



October 2005 Contemplation Theme

You are Always Choosing

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The secret of life is that you make progress in whatever direction you apply your efforts. You choose where you apply yourself, so ultimately the condition of your life is created by your choices. This is true even though other people do make choices that affect you. In addition other factors affect the quality of your life, including the weather, economic conditions, family events, your health, etc. In spite of your best attempts to control all of these things, you cannot. This may be hard to admit to yourself.

If you have been working to accomplish something or to change a situation in your life, you are actually doing it for a very selfish reason — you want to be happy (or at least to feel better). You want the external conditions of your life to provide your happiness and sense of self worth. When teaching a workshop, I asked a group, “Did you ever get all your ducks in a row?” A woman responded, “Yes!” I followed up with another question, “How long did it last?” Usually the answer that people give me is a short time frame, like “five minutes” or “two days.” I was completely amazed when she said, “Three months!” She went on, “My husband’s work was going very well, the kids were doing great in school, the house was perfect, the gardener came every week, the cars were running well.” I asked, “How was it?” She said, “I wasn’t happy. That’s when I decided to do yoga.” That was an intelligent decision.

When you work at accomplishing or changing things in your life, you are using an indirect method to improve your inner state, by manipulating the external conditions of your life. This is true if you are trying to get ahead work, if you want a person in your life to change, or even if you are volunteering your time on the environmental, political or social climate. Yoga says you must make an internal change — develop your own inner state of well-being and independent happiness. You can still choose to work on changes in the world, but your efforts will not come from an inner discomfort; they will come from an inner fullness and inspiration to support others.

Until you find this inner quality of peace and fullness, your choices are simply reactions to events. You live in the knee-jerk reflex too much of the time. Everyone in the world has more control of how you feel than you do. Even a total stranger driving the car in front of you can ruin your day. You are at their mercy and they are not very merciful. Yoga says you have free will, and even when you are letting someone else determine how you feel, you have made a choice to let them be in charge.

Tathaapi tadvat pancha krtyaani karoti.

The individual, even in this contracted condition, performs the five processes of Shiva.

Pratyabhijnahrdyam 10

This sutra describes you (the individual) as being in a contracted condition. This is true on many levels, including your own unhappiness or frustrations with life. But the most significant level of contraction is that consciousness contracts to become you (and everything else that exists). The One Reality is manifesting as this universe and everyone and everything in it. In yoga, the One Reality is called Consciousness, or Shiva. Thus, you are Shiva, but you are Shiva in a contracted form. One way Shiva’s contraction manifests is by being the energy that contracts to become atoms. It is also your mind contracting your sense of being, so you don’t experience yourself as all-expansive, ever-existent, supreme divine reality. Your sense of self is more limited (contracted). This is called “the human condition.”

It is important to notice that this sutra says, even in this contracted condition, you retain the whole capacity of Shiva within you. This is called “the human capacity.” The stated purpose of the ancient practice of yoga is to help you attain your full human capacity.

In this contracted condition, you still have free will. You perform the “five processes of Shiva.” This means that you (1) start up new projects and activities, (2) make them happen, (3) bring them to an end, (4) get so caught up in them that you lose track of yourself, and (5) have occasional insights and expanded moments that show you the infinity within yourself and the true nature of the universe.

Your ability to make choices is critical in this process; it is free will. You choose which ideas to bring to fruition. You choose which to ignore. You choose whom you will talk to and what you will say. Even when you are not saying or doing anything external, you are choosing to say and do nothing. You are also choosing to think whatever thoughts you are thinking, positive and friendly thoughts or negative resistant thoughts. You choose to blame others or to look for your own part in the situation. You choose to learn lessons, or to try to avoid them.

Any choices you make that start from a place of unhappiness will have repercussions that you don't enjoy. When you are feeling unappreciated, you look for someone to appreciate you; when you are feeling unfulfilled, you look for something to fulfill you. Your choice could be something to distract you, like music, movies, television, etc. Or it could be something to do, like plant a garden so you can feel good when it grows. Hopefully this is beginning to sound like a description of your life. This is “normal.” It is what everyone does, and what you have been trained to do. And it works, some of the time. But not always.

If the garden doesn't grow, or the person doesn't express their appreciation in just the right way, your need is not met. You might even get mad because your inner feeling hasn't changed, so now you are feeling unappreciated *and* angry. You can layer additional emotions in there: for example, if you are afraid to express your anger — now you can feel unappreciated *and* angry *and* anxious. In a case like this, you might decide you need to “work it out” with the other person. But, from yoga's perspective, the other person is not the problem. The problem is that you were feeling unappreciated, and you chose to embark on an activity to change that feeling from the outside. Your choice was motivated by your unhappiness.

The goal is to make choices from a place of inner depth, deep and abiding peace, and ever expanding ecstasy. When you interact with someone while you are feeling this way, the whole interaction will be dramatically different. You won't be needy, so you won't end up angry or anxious. And the other person might even enjoy the interaction more, too. For sure, you will be happier, plus your garden will grow better!

Your ability to make choices is affected by your internal state. More than this, your free will is limited by your inner contraction, but I'll describe that in another contemplation article. For now, what you can do is manage your own internal state by doing more yoga.

Namaste,

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