



Svaroopaa® Vidya Ashram

February 2016 Contemplation:
Yoga & Spirituality #2

Setting Yogic Goals

By Swami Nirmalananda & Rukmini Abbruzzi

If you don't set any goals, what will you attain? While this applies to your life, it also applies to your spirituality. The good news is that 45% of Americans make New Year's resolutions. If you don't make New Year's resolutions any more, much less try to keep them, how are you going to get enlightened?

When you set a goal and make a plan to attain it, you are working from clarity about what you want. You're choosing the direction your life will take. You're setting your own fate and determining your own future. Of course you must apply your energies to your goal, wonderfully increasing your chances of attaining what you have chosen. Would you get there without setting a goal and applying yourself?

Your yoga goal for 2016 could be about improving your health, getting better sleep, enjoying peace of mind or developing emotional buoyancy. *Svaroopaa*® yoga easily gives you all of this, and all at the same time. Yoga and meditation are amazing! Simply Google "benefits of meditation" and you'll get more than 31 million results. "Benefits of yoga" gives over 50 million.

In her 2015 year-long programme, Swami Nirmalananda explained why meditation is getting good press. It's not because meditation will give you a spiritual experience, but media loves it because it helps you attain your worldly goals:

Research has proven that meditation improves people's health, mental capacity, relationships, longevity and happiness. This is not news for you because you are already experiencing some or all of the benefits; you are the proof that the researchers are looking for.¹

The multilevel benefits of your *Svaroopaa*® practices are immediate: you've discovered how good you feel after just one yoga or meditation class. Apply yourself to your practices and you find that the benefits increase exponentially: it won't be long before your pain is gone, you're happier, more comfortable in your body, more at ease in your relationships and in your life. These benefits may be what attracted you to yoga and meditation.

If are already getting what you want from yoga, just keep doing it and you'll keep getting results. Except you're actually going to get more. Isn't that great? It's a marketing miracle, getting more than was advertised, even getting more than you paid for. What is the more that are you going to get? You're going to get your "capital-S Self," *svaroopaa*. Even if you are not looking for your spirituality, it will expand within you. You've already begun growing into your "Self."

When you want yoga to improve your life, your goal is focused on "small-s self." This self is like a diamond. Doing yoga is a way of polishing your gem. Now it sparkles and shines more when the light shines through it. Unfortunately you can get stuck here because yoga makes you more beautiful, sweeter, happier and more loveable, thus more people love you. When other people love you, it makes you happy. But happiness based on beauty or popularity will fail you.

Yoga's goal is to make you happy regardless of how others see you or feel about you. Their ability to love or approve of you rises and falls, depending as much on their life or their mood as it does on how you look or what you do. You need to draw on your inner resources if you truly want to be happy. You need a higher goal. Your yoga goal could be to know the bliss of your own Self, *svaroopaa*.

Yoga gives you your innermost Self, which is the Source of Love, the Source of Joy, the Source of Peace. Your own Self is the Source of Light: the light that shines through your polished diamond actually comes from within. Do you want to be the diamond (small-s self) or do you want to be the

^f Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati, "Inner Experiences," in *Spiritual Development: Stages & Steps*, *Svaroopaa*® Vidya Ashram 2015, page 1

light itself (capital-S Self)? The diamond in the dark doesn't glow.

Fortunately the sages promise us that you don't have to choose between the light and the diamond. It's not "either-or." When you discover your "Self," you are still your "self." In the process along the way, you continue to improve your small-s self while you are uncovering your capital-S Self within:

Bala-laabhe vishvam-aatmasaat-karoti — Pratyabhijnahridayam 15

By uncovering your inherent consciousness-power, you make the universe your own.

Yoga poses and breathing open the doorway inside, to the experience of your own Self. Meditation is the direct route, taking you deeper into your own essence, which is made of consciousness. You are not becoming a new-and-improved version of yourself; you are uncovering the Self that you always were. Your own Divinity was hidden within, you're simply finding your Self. That's why it is called "Self-Realization," for you realize that your own Self is and always was Consciousness-Itself.

In realizing that you are consciousness, you uncover your own consciousness-powers, which include creativity, bliss, illuminative insight and the power to decide and act effectively in the world. This is not mundane creativity, by which you can make a needlepoint pillow or grow a beautiful garden. You uncover Divine Creativity, shining through your mind and heart, showing you ways to make a difference in the world. It's a whole new level of aliveness, a whole new way to live!

But you don't leave your small-s self behind. You are still you, with your skills and talents, your relationships and activities, and even your silly quirks and idiosyncrasies. You are the capital-S Self, who is being your small-s self. You are that which yoga calls "THAT," that reality which has become and is being the entire universe. Your love and caring naturally extend through the whole universe; you make it your own. It is all as much a part of you as your fingernails or your sense of humor. The whole universe is an outer expression of your innermost essence. Yet in caring for all, you still care about those who are closest to you. You still have your life. You are still you.

While your own Self is already intact within you, most of the time you're not experiencing this deeper essence. Your attention is usually focused outward, working on goals that you've chosen or that others have chosen for you: a degree, a career, a relationship or even all of them at the same time. What happens when you achieve these worldly goals? Rukmini describes graduating from college:

I'd worked for years to get the grades to get into college, then to get the grades so I could get the degree. That big day arrived. I was wearing my graduation cap and gown, with a certificate in hand at last! I felt surprisingly empty. I thought, "Is this it?"

There are pivotal times in everybody's life: graduating from school, your kids leave home, when you retire. It's time to reevaluate your goals. You ask yourself, "Now what? I attained my goal but do I really want it?" Swamiji describes,

I would set and attain goals and then realize that attaining the goal didn't make me happy. I finally figured out it was because I'd been working on the wrong goals. I set a higher goal. And attained it.

No matter what goals you set for your small-s self, they're never as satisfying as you think they'll be. That's because what you really wanted all along is your own capital-S Self. Your own Self is the thing you were looking for even when you were chasing the other goals. You set goals to do more, even to be more, because deep down you know you ARE more. You are so much more.

The high points in life are when you're shining with light, loving, generous, joyful and peaceful. You want to be that way all the time. Of course you do — because it's who you really are, deep down inside. You are svaroopaa, the capital-S Self. You are Consciousness-Itself.

When you set goals and work toward them, you will achieve them. But how high are you going to aim? It's up to you. You get to choose. Maybe your goal is the experiential knowing of your own Divine Self. Now you'll want to do more yoga.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON "YOGA & SPIRITUALITY," OUR TEACHINGS THEME FOR 2016, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI, VIDYADEVI STILLMAN AND RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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