



May 2010 Contemplation Theme

Go With the Flow

– Swami Nirmalananda

A yogini told me about her family vacation several years ago, a week-long river rafting trip. Her father had worked for two years to get rare reservations for this special trip plus assembling all his children and grandchildren for a great adventure. They had a great time, all the way through the last rapids of the trip, where the guides checked all the straps on everyone's life jackets, and then told them they would be running the rapids without the raft.

Assuring them that it was safe, and that they had done this with hundreds of people, they gave the secret teaching that would make it work. "As the water swirls you right into a big rock, just relax. It will swirl you up and over the rock and you won't get any scrapes or bruises." Our yogini repeated a mantra of her own devising through her whole ride, "Shavasana, Shavasana." She was the only one who emerged with no scrapes or bruises. Laughing. Victorious. Ecstatic.

Go with the flow. This means is that control is an illusion. You are not in control, no matter how hard you try to be. Life is actually not about control. If it was, and if you really could control everything, you'd never laugh. You'd never love. You'd never be ecstatic. You have to give into the flow in order to laugh and in order to love. You have to flow with the river in order to experience the bliss.

Life is a lot like that river. Some sections are smooth and idyllic, and others have big boulders and churning water. While you're not in control, you do understand the cause-and-effect nature of the universe, just like the river guides who paddle in just the right places and who use their paddle to steer the boat in others. That's not control. That's intelligence.

You must learn to use your intelligence in a different way than you have been. You have been using it to try to get what you want, or to impress others, or to learn more and more stuff that fills your head with more and more thoughts, which make you more and more unhappy. Thoughts do make you unhappy. Just watch your mind for a few minutes and you'll realize it. This is why yoga focuses on quieting your mind. This is also why we love rivers, because watching one, or even rafting on one, has a wonderful effect on your mind. Even thinking of a river has this effect – it calms and quiets your mind. Technically, that's called yoga: the quieting of your mind.

If you thought river-thoughts all the time, your mind would be your friend. Right now, it's not so friendly. It harasses you. It cuts you down. It drives you crazy. It never gives you a moment of peace. So you do yoga to quiet your mind. The lessons you learn in your yoga class and personal practice apply to life so beautifully, as do the lessons you learn on the river. Sometimes, like in this story, the lessons are the same: go with the flow.

"The flow" is a technical term in yoga, translated from the Sanskrit word *turiya*. This is one of these words that have no exact equivalent in English, because it names something that we simply don't discuss in our everyday use of the English language. Translated as "the fourth state," it names a level of inner experience that is deeper than thought. It is the constant background of beingness, just behind where you usually find your mind.

It is called the fourth state because there are three others: waking, dream and deep sleep. Everyone knows these three states, cycling between them 24/7. But even while you are awake, there is this deeper level of knowingness and beingness inside. Even when you are dreaming, and even when you are sleeping, there is this deeper level of your own existence.

You already know this because you have experienced this before. Have you ever had a dream that you knew you were dreaming while you were dreaming? Or maybe you had a time that you knew you were sleeping while you were asleep. Who's the you that knew you were sleeping or dreaming? This is the you that is your real essence – *svaroopa*, *atman*, Self, divine essence, *svaroopa*, *Shiva*. It's there now. You are there now. You are here, now. You are *Shiva*.

Maybe you have experienced this deeper Self in Shavasana. While your teacher was guiding you through your awareness of each area of your body, you were deeper in there, somewhere in there. Maybe you could hear her words, or maybe not. But you were deeper, and you knew it. Or maybe you were deeper and you didn't know it

until you “bobbed” out, and then you wanted to go back to where you had been – even though you didn’t know where it was, or how to get back. But you knew it was good. Really really good.

That’s the Self. That’s your own divine essence. That’s *Shiva*. Unfortunately your ability to know your Self at this level is currently limited. Your access is short-lived and too infrequent. That’s why yoga has practices: to prepare you to dive deeper, stay longer, and ultimately to live from this level of your own beingness.

When you experience the fourth state while you are awake, you are living in a fluidity that pervades all of existence. My Guru described it like water mixed with milk. Just as the water mixed with the milk pervades it thoroughly, consciousness pervades all that exists. When you know your own Self as consciousness, you see and experience it pervading all, becoming all, being all – inside and outside, all at the same time.

Then every moment of life is lived in the flow. There’s no need to control, because life is always going the right way, whether your mind understands it or not. Thus there’s never a need for you to object to how things are going. Still you must participate in life. You are alive, so you must participate.

How do you participate without trying to control? You simply let go of your objections. Whether you relax your body (a mini-Shavasana), or you use a few Ujjayi breaths, or you repeat mantra or say a prayer – accept that whatever is going on is reality. Whatever is going on is going on. Once you quit objecting, you see it more clearly and you can make better decisions about what to do. You can even do whatever you do more effectively, and it works better.

It’s like when you make a wrong turn on a road trip. After driving for some time, you realize you’re in the wrong place and going the wrong direction. Complaining about it doesn’t get you to your destination. First you stop. Secondly you find out where you are. Now you decide which route to take – to backtrack to where you should have turned, or to find a new route. Life is like this.

Life is like this because of the cause-and-effect nature of the universe. The ancient texts describe that *Shiva* created the universe with certain built-in qualities and functions. The parameters include gravity, light, love, the multiplicity of forms, the infinite hidden within each finite form, and cause-and-effect (called *karma* in Sanskrit), as well as others.

Whatever you do has an effect, whether it is an action, a word that you speak or even a thought. Yes your thoughts have an effect, mainly on you. Your thoughts, words and actions produce results, though not always immediately. Every action you perform and every word you say creates a result at some point, either now or in the future. Every thought you think creates a result at some point, either now or in the future. Another reason to cultivate a quiet mind!

Those boulders in your river, the ones that disturb the smooth flow of your life – you put them there. They are your *karma*. You cannot give credit for your *karma* to anyone else: not your parents, not your boss, not society or even your DNA. Everything you have to face in life is the result of some prior action, word or thought, in this lifetime or even in previous lifetimes. You have only yourself to thank. So there’s no point in objecting. Every rock in your river is a gift you gave yourself.

Go with the flow. Lean back and soften into the moment. Lean back in your own body and soften into your life. Lean back behind your mind and find that deeper level of your own being, so you can see the flow pervading all that exists and recognize it for what it is – the divine reality, which is you.

Do more yoga.

With love & blessings,

Swami Nirmalananda

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