



May 2005 Contemplation Theme

Relationship, Desire and Detachment

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Yoga is about life, but you cannot say that life is yoga. Not unless you choose for it to be so. Yoga is about relationship, but you cannot say that relationship is yoga – unless you make it so. Most people live their life, having many experiences and different types of relationships, yet never looking deeper than the superficial level in themselves. Even though events push you into outgrowing old patterns, you may not want to grow. People around you push your buttons, maybe even frequently, but it is possible to skate through. Sometimes people even leave the situation in order to avoid looking deeper within. Yoga is the constant practice of looking within, to discover the deeper reality that is already there in its fullness, as well as to find and dissolve the blocks that obscure it. Relationships become yoga and life becomes yoga when you make the choice to do the inner work.

For most yogis, this choice begins with their body. Yoga classes or private sessions take care of most of your aches and pains, with the side benefit of improving your mental and emotional state. It soon becomes clear that the condition of your mind and emotions are affected by your body, and vice versa. Once you realize that your mind and emotions actually control the condition of your body, you have begun to understand yoga's ancient purpose – to quiet your mind so that you can experience the deeper essence within. The Yoga Sutras say it this way: *Tadaa drashtuh svaroope vasthaanam*; in the moment your mind becomes still, you abide in the bliss of your own being. [Patanjali 1.3]

The one thing in life that can create disturbances in your mind and emotions most effectively is relationships. You may have decided to avoid relationships so you can avoid the inner churning. Or you may be a person who loves the inner churning because it makes you feel "Alive!" The purpose of all yoga practices is to quell the inner disturbances, and to give you the ability live in the inner stillness that allows your deeper essence to shine through. Yet, avoiding situations or people that cause the churning is not yoga – what you must do is look at what happens inside when you are triggered. Since relationships affect you more than objects do, I will focus on relationships.

Any time you are affected by another person, it is because you had a desire for something in particular to happen – a particular outcome. If your interaction results in the outcome you wanted, you are happy or you feel loved and approved of. If it doesn't, you are disappointed or angry or hurt. Your experience actually comes from your desire, not from the other person. For example, you get a new haircut and are hoping that a special person notices and likes it. If 20 people compliment you, but that one special person doesn't even notice, you are upset. If the experience came from other people, the 20 compliments would mean more to you than the one neutral response. Your experience comes from your desire, not from the other person.

As a yogi, you recognize when you really do need a haircut, and you go ahead with the action. Other people will notice, or at least some of them will. You neither avoid the haircut, nor avoid the people. Relationship is part of life; it is the biggest part of life. You must go out in public and you must continue the relationships, even a focus on one special relationship if that is part of your life. What you must let go of is the desire for a particular outcome, which arises from the inner sense of neediness.

Yoga calls this letting go, "*vairagya*," which is one of the most misunderstood of all of yoga's teachings. The misunderstanding comes from the usual translation – "detachment." The English word "detachment" means separation, aloofness or indifference to worldly concerns. This is not what *vairagya* means in the yogic teachings. In fact, there is no English word that conveys the meaning of *vairagya*, because there is no concept in English for it. To understand the Sanskrit

word is to understand new possibilities about how to be in relationship and how to live your life. The closest I can come to a succinct translation is, “without neediness.”

When you are living from a deeper inner sense of your own being, you don't come from a place of neediness inside. As the practices of yoga open you, your inherent radiance begins to shine through unobstructed. The blocks are dissolved and it gets easier and easier to base yourself in that inner fullness and radiance. Then you can get a haircut, and you aren't waiting to see if it is noticed. You don't need that external validation because you feel already full and complete inside. You share your joy by trotting over and saying, “Look at my new haircut!” If the response you get is not complimentary, you consider changing hair stylists, not changing your relationships.

Neediness creates desire, which is what mucks up the works in relationship. In fact, desire mucks up life everywhere it touches. Yoga's answer to desire is *vairaagya*, which transforms your relationships and your whole life. But *vairaagya* is not detachment. It is not withdrawing from other people, keeping your self all on the inside, or becoming numb and uncaring. What is *vairaagya*? It is “without neediness.” You continue to be in relationship and involved in the world, performing all the same actions that you are doing now, but without neediness – without waiting for a specific outcome that will make you feel wonderful, or that will make you feel worthwhile.

The best way to understand *vairaagya* is to look at the opposite, because *vai-* means without, meaning without *raaga*. *Raaga* is a complex word that means feeling; the Sanskrit dictionary names these – love, joy, anger, regret, and greediness. *Raaga* also means coloring, referring both to the coloring of the mind by a feeling as well as to the coloring of cloth with a dye. It also refers to a musical mode or scale, a process in the preparation of mercury, seasoning for food, inflammation, and both the sun and the moon. For yogis, the key word is “greediness.” Yet the word “greediness” makes you think it is a rare occurrence. *Raaga* is pervasive in life, so I use the word “neediness” to make clear both what it is and how pervasive it is.

Vairaagya means you are fully engaged in your relationships, fully present, fully participating, fully alive, but without coming from neediness. Without the sense of neediness, there is no agenda for what the outcome should be. Then you can participate in whatever happens next, even if it is a surprise to you, because you didn't have a plan, not even an unconscious one. To do this, you must have an inner sense of self that does not depend on outcomes.

For example, if you ask a 3-year-old child, “What do you want to do?” Perhaps you were thinking that the two of you would play a game or read a book, but the child answers, “Let's go get ice cream!” If you let go of your plan, both of you could have a lot of fun. But if you have an agenda, and you really wanted to read a favorite book from your own childhood, then your feelings might be hurt.

You must let go of your agendas, because they all arise from neediness, which is a feeling of lacking something on the inside. But you lack nothing! You are already whole, complete, full and perfect. You are consciousness-itself. If you don't know that in the midst of your relationships, then you need to do more yoga!

Namaste



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