



October 2003 Contemplation Theme

## Continuity Amidst Change

By Rama Berch, R.Y.T.

I remember sitting by myself many years ago, silently bemoaning my life. I was in the middle of an intense personal crisis. The history of my life looked to me like I had been trying to walk across an ice rink on high heels, slipping and teetering from one near crash to another with a few flashy falls along the way. This was B.Y. (before yoga). Life definitely wasn't working for me. It had never been working. It didn't even make any sense to me, and I was in despair again. There were no tears — I was beyond crying.

As I sat there, I experienced a strange sensation uprising within me — a dawning realization that there was something underneath all the turmoil. It was an amazing inner feeling of continuity. In that moment, everything changed. I knew, in all of the precipitous changes I had been through, something deeper had been there all along. The one constant, in the midst of all those changes, was me — I was there. No matter who else was involved, I was there and I had somehow found my way through. Even when life was a complete flop, I survived. Even when there were scars from what I went through, I kept on going. I knew something in that moment and it has never left me. I knew I could trust. This is not a trust of anything outside of me, not even a trusting that I will always choose the right direction to go, but the trust of this inner something that was and is always there for me. It was the beginning of the end of fear. It was the experience of the inner continuity of being that underlies the constant change, life itself happening on the surface of that deeper reality.

Life is constant change. Yoga's ancient texts clearly describe this constant change in exquisite detail. They explain that this world is based on change, a constant progression of events that are sequencing themselves through time. This is guaranteed through the three *gunas*, three qualities which create a perpetual motion machine that fires up the cosmic flow: activity (*rajo guna*) overcoming inertia (*tamo guna*), clarity (*sattva guna*) piercing the confusion (*tamo guna, again*), peaceful quietude (*sattva guna*) being stirred by the fire (*rajo guna*) or being dampened by heaviness or despair (*tamo guna*). The detailed explanations fill many pages in many many texts. The universe is built on the principle of constant change.

There are two types of change, regardless of whether you are creating the change or whether it is being put upon you. One change is simply for the sake of novelty or variety, also called entertainment. This is the one that you see most commonly — society's norm. Novelty or entertainment is a superficial type of change. There's nothing wrong with this; you sometimes want to change things around just for the novelty of it. A woman described to me that she drives a different route to work every day. I asked her why, and she said, "A change is nice." Yes, it is. Going on vacation is another nice change — and a very important part of life. However, usually you crave variety in order to distract you from what is going on inside. There are inner blocks prevent your access to the deeper dimension of your own being, so you look for something to create an enjoyable diversion on the outside.

The other type of change is called personal growth. This is a change that clears the inner blocks that are preventing your experience of your own blissful, eternal, immortal essence. Of course, if you don't clear out these inner blocks through yoga, life's seemingly random events will force you to this change. Personal growth is actually an opening into consciousness, sometimes in spite of yourself. It is the clearing away of the inner constrictions that currently block your deep inherent knowing of your own being as Consciousness-Itself.

When you do *Svaroopa*® yoga, you are choosing the personal growth type of change. Whatever got you started in yoga, when you got the thing you wanted — you were changed. Maybe you came for help with your physical aches and pains, for healing on more subtle levels (to calm your mind or heal your emotions), or for stress relief and relaxation. When you get what you have come for, you are changing. This is personal

growth, not just a type of entertainment. This is an opening into consciousness. Maybe you even started yoga because you wanted to open the inner spiritual dimensions, but when they open — it is still a change from where you were. Many of you are experiencing all of these changes simultaneously: healings, relaxation and opening into consciousness. That's one of the best things about yoga.

Along with change, you also want stability, safety, consistency and security in your life. You have or you want a home, as well as to work in a fulfilling profession with a satisfying level of personal income, and to have a few other things as pillars in your life. You may have pets, and you want them to be healthy and live a long time; and you want your family members to be healthy and happy, and to live for a long time. It takes a lot of work to pull this off — you have to do the laundry, get the car serviced, water and weed the garden, and spend time with the people in your life, even when they are cranky and unhappy — or especially when they are cranky and unhappy. You have to remember their birthdays if you want them to remember yours.

All of this creates an external form of continuity. You try to create this external continuity because you are hoping for a sense of safety to come from the outside, so the internal levels of panic will subside and your crazy mind will quiet. The true sense of continuity comes from the innermost essence of your being, the Self. The Self is consistent, complete, and content — the inner continuity of Consciousness-Itself, Consciousness-Itself being you.

*The Supreme Reality of your Own Being is inwardly experienced as unbroken consciousness, the unchanging sense that "I am I." It is the unchanging Reality within.*

*-Shri Shankaracharya, Vivekachudamani*

The Self provides you with your own sense of continuity of being. When you wake up in the morning, you have the feeling of continuing on from yesterday. Even when you wake up in a different room or a different city, you have a sense of continuity of self. Even though you were asleep all night — not conscious, not knowing where you were or who you were, you didn't lose yourself. This is amazing!

Have you ever been a passenger on a car trip and you nodded off? You were watching the scenery, and the driver was driving, and you dozed off. Maybe you were going along through the woods, and then you woke up and you found that you had arrived at the beach. The outside is completely different and you don't even know how you got to where you are. But you still have this sense of inner continuity. You don't even have to think of it to make it exist. You still are who you were, even though you are in a different place.

It's like this when you go to sleep, even though your mind stops attending to things. It can rain outside and you don't know it. In California, we even have occasional earthquakes at night. The next day, someone says, "Did you feel the earthquake?" "No... I was asleep." You are unaware of the outside, even though things are still going on. But inside, at a deeper level than sleep, there is the Self. It never blinks out. It never goes unconscious — it is Consciousness-Itself. It is never unaware. It is always aware — even aware of your sleep.

You may have had the experience that you knew you were sleeping while you were asleep. The Self is the knower — always aware, knowing all, experiencing all. The Self is being all. The one Self has become everything that exists, including you. So when you wake up, you have this inner feeling of continuity. Even though your mind was asleep, and the outside was not a continuity of experience, the Self was continuous. The Self IS continuous. You exist.

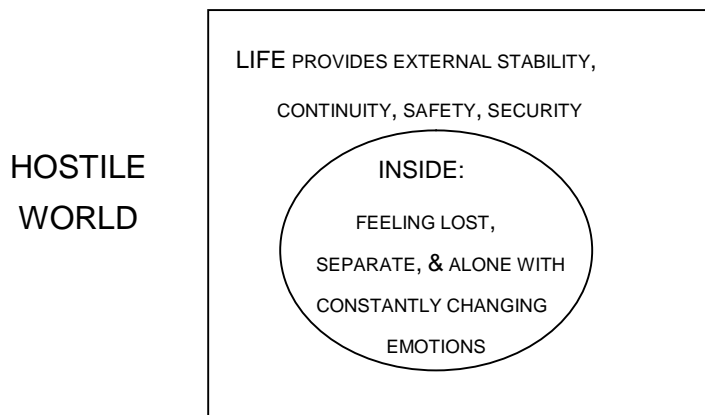
This existence-itself is Consciousness-Itself, and it is who you are. You put so much effort into creating an external sense of continuity because you are not looking at the internal continuity of being. You feel lost and separate and cut off from this inner continuity, even though it is there and supporting you all the time (it is being you!), but you are unaware of it. So you reach in the direction that you are looking — outward. You create external structure and support, you build a life for yourself, full of stability and security, and you look for people who will "be there for you."

But that life becomes too constricting, because it only supports your *idea* of who you are — your superficial sense of identity. The "perfect job" becomes less than perfect or you get bored with the same routine or the same people. You want continuity but you also want change. First you try to satisfy this need with variety,

novelty, entertainment. You clamp down on life to hold it in a firm grip, keeping everything stable and secure, and then try to divert yourself with a great variety of distractions. It works for a while, and for some people it will work for their whole life. But, it doesn't work for you; OK, maybe little bit — but not *really*.

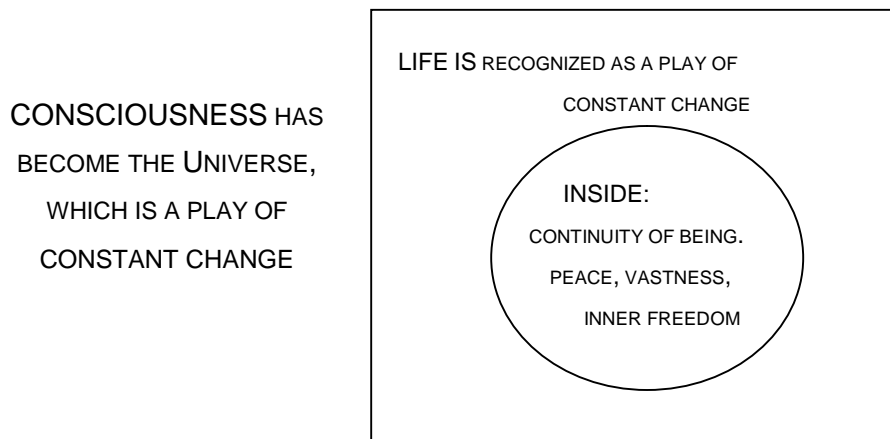
What has really happened is that you tried to stop the force of the *gunas* on the outside. You tried to force an unnatural lack of change — “stop the world, I want to get off!” — while you are cut off from the continuity of Consciousness-Itself on the inside of your own being. You got it backwards.

You have it been living it this way:



***B.Y. (before yoga)***

When the universe is really structured this way:



***Yogi***

You want change because the outside becomes a prison — a prison of your own making, through your efforts to create stability, structure, safety, protection.

In medieval times, a nobleman decided to build a protective wall around his home, big thick stone walls. He had one built around his family compound. He wanted it to be built very strong, so he hired many workmen. They labored for two years to build this wall. He wanted no weak points in it, so they were very careful to create the design so that it had no openings that could be breached. There were no windows and no doors.

When the last stone was laid in place, he finally felt safe. He was completely safe and secure within his castle wall — but he was also imprisoned. No one could get in, but he could not get out.

This is the story of your life. You have built your own prison by setting up your life to create a sense of external continuity. You have actually created the mess that you are in, the mess that you want to change. But the external change will not really work. The only change that will work is the change that gives you the inner continuity of beingness — you need the opening into Consciousness-Itself. Fortunately, this is easy to get — do more yoga.

Namaste,

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

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