

WENDY IN SPAIN & THE Onion Meditation

BY WENDY BATCHELOR



In September, 2015 I was invited by IYTA Spain to present again at their Teacher Training Course in Barcelona. As a member of the IYTA Diploma of Yoga Teaching Committee in Australia and now living part-time in southern France, I was delighted to be able to accept this invitation for the second time from Ramon Ribo (IYTA Teacher Training Committee, Spain). I was also keen to see the Spanish trainees again in their fourth and final year.

Opportunities for a closer working relationship between Australia and Spain are always celebrated, as are all IYTA's relationships with its international branches and fellow members. IYTA Spain was founded by Maria Teresa Martinez in 1975, and there has been a continuous close relationship since between Spain and Australia. These international relationships with our distant yoga 'family' are part of what makes IYTA unique.

Ramon Ribo and I met when I was President of IYTA in the early 90's and he was visiting Australia. He then represented Spain at the International Congress at Uluru in 1997, and I attended the anniversary of IYTA Spain in 2000.

Ramon has continued to work on the Teacher Training Committee and is a lecturer on the course, so it was lovely to be invited to share the presentation of a session on pranayama and meditation with him. He was presenting a pranayama session on *Surya Bhedana Pranayama* (the sun-piercing breath), an advanced pranayama practice. I was invited to complement this with a meditation or contemplation that would follow this. He would translate into Spanish for me.

The following is an account of our shared session that might inspire:

Ramon had given one of Patanjali's sutras (below) to the students to contemplate over their summer break as preparation for this session:

Patañjli's sutra II 50-53:

- The breathing movements are expiration, inspiration and suspension. When you focus the mind in this process, a subtle and elongated breath is obtained. (II-50)
- Then breathing transcends the plane of consciousness (II-51)
- And the obstacles to light, dissipate (II-52)
- And the mind is prepared for various forms of concentration (II-53)



This sutra was perfect preparation for the Surya Bhedana pranayama that Ramon would teach. I complemented this practice that renders the mind clear and diamond sharp, with a contemplation/meditation that ‘pierces the veils’ of illusion/*maya* called the Onion Game in Gnana Yoga.

The pranayama practice of *Surya Bhedana* is a perfect preparation for this meditation, as it is tapas for the mind and frees up so much prana/energy and heat that can be focused like a piercing beam into depths of contemplation to gain a greater awareness of who we are.

Two years prior I had been invited to present a session on *Pratyahara* – sensory withdrawal – for these Spanish teacher trainees. They remembered me as the Australian teacher who brought the tortoise and the colander (!) with her as her teaching aids. We laughed about that and they wondered what I would do this time. I confessed that I had forgotten the onions this time for my demonstration! So, in this open and light-hearted way, after the pranayama with Ramon, we began the deep contemplation/meditation of the Onion Game to ‘pierce the veils of illusion/*maya*’.

THE ONION GAME¹

This ancient ‘Game’ peels back the layers of who we think we are, in order to experience some of the reality of our expansive formless self and who we really are beyond the egoic self. Like peeling an onion layer by layer, we move through layers of external identification to uncover what lies at our core. The contemplation question for this Game is “Who am I?” In preparation, we spent a few minutes in silent meditation contemplating this question, to sow the seed of focus for the mind. When this exercise is done in pairs it can become a powerful exercise to drop to even deeper layers, when one asks the other ‘Who are you?’ I demonstrated this with Ramon so that they could see the process.

IN PAIRS

To work in pairs one asks the other the question, ‘Who are you?’ and after each response, the one asking says ‘thank you’. And after a few mindful moments he/she asks again ‘Who are you?’ repeating this question in a mindful way, over and over, so the other with closed eyes or open eyes can contemplate it without judgment (*vairagya*) and allow the spontaneous answers to come and be spoken. This goes on for about five minutes, with astounding insights and realisation for some. It is then repeated for the other partner to experience.

I explained in my introduction to the practice what may be encountered: at first the normal roles and self-images of who we are come to mind – girl/boy, student/teacher, yogi, mother/father, daughter/son, wife/husband, adventurer, writer, seeker, friend, worker, player, musician, lover, etc, etc – or nothing. Or an aspect of themselves – naughty, kind, judgmental, patient, or they may experience emotions passing through – sad, happy, angry, afraid, excited, calm, etc. Then as awareness deepens and the mind empties of these self-identifications, being part of something bigger often happens – the sky, the rain, the earth, the water, the wind, the trees, sunlight, etc. Then, as identification with forms falls away, some may experience that we are beyond form – energy, love, joy, peace, light, expansive, without limitations, spacious. For some, there may be Oneness – the realisation that they are nothing and everything – a glimpse of *Samadhi*.

Sometimes the mind stops and no identification at all can be found. We are in our Ground of Being and expansiveness in peace.

After sharing in pairs, I invited the students to enter into silent meditation again for several minutes, to continue the enquiry on this one focus – Who am I?

Sometimes a deeper insight or awareness comes. I then brought the meditation session to a close and we discussed what they experienced in the large group.

I was delighted to hear the next day that this experience had touched some of them, and for some it had led them to laughter and humour. I was delighted with this. It reminded me of the ancient tale of a yogi's conversation with God about his journey to find out who he is. He had travelled through the many 'lands' of sadness, happiness, grief, love, pain, joy, suffering, freedom, anger, ecstasy, loss, success, transformation, birth, death and rebirth, through many roles, and through many lives, and so on, (all these layers of identification had been integrated and gone beyond) and he asked what more can there be? God answered that the best land is reserved for last – the land of Humour and Laughter!!!

One never knows what the Onion Game will reveal about oneself and life and what one encounters behind the veils of *maya*. This is the journey of yoga that we will all take, to know who we really are – and to be free.

My husband and I were guests at a lovely lunch with the teacher training committee and the President of IYTA Spain Maria Ballesté Huguet and the TTC Coordinator M^a Àngels Ruiz Torruellas. It was such a joy to re-connect with IYTA Spanish friends and to be with them again, working together in the spirit and love of yoga – knowing that what originally brought us all together was the IYTA.

I would like to take this opportunity to say a personal heart-felt thank you to IYTA Spain for their generosity and friendship and on behalf of IYTA Australia I thank you for your commitment to the International Yoga Teachers Association. Our relationship is most treasured. Thank you to Ramon Ribo for his dedication and work to bring us together for such wonderful sharing and for his enduring friendship. Until next time!

Wendy is past President of IYTA, and has served on COM and other IYTA committees over many years. She was the Coordinator of the IYTA Uluru Convention "Silence in the Heart" in 1997 that brought IYTA members from all over the world together in celebration of yoga. She has lectured on the IYTA Diploma of Yoga Teaching since 1981 and presently leads the Philosophy team. She lives and teaches in Australia and Europe.

