



December 2005 Contemplation Theme

## 'Tis the Season...

By Rama Berch, C.S.Y.T., R.Y.T.

There's a lot going on at this time of year, outside and inside. You get to choose how you approach it. Perhaps one or all of the descriptions below will ring true for you, and help you make your choices.

'Tis the season to be jolly — to feast, to play, to celebrate with loved ones. The daily-ness of life is arduous, with more things that need to be done than time in which to do them. Play is a very important part of life that gets overlooked too easily, especially with so many types of entertainment readily available. There is a real difference between play and entertainment. Take advantage of this season and respond to the invitations to experience a lightness of heart and a few moments of pure silliness. I hope you laugh more during the next few weeks.

'Tis the season to be moody — inflated expectations collide with hidden emotional issues at this time of year, leading to more depression and more suicides than any other time of the year. The emotional roller coaster can run a little hotter, so you need to be compassionate with yourself, as well as with others. You may need to acknowledge that you need additional support to sort through the unfinished business inside. You may need to accept that your holiday is not going to match your desire or imagination. Most of all, you can soften back into yourself, like when you lie back in Shavasana, and rely on that deeper inner center of your own being to see you through.

'Tis the season to be giving — it is such a wonderful experience to find joy in giving joy to others. When you figure out the perfect gift for someone and you see their eyes light up when they open it, you feel wonderful. This inner feeling of joy does not come from gaining their approval. Your feeling of joy does not come from having been right about what they wanted. This pure joy arises inside when you make them happy. Your joy at doing this is a beautiful thing. How wonderful that we have many such opportunities throughout the year, including Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, birthdays, etc. But do you need the calendar to tell you when to do this? I remember a coworker from many years ago (B.Y. — before yoga), who explained to me that her religion forbid the celebration of secular holidays. Therefore they did not celebrate birthdays, nor did they give gifts on Christmas. She said, "Instead, we are always watching to see what someone wants and needs. We don't make them wait for a holiday to get it — we give it to them when they want or need it." How beautiful!

'Tis the season to be greedy — this is probably the reason that so many people sour on the holidays. The commercial tone to the holidays is tremendous, but I have gotten to the point that I even enjoy this part of it. I love the music in the stores; I delight in the beautiful and the silly decorations; I stop at every Santa I see. I feel like a little kid again and I love that feeling. Though I do remember clearly from my childhood the incredible greediness I felt, along with fear that my desires would not be fulfilled. That incredible need for a particular thing (or a long list of particular things) comes from two things: (a) the not-knowing of your own inner Self, so you look for outer things to make you happy, and (b) the explicit and thorough training that you have received in total consumerism. Each of these reinforces the other, and you end up getting caught in the middle — it is a Catch 22.

'Tis the season to be loving — the gift of your time is more important than any object you can gift wrap. Those family gatherings, or a gathering of people who become your family for at least

the day, are a place you say, “You are important to me. Important enough for me to give up a whole day of my time. Important enough for me to be in your presence. Important enough for me to give you the gift of my own presence.” Nothing more needs to happen; just to spend time with them is a statement of your love. There are no special words that need to be said, though those can pierce the armor around any heart when they are truly spoken. When you cannot spend time with these people, a phone call may be more important than any gift you send. What if you do more than the bare essentials — what if you phone three days in a row? Maybe you could phone on a day that is NOT the holiday day. Maybe you can find a way to express your love that isn’t commercialized, or even use the commercial push to help you find a way to let them know that you love them. Or maybe you could just sit and feel your love for each person in turn. The truth is, even if they aren’t perfect, you can still love them, and you do still love them. Allow yourself to feel that love.

‘Tis the season to turn toward God — when people bemoan the commercialization of Christmas, they are complaining about losing God. Even people who have trouble with the word “God” complain about the loss. “Holiday” really means “holy-day.” Religions that predate Christianity also worshipped at the solstice, using fire and light along with evergreen trees, joyous feasts and parties. The consistent theme is worship, an expression of love and gratitude to the One Reality called by many names. The Mayan calendar did not even have the last five days of the year on it, using these days to stop all their worldly activities and devote their time to honoring the source of life. There is a natural tendency to be more introspective during the deep of the winter, and the celebrations can be a springboard to a profound inner experience of the divine.

You get to decide how to approach this holiday season. It is your choice. Even if others around you don’t share your choice, you get to choose. Your choice is not about imposing your plan on your family and friends. Your choice is about your *bhav* (your mood, your attitude, your approach to the whole thing). You can also choose where you want to invest your time and money, including what you are buying and for whom, as well as who you want to spend your time with.

For me personally, gift giving in my family is hard, because we have many who, throughout the year, buy themselves the things they want. Several years ago, we agreed to give donations to not-for-profit organizations in honor of one another. The organization sends a nice thank you to the family member who was named. For the children, I thoroughly enjoy giving age-appropriate gifts, while I follow up on a less hectic day later on. It’s even more fun then because I get the kids all to myself!

For my own personal holiday celebration, I always create the time for a personal retreat, so I can approach the holidays as truly holy days. This year, after my own personal retreat concludes, I will be teaching a meditation retreat that begins December 30 and extends into the first week of the New Year, to support those who want to do the same.

For me, ‘tis the season to do more yoga.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rama". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a heart shape drawn above the letter 'a'.

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