



December 2003 Contemplation Theme

Everything is a Reminder

I found myself singing along with the music as I stood in line at Starbucks this morning, “Deck the halls with boughs of holly, Fa la la la la, La la, la la.” I love the decorated shop windows and the little huts going up in the shopping malls — “Santa Claus is coming to town...” This is a joyous season, whether you celebrate Christmas or not. At the same time, this is the most stressful time of the year, and a time when more people commit suicide than any other. Two people can walk down the same sidewalk, passing by the lights and decorations on every side, and have two different experiences. This is because it doesn’t matter what you are looking at on the outside — it is what you are looking at on the inside that matters. The lights, decorations and music are all reminders, but what they remind you of is different for every person.

One person is reminded of all the people she still has to buy gifts for, and how limited her budget is.

Another is reminded of the upcoming visit to his extended family, and is looking forward to the reunion with great joy. Yet another dreads the family scene, and these two people can even belong to the same family!

Someone else is reminded of so many joy-filled Christmas mornings and is delighted to be creating the same for her own children or for a family whose name she got from a list at the local homeless shelter.

One person will look at all the happy shoppers and be reminded of all the poverty and injustice in the world. He may donate his time or his shopping money to an organization that is working in these worthwhile arenas, or he might just complain about life.

There are many people who see every decoration as a reminder of the divine birth they celebrate from 2,000 years ago.

Some are reminded that they don’t celebrate Christmas because their religion is different than mainstream America. Some of these people like being different. Others want mainstream America to change so it includes them.

Some people use the joyfulness of the season to remind themselves of all the reasons they are not joyful, whether it is the problems of their life right now or the history of their life so far.

Where your mind goes is personal to you, but it determines how your entire holiday season goes. Your inner reality is so much stronger than the outer environment. Yoga says, “Look deeper! Look within and see that you are Divine Consciousness.”

A yogi uses every event as a reminder to look within. Everything in the world is used as a reminder of consciousness. Consciousness has become all that exists, and you can see this. There is an inner dimension that far transcends the outer events. Whatever you see, and whatever you do, say or think is an opportunity to recognize the divine within the mundane. This includes the holiday decorations along with the traffic jams. It includes the garbage that needs to be taken out, the ringing of the alarm clock, the errands to be run, and the smile of a child sitting in Santa’s lap, as well as the tears of another child who is afraid to sit up there. This is true, not just for five or six weeks at the end of every year, but in every moment of every day, all year long — every year.

I love to introduce new students to yoga by starting them with the Shavasana adjustments. Once they lie down on their back, I make sure they have enough blankets under their knees and then I shift one shoulder blade on the floor underneath them. After realigning that shoulder, I ask, “What is the

difference?’ Most students report that the shoulder feels lower, flatter or more relaxed. But quite a few report that their other shoulder is tighter. Instead of reporting that the one I adjusted feels better, they focus on the discomfort in the other one. If I now adjust the second one, then they report on a different pain in their body, and then another... They don’t know how to actually feel *good*. When their first shoulder feels good, they quit looking at it, and they go looking for any spot of pain to focus on.

Your mind loves to do the mental equivalent of picking at scabs. When you have a cut that is still healing, the scab forms and the healing is going on underneath. It progresses so well that the edges of the scab become loose. You know that you really should leave the scab alone and let the healing process continue underneath, but you pick at the edge. When you pull on it, sometimes you pull it all the way off and the bleeding begins again. You have reinjured yourself and the healing process will take longer this way. Yet you do it with your body — and you do the equivalent process with your mind. It is time to realize that you have some say about where your mind goes. Picking at the unhealed hurts is not a way of healing them. Living in the constant memory of difficult things you experienced in the past is a way of perpetuating the pain or even reinjuring yourself. Living in constant worry about the future is a way of creating pain from events that you may never have to live through. It’s almost as though you have an addiction to pain.

There is another alternative. Instead of having to choose between feeling pain and feeling nothing, what if you could actually feel good? It is simply a matter of choosing where to focus your attention. With this new yogi, still lying in Shavasana with only one shoulder shifted into place while noticing the other (unadjusted) shoulder, I say, “OK — your other shoulder still hurts. But, how does this one feel? I moved it — does it feel any different?” It can take two or three tries before she or he can actually describe the shoulder that was adjusted. She/he stammers and searches for unfamiliar words – words that describe a sensation of feeling good. It is an important moment, which is not just about the body. This is an important learning — learning how to feel good. Learning to look at what feels good, even if everything else isn’t perfect.

This is an important change in perspective, though it is not really yoga. It is a good beginning because, in yoga, you have to learn to look at what feels good. But this new ability is not for the purpose of feeling good. It is so that you can retrain your mind. It is not training your mind to deny the problems that need to be taken care of, but it is being able to choose your attitude while you are handling them. When you can see the bright side, you can smile in the midst of the storm, and it is even good for your health!

If that were all that yoga offered, it would be a lot. As your body is opening up, your attitude is lightening up. Still, this is all preparatory training. This training prepares you to use your mind in more powerful ways — to use your mind to look beyond your mind. You learn how to use your mind to look at Consciousness-Within. Once you begin this process, you become free from the old patterns and reactions. You become free, progressively and powerfully free.

Along the way, you can use everything as a reminder to look at consciousness. The One Divine Reality has become everything that exists, and you can see this (or remember this) in every moment. You must learn to see it. Without being able to see the divine in everything, you live like a thirsty man in a desert, looking everywhere for water and never finding it. Instead, everything in life is a reminder of consciousness — just look again. Look past your reactions and see the divine in everything. Start with your Self.

Namaste,



To reach Rama Berch or to get more information about Svaroopa® Yoga, contact:

Master Yoga Foundation

1-800-luv-yoga (588-9642)

www.masteryoga.org email: info@masteryoga.org 5670 La Jolla Blvd, La Jolla, CA 92037