



Releasing Willpower From Movement, by Gert van Leeuwen

Initially, I used to move from willpower; I was concerned only with results. In retrospect, I realize that this created a sort of tunnel vision; my consciousness was debilitatingly limited. I allowed myself to be driven by the wants and automatic patterns I had developed in day-to-day activities. Eventually, I became rather tired of these patterns and wanted to change my behavior through my yoga practice -- and also the development of relaxation.

The most important realization for me was that WILLPOWER IS DIRECTED THROUGH THINKING, WHILE RELAXATION CAN ONLY BE FELT.Â This realization and the experience of movement being initiated by relaxing certain muscles gave me enormous focus.

However, I did not know exactly how to develop this focus: should I approach it through my ego-bound decisiveness or through something else, something in my body? I noticed that I could couple the feeling of letting go with my breathing. That worked. It created a shift in my behavior, a shift from an ego-bound, cognitive control (willpower) to an emotionally bound, physical control whereby the focus of the movement was maintained. I developed the routine of connecting myself with essential technical points of attention in every _asana_ movement -- with relaxation as the central point within these directives.

I felt that I had found the solution for a complicated problem: if I allowed myself to complete the asana purely from feeling, then there was a risk that my technique would suffer, but if I focused on technically correct movement, willpower would take over. As it turned out, neither happened: I was able to maintain the correct technique and remain relaxed. This also became the way for me to release my tunnel vision. My thoughts became quiet and I was able to view the experiences of my body in an open, respectful manner. Through this experience with consciousness, and because I confronted my tension in an entirely new way, I was able to attain a new, higher level of consciousness. I was able to approach my tension from a feeling of relaxation together with a positive contact with my body. The "I"-focused, old manner, which was based on desires and driven by willpower, felt hard and aggressive when compared to this new experience.Â

I got the feeling that I was no longer the initiator of the movement: I felt how my body reacted to the focus of relaxation and movement initiated through my breath. I was able to observe this peacefully, without interfering, like an interested spectator.Â

AT A CERTAIN MOMENT, I FELT THAT MY BODY ITSELF STARTED TO ORGANIZE THE MOVEMENT. It was an awe-inspiring and, above all, totally physical moment.

My body underwent a transformation, and I became very warm. I felt light and full of energy and sensed a transparent connection with the space around me. This new development in my consciousness felt like a lightbulb suddenly went off. I was so surprised by this that my thoughts immediately took over, causing the experience to end. Luckily, I found that by starting over at the beginning (body consciousness) and without longing for this particular end result, I could replicate the experience.Â

I was less surprised the second time and so was able to lengthen the experience. It felt like an unsteady (but not frightening) connection with myself. Slowly, I regained a clearer overview of the situation without losing the physical sensations. This 'gathering' of myself felt complicated because I was eager to return to my habitual manner of movement -- namely, control. And control was the one factor that immediately stopped the experience. When I was able to continue moving without losing the sensations in my body, I once again experienced a large shift in consciousness. This could be described as higher consciousness.

Such experiences on a regular basis may well change your point of view in life. You will become more compassionate toward other people and the world in general, and you will cease to feel that you are alone. Returning to your self is like coming home.