

Saraswati River Yoga Newsletter

Editor: Judith Lockard

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Theme of the Month



ZEN

Vajra Moment There is a moment, in the wonderful old tearjerker Steel Magnolias when the mother tells her friends, ‘the flowers’ of the title, about her daughter’s death, after a long coma. She describes how she finally let go of her Herculean struggle to bring her daughter back to life and stood by as Shelby was taken off life supports. “It was the most precious moment of my life. I was there when that wonderful creature came into this world and I was there when she drifted out.”

“Most *precious* moment? What on earth could she mean?”, I used to wonder. But, as I have been immersed in the

Philosophy of Yoga as it is taught at SRY, I think I can sometimes glimpse how that could be true. Without judgment or comparison or expectations, it was a moment in time in which she was fully aware, completely absorbed and alert to the significance of being there. I think that that may be what Zen and Yoga are pointing to when they describe the lightening bolt of insight that is the Vajra moment. Of course it would be amazing to live your whole life like that and I think that that must be enlightenment, but for me it is enough to recognize it when I hear about it and occasionally experience feather brushes with it myself.

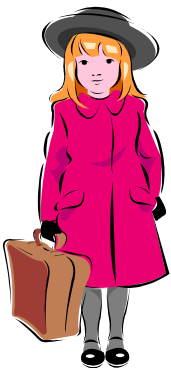
It was after I had experienced a similar moment, not as tragic, but just as life altering, that I first understood the mother in that movie. I was standing in my dining area, recovering from the most recent debacle with my teenage son. He had left for school in a quiet rage and I felt like I’d been hit by a tsunami and metaphorically lay gasping on the shore.





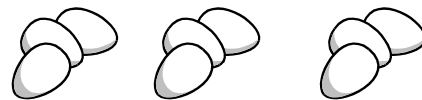
The fight was about his eating his breakfast, but of course it was really about who was in control as, at some level, all family fights are. On that day, as I gradually grew calmer, I was reflecting on the ways that my mother had controlled me, a topic about which I had railed, at her and to others, for over a decade (don't forget I came into my majority in the golden age of mother blaming). As I stood there I had a moment of clarity.

The thing I felt most deeply hurt by in my childhood was the times I was left to my own devices to fend for myself. The primary one, or screen memory as the Freudians call it, was a period in the early school age years when my mother left for work before I had to leave for school. I can still feel the sadness when I think of the buttered toast and cocoa that was my comfort food on those mornings.



As I thought about my son and his morning, I suddenly saw that my desperate need to feed him was an attempt to nurture that little girl-in

retrospect. At that moment, for the first time, I understood how in an effort to make up for my own losses, I was leaving my son as misunderstood and alone as I had been. It was a burst of clarity, like a thunderbolt, in which I experienced a deep sense of compassion for myself, both then and now, my mother and my son-all at once. Instead of seeing us as pitted against each other I was aware of the way in which we were all one in our humanness.



Of course, this did not immediately transform my relationships with either my mother or my son into gloriously peaceful ones. But it did provide the opportunity for a new perspective that had never existed before. I came to call this incident the story of the 40-year-old eggs and over time the new perspective became more and more frequently the one that informed my connections to my family.

Koan's, a primary mode and tool of Zen teaching, are brief statements designed to confound the rational mind and catapult the thinker out of the usual constructs and concepts that keep her/him stuck in an I, me, mine perspective. Similar to the therapeutic 'double bind' that Gregory Bateson described in his groundbreaking philosophical work *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, it places the person in a completely untenable position. By doing

so it requires the mind to make a leap out of the ordinary into a creative state, which, in the right context, can generate positive change at an exponential level.

An example of a powerful ‘koan’ that has saved the lives and families of millions of people around the world, is that used in the 12 Step Recovery program, Alcoholics Anonymous;

You can’t stop drinking, so in order to recover you must stop drinking.

Of course, it is the corrective context in which this is said that makes the recovery possible, but, if you stop to think about it, that is the fundamental message of AA. Nothing that happens after the moment of acceptance of that koan is remarkable in any way or isn’t something that probably hasn’t been suggested to the addict before.

In a similar way, the experience I had with my son’s breakfast and my mother’s absence required that I come to grips with either continuing to demonize my mother and then by extension demonize myself, or forgive my mother and in the process embrace a more compassionate approach to my own mothering. This is not a linear rationale process built, over time, through incremental insights, although there is nothing wrong with those changes. It is a lightening bolt awareness that introduces one instantly into a space where solutions and options unavailable a moment before are suddenly accessible.



If, once again we use the process of recovery from addiction, and listen to the stories of virtually every addict, at some point they will say, in some way, that for years they struggled to stop drinking and were completely unable to sustain it over any considerable period of time.



Then, one day they had a ‘moment of clarity’ and from that time forward they had the *option* to stop drinking. Of course, going to meetings and surrendering to some power outside themselves and helping other addicts are the sine qua non, ‘doingness’ of recovery. But what is it that made them, who a moment before would have insisted they would rather die (literally) than sit in a church basement and talk to other addicts suddenly be willing to do it?

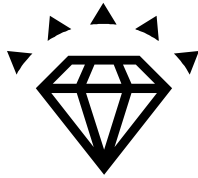
It is an axiom that you can’t scare an addict into abstinence, they aren’t afraid of dying, you can’t shame them into it, millions have tried, and you can’t make a rational argument that will convince them of the reasonableness of putting down the bottle. So what is the magic that makes the difference? Like the therapeutic double bind, the Koan and the Vajra moment, it cannot be explained. It is the linear mind that grasps for and holds explanations. But it can be observed and AA is a great place to see the ‘everyday’ miracles that are a result of that ‘moment of clarity’.

We can also observe these miracles in our own lives. But, as AA has a set of 'suggestions'* Zen has a set of disciplines and Yoga has the Yoga Sutras, which are the 'set up' for the Vajra Moment. It can come spontaneously, and does, but a structure must be in place to sustain the creative leap into another realm that the Vajra moment gives access to.

*Alcoholics are, as they themselves cheerfully admit once they get sober, defiant and rebellious by nature so there are no rules in AA.

Asana of the Month:

Vajrasana Diamond or Lightning Pose



Vajrasana charges the atmosphere of the mind bringing with it a sense of clarity similar to the clarity after a storm, when the darkness, pressure and confusion of the storm have given way to a sense of deep abiding calm. In that space, just after a storm, the weight or depth of awareness is still with us but now life seems more fully vibrant, colorful, clear and most importantly, present. Vajras are often described as diamond like, adamantite, or like lightning or thunderbolts. Lightning can either add to the confusion of the storm terrifying us with its awesome power, or, it can

briefly illuminate the landscape bringing an instantaneous awareness of the terrain around us. Lightning connects the sky and the earth, forming a supercharged conduit that alters the atmosphere around it.

Our bodies correspond to the earth, while our minds correspond to the sky. What connects these two is the shakti that travels from the base of the spine to the crown of the head, and it has the ability to change the atmosphere of our mind. In our bodies the conduits of this subtle electrical energy are called nadis. Nadis not only connect the different parts of our bodies to each other, but, connect us to the universe at large. We have many important nadis on the soles of our feet. Through these nadis we are in constant communication with the earth. As we take our seat in Vajrasana several things happen; we bring into contact the nadis of the earth to the base of the primary nadi in our body. This allows us to more easily bring the vast equanimity of the earth to our minds. This brings the mind into sharp focus on the present, clearing away the storms of the mind. As the mind calms and clears, lightning fast insights can be perceived in the mind. And in those flashes of insight the landscape of the mind is revealed. Sometimes that insight is just like lightning, momentarily searing into our consciousness the nature of the mind, only to be gone in the next instant. With a lightning strike we can hold its image in our minds eye for some time but eventually it fades. So does the clarity we get from these insights if we cannot stay grounded. But if we do stay grounded in the present then we, like the images of western Zeus or eastern Indra, can hold the lightning without casting it away, allowing it to burn away our

impurities, leaving behind what has been polished by pressure and heat and is pure, adamantine, and, true.

How to practice;

Have a blanket nearby.

Kneel with your knees and feet together. Tops of feet should be on the floor. You may cross the top of one foot over the sole of the other if this is more comfortable.

Sit back on your heels.

If the small bones near where the ankle and top of the foot meet feel like they are getting crushed come out of the pose and place that folded blanket under your legs from knee to tip of toes. Placing the blanket just under the feet will actually add to the pressure on those bones.

Alternately you could place another blanket between the backs of your thighs and calves and come to sit directly on the blanket.

Once you have established the seat, bring your awareness to the relationship between pubic bone and tailbone. You want to make sure that they are moving towards each other. Place the palms of the hands on the small of the back and on the pelvis simultaneously. Make sure they are level.

With the pubic bone and tailbone in alignment the spine will come up naturally and gracefully from the pelvic floor.

Keep the head, neck, and, trunk in one long line. Slightly bow the chin towards the chest. (So slight that someone looking at you would not notice you were doing so.)

Sitting up tall, feel the spine long and radiant. Even see the spine long and radiant with the mind's eye.



CHAI CHAT

Hello and Om Shanti. Don't you just hate meeting certain people where all they do is talk about the weather?



Ok, I admit it. I'm a hypocrite with a double standard to boot. I love talking about the weather almost as much as I love talking about all of you and myself. Summer is here, Yea! (All right, maybe we never had a spring but I'm shallow enough to still be happy).

Kirin's family, affectionately known as the MishFalkGlidden crew, are still celebrating. First it was Paul Falkenstein's return from Zambia and now it's Holly Glidden's promotion from 8th Grade. Hip-Hip Hooray. (Or in honor of Africa, should I say Hippo Hooray?). Juliet Glidden will be leaving in early July for Field Hockey Training Camp at Northwestern in preparation for the fall season. And, has anyone spotted Ashley at asana class with her new beau. I am such a yenta; all I want to know is if he's good enough for her. Details, I need details.



Shelly Uhler, of the first teacher apprenticeship class was recently

married and came back to N.J's Prallsville Mill to do it. Congratulations Shelly and om mazel tov.

Doing what I love best, I'll make mention of others in that graduating class. Monique Baron had a wonderful time in California with her sister Brigitte. Sarah Carr has been seen attending weekday asana classes and taking a break from grand-mothering. Sharon Kind makes the long trek from Philadelphia area several times a week, and Cosette, now living in Hawaii, was spotted taking class with partner Joel. I hoped it was a permanent return but alas, it was just a visit. Wonderful segue to welcome back Sandy Constable from Costa Rica. Sandy's not wasting any time settling in. Returning full-tilt boogy, she's teaching Gentle Yoga at SRY and upstairs-neighboring with Michelle Clancey.



Rumor has it that Elizabeth Jones may be soft spoken, but you should see her behind the wheel. Apparently someone at SRY tried hard to keep up with her on the NY State Thruway but was dust in the wind.

Our editor, Judith Lockard lives on the river and I have always imagined how delicious it would be to have the opportunity to watch the moods of the river 24/7. Some lucky person will find out soon because her upstairs flat will be for rent in August. A little chai chat gossip It is already imbibed with yogic energy. Alisa Rose and husband Shyam

once lived there and so did Barbara Cole-Kiernan.

A new demographic folks: hairdressers. The ones I know of so far are MaryLuce, Nancy, and Yvonne. What a pranic blessing for all their clients.



Returning to a summer theme, I must confess that along with beach book reading, it's my season for long drives and thinking. Meandering the back roads of Solebury in my car, listening to NPR's Car Talk, a lady from California called with a question about transporting her dog business using her van. She drives them for play dates, spa treatments and sleepovers. No fooling. We're not talking kennels here, but homes of other dog pals. Talk about being in the doghouse, I'll 'bow wow' of that invitation. Not to be catty but I bet that, soon, felines will lobby their owners for equal treatment. Or they can organize a Meow March. (And as for Car Talk advice: yes, pets can absorb toxic fumes when the hatchback is left open).

Hearing that plus the following led me to wonder what the world is coming to. Still listening to the radio I heard a love song 'I Used to be the Engine but Now I'm the Tracks.' Now that's bound to create equanimity in relationship. Then I passed a billboard for a local bank, described as 'A Breath of Fresh Air.' If all this is true, bring me a chai quick

while I'm still breathing. Then I visited a favorite child who had a Shrek poster on her wall 'Be the Best Ogre You Can Be, Celebrate Yourself.' Maybe there's still hope.

Well, dear friends, got to go. Car Talk is starting. Until next time, enjoy a cool chai in a shady spot and don't forget to send me a picture postcard.

Chai Chat Lady



Conscious Cooking

by Gayle Berkery

Summer Edamame Salad

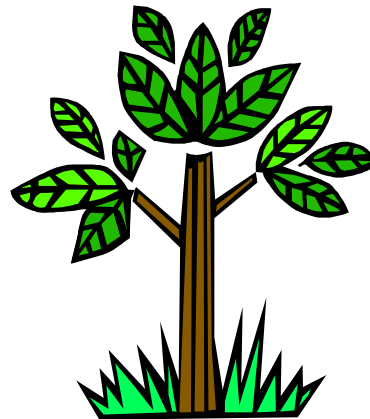
'Wow' your friends at your next get together with this recipe. This salad is as fun to make as it is to eat so go ahead and play with the measurements a bit to suit your tastebuds!*

- 2 cups cooked edamame beans
- 2 cups cooked corn (fresh corn works best but frozen will do)
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, sliced in half
- 1/2 cup ricotta salata cheese cubed
- 3 tbsp. good olive oil
- 2 cloves of garlic minced
- 1 pinch of salt and pepper

Combine the first six ingredients in a large bowl. Add salt and pepper to

taste. This salad tastes best when it is served at room temperature. To really impress your friends, grill the ricotta salata before adding it to the salad (just slice the cheese and put it on the grill until golden brown, cool, and cut into cubes.) For a grand finale to your meal, grill some fresh peaches over some hot coals and your friends will swear you've been taking more cooking classes than yoga classes lately!!! Enjoy!

* Editor's note: Gayle brought this salad to nurture me during the April flood that hit Lambert Lane and South Union Street in Lambertville pretty hard. Not only was it incredibly yummy and consoling but I brought it to a meeting where I was committed to bring a dish but was floundering as I didn't have a kitchen and it got RAVE reviews.



Upcoming Events/Announcements

Prenatal Yoga (Ongoing Sessions)

Saturdays, July 2 – Aug. 6 with Yvonne
(Drop-Ins allowed if space [ermits.]

Summer Workshop Series

with David Pittenger

Mat-Less Yoga July 10, 6-8 pm \$25

Yoga Rave Dance Party

with Carl Klemme

Saturday, July 16, 7:00 pm \$25

Enjoy a night of great music and dancing
in a smoke-free environment! Meet new
friends and catch up with old ones!

Guru Purnima Kirtan

David Newman

Saturday, July 23, 7:00 pm

\$15 in advance, \$18 at door.

Hip Openers with Kirin Mishra

Saturday, July 30, 12:30-4:00 pm

MUL and Class Card Holders: \$40 if
registered by July 15. All others: \$50.

CEUs: 3.5 hours towards SRYS and
Yoga Alliance Certification.

Kirtan with Michelle Clancey

4th Thursday of every month

8:15-9:15 pm (no charge!)

Yoga Sutras with Kirin Mishra

Mondays Sept. 12-Oct. 17.

6-week session, 6:45-9:00 pm

CEUs: 14.5 hours towards SRYS and
Yoga Alliance Certification.

Saraswati River Yoga

Teacher Apprenticeship Program

Application deadline: August 22

Program Dates: 9/9/05 – 2/25/06

New Class! Iyengar Style Yoga

with RaeAnn Banker

Firdays 11:00—12:30 pm

New Instructor! Carrie Robb

SRYS welcomes Carrie Robb to its
faculty of highly trained and dedicated
instructors. Join Carrie Wednesday
mornings, 9:15-10:45 starting June 1st.

Yes Men presented by Reel Justice

Saturday, July 9, 7:00 pm

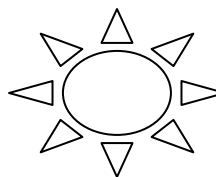
A funny, critical analysis of how
government is set up to promote
'welfare' for corporations, not people.
No Charge! Free Chai!

**Movie and conversation to determine
what we can DO to make a difference.**

(editor's note: Reel Justice assures us that the techies
will preview the equipment this month-sorry about
last month)

And Don't Forget To.....

- Pick up a new schedule
- Check out our Summer Rate Specials
- Sign-up early for upcoming events!



SARASWATI RIVER YOGA School

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CONNECTING TO THE INNER RIVER OF BLISS, WISDOM AND CREATIVITY