



October 2002 Contemplation Theme

Inside Out

It is possible that you started yoga because you wanted to feel better, but that is not what got me going. I did not want to feel better because I believed that it was an impossibility. The years before I found yoga were quite challenging for me. I was living and operating from survival mode. I had already tried doing everything that I grew up believing in, but none of it made me happy. Then I had tried taking it all apart, but that didn't make me happy either. My conclusion was that nothing could help. Still, I went to yoga. I don't really know why. Looking back, I still don't know why I kept going in yoga. It was like I was meant to be there.

Now, as a yoga teacher, I am delighted when someone tells me that yoga makes him or her feel better. I know it can, because it worked for me, even when I believed it was impossible. It did take me a long time, I confess. I dug deep into yoga and practiced hard, including doing the poses and studying the texts, along with offering my work in the yoga of service and chanting in Sanskrit. OK — the chanting made a difference. It only took me a few minutes of singing in Sanskrit, and all the inner agony would just be gone — like fog dissipating under the blazing sun. It was so quick and easy — I felt light and open inside. I even experienced spontaneous yoga postures as my spine opened and cleared. I didn't understand it then, but something was slowly filling me up with spaciousness on the inside.

Now I know that you can make the spaciousness fill you on purpose. It takes only a few breaths, when you know how to use the breath. It is just a shift of the weight in your feet, or just settling into your seat and softening your spine. The inner clutter melts away a little more every time. Especially when you begin with Shavasana. Ahhhhh, Shavasana!

Back then, I despaired that I would ever find something that would make me feel better, but I continued looking. It is so amazing — you never really give up looking. Everything you do in life is an attempt to make an impact on how you feel on the inside. The Pratyabhinjhrdayam calls it *anuroopa*, reciprocal adaptation. If you walk along the ocean, the beauty of the landscape makes you feel better on the inside. So then you decide to install a fountain in your office or buy a recording of ocean waves, so your environment can reciprocally adapt you in the same way as when you go for a walk by the ocean.

Your yoga class works with this reality, too. The yoga room is free from clutter, spacious and clean. The music is peaceful. The other people are quiet and kind. Many of the yoga poses are relaxation poses, where you are propped up on fuzzy blankets in an angle designed to provide maximum release of tensions through the deepest layers of your body. Even when you have to work in a few harder poses, the teacher is encouraging and helpful. Your family is probably not as consistent in being kind as your yoga teacher is! The yoga room is a real haven; it has an effect on you. You wouldn't even have to do any poses. You could just sit in the room for an hour or so and you would feel better. Reciprocal adaptation.

The rule is that the weaker adapts to the stronger. If your agitation is stronger than the vibe in the yoga room, you could bring your agitation in with you, nurse it all the way through class, and still leave with

it intact. But it works the other way around, too. If your inner feeling is deep enough, wide enough and delicious enough, it will not be disturbed by the traffic jam you got stuck in or the noisy things going on outside your room. You can actually end up carrying the vibe of the yoga room with you on the inside. It goes with you everywhere you go, and fills you from the inside out.

It starts small. At first you might notice that you drive home from yoga class more slowly. After a few more classes, that inner feeling lasts longer and your family notices that you are much mellower after yoga. Further yoga practice fills the inner space more fully, so that the feeling continues through the night and carries with you into your activities or work the next day. It is called *stitha-prajña*, the steady state. Reciprocal adaptation begins to work to your benefit — your steady state begins to calm things at home or work, and others respond to you differently. You have begun to live your life from the inside out.

Two questions become very important at this point. First you have to ask, “What is in your inside; do you want to let it out?” If your inside is full of old resentments and negativities, you don’t want to let them out, because your outer world would be as chaotic as your mind and emotions. There may be some clearing that needs to be done before you approach reciprocal adaptation from the inside out. Yoga does this by clearing your mind as it opens your spine. The more open your spine becomes the more peaceful and joyful you feel inside. It is reliable. There may be a few stubborn pockets of tension in your spine and negativities in your mind and emotions that take a bit longer to melt. I experienced years of the continuing anguish, with only those few moments of freedom in every chant. So, I loved to chant — and I still do. Only now I don’t depend on the chant to get that feeling, because it is almost always there.

The second question is, “Who is going to adapt to whom?” The weaker will adapt to the stronger. If your inner state is deep and easily steady, others will join you in that feeling. But if it is tenuous, then you will very quickly lose yourself in the familiar chaos again. As soon as you grab for something on the outside, wanting it to fulfill you, you have already lost the fullness on the inside. The mere act of grabbing is an act of denial of your inner state.

So, you practice *abhyasa*, persistency. Your persistency will pay off in yoga, just as it does in any arena of life, but the payoff is better because it makes every other arena of life more fulfilling. True *abhyasa* is to constantly remind yourself to look inside. Live from the inside out. Gently let go of the stranglehold you have on some of those external things in your life and look inside. And if that is hard, just do more yoga!

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rama". Above the signature is a small heart symbol containing the number "31".

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