

Saraswati River Yoga Newsletter

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Meditation-The Courage to Feel

This month our subject for inspiration is the works of Pema Chodren. There is absolutely no substitute for reading her directly and she is, unlike some of our mentors, extremely accessible. So I thought I would return to the inexhaustible subject of meditation as that is at the heart of Pema Chodren's work and for me the most allusive topic that we ever broach. What can I say that is new or useful? As I think about yoga, meditation is the core of the practice; both its means and its end.

I know that my understanding of meditation has changed and expanded over time. I am less focused on the 'how' of it and more on the results of having integrated it into my life, albeit incompletely. And I am clear that a consistent relationship and

commitment to meditation is one of the most transformative relationships I have. Being a mother is one of the others. In fact, a regret I have, (in spite of my daughters claim that regrets are against our family religion I do have one or two) is that while I was mothering I didn't have the habit or the steadfast commitment to meditation. I tried it off and on over the years, always saw the value but did not have a clue as to how important it could be.

As you could predict, when I try to describe how I understand meditation, why I do it or its impact on my life, words, even thoughts, fail me. Still, perhaps by a process of circumlocution I can edge up on it. Having made meditation a consistent part of my life for the last four years, even a moment of sitting still can allow me an encounter with the meditative state; that state which I know only by the way it is different from what I call my 'normal' state. *It has a feel to it.* I know *that* because, over time, the feeling has changed.



My first attempt to describe what happens when I meditate was to say that I had a sense of being in a slightly lower gear.

That is a very tangible feeling to me as I still drive a manual shift. I drive a 'stick' for no reason other than that I like to, which is also the reason I don't eat meat and I do eat fish. More and more of my life is lived by that rule. That way of living is the result I think, of my meditation practice. As I meander on my labyrinthine path toward a description of meditation I hope to explain how I see that connection

Because I like to. The thing I choose to devote my attention to are more and more guided by this seemingly frivolous rule. But it's not because they give me pleasure or are enjoyable. I like to do things that are neither pleasurable nor enjoyable. For instance I like to go to court and observe how justice is dispensed in the diverse community of New Brunswick New Jersey. Sometimes when I'm there I get angry or sad or scared for the world we live in; the one my children have inherited. So it's not about a personal experience of pleasure or enjoyment. I do have a faint hope that the records we keep in court and what we've learned about strategies that are most likely to get a just verdict for the people of that city may some day come in handy for someone. But that is not why I do it. It's not about results. I simply like to go. I can't tell you precisely how that is connected to meditating but it has something to do with choices. Where I put my attention

In class we often hear that the mind has the power choice. That, in a way, it is the only power the mind or we have. Through Meditation I have a wider field of choice and a deeper understanding of myself and what I feel to choose. This makes choosing a more liberated process. When I say liberated I mean free of knee jerk reactions, ingrained patterns, intellectual conceits and ego inspired conceptions of my self. A choice more or less free of those forces. And it's not about a hierarchy of the right choices. I have a friend who likes to stop by the local thrift shop to check on what's new on the racks.



I think she does it because she likes to. It's every bit as valid a choice as going to court. Like I like Narcissus and I don't like Poinsettias. (Recently I learned that Poinsettias grow into huge hedges in Bengal and I might like them if I saw them in that contextbut never mind). If you said you love Poinsettias I wouldn't try to rationalize or justify why I like one flower and not the other. I could give you reasons; personal history, experience, association, loyalty to my mother who also disliked them. But I wouldn't be offended if you disagreed with me. In fact I wouldn't even be involved with your preference. More and more I think our choices are simply that; choices. And I am not saying that I am neutral or indifferent about the

subject of my choices. I'm passionate about the court watch. But I don't think it is the right thing to do or better than another thing to do. It's just what I choose to do.



Back to meditation and how I used to describe it. I am reminded sometimes of the lotus flower. I doubt that I am the first to make this connection. It has a sort of familiar ring. But I made it myself while visiting a lake I camp on in the Adirondacks. At one end of the lake there are hundreds of lotuses, or lily pads, that float magically at the entrance to a maze-like swamp that I intentionally drift into each year. The lily pads lie spread out on the surface. But I know (because once I tried to pick one, oh shame) that they are deeply rooted in the bottom muck of the lake. I discovered that each one has a long, thin supple cord that is sunk into the bottom. The flowers are not disturbed by the storms that visit those mountains and get caught on the West side of the range with wind and rain for days. Not even the wakes of the motor boats that are now allowed to roar across the surface can shake them loose

Meditating has allowed my own roots to sink deeper into a core self that isn't as reactive to the waves on the surface. . It may be quite fanciful to compare my personal choices to lily pads but there is a way that they have become rooted out of sight and even consciousness, far from the surface

and undisturbed by the storms and mechanism of the mind.

Being so much older now (to contradict Bobby Zimmerman) and semi-retired, more and more I get to choose things because I like to do them. It seems like that's part of getting older in the very privileged world I inhabit. I think it's either that or lots of Doctor's appointments and they have so many more tests these days you could spend every hour being investigated from one aspect or another.

Anyway doing what I want, and knowing what that is, is related to meditating. Also wanting to do what I'm doing which might sound Pollyannaish but really is just practical.

These ways of encountering the world, of having a certain relationship to what I do that seems more liberated, have grown and darkened like a beautiful patina that spreads while you're not looking and changes the surface of an antique to something precious and subtly beautiful . I can remember when I didn't like anything I did. It was either a deep disappointment or an obstacle to some other thing I could be doing but hadn't been able to.

Sometimes I have remembered things that were hidden from me before I sat on the pillow. Not like a post traumatic stress memory. Much more mundane; like 'Yesterday you said you'd call your daughter and you had completely forgotten', or 'You want to finish that letter to the

judge you started and haven't even thought of it for days'. Things that were tucked away in my brain, outside of awareness, that are suddenly revealed as part of the landscape. It's tempting to use the analogy of the process of developing a photograph, which I find totally miraculous. But it isn't like that. It's just that the consciousness of something that was missing is there when I stand up. As a very distractible and forgetful person it is delightful to have this experience and more and more I trust that it will come.

Another way I know about meditation is how I feel after I get up from the pillow. Often I have a totally different relationship to something I've been struggling with for hours, days, even months. I can't predict this or orchestrate it like a strategy but it happens with enough frequency that I can trust that it is associated with meditation. The difference in relationship is not the same as times when I have had a revelation about a knotty problem like 'Wait a minute, I could just let that go', or 'Maybe I really don't *know* what's right in that situation' or 'Perhaps just forgiving him/her would be more useful than hating them every minute of every day for ever!'



Those are good shifts in consciousness and have saved me from the gallows many a time. They are the flip side of a position; the equal (or opposite) that we hear about in class. But they are not the transformations I see as related to meditation. This different relationship is more like the experience of resolution. Not resolving the problem but of being resolved. That transformation feels like rising from the pillow in a different reality from the one I sat down in. And being a different person in that reality. It's not dramatic. It's not really even different. Maybe it's like looking through a microscope or a telescope and seeing the same thing but more of it and that does make a difference.



Conscious Cooking

Parvathi

I was taught to cook to each season and to use spices and herbs that enhance the energies of the season. This recipe is full of warming and immune strengthening spices. Many people who don't usually like spinach enjoy this dish and a nice surprise most children do too. And it's fast for Indian cooking!

aloo palak (spinach with potatoes)

Ingredients:

3 cups chopped spinach
2 large onions chopped fine
2 large potatoes boiled but not mushy and peeled
1 tomato chopped
2 green chilies
1" piece ginger
1 tsp. lemon juice
1/2 tsp. wheat or other flour
1 tsp. red chilli powder
1 tsp. cinnamon-clove powder
1/4 tsp. turmeric powder
1/2 tsp cumin seeds
1/2 tsp. garam masala
1/2 tbsp. butter
pinch asafoetida (hing)
4 tbsp. ghee
salt to taste

METHOD:

Put the washed spinach in a pan, add very little water (just a sprinkle) and a pinch of salt. Cover and flash boil over a high heat for 2 minutes. Cool quickly, or hold under running water in a colander. Put in a mixer, add green chilli and run for a minute. Keep slightly coarse, do not make very smooth. Keep aside.

Cut the potatoes into big pieces. Heat ghee and fry potatoes till light brown. Drain the potatoes, keep aside.

In the same hot ghee add the cumin seeds.

Add the ginger, onions and fry till very tender.

Add the tomato and further fry for two minutes.

Add all the dry spices and fry till ghee separates.

Add spinach and potatoes.

When it returns to a boil sprinkle the flour if needed or add yogurt instead and stir well. Boil for 2-3 minutes. Add lemon juice and a pinch of hing which will help with any stomach viruses going around or just good in winter for immune system.



CHAI CHAT 2007

Dears, I have really missed our chats. Thanks for stopping by~

Zen and the art of Adornment. Try not to be obvious about it and watch Jenna put extra layers of clothing on. Just between you and me, she doesn't have a clue that I've been spying, using eye stretches without moving my head in her direction. I see her seamless Spanda flow, taking her inside-out and upside-down garments and Boing! Using one flip adorns herself, ready to go.

I hope all of you are happy with Santa's gifts. After a hard day, I flip off my shoes and flip on the Yule Log DVD Cousin Eddie got me. It seems to comfort me in my disappointment that my sister Maribelle did not take my hint to get me the Frontgate 100% alligator briefcase. It was only \$14,390. Well, I always knew she was cheap. Someone snitched on Grandma for moonlighting at Wal-Mart and Social Security cut her checks.

Although Christmas joy seemed unlikely for the Chat family this year, as Parvathi says, trusting the unknown brings "newness and possibility." Gramma budgeted out cigars and beer and switched from cable to a satellite Tivo thing. Now whenever we want, we watch better stuff like the L Word, and Weeds, and if you promise to keep a secret, our new favorite Sponge Bob Square Pants.

Question: How can you tell a Tantra Master and Pujari from a student?

Answer: Most of us have water bottles or tennis balls rolling around the floor of our cars. Not Parvathi, she has coconuts.

Tsana Andrews is always full of gracefulness and is never a bragger. Who'd have known? Not me. While I was shopping in Doylestown, I saw a display of her gorgeous photographs. The secret is out Tsana, asana teacher, designer, artist, photographer, and jewelry maker.

Speaking of which, our SRY yogini and silversmith Sherry Tinsman was the featured guest this fall at 'Meet the Artist Event' at James A. Michener Art Museum in Doylestown.

Abby Hoffman is no slouch either. Not only is she quoted on the SRY webpage; this autumn she had a one-woman show of her tiles at The Chapin Gallery, Princeton. The Princeton Packet also gave her the spotlight in a full-page interview. By any chance were you invited when Abby told Gabriel G and Bonnie P. to come and sample her homemade bagels? Hmmm, getting

creative here, maybe Abby can talk to Sherry, and arrange for the stale bagels to be gilded into bracelets. Now there's an idea!

Talking of ideas, Kathy O'Neil has a great way to stay au currant when she is in California studying Feldenkrais methods. She relies upon the SRY newsletter to see what's happening, be reminded of yogic philosophy and deepen asana poses. Kathy's travels and studies have paid off as she is now in private practice in Doylestown, using the Anat Baniel method of physical integration and movement.

It is wonderful to see more of Alice in SRY classes since she has retired. When she isn't in class you can still catch her on the city streets of Lambertville, walking her Akita, Raven.



Has everyone welcomed our new yoga babies to the world? On Thursday Oct. 26th, at 3:00 p.m Jade Marie Marguerite Dodds weighed in at 7'7" and 21". According to parents, Leo Dodds and Sandy Constable, she has a wonderful soul. I've met her and it's true!

Another new delightfully present soul is Henry, Errin Auletta's son. His presence is so apparent; I swear when I met him, he spoke to me. We are very happy these new Beings have joined our lives.

Speaking of our newest and youngest in the SRY family, at 75 I

think Bill Cole-Kiernan is our oldest. Yogins and yoginis don't be shy nor tell him I let the cat out of the bag. I heard him whisper that he hoped to receive 75 kisses, one for each year of his January birthday.

All you Tony Shaloub fans, Judi Barton appears in 2 scenes with him in the series Monk. It was filmed this fall but I need more scouts on this job to know when it will be aired.

Consider yourself forewarned about this segue. A Tantrika lives life fully in all domains, and speaking

of domains, John Fagan has been bringing grace, energy and color to Joy Stocke's /Fred Young's place, Parvathi's, Judith Lockard's and the Cole-Kiernan's.

Joy and Fred have been walking the walk of embracing their home reconstruction with true equanimity. Joy doesn't miss a beat as editor, writer, wife, mother, friend and yogini. If you haven't registered online to receive Wild River Review, you will be in for a real treat. Along with Joy's editorials, you can read Bill C-K's Ask the Philosopher column as well as yogini Kim Nagy's column The Triple Goddess Trials.

A literal scoop: Seeing Christine

Haas reject a fabulous stretchy green shirt outside the fitting room at Marshall's, I scooped it up & bought it. True confession time, I've been writing on my Blackberry today as I continue sleuthing behind Christine, this time in Lord & Taylor's. Oh! She just abandoned a gorgeous sweater that I have to get to, so I gotta go.



Until next time, my lovelies, let's pretend it's COLD enough for a hot cup of chai and invite me over.

Chai Chat Lady

Upcoming Events/Announcements

**Kirtan with Riverchant
Michelle Clancey & RaeAnn Banker**
4th Thursday of every month
8:15-9:15 pm (no charge!)

**Saraswati Vidya, The Wisdom
Teachings with David Pittenger**
1st and 3rd Wednesday of the month
12:30-3:30 pm.

Yoga Basics Enrolled Class
Sundays, Ongoing Sessions
4:00-5:30 pm

Meditation with Pam Mulcahy
Tuesday nights, 8:15-9:30 pm, *no
charge, donations are graciously
accepted.*

Prenatal Yoga with Rachel Welch
Thursdays, 12:30 – 1: 15 pm
Ongoing Sessions

Post-Natal Yoga with Terry Adler
Thursdays, 6:45 pm – 8:00 pm
Ongoing Sessions

Gentle Yoga
Tuesday Nights, 6:45-8:00 pm

Family Yoga with Terry Adler
Once a month – next class is
Feb. 16 6:00 -7:00 pm

Kids Yoga
Fridays, ages 4-9, 4:30-5:30 pm

**Monthly Alignment Intensive with
RaeAnn Banker**
Saturdays, Noon – 2:00 p.m.
October 4 – Lower Back/Abdominals
November 11 – Knees, Hamstrings,
Quads
December 9 – Upper Back, Neck &
Shoulders

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