



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

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Self & Self #3

The Bliss of Consciousness

By Gurudevi Nirmalananda

Bliss is not the goal. Consciousness is. This can be confusing because most seekers are looking for bliss. But Consciousness is what matters. Still, bliss is incredibly important. Why? The need for bliss is built into you. Your body is hard-wired for bliss; it's called your parasympathetic nervous system. Your body has bliss software; it's called your endocrine system. Your mind and heart run on bliss. Without bliss, your heart dries up and your mind leapfrogs from anxiety to anxiety. It is not a pretty picture.

When you get even a drop of bliss, you spontaneously exhale with a sweet sigh, "Aaahh." All your biological systems stand down from red alert and you become human again. Being human means you have the capacity to shine God's light and love into the world. You have this capacity because the source is within, what yoga calls "your own Self."

The bad news is that, without bliss, people decide that life is not worth living. The good news is that bliss is easily attained. Though lasting bliss takes preparation and practice, instant bliss is instant. That's why my generation, coming of age in the 1960s, was focused on sex, drugs and rock and roll. Now, I can see that we settled for too little.

Bliss can be a continuing inner experience. It should be! That's yoga in a nutshell. Yet bliss is not the goal. Consciousness is. But what is Consciousness? For that matter, what is bliss?

Consciousness is your knowing that you know. You don't merely know things. A dog or cat knows things, but you know that you know. This is called Consciousness, technically the "self-reflective power" that humans have, unique amongst all other creatures. You are able to see that you see. You even think that you think. There are multiple dimensions within you, awaiting your exploration. The deeper you go, the more blissful it becomes.

This brings us back to bliss. What is bliss? Bliss is the sensation you experience when you rub up against God. In yoga, you find God within. So bliss is the sensation you experience when your personhood is being filled by God's light and love from the inside-out.

People usually associate bliss with half-lit rooms and half-conscious states. Most of the world accepts being drunk, drugged or half-asleep as a substitute for God. For a yogi, it's not enough. Unconscious bliss is unconscious. Personally, I always wanted more. I want you to want more.

The great yogi Adi Shankaracharya wrote a poem 1300 years ago, with a chorus after every verse, "chidananda rupah." Rupah (or roopa) means form, which you also see in the name "Svaroopā® yoga." Chit is yoga's name for primordial Consciousness and ananda means bliss, which is why you see it in the names of each of our swamis. All together this means:

Chidananda rupah.

My true form is the bliss of Consciousness.

His eight verses name all the things that you are not, including your body, your mind, your relationships, your possessions, your skills and talents, your past and future, your fears and desires, and more. While all of these are important, you are more than any of them. You are more than all of them put together. You are the one who has these things. You use them to show up and function in the world, but you could change any of them and still be you. Even in the midst of change, your essence is unchanged and unchangeable.

What is your essence? It is the mystical reality within: Shiva, the One Reality who is being you while being all. This is why the next line in the poem's chorus is:

Shivo'ham Shivo'ham

I am Shiva. I am Shiva.

What an amazing statement! When I first heard this teaching, my soul leapt with joy. But my mind contracted, saying, "What? Isn't it delusional to think that you are God?" At the same time, my heart quivered, hoping that the teaching was true while fearing it was not. While all these levels within me were vibrating, there was a deep steady inner presence, a wordless knowing. It is this wordless knowing that matters. This is your own Self. It is Shiva, knowing his own Shiva-ness, also called the "self-reflective power of Consciousness."

Shiva has five Divine Shaktis, five energies that bring the universe into existence. Each is a level of manifestation, so you can look at them sequentially, yet they work together to become all that exists.

Chit Shakti consciousness — Shiva reflecting his Shiva-ness in the lens of his own perception.

Ananda Shakti bliss — Shiva delighting in his perception of his own Shiva-ness.

Iccha Shakti will — Shiva choosing to bring forth multiplicity within his own Shiva-ness.

Jñana Shakti knowledge — Shiva knowing all that he will become, knowing each as himself.
Kriya Shakti action — Shiva bursting forth in multiplicity while remaining whole and unitary.

Shiva abides within himself during the pralaya, the timeless time between universes. Beyond form and formless, beyond light and dark, beyond time and space, Shiva is BE-ing. The first level of movement or energy is when Shiva reflects his own being to himself, chit-shakti. It's like when you look into your own eyes in a mirror, you see that you see. This is the self-reflective power of Shiva: to BE and to know that he BE-s. This is Consciousness.

You have this capacity intact within you. This is how you see in the mirror that you are not merely a pretty face, you are the one who sees. There is only One looking through all eyes, including yours. *Svaroopā*[®] yoga's practices propel you into this inner knowing and being.

Seeing that you see is blissful, ananda-shakti. Shiva's knowing of his own Shiva-ness is a bliss-filled knowing, a limitless and unending inner ecstasy. This means that, when you know your own Self as Consciousness-Itself, you experience the bliss of Consciousness. Thus the sage sings:

Chidaananda Rupah, Shivo'ham, Shivo'ham

My true form is the bliss of Consciousness, I am Shiva, I am Shiva.

This ever-expanding inner ecstasy concentrates itself into will, knowledge and action almost simultaneously. You can think of it like a pot of nectar overflowing and spreading through the whole world, even erupting in an orgasmic expression of creative force. Iccha-, jñana- and kriya-shaktis dance and swirl in what the tantrics call the "proliferation of shaktis." Everything that exists is another form of their entrancing, even entangling nature. This is how Shiva becomes jiva, the individual who does not know their own Shiva-ness.

Shiva, while being whole and unitary, is being all the multiplicity of the universe. Yet each of the multiple beings feels different from the others and, worse, separate from Shiva. Thus the dramas begin. Each jiva contributes to the fascinating spinning of repetitive cycles lasting until the next pralaya, when it all merges into Shiva again.

What happened to the bliss? Where's the Consciousness? It's all dumbed down. You accept mere pleasure as a substitute for bliss. Instead of being Consciousness-Itself, you treasure being conscious, using your senses to maximize life. Yet you crave the unconsciousness of sleep as well as the intoxication of food and other substances.

This is why the ancient sages said you must leave the world, so you stop chasing your senses and settling for limited bliss. As long as you look outward for bliss, it will be temporary and watered down. You have to look inward to find the source. The tantrics take a different approach, essentially saying, "If Shiva is being the world, why do I have to leave the world to find Shiva?" Instead, the task is to see Shiva in all the forms he BE-s, beginning with your own. Best of all, they found a shortcut: Shaktipat.

When you want something, you get it from someone who has it. If you go to a shoe store looking for pizza, they cannot help you. So if you want to find the bliss of Consciousness, you go to one who has it. That's the Guru. Shaktipat is the initiation into what the Guru has — Self-Knowingness.

Now your process goes in the reverse order. Above, I described how Shiva became Consciousness, by reflecting his own being within himself. That bliss-filled experience erupted into will, knowledge and action, the creative power that has brought this universe into being. You are part of this universe, so now you track it all back to where it came from. Fortunately, it's all found within.

Thus you perform the action (kriya-shakti) of looking within through meditation. Deepening beyond your knowledge of the world (jñana-shakti), even beyond your motivations and desires (iccha-shakti), you discover the bliss of your own being (ananda-shakti).

Don't stop at the bliss! Your own essence is the source of the bliss. While bliss is the "form of Consciousness," as Shankaracharya described, you must go beyond form to the formless. Then you go all the way to the knowingness of your own Beingness (chit-shakti). And you go beyond that to Beingness-Itself, Shiva. For you are Shiva. You already are and always have been. All you lack is the knowing of your own Self.

Now here's the mystery, the mystical kernel that makes it all work. When you get Shaktipat, chit-shakti is arising within you, opening you from the inside out. This arising often brings up bliss, ananda-shakti, truly the bliss of Consciousness. While you're working the process from the outside-inward, by meditating and doing your other practices, the Guru is working on you from the inside-outward. What a Divine shortcut!

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Svaroopā[®] Vidya Ashram ♦ www.svaroopaa.org ♦ info@svaroopayoga.org ♦ 610.644.7555