



Svaroopaa® Vidya Ashram

August 2017 Contemplation:
Exploring Yoga's Multidimensionality #8

Nirmala: Without Malas

By Swami Nirmalananda & Rukmini Abbruzzi

You are a “mala-covered samsaarín,” according to one of yoga's Sanskrit texts. It means you are trapped in a repetitive cycle, even unto lifetimes. This is caused by the three malas (veils) that cover your own Divinity: aanava mala, maayiiya mala and kaarma mala. This map explains how you can be Consciousness, yet not know you're Consciousness:

Chidvat-taccakti sa.mkocaat malaav.rta.h sa.msaarii

— Pratyabhij~nah.rdayam 9

By choosing to contract, Consciousness (Chiti) becomes the individual (samsaarín), subject to limitation (mala-covered)

Consciousness contracts to become you. The energy that has created and is being the universe is a conscious energy, even the physicists know this. The yogis described it thousands of years ago, honoring this conscious energy as Divine Mother, calling Her “Chiti,” Consciousness. Spiraling, coalescing and contracting down into a concentrated point, She becomes each and every thing that exists. Including you.

Chiti places Herself in a state of limitation in order to experience being unique, small, separate, and alone. She contracts in order to experience moments of joy, sudden bursts of inspiration and bouts of love, as well as periods of not feeling love, and not experiencing joy or inspiration. It's not your fault that you don't know that you're Divine Consciousness. You didn't forget — Consciousness Herself took on forgetfulness.

You are Consciousness, who has forgotten that you are Consciousness. The forgetting is called aanava mala, the first of the three malas. Aanava mala gives you the feeling that you don't know who you are. This not-knowing is painful, lonely and scary.

Swami Nirmalananda shares, “So many times I remember waking in the middle of the night, even when I was a child, feeling utterly alone and in total despair. I didn't know what to do about it, not even how to describe it to my parents or ask questions about it. Yoga gave me its name: aanava mala. More than merely naming it, yoga freed me from it.”

Aanava mala makes you not know your Self, then maayiiya mala compels you to create a substitute sense of self. You look outside for something to identify with, becoming entwined and enticed by Maayaa. Thus you feel, “I am a yoga teacher, a gardener, a wife, a husband...” These identities feel like a small safe harbor from the pain of not-knowing who you really are. Unfortunately they are temporary, as anything you use outside of yourself to construct your sense of self has a time limit.

Rukmini shares, “I've been a flute player, a barista, a bookworm, a soccer mom. I'm not any of those things anymore, because my interests, my job, and my children have all changed.” You outgrow them or sometimes they end before you'd choose. The storms of change come, so you paddle to another small harbor, creating and shoring up a new identity that comes with its own list of needs and desires.

Kaarma mala creates ceaseless activity based on your identities. If you're a yoga teacher, you need to buy blankets, write lesson plans and have students. If you're a gardener, you have to buy seedlings to plant, water and weed. If you're a soccer mom, you've got to buy cleats and bring orange slices to the games. Kaarma mala compels incessant activity to support your substitute sense of self and to avoid anything that threatens it.

Not only are your many identities subject to change, they'll never be enough. They won't complete you. While the malas veil your knowing of your Self, they don't completely block it, so you yearn for more. You want to know the MORE that you are. Yet the veils are gossamer-thin; your own Self is so close.

Driven by fear and distracted by Maayaa, most people settle for fleeting moments of happiness, brief periods of joy. You seek more, and your seeking brought you to yoga. Your *Svaroopaa*® yoga practices give you direct and reliable experiences of your own Divinity. It's easy because it's already there within you, all you have to do is decompress your spine.

Over time and with continued practice, your inner experiences get deeper, last longer and begin to expand into your life. You become less fearful and less dependent on external circumstances going your way. While you relish the joys of each small harbor, you know the bliss of being the whole ocean.

Is it possible to be free from the malas, to always know you are the whole ocean? Yes. But only the Divine can wake you from the amnesia that the Divine created. Only Shiva can reveal what Shiva has hidden. This is the inner revelation that yoga calls Grace. By Grace, you recognize that you are the Self; you always have been. That's why we call it "Self-Realization" instead of "Enlightenment."

"Enlightenment" implies that you were dark and need to be lit up. But "realization" means understanding or becoming aware of something that's already there. You become aware that you already are the Self. You were never not the Self; you are never not Divine; you just don't know. By Grace, you will. The agent of Grace is the Guru. A Shaktipat Guru is appointed to the task of revealing your true identity to yourself.

When Swamiji received sannyas (swami initiation), she was given the name Nirmalananda. It's a compound word: nir-mala means without malas, aananda means bliss. "Nirmalananda" means the bliss of being without malas. It not only names her state, it names the state that she has devoted her life to giving you and all who yearn for upliftment. As a Shaktipat Guru, she is empowered to give you the initiation that pierces aanava mala, to wake you up from your Divine amnesia.

You can go to a Shaktipat Retreat to receive this inner awakening from Swami. Many receive it spontaneously through their *Svaroopaa*® yoga practices or *Svaroopaa*® Vidya meditation. These work because they are Grace-infused practices. Shaktipat happens when you are ready, and the practices get you ready.

Once the Guru pierces aanava mala, you never go back to the not-knowing in the way you've experienced it your whole life, even lifetimes. The mala is not completely dissolved; it's pierced. You'll probably forget your Self for a while, and then remember again, in a gradual unfolding, until one day you'll simply know. You'll know you are the Self in the same way that you know you are alive.

When you abide in that knowing, you won't have to give up your identities, relationships, and activities. But they won't define or limit who you are. They become what you do, expressing forth from the fullness of your being. To be limitless, blissful and free all the time, to realize your own Self in this lifetime, align yourself with Grace. Do more *Svaroopaa*® yoga.

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