



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

November 2015 Contemplation:
Understanding Yoga — Understanding Life #11

Grace is Amazing

By Swami Nirmalananda & Rukmini Abbruzzi

You are an individualized expression of The Ultimate Reality. You are the Self, ever blissful, all knowing, pure existence. You have always been the Self. You have never not-been the Self. Is this how you experience yourself every day? Svaroopavidya, the experiential knowing of your own Self, means you wake up knowing, “I am Consciousness Itself! I am that which manifests the universe and beyond!” Or are your first thoughts something more along the lines of, “Gotta get up. Gotta get dressed. Gotta go to work. Where’s my coffee?” Or, as a yogi, maybe you’re thinking, “Gotta get up. Gotta meditate. Where’s my chai?”

Maayaa, the fourth of Shiva's powers, traps you in Her spellbinding dance. She traps you in the experience of being an individual, separate and alone, with limited time, limited energy and limited resources, unto lifetimes. But Shiva's fifth power is Grace. Grace pierces the veil of Maayaa, revealing your inner Divinity to you, within you. These experiences are great, profound and mystical moments, tastes of enlightenment. Grace also shines into mundane matters, giving you the “aha” moment, when what's unknown becomes known. Once you know what you didn't know, everything is illumined by that knowledge. Grace changes everything.

The current of Grace that flows through Svaroopā® Yoga is very strong, coming from a lineage of Masters who have carried these teachings to our current time. You make a small effort, starting in Shavasana, bringing one knee in towards your chest to hold it in line with your ear for a bit. Then you hold your other knee. You get so much change after just a couple of minutes. More than mere physical change, you get the deeper inner opening that gives you access to your own Divinity. It's amazing! Both physical and more than physical. Grace supports you every step of the way.

Our yoga and meditation practices are Grace-filled and Grace-fueled. Every pose you do, every breath of your breathing practice, every repetition of mantra and every meditation draws you deeply inward, revealing what has always been hidden within. Since Shiva hid your Divinity within you, Shiva must reveal it. Shiva emanates Grace so that you experience and know your own Self.

Everyone has had Grace shine into their lives in some wonderful ways, and everyone serves as a conduit of Grace from time to time, either intentionally or accidentally. A friend makes you a cup of cocoa and listens, really listens to your troubles, lifting you up out of the stuff you're stuck in. A yoga teacher props you with precision in a pose so you discover the stuck spot in your spine. Then she or he gives you a pull and the stuck stuff dissolves — revelation! Grace is the power of revelation and upliftment. It doesn't just come through yoga; it's a power of Shiva and Shiva is everything, so Grace is everywhere.

You may not be receiving all the Grace available to you. Even with yoga in your life, even with sweet moments of upliftment by strangers and friends, from loved ones and sunsets, and even stray kittens showing up at your door, you probably don't experience Grace as often as you'd like. Or as much as you need. Swami Nirmalananda says, “I live a Grace-filled life and I would like for you to, too.”

How do you access Grace more concretely, more frequently and more powerfully? On the inside, you attune yourself to Grace, and on the outside you go to the source of Grace. The Sanskrit word for Grace names the source of Grace — Guru.

Gukaara.h prathamō var.no maayaadi-gu.na-bhaasaka.h,
rukaaro dvitiiyo brahma maayaa-bhraantivinaa”sanam. — “Srii Guru Gita 24
Gu- is Maayaa, fragmentation, Ru- is the knowing of the One.

Guru grants the Self and freedom from great Maayaa's spellbinding play¹

The word Guru is made up of two root sounds,² “gu” and “ru.” Gu vibrates with Mayaa, the not-knowingness and inner darkness. Swamiji says it's aptly named, because it's like “goo.” “Ru” vibrates with knowingness, the light that illuminates darkness.

Nirmalananda says, “You need the Guru, one who takes you from darkness (gu) to light (ru). You've probably already had a few rugus in your life, those who have taken you from light to darkness. It's time to go the other way.” The title Guru honors those who give their lives over to the force of Grace, thus becoming a reliable source

¹ Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

² Bij mantras

for others, like a tree is a reliable source of shade. With such a Master, it's the force of Grace that's being named by the word "Guru," not the person or personality.

The creative power is called Brahma, the energy of maintenance is called Vishnu, the force of destruction is called "Siva. The dynamism of concealment is named Maayaa and the power of upliftment is called Guru. Even though we have the five names, there is still only The One. The One Divine Reality has these five cosmic powers, the fifth of which is the power to set you free.

Rukmini describes it, "Swami Nirmalananda, as a Guru, is an agent of upliftment and revelation. Her teachings, her practices, her presence free you from Maayaa's spellbinding play to reveal Who You Are. The Divinity of your own Self." To step into relationship with a Guru is about opening yourself up to the flow of Grace that takes you home to your own Self, to the recognition, the Realization of your own Self as Shiva.

I didn't know what Grace was before I met Baba. I heard the word in church but didn't understand what it meant. Baba made it tangible for me plus he gave the scriptures and teachings that explained it. At one point, after years of being flooded with his Grace, I decided to contemplate Grace so I could understand what was happening.

I asked myself, 'When did I first experience Grace?' I tried to peg it onto the date I'd received Shaktipat, but I realized it had started long before then. As I tracked back to try and identify it, I realized my life has always been filled with Grace. Grace is everywhere because God is everywhere. Are you paying any attention?

Before I met the physical form of Grace, the incarnation of Grace, the Guru, I didn't know what to call it. I couldn't pick Grace out of all the influences in my life. I didn't know how to align myself with it and how to receive it. Baba gave me that, and so much more.

— Swami Nirmalananda

Some people don't realize that the relationship with the Guru is a relationship with the force of revelation. They want a Guru to be sweet, nurturing, mothering and supportive. But nurturing and support are not part of the definition of Grace. They are part of the third action of maintenance, personified in Vishnu. The Guru is not Vishnu. The Guru cannot support you in staying small, trapped in Maayaa's illusion. The Guru will use whatever means necessary to move you out of your limitations, sometimes with sweet words and sometimes with fire. The Guru is embodied Grace, the Self pulling you towards the Self.

A true Guru is the living embodiment of the teachings, a visible promise that you as a human being have the capacity to be fully human and fully Divine. You need a living example. If you don't have a model of embodied Divinity, how can you believe that it's who you are and who you can be?

Yet she's not interested in you following her. She knows that it's not about her as a person, persona or personality. Everything she does is about you and how much Grace you can let in. She is in your life, if you allow her to be, like the sun in the day — to fill you with light. The Guru's greatest gift of Grace is the awakening of your own inner force of upliftment through Shaktipat.

Grace will pour into your life in many ways, but Grace in the form of a human being, someone you can have a relationship with, touches you more deeply than any other kind of Grace. Those that you love inspire and challenge you, they push you to grow beyond your limitations. They expand your capacity to love. Sometimes they even push your buttons. But always, it's your relationships with other people that touch your heart and affect you most deeply. This is why Shiva gave us Grace in the form of human being, to be such a powerful force for transformation and upliftment.

Kashmir Shaivism says the whole of Consciousness is intact within you, and promises that you can experience this while you live your life. The purpose of the Guru, and the service the Guru gives, is to be the embodied, scintillating lamp of Consciousness that lights your inner lamp. Thus you experience and become the embodied, scintillating lamp of Consciousness that You already are. That's Shaktipat. That's Grace. That's yoga.

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