



December 2000 Contemplation Theme

The Season of Giving

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

“It has all become so commercial! The spirit of the season is lost. I remember when . . .” The focus of the holidays is undeniably on gifts. The real meaning gets buried under the wrapping paper and ribbons, followed by the credit card bills the following month. Why do we go through this every year?

Look again. Look closely at your own experience. There is a real bliss in the giving of gifts (as well as in receiving them!). There is nothing wrong with having a holiday that is focused on giving gifts to people we cherish. We can prompt an experience of joy for them, while we delight in our own generosity and caring. The giving of gifts is even mentioned in a yoga text as a reliable way to experience bliss. However, the Bhagavadgita tells us that there are three types of gifts: pure gift, uncaring gift, or the gift given with ulterior motives.

The pure (sattvic) gift is given with only one thought, “It is to be given.” You really enjoy giving this kind of gift. It goes to someone you care about and want to give a gift to. You really look forward to sharing their delight in it, because you know it is perfect for her or him (and it was the perfect price!).

The uncaring (tamasic) gift is one given without thought, or given to a person you dislike or disrespect. You put nothing of yourself into it, so it has no aliveness. There is no joy in it. It can even be expensive or impressive, but there is no real meaning because you did not put yourself into it. Your joy comes from getting it over with, completing the task.

The gift given with ulterior motives (rajasic) is one you choose for its effect. The recipient will be impressed, or perhaps they will owe you something once it is opened. There can be joy in this, but it is not an uplifting feeling at all. The joy comes from a feeling of having won a competition, with an undercurrent of fear because you know the contest is really never over.

Ultimately your experience of this holiday season is dependent on why you give the gifts, not what you select. It is about your motivation. Why you do things is always more important than what you do. Your motivation determines your experience more than the actual deed.

“What can I get for so-and-so?” The pressures of the season show up so clearly when you make up your gift list, especially if you plan a budget amount for each person. How do you decide who should be on your list and what to give to each one? This is very tricky stuff! And you must decide. This is the yoga of life.

Namaste,

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