



October-November 2010 Contemplation Theme

Pain, Pleasure & Bliss

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Pain and pleasure are within the pairs of opposites; bliss is beyond both. Pain and pleasure come from the outside, but bliss arises from within. Many yogis practice yoga in order to end pain or to expand their experience of pleasure, but yoga is really about discovering the bliss of your own being — *svaroopa*.

The true goal of life is bliss. Bliss is not merely a colossal experience of pleasure; it is something entirely different. For example, you experience bliss when you eat just the right amount of food, not too much and not too little. The traditional holiday meal can tempt you to indulge in your favorite tastes until you've eaten too much. At that point, pleasure turns into pain. You stagger away from the table, barely able to breathe, and have to wait a few hours before you have room to begin on the desserts. Instead, if you eat just the right amount of all those delicious foods, you walk away from the table with an entirely different feeling. You have experienced the pleasure of the tastes without creating the pain of overindulgence. You feel completely satiated, amazingly content. It's a light feeling, not heavy. You feel relaxed, not lethargic. You are peaceful but not drugged. It is a different kind of happiness because it arises from a different source — it arises from within you. It is not pleasure; it is bliss.

The food does not create your bliss. In this example, where you don't gorge yourself to the point of pain, but you find the perfect point of just-the-right-amount, your mind is profoundly quieted, thus the bliss of your own being arises inside to fill you completely. Patanjali describes this in the Yoga Sutras:

Tadaa drashtuh svaroope'vasthanam

In the moment your mind becomes still, you become established in the bliss of your own being (*svaroopa*). — Sutra 1.3

Patanjali's ancient text recommends you quiet your mind with yogic methodologies, not food, but the principle still works the same way. The key point is that you can escape from the pairs of opposites even when you are dealing with food. You can go beyond the yo-yo of pain and pleasure and discover pure bliss.

Food is a dangerous example for these important teachings, because you can get distracted by the example and miss the point. The point is that pain and pleasure are not the point! Life is about bliss. Yoga is about bliss.

You already know a lot about avoiding pain and maximizing pleasure. These are prime motivators, a defining characteristic of the human lifestyle and the primary factor in most decision making. Unfortunately this approach doesn't work very well. Even when you are able to set things up for your pleasure, things happen that you didn't expect. Also when you work hard at avoiding painful situations or problems, they manage to show up anyway. Both pain and pleasure have occurred throughout your whole life so far, and they will continue to occur for the rest of your life. If you try to avoid pain and maximize pleasure, you will do the same things that everyone else does:

Look for other people to make you happy, and even put pressure on them so they will make your happiness one of their priorities

Manage all your activities and your possessions so you are happy

Get so caught up in your mind that you cannot see beyond your own thoughts and emotions

Spend every waking moment of every day trying, and trying, and trying...

Fortunately, the goal is something beyond the pairs of opposites — the goal is bliss.

Many people have confided to me that they don't know what bliss is. The first few times I heard this I was astonished! What a sad statement they make when they ask, "What is bliss?" It means they don't know how to look inside. Yoga says this is how everyone begins, and calls it "the human condition." Your

human capacity is to know the bliss of your own divinity, but your human condition is that it is hidden from you, hidden within yourself. The human condition keeps you enmeshed in the continuing pursuit, either chasing pleasure so that you will experience happiness, or running away from pain so that you will experience peace. But the pursuit itself disturbs both your peace and your happiness!

There's a point where you must stop, which is why yoga is for the purpose of stilling your mind. The yoga poses and all the other practices are for the purpose of stilling your mind, so that you have a different inner experience: different than pleasure, different than pain, different than the constant running away from or running after something.

Pain and pleasure are experiences that arise from the world, but bliss arises from within your own being. The world inundates you with opportunities to have experiences, experiences of people, places, things, events, activities, leisure time, accomplishments and sensory input of all kinds. You perceive these from the outside —> inward. If you hear music, the sounds come from outside, are received by your ears, stimulate brain waves and trigger physiological processes that change your inner feeling. If it is music that you find pleasurable, you feel happy. If it is music that you don't like, you are put on edge. In this way, your inner experience of pleasure or pain is created by something outside of you. Perception is happening from the outside —> inward.

Bliss arises from within your own being. When your mind becomes still, you can turn your perception inward. Your true essence is Consciousness-Itself; when you perceive this, even a hint or a glimpse of your own Self, bliss arises from the inner source. The direction of perception is from the inside —> outward. Bliss arises from your core, expands to fill your heart and mind, and overflows into your life and into the world. This process is happening from the inside —> outward. Thus, bliss is not merely lots of pleasure. It is profoundly different than the experience of pleasure. It is better, longer lasting, inexhaustible, supremely independent, always available and free.

The goal of yoga is bliss, whether it is a momentary experience or it becomes constant, as promised by Patanjali in the sutra above. Most people who are starting yoga don't know this yet. They are usually coming because of pain and pleasure: they want to end the pain they are experiencing, or they want to extend the pleasure that their body gives them. One woman thanked me for *Svaroopā*[®] yoga by saying, "This yoga has extended my professional dance career by five years." I responded, "I'm so sorry to hear this!" She was still seeking the pleasure instead of finding the bliss. I wanted more for her.

While pain and pleasure exist as pairs of opposites, bliss is beyond the pairs of opposites. The pairs of opposites haunt you throughout your life, as you careen from one experience to another. Yoga gives you a new way to live. Yoga makes you able to look life squarely in the face without flinching and without being pulled off-center. This is an incredible ability, technically referred to as an inner state, described as "svaroopē'vasthanam — established in the bliss of your own being." Do more yoga.

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