



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

January 2016 Contemplation:
Yoga & Spirituality #1

Uplift Your Aspirations

By Swami Nirmalananda & Vidyadevi Stillman

You already get so much from yoga: improved health, better sleep and reduced stress, plus you are calmer, more peaceful and even happier. Yet yoga offers much more, promising you will be grounded in your own Divine Beingness. Patanjali's Yoga Sutras calls this "svaroopā," which is where our practice gets its name. In 2016, our teachings theme is Yoga & Spirituality. We have the whole year to clarify and support the profound experiences Svaroopā® yoga gives you.

Spirituality is not a religious goal nor even a yogic goal. It's a human goal. It's the purpose of life. Swami Nirmalananda says, "This means that life is spiritual, whether you are religious or not, because it's all about you experiencing your own 'spirit,' which is built into the word 'spiritual.' Your spirit is Divine. You are that Beingness that is being all and beyond all."

To attain this you must allow yoga to invade your life. If you want a yogic life, you must uplift your aspirations. Aim higher! However much you have already accomplished, there is more. Wherever you have been and whatever you think you still can do, there is more available to you. To find that "more," you must look inward. This is what yoga gives you: the ability to look inward so you can find what is already there — your own Self.

This means you must do more yoga. There is truth in the saying, "Practice makes perfect." How many of the 7 billion people who inhabit this planet really are accomplished in the arts, sports, business or yoga? Too many people attain only mediocrity. Nothing is attained without practice. Most importantly, you cannot deepen into the experience of your own Self without practice.

Patanjali explains what practice is, which applies whether your goal is to improve your life or to attain the ultimate:

sa tu diirgha-kaala-nairantarya-satkaaraasevito d.r.dhabhuumi.h — Yoga Sutras 1.14

Abhyasa (practice) becomes firmly grounded by being cultivated for a long time, without interruption and with devotion.¹

If any one of his three essentials is missing, your practice will not take you to your goal.

A LONG TIME

Vidyadevi loves to go to Longwood Gardens, with 4.5 acres of greenhouses housing 5,500 types of plants. For a long time, since 1919, they have first prepared the soil for the plants, removing any rocks, adding fertilizer and the seeds. Then each sapling has been tended by watering, weeding, pruning and protecting it from insects and animals. They must tend to the plants over the long haul if they want to see results. The same is true with your own yoga practice. Are you going to continue your practice for the long haul? If you don't, you won't get the payoff, especially if your goal is living in the Bliss of your own Self.

WITHOUT INTERRUPTION

A plant requires a certain amount of water, heat, light and nutrients to bloom. If you care for your plants sporadically, they will not blossom. Have you have had plants die because of this? Interruption is not compatible with lasting for a long time. In the same way, your yoga practice must be without interruption. The things you do daily have the biggest impact on your life.

¹ Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

Longwood Gardens is open every day of the year. Behind the scenes, the plants are taken care of on a daily basis. Yet your yoga practice can be interrupted by vacations, family, friends, work, and other things. Except it is your yoga that supports you in the midst of vacations, family, friends, work and everything else. When you miss a day, you lose that support. Worse, you're not making headway toward the deepening into your own Self.

WITH DEVOTION

You will not get anywhere unless you invest your heart. It's the same with a job, with getting an education and with maintaining a relationship. Both your heart and mind must be engaged in the process. Vidyadevi says, "This is why, when I am co-teaching with Swamiji, I come and listen to her discourse even if I have heard it before. Hearing her teach opens my heart and gives me more devotion toward my own practice."

You don't continue doing anything unless you've put your heart in it. You know this. Even your plants know whether your heart is there or not. If the people at Longwood Gardens stopped caring about the gardens, they would fall into ruin. The same is true with your own yoga practice. If you are not devoted, your practice will be dry and mechanical, and you will not attain the goal.

CULTIVATING ABHYASA

In *Svaroopā*[®] yoga, you start learning abhyasa in the first theme, Daily Practice. You learn how to do a home practice, so you can continue for a long time, every day without interruption, while cultivating your love for the practice as you receive the many benefits.

Mumukshutva is "the longing for liberation." This is what fuels your whole process. *Svaroopā*[®] yoga cultivates this longing quite purposefully. Consider how you feel when you roll out of Shavasana at the end of class and rest on your side. Or remember how you feel at the end of meditation, when you slowly open your eyes. This feeling is named svaroopā; it is the bliss of your own Self. Once you have had that experience, you want it again. And again and again.

This keeps you coming to class as well as doing your home practice. Recognize the yearning for what it really is, the longing to know who you really are. Allow yourself to feel the power of this yearning so you can pour it into the process that leads to the experience of your own Self.

Everyone has this deep longing, but those who feel it most strongly were yogis in previous lifetimes. Though they didn't attain enlightenment last time, the fruits of their prior practices come with them into this lifetime.

A yoga bhrashta (reborn yogi) is reborn either in a prosperous family that loves God
or in a family of yogis so as to continue his practice from his previous birth."

Bhagavadgita 6.41-42²

What good news! This means you brought all your spiritual progress from previous lifetimes into this lifetime. It also means all the practice you do now is laying the groundwork for getting enlightened in this lifetime or for coming in with a head start next time.

Most *Svaroopā*[®] yogis are yoga bhrashtas, otherwise they would want to pump out Sun Salutations or be striving for yoga-buns. Your interest in *Svaroopā*[®] yoga means that your yearning is propelling you into yoga's spirituality.

The difference between you and others is that your yearning is greater. It means that your own Self is so close to you, arising within you, demanding to be known! Your yearning is the rocket ship fuel that will take you all the way. *Svaroopā*[®] yoga intentionally cultivates your yearning by giving you the experience of your own Self again and again. Do more yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON "UNDERSTANDING YOGA — UNDERSTANDING LIFE," OUR CONTEMPLATION THEME FOR 2015, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI, VIDYADEVI STILLMAN AND RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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² Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda