



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

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Insight into Sutras #8

Giving Yourself Over

By Gurudevi Nirmalananda

Yoga teaches surrender. This is how you get enlightened. It is also how you fall in love.

Surrender is how you experience God, whether you're looking outward or inward. This is why we formally teach the art of yogic surrender in every *Svaroopā*® yoga class – twice.

In English, the word surrender means you have lost the battle. As the loser, you now stand to suffer even more. Sanskrit has words that mean this but yoga doesn't use them. Yoga's texts use different Sanskrit words:

avasrj — to let off, let loose, let go, send, dismiss, abandon...

tyaj — to get rid of, free oneself from...

da — to give, grant, bestow, offer, to hand or deliver over...

parida — to surrender through devotion, to deliver up, to entrust...

sharana — to take refuge, to get help, shelter or sanctuary...

Some of these terms point to becoming free, a central theme of my young adulthood. Others mean bestowing or granting something precious to the care of another. The terms for taking refuge, shelter, sanctuary and protection are also paired with devotion. King Vatsaraja described this in 1000 BCE in the Kamasiddhistuti:

I seek refuge (sharana) with the glorious Goddess Sundari, the benefactress of prosperity, the secret heart, whose heart is soaked with compassion. She is blazing with an utmost tenacity steeped in joy, and consequently beaming with plenteous light that shimmers spontaneously.¹

What a Divine surrender! Yet you must go through stages in learning how to give over. Few are able to begin with being wonderfully overwhelmed by the glorious Goddess Sundari. Most start simpler. Bottom line, it is the experience of surrender that yoga values — not to whom you are surrendering. Why? Because each time you surrender, you become more you.

We teach surrender in Shavasana, a reclining pose, at the beginning and end of every *Svaroopā*® yoga class. I especially love the closing Shavasana. As a teacher, I can see the yogis giving themselves over to the floor, clearly deeper than in the beginning Shavasana. After the words of the Guided Awareness finish, the sweet silence becomes profound stillness.

While this begins as a physical process, it deepens. Such a surrender grants freedom from all your worldly cares and concerns, soothing your nervous system and brain, replenishing your heart. You become progressively more able to give over to a deeper experience, giving in to your own Divine Essence — Self.

Shariram havi.h.² — Shiva Sutras 2.8

The body is the offering.

You put your body into it. You are using your body as a doorway to enter into your own Self. It's not the only doorway available. Yoga uses every possible access point, from your body through your breath, your words, your thoughts, your actions, your memories and even your fantasies. Go ahead, think "I am Shiva!"

However, your body is one of the easiest ways inward. When you come to a yoga class, you leave other things behind. You surrender them so that you may have a greater experience, a deeper and more profound experience than worldly things can provide. And so you can bring a "new you" back into your life.

Your body is important. Where you put your body is where you put your life. The location where you live is key to who you think you are. The people with whom you share your physical space are the ones who give you a sense of meaning. The actions you perform, whether for your work or by preference, are where you pour your energies, your love and caring. It's all body based.

¹ <https://shorturl.at/EJPW3>

² "Sariira.m havi.h."

This is why I went to live with my Baba. I wanted to put my body there, in the room when he was teaching, not reading quotes from what he said. I wanted to live in his Ashram, in his home. My room in his Ganeshpuri Ashram connected down the hallway to his room. OK, it was three hallways, but I was in his house. It mattered to me then. It matters still.

Surrender shows up in our human lives. In marriage, in sexual union, you give your body over to another. You give your body over to dancing or to a sport. Playing a musical instrument is physical, yet an experience of surrender. The Native American vision quest is a physical process, seeking a great surrender. Pilgrimages are all physical: travels to holy mountains, rivers and sacred sites within the many traditions, seeking a Divine surrender.

Where you place your body matters — to you. You are not your body; it is something you have. A vital piece of equipment, you need it to be in this world, so you need to take good care of it. But you are more than your body. You are the one who lives in your body.

When you were born, you had to figure out how to use your body. You figured out how to get your thumb in your mouth. You learn how to manage a spoon, button buttons, how to walk and talk and more. Once you had mastered the basics, you begin exploring the world around you, looking for things to experience. Most people spend the rest of their life continuing this process, putting their body through so much, yet getting so little for their efforts.

A few people realize that that life can be more than a series of reruns. Yes, you could eat more chocolate. And what will that get you? Bottom line, pleasure is not enough. It satisfies you, but too briefly. Then you want more. You live in the wanting, which means you live in a feeling of lacking something. Yes! What you are lacking is your own Self.

When you are experiencing Self, you don't want anything else. At the top of a mountain peak, gazing at the endless views, you don't crave chocolate. The view triggers an expansive inner state, called a "peak experience." Yoga's goal is for you to live in this expansive inner state all the time, without depending on a panoramic view to get there. For it is an inner state, even when triggered by something external.

So you practice. Like an athlete, your practice makes you better and better at attaining this inner state. Except you don't attain it; you surrender to it. You surrender to your own Self, the expansive reality within. Now, based in the inner Knowingness of your own Beingness, you still have a body. What do you do with it?

For the first 30 years of my life, I thought my body was for the purpose of consuming things. Like the original Pac-Man game, I chomped on endless rows of dots. I hoped those many things and people would make me happy. In hindsight, I can see that my success rate was nowhere near 50%.

My success rate has improved. Yoga opens up an inner depth and steadiness that frees you from the endless pursuit of happiness. The bliss of your own Beingness fills you from within, giving you something worth sharing.

Shariram havih. — Shiva Sutras 2.8

The body is the offering.

For a yogi established in the Self, the body is the means by which they give. Every action is a sacred act, whether pouring ghee into a yaj~na fire or buttering toast. The whole of life becomes a Divine offering, a way of making a difference in this world, this physical realm that we share.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES, "INSIGHT INTO SUTRAS"

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