



March 2010 Contemplation Theme

## Satisfaction

by Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati

An ancient yogic teaching was rendered into a modern day sutra\* by Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones:

I can't get no satisfaction...

I try, and I try, and I try, and I try...

Your heart and your whole being yearn for a satisfaction that the world cannot provide. Whether you're striving for recognition on the job or in your relationships, a new home or a new car, whiter teeth or a better nose, or anything else – you can get it, but you're still not satisfied. That sense of full and complete satisfaction is rare, and it is essential. Without it, life becomes a treadmill with no end in sight.

You have had experiences of complete satisfaction, perhaps better described as supreme contentment. One tantric text describes how nature can provide such profound experiences, whether you are looking at a vast view, getting lost in the woods or watching the ocean. In that timeless moment, you feel complete. You feel whole. There is nothing you need or want; there is nothing you need to do. I have heard people say, "If I died right now, it would be OK."

The first time I experienced this completeness, and I knew I was having an experience while I was having it, was at the top of a mountain. Mt. Tamalpais is not your ordinary mountain. Overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco Bay and Pacific Ocean, it is easily accessible — you can drive to the parking lot at the summit. My cousin took me there one afternoon. We wandered along different paths across the grassy field adjacent to the parking lot, so I had no clue what lay in my immediate future. As I came up over a rise, the whole breathtaking scene of bridge, bay and ocean burst open in front of me. As I write this, the hairs on my arms are standing on end. The memory of the event places me there again!

Yet I knew that something else was happening. Something I didn't understand it. I looked more closely at the bridge, thinking, "Is it you that is making me feel this way?" I looked at the sunset washing its colors over the fog bank, asking "Is it you?" I looked for the source of this ecstasy, but I could not find it in any of the things I saw, nor in the totality of the scene. I didn't know that the source of what I had experienced — the sense of bursting open — was and is inside. A few months later, I found my way to my Guru, who gave me access to that inner source, which is my own Self. Your Self is in the same place, inside you.

Yoga calls this experience *pratyabhijñā* (*prat-ya-bij-nya*), which means recognition — the recognition of your own inherent divinity. This is the only thing that truly satisfies you. This is why it is so hard to get satisfaction — you are looking in the wrong place. You are trying so hard, you try and you try and you try to get satisfaction from things that simply cannot provide it.

Why do you try so hard? There are two reasons for your incredible efforts. The first is that your hard works pays off — sometimes. Sometimes, like a runner after a long race, you get satisfaction. You might be exhausted, but somehow, through the exhaustion, that feeling of full and complete satisfaction bubbles up. Yoga's ancient teachings explain how this works: when you gain something you strenuously wanted, your mind stops; every time your mind stops, the bliss of your own being arises within you.

It's like me standing there, overlooking the San Francisco Bay, realizing that the incredible feeling didn't come from the view. It's not like the view was emanating little bliss-bits that were soaking through my skin to make me happy from the outside-in. I knew that I didn't understand the source of my feeling, but now I know why — I didn't know where to look.

So when you work hard at something, or you desire it hard enough, and then you get it – you experience *pratyabhijñā*, what the Stones call "satisfaction." This happens every time your mind stops, which is why so many of yoga's practices are for the express purpose of quieting your mind.

The second reason you try so hard is because of the yearning. Built into your humanness is the innate yearning for transcendence, which is the most important result of the *Svaroopā*<sup>®</sup> yoga practice. While you are taking care of your aches and pains, improving your health and mood, increasing your stamina and vitality, balancing your immune system and resetting your endorphins — you are also cultivating your own innate yearning for satisfaction. Once you truly realize that you cannot get satisfaction from outside, you can experience the yearning in its true form. Karobi Sachs described it beautifully:

The yearning is a sense of deliciousness that you know is there, but just beyond your grasp. It is a tingling vibration deep in your being, promising something more, something that you know is more than you can even imagine. It is the welling up of tears for no reason; it is the longing for that which you know — and yet can't grasp onto. It is the elation that wells up, just by contemplating yearning itself. It is the swelling of your heart into an expectation of unknown joy. This is the yearning. You know it so well.

To allow yourself to feel the yearning directly, without mundanating it, is both painful and delicious at the same time. I made up the word, “mundanate,” meaning “to make mundane.” It is the opposite of the word “sublimate,” which means to make sublime. The contemplative traditions (monks and nuns) practice celibacy and prescribe that the initiates sublimate their sexual energy. You may have thought that sublimating means repressing, denying, avoiding or even expressing sexual energy in abnormal ways, and may even have thought that sublimation refers only to sex. In fact, sublimation means to make the mundane into something sublime, supreme, or complete. In terms of celibacy, it means you turn that overwhelming desire and energy toward God, who provides you with a deeper, more complete satisfaction than you have ever experienced, even with good sex.

While something mundane can be made sublime, it also goes the other way. The sublime can be turned into the mundane. This is what I see when I look at the popular yoga calendars. The sacred postures that open you up to the experience of your own divinity have become circus posters, showing contortionists wearing almost nothing. When the yoga poses serve their original purpose, they are a rocket ship to God.

And you yearn for this experience. The yearning is built into you, inherent within you and every human being. Most of the people you know mundanate the feeling and look for satisfaction in a new job, a new pair of shoes, a new spouse, etc. You've tried doing it yourself; after all, you had such good role models! But it doesn't work for you. Somehow you know you are looking for something more. And you get no satisfaction from all that efforting.

I try, and I try, and I try, and I try  
I can't get no, I can't get no...

The “trying” gets in the way. You get satisfaction by surrendering to your own core essence, which is the divine all-pervasive, ever-existent One Reality, which yoga calls “Shiva.” You are Shiva. This surrender is not a “giving up,” but a “giving in” to your Self. Discover your own core essence. Know your own Self. Be that which you already are, the source of full and complete satisfaction. And carry that into your life. Do more yoga.

With love & blessings, Swami Nirmalananda

\*sutra — a concise saying with profound meaning, usually in Sanskrit

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