



May 1999 Contemplation Theme

Ego

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

Your mind's job is to doubt (and it's doing a very good job). It distrusts everything and everyone, keeping you in a state of unrelenting anxiety and a feeling of distance from others. Yoga calls this part of your mind *ahamkara*, which is usually translated as "ego." This is different from what most people mean by the word "ego," thinking of someone as having a big ego when they act in certain ways. Yoga says that such a person has a small ego, because they have to act this way to counteract the way they really feel inside. *Ahamkara* is a specific aspect of your mind that makes you feel small and inadequate. It has a million ways of chopping you down to size. It even has the effect of shrinking or compressing your body. You actually get shorter when you feel yourself to be small. By doing yoga poses, you begin reversing this process by elongating your spine. This naturally expands your sense of self, propelling you beyond *ahamkara* into *svaroopa*, the Bliss of your own Being.

Ahamkara is the part of your mind that acts like a barbed wire fence, carving a specific territory out of Consciousness-Itself to name as your own, and then doubting everything else. You live inside this small section that is your own personal turf instead of recognizing the vastness of your true identity. *Ahamkara* specializes in reminding you of how small and inadequate you are, constantly reinforcing your seeming separation from Consciousness-Itself. "Do not degrade yourself," says Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita*, an important yoga text. This is a powerful reminder and important yoga practice that is actually more important than the yoga poses. Think well of yourself!

The average person thinks 65,000 thoughts per day. The problem is that this is not a constant stream of new, creative, uplifting and inspiring thoughts. Not only are they repetitive, too many of them are demeaning. If you spoke to your friends this way, you would not have any friends. It does not matter when you learned to talk to yourself this way or from whom you learned it. It is time to make a change.

When you notice that your mind is on automatic pilot, you must intervene. Do not merely watch your mind — do something different with it! Take a long in-breath with an especially slow exhale. Do a yoga pose or indulge in a nice stretch. Replace that thought by thinking something positive about yourself or you may find it easier to think something positive about someone else. Perhaps you need a mantra that you can repeat silently inside, to replace all those unnecessary thoughts that continually re-construct the barbed wire fences of your *ahamkara*. You must retrain your mind so that it no longer limits your sense of self, but becomes a window through which you can look inward to the inner vastness of your own being.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Rama'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a heart shape above the 'a'.