



Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram

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Self & Self #6

Breakthrough!

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That's what you really want, a breakthrough: a shift in perception, an insight or realization that makes you "get it". Suddenly you're free. Whatever was weighing you down simply has no power over you anymore. And you can't go back to the way you were either. Once you know, you can't not-know.

We love breakthroughs, even the images that evoke the feeling. Seeing the sun shining through a hole in the clouds brings me to a halt every time. I look around to see if other people are seeing it, too. I love a photo of a bird flying into a vast blue sky or a high-jumper sailing over the bar. As a kid in elementary school, I used to run and leap across the giant rain puddles on the playground. It felt almost like I could fly.

It's true, we want to fly, to shatter the shackles that keep us bound. It's the norm to live in your agendas, entangled in emotions and chasing wisps of thought. But the desire for freedom is there, inside. So many popular musicians sing, "I want to be free!" Yes! Freedom! Yoga is all about freedom.

Many people begin yoga by seeking freedom from pain or stress. Both dissolve in your first Svaroopa® yoga class. Then you want more: freedom from the limiting patterns in your body-mind, along with the unleashing of your power to laugh, love and give. These are great freedoms. Yoga delivers on these and promises more.

Udyamo Bhairava.h. — Shiva Sutras 1.5

The inner arising of transcendental consciousness
shatters your limitations and sets you free.

This is the ultimate breakthrough, the awakening into your own spiritual essence. It is called Shaktipat. However powerful you may believe love is, when you find its inner source, you find more. The source of love, source of joy, source of life, is your own Self, your own inherent Divinity. Bhairava is a name of Self, of Shiva as the destroyer, in the act of obliterating the feeling that you are not-Divine.

In this Sanskrit text, the previous four sutras laid out your dilemma: (1) You are Shiva, Consciousness-Incarnate. (2) You don't know who you are because Shiva hid himself inside you and (3) keeps your mind busy looking everywhere else except inside. (4) Your mind is constructed to run reruns, making you overreact every time.

What's amazing is that everybody keeps running around in these circles even though they're not enjoying it. Some people hope for an outer breakthrough, like winning the lottery. The difference with seekers is that they look for an inner breakthrough. There are many spiritual methodologies to try. Unfortunately, some of them merely give you a high, not a real breakthrough. Is that enough for you? It wasn't for me.

A couple of years ago, I helped staff a booth for Downingtown Yoga at a local exposition showcasing lots of different methodologies. On our right was a crystal healer; sound therapy with oriental gongs was being done on our left. Across from us was a vendor with incense, perfumes and oils. I watched people booth-hop, floating from one high to the next. They were having fun.

But I wanted to teach them how to be high without all those props. I wanted to show them how to look inside. I wanted to give them a breakthrough, not another coping mechanism. Shaktipat is the deepest, truest and most profound breakthrough of all. It reveals your Divine Essence to you, like when the clouds roll back, showing the sun that was already shining. And once you know, you can't "not-know" again.

What is it that you know after receiving Shaktipat? You have a deeper inner knowing of your own Self, the Divine light that is your essence. Your mind may return to pursuing its familiar patterns, but the deeper knowing has been awakened and is always there. Best of all, you can call it up within you, to arise and overwhelm your favorite forms of self-sabotage. How do you do that? Simply meditate. Of course, you use the enlivened mantra of this tradition to meditate, which works like scrubby-bubbles for your mind.

Gradually your mind tunes into this deeper power, your own Beingness. Your mind gives up its grouching and pettiness. Your mind shines with the light of your own Divinity, making you God's agent in the world. What a way to live! I confess, it is the only way I ever wanted to live.

Without this inner knowing, your mind is like a hummingbird. Though pretty, it darts from here to there, getting a drop of nectar in each place without ever getting filled up. Hummingbirds have to eat half their body weight every 15 minutes, visiting 1,000-2,000 flowers per day to do so. Similarly, your mind is voracious! It will eat you up.

Vidyaa-sa.mhaare taduttha-svapna-dar"sanam. — Shiva Sutras 2.10

Without Self-Knowledge, all kinds of thoughts arise, full of a sense of difference.

When you don't know your own Self, every thought is based in, "I'm different." You constantly remind yourself of your differences, comparing yourself with others. Everyone is focused on being different, which means everyone is actually doing the same thing. Your efforts to distinguish yourself from others make you feel separate, alone and lonely. You don armor, trying to protect yourself, or you crawl into a cocoon, trying to hide. The pandemic has only made it worse.

The inner experience of Self changes everything. You see the light of your own Beingness, impossible to chop down to size. Your mind breathes a deep sigh of relief, free from the need to conjure up problems and fears. And when life presents challenges, your mind shines the light of Consciousness into them, creating a pathway through the quagmire. Breakthrough changes everything.

So how do you get a breakthrough? Sometimes people tell me, "I'll wait for an answer from the universe." If you just wait for it, it could take a while. I think serendipity can be overrated. But if you try to force it, the answer doesn't feel real. It's like saying that you love a gift you've received when you really don't. If you overanalyze your situation, you often get more trapped in your dilemma.

Your mind has to stop for you to allow the breakthrough. That's why some say you have to bottom out, for only then does your mind stop. Kashmiri Shaivism gives it a more positive spin, calling the breakthrough "udyamo", meaning it is a raising up or elevation of your consciousness. Not a thought, it is a flash of understanding that opens your eyes to a whole new way of being.

Yogis of yore did intense poses and breathing practices, hoping to spark a lightning bolt inside, the cosmic energy that would light up their spine, Kundalini. In this yoga, you get it from one who has it. In Shaktipat, the "shakti" (energy of Cosmic Consciousness) is "pat" (transmitted) into you, to awaken your own dormant potential. Once awakened, you shine with your own light, progressively more and more as you learn to cooperate with it.

"Aha moment" was recently added to the dictionary. It's defined as "a moment of sudden inspiration, insight, recognition or comprehension" (Merriam-Webster). Oprah popularized the phrase, describing the aha doesn't happen because somebody is teaching you something new. The aha happens when somebody helps you to remember what you already knew.

Who is the somebody who will help you remember your own Divinity? Only one who knows. Such a yogi must know their own Divinity as well as yours. Sometimes people ask me, so earnestly, "What do I need to work on?" I answer them truthfully that I only see them as Shiva. I see their Divine light, not their shadows.

Yet you tend to look at your shadows. I'll tell you to get over it! Look deeper and find who you really are. Use the mantra to carry you deeper within so your light fills the shadows, obliterating them forever. This is the point of Shaktipat. It's not merely about having a good meditation. It's about what happens when you open your eyes at the end of your meditation.

If it was a breakthrough, you cannot go back to the way you used to be. I know, unfortunately, that you will try. Those mental and emotional patterns are so deep that they can be ruts you get stuck in. But the power of Consciousness has been awakened in you. It means you won't be comfortable with being stuck in a rut. You'll want out — technically the way out is in, through meditation. When you find your own Self, you abide in the ocean of Consciousness, not in a muddy old rut.

Do more yoga.

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