



November & December 1998 Contemplation Theme

Gratitude

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

You can celebrate Thanksgiving Day without feeling thankful. It can even become a celebration of greed instead of gratitude. Before you can feel gratitude, you have to see for what there is to be grateful. Finding the blessings in your life is dependent on what you look at, not on how well your life is going. This shows up even in yoga class.

I enjoy helping new students settle in for their first guided relaxation. They lay down on the floor. I bring cushions and blankets and then I adjust them to make them more comfortable. I begin with one shoulder, sliding the shoulder blade down their back gently, to lay it flatter on the floor. Perhaps you already know how good this feels. Then I stop and ask, "How does your right shoulder feel compared to your left?" The range of answers is amazing!

Many students close their eyes and sigh, "It feels flatter, softer and more relaxed." Others open their eyes wide and begin looking around, as though they might find the answer written on the ceiling. Finally they say, "It feels better." Not sure if their answer is right, they put a question mark on it. I ask again, "Better . . . in what way?" They cast around again, their difficulty arising from the fact that this is an entirely new feeling for them. Finally, they state quite definitively, "It feels more relaxed." Some will say it feels lighter or heavier, or both. Others describe it as "more energy flowing through." Others say it is wide, or lower, or "fluffier." Anything they say is correct, because they are reporting their own experience.

But some tell me, "My left shoulder feels tighter." They don't notice the improvements. Instead, they focus on the discomfort in the other shoulder. Some go on to describe ten years of history with shoulder problems, not noticing that something has changed. If I point out, "I moved your right shoulder," they say, "You did?" They have a tendency to always focus on the problem, or on their history of past problems. This is a problem in itself. It's like seeing the world in black and white instead of color; or it is like monovision where you have no depth perception. Everything seems flat and colorless. They have no joy, no gratitude.

This changes, of course, with regular yoga practice. Along with becoming more flexible and less stressed, you begin to see your life differently. You see the color and the depth in every moment. When one shoulder is tight and one is relaxed, you can notice the relaxed one. You even laugh at the difference between them. You begin to see the light in your life instead of obsessing on the dark spots. Your perception changes. You see your life and yourself differently. Then you can experience gratitude. You begin to live with an attitude of gratitude. Life is good.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in cursive that reads 'Rama', with a small heart symbol above the 'a'.