

Independence Day
Ginseng Yoga Studio Monthly Newsletter
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Every year we watch the 4th of July parade in Coronado. I am not sure why. We probably wouldn't if we didn't have a little boy still enamored of all things "pomp and circumstance."

But every year we watch, and every year we notice the same thing: The Independence Day parade, at least in Coronado, seems less a celebration of Independence and all that is good about America and more a celebration of our local military.

Of course, the military feels they are responsible for America's Independence and they certainly should have an important presence in Independence Day parades, but apart from the Surf Club's lead float, this particular Coronado parade is so wholly devoted to military might, pride and glory, that one feels finally relieved when the last float pulls up and who is on it but the Falun Gong doing some form of Chi Gong!

The quiet, the slow movement, the utter foreignness of it all, is stunning. Many people find it quirky and odd that the Falun Gong come to small town Americana for the Fourth of July parade. Others simply turn and walk away. For them, the parade is over. I find it peaceful and restorative.

It is at this point that someone will suggest that next year we join in behind them, and everyone enthusiastically agrees. We will have a float of our own, label it "The Coronado Underground" and sit in lotus position meditating, occasionally filling the silence with OM.

We never do it. But we delight ourselves in thinking of it.

We don't think about having a float because we feel that yoga makes us better than anyone, or to make a point. In fact, we notice by living with and rubbing up against people, ideas and culture so different from our own, that there continues to be a need for greater and greater awareness and compassion within us. We also notice that this more challengingly gained awareness and compassion lead to more serenity, more contentment, and more love.

We enjoy the play and the dance of yoga. So when we see people creating floats to carry and express their core beliefs, we feel inspired to do the same – to float on a float in a state of Pure Being. What a way to celebrate Independence Day - and independence as we experience it!

Yoga Sutra 3.55: Sattva Purushayoh Suddhisamaye Kaivalyam

Freedom is when the mind has complete identity with the Perceiver.ⁱ

We do truly have so much to be grateful for in America. We have many, many freedoms that most people around the world do not enjoy. At the same time, by Patanjali's definition how many people in America are really free? How many are truly enjoying their liberty?

So many of our countrymen suffer from mental agitation and can not still the random, oppressive thoughts that keep them awake at night, keep them unfocused, not present, living or working below capacity, and drained. So many of our fellow freedom-lovers have their attention hooked and held by advertisers, employers, politicians, magazines, social and peer groups.

The conditioning is so pervasive that even when we have a daily awareness practice our minds can still wander or easily become hooked again. We meditate, our mind is clear, but then a friend calls, she has had a dramatic day at work and whoop, we are hooked. Sometimes you wonder, whose mind is it anyway?

When we have lost the ability to direct our thoughts freely, we are not free. On the other hand, when we come to realize, either due to physical pain, emotional instability or uncontrollability, mental agitation, or simple curiosity, that there is another way, that we can unplug from the great "Matrix" of human *dukha* (suffering, or "that which constricts the heart"ⁱⁱ), we begin on the path of Yoga.

We continue on that path with Asana that strengthens and purifies our bodies and begins to still mind. Through Pranayama, we purify our more subtle bodies, grow energy, and increase our skills of concentration. With Mantra we project our minds to a higher energy field, shifting the vibration of our body at a cellular level, affording even greater functioning of the mind/body system as well as greater clarity, perception and stability.

Eventually we develop a body, a mind and the energy to sit quietly in meditation. Through this we begin to notice a witness – as if something ethereal but powerful is sitting in the back of the mind observing. We begin to realize that this presence is there all the time observing everything - thoughts, feelings, even the emptiness.

Finally, we merge with that presence. We become the witness. We completely lose any self or ego identity and we are nothing but the Perceiver. This is *Kaivalya*, or absolute freedom.

Few of us go all the way to *Kaivalya* with our Yoga, but Yoga is a liberation practice and many of us do have an experience of *Moksha*, or liberation, at one time or another in Svasana. Sometimes, whether it was just the right practice, or we are in just the right space, Svasana can be an experience of pure freedom. We lose awareness of the body, the breath becomes almost still, and our mind is just empty and spacious. Or we focus on the light in the heart or the third eye and in an instant we see and we feel nothing but light.

This is freedom. This is the freedom I celebrate every Fourth of July and this is the freedom I want for America, for all Americans, and for all of humanity.

I hope you have an inspired Independence Day. Wherever you are, I hope you experience Moksha. If enough of us share the same fervor for Moksha and Kaivalya that our neighbors in Coronado have for their idea of freedom, we may just make that parade after all – and we will have floats filled with people in Svasana!

Oh sweet liberation...

Laura Plumb
July 1st, 2006

ⁱ Yoga Sutras by Patanjali, interpreted by TKV Desikachar from his book, *The Heart of Yoga*.

ⁱⁱ Krishnamacharya