



September 2014 Contemplation: Body, Mind & More #9
Deceptively Easy ▼ Amazingly Powerful
by Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati & Rukmini Abbruzzi

Svaroopa® yoga is easy yoga, maybe even too easy, compared to the athleticism that has taken over the Western yoga world. Especially with plaid blankets filling in where your body needs the extra support in a pose, giving your spine a whole new lease on life. Your teacher encourages you to “soften into the pose,” reminding you of which muscles to be using and which muscles to be relaxing, so you don’t stiffen or force. You unfortunately already know how to push yourself; you don’t need any training in that.

Swami Nirmalananda remembers one yogi’s reaction to her first *Svaroopa*® yoga class.

After taking her first class one evening, she called a friend, totally outraged. A yoga teacher herself, she ranted about this “bogus yoga,” complaining that all we had done was roll around on the floor for an hour-and-a-half.

The next morning she got up to do her strenuous yoga practice, but her body moved completely differently — easier, farther, smoother, no pain... She called her friend back and said, “There’s something amazing going on here and I want to know more about it.”

While it can feel like you’re doing nothing, the poses are unraveling the deepest layers of tension in your body, your spinal muscles. This decompression of your spine opens up your inherent health and vitality, yet this core opening offers you more: revealing your *svaroopa*, your own Divinity. This is the amazing power of *Svaroopa*® yoga, a profoundly spiritual power.

Simple and deep, accessible yet profound, both easy and powerful. These are rare combinations, yet they describe *Svaroopa*® yoga perfectly. You make a small effort: you lie in Shavasana, bring one knee in towards your chest and hold it in line with your ear for a bit, and then you lay it down. You get so much deep change in just a couple of minutes, in only one half of one pose. So you keep on going, doing both sides and sequencing your whole spine from tail-to-top. As your spinal tensions melt, your breathing becomes steady. Your mind becomes calm. Your heart becomes light; you’re truly “lighthearted.” Your inner feeling of your own self gets deeper; your life gets better. Simple, easy and accessible practices give you deep, profound and powerful results.

Some poses are “working poses” while others are deep spinal release poses. Some combine both approaches, so you are working your abs, arms and leg muscles in order to get deep spinal release. But your first step is to learn how to allow the core release to reach all the way “in there.” Thus you begin with poses that provide full spinal support. With your back on the floor, the easier you allow the pose to be, the more powerful it is. More change happens when you get out of your own way. When you effort less and allow the pose to have an effect on you. When you cooperate. When you surrender. Uh-oh, “surrender.”

This is not easy for everyone. Letting the pose be easy can be hard. “No pain, no gain,” is a particularly Westernized approach to life. It can take time, practice and perseverance to find the ease. It takes courage to surrender.

As you continue the same simple-but-profoundly-precise poses over time, they become even more powerful. You get more out of them. They take you to an experience of your Self more quickly, and the experience is increasingly more profound. Rukmini describes her evolving experience of Shavasana:

The first time my teacher said, “Notice your toes,” I wasn’t even sure where they were. I wanted to pick my head up and look at them. I didn’t understand I was able to notice my toes from the inside. My mind was really busy the whole time, trying to do what the teacher was asking of me.

After coming to classes for a while, when she said, “Notice your toes,” I was *gone*. I passed in.

Now, with each “notice your toes” I sink in to a deep, quiet state, being aware throughout the whole Guided Awareness. When I hear the closing phrase, “Follow Awareness in to Its source; rest in THAT,” I know that I *am* THAT.

This is Grace, yoga’s revelation, revealing the reality of your own Divinity. Grace flows through *Svaroopā*® yoga. It doesn’t flow only through *Svaroopā*® yoga, it flows through all spiritual practices. It’s part of the human experience. How fortunate that the Grace flowing through *Svaroopā*® yoga and *Svaroopā*® Vidya is such a strong current. The poses open you up to the infinity of your own Divinity. But what if you do it in the other order; what if you start with infinity and add it to your pose? The ancient sage Patanjali recommends precisely this:

prayatna “saithilyaananta samaapattibhyaam — Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras 2.47

[Asana (pose) is mastered] by relaxing effort and
merging your mind in the Infinite.¹

In the preceding sutra, Patanjali has said that asana should be steady and easy. Now he is telling us how to achieve this: while you’re in a pose, let go of efforting and pour your mind toward the Infinite. Try it with a working pose. Do Warrior Pose. Relax into the pose without losing your alignments, and think of the sky — let your mind expand into the vastness of the sky. Does your pose get better? While the sky is not actually infinite, you are using the sky as an easy way to turn your mind toward something greater than itself, you’re turning your mind towards the infinite. Starting with relaxing into the pose and then pouring your mind toward the infinite can have a big effect on your pose. Now add a new dimension to your experiment: on the other side of your Warrior Pose, repeat mantra, silently or aloud:

OM namah shivaaya, OM namah shivaaya, OM namah shivaaya,
OM namah shivaaya, OM namah shivaaya...²

This is the mantra of our lineage, which means “I bow to my own Divinity.” Relax into your Warrior Pose and repeat mantra while you are there. See what happens to your pose. The mantra holds the whole of consciousness in the words and sounds, so by repeating mantra, you’re applying your mind to something that *is* the infinite the inside, which is your own Self.

This would be wonderful and tricky stuff, deceptively easy and amazingly powerful, even if it were just about you getting into a better yoga pose. Yet yoga is really about meditating on the infinite, so that you will have an experience of the infinite within you, that is you. If that experience makes your pose easier, what will it do for your sense of your self when you’re not in a pose? This can affect your day, even your whole life.

You could actually repeat mantra all the time, while in yoga poses and when you are not in yoga poses, and you would have an ongoing experience of your own Divinity. You’d be living in the world from that innermost dimension. While this is an important step, it’s not the goal. Ultimately you won’t need yoga poses, mantra or any of yoga’s practices to open the door to your own Self, because you’ll never not know who you are. This is Self-Realization: to realize you are the Self, it’s always been who you are. And on your way to that inner knowing, you get to choose the doorway that works best for you: asana and breathing, mantra and meditation, sutra studies, devotional practices, selfless service — every doorway opens the inner path to your Self; every door is suffused with Grace. Pick one or do them all! Do more yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON “BODY, MIND & MORE,” OUR CONTEMPLATION THEME FOR 2014, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI AND VIDYADEVI STILLMAN OR RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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¹ Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

² Pronounced o-o-o-om nā-mā(h) shī-vāā-yā