



August 2008 Contemplation Theme

Transformation is a Process

by Rama Berch

Bliss transforms you completely, utterly and forever. Even a taste of bliss leaves an imprint all the way through your body and mind and into your soul. You carry that imprint with you forever, unto lifetimes. You look for a way to get back to that bliss again, because bliss is your very nature. Without bliss, you feel like you are missing out on the meaning and purpose of life. Yet to be able to live in bliss requires that you undergo some transformation. Bliss is instantaneous, but transformation is a process.

Perhaps you once received a phone call with good news, like the birth of a much-awaited baby or results of a test or a big promotion. The moment that you heard the news, you went into bliss — instantaneous bliss. In its fullest expression, bliss is far beyond mere joy. It pervades all the levels of your multidimensionality. The thrills and tingles in your body are only part of it. The laughter or tears are only part of it. The expanded sense of self is the most important part of it. You ride the wave of that illimitable bliss for hours or days, but then you crash. You aren't able to sustain that bliss. You return to your normal state of sort-of-just-barely-alive, with all of its attendant tensions and fears. Your eyes go dull again as your breath gets thin and irregular and your mind returns to its familiar refrains.

What you experienced is called “dependent bliss.” From that moment on, you love babies. Maybe you want to frame the test results or even visit your new office in the dead of night. You are hoping that the bliss will erupt through you again, but it doesn't work the same way the second time. So you seek out new experiences, perhaps even more extreme experiences, to overwhelm the habitual tensions and fears that keep you shut down and numbed out.

You also experience dependent bliss when you get angry and yell at people. Crying can do it, as well as hyperventilating and then collapsing. A sudden insight or self-understanding triggers bliss, which is why people like to work on themselves, using the many creative methodologies that make up the American self-improvement landscape. Even getting rid of the junk in your basement, garage or storage shed triggers dependent bliss. Whether you are yelling, crying, or cleaning out your closet, you are emptying out the junk from inside you, which makes it possible for the inherent bliss of your own being (svaroopa) to arise within and pour through you. It is profoundly healing.

Clearing out the old psychological blocks — yelling, or crying, or thumping on the bed with a garden hose — doesn't create the healing. The bliss does. Even a moment of bliss heals wounds from 100 lifetimes. This bliss-based healing manifests through all the levels of your being simultaneously. Thus, healing is not the goal in yoga. Bliss is the goal.

When you bathe your brain and body in bliss chemicals, both undergo profound physical changes. Bliss saturates your mind as well, imprinting bliss on it instead of the usual hurry, fear, need and greed. These changes create a permanent internal shift in your sense of self — a true transformation. This is not psychology. It is not healing. It is not growth. It is not self-improvement. It is yoga, which defines itself as a path of self discovery. You discover the source of independent bliss which is already full and complete within you. When you have the experience of svaroopaa, the bliss of your own being, your mind and body are transformed, and it overflows into your life.

Still you must remember that bliss is instantaneous but transformation is a process. You can use any of yoga's thousands of shortcuts to bliss. *Svaroopa*® yoga specializes in them because your spine is the conduit of inner bliss. As soon as you unlock the tensions at the base of your spine, bliss begins to arise within you. Ujjayi Pranayama is another way to get to bliss, if you slow your breath down and do it with less efforting. Mantric music, chanting and meditation are pathways to bliss, as are the quotes and sutras that your teacher shares with you in every class.

While yoga's tools propel you through the seven levels of bliss that I described last month, your ability to live in that bliss constantly requires some preparation and conditioning. This one of the reasons that doing more yoga is so important — not just to get to the bliss of your own being (though that is a very good reason!), but so you can condition your body, brain and mind to being bathed in that bliss all the time. In the beginning, you may miss the adrenaline. We live in an adrenaline-rich society; even caffeine makes your body produce adrenaline. While most people think that adrenaline is a stress chemical, it is actually a fear chemical; your body produces adrenaline when you experience fear. It creates a “high,” a hyper-alertness and ready-to-go state that is your body's readiness to run away or stand and fight. This adrenaline high is exhausting to your body and mind. By contrast, the natural high that comes from your experience of independent bliss is deeply nourishing as well as profoundly healing.

In order to live in the bliss, you must condition yourself to it. Your body and brain need the cellular changes that the bliss chemicals provide. Your brain is part of your central nervous system, which includes your spinal cord, both of which are profoundly changed with core opening. Most importantly, your mind is imprinted by every bliss-bit that you experience, wiping away the old fear-based programming. Yoga promises that your mind will become naturally inclined toward upliftment once it has been through the transformations it needs:

Tadaa hi viveka-nimnam kaivalya-praagbhaaram chittam. Patanjali Yoga Sutras 4.26

After these transformations of mind, you have a mind that is naturally inclined toward liberation due to its clarity and power of subtle distinction.

The most powerful way of transforming your mind is to bathe it in bliss. Imagine that the government embarked upon a new program that required everyone to spend 90 minutes per week at a clinic that gave them an intravenous solution of bliss chemicals for free. The treatment would be completely safe and have no adverse side effects. Week by week, every person in the country would be bathed in bliss. They would drive home differently and deal with their family members in a new way. Their work would reflect the cumulative effect of their innermost experiences of bliss. Their choices in life would change. This happens to you in your *Svaroopā*® yoga class, as well as your personal yoga practice.

Athletes condition the body to performing well, as do dancers and clowns. They work hard to perfect their routines, knowing that the body can withstand that type of physical punishment for only a few years. Musicians condition their body to play their particular instrument, developing their lungs for a wind instrument or their ability to use both hands in different ways for piano or drums. Svaroopis condition their body and mind to bliss, so they can experience all seven levels of bliss in their practice plus live in it all the time.

But the process of transformation is truly a process. There are the stages where you don't know who you are any more. You try to do the things you used to like to do, but you find that you don't like those things any more. You haven't yet figured out which yoga practices will support the "new you." This new you isn't universally welcomed by everyone — some people like the old you and want you to go back to being contracted and fearful again. Maybe you want to go back to the old you, but when you try, you aren't happy there any more. Now what do you do?

Think of the caterpillar. When the caterpillar is sealed into its cocoon, consider what happens to it before it emerges as a butterfly. There is a point where it stops being a caterpillar, but it hasn't yet become a butterfly. It doesn't know it is going to be a butterfly. It doesn't know that it will be enchantingly beautiful and float on the air, drinking nectar from the flowers. It isn't what it used to be any more, yet it isn't what it is going to be — the same as you. It's in process.

A tadpole undergoes a different type of transformation. It doesn't dissolve into mush, as does the caterpillar. Its tail disappears as its legs grow, but there is some point along the way where it stops breathing water and begins to breathe air. That's a pretty major change! The equivalent happens for you. What used to nourish you may now be suffocating. You even breathe different air than you used to.

My favorite metaphor for transformation is stripping paint from an antique. You remove the chipped and scratched layers of paint to uncover the beauty that was always hidden underneath. In yoga, you are gradually removing everything that other people layered onto you, all that stuff that is not really you, to discover who you really are. Along the way, you aren't actually becoming someone new and different. You are simply losing the who-you-are-not and becoming more and more your own self. And that self is the one ever-existent supremely divine **Reality** — Consciousness-Itself. You are That. Do more yoga.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rama". Above the signature is a small heart symbol containing a smaller heart, with a dot above that.

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