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**OBSTACLES? HOW TO REMOVE AND TRANSFORM THEM**

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*~ Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha ~*

I have been thinking a good deal about obstacles, our relationship to obstacles, and the "removal of" obstacles lately. I've also been considering some recent personal experiences with obstacles and I've been frequently chanting the name of Ganapati (also known as Govinda or Ganesha). The Indian/Hindu representation of Ganapati is one of a strong and powerful elephant. This image is designed to remind us that we have the power within to remove all obstacles. (At a later time, I will write more about deities and the various Indian/Hindu representations of the Ultimate).

As a psychologist, I frequently work with clients who feel stuck, impeded, and mired in hindrances, obstructions, and difficulties, sometimes for years. I believe it to be "magical thinking" and overly simplistic to think that one could chant to a deity that embodies and represents the removal of obstacles in order to remove all obstacles. And yet...

Kaliji has said numerous times that thoughts follow energy and energy follows thoughts, thereby encouraging us to be mindful of our thought content and the effects of thoughts. The field of interpersonal neurobiology also supports the idea that the brain is in constant evolution, even after our formative childhoods, as our neural pathways continuously respond to and rewire themselves based on our experiences, thoughts, and relationships. Yogic perspective and practice further suggest that if we calm the chatter and reduce clutter, Truth is revealed. It makes sense, therefore, that if we calm our physical-psycho-emotional-spiritual-emotional-

energetic self and align it with positive intentions (as well as calming and positively influencing our environment over time) that hindrances and difficulties will lessen (and we will also better deal with those that arise).

Here is a simple example: I take a roundtrip 10-minute drive on a regular basis. Recently, I have had several interesting experiences with traffic obstacles on this route. On more than one occasion, I have had a regular radio station playing in one direction of the drive only to find that I encountered every red light and several construction zones where I had to wait for the flaggers to change their "stop" sign to "slow." In the other direction of the drive (not always the same direction or in the same order), I have had a CD playing with chants to *Ganapati/Ganesha*, only to find that I had green lights and flaggers indicating "slow" immediately, thus a smooth obstacle-free drive. Again, I believe it to be overly simplistic to think that if we simply have our radios set to "remove obstacles," we will not encounter any. Yet sound and music can alter our moods and our thinking. It is not inconceivable that the sound vibrations and intentions with which we approach situations make a difference...

It also seems that something is an obstacle partially based on how we see it. For example, certain "significant" difficulties that I have faced in the past (for example, depression, self-image problems, negative body image, worry about failure) were truly challenging and seemed insurmountable at times. They have, however, ended up being great teachers and have made me who I am today (as a person, a therapist, and a yoga teacher). I feel grateful to have faced and moved into and through such difficulties.

I also watch how others' encounter obstacles. During yoga practice, students move to the "edge" of a posture or face negative self-evaluations as they arise. I attempt to support my fellow practitioners in observing these challenges as non-judgmentally as possible, inquiring into "bigger picture" concerns. Is this challenge in the thighs who you are? How far into the thigh stretch is helpful and when does it become hurtful? Is the negative judgment accurate? What is helpful in it and what is worth letting go? Who are you really? Recently I had the chance to observe another yoga teacher's nervousness when she found that I would be her student, as well as a number of other teachers and advanced yogis. She acknowledged her nervousness, moved into it, and did not let it stop her. By the end of the class, she had released it and she and all of her students thoroughly benefited from the class, relaxing deeply and releasing into yoga (as profound, transcendent union). The experience was transformative. It was also a representation of the way in which obstacles are our teachers. We all continuously learn from ourselves, others, experiences. Gurus (teachers) are everywhere.

Some obstacles and challenges are quite temporary (i.e., traffic), some endure for a time (i.e., a job loss or financial difficulties), and some are much less changeable, perhaps even permanent. For example, our dear, departed TriYoga sister, Debbi Gardner, faced a major and eventually life-altering cancer diagnosis in the last few

years. Even in the face of death, she transformed her own and our lives by demonstrating the ability to accept this final transition, prepare for it, and embody and express love. At her memorial, we were blessed by the gift of love as she had found amazing, beautiful, and deeply touching ways to express it from beyond the grave. Through her perspective and example, her "passing over" was no longer an obstacle or something to be feared, but another journey, a transition, a departing from this to the "other side." (For more on Debbi's transition, visit <http://www.debsway.net>). Since none of us live an obstacle-free life, it seems worth examining our relationship to challenges - large and small - including the final challenge of accepting our own mortality, acknowledging that the embodied life we lead is temporary.

*"We are all one, no separation."*

*- Debbi Gardner*

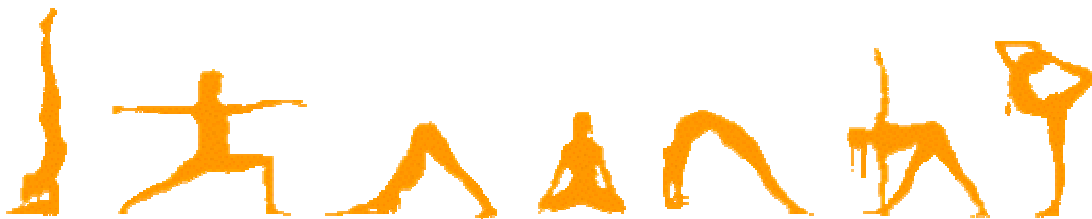
*Postscript:*

I thought that I had completed this article last night, saving it for a final re-read this evening. But, of course, contemplation of obstacles has its hazards, particularly if we believe that thoughts follow energy and energy follows thoughts... Perhaps Krishna and Ganapati got together for a good laugh at me today; perhaps this was a cosmic test... Our child-caretaker, who is truly reliable, unexpectedly had a mandatory and important appointment that could not be rescheduled in New York City this morning. My husband, between night shifts and ill with a fever and chills for the last two days, could not be asked to take on the children. I scrambled to find an alternative arrangement for them and shifted my client schedule to make it work. As the day progressed, it became apparent that she would not make it home by mid-afternoon as I had hoped. In the last moments before yoga class, I thought to ask a regular Tuesday evening student, certified in TriYoga, to teach class for me (thank you, Marj!) so that I could return home and relieve the high school student who had already been caring for the children for 6 hours (thank goodness for his spring break!). As I prepared to leave the yoga studio, knowing my class was in good hands, a small pewter circle next to the figurine of a yogi on my office key chain fell to the ground. I had never paid much attention to this circle. It read "Balance." I and the students still in the waiting room had a good laugh as I said that I had just lost my "Balance." As I laughed my way out of the studio/office, I thought how comic it really was that, as I was writing about obstacles, I was encountering a number of them (albeit relatively innocuous ones, thankfully). I also thought to myself that I had handled the challenges of this day remarkably well (especially given how I might have reacted to them in the past): with relatively little stress, doing what needed to be done to manage the challenges as they arose.

Then... as if to truly tease and test me - to speak loudly from within "have you forgotten already?" - I took the children out for dinner. Our meal was going

splendidly until, for no discernible reason, my littlest one started screaming. SCREAMING, inconsolable SCREAMING. Nothing I could think of to do would appease him - no soothing, no holding, no ignoring, nothing... (I always say that he must be teething when such incomprehensible crying arises). We finished eating as quickly as possible. Then the older one joined in the screaming and crying. We left the premises, my head hung low in embarrassment at the scene and noise that we were creating. In the car, it continued. SCREAMING. I tried to drive quickly, to get home. I tried music. I tried reaching back to pat them. Nothing, just SCREAMING. Then, not believing for a second that it would work or be any different than the other music I had on, I put on "Gam Gam Ganapataye Namaha." And the screaming and crying ceased, almost immediately, and did not start up again. WOW! (Have you forgotten already? I guess sometimes we just need to be continuously reminded to truly learn and trust).

*~ Jai Ganesh! Jai, Jai Ganesh! Jai! ~*



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