



May 2014 Contemplation: Body, Mind & More #5

Embodied Reality

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If we could be there with you, we could ask you a simple question in a very personal way, “Who are you?” What’s the first thing that pops into your mind? Would you say, “I’m a yogi,” or “I’m a wife/husband,” or “I’m a parent?” Instead, what if your very first thought was, “I am Consciousness.”

As a Svaroopi, you are on a path to abiding in svaroopavidya, the experiential knowing of yourself as Consciousness-itself. Once you know, you will never not know. What’s more, you will recognize everyone and everything as an embodiment of the same Divine Reality. This description of your future comes from an ancient yogic text:

Chidaananda laabhe dehaadi.su chetya-maane.svapi. Chidaikaatmya
pratipatti daardhya.m jivamukti.h. — Pratyabhijnahridayam 16

When the bliss of Consciousness is attained, you are established in the permanent identity of Consciousness, while you experience your body and all objects as forms of Consciousness. This is liberation while alive.¹

You don’t yet live in that knowingness all the time. Instead, you get your sense of identity and personal meaning from your body, your relationships, your job, your age, your gender, your skills, etc. Think of it all in a new way: you *have* a body, an age, a job, but these are things you have — not things you are!

All these outer realities are important to you, yet they will inevitably change. You are the unchangeable Reality that is hidden at a deeper level within. Each of your identities is limited compared to who you really are at the deepest level. The sages describe it like the ocean. You are the whole ocean, with each identity being a current in the ocean. When you’re caught up in the stuff of life, you’re caught in a current and are being buffeted by the waves. You must dive deeper into your Self, so you know that you are the whole ocean, including the currents and the waves.

Svaroopa® yoga gives you powerful tastes of this deep, calm, peaceful, blissful, expanded state, because your innermost essence opens up when you decompress your spine. Plus the opening and closing Shavasana in your classes settle you deeper within. In addition, you are used to the halo effect of your practices, the way your yogic state affects how you show up for life: you are nicer to your family; you take difficult things in stride; your internal pressures lessen or dissolve. Unfortunately, they come back. This happens because your state is not yet steady; you are not yet established in svaroopavidya, the experiential knowing of your own Self.

Svaroopa® yoga poses give you a temporary experience of peace and bliss. When you have this experience, you have stepped into in the beginning stages of enlightenment. Then you lose it. So you need to do more yoga, to experience the peace and bliss of your own Self again. And again. And again, every time you do core opening poses.

Instead of experiencing peace and bliss, what if you experience yourself as the source of peace and bliss? This sutra says you can experience this, and that it will be all of the time. How? By doing more yoga. All of yoga’s practices teach you to be a scuba diver, to dive beneath the waves and swim in the vast inner space of consciousness — your own Self. Swamiji describes the process in an informal sutra:

Again, again and again turns into always.

¹ English rendering by Swami Nirmalananda

The practices reliably provide you the experience of your Self as the whole ocean of Consciousness. As you practice longer or do more yoga, these experiences are easier to access and they last for longer periods of time. To attain the permanent state, your most important practice is meditation. Yet it is mantra that gives you meditation, so you must repeat mantra.

If you're interested in improving your body, your most important practice is Ujjayi Pranayama. If you're interested in improving your life, seva (volunteering) is the most important practice. Swamiji says, "So many practices, so little time." You must choose which practices to do with your available time.

Of course you can do all of them, but don't think that the goal is to be doing yoga all the time. This is not about increasing your yoga time so that you can crowd out the other parts of your life, especially the parts that are painful or uncomfortable. This is not about using yoga to withdraw from life and relationships. It's not even about becoming established in a steady state of all-knowing, ever-blissful Beingness. If that were the goal, this wouldn't be a tantric path. This path embraces the whole of life, the whole of Consciousness, recognizing the Divine in the mundane and the mundane as the Divine.

Svaroopa[®] yoga practices are tools to open up your inner experience. They are doorways to finding the whole universe that is within your body. The promise is that, when you open your eyes, you'll remain in that profound inner state. You won't lose your Self when you go back to life. You'll recognize everything you see and every person you meet as another form of concentrated Consciousness, the One Reality in a multiplicity of wonderfully different packages.

Every interaction, whether it's with a friend or a stranger, becomes a dance of the Divine meeting the Divine, Consciousness playing with Consciousness. Life will still bring you tough stuff. You'll still experience pain. This is because you've got karma. But you'll no longer suffer in the midst of painful experiences, nor suffer when you cannot attain pleasurable experiences. Both pleasure and pain are Consciousness; neither one is more desirable than the other. Pleasure won't make you any fuller because you're already full. Pain won't diminish you because nothing can take you away from your Self, because there's nothing that's not you.

Swamiji remembers her Guru explaining it so beautifully, that you will find only your own home everywhere you go. You will see that there is no reason to worry. You will meet only yourself everywhere you go, because there is no one else and nothing else in the universe. You are the One who has become all that exists. When you see the world, you are looking into the mirror of your Divinity all the time.

Living from the depth of your own embodied Beingness, fully present and engaged in the world that you recognize and celebrate as the same embodied Reality. This is your future. Do more yoga (and meditation).

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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