



February 2001 Contemplation Theme

## Integration: Yoga's Key to Relationship

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I confess, I am an extremist. Nowadays, at least, going to extremes is in style. The fanaticism required to become an Olympic athlete or to make it as a survivor on any island is offered as a role model for us all. I never needed any role models for this. I come by it organically. I have always given myself fully to everything I tried. I wanted something that I could pour my energy into, something to which I could devote my life. I tried many things before I found the one that works for me — yoga. I suppose I might qualify for the label, “obsessive-compulsive.” Actually, everyone is infected. It is the human condition. As a human being, you have *anava mala*, a feeling of being incomplete. This drives you (*raga*) to look for someone or something to complete you. When you find something that works, you go back again. You keep going back until you either wear it out or (hopefully) find out that it really works. Relationships are the most seductive of all the imbalances.

At the foundation, human beings are intrinsically unbalanced. However, finding balance is not the answer. I broke the last teeter-totter I rode on. At a big outdoor party, I was one of a number of adults and children balancing out our weight on the two ends of a long board. We moved closer and farther away from the fulcrum until we could glide up and down. Gliding turned into bouncing, which became a feeling of almost flying. Then there was a loud crack and we all ended up on the ground, laughing hysterically. All your attempts to balance your life are destined to end up in the same crash. At least we were all laughing.

The attempt to balance your life can be approached like a recipe: put in a little of this, a little of that... But the final result is different every time. Sometimes, all you have time for is fast food. You get lost in something and it takes all your time and energy. It might be your work, a book you are reading, a relationship, a new hobby or sport. It becomes your total focus. Everything else gets lost. After a few days (or a few years), you realize that you have been completely unbalanced — again. Life is not about balance. Yoga is not about balance. Both life and yoga are about integration. Balance is horizontal. Integration is vertical.

Yoga opens up a multi-dimensional experience. You already know the superficial levels too well. The superficial makes you crave something more significant. This is what drives you to extremes, looking for something to trigger a deeper experience, something that is more profound. Yoga specializes in the profound. This inner experience is the true purpose of all the yoga practices, including meditation, chanting, study of the texts, offering your service to others, and even “just” the yoga poses. However, having a deeper inner experience is not the true fulfillment promised by yoga. The true goal is to carry that deeper experience into your life. This is called “integration.”

You have probably already tasted this “integration.” Within your first few yoga classes, you find that the effects carry with you when you leave. You drive home a little more slowly and calmly. You are kinder and more loving with the people at home. You have more clarity at work and more energy when you leave. You become able to pour yourself into something without getting lost in it, because you have a deeper dimension inside that sustains you. This is called integration. It is the development of the vertical axis of your own being. You carry the deeper sense of self with you everywhere you go. You get better and better at it as you continue in yoga. This ability to live the inner and outer levels at the same time is the supreme fulfillment of human potential. It is the ultimate.

The most important area of your life that this affects is relationships. A relationship begins when you have a profound experience in the company of another person. After that incredible moment, you will want to spend more time with that person. You become unbalanced, hoping you have found someone that will fulfill and complete you. Ultimately, you discover that person cannot do that for you — because no one can. So you begin to look for balance again. “I need to find myself. I’ll spend less time with him or her. I need a hobby. Maybe I’ll call up some old friends and get reconnected. I know, I’ll take a yoga class.” At least the last one will work!

Yoga works because it fulfills and completes you from the inside. It doesn’t balance you out. Yoga gives you access to the profound deeper dimensions inside, and makes you able to bring that with you wherever you go. It takes the pressure off your relationships. Now you have something to offer: the deeper level that you previously hoped the other person would trigger in you. You can even share this fullness, so that you both deepen into the profound together. Best of all, you know that it is not about one person completing the other. The fulfillment comes from inside, and then makes every relationship work. You begin to live in the vertical axis of your own being. This is the integration that yoga promises. Do more yoga.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rama". Above the signature is a small heart symbol containing the Sanskrit characters "Om" and "Namah".