



November 2011 Contemplation Theme

Family

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

One of the primary causes of Holiday stress is family. Yet, those without family often experience severe holiday depression. What is going on?

Your family is there for the purpose of pushing your buttons. They're really good at it, aren't they? They show you exactly how you are not yet enlightened. They do you a great service. If no one came along to show you where these hot spots were, you could continue on in your comfortable delusions. You would continue utilizing your familiar and effective ways of avoiding facing yourself. Few friends will take on that level of commitment and responsibility, because it is too easy to end a friendship. Family ties can be ignored but not broken. This family tie creates an incredible trust, even when the relationships are difficult. This trust allows you to dislike (even sometimes to hate) one another while there is an underlying love, recognized or unrecognized.

Psychology is well known for offering tools that identify the causes of our hangups, often found in our childhood experiences. Students sometimes share with me the difficulties of their childhood and how those events caused their current misery. Yoga offers a way reframe that experience: your childhood was your karma. You were born into the perfect family for you to undergo significant and key experiences necessary to fulfill your karma. Your family did not create that karma - you did. You set events into motion, even in a previous lifetime. Those events will reach their full flowering at your own doorstep. You can blame no one else for your karma, only to yourself, even if you do not remember setting the events into motion. Spiritual growth means (1) you take responsibility for everything that happened to you, (2) you drop it and forget about it, and (3) you move on with your life. You create new karma by making new choices, based on a different understanding than the one you constructed through those karma-rich years of your childhood. Yoga gives you this new understanding, bit by bit.

I met a man a few days ago, who came in for his first yoga experience. As we talked, he mentioned the company he works for. I know one of the executives in his company because he practices yoga at MYA. I asked, "Do you know this man? He takes classes here." "Oh, yes!" replied the new student. "I bet I can tell you how long he has been taking yoga. Let's see, about 4 years, right? He used to be really tightly wound, but that changed about 4 years ago. He really calmed down and is much easier to deal with." Yoga gives you this new understanding so tangibly that they even notice at work. What about with your family?

Now you might be thinking, if only my family members would practice yoga. My life would be so much easier! While that is true, it is another attempt to abdicate your responsibility to face yourself and your own karma. If you do yoga, your family might change or they might not. But you will change the way you look at them, how you think of them, how you speak of them, the way you speak to them, and the way you act toward them. That change in you is what matters the most, and it does change your karma!

Perhaps the ultimate test of your yogic attainment is to spend time with your family over the holidays. You may find that you can maintain your hold on sanity for days longer than ever before. After more yoga, you may begin to carry a quality of inner peace within you without having to strain for it. In succeeding years, it gets better until it becomes a persistent quality of genuine love and delight in the familiar family antics that used to drive you crazy. Surely that means you are getting close to enlightenment!

Do more yoga.

Namaste,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Rama', with a small heart symbol above the 'a'.