



Svaroopā® Vidya Ashram

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Self & Self #4

Yoga & Worldly Life

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Everyone matters. But no one person matters any more than any other person. Each and every one matters fully. This is the mystical perspective. You have this perspective when you are experiencing your own Self. The One Divine Essence shines through as every single being and every single thing. They are all lovable. They are all to be revered and respected. They are all to be protected and cherished.

I can say the same thing in another way, “How big is your heart?” Yoga will make you get used to living in a greater love and a greater inner spaciousness than you’ve known before. You’ve probably had tastes of it, perhaps in meditation or somewhere on a mountain-top. Yoga promises that you will live in this, the bliss of Consciousness, all the time.

This is radically different than the image of a yogi in a cave or the forest, withdrawn and alone, rejecting the world in order to find God. God is in the world! When you reject the world, you reject God. In order to know God, in order to find your own Divine Essence, you must embrace it all. But here’s the trick. You embrace it all, but without preferences.

Why? Because God is not merely in the world, God is being the world. It’s impossible to prefer one form of God over another, for everyone is made of the same mystical substance. Bottom line, we’re all made of the same thing.

Tan-naanaa anuruupa graahya graahaka bhedaat. — Pratyabhij~nah.rdayam 3

Shiva chooses to become the multiplicity of the universe...

This universe is made of energy, conscious energy, as the physicists have discovered. Matter is made of energy, which is aware of itself. It is aware of all the atoms and sub-atomic particles it is being. Everything is made of this conscious energy, including your bones and body. Even your mind and heart are made of this energy. You are a form of the formless reality, as is everyone and everything. You matter.

I like to play with the multiple meanings of the word “matter.” Everything matters, meaning it is of great importance, precisely because it is Divine Energy coalescing into matter. The One Primordial Reality, Shiva, is choosing to be every ant, every squirrel, every tree, every cloud, every raindrop and every person on whom the rain falls. That includes you. You matter. It means two things, both that you are of great significance and that you truly do exist.

Some meditative systems say that the world is unreal or that it doesn’t exist. Some say it is all mind. Popular movies sometimes espouse these perspectives, notably the Matrix films. I was confused by this in my early years of studying yogic texts. I thought the different systems were all saying the same thing. Nope, they are saying different things. Some say that the world doesn’t exist. Our tradition, Kashmiri Shaivism, says that the world is real.

The key is found in what each system promises. If you do their practice, where will you arrive? It’s like the “destination check” at the beginning of each airplane flight. An announcement is made, “This plane is going to Nome, Alaska. If that’s not where you’re going, get off now.”

One of the meditative systems promises freedom from suffering. Others promise nirvana, literally meaning the annihilation of being. Another promises you will be suffused with God’s love. Kashmiri Shaivism promises you will know your own Inherent Divinity, and you will see that reality being all — the bliss of Consciousness, inside and outside, all at the same time. How much can your mind expand? How big can your heart be?

Yoga calls this freedom, that you live in the world while you cherish it fully. You feel spacious inside, suffused with light and bliss, containing all while being expansive, beyond all. In meditation, delving deeper within, you discover this inner vastness, light and bliss. This is your own Self.

When you reject someone or something in the world, you are shutting your heart down, turning away from that form of God. When you pursue a specific thing or person, you are rejecting all the others. But I know that your heart and mind are big enough for all of them. You have a Divine capacity that you simply are not yet using.

When I was expecting my second child, I worried that I wouldn’t have enough love for two. I loved my first child so much, more than I had imagined possible, so I feared that the new baby would only get leftovers. After birthing the baby, I was delighted and amazed to discover that my capacity to love had expanded. I could love this new being as much as my first child. Love is not like a pie, that if you cut it into 10 pieces instead of 8, everyone gets less. Love expands.

What is the outer limit? There is none. But there is an inner limit. It is found wherever you install dotted lines, classifying people as family/not-family, as naughty/nice, as pretty/ugly, as similar/dissimilar to you. Those dotted lines in your mind and heart hurt you more than anyone else. Let them melt away. Find the wholeness within.

Yes, you must make distinctions about your responsibility to others. Years ago, I drove to my children's school to pick them up one day. Two hundred kids came pouring out the doors. I loved them all! But I didn't take them all home with me. I was responsible only for certain ones of them. That's called dharma: what you do for others to fulfill your roles and responsibilities in the world.

But while you do your dharma in life, your heart can be bigger. Your inner depth can sustain you in the midst of your lessons, which life presents to you in bold living color. It's all about your willingness to play the game. A traditional teaching story illustrates this very well:

The Guru decided that the yogis had been sitting around too much. He told them to choose up teams and go out to play softball. The first team went up to bat and scored 30 points. Finally the other team was able to put them out. As the outfielders ran in toward home plate, the Guru shouted out, "OK, now we'll play soccer. New teams!"

You might want to resist, even want to score a few runs to get even. But it's not about your score. It's about your willingness to play the game. Are you in? When you put yourself into it, you get more out of it. Life works this way. So does spiritual development.

When you were a child, you outgrew your clothes every summer. Growth means you leave some things behind. In adulthood, the process is more internal. You outgrow limited attitudes. You outgrow your fears; they can no longer hold you. You lose the ability to hold a grudge or blame others for your situation. Your heart grows along with your willingness to participate.

The sage Narada asks an important question in the Bhakti Sutras:

Kas tarati kas tarati maayaa.m. – sutra 46

Who crosses? Who crosses Maayaa?

It's a great question. Who is going to make it all the way? Who will become enlightened in this lifetime? The answer is intensely personal — you decide. If you want it, you can do it, especially once you've received Shaktipat. This mystical initiation awakens your own Self to arise within you, filling you with your own Beingness. A tangible form of Grace, the power of revelation, you call on it by repeating the enlivened mantra of our tradition.

If you call on Grace only when you're having problems, you'll get help with your problems, but you won't get enlightened. If you want to live in the bliss of Consciousness, you need to play ball more often. Only if you ask for more will you receive more.

Narada raises the question above, about who will become free from Maayaa, then he answers it. His answer is for you to leave everyone in your life, to serve great beings and be unselfish. Jesus said the same thing (Luke 14:26-27). He explains why, "You must love me more than your father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters..." In other words, if you love him more than family, you'll leave family for him. Sounds like some of the meditative systems I was confused by in my early years of study.

Kashmiri Shaivism says you must embrace the world, without becoming entangled in it. This tradition ups the ante. The question is whether you can stay with your family and still love God more than any of them. As important as each of them is, it is the Divine in them that makes them lovable. And that Divine is in everyone, including you. So your task is to first find the Divine in your own Self, then to see God shining through, as all that exists.

You don't have to leave the world in order to get enlightened. You can call on Grace when you're walking, when you're showering, when you're eating, and even when you're in a conversation with someone. You can repeat mantra all the time, or take mini-mantra-recesses several times a day. Or you can choose to do it only sometimes. The less you do, the less you will get. It's a fact of life.

While you don't have to leave the world in order to get enlightened, you do have to choose what you want in this life. If you want to make lots of money, you'll work hard. If you want to be popular, you'll work at your relationships or establishing your social media presence. If you want to be enlightened, you'll apply yourself, right here, in your life, where you live now. Do more yoga.

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