



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

October 2015 Contemplation:
Understanding Yoga — Understanding Life #10

Maayaa's Worldly Dance

By Swami Nirmalananda & Rukmini Abbruzzi

*And the seasons, they go round and round
and the painted ponies go up and down.
We're captive on a carousel of time...¹*

Joni Mitchell's song about the seasons of life describes Maayaa, the fourth action of Shiva. Maayaa is Shiva concealing Himself, making you think you are just one small, limited human being, and that life is like a carousel with the painted ponies whirling by, each

unique and different from each other as well as different from you.

But the reality is that you are so much more. You are Shiva, the whole of Divine Consciousness. Everything that exists, everything you see and hear and feel and touch is Shiva too. Maayaa conceals Divinity from you.

Maayaa is most often described as "delusion," like the snake in the rope. A man walks into a dark room and sees something coiled on the floor. In a moment of panic he mistakes the rope to be a snake. When he turns on the lights, the light reveals the true nature of the object: it's simply a rope.



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The likelihood it would be a snake is significantly higher in India than in Downtown or your hometown, so you're less likely to think or fear "Snake!" when you see a rope in the corner of a room or your shed. But this may have happened in other areas of your life when there was no real threat. How many of your worries and fears have turned out to be pure delusion? Mark Twain said, "I am an old man and have had a great many troubles, but most of them never happened."¹

You've come into the world with your own unique karma and you've been through some challenges and difficulties. Your mind was rigged by certain childhood events so strongly that your ability to see what is going on now is distorted. Most likely, what you experience now does not correspond with what is actually in front of you. That's called delusion. Additionally, consider how reliable your memory of those past events really is. Rukmini was surprised to discover, when she brought up a past event with her children, that each had a different memory of the experience, none of which matched Rukmini's memory. Memories are notoriously unreliable.

The good news is that memories are also malleable. Studies show that every time you recall a memory, it changes. Spiritual growth in particular is very good at changing your memories. As you gain understanding of yourself and other people around you, your perspective and even your memories shift. They reflect your expanded, clearer, more compassionate and more loving perspective. You'll outgrow your old delusions, and you'll create less delusion along the way.

While thinking of Maayaa as delusion is a useful way of understanding the difficulties of human life, it's a misunderstanding of the tantric teachings of the Kashmiri sages. They describe Maayaa as "illusion," a cosmic force, one of the powers of God. This means Maayaa is a power much greater than simply your mind's capacity to delude you. They gave us many ways to understand how the formless becomes the forms:

sa chaiko dviroopas trimayash chaturaatmaa sapta panchaka svabhaavah.

— Pratyabhijnahrdyam 7

Though Consciousness is One, she becomes two-fold, three-fold, four-fold and of the nature of 7 pentads (7 x 5= 35).²

The 35-fold map describes how Consciousness progresses from the most subtle vibration through levels of increasing contraction to become the universe and everything in it. On this map, Maayaa is level number six, near the top of the map. This means that Maayaa is a form of Shiva, a very subtle and powerful form. Shiva becomes Maayaa for the express purpose of hiding Shiva's Divinity. Thus the manifestations of Shiva don't know they're Shiva, including you.

Maayaa is the veiling of the knowledge of your own Divinity in the illusion that you are merely human. You're not simply mistaking a rope for a snake; you're mistaking a rope for being a mundane object, made of hemp or polycarbonate fibers, when it is pure consciousness — in the form of a rope. Maayaa traps you in the illusion that the mundane is merely mundane.

¹ <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2013/10/04/never-happened/>

² Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

A crystal hanging in a window fragments a single beam of light into rainbow-colored dancing dots of light. In the same way, Maayaa is the power of Shiva that splinters the whole into little bits, yet without ever losing wholeness. It's not your fault that you see the world in a mundane way; you're designed to see it this way. This is happening at a very subtle level within you, far beyond your mind. This means you can't think your way around the illusory veil of Maayaa.

Since you have all the powers of Shiva, you have the power to conceal and to create illusion. You tell half-truths or downright untruths. You conceal how you feel or perhaps even who you really are. Halloween costumes are a celebration of Maayaa and of your ability to hide behind a mask. You hide pain, grief and despair from acquaintances, perhaps from loved ones, maybe even from yourself. Have you ever hidden your joy? Rukmini remembers,

I returned from an Ashram program so full of joy, overflowing with bliss in a way I had never felt before. And I remember sitting in my car, about to go into a grocery store, and thinking, "Uh oh. It's too much. You're too much. Someone will see." So, just like that, I pulled a mask down over myself. Not just over my face but over my whole being.

That's Maayaa: concealment. A rope in front of you, the people around you, the floor beneath your feet, your pets, the sky, the whole cosmos is nothing but "Siva. It's all Divinity incarnate. The Svacchandra Tantra says:

na shivam vidyate kvachit.

There is nothing that is not Shiva.

There is nothing that is other than scintillating consciousness. There is nothing that's not the Divine, masquerading as the mundane. It's like a cosmic game of peek-a-boo, which is why babies love this game. When your hands hide your face, the baby looks surprised, even a little concerned. And when you open your hands to reveal yourself with a happy "peek-a-boo," the baby giggles with delight and the joy of seeing you once again. You are Shiva, having the experience of not-knowing in order to have the delight of knowing again. Maayaa is your cosmic hands in front of your Divine face, creating the game.

There is still another aspect of Maayaa to understand — the mystical dimension of Maayaa as well as all of Shiva's powers: creation, maintenance, destruction, concealment and grace.

From the individual's perspective, creation is an expansive, great, delight-filled act, but from Shiva's perspective, creation is the end of cosmic knowingness. In creating the universe, Shiva is now hiding Shiva's Self by being something less.

Maintenance, for the individual, is nourishing and supportive, and is necessary as well as wonderful. From the mystical perspective, maintenance is the continuance of limitation, the perpetuation of your fears and suffering, the maintenance of your separation from your own Divine essence.

Destruction, often feared and thought of as terrible, seen from Shiva's perspective, is the ending of limitations. The masquerade ball is over and you unmask yourself, the jig is up and Shiva gets to be Shiva again.

Maayaa is concealment, whether you think of it as delusion or illusion, both of which are something to get free from. Instead, the mystical perspective shows you that Maayaa is a glorious way of creating the Divine game in which you are a primary player.

Grace is revelation. The individual welcomes Grace as a way out of limitation, but Shiva sees Grace as a way of ending the Divine game.

All of these perspectives are valid, just like the person in the valley looking up to the mountain top compared to the person on the mountain top who is looking into the valley. Even when you're "only" doing poses and breathing, the goal and purpose of all the *Svaroopaa*[®] practices is to open the pathway inside. *Svaroopaa*[®] yoga shows you your innermost depths and pierces the veil of Maayaa, so you know once again that you are Shiva. When the light of your own Divinity is revealed to you within, and then you open your eyes, you see the light of consciousness shining in even the most difficult situations and people. You live in the universe in a state of Grace. You are Shiva playing in the universe by being the universe.

Yet, even when you know that you are Shiva, Maayaa still exists. The universe still exists. You delight in seeing it all for what it is, the formless being all the forms. This is called a Grace filled life. This is why you need to "Do more yoga!"

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