



April 2015 Contemplation:  
Understanding Yoga — Understanding Life #4

## Yoga Promises Freedom

by Swami Nirmalananda & Vidyadevi Stillman

Did you ever ask yourself, what's the point? Once you've fulfilled your dharma (responsibilities), made some money (artha) and saturated your senses with pleasures (kama), you begin to wonder, "Is this all there is?" Our Western world doesn't offer anything else, but yoga does — the fourth goal of life: moksha (freedom). Yoga promises enlightenment or Self-realization, but the word "moksha" actually means "freedom."

You've already worked on the first three of the goals of life: to be a good person, to do good in the world, to have a good time, to acquire possessions, to set yourself up for your elder years and even to be able to pass things along to your family. These are wonderful and important things, but they all have you looking outside for satisfaction. No matter how much you do, it still feels like something is missing. That's because it is; you have to look inward. Nothing is truly fulfilling without liberation. Moksha is yoga's specialty.

Swami Nirmalananda says, "Liberation is freedom from limitation, freedom from rebirth, freedom from the bondage of karma. Liberation is freedom from the burdens of life, even though you can live in the same place and share your life with the same people. When you are liberated, none of it is a burden any more. It is all joy, even the hard stuff. There is nothing to share but love."

To be liberated means to live in the inner fullness all the time, an inner fullness that is always arising within, regardless of what's happening around you. You are already familiar with this inner arising because it you experience it in your best moments. At the least, you experience it as happiness, which arises within you, though it's currently dependent on something outside of you triggering it.

Next time you feel happy, ask a yogic question, "Where is this feeling coming from?" It doesn't come from the outer trigger. When you track it, you'll see that it arises from deep inside. This means you can dive into its source directly by looking inward – deeper and deeper inward. The sages consistently describe yoga's goal as living in the ever-arising inner flow, which continues to expand into escalating levels that can only be described as ecstasy. Swamiji calls this "independent bliss."

Mumukshutva<sup>1</sup> is the Sanskrit word for the longing for liberation. In the middle of the word, you see moksha (spelled with a "u"). Moksha is liberation. Some people, when they first walk in the door of a yoga studio, already know, "That is what I want." Actually, everyone who comes to yoga does want liberation, whether they can put it into words or even admit it to themselves. This is because everyone experiences the longing though not everyone acts on it. By the time you decide to try yoga, you've tried a few other things that didn't work well, and the yearning is still pushing you forward.

Early on you experience the yearning as a feeling of wanting something that you don't know what it is you want. This is mumukshutva, the deep longing to re-experience the Self, the inner Truth of your own Beingness. It is the longing to know God. Yoga advises you to cultivate this yearning, to feel this longing in its fullness. It's bittersweet, like bittersweet chocolate. Isn't that the best?

*Svaroopa*<sup>®</sup> yoga, particularly, is the yoga for seekers. Swami Nirmalananda says, "*Svaroopa*<sup>®</sup> yoga turns seekers into finders. What happens when you stop being a seeker is you become a finder." This is yoga's promise, documented by the ancient sage Patanjali in his Yoga Sutras:

*Teevra samvegaanaam-aasanah(a)* (1.21)

The deeper inner experience of your own Divine Essence is easiest for those who desire it most earnestly.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced mū-mūk-shet-va

<sup>2</sup> Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

Your yearning to know your own Self brings you closer to the experience of your own Self. Swamiji says, “By itself, the yearning is that powerful. Allow yourself to feel the yearning.” *Svaroopā*<sup>®</sup> yoga cultivates this yearning, quite purposefully, thus placing you in alignment with Patanjali’s teaching.

Consider how you feel when you come up from your final Shavasana at the end of class, then roll over and rest there, curled up on your side. At the end of your meditation when you open your eyes, how do you feel? That feeling is named “svaroopa;” it is the bliss of your own Self.

When you have had that experience, you want it again. And again and again. This keeps you coming back to your yoga class as well as to the yoga you do at home. In *Svaroopā*<sup>®</sup> yoga, we teach you specific practices to cultivate the experience of your own Self, specifically so that you will find your yearning. Once you recognize your own yearning, you can pour it into the process that leads to the experience of your Self. Your yearning is for who you really are.

Everyone experiences the yearning but most people displace it into other things. They feel the yearning but they don’t like the feeling, so they make some popcorn, call a friend or go on a trip. Everything they do, and probably everything that you do, is being done so that you will feel better. That means you are not feeling “better” already. So you yearn, and the yearning makes you do, and do, and do...

You displace your yearning into mundane things, trying to do all the things that everyone has told you to do to be happy. Even though you do all these things, still you are not really happy. You begin to wonder, “What is wrong with me? Everyone else is happy with these things.” Except that everyone actually is not happy. If they were, they wouldn’t still have a shopping list or even a bucket list. They do the things that they’re telling you to do, but then they still want to do more and different things because they are not happy.

Vidyadevi says, “I ‘mundanized’ this yearning for decades by climbing mountains all over the world. I displaced my inner yearning by getting momentary highs from the vast views and beauty of nature, but it never filled me. Once I experienced the depth of my Being through yoga, I never climbed another mountain. It is truly found inside. Now I do the practices that allow me to scale the inner heights, to explore and to experience the ever-expanding vastness of my own Being and to live in this world more joyously.”

The yearning underlies it all. You’ve tried and proven that it doesn’t work well when you displace your yearning into mundane things. It’s time to feel your yearning directly. When you allow yourself to feel that intense inner desire, the experience you yearn for is already so close to you. Your own Self is less than a breath away.

When you allow yourself to feel your yearning, you will discover the mystery: the experience of Self is found in the yearning itself, because your yearning is the Self reaching out to you from within yourself. That desire, that yearning, is a form of Grace, as Swami Nirmalananda describes in her commentary on the sutra above, Patanjali’s 1.21:

All your life you have been experiencing a yearning — it is the yearning to know  
your own Self. Recognize the yearning itself. It is the fuel for the rocket ship  
that takes you to your Self.

Moksha, liberation, is the goal of yoga. Cultivate your yearning through your yoga practices, so you are drawn toward liberation more quickly and more easily. Doing more yoga will strengthen your yearning.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON “UNDERSTANDING YOGA — UNDERSTANDING LIFE,” OUR CONTEMPLATION THEME FOR 2015, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI, VIDYADEVI STILLMAN AND RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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