



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

May 2016 Contemplation:
Yoga & Spirituality #6

In the Midst of Life

By Swami Nirmalananda & Vidyadevi Stillman

You are a modern day yogi. You shop, cook, take care of your family, drive, work, play and you do yoga. It puts you in a very beneficial feedback loop: you make time to do yoga practice, then yoga helps you do life more efficiently, which gives you more time to do your yoga. In Sanskrit, what you are doing is called “sadhana,” which means “spiritual practice and process.” You’re growing spiritually, a process supported by your practices.

Vidyadevi says, “I did not know this was a spiritual yoga when I began. I thought yoga was just another form of physical exercise and then it snuck up on me. I experienced that it was mystical and there was a whole new dimension of myself to explore within that is ever expanding.”

When does sadhana stop? Even through you might miss a class or a daily practice session, you’re still doing sadhana — at least until your mind starts to go crazy. When your mind starts up, you’ve stopped making spiritual progress. You’re not a yogi any more.

Your busy mind does tuck your tailbone under so your whole body tightens up, but the real problem is that you have lost your “capital-S Self.” You’re living in a painful inner split like a mental and emotional roller coaster ride with no way to get off. The ancient sage Patanjali recommends that you simply never get on the roller coaster.

His text begins by stating the purpose of all yoga’s practices is to quiet your mind. He describes how it works: when your mind is quiet, you abide in your own “svaroopā,” your innermost essence, your deepest spirituality.¹ He urges you to do yoga all the time:

Tatra sthitau yatno’bhyaasa.h — Yoga Sutras 1.13

Practice is the constant quieting of your mind.²

Patanjali is not telling you to do poses and yogic breathing 24/7. That would make the practices be your goal. Though a pianist does musical scales, the scales are not their goal. The scales support a greater goal. Yoga’s greater goal is that you live in the experiential knowing of your own Divine Essence (svaroopavidya). Patanjali says you will get there faster if you do a particular practice 24/7 — the moment-to-moment quieting of your mind.

Is this even possible? You have to take care of family and friends, responsibilities at work and home, and even enjoy treasured vacation time. This doesn’t sound like a very practical spirituality.

Understand that Patanjali taught yoga monks who came to live in the forest with him. They had no jobs and had even left their families and homes specifically for the purpose of sitting in meditation all day, every day. Keeping your mind quiet is much easier when your only task for the day is meditation. But you are a modern day yogi. Your life has lots of people in it, most of whom help stir up your mind. Thus Patanjali’s simple practice, keeping your mind quiet, is not so simple.

A modern day yogi needs a modern day yoga, one that twines through the flotsam and jetsam of life while providing self-care methodologies. Svaroopā® yoga is a tantra, like a weaver’s loom, weaving the disparate strands of life into a beautiful cloth, colored through with your spiritual essence. How does it do this? By awakening your own spiritual potential, the transformative energy that was hidden within you at birth.

All our tail-to-top practices are profoundly mystical. They unlock your hidden potential, a cosmic energy that climbs your spine and in-lightens you from the inside out. Your own Divine Essence illumines your mind and heart progressively more and more, shining into your life. Shaktipat is the inner awakening, which is how you get the “more” that Svaroopā® yoga is so well known for.

These practices propel you into your own capital-S Self, profoundly, dramatically and dynamically.

¹ Patanjali 1.1-1.3

² Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

Experiencing your own spiritual essence shows you who you really are, profoundly, dramatically and dynamically. Initiation is a much more powerful and direct route than Patanjali's practice of quieting your mind. Quieting your mind is preparation for experiencing Self. Instead *Svaroopā*[®] yoga practices give you the experience of Self directly and immediately.

It is like you are sitting outside on a cloudy day, waiting for the clouds to clear so the sun will come out. The clouds are the thoughts in your mind, which you're trying to quiet, because the sun of your own Self cannot shine through. *Svaroopā*[®] yoga powers up your rocket ship to blast you through the clouds so you head straight toward the sun. The clouds may still be back there, but you are in the stratosphere, carried there by Grace. You are now at a whole different level. *Svaroopā*[®] yoga doesn't merely quiet your mind, but it reveals your own Self to you, so you can always live in that state.

As long as you are not yet Self-Realized, you experience breaks in your inner state. Maybe you fold up your inner peace as you fold up your yoga blankets or when you get up from meditation. You may even stop doing yoga during your yoga class, like when someone's cell phone rings. "Jeepers! They should turn off their cell phone!" As soon as you start reacting, you are lost again. Sometimes it takes so little to set you off.

Swami Nirmalananda explains, "When I say, 'Do more yoga,' I mean that your yoga doesn't stop when class ends. Yoga pervades life. Life becomes yoga." This means you choose to cultivate your experience of Self when your eyes are open and you are functioning in the world. Now you are a full time yogi!

Patanjali's recommendation to quiet your mind is a good one, but it has an underside. You can enforce a fake quietude by repressing your own thoughts and reactions. You can hide your feelings from others and even hide them from yourself. All of these forms of delusion are destined to cause you pain. You might even try to control people around you so that your mind will be quiet. These are not yoga practices.

Instead *Svaroopā*[®] yoga says you must carry your Self with you into life. Taking classes and doing personal practice give you the experience of Self, which lasts for a few minutes or hours, like a "halo effect." You can live in the halo effect by interspersing yoga throughout your day. Simply stand in Tadasana or sit with an uplifted yogic posture, even at your desk or in your car. Use Ujjayi Pranayama to hit your reset button; it only takes three or four breaths. Once you've received mantra, it offers the most powerful support for your inner state, and you can repeat it 24/7. It does more for you than quiet mind can ever offer.

But *Svaroopā*[®] yoga also has practices that train you how to function in life from a yogic state. Seva is "yoga-in-action," also called karma yoga. Almost 100 sevites support *Svaroopā*[®] Vidya Ashram's day-to-day operations, including our extensive menu of [Freebies](#). While applying their mind and effort to practical activities, they reap spiritual rewards. Their mundane actions open up their inner experiences, usually gotten only from spinal release and meditation. They are learning how to live their life as yogis: that every action, word and thought is another way that the light of their own Self shines into the world.

The practices of puja (worship) and dakshina (offering financial support) brings yoga to your heart and your wallet. Vichara (guided self-inquiry) brings yoga into your thoughts, actions and relationships. So many ways to carry yoga into the midst of your life!

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