



November 2014 Contemplation: Body, Mind & More #11

More Alive, More Joyous, More You!

by Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati & Vidyadevi Stillman

It's the season of joy! Thanksgiving and the December holidays, with the decorations, music, gifts, special foods, family and friends, makes this a joyous time for so many people. Yet for others this is a time of stress, anxiety or unhappiness, and the knowing that their expectations or hopes of joy can't be fulfilled.

You have experienced both being more joyous and less joyous. You look for circumstances to make you joyous. Sometimes this works but sometimes it doesn't. Consider, when you are in circumstances that make you more joyous, what is that feeling like? What is that feeling of joy? When you get a sense of that "more joyous" feeling, which is something you have already experienced so many times, you can simply call that to your awareness and experience it again, in its fullness. This is a great way to use your mind and memory.

Now contrast that joyousness with the feeling you have in rest of your life. It's like a black-and-white compared to a color photo. Yoga says the problem is that the percentage of your life you experience joy is too low. Beyond that, even when you feel such joy, it is too short because the situation you depend on for your joy doesn't last.

The yogic sage Shankaracharya said, in his text titled Vivekachudamani,

"...your own innermost self [is] the ceaseless joy within you."¹

This means you have the capacity to experience "ceaseless joy" within, but you currently only experience periodic joy, which is dependent on unpredictable externals to trigger it. Why do you invest so much time and energy trying to create certain circumstances, ones that will make you more joyous? Because life really is about joy. Being more joyous is THE measure for quality of life.

Now let's look at "more alive." When you feel more joyous, you feel more alive. Of course you already experience this, but look a little more closely at that feeling of more alive and less alive. Some people push the limit in order to get that feeling of aliveness; if you are hanging onto the side of a cliff with your fingers and toes you have to be 120% there!

Of course adrenaline is involved, but there is another quality as well. On the edge, for many people, provides a quality of hyper-aliveness. Adrenaline junkies do things like jumping out of airplanes (skydiving), ski avalanches, bungee jumping, etc.

People also do things to feel less alive, to numb themselves out, because their life is too painful. People take alcohol and drugs, sleep a lot, withdraw from others and avoid participating in life, etc. They do things to make themselves feel less alive. But most people are looking for life's events to make them feel both more joyous and more alive.

Fortunately, yoga gives you this — joy and aliveness. You can go a yoga class when you are not feeling joyous at all and you'll feel different at the end. If a researcher gave you a psychology self-assessment test before class, you might be at 40% or 62%; the test at the end would show you higher, maybe 78% or even 90%. If you have been looking for yoga to make you more joyous, this is a sign of your intelligence.

What if they could give you a psychological self-assessment test for "more alive"? You already know that yoga makes your body more flexible, makes your digestion work better, makes your breath move more fully and makes your heart pump more efficiently (and therefore more easily). Your stress chemicals are down and your endorphins are up, your muscles are working efficiently and you feel your body in a whole new way. Your body is more alive! You are more alive! You are more present in it!

How does yoga do this? You might think it happens because you are in a spacious room with spiritual music and stacks of plaid blankets. But when you think this, your mind has again gone

¹ Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

looking for the environment to make you joyous and alive. This is not what makes yoga work for you. *Svaroopa*[®] yoga makes you more joyous and more alive because it gives you the inner experience of your own Self, svaroopa. When you experience your own Self as Consciousness-Itself, you draw from the deepest dimension of your own being, which automatically makes you be more present, more alive, more joyous – more You! Shankaracharya wrote about this over 1,300 years ago,

“That Supreme Reality, which has become everything that exists, has become you, and is manifesting as you, through your body...”²

Since your yoga makes you both more joyous and more alive, now you don’t have to look for other people to give you a fix. You no longer step into the world feeling needy and dependent, waiting for something to make you feel better. Yoga makes you feel better before you step out, so you go into the world carrying that sense of inner fullness with you. You have something to share.

Vidyadevi describes, “A few years ago I had a yoga therapy client who always came in for an *Embodiment*[®] yoga therapy session before her in-laws came over for dinner. This event was not a joyous occasion for her. She planned the therapy session, not for her body, but to change her inner state. From that deeper state she was able to allow the evening to play out, yet be fully joyous, fully alive and fully present.”

This all happens because of what the sage Shankaracharya describes,

“There is a self-existent Reality that is the foundation of your own inner sense of self. This self-existent Reality is your very Self.”³ — Vivekachudamani

What is that self-existent Reality? That is that Ultimate Reality which has always existed, the cosmic Reality, the source of this universe and the foundation of your own being. Whether you are awake, dreaming or sleeping, your own Self is always there, just behind your mind. When you wake up in the morning and remember a dream, your mind is not remembering it, because your mind was asleep! Another level within you is reporting that you dreamed, or that you had a good night of sleep — that is your own Self.

Shankaracharya warns,

“The true nature of your own Self is extremely subtle. It cannot be perceived by the mind, due to the density of which the mind is made. It is known in your inner state of absorption, which is attained by plunging inside. Plunge deep within your own being to know your own Self as Consciousness-Itself. Allow yourself to know and to be that which you already are.”⁴ — Vivekachudamani

You already have these deep inner experiences in *Svaroopa*[®] yoga classes, in your own home practice and especially in *Svaroopa*[®] Vidya meditation. By plunging deep within, having the inner experience of the extremely subtle reality within, you know that which you already are, your own Self as Consciousness-Itself.

You already rely on yoga to make you more joyous and more alive. *Svaroopa*[®] yoga reliably gives you your own Self. When you lose your Self, simply do more yoga and meditation. If it worked before, it will work again. It will give you what Shankaracharya promises,

“At this innermost level, you never cease to experience infinite joy.”⁵

This is the way a yogi lives in the world. What a way to live!

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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