



September 2008 Contemplation Theme

# Consciousness Becomes You

by Rama Berch

Consciousness makes you glow. I can tell when someone is having a deep inner experience of their own divine essence because they are so beautiful. In this way yoga fulfills the children's song, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine..." *Svaroopo*<sup>®</sup> yoga is designed to systematically dissolve the blockages to that light, so you can experience your own radiance more and more fully, as well as share it with the world. Along the way, one of the things that happens is you become more radiant, younger and more beautiful.

Your body loves consciousness. Consciousness is the best health tonic, the best joint lubricant, the best skin lotion, the best beauty cream, the best perfume. When you are based in your own essence, your body moves fluidly and easily and your wrinkles melt away. Consciousness becomes you. You know this by the opposite as well: when you have lost yourself and are feeling scattered, needy or scared, your body is tight and your face is shriveled, drawn and old. How wonderful that the world can take one look at you and tell exactly where you are — in yourself or lost again. When you are grounded, centered and open to your own essence, it shows. Consciousness becomes you, by which I mean it makes you beautiful.

The reason it works is because consciousness is your own being. Your inner experience of your Self is essential to your health and well-being because your Self is yourself. If you don't have frequent and deep experiences of Self, it's like water trying to get along without being wet, or fire trying to burn without heat. When you are not based in consciousness, you are not yourself. You have to have the inner experience of your own Self, or you are simply not you.

There are three things you need to know about consciousness. First, you are consciousness-itself, of which I just reminded you. Second, consciousness is being you, being everyone and being everything that exists, all at the same time. Consciousness is having a great time being the whole universe and that which is beyond the universe.

The Paramaarthasaara by Abhinavagupta describes it this way:

*ajnana-timira-yogaad ekam api svam svabhaavam aatmaanam*

*graahya-graahaka-naanaa-vaichitryenaavabudhyeta (26)*

By taking on the veil of unknowingness, Shiva, though one by his very nature, knows himself as many, in the form of the infinite variety of limited subjects and objects.

This says that ultimate ever-existent reality, called Shiva in the texts of Kashmir Shaivism, has chosen to manifest as the universe. This means that Shiva (consciousness) becomes the universe and everything in it, including you. Consciousness becomes you, meaning that you are made of consciousness-itself. This is the second meaning of our contemplation theme, "Consciousness Becomes You."

In the Pratyabhijnahrdyam, Kshemaraja beautifully describes Shiva as being "universe-bodied," (*jagat-sharira*) meaning that the universe is the form of the formless. This is very different than saying that the universe is an illusion, or that everything is in your mind, or that this was created by a supreme being who oversees it still. Instead, the stars, clouds, flowers and even your own body and mind are all forms of the formless. Somehow, it is probably easier to see it in the stars and in the flowers.

One of the great secrets of developing a deeper understanding of yoga teachings is to take each teaching personally. Instead of reading, "Shiva has become the universe," you need to read (and even say out loud), "Shiva has become me." Shiva has become you, not only by taking birth at a certain time decades ago, but Shiva is still being you — making your heart beat, making your breath move, making your eyes able to see and your mind able to think. Shiva has chosen to become rivers, mountains, elephants, peacocks, whales, ants and even you. The problem is that you think too little of yourself. It is time to allow yourself to admit that you are truly divine. "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine..."

Consciousness wants to be you, specifically and individually you. Consciousness is having a good time being you, even when you are not having a good time. Think of it this way: have you ever gone to see a movie that you knew would make you cry? You can say that you actually paid money to go do something that would make you feel bad. Why? Because feeling bad can feel so good. In this way, you can understand that Shiva is having a good time being you, even when you are not having a good time. There is, however, still one problem with this: you are not having a good time. This is true for too much of your day and for too much of your life. If you are the ultimate ever-existent reality, why aren't you happy more of the time? Why aren't you in bliss all the time?

The reason is because you aren't really being you. You keep trying to be someone else. You have taken on so much of other people, you don't even know what is you and what is not. It began when you were a child; you learned how to walk and how to talk by watching the people around you. At school you had more role models, both helpful and harmful. You still watch other people, to see how you want to be, but hopefully you are working with better role models now. You need to find your own unique,

distinct, individual identity, which is your Shiva-ness as well. You need to find yourself, because when you find yourself, you find your Self.

This is one of the most important things that *Svaroopa*<sup>®</sup> yoga helps you with, by beginning the spinal release at your tailbone. Energetically, Shiva manifests the universe by creating matter from energy, through a process of contraction or condensation. In the human body, that energy condenses from top to bottom, ending up just below the tip of your tailbone in the first chakra (energy center). When you do the poses that open up your body physically, you are also opening and balancing this energy center, which grounds you in your own distinct, unique, individual identity. You gain great clarity on who you are in a very practical and undeniable way.

At the same time, this tailbone release opens you up in another way, which brings us to point number three — your own Self is not far away from you. The tailbone release gives you access to the deeper dimension of your own being, which is so close to you. Your Self is closer than your breath.

Every thought takes you away from your Self. Every time you make an effort to be better, to do more, or to become someone or something, your own efforting shuts down the “who” that you already are. Now this doesn’t mean that you should stop using your mind or that you should stop living your life. You must do your part in this world; that’s your responsibility. You also have a right to express yourself by living your life to the fullest, in a way that blossoms forth the divinity that is hidden inside you. When you realize how to do this, you discover that it is so easy that it is completely effortless. All the efforting is gone. So how do you get there?

You must have a healthy ego. The tailbone release helps you heal the old ego-wounds and cultivate a healthy ego. Yoga is not about getting rid of the ego. Instead, you clarify or purify your ego, so it becomes like a picture window that is so clear you cannot tell the glass is there. The radiance of sunlight shines through clear glass without being diminished by layers of dust or patterns in the grime. Your ego needs to be washed clean so your own inner radiance shines through. Right now, it is smudged with memories of who you used to be. It is layered over with fears and desires, all of which are based in what other people think of you. The transparency of your ego is filmed over with confusion and self-doubt. All of it shows up in your body as well. *Svaroopa*<sup>®</sup> yoga clears it away, bit by bit, layer by layer, all at the same time, through core opening.

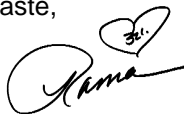
The phrase “core opening” has multiple meanings. First, it means you are doing poses to release tension in the deepest muscle layers in your body, your spinal muscles. This decompresses your spine beginning at your tailbone, creating space for your vertebrae, discs and nerve roots, as well as taking pressure off your internal organs and glands. Along with relieving pain, it is incredibly health-giving. If this were the only benefit of core opening, this practice would be a miraculous way of working with the body. But it wouldn’t actually be yoga, because yoga is about the “something more.”

“Core opening” also means that you are opening to the experience of your own essence. The opening is both physical and more than physical. Each time you open your spine, you also open yourself to your own core essence, which is the real reason that *Svaroopa*<sup>®</sup> yoga works so well. Not only do you get health-giving physical benefits, but consciousness heals you, transforms you and illumines you from the inside out. The radiance of your own being can shine through when you dissolve the layers that have been blocking its light.

You have to get out of the way to let that light shine through. What you actually have to get out of the way is the stuff that isn’t you. Your desires and fears block your divinity. Your need to prove yourself or your desire to be better than others is not only demeaning to yourself, but it also says you don’t respect the others you are trying to best. Your desire to hide or your impulse to impress is a way of hiding from your own essential light. “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine...” doesn’t mean you take a flashlight and glare it into other people’s eyes! That is *himsa* — harming. Your radiance is a gentler, more illuminative light.

One of the ways you know that you are finding your core essence is that you feel like yourself. It’s so easy. You feel open on the inside, which makes you able to be open to those around you. You are interested in life and participating fully without being exhausted or drained. You have a way of communicating your genuine caring, sometimes with words and sometimes in silence, but you are not so limited in whom you care about — you care about everyone. You live in one of the seven stages of bliss, with the light shining through your eyes, through your whole body and your whole being — all the time. Just like the song says, “I’m gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine *all the time*.” All you need to do is more yoga.

Namaste,



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