



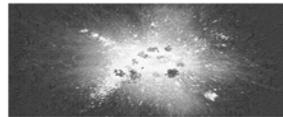
Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

November 2017 Contemplation:
Exploring Yoga's Multidimensionality #11

Time & Timeless

By Swami Nirmalananda & Vidyadevi Stillman

"The universe, and time itself, had a beginning in the Big Bang, about 15 billion years ago." — Professor S. W. Hawking.



They tell us it all began with a big bang, but what was there before the bang, that banged? India's sages named that reality "Shiva," meaning the Auspicious One. Shiva is that which existed before the Big Bang, that which banged, that which is being the universe and still exists beyond the universe. Whether you use the Sanskrit name or a different one, something existed or there'd have been no bang.

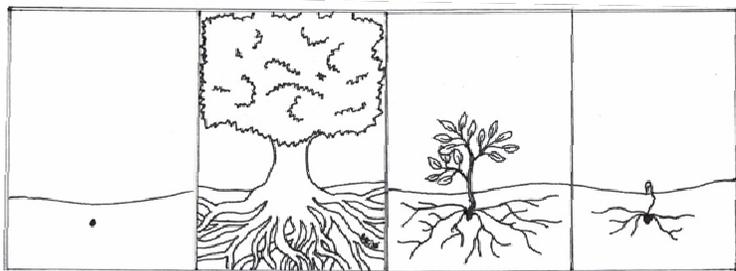
Shiva decided to move: Shiva moving within Shiva, an intoxicating movement that wound Shiva into a progressively more and more concentrated state, which reached critical mass and imploded. Science thinks of the Big Bang as an explosion, but the ancients knew that Shiva's movement is the energy which contracts to become matter. On the way to becoming matter, Shiva took on rhythm and sequentiality, creating time out of timelessness. Called "kalaa," this is Shiva limiting Shiva's eternity by becoming time. Tick, tick, tick...

Your most limited resource is time. While this means you have a limited life span, it also means each day offers you more choices than time to do them. Though you try, you can never do it all! You rush, hurry, and strive to do more but never fit it all in. Swami Nirmalananda says, "You're carving your life out of a block of time like a sculptor chisels stone, choosing what to keep and what to cut away. You're sculpting time. What are you making out of it?"

The ancient sage Patanjali defined time as the progression of events:

atiita-anaagata.m svaruupato'styadhva-bhedaad-dharma.naam

Past and future exist due to the real difference in forms as they express their characteristics. —Yoga Sutras 4.12



Sequence these drawings to see the seed expressing forth its inherent characteristics, sprouting and growing into a tree. Time is a progression of events, which makes time malleable; events affect your perception of time. "School vacations dragged on endlessly, mainly because there wasn't anything to do. Later, as a mom with young children, my very busy days simply flew by," Swamiji remembers.

Though you can't add more hours to the clock, yoga offers tools to free you from the tyranny of time. Doing three hours of Ujjayi Pranayama can substitute for a full night of sleep. Like you're creating time, you get 4-6 more hours in your day to do what you want to do. More importantly, Ujjayi changes the way you move through time. Do only 20 minutes daily and you'll make friends with time. Things dovetail and begin to flow. Time is no longer your enemy. Ujjayi Pranayama makes you the master of time.

With time being the sequencing of events, we get past, present and future. Instead of experiencing the present moment as it is, most people fixate on past or future. We'll look at both. Patanjali defines memory for us:

Anubhuuta-vi.saya-asa.mpramo.sa.h sm.rti.h — Yoga Sutras 1.11

Memory is not allowing an experience to escape from your mind.

When a past experience comes up again and again, it is not haunting you. You keep grabbing it back so it won't escape from your mind. That memory may be pleasant or unpleasant, but you won't let it go. Whatever happened on that day in your life, other things also happened on that day. Do you remember what you had for lunch or dinner on that day? Probably the menu has escaped from your mind, but not this event. You're grabbing onto it, even reliving it again and again, by running it through your mind and sharing it with others, even complete strangers. Why? Because you have built an identity around it. Your mind works hard to hang

on to it so you can use it as a crutch, to prop up your identity, maybe as a loving and needed person or maybe as an injured person.

A student once asked Swami Nirmalananda, "Please don't touch me. I know you're trying to help when you realign my props and even my body in poses, but I've been through some traumatic experiences, so I don't want to be touched." Swamiji replied, "I may not be the right teacher for you. I cannot promise that I won't touch you because, for me to remember to avoid touching you, I have to remember you've had traumatic experiences. I won't reinforce your identity in that way."

Together they agreed that, if Swamiji was touching her and the student wanted Swamiji to stop, the student would simply take hold of Swamiji's wrist or ankle, whatever was easiest. Swamiji reports, "About two weeks later, she stopped me by squeezing my ankle. She never stopped me again. But the real success of this story is that I don't remember who it was. I didn't cage her in that identity."

Perhaps you have been obsessing on certain memories, even for decades. What identity do those memories support? To get beyond that limited sense of self, expand your memory base. Find and hang onto other memories, for there are many that have escaped which might be worth finding and keeping.

Instead of reliving the past, you might be a person who spends your time in the future. Your mind can create many possible futures by fantasizing or worrying, about so many different things, like: what might happen or not happen, what you are hoping to get or to avoid, what you would say to someone, and what if...

Unfortunately, you construct your future out of your memories, too often projecting that your future will be a repeat of your past. You can't imagine a future possibility unless you have already experienced, seen or heard about it. For example, a child will not want sugar in the future if they never had any in the past.

You also work hard to make your future be the way you want it to be. Making decisions can be hard because you're trying to figure out, "If I take job A, will I have more of what I want, or will job B give me more?" Focused on what you want to get, you chase after external things, trying harder, moving faster and not even enjoying what you already have. When do you step into the present moment?

When you are in the past or future, you are not in the present, meaning you are not present in your body. You only do "drive-bys," just to notice if you are hungry or thirsty, hot or cold, tired or fidgety. Then your mind takes you off again, tripping in your time machine. Your body suffers from your absence; when nobody's home, your body tightens — it begins to die.

It is your presence in your body that makes it a living body! When you become present, your body moves, breathes and opens up like a blossoming flower. Svaroopa® yoga poses excel at making you more embodied. Every class begins and ends with the Shavasana Guided Awareness, specifically to get you into your body, using it as a gateway to your own Presence, your own Self. By being here, in your body, you become present in your own Presence. That's the goal of yoga, that you know your own svaroopaa, your own Self.

Meditation is the most direct route to piercing kalaa, Shiva's self-imposed limitation of time. In meditation, it's easy to experience the eternity of your being, because your own Self is Shiva, the reality beyond time. Vidyadevi describes,

In a meditation, I could hear and see a pulsation rolling across vast empty space, like the rolling out of what would ultimately be the universe. The I, the Self, who knew I was watching, was eternal — beyond space & time. In contemplating this, I realize that anytime I am the Self, I am timeless."

Through your Svaroopa® yoga practices, you will discover who you are beyond time, as well as master and live within time. This is tantra: the weaving together of the outside and inside, the mundane and the Divine. Do more yoga. Do more Svaroopa® yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON "EXPLORING YOGA'S MULTIDIMENSIONALITY," OUR THEME FOR 2017, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI, VIDYADEVI STILLMAN & RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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