



June 1993 Contemplation Theme

The Changeless Principle

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“The one thing constant in life is change,” advises an ancient Greek philosopher. Yoga goes one step further. In the midst of change, there is an inner principle that remains steady. The constancy of your own presence never leaves you. However, you may not be looking inward to find it. If you define yourself by the outer situations, your sense of self changes with the changes of life. One moment you will be happy, and the next moment you will not. If you measure your self by your net worth, or if you are merely at the mercy of the evening news, you’ll be living on a roller coaster, rising and falling from heaven to an inner hell.

People react differently to change. Some people live for change. Others like to have a choice in the change. Some people resist change; others are relieved when it is thrust upon them. The most adaptable and flexible people are those with an inner sense core of stability. They handle and enjoy whatever life offers. One Sanskrit text describes this by stating, “Realizing the inner Truth, one can live anywhere.”

Certain yoga practices develop this inner sense of stability, while engendering flexibility. You must have both stability and flexibility. Then, you can live anywhere and enjoy every moment of life, not in spite of what it brings, but because of what it brings. With this inner steadiness, you can be flexible without being a doormat. You will not need to use your old tactics: to resist, to hide from or to control change. You will not have to create change in order to avoid having it thrust upon you. All these tactics have one major drawback, primarily loss of joy. Life is meant to be a joyful experience, with your welcoming each moment of each day, even when the unexpected occurs. You will not experience this joy if you are always controlling the external components to try to make your life seem perfect.

Your inner Self is the one changeless principle. When life is swirling around outside of you, your inner Self remains serene and undisturbed. This serene center is called “Self” or “That.” You are That. You have always been and will always be That. You can never lose That. When you know That, it supports you through the fluctuations inherent in life.

A Sanskrit verse describes this as niralambaya, needing no support. You do not depend on an outer role or identity to prop up your sense of self. Your actions and words come from the changeless inner principle. The goal of yoga is for you to live in this state. It is already familiar to you, because you get a taste of it at the end of every class. This inner assurance eliminates any need to defend or protect yourself. It is never affected by stress or hurry. It is the deep experience of your inner Self in every moment.

Once you’ve found it, it fills into the other parts of your life. This inner support becomes tangible in every moment of your day. When this is not your day, you turn to crutches for support of your sense of self. Let go of these crutches, because any crutch will ultimately be lost. A personal crisis arises because your crutches are threatened or lost. Is your car or your extensive wardrobe irreplaceable? I know someone whose home burned down and she lost everything. If this happened to you, would you still exist?

Of course, you would still exist. And you would have an excellent opportunity to look beyond external crutches and find the changeless principle within. The real meaning of life comes from your inner Self. This is what yoga gives you. You taste it in Shavasana (Relaxation Pose). It is there in every yoga pose. You can perfect it in meditation. In this way your practice of yoga becomes the perfect preparation for life — you are able to find the changeless principle even in the midst of life’s changes. Then, every change is a celebration of life itself! Do more yoga!

Namaste,