



March 2004 Contemplation Theme

Opening Into Life

By Rama Berch, R.Y.T.

Vitally alive! A body that is breathing and pulsating with aliveness in every cell. Eyes clear and radiant. Glowing with a happiness that arises from an inner surety of being. Yoga makes you alive — fully alive. You have the capacity to live this way in every moment, and some work to do in order to get there. Too many people settle for less and walk around half-dead.

Can you really be fully alive in every moment? There are so many parts of the day that are difficult. Maybe you have a long commute in traffic every day. So, just put on some rousing music and sing along at the top of your lungs. Perhaps your challenge is at work: it is simply a dead-end job. You have to pour yourself into it and give it your best in every moment. Even if nothing changes on the outside, you will feel better for having put yourself forth fully.

Is it possible to be fully alive in every moment of your life? Even when times are difficult? If you are going through difficult things at home, open your heart even more. Love the people in your life even more! Even if you are facing the imminent death of someone you love, you can decide to celebrate their life with them. Say all the thank yous and remember all the times you have shared. Allow yourself to feel the joys and the pains all over again. Walk into grief with your eyes wide open, even when they are full of tears. Live! Allow yourself to feel, regardless of what is going on.

In the practice of *Svaroopa*® yoga, we use poses to open your spine. This release of the deepest layers of tensions is for the purpose of freeing your body from what makes it less alive. As you open up space in the core of your body, your internal organs are no longer subject to compression and begin to work better. Your nervous system, immune system, respiration and circulation all improve. Additionally, your mind and emotions become progressively more clear; you are able to live in the moment and carry less baggage from the past. The joy and love that is inherent in your being can rise from the Inner Source and spread into your life and the world, while your sense of self continues to deepen. All this makes you more and more alive — more and more fully alive. You can participate in every moment of life fully, even if it isn't what you thought it would be.

Yoga describes the purpose of human life as being two-fold. If you had a sense that you came here in order to accomplish one overarching purpose, you are actually half right. There are two things that you are here to accomplish. The first is to have experiences, a full range of experiences. This means that life is not merely about happiness and ease. The experiences of life include sadness and challenge. You are meant to be as present for grief and loneliness as for the times of celebration and community. Allow yourself to experience it all — fully.

The second purpose of life is Self-Realization. Whether you have embraced this as a goal or not, working on this is what makes the other purpose of life happen. If you don't look at your own potential for realization, the first purpose of having experiences doesn't work out for you. This is because, when you don't know of your own inner essence, the outer things become the most important things in life. Your first purpose, to have experiences, becomes your only purpose. Thus, if things are going badly today — you are having a bad day, or (worse) you are a bad person. If things are going well — you are a good person, having a good day. When you don't look at your own inner essence, your whole sense of self is created by where you are, what you are doing and how it is going, not to mention what other people think or say about you.

When you have painful experiences, you don't want to feel the pain, so you tune it out. You shut down on the inside, so that you don't fully experience what is happening. This process of shutting down is one of creating

physical tension. Your ability to feel the physical sensations of your body actually diminishes as you try to not feel what you are experiencing in your mind and emotions. Sometimes this is a valuable decision — especially as a child, your ability to shut out the painful stuff might be what got you through a tough time. Even if that was what you needed to do sometime in the past — that was the past. Your ability to look life fully in the face and to move into it with vigor is based on your current stature as an adult, and as a yogi.

A yogi does not shrink from anything. A yogi does not label anyone or anything as being good or bad — everything and everyone is a form of Shiva, the one divine essence manifest in all forms. As a yogi, you can (and must) choose where you are going to spend your time and with whom, but without having to shut yourself down or tune out your experiences. This means you can watch the evening news without being upset by it. You can have an experience of knowing and seeing the pain and injustice in the world, without going into pain yourself. And, even if it does bring up the feeling of personal pain, you can embrace it. It is only temporary — all experiences are temporary. They all change with time. Just keep tuned in. The show is ever changing.

As you continue the process of inner opening, you discover a deeper and greater sense of self. Then the stuff of life doesn't slay you. Things come and go while you fit it into a larger perspective. The ups and downs of life become less all-consuming because you have a larger sense of self. It is not threatened by the momentary losses and it is not lost in the neon light of success. If you make a mistake today, you have a sense that there is a tomorrow coming in which you can try to rectify it. If you enjoy a great success today, you know that there will be something tomorrow that will humble you again, and you enjoy that too. Your inner sense of self is large enough to accommodate the ever-changing world along with other people's opinions of you.

When something in your life becomes so overwhelming that you get lost in it, then the problem is not the thing that overwhelmed you — the problem is that you lost your Self. Your own inner source of resiliency, joy and love is lost. This is the very source that will make you able to handle all the things that life brings, but you lost track of it. This loss of Self is the biggest catastrophe of life — and you see it everywhere you look, in the media, the movies and TV shows, and in everyone you know. As a yogi, you need and want something more. You must!

In yoga, you work on the two purposes of life simultaneously. If you tried to leave your life to work on Self-Realization, then you would have lost track of one of the purposes. The archetype of the yogi, sitting in a cave meditating by himself is an archetype — not reality. Yogis in India live in community, sharing the process and working together toward that ultimate aim. Along the way, they have many experiences — of relationship, of a shared goal and the work that needs to be done, of celebrations of joy and love for one another, etc. In other words, yogis have a life. So do you. You must work on both purposes of life simultaneously. You can begin by fully embracing your life. Step into it as though you chose to be alive. Participate fully, while you are living from the inner depths of your essence, or looking for it — inside.

Do More Yoga!

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rama". Above the letter "a" is a small heart symbol containing the number "31".

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