



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

June 2016 Contemplation:
Yoga & Spirituality #6

Fully Alive!

By Swami Nirmalananda & Rukmini Abbruzzi

No one wants to merely exist. How can you be truly, fully alive? Everyone says that all you need is a fulfilling job, a busy social life and time to pursue your passions. Maybe you'll decide to travel to exotic places, jump from airplanes or lovingly knit sweaters for the dear ones in your life. Not to mention that you're a yogi, so you add your yoga to the mix.

*To live is the rarest thing
in the world. Most
people just exist.*

— Oscar Wilde

But yoga's sages say that this is not what living fully is about. It's not about what you do or even how much you do. Your aliveness is found in how you do it. Fully alive means you are fully present, fully participating in life, but without depending on a certain outcome so that you don't lose your Self in the process. Yoga promises that you will be fully alive in every moment, in every location, in every relationship, in every task and in every breath. You are fully alive because you are living in the knowing:

...I am unborn,
undecaying, no start or end,
unchanging, consciousness and bliss,
smaller than small, greater than great.

I am beyond the primeval,
everlasting, self-luminous,
taintless, pure, vast space, unmoving,
blissful and imperishable.

— rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

Svaroopā® yoga practices dissolve the tensions through multiple levels of your body, mind and heart, clearing away inner blockages that hide your own Self. Every pose, yogic breath and mantra repetition opens up your inherent flow of happiness, joy and light. It's like unkinking a garden hose. You discover the source of that inner flow so that you're filled 24/7. The light of your own radiance shines through your life and relationships. But it shines only until the moment that it doesn't.

Something happens that triggers an internal objection to what's going on and, before you know it, you have a kink in the hose. You're cut off from your Self. It could be a tiny trigger, like being on hold with customer service for a long time, or a bigger deal, like stuff in your relationships, job or finances.

You already work hard to manage the contents of your life, trying to live in a sattvic bubble – a life filled with pure food, serene and peaceful surroundings, harmonious relationships. Unfortunately, no matter how much you try, you cannot successfully manipulate all external circumstances to suit you. Worse, some people may not want to live their life according to your plan for your personal happiness.

Living fully means you accept everything that's happening, while it's happening, simply because it is happening. It doesn't matter how you think it "should be." What matters is how it actually is. Objecting to it doesn't change it. Wishing it were different doesn't change it. Seeing it for what it is, this is the first step toward changing it, if it can be changed. More importantly, this is taking care of yourself by staying in Self.

In the same way that you soften into *Svaroopā*® yoga's spinal release poses, you can soften into the reality of your life. Our poses target the tightest areas of your spine, sometimes uncomfortably. When your angle is both safe and effective, you stay and breathe softly for a minute or two. Your pose dissolves the tensions along with the discomfort or pain. In the same way, when something is going on in life, you can stay with it and breathe softly. Staying with it, without trying to change it or avoid it, begins to dissolve your unpleasant feelings within a minute or two. Swamiji says, "As soon as you notice your experience, you are conscious. Being conscious changes everything. I call this, 'experiencing your experience'."

Rukmini recalls her first try:

I had a migraine and decided to try "experiencing my experience." I began to notice that there was the pain of the migraine itself, and there were muscles I had tightened around the pain to protect myself from it. I definitely had objections to the pain. But as I allowed the pain, truly accepted it that

it was there, it all began to melt away. First the pain of the migraine began to change in some way, then it actually diminished. I discovered that, in objecting to what was happening, I had cut myself off from my own Self. The moment I actually experienced my experience, I was no longer separate from my Self. And my Self is where the healing power comes from!

It is tricky. If you accept what's happening, but hoping that accepting it will make it go away, that's not really accepting it. There's a subtle objection built in. Acceptance is being 100% all in, without being motivated by a payoff. Swami Nirmalananda says, "You've taken the wrong highway exit. To find the way back, you first have to ask, 'Where am I?' Then, accepting where you are, you can actually do something about it."

Acceptance is not giving up. You can still work on changing things, while you have no delusions about where you are starting from. You make more intelligent decisions and operate more effectively when you begin by accepting where you are now. Objecting to the current situation, especially by comparing it with what you want, makes you incapable of clear thinking. It's like if it rains when you planned to go to the beach, you can be irritated and sit unhappily at home, complaining about your ruined day. Or you can accept the rain and go to the movies instead, or even go walking on the beach in the rain.

Most people are comparing the reality of their life with the unreality of their mind, unfortunately preferring the maayaa of their mind to the flesh and blood circumstances in front of them. It's painfully easy to do. As a yogi, you make a different choice, to embrace your experiences consciously, thus living more fully.

Is there anyone who doesn't have to work at this? Anyone who is fully alive all the time? Yes, the knower of the Self is always fully present, always fully alive, living with an open mind and open heart. The Guru is such a person, living in the ever-knowing that she is the Self. That knowing is not diminished or enhanced by any person or situation. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna describes such a Self-Realized being:

ya.h sarvatraanabhisnehas
tat tat praapya .subhaa"subham
naabhinandati na dve.s.ti
tasya praj~naa prati.s.thitaa
— Bhagavad Gita 2.57

The one who is free from desire in all situations,
neither delighted by good fortune
nor dejected by tribulation,
is fully established in the Self.
—rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

This is yoga's true goal, memorialized in the Ashram's name: svaroopavidya (vidya-the experiential knowing of, svaroopo-your own Self). When you know your own Self as Existence-Itself, you know there is nothing that you are not. You are Shiva, who is being everything:

every person, every tree, every blossoming flower,
every baby's smile, everyone who is being born,
everyone who is dying, everything that exists and
that which is the source of everything that exists
and beyond it.¹

What more could you ever want? Knowing your own Self, there's no more desire, nothing to gain, nothing to avoid. Every good fortune, every difficulty is another form of consciousness coming your way. It's all you — you as an individual, who is experiencing everything, all of which is Shiva, who is you.

Now your decisions and actions no longer come from a place of need, greed or fear. This is the Guru's state. This is how she lives her life. In this way the Guru is showing you your own future. As a human being, it's your destiny to realize that you are the Self. Not just sometimes, not just in meditation. Always. The Guru is your direct path to this state, because it's her job to spark the inner awakening that frees you. This is the specialty of the *Svaroopo*[®] path, the inner awakening you that gives you the knowing of your own Divinity. Every pose you do, every yogic breath you take, every mantra repetition then expands your inner opening into your Self. What a reason to do more yoga!

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¹ Poem by Rukmini Abbruzzi