

Your Yoga Community

by Vidyadevi Stillman & Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

Remember your first yoga class? Whether it was today or years ago, it's something you never forget. The memory lingers on because your first class showed you the possibility of living in your body in a whole new way. Svaroopa® yoga changes your body so quickly and easily, yet it takes care of your mind and heart at the same time. When you begin, you embark on an inner exploration that will give you experiences you never dreamed possible.

At first, it's a little strange to experience such deep rest and profound peace. It's so new! Continuing your yoga studies, you come to rely on this peace, as well as the tangible physical improvements and deeper inner experiences that are beyond your mind. While your aches and pains may have gotten you started in yoga, it is those deeper inner experiences that ultimately bring you back again and again.

Many new yogis are venturing into something that no one else in their family or inner circle knows about. You are fortunate when a friend or family member shares your experience, but it is unfortunately rare. This is why it is so valuable to be in the company of other yogis. When you talk with them, you get to share about your yoga experiences with others who are truly interested and understand. Plus you learn from their experiences. Together you grow in your understandings of how yoga changes you. You make some yoga-buddies and maybe share transportation, go out for tea or a meal together or enjoy other get-togethers.

While yoga is an inner process, thus a solo venture, it works better when you have external support. This was also true in ancient times; the yogis always practiced in community. The iconographic image of the solitary yogi sitting in the snow bank just inside the mountain cave is a western romanticization. When a Guru did send a yogi to meditate in a cave, the community set up a support system. Another yogi made sure that the cave yogi was getting regular meals and didn't have to deal with any external difficulties – it was the only way that the cave yogi could have the luxury of that deep inner focus.

Sharing the company of other yogis, being in community, is an important part of your yoga practice. Compare a weekend with old friends that are (of course!) dear to you, to a weekend with other yogis. Your old friends or family members may even be pursuing lifestyles that you tried and left behind. You perhaps come home drained and exhausted; you're like a mirror reflecting their state and lifestyle.

What about a weekend at a Yogimmersion (yoga weekend) or Svaroopa® yoga conference, in the company of yogis? Of course, you do some yoga together, but you also spend time chatting and laughing, eating together, shopping together, etc. You return home energized, refreshed, vibrant and scintillating with consciousness, again reflecting their state.

Yoga is not just about owning plaid blankets or doing daily practices. Yoga is also about how you choose to spend your down time. What are you doing to align yourself with Grace right now? Well, the answer is that you are reading this article. But when you put this article down, what are you going to do to align yourself with Grace? Ask not only WHAT are you doing with your time, but look particularly at WHO you spend time with. You don't have to cut anyone out of your life, but one of the ways you can align yourself with Grace is by choosing to spend time with other yogis.

It's obvious how the company of other Svaroopis affects you — just compare your experience of taking a yoga class to doing poses at home. Even if it is the same poses, done in the same amount of time, you get more out of the class. Yes, your teacher contributes to that for you, but so do the other yogis who are there. This is called Alignment with Grace,

As your yoga develops and has a deeper effect on you, you begin to carry the peace and bliss of yoga into your life with you, sharing it with everyone around you. Consider what most people share with others. Most people share their anxieties, fears, dislikes, blame, etc. What does a yogi share? Would you rather go to a luncheon at a nice restaurant with five other people from your residential neighborhood or with five people from your yoga class? You would probably still be talking about the same things (yourself and your life), but the conversations are completely different. This is described in a sutra (aphorism) from one of yoga's ancient texts.

Lokaananda.h samaadhi-sukham — Shiva Sutras 1.18

In every moment, the Master experiences the bliss of the Self, and this experience is transmitted to those who come in contact with her or him.¹

¹ Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

Your yoga practice turns you into a channel of Grace. You are calmer, more peaceful, more energized and relaxed, not only during yoga but all the rest of the time. Even the next day at work, and even when you spend time with dear ones (who can still be challenging), you are in a better mood. Swami Nirmalananda tells this story:

A man taking my “Intro to Meditation” series explained he was taking the course because his employees were complaining. They told him that his stress level was affecting the quality of their lives, so he needed to do something about his stress. At the end of the first evening, he came to me to request that I not tell anyone he was in the class; he wanted to keep it a secret.

The next week he reported that he was meditating every day. His meditations were going very well and everyone at work was really glad he was taking the class! I asked him what happened to the big secret? He said by the third day, he had to tell his employees. They kept telling him that he was “so different; what is making this change in you?”

Not only was he less stressed, he was serving as a conduit of Grace already. His employees were deeply affected. This really happens to you very quickly. *Svaroopā*® yoga makes you become more and more a channel of Grace. That’s because this is the yoga of Grace. What you’re doing in the breathing and the poses is aligning yourself with Grace. Then Grace takes care of you.

You align with Grace when you get involved in the community that has formed around your yoga teacher. Your yoga teacher is a vehicle of Grace. The deeper your teacher goes, the more training and practice she or he has, the deeper their attunement and the more fully they serve as a vehicle of Grace. This gives you a deeper experience of *svarooopā*, your own Self.

One teacher told Swamiji that she had taught another yoga style for 10 years before training in *Svaroopā*® yoga. After a couple of years of teaching *Svaroopā*® yoga, she was thrilled to see the huge difference in her students’ bodies: their back pain was gone, etc. She then moved to a new area. In distributing fliers for her *Svaroopā*® yoga classes, she met a local teacher with a 10 year teaching history in her original yoga style. The local teacher was moving away and referred her students to the newly arrived *Svaroopā*® yoga teacher.

Her new students got the same changes in a few months, changes that had taken her earlier students two years to get! This is because this *Svaroopā*® yoga teacher had gone further in her own trainings. She had opened more into her own body and into her own Self. Your teacher truly becomes more and more a vehicle of Grace, as their skills deepen and as their understanding and their inner state deepens.

Now consider what happens when you study with the Master Teacher, the Guru. What happens to you when you step into relationship with someone who is consciously serving Grace in that whole-hearted way, consciously attuning themselves to consciousness? A yogi becomes more and more transparent, until only consciousness is shining through from their innermost Being. When you can see this, you want to spend more time with them because of what they share with you: the Consciousness that is your own Self. This is Grace.

Swami Vivekananda, a great sage from India, said, “Take refuge in some soul who has already broken his bondage, and in time he will free you through his Grace.” The Guru is like a fire hose of Grace. In the middle of summer’s heat, do you want to get sprinkled with a sprinkler or do you want to open up the fire hydrant, have the water shooting up and you get drenched in Grace?

This is the value of the relationship with a Master. Your participation in this relationship guarantees you more spiritual progress than any other single thing you can do. Doing more yoga includes the things you do on plaid blankets plus a lot more: Yogimmersions, free phone calls, trainings and retreats through the consolidated offerings, giving donations, reading the community newsletter and blogs, offering your time through seva, doing more japa, and time with the Guru – and more.

Understand that what the Guru shows you is your own future. When you see the depth of knowledge, the scintillating light of consciousness, and you get a taste of that bliss, you are really getting a peek at where you are going. You get a taste of what it is like to be established in your own Self. This doesn’t mean that you will be teaching, but it is a promise that you will be in that state. The Guru is the physical promise of your future.

Grace is ever-present, yet it is magnified by your practices. Your teacher serves as a conduit of Grace, as does her or his teacher. Your yoga community aligns you with Grace. Yoga gives you tangible ways to draw Grace into your life, like you draw breath into your lungs. Do More Yoga!

To reach Vidyadevi or Swami Nirmalananda or to learn more about *Svaroopā*® Yoga & Meditation, contact: *Svaroopā*® Vidya Ashram, home of Master Yoga:

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