

Harmonizing Your Existence

By Swami Suryadevananda

The smaller we are, the larger is the world. But, we are part of this whole universe – not only a part, but one with all of what we behold everywhere. We ourselves are one, and we are at the same time one with the large oneness called existence. Why is it then that we feel separated from nature and others?

From early days we are infused with ideas of doing something with everything, making something out of everything and utilizing things. Building on the feeling of utilizing things destroys the respect we should have for all, as we begin seeing everything and, later, everyone from a utility point of view. How can we feel oneness with everything and everyone if we are constantly seeing everything from this selfish view? Why does everything have to be utilized or rearranged in some way?

Everything in nature has its own purpose and existence just like we do. Nature has abundance to sustain (quite comfortably) all creatures, but greed destroys the harmony by which we can feel a part of everything.

Nowadays, the word ‘networking’ has even given socializing a selfish twist. When I think of networking, I think of working the net - perhaps that is what it is. We work a net to see how more fish can be gathered. How can there be any sense of respect for others if utility stands in between? If there is no respect, how can we feel any sense of kinship with the enormity of existence with which we are one?

Developing the feeling of respect for things and others starts at home. Can we treat all that we have with respect and not merely regard them as useful? Can we see others with respect instead of taking for granted our relationships and set up expectations of behavior?

Taking good care of all that we have, using things and putting them away neatly develops this kind of respect for things. You may think that this is silly or too emotional, even unpractical. Why? If you are to use things, what do you lose in treating everything with respect? You have much to gain, as practicing respectfulness is acknowledging the independent status of all things and respect things. This consideration is the bridge to feeling a oneness with things. In respecting, you treat things as if they matter and therefore will begin to take better care of them. This will also thin out utilitarian ideas. This feeling of respect can be extended to everything, including things that are not yours, so to say.

There is obvious gain in treating ‘our things’ with respect, but other things...? We do not do too well here. When we go to a hotel, an ashram, or a place where we learn something, it does not seem to matter too much to us to leave things as tidy as we do at home. The idea is not to be a ‘neatness freak’ but to feel respect for everything, as this is the antidote to the utility feeling which is rooted in selfishness. Things that are ‘ours’ are the starting point as they are closest, and we have personal gain in taking care of our things. The feeling can be extended to all things, treating them just as if they were ours and then, as things that have independent existence - which they do have.

Your life will become graceful when you have respect for all things. It is like walking without leaving footprints. You will tread gently and not clash or collide with things in some careless manner. This will result in less friction with things and you will be able to do what needs to be done, use things if needed but respectfully so, and put them away in good condition and order. You will gradually be able to relate to all things - indeed to the entire universe - as this feeling takes root in your being.

When you come, for instance, to meditation in the morning hours, others may already be seated. It is best to let yourself in quietly, closing the door gently and try to make the very least noise possible. Your entry should not even be noticed if you truly care. If you are early, take a seat towards the front so others who come a little later can fill in the spaces to the rear and cause the least disturbance. I remember a little rule from earlier days, "If you are not early, you are late". Being punctual, and even arriving early, is a reflection of your overall feeling towards everything. Being seated a little earlier for meditation causes the least disturbance and also gives you some time to center your thoughts. These are simple ways to cultivate thoughtfulness and a feeling of oneness with everything.

The mind likes to appropriate or lay claim in many ways. Once it finds a seat or space, it looks for that seat or space and feels that it is *its* seat or space. This gives rise to feelings of possessiveness for things that are not its own. Actually, nothing is ours, we are only trustees of everything. Harmonizing or universalizing your existence is growth into this feeling.

Mostly, we find living in this way difficult because we don't think of these things and do not properly and fully concentrate on all that we do. Distraction has become our *modus operandi* and we are never fully present at any time. Eating our meals is both an enjoyable and necessary function and yet, we are too distracted to enjoy the meal or digest it properly. We are always in a hurry, even to enjoy a nicely prepared meal or digest it well - why? Can you imagine all that goes into one single meal? The earth has offered its best, the plants have sacrificed selflessly, the farmer has toiled for the harvest, many people have handled it till you were able to get the produce to prepare for the meals. Now, the body which allows your existence, digests your meal (*not you - you only put the food in your mouth*) and only the intelligence beyond the little 'me' can digest all that we insist on eating. There is a universal operation in eating and you can feel your link in this linkless chain if you concentrate on eating. You will enjoy your meal better, chew and digest the food better and probably eat less. We eat much more when we are distracted. The stomach does not have fingers to count the food we push in, but it protests in different ways.

Concentrating on this one act of eating can show you how much you can gain by concentrating on everything fully. Not concentrating is also the primary cause for problems in relationships. We take people for granted based on, "I know him or her and, ...". But everyone changes, evolves, and we are growing too. If we are fully attentive, we will respond to each situation best and this will slow down the mind's furious activity, as it does not need to think of everything ahead if you are committed to giving your full attention when situations appear. The mind is 'habit in function' and it can be changed by new habits, new ways of functioning, and not by some nice thoughts gathered like pretty shells from the seashore.

I remember a quote I read someplace, “The more I realize what great things come from little things, the more I realize that there are no little things.” It is precisely this spirit that is needed. The whole cosmos is in each and every particle of sand.

If you are coming to learn and practice yoga, the unity of all things is the aim of your discovery and you should take every step to practice this and feel this. Yoga is the discovery of the *unity of things* and this cannot even start if you are not ready or willing to sacrifice selfishness or ‘me first’.

Gradually, you can extend this same feeling with things that are yours, as well as with those that are not yours, your attitude in the meditation hall and then into all other aspects of your life. In this way, you harmonize your existence by adjusting yourself with all things and people instead of utilizing them or expecting them to adjust to you. These are all sharp blows at the ego and yoga requires its absence.

Thinking of others first - be it things, people or environments - is thinking of yourself less. This is how you loosen selfishness, and not by reading nice thoughts from a coffee table book. It is easy to think of your family, friends and society first, and this is based on selfishness too ... ‘my...’. But you have to be consistent so you can gradually wipe out the ‘my’ and get to the ego or ‘I’.

Yoga or real spiritual life is not what you do but the heart and mind that is behind all that is done. Doing or action becomes a means to see the condition of the heart and mind behind the doing, and the harmonious action resulting from this vigilance transforms the heart and mind. Harmonious action is acting as if you were one with it or people. You would not treat yourself roughly or in a slipshod manner - why would you then treat things or others such?

All through the day we can do our usual things in such a way so as to have a steady stream of the practice of yoga or the discovery of oneness through action. But this requires keen alertness without break. You have to see everything afresh and with respect - as if it were your very own self in things or people. Are you prepared to do this? When you embrace nature, nature embraces you. If you treat things as being merely useful to yourself, you grow in this utilitarian feeling and increase in selfishness. Selfishness makes your world smaller - and yet you work hard to get money and things to feel larger. But, these cannot work, as smallness within cannot be expanded through things outside.

Maturity is when we take full and complete responsibility for all our actions (or the outbox) and accept all that comes (or the inbox). I cannot change how things work out or the inbox, but the outbox key is completely in my hand. Can I concern myself with acting expertly, in such a way that this skillful living reveals the old me and shapes a new and healthy me?

This essay has hints on adjusting yourself at all times, as through masterful actions you can adjust the vehement ego. Without the feeling of respect for all things and every one, there can be little real progress in spiritual life. Respect is a positive feeling or regard for others, and it is the constant practice of this that will gradually efface the sense of otherness, or separateness, and its inherent selfishness.

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