



Svaroopaa® Vidya Ashram

November 2023 Teachings Article:

A Yogi in the World #11

## Why Do You Do What You Do?

By Gurudevi Nirmalananda

There's always a reason behind your actions. You are a volitional being, meaning you have free will. Animals function by instinct but humans have more options. What is it that motivates you?

When you lack any of the basics, they are your priority. We hear news reports every day about people affected by war or famine, threatening their survival. Perhaps in your own area, there are people who lack food, shelter and safety. These are root-level motivators.

Relationships can provide compelling motivations. Sometimes you do things *for* other people and sometimes you do things *to* others. You may work to avoid issues or you may choose to bring them up.

The third primal motivator is power. It moves many people to action, a compelling drive we share with creatures great and small.

These are the big three: security, intimacy and power. These instinctual musts govern too many people's lives. Personal needs and life events centered at these levels trigger reflex responses, like a hammer tap on your knee triggers a little kick.

Yoga honors the reality of such needs and reactions. You must prioritize basic issues, perhaps making yoga part of your support system when setting up a better quality of life. I have been fortunate to help a few yoga students facing such difficulties. Yet I recognize that most people come to yoga only when their basics are managed.

Once you have room to look at yourself and your own process, I ask — why do you do what you do? Hopefully you're not focused on the instinctual level anymore. You have some breathing space in your life, enough that you're interested in yoga. That means you have freedom of choice.

As an adolescent, I made choices based on anger. I was deeply frustrated at the incongruity between the ideals I'd been taught compared to the reality of the world around me. The prevailing message seemed to be, "Do what I say, not what I do." My knee-jerk response was to try both what was recommended as well as what was advised against. What I learned in the process fueled my aspirations for something greater. I first sought it in higher education, but intellectual achievements were not enough for me.

Only yoga's timeless teachings satisfied me. Now, for five decades, I've deliberately deepened my yogic knowledge and the experiences it has opened up in me. This is truly a bottomless well! Yoga has empowered me to live up to the highest ideals, yet in a down-to-earth way.

I think of my life's path as a good use of my free will. Svatantra means free will. Svatantrya is God's free will. Only you and God have free will. It is the distinguishing characteristic of the human being, the mystical meaning of this Bible verse:

God created humankind in his own image... — Genesis 1.27

The Pratyabhijñānaśāstra agrees, describing how Consciousness becomes the individual by damping down on her Divine Bliss and Knowingness. This means that, while being you, she has not lost her Primordial Beingness, as described in a tantric text:

...the self-luminous character of your inmost nature never disappears  
(in any condition). — Tattva-garbha-stotra

Whether you are enlightened or not, the wholeness of your own Beingness is intact within you. It always has been. Regardless of whether you are happy or not, agitated or serene, ill or healthy, your essence is Divine.

The One Divine Reality effulges forth, manifesting the universe within his own existence. Why? It is because the bliss of his own Beingness overflows into the power of creativity. This is svatantrya, Divine will. It arises from bliss.

As you are a manifestation of Consciousness, Divine will is intact within you. You currently use only a small portion of it, just as you access only a sliver of the bliss that is hidden within.

Ideally, all your decisions and actions would be motivated in the same way as Shiva's – out of effulging bliss. When you are experiencing your own Self as Consciousness-Itself, this is easy. Yoga's goal is for you to live in the unimpeded, absolute Knowingness of your own Beingness, which you experience as the bliss of Consciousness. What a great future you have in store!

When you discover this deeper dimension of your own Self, what actions will you choose to perform? Free from neediness and fear, you make different choices than in the past. Your old motivations melt away.

Yogis sometimes ask me about this, saying that they've lost their edge. It's because they are in bliss, or at least they've attained the early stages, which are deep peace and supreme contentment. When you feel this way, you are no longer impelled into doing things to make you happy.

Such a yogi is described in this verse:

He performs actions with understanding and with unselfish motives. He has a generous mind and is a profound thinker. He eats sparingly. He is careful and competent in his actions. He is courageous and free of pride.

— Kularnava Tantra 13.25

You can see how such a person would be happy. As you do more yoga, this is where you are headed. The point is that you will always feel fulfilled, which is how you can be unselfish, generous and profound. Not to mention competent, courageous and free of pride.

Now you have a lot to offer to others. You are free to contribute to the world, both in fulfilling your responsibilities as well as going above and beyond. You choose where to give and how to make a difference. The "why" that impels your decisions and actions is the effulgence of your own being, which is arising and overflowing from within.

If such altruism is not yet your *modus operandi*, you're still suffering. Your inherent nature is benevolent. You love to give; you love to help. It's only your neediness that gets in the way. When you look outward for fulfillment, you lose out on the inner fullness. It's like the ocean asking for a drink of water.

Yoga says look within, deeper and deeper within. Your usual inward glance shows you only the superficial levels of your life, already being constantly reviewed by your mind. To look deeper, you need to develop Divine eyes, the ability to see in a whole new way.

A few days ago, I enjoyed the beauty of the full moon shining through a skylight in my home. I had to look past the leafy tree branches that partially blocked the view. Instead of focusing on the leaves, I recalibrated my eyes to see farther away, the silvery moon that lit the night. In the same way, you develop your ability to see *who* you are, while you are in your life and all its realities.

It is *who* you are that makes all the difference. You are an individualized form of Divine Consciousness. Shiva is being you because Shiva wants to be you, uniquely and specifically you. Yoga makes you able to settle deeper into your own Beingness, so your essence shines into the world like the full moon lights up the night.

Now you draw from the bottomless well of Beingness-Itself, your own Self, who is the One Self being all while being you. Divine inspiration fuels your life, giving you answers as well as the love that makes everything possible. Do more yoga.

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