



November 2008 Contemplation Theme

Unconditional Love

by Rama Berch

The year-end holiday season approaches; this is “The Family Season.” Some of you are apprehensive about the upcoming family gatherings. If so, your problem arises because of conditional love — you want them to love you unconditionally, but their love is clearly based on certain conditions. Unfortunately, so is yours. If you loved them unconditionally, you wouldn’t complain about them to other people. You’d find their quirks to be endearing. You’d see their flaws with understanding and you would treat them with gentleness. When your nearest and dearest are being negative and cranky, you’d be concerned for them instead of becoming defensive, frustrated or full of self-doubt. The real problem is that you want them to love you unconditionally, but they want you to love them unconditionally. Who goes first?

You have compiled the list of how each of your family members should change. It’s so easy to see what they need to do. When you keep your eyes on these needed changes, you are placing conditions on your love. You are treating them the same way you were treated. You didn’t like being treated that way, way back then, and you don’t like it now. They don’t like being treated that way either. Unfortunately, giving conditional love is the only thing you know how to do. You learned from masters. They were excellent role models for how to give conditional love.

In fact, parents are supposed to give conditional love. They have the job of teaching you acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. If you are a parent now, you know the importance of this job; you do it by putting conditions on your love. The hidden truth is that you don’t stop loving a child who is misbehaving, but your job as a parent requires that you react strongly. But the child’s experience is, “Mommy/Daddy doesn’t love me when I misbehave.” You know your love is always there, but the child doesn’t know this. It is so much easier to see all this when you are the parent. It’s harder to see it when you look back to your own childhood. Yet the love was always there. You’re just looking in the wrong places. Look between your memories. Look in-between those painful memories – you’ll find the love.

It’s time to grow up. You need to grow up in two ways: it’s time to see your family with more clarity, plus it is time for you to grow beyond your early conditioning. Let’s begin with getting beyond your conditioning.

You have already made so many changes: you don’t do everything the way your parents did. You have made choices to do some very important things differently. Perhaps you eat different foods now than what they still serve at holiday meals. You may do a different type of work or maybe you live somewhere that is very different from where you grew up. You may be making different parenting choices. Plus you do yoga, which may create a very different lifestyle and perspective than how they were then (or how they are now). With all these differences, which you have worked hard to create, you probably still react your family in the same way that you always have. You haven’t made any changes in your knee-jerk reaction — you are still looking for unconditional love from them when they have proven themselves incapable of giving it.

There is a reason that you return to the same people, hoping for their unconditional love, even though you don’t get it — again. You do it because they did give you unconditional love when you were young. Unfortunately those aren’t the times you remember. In their best moments, their eyes shone with the radiance of pure love. You basked in it. You didn’t have to earn it; you weren’t being good in order to get their approval. You were just being you and they radiated pure love.

I remember being a child, tumbling around on the living room floor, and looking up to see my parents radiating joy and love. I remember running across a big grassy lawn, simply enjoying watching them watch me. I remember getting snuggles and kisses, sometimes when I was happy and sometimes when I was crying. I remember so many times they showed their love. They didn’t have words to express it; words were not needed. Your nearest and dearest did give you unconditional love — you just have to look in-between the memories that you keep front-and-center.

While they gave you unconditional love in their best moments, they weren’t always at their best. As an adult, you can look back and see that they had a limited capacity. They brought their own conditioning into their relationship with you. Whatever they went through before you were born (and even after) affected how they raised you. I can see that with my parents, who grew up during the Depression. With the uncertainties of

today's economy, I now have a better understanding of how that affected them. Today's economic situation is based on people's fear, which is feeding a cycle that will spiral farther downward before it rises again. Yet you have to remember that it will rise again. The trick is to figure out how to look beyond the institutionalized fear and make your decisions based on realities. If you still have your job and home, then nothing has really happened to you. Even all the economists and analysts say the same thing — bide your time. Don't react out of fear.

So your family members brought baggage into their relationship with you. Yoga says that you were born into this particular family, which carries this type of baggage, and you went through that stuff with them because of your own karma. Patanjali calls it "the conditions of your birth," referring to the country you were born in, the economic and educational status of your family, as well as whether you were the oldest, youngest or in between. The circumstances and people around you, including their baggage, provided fertile soil for your own karmic seeds to sprout. Thus you cannot blame them for your conditioning — in yoga, you recognize your own culpability, or at least your ability to decide what to do with all that baggage. The bottom line is that it is up to you, whether you look at it from the perspective of multiple lifetimes or you see it as being simply about this lifetime. What happens next is up to you.

The last time you walked into a family gathering, you probably brought your same old agendas with you. Were you still trying to get even, to make everybody happy, to make your point, to get what you never got, or to prove that you were right all along? Give it up. Every agenda item is about you getting something from them — something they never gave you before and they are not going to give it to you now. They can't. They love you, whether they show it or not, but they don't know how to give you what you are asking for. If they knew, they would have done it decades ago. They have a limited capacity. They are still wonderful people in so many ways, but you are bumping into their limitations.

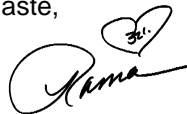
Your capacity is not so limited. You are a yogi. As a yogi, you know how to base yourself in your own inner essence, or at least you know how to get back there at the end of the day. You don't come into the family with your neediness leading the way. You come in with an inner core of beingness that makes you feel full, whole and complete. You're not waiting for them to compliment you, to approve of you, to understand you, to agree with you, or to ask how they can get some of what you're getting from yoga. You're not waiting for these things because you grew up. You don't need that old baby pacifier because you outgrew it. You don't need your teddy bear because you outgrew it. You don't need them to fill you up, because you outgrew the neediness — you come from fullness now.

You can see your family more clearly. You can see their limited capacity, and you can see the love that shines underneath. They let it show as much as they can and as often as they can. The rest of the time, they have their dance, going through the ritual of greeting, laughing, disagreeing, sharing their successes and failures, eating, working together, putting pressure on you, etc. So much of the time, the same family members are saying the same things to each other again — like an ancient ritual that becomes more meaningful each time it is done. It doesn't have to change. They don't have to change. They are loveable just the way they are. You really do already love them; all you have to do is let yourself recognize this.

So now the question is, can you love them unconditionally? Everyone wants to be loved unconditionally, but you are the one with the greater capacity to offer it, because you are a yogi. When you experience unconditional love for them, everything will change, even if nothing changes.

Do more yoga.

Namaste,



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