



June 1999 Contemplation Theme

Sense of Purpose

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

“Ego is the bad stuff,” one student said authoritatively. “Yes,” I replied, “and ego is the good stuff, too!” For example, if you quit smoking, you can feel quite virtuous, and even become quite obnoxious to others about your reformed ways. Your old identity as a smoker has been replaced by a new sense of identity as a non-smoker — but it is still a way of saying, “I am what I do.” Your mind performs this insidious function called ahamkara, which means “I am what I do.” Ahamkara is usually translated as “ego,” which is misleading because we think of ego as being the bad stuff.

Ego makes you think that you are not a divine incarnation of perfect consciousness, at play in a world of consciousness. Ego makes you not live in the knowing of the Bliss Of Your Own Being. It is an inner separation from your true Self that turns into the inner dialogues. It creates the drama of your life played out in never-ending thoughts. Ego makes you feel not good enough, not strong enough, not pretty enough, and not thin enough (even when you are). It makes you try harder, go faster, and do more. Ego is the voice that whines, “Why am I here, anyway?”

It is ego that feels incomplete and yearns for a sense of purpose in life. USA Today reported that one third of Americans would ask God, “What is my purpose in life?” That is a lot of people! Fortunately, many of them come to yoga classes. When you look around the yoga classroom, remember that there are many there who share your same yearning. This sense of purpose is called dharma, and is the “why” you are here and the “what” you are supposed to be doing.

The Isha Upanishad says that it is your dharma to know the true Self, which is Consciousness-Itself being you. Without this attainment, you will always be striving for something. You can attain all the awards, know all the right people, vacation in all the places on your list, and you will still be adding more things to that wish list. This is because of ego — ahamkara always feels incomplete. Ahamkara says, “I am not the whole of Consciousness. I am less. Therefore, I need something to complete me. What is that perfect something that will make me feel complete?” So, the search begins. And it goes on, and on, and on . . .

The purpose of your life is to know the true Self. The things you love to do the most are the things that give you momentary flashes of the Bliss of Your Own Being. You have had this experience when you watched a sunset or climbed to the top of the mountain, or when you looked deep into someone’s eyes and truly connected, or just when you heard your cat purr. But these are only momentary flashes. Then ego forces you to move on. Ego says, “I am what I do. Even though this thing took me to the Bliss Of My Own Being, I must keep doing.

So, what is next?”

How do you get out of this trap? Do more yoga! Yoga gives you a direct route to the experience of the true Self, while it develops your ability to stay in it progressively longer. Then you will not ask for the people and things in your life to make you feel whole. You take the inner fullness and pour it into your life. In this way, you can keep the same job, live in the same house, drive the same car, stay with the same spouse, and feel that you are expressing your purpose in life. Because your life becomes the expression of your true Self. Anything less than this will not be enough.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Rama', with a small heart symbol above the letter 'a'.