



August 2005 Contemplation Theme

The Power of Choice

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Whenever you feel a desire, you have the power to choose whether to act upon it or not. You can even choose to do things you don't want to do, or choose not to do things you really should be doing. Your whole life comes from your choices. Your ability to choose is the most powerful of all your abilities.

Your ability to choose is called *svatantra*, which means free will in Sanskrit. It is part of your divine nature. Every human being is an individualized form of consciousness, which is the One Divine Reality, and consciousness has absolute free will. This free will is full and intact within every human being, but it is not completely free — not yet. It is bound by the needs and desires of others, both family and strangers. The classic example is that you cannot yell, "Fire!" in a crowded theater. Further, your power to make choices can harm others and your relationships with them. You also need to avoid choices that would cause harm to yourself, and to choose to do things that are beneficial even when you don't like them. These limitations on your free will are practical limitations — certain choices are practical.

Your free will is also bound in another way: from your unconscious fears and desires. You are impelled toward certain things, even when you don't want to be. This is the strongest and most painful binding. You know this if you have ever made a list of the pros and cons of two choices, A & B. Even if A is clearly the most beneficial choice, it is amazing how many times you will do B, anyway. You can even say that you will do A, and then you end up doing B, and you end up regretting it. It is more frightening to consider how many times you don't even stop to do the analysis.

Food is one arena where your limited free will is easy to see. Food compulsions are not limited to those who carry more weight than society approves of; many people have terrible eating habits but their bodies don't show it (not yet, anyway). Maybe you remember being a teenager — being able to eat anything and keep going. The human digestive system is incredibly adaptable, and can convert the nutrients in pizza and French fries to what your cells really need. Along the way, it strains other systems in your body: elimination, immune and glandular systems suffer. But the vitality of youth allows many mistakes.

Those who religiously make good eating choices may be doing it out of compulsion just as much as those who eat popcorn or ice cream for dinner. The choice to go organic can be a well-reasoned decision, or it can be compensation for unrecognized needs and unconscious memories. It is hard to see what our food needs really are, separate from all the other factors, because food is related to mother, to survival, to comfort, to your blood chemistry, etc. How do you sort all of this out?

Ultimately it isn't really about food. You can explore any other topic to see how limited your free will is. Your choice of profession, where you live, the type of car you drive, the style of clothing you wear, the people you choose as friends and what you do when you are with them — all this (and more) is affected by unconscious issues. Your unconscious issues are not even limited to what you have experienced in this lifetime; they are shaped by prior lifetimes as well!

Yoga promises that all of this will change. The practice of yoga clears away old patterns in your body and mind, both at the conscious and unconscious levels. After just a few classes, you find that you are less reactive to events. A new level of clarity dawns and you see nuances in a situation that had been completely obscure before. You may spend more time with a new friend than with an old friend, or find that you don't want the same encouragement for old habits as you used to. At first these choices are unconscious, until someone says, "You're different. Why

don't you do 'x' any more?" You have been using your power of choice, but you have been using it unconsciously. You have been shaping your life with unconscious choices.

What if you could use your free will freely? This is one way to describe the goal of yoga — *mukti*, completely free. To be able to make choices without them arising from unconscious issues is an amazing feeling — a feeling of great freedom. Your reasons for choosing what you choose are completely different, because there are no needs, no compulsions. Can you imagine that?

Yoga describes the origin of your free will this way. The universe came into being through the power of choice. While the physicists have mapped the Big Bang, they don't know what it came from. The yogis make it clear:

Chitih svatantraa vishva siddhi hetuh.

Consciousness, out of free will alone,
is the cause of the emanation of the universe.

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Something existed before the universe existed, the something that "banged." Yoga calls it consciousness, because it existed in the fullness of the knowing of its own existence. It still exists, knowing itself, both as the universe and extending beyond the universe. It chose, and is still choosing, to manifest the entire universe within itself, as a form of itself. This includes you.

Chitivahnir avarohapade channo'pi maatrasya meyendhanam plushyati.

Consciousness does not lose divine nature even when being the individual...

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You are an individualized form of consciousness, and you have the whole of consciousness within you, even though you don't realize it all the time. One of the qualities of consciousness is free will, which is why you have free will. Your free will is currently bound, but you can make it free. This process of becoming free is called yoga, and it is the goal of *Svaroopā*® yoga. The core opening provided by the spinal release poses is an opening into the wholeness of consciousness inside. Even if you came to yoga so you could work on your body, you get the opening of your inner experience of consciousness, too. And your body does get better and better and better.

The bottom line is freedom — and tremendous joy. To understand free will is to experience the tremendous joy hidden within yourself. Your ability to make choices is an expression of boundless freedom. The choosing is a movement within that space of freedom — the movement itself is joy!

Make all of your choices from joy, instead of looking for your choices to give you joy. It's a simple switch that changes everything. Make your choices from a place of joy within, instead of looking for your choices to give you joy. It's called freedom.

And when you are not experiencing joy, choose to do more yoga. Especially, do yoga before you make a choice — then your choices will arise from joy.

Namaste,



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