



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

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Focus on Enlightenment #5

## Living in Bliss

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“I don’t want to live in constant bliss,” a student said to me. No one ever told me that before, so I was surprised. I asked her why. “I don’t want to lose my downs. Always being up sounds boring. I love my downs.” I reassured her that bliss is never boring, but that she can have life any way she chooses. I didn’t understand her choice because I was doing yoga specifically to get free from the existential angst I knew too well.

Since she was 20 years older than me, I considered that she might know more about life than I did. Perhaps I would mature into it. Instead I’m happy to say that I’ve matured into a constant inner bliss. While bliss is my inner foundation, I still use my mind and feel my feelings. It’s called multidimensionality.

Thoughts and emotions are like the waves on the surface of the ocean, fascinating and even fun, but superficial. The ocean’s depth is always there, just as the bliss of pure beingness underlies your mind. Like the ocean, every human being encompasses an inner depth along with surface-level capacities.

The Yoga Vasishtha says there are 35 levels of which the human being can be aware. It is simpler structure than it seems, with your sensory perceptions taking up 20 of the levels. At a subtler dimension is your mind, but it can captivate you for a long time. This is because it spans three levels, pivotally placed between your outward-turned senses and the inner dimensions of your own being.

Delving deeper inward, you have 12 expansive dimensions to explore before discovering the One who experiencing all these levels. That is your own Self, the experiencer of all your experiences. A Self-Realized being is established in the Self, knowing and experiencing their own Beingness while enjoying all the other levels at the same time. You can think of it like a beautiful and fascinating kaleidoscope, but with 35 levels, all of which are interacting with each other. It’s a glorious multidimensionality!

Most spiritual traditions say you must leave the 35 levels behind in order to know your Self. Our tradition, based in Kashmiri Shaivism, says you can have it all. The difference is Shaktipat, the initiation that opens up the deepest inner dimension for you. You don’t have to wrestle with your mind for decades before you experience your own Self. Shaktipat gives you your Self at the very beginning of your spiritual path.

I didn’t explain all this to my student who was rejecting constant inner bliss. I didn’t yet understand that Self-Realization gives you mastery over all the levels of your being, all at the same time. Yet I’d seen it in action when watching my Guru. One evening, during his profound spiritual discourse, he cried. He’d been talking about his own Guru, so lovingly, so full of gratitude. He said, like anyone would say about a loved one, “I miss him still.” And a few tears slipped down his cheeks.

I was deeply touched. Though my heart was melting, my mind was confused. “Wait! He’s supposed to be Self-Realized! Doesn’t that mean he’s always in bliss? How can he be sad? How can he be crying?” Now I see that his inner state was undiminished. My problem at the time was that I didn’t understand what Self-Realization is. I will attempt to explain it here, although he warned us, “You cannot understand it until you get there.” Possibly my explanation will help you get there!

Self-Realization is commonly called “enlightenment,” though the words mean significantly different things. “Enlightenment” means a light was turned on. Yoga says, if it was turned on, it can go off again. Self-Realization means you realize that you are the Self. Once you know, you cannot stop knowing. It’s a realization, an undeniable inner knowing.

When you realize that you are the Self, it’s like the ocean realizing it has depths. The depths were always there, but now the ocean knows. Your Divine Essence is already and always has been there, even while you were looking on the surface level for an improvement in your life or in your mind. Svaroopā® Vidya meditation is about discovering the deeper dimension within while you have a mind.

You don't lose your mind, nor do you lose your life, yet you are changed while you live in them. What is that change? You simply realize who you are.

Getting there is not simple. Why not? Because your mind and emotions are complicated. Truth, Essence, Being, Consciousness and Bliss — these are all uncomplicated. It's your mind that messes you up. Thus, all of yoga's practices are for your mind. That's easy to see if we return to my student who didn't want to give up her "downs." She didn't want to lose sadness, anger, guilt and fear. Why? She believed that, if she never felt sad, she would lose love. Her experience was that when someone told her about their difficulties, she felt sad for them. This was a way to show her love. If she was sad, she could turn to people who would show her that they loved her in a similar way. She associated her unhappy emotions with getting or giving love.

What if you could both give and receive love without having to be motivated by unhappiness? When you are based in your own deepest essence, your emotions are Divine Emotions. Every thought or feeling is motivated by the bliss of Consciousness, including love, including tears.

Your own experience is that your thoughts and feelings are inextricable. Whatever you persist in thinking, your body feels. It's built into your anatomy and body chemistry. If you think angry thoughts, your body produces noradrenalin, which shortens your breath, elevates your heart rate and your blood pressure while it shuts down your digestion. If you think happy thoughts, your breath opens up, your digestion improves and your brain produces endorphins (bliss chemicals).

When you feel the physical sensations (called feelings) created by your thoughts, you are experiencing emotions (also called feelings). It's impossible to have emotions without physical sensations. People who don't feel their body also don't experience emotions — an excellent reason to numb out, many of them would say.

Every *Svaroopā*® Yoga class begins with a training in body awareness. It's a beginning step into pure awareness, the Consciousness that is your essence. Since this training enlivens your body and uncovers your emotions, you might think we're working on your body and emotions. Yet the key to both is your mind: your thoughts create your emotions, which affect your body. We've unmasked the culprit behind so many physical conditions and emotional upsets — your own mind.

This is why every yoga practice targets your mind. Using these time tested methodologies on your mind makes you able to get beyond your mind, so you have the experiential knowing (*vidya*) of your own Self (*svaroopā*). This deep inner knowing arises to fill your mind, also affecting your body, which means you experience the feeling of Self. What is that feeling? Pure Bliss. Bliss is a Divine Emotion, the primary and most significant of all the Divine Emotions.

An early stage of bliss is inner peace, even contentment. A more powerful level is an inner happiness, but it's not the kind of happiness that we seek in external events. Instead, this feeling arises independently — I'll call it "delighted" or "joy-full." Love is another Divine Emotion, but its name is too often misused and too little understood. The love that arises from within is universal, a profound fondness or tenderness that extends to every person, every insect, every rock and galaxy. As you continue to delve inward, it keeps feeling better and better.

Divine Emotions are not caused by your thoughts, though thinking about them is tremendously beneficial. These are lasting experiences, sourced from within. Your own Self arises within you and fills your mind, which triggers physical sensations, making you able to feel it. Once you find them, they are constantly arising, for they come from the unchanging reality within. It is a whole new way to live.

Yet you still use your mind. Sometimes a flash of anger is the appropriate response to a situation, or maybe sharing a few tears. But once you know your own Self, these surface level thoughts and feelings don't disturb the underlying flow of bliss. You live in the multidimensionality of your own humanness and Divinity, simultaneously.

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