



Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram

December 2016 Contemplation:
Yoga & Spirituality #12

Celebrating Light

By Swami Nirmalananda & Rukmini Abbruzzi

Sparkling lights are wrapped around trees and draping houses. Multitudes of candles are lit to celebrate Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanza, Diwali, the Solstice. At the darkest time of the year, our holidays focus on light: both the longer days of sunlight which will come again, and the light of the Divine.

“Holiday” comes from the old English halig daeg, meaning holy day. It gives us religious festivals as well as recreation. At best, these days are an opportunity to celebrate and play with your loved ones, to experience the joy of giving and receiving, and to turn your heart and mind towards the Divine. Unfortunately, it can also be a time of adding more to your already busy schedule, straining your finances and spending time with the people who most stress you out. Needs and expectations lead to disappointment. It can be tempting to avoid the whole thing, especially if you no longer practice the religion and traditions you grew up with.

Your family and their traditions are foundational fibers, woven into the tapestry of who you are today. Whether you continue in your family’s traditions or simply visit them on holidays, this is an opportunity to embrace your small-s self. This is very important because accepting your small-s self is part of finding your capital-S Self.

Rukmini shares, “I come from a big Italian family. They celebrate Christmas with lots of food, wine and boisterous conversation. I don’t eat most of the food, drink the wine or talk that loudly. I’ve often found it overwhelming. But the last time I was home, I could see my parents’ big-hearted generosity and love that underlies every family celebration. I was filled with love and gratitude for being able to share with them. It’s yoga that gave me the ability to perceive and embrace my family in that way.”

Yoga makes you able to see in a new way. Yoga isn’t religion. It’s mysticism. Yoga doesn’t say that one religion is right or that certain holidays must be celebrated while others are avoided. All religions are honored, as is documented in a text from over 1200 years ago:

Tad bhuumikaa.h sarva-dar”sana-sthitaya.h — [Pratyabhijnahrdyam](#) 8

The various traditions are different roles of Consciousness.¹

This text calls the Ultimate Reality by the name “Consciousness,” explaining that the One has become everything that exists. In addition to being you, Consciousness is also being all the different religions, traditions and paths. The author Kshemaraja explains that Consciousness becomes so many different traditions because there are so many different kinds of people. Different people need different ways of being in relationship with the greater Reality, even calling it by different names or denying its existence.

While honoring all religions, yoga focuses on your spiritual capacity. Yoga develops your ability to see the Divine in all, which is pure mysticism. To unveil the mystery, to reveal the hidden dimension of your own being, to cultivate your experience of your own Divinity, this is yoga’s purpose. This is mysticism: to find and to know your own Self.

You experience stress and disappointment during the holidays only if you’ve lost your Self. Yoga explains that your human condition makes you feel empty, needy and incomplete. By contrast, your human capacity is to experience the bliss of consciousness, your true nature. If you’re not experiencing the luminosity and fullness of your Self on the inside, you hope the holidays will bring it back. You want other people to fill you up. You give, but it’s to get something in return: if I bake you sugar cookies, will you love me? If I give you a present, will

¹ Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

you give me one? These exchanges can make you happy for a moment, but they are only a temporary fix.

'Tis the season to do more yoga — to help you manage the season. You already use yoga as a way to relax, relieve your pain and reduce your stress. *Svaroopa*® yoga's core-opening poses unravel your deepest tensions, starting with the physical level, simultaneously clearing your body, mind and heart. This is a leveraged practice, meaning it only takes a little breathing and poses to give you back the ever-arising joy and bliss that are the core of your being.

More importantly, every time you do *Svaroopa*® Yoga, you experience your Self as the One. As you continue yoga, you experience this more and more frequently, for longer periods of time, until you abide in that state permanently. Our text describes this:

Tadaa prakaa"saananda saara mahaamantra veeryaatmaka poor.naahantaa vashaat

sadaa sarva sarga sa.mhaara kaari nija sa.mvid devataa

chakre"svarataa praaptir bhavateeti "sivam.

— Pratyabhijnahridayam 20

From practice comes the result:

merging into perfect I-consciousness or Self-Realization,

which is the essence of consciousness and bliss,

having mastery over the energies of the universe.²

This sutra promises that you'll know your Self in the same way that you know your own name. By continuing your yoga, your mind and heart are attuned to your innermost essence. You experience yourself as the Self again and again, until you realize that you are the Self. You become Self-Realized. It's not far away from you; your own Self is closer than your breath. You already are perfect consciousness and bliss. You always have been, but you don't always know – not yet. You'll get to where you never not know.

Instead of reaching for temporary happiness and joy on the outside, then you'll live in the ever-arising flow of joy from within. You won't want the holidays to make you happy, nor avoid the holidays to avoid pain. Sourcing yourself from your depths in every moment, you'll give freely from the limitless fullness of your own being. Every day is a holy day.

Holiday celebrations are a Divine dance of Self, meeting Self. When you know who you are, what is left to do? Only one thing: to celebrate! And to pour your joy into service. These are the same thing. This is the state the Guru enjoys. She couldn't give your own Self to you if she didn't have her own Self. From the limitlessness of her own beingness, the Guru gives with joyful and unbounded generosity. She is the Self, giving you svaroopavidya, the experiential knowing and being of your Self.

This joy and generosity is your future. This is the reason you took birth and the reason you do yoga. This is the reason we celebrate light, especially in the shortest days of the year. 'Tis the season to do more yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON "YOGA & SPIRITUALITY," OUR TEACHINGS THEME FOR 2016, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI, VIDYADEVI STILLMAN AND RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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² Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda