



# Nadam and Indian Art of Music ~ David Life talk

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Focus:Nadam

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**Jeannine** (director, Jivamukti Yoga Toronto)

And now for the other introduction. David has come here and has been traveling around quite a bit this past year. We feel really happy that you have come here to teach us this week-end. I would like to thank you for coming here ...we always feel your presence here with us, but when you actually are here...Thank you so much for coming.

**David Life**

Maybe if you don't mind we could start with a few minutes of silence. Just a quiet meditation. Sit straight for one or two minutes. Just to begin to see your way through the clutter that might be there and allow some spaciousness to come. Let's OM first.

*OM. OM. OM.*

*lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu*

*lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu*

*lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu*

*may all beings everywhere*

*be happy and free,*

*and may the thoughts, words, and actions of my own life*

*contribute in some way*

*to that happiness and to that freedom for all*

*OM shantih shantih shantih*

Two minutes of silence, going beyond words.

(meditation)

*OM*

I wanted to thank everyone for coming tonight. Its very nice to see old friends and new friends alike. I was wondering what to talk about tonight, and why not speak about theme of the month. Nada Yoga. You've all been getting classes about Nada Yoga this month, so maybe someone can tell me what Nada Yoga means? Anyone.

*(students) Yoga of sound. Unstruck Sound (anahata nadam)*

Those two examples are really great because what we do when we study sound in yoga is we go from the sounds we experience with our ears in the world the struck sound, and we refine our ability to listen and perceive correctly and travel to the unstruck sound. And that really is the task of the Nada Yogi.



Copy I think a lot of times Nada Yoga is equated with great musicians. As it should be, For example someone refers to Ravi Shankar as a great Nadi Yogi. Someone who has dedicated their life to the ability to listen, and refining their ability to them play music for desired effect, particular effect. There are many different musicians who you would consider great masters and truly and certainly from Indian tradition many of the great musicians have had to endure lives of great intense study and dedicated no more or less than any yogi has subjected themselves to in any other way.

In India the art of music is divided into three categories. First and most important is voice. The second, also important but less so than the voice, is the ability to play music, using a musical instrument. The third aspect to the art of music in India is dance. It is considered an aspect of music. What I want to speak about more directly is what all this has to do with asana practice or meditation practice. How does this ability to refine outer listening either in types of music, changing it from music that maybe amplifies negative aspects of our temperament, trading that for music that is uplifting and spiritually evolving. And then taking that refinement, taking that ability to hear and to deeper levels inside until we hear the sound the permeates all the other sounds.

In the Indian art of music, this first category, the ability to sing or the voice, the nature of the voice, the nature and quality and sound of the voice, is the most important aspect of music. And for good reason. In all the spiritual traditions we find generally a high regard for the word. In Christianity we have in the bible the first was the word and the word was God. So there is an acknowledgement that sound or vibration is the essence of material existence. That all that we see around us is little bundles of energy vibrating at different rates whether we're looking at another person, or one of these columns, or a car down on the street. It is all essential the same ingredients just vibrating at different rates. So the rate of vibration is sad to be the essence of the thing, it's vibratory essence. And that vibration is a sound. As sound that is distinctive to each material object. So a study of their essential nature, of the essential nature of the world, the essential nature of ourselves, is really a study of sound. We first need to establish common ground in order to deepen our investigation.

The voice is really an interesting thing. It has so much in it. For example, if there were several people in the other room each saying the same sentence. By the sound in their voice we could get a lot of information. We could know how old they were. In other words, if a very young person speaking in the other room, we would know by a certain quality in their voice that it was a young person. If it was a teen, we could probably tell we could probably tell that too. We could tell if it was a middle aged person, and certainly we could tell an elderly voice by the special quality their voice has which is special to their age.

The same thing is true really for spiritual practice. As your practice unfolds, you will find your voice changing. Certainly there is an ability to control the volume and pitch, but more precisely when you find you have the ability to say what you mean and say what you mean very directly and meaningfully, you know the essence, some how you have boiled it down to the essence of the sound. You have taken away the extraneous parts. You have taken away the apologies. Taken the anger and what's left is the essential message that you wanted to speak.



Voice is really a refinement of breath. So that you have certain sounds with the breath. (*Examples*) Various types of breaths that we have, have a meaning to it, a meaning to the breath. All the words do is take that to a higher level of refinement. So that the breath itself, carries a lot of meaning when you attach or present a word with the breath behind it, it adds a certain degree of potential to that breath. Certainly when you, in all cultures and religions, we find a high value placed on the name, the name of God. And truly all the names are unspeakable but we have some names we can use which the wise ones have said are close to the right name. But when you present a breath and on that breath is riding a name of the Divine, and aspect of the Divine, it has great power of potential. It has potential to unite or divide, It can be used as a curse or a blessings. It is up to the person and what the put in the breath that that name flows on what the result of it might be.

So when we say the first and most important aspect of music in India is voice, and we realize that we realize voice is really a refinement of breath, then we can begin to understand the entry point in asana and meditation practice for this study of sound, this Nada Yoga. So that we all realize when we are doing an asana practice, we are working with our breath. When we sit quietly, we notice the breath flowing in and out, we are working with our breath. And we're listening to our breath, we are having a high level of consciousness and awareness of the ease with which the breath flows. And hopefully we are having an awareness of the tension that is floating on that breath or why we're breathing in any moment in time. That truly, I think, is one very important reason or link between asana or meditation practice and the study of the yoga of sound.

You know, any great singer that you listen to, whether it is Bob Dylan or Pavarotti, when they are on all you hear is the breath. Those words are riding on each breath in such a way so as to bring an exulted experience to the presence of that/ There is such a close link between the breath and the intention, and the word or lyric. In mundane ways we could say '*listen to how long they held that note*'. Really what we are admiring is the ability to give duration to the breath. And certainly all of us have respect for that ability to control the breath, to control its duration. That is part and parcel of the yoga practice.

The second aspect of music of music in India, the playing of music instruments, there are of course a lot of parallels to the yoga practice. We speak of tuning our instrument, speaking of the body as a vehicle or instrument of transformation. And the importance of being able to remove superficiality, to remove blockages in the form of emotions or angers or various unknowing of the self within the body as we come closer to a more pure state of being, a pure state of knowing, then our instrument is said to be tuned. If you look at musical instruments, often they are shaped like human bodies. If you look at a cello, or Indian instruments like sitar. The great example is given that when Buddha discovered the Middle Path he was watching a musician tighten the strings of an instrument. Buddha realized if it was wound too tight, it didn't produce a good sound. If it was too loosely wound, it produced no sound at all. This is the Buddha's revelation of the Middle Path being the only viable path for yogic practices. So there are many parallels between the playing of the instrument and what we do in an asana class. We literally play our instrument. And we refine our ability to play. Even sitting for meditation practice, there are lots of obstacles to get past. many of which are linked with the instruments' inability to take a seat and hold it gracefully over a period of time. This is something you work on and develop a greater ability in, you practice with your instrument.



Lastly there is the element of dance. Dance of course is associated with rhythm. And rhythm of course being a very important aspect of music. Rhythm is an one way that human beings, whether hitting two rocks together or later on became a tabla or a bass guitar, in any case, it was a way to experience the beating of the heart. A way to experience the stomping of the feet. And a way to potentialize those inner beats, inner rhythms. Of course when we move in an asana practice and most especially move in a flowing series of movements, that are repeated over time, we start to begin to find a rhythmic element of a yoga practice. And we start to tune the breath and heart rate to those movements.

Many of you have probably experienced in classes where music is played during the class. You know that sometimes the music can be helpful and other times it can be sort of a drag. Its an interesting experiment to begin to figure out what exactly is it about the music that makes it helpful or not helpful in a yoga asana practice. Some things I think are helpful is when the music or rhythm of the music matches what would be a good breathing practice through an asana practice. So that, rather than counting with numbers your breath, you have automatically a beat in the music that automatically times your breath without using numbers. So its more akin to feeling, a feeling experience of the asana and music working together rather than more of a linear experience of asana from initiation to completion 1, 2, 3, 4, 5... That's helpful; Certainly the aspect if elevating lyrics, lyrics that perhaps contain the name. I think we're going have some of that here in a little bit. When these elements are incorporated into the yoga asana practice, it helps remind us of our intentions, of why we want to do a warrior pose, or why we would want to stand on our head. That why being to find out why we are here at all. To create an expansive experience of being in the world rather than a contracted experience.

That's all I wanted to say in tan introductory way about Nada Yoga, about what it has to do with music and what all that has to do with the yoga asana practice. To summarize, we refine our ability to breath, we refine the instrument that we use, and then we dance with it. Those aspects are equally important in Indian music, and in a yoga asana practice.

Any questions? It doesn't have to be about Nada Yoga.  
Should we go right to the music?

It took me 10 hours to get here [*Toronto*] from New York, on an airplane. How, you might ask? I think I wasn't singing the right song! No, just delays. But, you know, it seems to be, I just came back from Colorado and it took two days to get back. It's kind of the way things are going in the air transportation industry. It's a bit crazy, I guess it'll sort itself out. But we're all used to a certain thing. I was listening to people on the plane as we were sitting on the runway for a long time. Mainly complaining to each other, to stewardess, people across the aisle. Complaining about things not being as good as they used to be. It never used to take this long to go from New York to Toronto. So forth and so on. It's interesting listening to it how we don't just do that on airplanes waiting on runways...we do it in our lives in general. We use the words we speak to reinforce or hold up the thoughts we would like to keep in our mind. Most people unfortunately do it unconsciously. They don't realize they are having a negative thought in their mind, a judgmental thought, a thought that isn't leading anyway, certainly isn't helping the world be a better place a happier place.



And then in order to keep that thought prominent they'll start talking about it to other people, and get people to agree them, to support that thought and support it. Then other people across the aisle and anyone else they can get to join in. And it's an interesting process to go through. I didn't notice anyone on that airplane trying to cheer things up. Telling jokes, being happy, sharing their bottle of water. but that's a choice we have. Not only in that airplane, but on the jumbo jet of life. We can choose the words that we speak and what they represent in terms of the state of mind and intention. We can choose to make it a happy joyful place or we can choose to make it a hell realm. That's our choice as individuals. Each of us are empowered to stand up on that airplane, make everyone laugh, share your newspaper, whatever it might be, or to spoil about the whole thing, to talk about how terrible it is to be stuck on an airplane with a 10 or so amazing beings. Its not such a bad thing. Because you don't know. The people sitting across the aisle from you could be very interesting if you just talked about something other than the airplane. We need to do that in our lives, certainly as yogis, we need to carefully select the words we choose to speak so they create and sustain a world that is nice to live in, that is helpful for everyone involved. I truly think we can do that. And I'm happy to be here amongst people who are interested in doing that.

Do you have a question now? *(laughs)*

*What did you do on the plane?*

What did I do? I was listening to everyone else judgmentally. *(laughs)* No, I was reflecting on that too... what am I doing here being a pompous yoga teacher sitting here judging everyone else's speech! But I was trying to watch it all happening, including my happening. That's truly the first step forward. Being able to step outside of your own circumstance, to see it occurring including your own part in it. And then some change is possible. Until you are able to step back from it nothing is really possible, so it's a baby step but it is a step. I guess the next step is to stand up and sing a song.

Maybe we should go to some chanting of the name. Thank you all.

[*Kirtan begins*]

