



November 2004 Contemplation Theme

## Embracing Life Fully

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The experiences of life are incredibly diverse. An ever-changing parade of people and events activates so many thoughts and emotions inside, that you seem to be completely at their mercy. In order to maximize your pleasure and minimize your pain, you put great effort into controlling the events and people in your life. While you are trying to manage (or remodel) the people in your life, they return the favor. All of this is done in the name of happiness — you are just trying to find happiness. But you are looking in the wrong place — you are looking outside when happiness is inside.

The quality of your life is not determined by the experiences you are having, it is determined by your reaction to those experiences. The recent World Series was greeted with great joy in Boston, while others in the country had a different reaction to the same events. Yoga makes you able to embrace all of life fully, by freeing you from your old knee-jerk reactions. You can live in the events and experiences fully, even if they don't match what you thought you wanted.

When you are not happy, your mind is messing with you. Any emotion that you experience is arising from an inner objection (recognized or unrecognized), "I don't want this to be happening!" It is this internal objection that causes your pain, not the events that are unfolding. The events have no inherent rating. While everyone acts as though events have ratings, they do not come with a scorecard. You might expect that getting a job promotion could be worth 5 points, but getting laid off is a -5 (or a -25), and having someone important to you reach the end of their life is a -100. Yet, sometimes people are promoted when they don't want to be; sometimes people choose to take the layoff when their company is downsizing. And sometimes death is a welcome relief, especially after a long debilitating illness. Your happiness or unhappiness is never caused by the people or events in your life; it is all about your reactions.

When you object to life's events, it creates a measurable physical process in you. Your objection affects your heart rate, your blood pressure soars, your eyes dilate, your skin goes white and dry, your diaphragm constricts, and (of course) your tailbone tightens. In fact, the tailbone is the first thing in this complex chain of events, even though the medical researchers haven't found it yet. You can easily feel this for yourself if you have been doing enough Svaroopo yoga to get the core release — when you react emotionally, you can feel your tailbone curling up and inward.

When you have an inner objection to what is happening, you can't think straight. Your ability to see and understand what is going on is completely distorted; even your brain chemicals are thrown off by your inner objection. Any decision you make while you are in this state is unlikely to be very helpful to you or anyone else. This is why it is a good suggestion that you take a few breaths or even walk away from the intensity of the moment. You can think about it, talk it out with someone close to you, and take some time to get used to the idea that this event is even happening. Once you get over objecting to the existence of the problem, you may discover it isn't even a problem — it could be a wonderful opportunity! Or maybe it is a life lesson showing up *again*, in a whole new way.

When you stay in the INNER objection, you are churning with thoughts and emotions. The power of these thoughts and emotions is completely captivating; you get so lost in them that you forget who you are. You become a living-breathing-walking-talking OBJECTION. It's like you are a walking exclamation point, with an unhappy face drawn on it. You have been trained in how to live this way. Society even rewards you for it. You will find that you have nothing to talk about unless you are complaining about something. When you are in objection, you can always find someone to commiserate with you. Even if you accept that events that are happening in the way they are, people will try to stir you up. They seem to want you to be unhappy about things.



Yoga changes all of this. Its effects are immediate and reliable. At the end of your very first yoga class, you feel better — not only physically better, but you also are in a better mood. Your attitude improves and it lasts for several hours or for several days. Each time you do yoga, it lasts a little longer. Many new yogis

have told me that their co-workers notice the improvement in them. One woman, arriving to class a few minutes late, said that her children sent her to yoga because she was in a bad mood. “Mommy, have you done your yoga today?”

In addition to relieving the physical tensions and pain, yoga clears the stress hormones from your blood. The release of the deep spinal tensions tracks from your tailbone upward and releases the tension in your diaphragm. You breathe easy. As this core release deepens and spreads, even your facial tensions melt away. You feel younger and happier, and you even look younger and happier.

Yoga’s effects are cumulative. They deepen with each class you take or each time you do your own practice. If you decide to set some time aside for a weekend of yoga or even dive into a yoga retreat, the process speeds up, freeing you from the internal pressure you have been collecting for a lifetime (or many lifetimes).

Yet, there is more. You can cooperate with this shift in your internal perspective, even when you are not doing yoga poses. The most powerful practices of yoga are not the poses and breathing techniques — the most powerful practices are new ways of dealing with your mind. Instead of suffering from a constant inner objection to life’s events, you can choose to take things more in stride. You can do practices that help you embrace all of life fully, even the difficulties. Just say, “Yes.”

Begin repeating, silently inside, “Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes...” It can be fast or slow, loud or quietly whispered inside to yourself. Use yes as a mantra — it is the best English mantra I know. When you repeat yes inside, you actively intervene in your mind’s constant whining about life. Your mind is constantly objecting to things, finding fault with others (and yourself), and generally being negative about everything. Just say, “Yes.”

Now, this doesn’t mean you have to agree to go along with everything that is happening. The inner yes means that you accept the situation as it is, but you still have the power of free will. You can choose what you are going to do in the face of these events, which might mean that you work to change them. Or it might mean you decide to leave. Or it might mean that you will stay and learn from them. Or something else... But none of these are possible if you don’t look life squarely in the face and see the reality as it is. When you say yes, your fuzzy vision clears and your ability to make a decision improves.

This mundane mantra is a big improvement over what your mind usually does to you. The best way to use this mantra is to repeat it when you don’t need it. When nothing is happening, cultivate the inner stream of continuous yes’s. It is a powerful substitution for what your mind would be doing otherwise, running the old reruns from your life (and it only ever runs the downers, never the inspiring and uplifting events from your past). Just say, “Yes.” You can do yoga with your mind. Say it again, “Yes.” “Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes...”

You will come to live with a feeling of enthusiastic participation — embracing all that life brings to you, even when you didn’t plan it and you don’t understand it. This full participation in life comes from a deep inner opening, which you can help create with both your body and with your mind. You enjoy an increasing ability to stay open to the inner source of happiness all the time. Yoga promises you this; yoga guarantees it.

Then you are experiencing life in its fullness, so you are no longer being driven by the old mental and emotional patterns. Yoga’s inner clearing opens the way for the light of your own being to shine through — through yourself, into your life and into the world. This is how you and I will change the world, together. Just say, “Yes.”

Namaste,



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