



March 1998 Contemplation Theme

Action

By Rama Berch, C.S.Y.T., E-RYT 500

Modern life seems to be measured by our level of activity. It seems to be a natural law: when you do more, you are worth more, or at least you are a more interesting person. Life can be so overbooked that you have to come to yoga in order to relax. You hurry up to get here so that you can lie down on the floor and do nothing but breathe for a while. Sometimes the hardest part of yoga class is just getting there! Yoga seems to say, "Slow down!" The slowing down or the complete halt (in the relaxation at the beginning of a class) is truly needed, but for a different reason than you might expect. There is nothing wrong with activity. There is nothing wrong with the amount of activities you engage in, nor with the things you choose to do. The problem is your reasons for doing those activities.

Yoga changes the reasons that you do things. I began yoga with the desire to be free from pain, both physical pain as well as a deep obscure pain that was impossible to put into words. That pain was the motivation for everything I did, whether I recognized it or not. I worked hard and I played hard to avoid feeling that pain. I continued my education in hopes of getting ahead, convinced that success would alleviate the pain. I embarked upon relationships in order to get free from the constant gnawing inside. I did all the things that society recommended, but none of it gave me what I really wanted. I finally turned it all upside down and dove into yoga because it worked. The deeper I got into yoga the more effective it was. This is still true 25 years later.

Now I do all the things I left behind when I escaped to India. I work hard and I play hard. I have meaningful relationships and am enjoying an unanticipated level of success. But I do it all for a different reason than before. Activity itself has not gone away. Sometimes my daily schedule is far more challenging than life was "before yoga". But I'm not doing these things in order to be free from pain. I'm not waiting for someone else to acknowledge me or need me. I feel joyful inside and the joy overflows into activity. The activities of my day arise from an inner fullness that supports me, rather than an emptiness that seeks to be filled.

In the beginning of yoga practice, it is important to create times where all activity stops. It is not because yoga values inactivity, but because you need inner quiet in order to find the essential piece that was getting overlooked: your Self. You have this tendency to identify with what you do, including your profession and your hobbies. Yoga gives you something else to identify with: consciousness-itself which is your real Self. During the month of March we will be contemplating the motivations for our actions and finding a way to remember the true Self in the midst of activity. In April we will go on to consider the law of Cause And Effect, otherwise known as karma, which you collect both from your actions as well as from your reasons for acting. We look forward to seeing you and building that inner experience together.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Rama'. Above the signature is a small heart symbol containing the initials 'S.T.C.'.