



December 2013 Contemplation: Alignment with Grace #11

## Yoga: For a Good Life

by Rukmini Abbruzzi & Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

This is the season of giving, of gratitude and of joy. We celebrate light at the darkest time of the year. It can also be the busy season of doing more. You may be preparing to spend time with people you love, knowing that they sometimes push your buttons. You're probably doing more right now than you usually do. At what point does it turn into hassled, harried and stressed? There's a point in there, while your focus is on preparing for a celebration of light, unfortunately you lose your own light.

Yoga! You know that your yoga will take care of you, whether poses, breathing, japa or meditation. Each of these is a different doorway into the One Reality, which is your Self. Whichever doorway you enter, opening the door aligns you with Grace, which saturates your body, mind, and heart.

Yoga is the science of inner opening, an opening you allow by consciously letting go on the inside; you really can make the choice to lay down your inner armor – the armor that divides you from your own Self. Every time you do yoga, the light of Consciousness (which is you), arises within you. Your body, mind and heart become windows that transmit the light that you are, out to the world. The Light of Consciousness shines through you, as well as through your words and actions.

When your yoga practice ends and you open your eyes, how long does this inner opening last for you? Driving home from a yoga class or private session, you're demonstrably a better driver. How many miles does it last? One mile? Three? Maybe it takes nine miles before your mind is spinning again, your breath tighter, your body stiffening. You've just shut the inner door again, picked up the inner armor and cut yourself off from your Self.

When you are disconnected from your Source, everything you do is from a place of tension. Not only is everything harder but it is often less effective. Swamiji likens it to firemen who are running to put out a fire. In the rush they forget to connect the fire hose to the hydrant. They drag the hose down the street and to the burning house, but when they get there, they're not hooked up. What do you really have to give when you don't have your Self?

The good news is that it won't be long until you align yourself with Grace again. There will be another yoga class or your next meditation period. It's only as far away as your decision. How wonderful! How accessible! Yet you wait, postpone, procrastinate. You put off feeling better.

Just remember one thing: it's all so easy! The moment you become aware that you've lost your Self, simply stand in Tadasana, or take a few Ujjayi breaths or repeat mantra a few times. You can simply choose to lay down your inner armor and open to your Self at any time, while standing at your kitchen sink, while pushing a grocery cart, while spending time with a button-pushing relative.

This is a yogic approach to life: the inner opening and attunement all the time, not just when you're doing poses. You've already proved to yourself that you're capable of experiencing the Self when you're driving – that's what you did when you drove almost nine miles away from your yoga class before losing your Self.

Could you live in alignment with Grace all the time? First, consider what it's like to live out of alignment with Grace! Now you have a little more motivation to live in Grace all the time. In the Bhagavad Gita, K.r.s.na<sup>1</sup> tells us how,

“*Yoga.h karmasu kau*”*salam* — verse 2.50

Yoga is skill in action

He doesn't define yoga as skill in asana (yoga poses), or breathing practices, or japa (mantra repetition). Yoga is skill in action. Every action. What makes an action skillful? Breathe for a moment and consider the possibilities – skill in every action. This is not merely about being knowledgeable or talented; there's something more going on here... This is not about measuring up or performing to expectations. There's something more going on here...

What makes an action skillful?

When you're fully present, genuine and engaged, giving it your all yet not waiting for the payoff that's coming. You become present, genuine, engaged, giving your all and supremely free, when you are open to your Self. Your efforts become effortless.

Rukmini offers the example of baking a cake for a party (and she's a skillful baker!). You bake and decorate it to your most beautiful skill level, you put your whole being into it, from a place of fullness, completeness and joy. And when you're done, you're done. You're not doing your best because everyone will think you're great, or to get rave reviews. Those are payoffs. When you're abiding in the bliss of your Self, what can a rave review give you that you don't already have?

Pick any of our Grace-filled practices; they all give you the experience of your Self, so you can live your life in a whole new way. You can open to your own Self with a pose, a breath or a few mantra repetitions. Then your actions (every action!) is done with the skill that K.r.s.na describes. How does this happen?

Grace is the ever-arising knowing of your own Self. The sages defined Grace as the light of Consciousness blazing within you, bringing you home to your Self. When you do the practices, and especially when you've received Shaktipat, you become filled with Grace. You radiate the light of your own Divinity out into the world. Shaktipat sparks the light and you choose to nurture its growth within as well as where to shine it. Your life becomes yoga, skill-full, Grace-full action. Do more yoga.

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<sup>1</sup> Pronounced “Krish-na”