



December 2012 Contemplation Theme

Sensory Impressions

by Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

I watched the fiery sun rise over the Ganga (Ganges River) in Varanasi. He wiggled through the layers of clouds and became round again, reflecting across the water shining in my eyes. People around me were doing other things: watching a passing sheep, playing with a ball, washing laundry on the stones, walking and talking about important things. I watched the sun. It took about 3 minutes. I can replay in my mind the orange sun any time I choose.

Sensory impressions. You need a better quality of sensory impressions layered in your mind. Whatever impressions are in there are going to replay. This is the mind's function. Make choices about what sensory impressions you are going to layer in there.

As I watched the sun, I felt my place in the cosmos, an individual on a planet enlivened by the light, fed by the plants that are nourished by this fiery ball in the sky. I am so small, a speck in the universe, part of it all yet encompassing it all, outside and inside, all at the same time. I feel this still. I don't need the sun to remind me of who I am. Yet He does every morning, again and again. What a glorious world this is!

Fill your mind with a better quality of sensory impressions. The stuff you usually pour in there is simply not good enough for you. You are an incarnation of Divine Consciousness but you fill your mind with dreck. Later your mind plays it all back for you, so you get to experience the poor quality of stuff you fed your mind again and again. Uplift your senses and you will uplift your mind.

This might sound like the opposite of yoga's teachings which emphasize quieting your mind. So much of yoga's practices are done in a quiet space, in silence or with soothing music playing in the background. Your mind needs the quiet because it is so full of sensory impressions. Always churning, these impressions harass you day and night. The churning of your mind exhausts you! It creates and perpetuates the physical tensions that make you need core opening. It's wonderful how you can use the poses to release those physical tensions and see how your mind reliably settles into stillness. Then you experience a deep and profound peace. Beyond peace, the bliss of your own Divine Essence arises inside and fills your senses from the inside out.

This is the best use of your mind, filled with your own inherent bliss from the inside out. When you know your own Self, your mind is scintillating with consciousness. A mind like this does not harass you. It serves you, making you able to see your life clearly, make your decisions from an inner knowingness and communicate with others with sensitivity to their needs while never losing track of your purpose. How do you attain a mind like this? You align your mind with consciousness. It's going to take some work to get there — inner work.

When your mind does its usual thing, it is taking in new sensory input or simply regurgitating impressions from prior experiences. Right now, everything that runs through your mind is about something outside of you. This is because your mind is doing its job well, keeping you outward-turned, always looking for something outside of you to fix the way you feel. You need a fix because you are not feeling your inherent is-ness. Thus yoga's practices all turn your attention inward. When you turn your mind inward, it automatically stills. In that stillness you find your Self. The pain relief, spinal decompression, mental and emotional healing and stress release all come from the power and peace of your experience of your own Self. When you experience your own Self, your only desire is to know your own Self all the time.

This can make you want to resign from the world. That small cabin in the woods, off the grid, sounds more attractive by the moment. Especially in the heat of holiday preparations, you think “do more yoga” means to run away. NO! In ancient times the yogis got to run away. They moved into the woods, lived in communities and shared their lives with others dedicated to knowing the Divine Within. About 5,000 years ago, at the changing of the era, a great teacher brought forth a new teaching — do it in the midst of life. In the Bhagavadgita, Shree Krishna lovingly explained that if the yogis leave the world, who will bring peace? You are the one. You have to do it. You have to be a yogi in the world, in your life, in your family and in the midst of the holiday season.

For this, your mind needs help. You need a better quality of sensory impressions. The computer people call it “garbage-in, garbage-out.”

The Christmas music being played in every store, even pouring out of the gas pump with your fill-up, is so beautiful. Pause for a moment and listen to it! Hum along. Let it fill your ears and make an impression on your mind.

The winter landscape can be unutterably beautiful. Let it stop you for a breathless moment. Take a photograph with your mind, that you can replay the view, like looking at an Ansel Adam’s photograph.

Talk about the best moments of your day, the best qualities of the people in your life and the wonderful things you are planning. Steer your conversations in uplifting directions and fill your mind with other people’s inspiring stories.

Turn off NPR and listen to a chanting CD.

Google God or Shiva or namaste.

Go for a drive and look at Christmas lights.

Light some candles and have a sing-along (or sing by yourself).

Reread a contemplation article that inspired you.

Do more yoga.

Fill your mind with sensory impressions that induce peace, inspire joy, uplift your heart and make your eyes shine. When these sensory impressions replay later (and they will!) you get to re-experience that same inner surge again. This is a good use of your mind!

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