



February 2014 Contemplation: Body, Mind & More #2

## Exploring Your Own Heart

by Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati & Vidyadevi Stillman

Your heart is an essential and amazing part of your body. It is a hard-working internal organ, pumping blood (containing oxygen, nutrients, hormones, etc.) to every cell of your body, including your skin, your muscles, your other organs and all the way into the cells in your bones. It beats 100,000 times a day, over 35 million times a year. It began beating before you were born! Even if you've had some problems with your heart, it has worked for a long time and is continuing to serve you still.

You could even pause here to say thank you to your own heart. Take a moment, a few breaths and say thank you to your own heart. In that moment of gratitude, you might even feel a feeling in your heart, a tangible feeling inside. Now you're looking at another meaning of the word, "heart."

In English, "heart" also refers to your emotional condition. You talk about your heart when you're having an emotional experience. So many English idioms express this:

- "with all one's heart"
- "to take heart"
- "the child won everyone's heart"
- "to have your heart set on something"
- "to follow your heart"
- and many more...

In everyday conversations, when you use the word "heart," you are usually talking about love and emotions. This means that heart is a very important part of life!

Yet the word "heart" also has a broader meaning, used when we are talking about:

- "the heart of the matter"
- "let's get to the heart of it"
- "to put your heart into it"

Yoga teaches you to put your heart into whatever you are doing. Even businesses want their employees to put their heart into their work. They don't want their employees to become emotional and "wear their heart on their sleeve", but they want their employees to bring some core, some essence or some meaningful quality to their interactions with customers. This is because, when you are a customer, you want the person who is helping you to truly care about helping you.

Yoga's vocabulary agrees with all these definitions of "heart" and more, describing the heart as a gateway to the essence of a human being. Swami Nirmalananda describes it this way:

"What is the essence that is found in every human heart?"

What is it about a human being that, no matter who they are, where they have been and what they have done, that there is still some essence, an essence of vital importance?

Whether we consider convicted criminals on Death Row or a child who is lost in the woods, each one is important.

Each one is a human being.

Each one matters.

There is something in every human.

What do you call that essence, found in every human heart?"

Finding this essence is yoga's goal, clearly described by the sages in the core of yoga's teachings, in the heart of yoga's teachings:

Aasanastha.h sukha.m hrade nimajjati. — "Siva Sutras 3.16

The yogi established in a steady posture easily becomes immersed in the heart.<sup>1</sup>

"Immersed in the heart" does not mean to be immersed in your physical heart or your emotional heart, but to be immersed in the heart of beingness. It's what yoga does for you – immerses you in the heart of

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<sup>1</sup> Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

your own beingness. This is the essential part of every human being, that core essence that yoga names “svaroopa.”

Some yoga poses are called “heart openers,” making people expect that they will become emotional. Instead, when the pose is aligned and propped effectively, you get an inner opening to your deeper essence, called yoga’s heart. Similarly, mantra repetition, chanting, sutra study and meditation do this work in you, especially once you have received Shaktipat.

Yet this sutra is not talking about heart opener poses. This sutra promises that you can use your body to get to your own essence, but the pose you need is the seated pose. This is a very important pose! Your teacher emphasizes your ability to sit in a steady pose with a comfortably upright spine because, when you simply sit, you settle easily into your heart, svaroopa. You sit in your own Self deeply.

This sutra says you don’t merely have an experience, like a glimpse of your Self, but that you become immersed in your heart. It is not like you’ve gotten a little wet while walking in a rainstorm, so you come inside to get dry. When you get “immersed,” it means you are always wet — saturated with your own essence, svaroopa.

Heart-full experiences are essential to life. Without them, life has no meaning. You want to have the feeling of your heart being full in two ways, both being filled by others as well as overflowing with what you have to give. The danger is that emotional fulfillment can become slavery’s ball and chain, or goad and whip — the ways that people try to limit and control others. You already know what it is like to have others try to limit and control you, and you have returned the favor. The problem is that you’ve been looking for the “filling up” or the “overflowing out.” Mistakenly, you call that love, when the inner reservoir is where the love is; the infinity of your own svaroopa is made of love – and more.

Vidyadevi tells of a longtime friend who got married, having already decided she did not want to have children. Within her first year of marriage, she accidentally became pregnant. She was deeply worried as she could not imagine how she was going to love this child, but of course she found that she had plenty of love. A couple of years later, she found herself pregnant again. When they talked, her friend shared that she loved her first child so much she didn’t think she had any more love to give. Well, she found out that she could love both of her children fully. A couple more years passed and she became pregnant with her third child. Again she found that she could love all three with so much love. Her love was endless for her children. Consider, what if she had one or three more – could she love all of them? What is the capacity of the human heart and where does this capacity come from?

“Hrade” in our sutra comes from the Sanskrit word “h.rd” meaning heart. In this sutra, “heart” refers to the ocean of your own immortality. Your heart doesn’t need filling. It is already the ocean: the ocean of your own immortality. When you realize what is there in the core of your being you will recognize

- 1- That ocean is not yours: it is not yours to own, not yours to keep, not yours to control
- 2- You are the beneficiary: the one that benefits the most is you, even when you draw from the bottomless depths to overflow onto others
- 3- It will always be there: the fullness of that ocean will always be there, for you are the ocean of immortality. You will always be there. This is your own Self.

Perhaps now you can see that the amount that flows in and out is merely a trickle compared to what is already there. Most people are measuring the flow and calling it love, but yoga shifts your attention to sitting in the presence and beingness of your own Self, which is the fullness of your own heart. Your heart is everything you think it is, yet it is so much much more. To explore the more, do more yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON “BODY, MIND & MORE,” OUR CONTEMPLATION THEME FOR 2014, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI AND VIDYADEVI STILLMAN OR RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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