



August 2014 Contemplation: Body, Mind & More #8

Yoga for Every Body

by Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati & Rukmini Abbruzzi

Everybody can benefit from yoga. *Svaroopa*® yoga in particular is great for every body. Each pose is customized to individual body needs, thus meeting you where you currently are. When you work with your body as it really is, especially targeting your spine, deep tensions melt and your vertebrae decompress, so blood, oxygen and your body's own healing energy (prana) bring new life into areas that need it. You are renewed, relaxed and revived, from the inside out. This feels so good!

Feeling good is important, one of the reliable results of our practice; it is a pleasurable experience of being in a body. This is what most new yogis come in looking for. Yet this pleasurable result is not the transcendental bliss that *Svaroopa*® yoga promises. Pleasure is a superficial result; yoga's true goal is much deeper. The goal is the constant experience of inner peace and more, an inner ease and a wellspring of joy that is more fulfilling than mere pleasure. This is called "*svaroopa*," meaning "your own true form," which is your own Self as Consciousness-Itself.

If your goal is pleasure, you do the roly-poly floor poses that feel good and you avoid the poses that make you work, but you'll never get to the bliss. To access inner bliss, you need a deeper clearing, which dissolves the inner blockages that keep you from knowing your Self. This is why we target your spine! The inner clearing is physical and more than physical. It is sometimes easy and sometimes hard. If Half Frog makes you want to linger in it forever, but you want to come out of Pigeon after three breaths, the reality is that you need to do more Pigeon. This is why your teacher leads you through a variety of poses in every class, targeting your deeper tensions from every angle, clearing the stuck stuff that's so hard for you to clear on your own.

You must train your body to openness and ease, both on and off your yoga blankets. *Svaroopa*® yoga's core-opening poses dissolve the blockages, but if you go back to using your body in your habitual way, you'll simply reinstall them. Our abdominal activators, standing poses and backbends teach you how to live in your body in a whole new way. A strong and healthy way, a blissful way, an ease-full way.

Learning to engage muscles you're not used to using, instead of the spinal muscles you've habitually tightened and used for everything, can be awkward — even uncomfortable. That's par for the course when you learn any new skill. As a baby you had to learn to use a spoon. At first the food ended up on your cheek, up your nose, or in your eye. But once you got the hang of it, you were able to feed yourself! Rukmini remembers learning to use her hamstrings for the first time in Bala Shalabhasana (Baby Locust) pose:

My muscles were so shaky. It was surprising to discover I had these muscles in my legs I had barely been using. And I'll never forget my first Walking Lessons class, where I used those newly-found hamstrings, in conjunction with abdominal muscles, to walk. It was an Ah-ha moment: This is how my body is *meant* to walk! It was exhilarating!

This is the learning curve. Once you learn to use your body in a more intelligent way, you will enjoy better physical condition. More importantly, you live with an inner depth, the inner knowing of your own Self, so you bask in the bliss that is you. This is why yoga is so well known for providing inner peace. Yet peace is just the first level. There's more!

Swami Nirmalananda describes developing the 12 monthly themes that *Svaroopa*® yoga teachers offer throughout the year.

I'd usually teach 12-18 people in class. When I started the Abdominals theme in a new month, 18 students would come in the first week, the second week would have only 15, the third week would be 12 and by the fourth week, only 6 students would show up. So I

started giving little pep talks, “What are you running away from? You’ve got to learn how to use your body, or you’re not going to get to the Self. If you want to use your body to access your own Divinity, you have to use it intelligently, ergodynamically.”

When you learn effective body mechanics, you move through the world with your body aligned, your mind clear and your heart open, shining the light of your Self into the world. You take your bliss with you wherever you go, whatever you do.

The good news is that you don’t have to wait until your body is perfect or your spine is perfectly aligned. Every step in the process makes you able to use your body more intelligently as well as stay open to Self. You don’t have to choose between these goals. You get it all, all at the same time!

Regardless of your physical condition, as soon as you begin getting core opening (spinal decompression), your inner doorway opens; you begin experiencing your own Divine Self. A doorway can be crooked, the paint might be peeling and the hinges a little creaky, but still the door can open. Every body can be used to reach the Self in everybody, because the Self is what your body is made of.

Cidvat-tacchakti-sa.mkocaat malaav.rta.h sa.msaarii¹

— Pratyabhijnahridayam sutra 9

Consciousness chooses to become an individual, by contracting into form,
taking on three levels of limitation (malas).²

Consciousness is contracting. Why? Because She’s choosing to do so. The Formless Reality is willingly, joyfully, blissfully dancing into form, by being the energy that is spiraling into matter, to become an individual. That individual is you, and me, and everybody and everything that exists. This means you are a concentrated form of consciousness, and thus you are made of bliss, because Consciousness is always experiencing the Bliss of Consciousness.

Swamiji refers to you as “Consciousness Concentrate.” Think of frozen orange juice. How hard is it to get it out of the can so you can make it into juice? It is easier when you take the can out of the freezer, set it on the counter and let it thaw. Did you ever open the lid and taste the concentrate? Just dip your finger in that orange liquid and put a drop on your tongue... Whew!! You are concentrated Consciousness, just like that orange juice is concentrated.

You and everyone who exists has a body, a mind, a heart, a soul and a self (small-s self), all of which are forms of Consciousness-Concentrate. You can use any of these entry points to experience your own Self (capital-S Self). *Svaroopa*[®] yoga specializes in using your body and breath. *Svaroopa*[®] Vidya specializes in using your mind and heart as gateways to the Self. And the Grace that suffuses all the *Svaroopa*[®] practices makes it easy. To find and to live from the innermost dimension of your own Divine Self, do more yoga. Do more *Svaroopa*[®] yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON “BODY, MIND & MORE,” OUR CONTEMPLATION THEME FOR 2014, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI AND VIDYADEVI STILLMAN OR RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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¹ The Sanskrit words are in the Velthius transliteration, which makes it easy to identify the unique pronunciation of each sound. [Click here](#) for more information.

² Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda