



October 2001 Contemplation Theme

Seeing Beyond the Illusion

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In your head you have an idea of how the world works. It is not how the world works — it is your idea of how the world works. On September 11, 2001, that idea got shattered. Now you have to construct a new idea of how the world is. That idea will also be wrong, but you still must have an internal model.

This is the real change. The world-shaking events have done more than destroy airplanes, big buildings and thousands of lives. Beyond threatening your sense of personal or national safety, they have made your petty anxieties seem even pettier. Your most consuming ambitions and desires might seem insignificant now. The “big stuff” doesn’t seem so big compared to the drama playing out on the world stage.

For thousands of years, yoga teachings have warned about getting caught up in the kaleidoscope of the world. You make a map in your mind about the way the world works. Then you place yourself in that map. It’s like the big display board in the middle of the mall that has a red arrow saying, “You are here.” Your sense of self is constructed within the landmarks of your mental map of the world. When the landmarks change, you don’t know who you are anymore. That is what is happening now and it is happening to all of us, all at the same time. What is most amazing is that 260 million Americans, along with innumerable others, are all reconstructing their idea of the world at the same time.

The internal map you had been using was inaccurate. The world has really not changed. The world was not the way you thought it was. You have been living in an illusion of peace and safety, while the world has been in turmoil for decades. The landmarks have been there for a long time, but you may have been ignoring them. Multiple wars have been going on simultaneously throughout the last fifty years or more. Whole nations live under the threat of daily terrorism, with the corner grocery store being blown up moments after a person has walked out. Millions of people have been kidnapped in the middle of the night by their own government and never returned. Marauders and soldiers have been killing one another in the name of religion and/or race continuously throughout (probably) your whole lifetime. The only way you could have not known of this terrible daily risk was to work hard on blocking it out — to live in an illusion, more properly termed “delusion.”

The Sanskrit term for illusion is maya. The One Reality hides itself within the world, which is an ever-changing phantasmagoria. Everything that exists is a unique manifestation of the One Reality — the formless appearing within form and activity. Thus, the world is real, but you must see beyond it to the unchanging ground of all Beingness. Most people become completely fascinated by the constant changes. They try to manipulate them in order to “win the game.” This is the illusion, or the delusion — that the goal is found in the manipulating of the phenomena. The problem with maya is that you lose track of the greater Reality that pervades all of existence. When you see this Reality within yourself and within all forms, then you can be fully alive, fully human, and fully divine — simultaneously. Yoga describes this as seeing beyond the illusion.

These days, seeing beyond the illusion is the task at hand, in the profound ways and in a simpler way as well. The still-open wound that most of us are suffering from is the death of our illusion about how the world is. The everyday threat that so many have been living under worldwide is now personal and close up. You are staring death in the face. But this is not new. You always have been staring death in the face. Your risk of personal injury or death at the hand of a terrorist or madman has not increased by any percentage points at all. The chance that you will die in a car accident is much higher than dying from any

political or personal act of violence. While you unconsciously plan on having decades more to do with as you please, you really don’t know and you never have. This is the not the bad news — this is the good news.

Every day counts. Every breath matters. Every hello and every conversation is significant. If you wait until tomorrow or next year before you mend your broken bridges, you may not have the chance. If

you deny the impulse of truth arising within you, you may not have another opportunity to follow up on it. To look death in the face is to find life.

It is so tempting to try to patch your old worldview back together. If you succeed with the spit and baling wire, something else will have to happen to blow it apart. Recognize the reality of the world. See past the illusion. The world is a mixture of pleasant and painful things. Experience it and look past it. Live in the world and look beyond it. Relationships are a mixture; your job is a mixture; your life has its tides — high and low. Admit it and find something more. Discover the meaning of life inside yourself. Delve inside to find the source of the light that shines through your eyes. Live from the Source. Or at least do what you need to do in order to reconnect with that source inside — do more yoga!

Namaste,



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