



December 2010 Contemplation Theme

Dark & Light

by Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

In the darkest days of the year*, our holidays focus on light. Whether your tradition has you setting out flaming ghee wicks for Diwali in November, lighting candles for Hanukah, stringing lights on a tree for Christmas or enjoying the neon lights and fireworks of the New Year, your celebrations feature light. Even a single flame shines so brightly in the dark! Because you are putting out lights, you may think that light must be projected into the dark, as though dark were the foundation of existence and you must work to bring in the light. Yoga says that it is the other way around: your nature is light. This universe comes from light. Light is the foundation of existence.

This means that light is easy – dark is hard to create. Even the dark of night occurs because we are in the earth's shadow, which blocks the light of the sun. The sun never stops shining. You have to block it out in order to experience the dark. You have to work hard to block out the sun – it takes special types of shades or curtains. I once had neighbors who put aluminum foil on their bedroom windows because they worked at night and needed to sleep during the day. It's not easy to keep the light out.

You can hide from sunlight inside a cave or in a building without windows. Yogis are sometimes sent by their guru to meditate in a remote cave, so their meditation can continue through all hours, free from the diurnal rhythm. Other yogis or nearby villagers bring them food every day and make sure that their physical needs are provided for during this period of intense practice, which the yogi has long been preparing to undertake. The yogi emerges from the cave over a period of days or weeks, getting acclimated to the light slowly, as have the miners who were recently rescued in Chile.

Many people are hidden away from the sun at work, arriving before the sun comes up and leaving after it sets, working under artificial lights without windows or fresh air. One yogi told me how hard his job was because it required that he work in a dark laboratory, with specialized lights that enabled him to handle a detailed and repetitive task. He spent his whole day in the dark.

Some people orient their life around the night hours, staying up until the wee hours of the morning and sleeping during the day. They deliberately shift their lifestyle away from the light and live in the dark. They create a type of isolation from other people, or they fill their life with others who share their feeling of isolation, perhaps from an inner need for protection or a sense of rejection. Yet even such an extreme lifestyle decision does not stop the light from shining.

By contrast, yogis love the light. The ancient tradition emphasizes early morning practice, beginning two hours before the sunrise, between 3:00 and 4:00 a.m. Many Svaroopa® yogis first recognize how deeply their yoga is working in them when they begin spontaneously awakening at this early hour. It's such a sweet time! The early morning practices anticipate the lightening of the sky and rising of the sun, both of which create a profound inner upliftment – if you are up and have done your early morning preparation so you can feel it.

I've been especially enjoying everyone's holiday outfits this year, in the shop displays and on the party-goers. So many clothes sparkle, with sequins and glitter reflecting the light. People love the light so much that they want to wear it, as well as deck their halls and outline their roof with multi-colored light.

Light is important because your inherent nature is light. You are the light of consciousness, in a unique and individualized form. That light shines through your eyes, fills your heart and sparks your greatest ideas. The light of your own being arises from its inner source, spills into your life and fills your relationships with light and love and joy. This is true in your best moments. It is how you want to live all the time. Yoga gives you the ability to do so. Yoga also explains why and how it works.

The physicists and yogis agree that it all began with the Big Bang. That bang emanated energy which became light; the light coalesced into matter. This is a vastly simplified explanation but it is true – everything is made of solidified light. Even your body is made of light. Even the chair that you are sitting on is made of light.

There's one problem with your sense of what the Big Bang was. You probably think that the Bang was an explosion emanating energy and light into the dark. If so, you're assuming that dark is the basis of existence, with light being added to it. The physicists do not describe it this way, but most non-physicists picture it so, without even recognizing that they do.

The yogic sages make it clear that something existed before the Big Bang. There was something there, a something that banged. That something was not (and is not) dark. That "something" is an ever-existent reality. It was and is self-knowing beingness, Consciousness-Itself. Named by the ancients in their language (Sanskrit), that something is Shiva.

Shiva is light, but the word "light" has multiple meanings. Normally it means (1) the opposite of dark, or (2) the opposite of heavy. But Shiva as "light" means something else: scintillating presence, radiant beingness-itself. The most important thing to know is — You are That. You are that light, that presence, that beingness. You are that which the ancient yogis called "That."

Shiva is "That which Banged," creating the Big Bang as an implosion within Shiva's own being, which is why energy contracts to become matter. The Big Bang was not an explosion, with light expanding into a field of darkness. It was an implosion, with Shiva contracting within Shiva's own being, to contract light into matter and bring the universe into existence. You are made of that light. Light is the basis of existence – not dark.

Light is important to you because you are made of light. You already know this, not because of a scientific theory or an ancient teaching, as inspiring as they can be. You know this because of your own experience. You feel most like yourself when you are shining with light. When your eyes twinkle, when your heart overflows, when your words have a melody hidden in them, and when your actions show your generous and loving nature – you feel so natural. You feel like yourself. You are radiant with light in those moments. You are your own Self.

Yoga offers a tried-and-true methodology by which you stop blocking the light of your own being from shining through. When you begin with the physical practices, you are removing the blocks to your body's natural state of openness. Your body is naturally soft, supple, strong, healthy and resilient, like a two-year-old child's. The tensions that have accumulated since you were two years old are blockages to be removed. When you do some slow breathing and poses to open your spine, you glow afterward. The things you do daily are the most powerful, which is why you need to do your yoga breathing and poses daily. If you aren't removing the blocks, then you are probably installing more of them.

Yet you do not have to perfect your body in order to have your inner light shine. Even if your body is imperfect, your eyes can shine and your heart can overflow. Yoga's most powerful effects clear the blockages from more important levels – your mind and emotions. Clearing these blocks is the primary purpose of yoga's practices, as your inner light must shine through your mind, so it must be clarified.

When you begin aligning your life with the principles of light by following yoga's precepts for living, that glow begins to shine through your life. When you deepen your inner experience through meditation and chanting, as well as by studying the teachings, you plumb the depths of your own inner essence to discover the source of light within, the light from which you are made.

Along the way, your mental patterns are reprogrammed. Yoga removes the old self-destructive patterns and habits. You become free from the limited ideas of who you are. You take the aluminum foil off the windows of your mind and open up the curtains so your inner light can shine into the world – which needs your light. Do more yoga.

*While we in the northern hemisphere are experiencing the shortest days of the year, Australian Svaroopis are enjoying lots of summer sun. Yet the traditional holidays that celebrate with light originated in the northern hemisphere, where the days are short at this time of year.

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