



November 2009 Contemplation Theme

Family Relationships

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Family offers you the most challenging relationships in your life. These are also the most important relationships in your life, relationships from which there is no escape. Even when you try to escape from your family members, you take them along with you in your head and in your heart. November and December in America is family season, which is both a blessing and a curse. So how do you go to family gatherings as a yogi?

When you read the word “family,” I’m sure that a certain person or several of them come to mind. These are the ones that are most pivotal in your psyche, whether you enjoy these relationships or not. Your relationship with them is significantly more challenging if you don’t live with them. If you lived with them, the difficulties would come to the surface, and all of you would find a different way to deal with it. When you live at a distance or have infrequent contact, it is too easy to leave the undercurrents hidden, which makes them more troublesome. You are probably the person who is most affected by the undercurrents, while the others are seemingly unaffected. This means that you have to be the one to take care of the undercurrents – but only for yourself. As a yogi, you must take care of your inner state. You don’t have to fix anyone else. This should be a big relief! Especially when you consider how much “fixing” they may need.

This means you don’t have to have a heart-to-heart talk, or confront them, or get them to change. You don’t have to explain your life, or who you are now, because (take a big breath) you don’t have to get their approval. As a yogi, you are cultivating an inner experience of your own Self, basing yourself in your own inner infinity, which makes you free of need and fear. You don’t need their approval because you don’t need anyone’s approval.

Of course, if a family member is trapped in a self destructive cycle, with drugs or other addictive behaviors, you and your whole family need to work together to help them. Otherwise, look at it this way:

They aren’t doing yoga. That means they haven’t chosen to change.

Even though you are changing, it doesn’t mean they have to.

You have to love and accept them as they are. If you don’t love them as they are, you are the one who is in pain about it. In order to love and accept them, you need to open your heart and mind even more than you have already. Yoga demands it of you. Your family needs it from you. Family is actually about how you handle yourself, in yourself, with yourself, for yourself, as yourself. It’s not about how you handle them. It’s not about getting through to them. It’s not about helping them, or changing them, or healing them, or motivating them, or even opening them up. It’s about how you handle yourself, in yourself, with yourself, for yourself, as yourself.

When you walk into your family gathering with a needy heart, you will be disappointed again. When you want their love, approval, interest, encouragement, help, acceptance or support, your mistake is that you got it backwards. You thought your family was supposed to love you, but it is the other way around. They are depending on you. They always have.

Let’s begin with your mother. Whether she is your birth mother, adopted mother, stepmother, or foster mother (or maybe you have several!), begin with the one who nurtured you as an infant. Whether she is alive or not, consider what happened back then. You were so cute! You were so loveable. You had those tiny fingers and toes. Your face was so sweet, your eyes were so clear.

You know what it is like to look into the eyes of a little baby. It’s like you can see all the way to God. It’s true! While the baby comes with all the structure of their mind already in place, the content has not filled into their mind yet, so you can see clear through their mind – all the way to the innermost dimension of

their being. You see the divine essence within them which is the One Reality within each and every person. When you see this in the baby, it touches the same place in you, and you experience this divine essence. You are filled with bliss and joy. This is why everyone loves babies. But you think the filling comes from them. Instead it is reciprocal adaptation: their openness created an inner openness in you, so your own inner bliss arises and fills you from within.

You were once that baby. Since then your mind has filled in with a lot of content, which obscures your ability to see all the way into your own Self. Still, the structure of your mind was there when you were born. You came in with certain traits and tendencies; your personality was clear from the time you were born. Those characteristics are the structure, like the girders of the Eiffel Tower. In the decades since your birth, you've filled in the spaces with lots of content, as if you filled up the Eiffel Tower with boxes and furniture. It's not so beautiful when you cannot see through it.

When you were a baby, your mother looked into your eyes and saw your divinity, which propelled her into the experience of her own divinity. You experienced her divine love, but you didn't realize that you triggered it. Unfortunately she wasn't always able to access that within herself, so she wasn't always the perfect mother. But neither of you realized that she was depending on you to put her there.

When you were a baby, everyone who looked into your eyes had that experience. That happened later too, and still does. Whenever you access your own essence, the others around you are affected. This is the basis of most love relationships – one person taps into their own inner source and shares that experience with another, who is propelled into their own inner source. This is why I went to study with my Guru, because he was established in that state, so he propelled me into it, again and again and again.

What this means is that your family wants you to be enlightened! They want you to bring the best of yourself to the relationships. When your mind is clear, the light of your own divinity shines through without being distorted or colored by the content of your mind. This is why yoga works primarily on your mind. In fact, when you are doing poses, you are working on your mind. You know this because you know that when you do a simple spinal release sequence, your mind becomes clear, spacious, peaceful, happy, and sweet.

When you are going to see or talk with your family members, do some yoga first. At least do a little Ujjayi Pranayama. Even a few breaths will reinstate your yogic state. Then you can let your own deepest essence show. Yoga frees you from need and fear by giving you an experience of your own Self. When you are coming from your fullness, you won't be looking for something from them, and you won't need to protect yourself from them. Let your eyes be as clear as when you were a baby.

Of course, they still want to know about your life. They want to know if you are happy. They want to know if you are successful. They want to know if you are moving to a new home, buying a new car, doing yoga and/or making new friends, etc. But they don't want to really know all about yoga and what it is doing for you. They don't want to do yoga. They know that they are fine the way they are – if only you will fill them up with their own divinity once again. Do more yoga.

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