



July 1998 Contemplation Theme

## Abhyasa

By Rama Berch, C.S.Y.T., E-RYT 500

Perseverance is a key principle of yoga, as well as a skill that enhances the quality of your life. This Sanskrit word abhyasa means perseverance. It is also translated as vigilance. The vigilance is directed to yourself, noticing when you are slipping from your yogic State and then doing something to improve it immediately. A student recently described, “Now, whenever I do not feel happy, I know to do something about it immediately. I have a choice. I can change the way I feel, which then changes what I decide to do. Even stressful things aren’t stressful any more. My whole life has opened up!”

To practice yoga in this way is a radical act. If you use the tools of yoga to monitor and fine tune your state (which includes your mood, emotions, attitude, mental state, and physical state), you will be radically different from everyone else, because you will be happy all the time. One of the curious side effects is that you will not have anything to talk about. Listen to the everyday conversations. Everyone is complaining about something. If you have nothing to complain about, what will you have to talk about? Try it for one day. It is a great yogic practice. For one full day, do not utter even a single complaint. You may find that you have very little to say!

The next stage of abhyasa is to maintain vigilance over your thoughts as well as your words. Do not allow your mind to peruse those old ruts any more. How do you stop? Simply use a yoga tool to divert your mind from its familiar routine. You can do a yoga pose — stand in Tadasana. Or sit quietly for a few long yoga breaths. Practice the yoga of the mind — remember a deep relaxation or meditation you have experienced, or bring to mind a contemplation from a recent class you have attended or book that you have read. Cultivate the yoga of the heart — expand your awareness to notice and to feel that you are surrounded and supported by the presence of the divine in this moment and in this place.

Yoga specializes in tricks and techniques to effect an immediate shift in your state. But none of them work unless you use them. A yoga teacher told me recently about some deep changes occurring in her body after several days of intense physical yoga practice. Never having experienced anything like this, she called a friend to come over and give her a massage. I asked her, “Why did not you do a soothing yoga pose or yoga breathing, to calm the effects and help along the changes?” She said, “I could not think of what to do. I forgot.” If a teacher can forget, it is readily understandable that you might also lose track of what to do. This is why regular practice is so important. You must go to class or do your own practice regularly so that it becomes habit (a very beneficial habit); then you know what to do when you need it the most!

However, true abhyasa is noticing the slightest shift in your state and fine tuning it before it becomes a problem. It is like the small adjustments you make in your steering wheel as you drive down the road. Remain vigilant and notice when you are the slightest bit off. Persevere with the yoga practices when you need them and when you do not!

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rama'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small heart symbol above the letter 'a'.