

Saraswati River Yoga Newsletter

Editor: Judith Lockard

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Theme of the Month

We have heard a lot about teachers this month and often the subject of the inner teacher was raised. Our yoga tradition emphasizes that practice is done to cultivate a deep knowing. This comes from a place of stillness, resulting in skillful action as the expression of that deep knowing. We are entering a realm that has no exact coordinates; that slippery terrain between trusting your own internal voice and the arrogance of making choices in isolation; This domain is bordered by surrendering to something outside of yourself and trusting your intuition or inner wisdom. Of course there is no one answer Yoga says that the whole aim of practice is to know when to do which.

As I think back over the history of my own ongoing struggle to explore this territory, it invokes a time when my son was first unleashed on the roads as a licensed driver. Early on I caught a glimpse of him rounding the corner on to our suburban street, one elbow cocked

on the window ledge, his attention focused on the young mother with pram who was navigating the sidewalk. I wanted to scream, "Don't you know you are in a 2000 pound killing machine? You can't be this casual!"

Upon reflection I realized he also needed to have a little arrogance and unearned self-confidence to get him out on the road; and that only time and experience would hone him into a driver. This equal and opposite balancing act between Hubris and humility was as integral to his driver's education as knowing the number of feet between braking and stopping

As I think about my own journey toward when to trust myself, and when to surrender to a higher order, I see some similarities to my son's process

I recall standing before a security officer in an airport in Denver, Colorado I was a young college student feeling my freedom and sense of autonomy for the first time. In my pride I had stayed in the restaurant through the first two announcements of my flight "They always call at least three times, why should I rush out like a goody-two-shoes at the first command for boarding?" Well, needless to say, the plane had departed without me and now I was standing, indignant, before the official saying, "We are at an impasse. I'm supposed to be on that plane. Someone needs to get me another ticket because

that was my last penny” “No,” he replied, “You are at an impasse! Your plane just left and you’re the one who has to find a way to catch another flight.” My only consolation was that he pronounced the final E in impasse as if it were a long A; something my French-speaking mother would have seen as beneath contempt. But that was small comfort at the moment. I called home and had another ticket charged to her credit card.

While today it is a wonder to me that I could have been so naive, not to mention so entitled, I kept this memory as a cautionary tale and a yardstick to measure the gap between being slavishly submissive and foolishly arrogant. And through the years I have formulated an increasingly detailed map of power and influence; when you have one or the other or neither, when to submit and when to stand and fight, when to strategize and when to bow out gracefully, or even flee the scene. Of course, in the airport I had neither power nor influence other than the economic solvency of my family. But it was also a landing on the larger journey; knowing when to trust myself and when to submissively follow orders. Of course it was a ridiculous act of arrogance on my part. But for many years to come I remembered the feeling of having taken a chance and gauged my grounding incorrectly, like when you step on a rock in the water, thinking it is solidly planted in the stream bed and find yourself tipped into the water. And it was a useful recollection. ‘What was I thinking’, you might well ask? Other than being quite inexperienced in the world, I was experimenting with that edge that is the realm of being submissive and subservient and that of taking chances based on some trust that you know what

is best in the situation. Most psychologists today would agree that someone who maintains strict adherence to the rules, to authority, is not as developmentally advanced as someone who, with the wisdom of experience, adheres to his own autonomously constructed value system. At the same time we all know dangerous individuals who refuse to surrender their moral values to the scrutiny of others, particularly those subjected to their power, and cite a direct connection to a deity as their only advisor.

In yoga we learn to meet what is, to surrender expectations, to steer a course between unwarranted hope and paralyzing despair, to clear the veils of illusion through the discipline of practice and sharpen our awareness of what is, to become attentive to all things at once. A very tall order indeed. Fortunately we have a good start on this journey as Asana practice is the template for every aspect of the endeavor.

And the first step, surrender, is one of the most difficult stumbling blocks for most people. Some of us equate it with humiliating situations in the past in which others, because of our age, gender, race, sexual orientation or ableness were powerless to assert our rights as equal beings. Even more unjustly we often felt shamed by our powerlessness when in fact those abusing the power were the ones who behaved shamefully. And all of us are influenced, though we know better intellectually, by the prevailing cultural myth that to surrender is to be weak or inferior to those who use their power to control others.

In class the other day I heard for the first time that surrender means NO SEPARATION. How simple and how profound. If I am everything and

everything is me then surrendering holds no dangers for me. But how to do that while still maintaining my integrity, the honor of being fully what I have come to express on this plane? In other, less abstract terms, when do I stand and fight and when do I bend like the reed? How do I know when I am being rigid and self-centered and when I'm being a scaredy cat, saving my own skin at the expense of others.

It begins (and perhaps ends as well) with knowing my patterns. Remembering the way it felt standing in the airport (now that I think of it, maybe I should just stay out of airports) filled with righteous indignation without a tiny bit of ground to stand on.

Practicing discipline and awareness without judgment, first with situations that do not deeply affect me and then gradually, over time including things that are closer to my sense of my identity and to my heart, over time I can begin to correct for my tendencies, like adjusting the wheels when you hear them hit that corduroy strip on the highway.

It is an important aspect of this learning that whenever I have made a profound change and entered a new realm of awareness or detachment I have had to tolerate the experience of being utterly alone. This doesn't necessarily mean that I was physically alone but it does mean that I had to accept the condition of being misunderstood, of being on the opposite shore from everyone and everything I felt connected to or aligned with, from whom I derived a sense of belonging. Before I talk about the feeling of desolation and emptiness that is I think a sine qua non to true transformation, I would like to take a moment to speak about a disinterested position This is often confused with uninterested or indifferent, cold,

unfeeling. But, it is quite the opposite, as it often allows for a high degree of curiosity, even deep caring but not from a place of having a vested interest in the outcome but from one of detachment that is rooted in not knowing. Not knowing, that is, how it should turn out, what is the right or best thing to happen but none the less, deeply moved by the proceedings The dictionary defines disinterested as not influenced by personal interest or selfish motives, free of bias, impartial. This is the best description of the stance from which one views life when there is deep knowing. And I think, can only be acquired after one has surrendered all illusions of knowing what is best. It is, for me, an evanescent realm found and lost a 1000 times but a bit clearer in my sites with every hard fought surrender.

The beginning of exploring this terrain came very much in spite of myself. It seemed as if everything I had planned and dreamed of had either slipped through my fingers or was in a dilapidated heap around my ankles. In retrospect this was not really true but it sure felt that way at the time After twisting and turning and squirming every way I could to control the circumstances, I had a momentary willingness to give up, not the self centered feeling sorry for myself that had characterized my early adulthood but a sense that I could stop voting; evaluating and analyzing and give up thinking that I knew whether things were good or bad. For me this was only possible when all my schemes had proved fruitless, even my back up plans.

But in that moment there was an enormous freedom The liberation that attends surrender of control. And there was a freshness, like a child's wonder while not being naive. This is the

emptiness that is both nothing and everything, the exuberance, meaning lively abundance; this is what yoga calls Space. It is, as was said recently in class, an acknowledgment of the grandeur of everything in life, a grandeur outside of concepts, rooted in pure awareness.

But as I have heard said in other spiritual traditions; in order to move from one level of participation to another one must pass through a time of desolation and a sense of emptiness and loss. A side comment to fill out the map; a sure tip off that I am onto a bad patch is a sense of urgency; if I have to run out and pop that hastily scribbled note into the mailbox this very minute or pick up the phone to set somebody straight before another minute goes by it is almost certain that I am into the side of territory that will be another cautionary tale and later remind me in a most unpleasant way of the Denver airport.

It takes strength to act on a choice, based not on concepts, but out of that surrender. When I examine the action in the context of my patterns and tell the truth about the results, I acquire the strength to keep going and the skill to be more discerning the next time. In this way I begin to create the third leg of a triangle, the one on which the other two are founded; trust. Even if the choice seems, in the short run, to be a bad one. This is not the trust based on having been right, a good guesser, It is trust in the triangle we hear talked of in class; skill, strength, and trust in the Self or inner teacher that is being created.

Asana of the Month

By John Fagan

Mudra

This month we have decided not to focus on a particular asana. Instead we are going to explore mudras and their relationship to our lives and our practices. Although mudras can be done with the whole body, in a given asana they are commonly expressed through the hands.

The action of a mudra is generally to relax the mind and the body, setting the stage for a particular wisdom to enter one's consciousness. But mudras are not limited to this. Some mudras can be practiced to help correct and heal the body. Some are used for rejuvenation, and there are others still. So what are mudras?

Mudras are physical postures we can use to circulate the subtle energies of the body in a specific way. Each mudra has a unique energy pattern. This pattern in turn has a unique way that it affects the body and mind. Mudras work with the subtle pranic energies of the body. Much of this pranic energy, our life force, is wasted. The chakras continuously radiate this energy away from us just as where we place our attention does. Mudras, when practiced correctly and with understanding, reflect and redirect this energy, allowing us to focus more of our energy into the upper chakras. Once enough prana is available to these upper chakras higher states of consciousness can be attained.

In our practices mudras become the link between our physical bodies, our mental bodies and our pranic bodies, annamaya kosha, manomaya kosha, and, pranamaya kosha respectively. This link

allows us to balance the prana across our bodies making for a healthier more sound being. This link also allows us to move the prana where we need it to be spiritually. That is, the upper chakras. For our practices the practice and understanding of mudras deepens our awareness and concentration. It gives us access to greater amounts of energy that we can then funnel into our spiritual practices. In our daily lives mudras remind us to be more introspective. They can help us to alleviate physical and mental problems. And they reduce stress. As with all yoga practices the key to understanding and knowing mudras is practice, practice, practice.

Conscious Cooking

By Bonnie



At the 4th Birthday party of SRY (a stellar event all 'round) there were many scrumptious dishes, as always [This year they seemed to disappear with lightening speed-late comers had eaten earlier, I hope!] As I made my way around the festive crowd I interviewed (informally of course,) the revelers. Many dishes were touted and I now have a file card in my head of future Conscious Cooking delights, but none got more praise or requests for the recipe than the Wild Rice Pecan Salad It took me ALL night to track down the chef. Once unmasked, she rolled her eyes said, "Now you want me to create a recipe?"-typical yogi, I guess she cooks by feeling, awareness leading to articulation and a bit of divine inspiration. However, when I got home and before I'd even finished washing out my own dish, this appeared on my computer

Judith,

Aaah! Ok,
here is a potential recipe. It's not exact,
ya know?

Here goes:

2 cups of your favorite wild rice
1 vegetable bullion cube
a pat or two of butter.
2-3 cloves of garlic
1 large onion(vidalia onions are best).

1/4 cup of balsamic vinegar
1/2 cup pecans (chopped)
1/2 cup dried cranberries or raisins
1/4 cup thinly sliced scallions.
some extra virgin olive oil

DIRECTIONS

Start with about 2 cups of your favorite wild rice and cook as per directions adding a vegetable bullion cube and a pat or two of butter. Mince 2-3 cloves of garlic and one large onion, saute in butter or oil slowly until translucent and sweet. When onions are done, over a very low flame Add to the pan balsamic vinegar, scraping up any carmelized bits of onion.

Chop or break up the pecans and brown them in the toaster or over a flame in a dry pan (for extra credit, and calories, saute pecans in butter).

Mix together cooked rice, onions and garlic, toasted or sauted pecans dried cranberries or raisins and scallions. Toss together and add salt to taste.

If the rice seems dry, and you opted to not use butter in cooking the rice and pecans, add some extra virgin olive oil, and maybe some more balsamic vinegar. Good served either room temperature or warm. Also a nice option is to add any other dried fruit.

Bon appetite!



CHAI CHAT

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Hello again, dear yogis and yoginis. Happy 4th Anniversary Saraswati River Yoga Center! What a celebration. One of the things I love about SRY is the variety of students. This was reflected in the attendees at the party, from the youngest of babies to septuagenarians. A smile came to my face as the evening progressed when I saw several sleeping children- Niya on mom Nicole's shoulder, Daniel on dad Chris, Dominique on dad Andy, and Chrisjean on her dad Chris. How sweet!

Speaking of the party. I am thrilled to have received an award and Ashley was so generous to accept it on my behalf. Hmmmm, her doing that opens many possibilities. I think I might send her on my next blind date. She is so beautiful and charming, it might break my record and guarantee a second date.

Our tireless editor Judith received a well-deserved award for this consistently high quality newsletter. In submitting this article to her, she told me that many people assume that *she's* the chai chat lady. Not so! Let's get down to basics here-this is just too much fun having you all guess my identity. (I must also confess the fear that if you knew who I was, when you see me, you might run the other way with concern of what I might print).

Flash! Make sure you look your best when you see Beverley Pattenden. She just might invite you to appear in a photo shoot. As part of a production team, she arranged for Buffy Morgan and David Pittenger to appear in a photo spread in November's Gourmet Magazine (page 191 to be exact). The article is Bohemian Thanksgiving. Scoop is that Beverley and David will appear in the December issue and here's the biggest scoop: David will appear decked out as a cowboy in January's issue. I'm sure sales will boost as we all rush out to see that! Here's a question for you David. I am wondering...are you planning to replace the Om at start of class with Yipeeiiiaa?

Talking about the west, as usual, travel has been in the air. Millie Kenney has just returned from a 2 weeks trip to Turkey with her husband. She found the whole country a history lesson. Joy Stocke and Fred Young are in Venice celebrating their 20th wedding anniversary, Kirin, Paul and their girls are jumping the waves in Malibu, Denyse is spending the holiday season with her family in Oregon, Ruth Nicholich has returned from several journeys, Dunphey Sr's have recently returned from two cruises, and of course, Jan is either going to or coming from Paris (ask her about her haircuts).

Couldn't help overhearing some yoga hall talk last month. Apparently Barbara, Susanna, and Beverley were questioning the meaning of a Yiddish word. Here is the scoop Susanna, and you can share it with your mom. Schmutz is the smudge on your face and schmaltz is the chicken fat you put in your mouth. (Or in Yiddish jargon, add an "ey" to schmaltz and you get what some people might call

this column). I hope this clears things up.

Well folks, thanks again for showing up in class with your interesting lives.

Maybe next time you'll find yourself in print. As for me, I have to plan my next disguise. I wish you blessings for whatever brings you warmth and comfort this holiday season. I raise my chai to you.

Om shanti from Chai Chat Lady.

Upcoming Events & Announcements

Check lobby for flyers and details!

Removal of Obstacles
with Kirin Mishra
Saturday Apr 3rd 12:00 – 4:00pm

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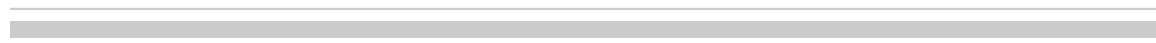
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