, but especially svadhya, calling it an exalted spiritual practice. He rarely spoke about asanas (poses) or pranayama (yogic breathing), though he made sure we had training in both. He set up our group practices to include 4 hours of svadhya daily, plus 2 additional hours of other chants. We did our asanas on our own; even meditation was up to us individually.

He taught and even demonstrated for us how asana and pranayama are included in svadhya. Sitting in an elevated seat so we could all see, he held the book in his right hand, placed his left

palm on his knee, and showed us how to use our breath efficiently, breathing rhythmically with the lines of Sanskrit poetry. He explained that having a one-pointed gaze, focused only on the text, is the next step toward meditative absorption. I could feel in the chant how I was getting all the benefits of the multiple practices he described. Others told me about the days before I met Baba, if someone turned their gaze away from their book, he'd toss a wooden block at them. He had great aim!

Baba's explanation of asana is profoundly different than its presentation in mainstream media. Sitting for 90 minutes without changing position is far beyond most people's current capacity, yet this is exactly what the yoga poses are intended to provide for you. *Svaroopā*® yoga targets your spine, opening from tail to top, so that you can sit. This is consistent with the three source texts on hatha yoga, as well as Patanjali's more ancient exposition, wherein he defines asana as "comfortable, motionless sitting."

Your *Svaroopā*® yoga teacher emphasizes the importance of the seated poses in many of the themes, and our new Pose Cards provide great detail to empower your home practice, especially leading to your ability to sit. But what do you do when you sit? The asanas are well known, but the practices they are preparing you for once you are able to sit, are still a mystery. Svadhyaya is one of those mysterious practices.

For thousands of years, yoga has described itself as a mystical science, meaning it is about the mystery-teachings coming from the ancient sages, teachings kept alive by the generations of yogis unto today. Yoga was never lost, needing to be rediscovered. It's a living tradition, from which you take the parts that are meaningful to you. Yet it is an integrated whole. Wherever your interest impels your beginning, it's like pulling on a string of a knitted sweater, the whole of it comes along.

Svadhyaya cured me of singing the blues. Now I sing the bliss. Once I found what yoga's ancient music offered, the blues had no juice any more. Once I tasted yoga's tangible results, the blues had no draw any more. The bliss of my own being became more important than the blues that named the pain I'd endured for lifetimes. Even a little tailbone release opens up bliss, but Patanjali promises more: communion with God from the chanting of yoga's texts.

You can easily explore svadhyaya with a CD. The texts that Baba trained us in have become widely available, along with other ancient texts. Recordings by western yogis and artists are available as well as recordings by yogis and priests from India. Play them in the background while you do your asana practice, while you're cooking, eating, working, driving, etc. Let the Sanskrit soak into your mind and a little deeper.

Here are some of the texts easily available in recordings:

[Guru Gita](#)

[Vishnu Sahasranam](#)

[Rudram](#)

[Bhagavadgita](#)

[Shiva Mahimna](#)

[Chandi Path](#)

If you're enjoying one of them, buy the book, read the translation and follow along with the Sanskrit. But sit up, hold the book in one hand and place your other hand on your knee (you can change hands back and forth). Breathe with the rhythms of the lines. Focus your gaze on the text. See what you get. Is Patanjali right? Will you see God? Look again more closely, he doesn't promise that you'll merely see God. You'll be God. Do more yoga!

To reach Swamiji or to get more information about *Svaroopā*® yoga, contact: Master Yoga Foundation

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