

Saraswati River Yoga Newsletter

Editor: Judith Lockard

Vol. 4, No. 1

January 2006



Theme of the Month

Meditation-

It is very brave to meditate. At least I think it is. I was afraid of it for a very long time. It is hard to explain how counterintuitive meditation is for one raised in the Eurocentric American culture of the North East. I was brought up to hold my mind as primary and to understand my self as a mind. Meditation means going beyond the mind and the mind knows it. A primitive fear arises when I contemplate going beyond the control of the mind. It starts with being afraid that if I am not thinking about something I don't exist. It continues with the fear that if I don't set a timer I might never 'come back'. These are of course childish concepts and make no real sense But they are some of the obstacles that I encountered when I 'tried' to meditate. I had to learn to overcome them in order to talk myself into allowing time in my life for meditation. So I will share with you the clumsy ways I tricked my mind into allowing me to transcend it.

I belonged to a spiritual community whose literature extols the virtues of meditation.

Fortunately, they do not go so far as to try to teach how to do it. In some ways teaching is antithetical to the experience of meditation. The quick guide for learning to meditate is; find someone who does it, preferably a group, and join them on a regular basis.

But not having access to the quick guide, I was on my own for methodology. I knew that the hardest thing for me was to consistently devote time to something so divorced from a product. I also was someone who had great difficulty sitting still for more than a minute at a time. My children often tease me saying that the entire time they were growing up they never saw me sitting down. So I gave myself a very easy goal. Just sit for five minutes without getting up and call that your first step toward becoming a meditator. Sounds absurdly easy, right? I couldn't do it. I would forget and wander off or go for days without remembering that I had committed to doing it. The first trick I used then was to not give up simply because I had failed. When I remembered I would get back on the horse and commit again. I learned that trick when I stopped smoking over a quarter century ago. I quit hundreds of times. I never berated myself for having a cigarette but quit again the very next time I had the impulse to do so. Another key element of this strategy was that when I had the urge to quit again I did not indulge in self recriminations, or list my previous

failures. And then one day I became a non-smoker.

So I had a strategy that I knew worked and I applied it. Every time I thought about wanting to commit myself to a regular meditation practice I set myself the goal of doing it and chose a time and place to begin. Then after a period of time, sometimes weeks later, I would notice that I had forgotten again, had never even managed to remember on the very first day. I would commit again. But I couldn't do it. For reasons that I only now dimly grasp, I was afraid. So I got a tape of an inspirational speaker that I liked, Steven Levine, and I chose five minutes from his tape on forgiveness. Today I might choose someone speaking a language I didn't even understand or music, but at that time I needed words. I needed concepts that made sense to me to fool my mind into giving up control. I sat for five minutes for several weeks in row-a new record! I noticed right away that some things that were troublesome in my life were easier, less intense, more accessible and somehow I knew that the difference was connected to the meditation or what I was calling meditation. If you were to have observed my meditation practice you would have seen me sitting still for five minutes. Internally what was happening was that I was less likely to be thinking the usual thoughts that I think. I was allowing the voice of Steven Levine to block those thoughts. Time passed and once again I drifted away from meditation, forgetting to do it and then forgetting that I wanted to do it.



Then I went through a very difficult time in my life and the same group that had first introduced me to the idea of meditation once again became central to my life and daily routines. There was one meeting they had where, after reading some inspirational

literature in a darkened room, everyone was silent for ten minutes; they were calling this meditation. I went to that meeting every week for a year; although I had no idea what I or they were doing it made me feel better to be there. I really liked it for some reason that I couldn't articulate. Many of the people in the meeting were damaged, fragile souls, cast offs from society who were often on one end or another of a visit to the local psychiatric hospital. But I felt safe for that one hour in the semi dark in that room. The sharing after the silent ten minutes was often very genuine and vulnerable. I rarely shared myself except occasionally to say that I still wasn't sure what meditation was but that I liked being there with all of them. I did notice that while my thoughts continued to race there was a sense that they shifted down from fifth to third gear. That was a concrete difference that reassured my mind. It could catalogue a tangible result.



And then I moved across the ridge, called the Sourland Mountains, from the Princeton-New York side to the New Hope- Philly side; I think of this as the Great Divide. I no longer attended the same weekly meeting. And once again I drifted away from meditation, never having really integrated it into my life.

When I started attending SRY it was at a challenging point in my life. Today I think of this as a time when many of my identities were crashing and burning and I can see, in hindsight, how liberating it was. But while it was happening I was pretty miserable. Many of the roles and relationships that I rely on for a sense that I am a good, or at least not a bad, person seemed to be crumbling. There were a few places where I felt some peace; yoga class, kirtan and meditating. In order to meditate I was driving from Somerset NJ to Buckingham Pa to sit for 25 minutes of meditation lead by our teacher, Kirin.

To be honest, the meditation still scared me. But our teacher would tell stories afterward and I lived from week to week for those stories. Before and during the meditation I was afraid again; afraid that I would make a noise or be restless or just panic and have to get up and disturb others. It turned out, though, that my fear of disturbing others wasn't so bad. Our teacher encouraged us all to remain still and not move, as something was always 'lost' when you moved. She added that if you could not be still for yourself you could do it for the others in the room. I think she began with 15 minutes, which seemed like an eternity, and over the year increased it to 25 minutes or thereabouts. In those weekly sessions I had a chance to stretch the 'muscle' of tolerance for discomfort. And I learned that everything changes. That not all pain gets worse, as my mind likes to have me believe. Some pain actually goes away. Sitting in community again, as I had in Princeton, gave me the courage I needed to see me through the leg pains and panicky feeling that it would never end.

I hope this does not sound like a recipe. The strategies and tactics I have shared are for recalcitrant control freaks like myself and would only work for someone with my exact set of neurotic survival skills. As our teacher often says, if you compare the way you do an asana to anyone else you have to know that you have the exact same body and history that they have. It is the same with the asana of meditation. I have shared my struggles with becoming a meditator for anyone who thinks "I should be able to meditate. What could be simpler? What is wrong with me that it seems to be so hard to make myself do it?" Know that you have at least one kindred soul who struggled through to a time when sitting to meditate is a daily occurrence, no more grandiose nor skippable than brushing your teeth. What happens while I meditate is as varied as the day I do it but I always make a few moments, at least, to sit and do 'nothing'.

And as Robert Frost so eloquently said,
"That has made all the difference"

People who discover that I meditate often say, "I have always wanted to do that. Can you teach me?" I always answer, "Pick a time and place and for 6 minutes a day sit there without getting up."
They ask, "And then...?".
"That's it," I say. "Do that and see what happens." Many of them have regaled me with how important their meditation practice has become in their lives and many have practices far more sophisticated and impressive sounding than mine. But all began the same way, as I did and for all it has worked.

Which reminds *me* of a story. Many decades ago, when I was a dyed-in-the-wool earthy, crunchy hippie I moved from the city to a place with a tiny plot of land. Of course, I decided to grow a garden. I read every text on organic gardening in existence, collected compost stinkily under my sink all Fall, and ordered my seed catalogues in January. In early March I bought graph paper and began many iterations of a garden 'plan'.

In late March a friend from the city came to visit for the weekend. I knew he had grown up on rural LI and he paid for his suburban idyll by being bombarded with countless questions about Big Boys versus Early Girls, the merits of Nasturtiums over Marigolds for bug control and where to plant the corn in relation to the zucchini. After indulging me for several hours my friend said, "Judith, dear, take some seeds and put them in the ground. Some of them will grow." And so to those of you who wish to become meditators, I say, "Take your seat. Be still. Something will grow."



Asana of the Month:

Loving Kindness Meditation

In asana we raise the intelligence of the body to the level of the mind and in savasana we integrate it. Through the technology of pranayama we raise the intelligence of the body and the mind to the level of the self. When we enter meditation we raise and integrate the self into the Self. When we enter into meditation we no longer support the concept of ego or separate self. Yogis say there is but one being in all of creation, therefore individual realization is a myth. We attain liberation not through any merit of our own but through the grace of our higher self, god, or the Great Mother. It is through this divine grace that we are able to escape the bondage of samsara. Whether we achieve realization or liberation in this lifetime or not we should acknowledge the tremendous amount of grace we've been given. To have a life that allows us to take the time to practice yoga is a gift. The vast majority of beings on the planet must focus solely on survival. It is our duty to acknowledge our good fortune and the structure that supports it. As the global economy steps further onto center stage the ways in which our lives of privilege are supported on the backs of the poor becomes clearer. Thanks to the information age the size of the world has gotten "smaller". This new found smallness will not allow us to think of "them over there" as not connected to "us here" for very much longer." Just as it is a myth that there can be individual realization or liberation, so too is it a myth that while one suffers others do not. In these times of great fortune for Western democracies it is imperative to see and hold what supports our low cost of living.

As we acknowledge the grace of peace on our soil; enough to eat, a safe place to sleep, a life free of fear, can we understand a life where these things are not a given? Can we comprehend that billions of people in this

world do not enjoy that safety? In recognizing the injustice in the world, as yogis, are we willing to push against our own comfort zone, challenging ourselves where we buy into the power structure that keeps so many impoverished?

This is not to say that we should quit well paying jobs, give away all our possessions, move out onto the streets, but, what will it take for us to stand up in support of the less fortunate. 'Less fortunate' should be read as those who are intentionally displaced. Loving kindness meditation start us on the path of critical awareness, recognizing what we have been gifted in this life time and asking that that same grace be given, not just our friends and selves but also to the impoverished nameless masses, to those seen but not fully seen by us, as well as those towards whom we hold animosity.

Loving kindness recognizes that we have grace not because of any merit on our part but due to the intention of another Being; we must then intend it for others and where we can act towards that aim.

How to practice:

It is essential to establish the seat or asana properly for meditation.

The spine should come directly up from the pelvic floor. You can find the pelvic floor's corners by shifting left and right across the sits bones, forward and back to the pubic and tail bones. When you can establish the weight across those four points equally then the spine will rise naturally and gracefully from the center of the pelvic floor. Some cues for proper alignment, if you find the mind getting dull or heavy make sure you are not sitting too far back and rounding the spine, on the other hand if you find the mind racing make sure you are not sitting too far forward.

After you have established the asana start with a few rounds of simple pranayama just to equalize the air flow to the brain. One pranayama you could do is nadi shodhana. A simple explanation: pinch off one nostril breathe in through the other, pinch off that

nostril exhale out the opposite. Thread the breath through the nostrils in this manner always breathing into the nostril you just breathed out. Do this for a few rounds until the mind feels calm and relaxed.

For beginner students it is best to start with the hands comfortably in the lap. Place your dominant hand into your less dominant hand palms face up. It is often nice to allow the tips of the thumbs to lightly touch.

Place the tip of the tongue to the back of the upper teeth at the roots. This will help to minimize salivation.

Ideally you will sit in an upright position. If you need to, sit against a wall, or if you need to sit in a chair, but, make sure to place a small pillow behind you to ensure that the spine remains vertical.

Once you have been seated for a time with the mind focused and relaxed bring to mind someone whom you have good feelings towards, they you not be very intense just positive. Offer this person these three boons “May you be happy and free. May you have enough to eat and a safe place to sleep. May you be free from danger and harm”.

Next bring to mind someone you see around but to whom you have no personal relationship. Your feelings towards this being should be neither positive nor negative. Your feelings towards them should be neutral. Again offer them these three boons, “May you be happy and free. May you have enough to eat and a safe place to sleep. May you be free from danger and harm”.

Next bring to mind someone to whom your feelings are negative again offer them the three boons. “May you be happy and free. May you have enough to eat and a safe place to sleep. May you be free from danger and harm”.

Finally bring your self to mind and again offer these boons to yourself.

See all beings receiving the three boons and say to yourself “May it be so.” Linger here a moment. Acknowledge all the beings that have and continue to support you, before gently opening your eyes

Conscious Cooking



Kidney Beans with Cardamom – Yogurt Sauce

By Paulette Shepard

On how I see cooking, food and yoga: As part of my seva in supporting Saraswati River Yoga I was asked to cook some meals for an ongoing program at our yoga center. My first thoughts were fear when the question of cooking came up because I had never cooked for anyone other than my self. But yoga practice at SRY has taught me that fear is part of that mind game the ego plays to keep the body off balance. After calming down I remembered the enjoyment and comfort one feels at SRY while training and receiving wisdom, and Kirin's comments that eating food together is good for the soul.

As I took the plunge and began my first attempt at making food for a group I realized that cooking felt good and food made people feel good (me also). My fear was unfounded. I could cook and enjoyed the cooking experience, especially different cultures.

We are all connected. Those words have always stuck with me as I heard them repeated at SRY during teacher training and Asana classes with Kirin. For me the connection at SRY has been one of personal growth in so many areas, learning/enjoying compassion and an all-round enjoyment for life. The people at SRY are good energy, I love the positive good energy I feel at SRY. Here is one of the dishes I cooked for the TSP program as part of my seva People said they enjoyed it and I certainly enjoyed making and serving to my fellow yogis.

6 Servings

- 1 tablespoon Clarified Butter (Ghee)
- 1 cup plain yogurt (regular or fat-free)
- 1 teaspoon cardamom seeds (removed from pods), crushed
- ¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
- ½ teaspoon ground red pepper (cayenne)
- 2 cans (15 to 16 ounces each) red kidney beans, rinsed & drained
- 1 large tomato, chopped (1cup)
- 1 cup water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup finely chopped fresh cilantro

1. Heat Clarified Butter in 2-quart saucepan over medium-high heat. Add yogurt, cardamom seeds and turmeric; stir-fry 6 to 8 minutes or until all the water in the yogurt has evaporated.
2. Stir in remaining ingredients except cilantro; reduce heat. Cover and simmer 10 minutes. Remove lid and simmer about 5 minutes longer or until sauce is slightly thickened. Serve sprinkled with cilantro.



CHAI CHAT

Hello Everyone! I am really happy today. Just back from a scrumptious walk and connecting with all of you again; what more could I want?! I can tell you what I don't want. A girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do, so every afternoon I settle down for a chai break with Oprah. Now SHE is inspirational & makes a huge difference; but those commercials. I don't know about you all, but I'm tired of seeing yoga

commercialized and even more tired of its association being 'for women'. Here's what I saw: a guy is in RiteAid buying sanitary products for his lady, next scene 'tolerating' her yoga class but when they are cozying up and she wants a sip of his Dr. Pepper, he walks out the door. Then there's the one about a new drug which controls monthly menses to 4 times a year. How does Madison Avenue example their idea of convenience? You guessed it, a woman doing asana. There's an even stronger message to all of this, but it's not for this lady or column to explore.



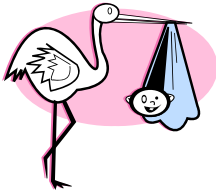
The way I see it, Kathleen Papa has the right idea. She has created Stone Aroma Bliss, essential oil products and treatments that align with a person's Highest Nature and lucky us, SRY sells them. Have you noticed when Kirin returns home from her long journeys she is glowing and sans jet lag? She attributes it to the influence of using Kathleen's treatments and products. Hmmmm maybe we should write Oprah.

For those of you who don't have the details and wonder where Kirin has been lately... in India!! She was invited to teach Tantra to a few hundred Indian scholars. Our SRY director was also the keynote speaker at this yearlong conference as well. All this is quite an acknowledgement of her expertise, and she is the first woman to be invited. We are so privileged to have Kirin's wisdom, radiance and generosity regularly available to us, in hardly-on-the-map-of-Spiritual-Havens, New Hope, Pa.



Hey folks-here's a little exploration you might try next time you feel bored. I got home today to 16 phone messages. All but 3 started not with Hello, not Hi but "Hey." Check out your own and we can tally and chat about it.

Apparently Barbara & Bill left a strong impression on Chris Oquendo's son who was at the SRY anniversary party a few months ago. This first-grader sat at the breakfast table one morning surprising Chris with his recitation of BCK2 entire comedy routine. (Maybe we can recruit him for the next shindig).



Speaking of kids, Erinn Auletta our long time friend, student and beloved front desk staff person will be retiring that job at the end of February to prepare for her new baby. How lucky that little one is to have such a fabulous mom!

Continuing with a theme, I have heard that Terry Adler is the new Pied Piper of SRY. Her Yoga for Kids class is a hit. Staying with this theme, I also heard Yvonne Stuck has returned in her glorious new mommy-hood to lead both Pre and Post-Natal yoga classes to a bunch of contented moms. Hearing how wonderful her class is almost makes me want to become pregnant. Almost.



With the hiatus of my favorite Reality TV Shows, I am imagining creating one at SRY. What do you all think about a revival of the Dating Game? Apparently classes have evoked not only the Goddess Saraswati but also the Goddess Cupid. You can threaten to fix me up with Howard Stern or Jerry Springer, but I still won't tell you who the couples are.

Well dear hearts, I gotta run. The days are getting longer but we're almost out of daylight and I've got to see if my red shoes match my lipstick. It IS only 6 weeks to the Oscars. In the meantime, keep a tally of those "Heys," and most of all, share some Chai with a new or old friend.

Om Shanti,
Chai Chat Lady



reel justice presents:

WALMART
The high cost of low prices

SATURDAY January 28, 2006

FREE
Chai, too!

Doors open at 7p

Upcoming Events/Announcements

Kirtan with Michelle Clancey

4th Thursday of every month
8:15-9:15 pm (no charge!)

Saraswati Vidya, The Wisdom Teachings

with David Pittenger
Starts Nov. 2nd, 1st and 3rd Wednesday of the
month, 12:30-3:30 pm.

Kirtan with David Newman

January 7 at 7:00 pm

Ayurveda for Woman with Paula DiGregario

Ayurvedic Women's Health in the Wise
Earth Tradition, January 21
Ayurvedic Nutrition in the Wise Earth
Tradition, January 22

Hip Openers with Kirin

January 28, 12:30-4:00

Saraswati Day Workshop with Kirin

February 4th

Activism and Contemplation with Kirin,

Feb. 13-17 at Pendle Hill

5 Key Practices for Women with Denyse Corelli,

Saturday, March 4, 12:30-3:30

And for those of us who yearn to deepen our
experience and spend more time in practice
and study w/ Kirin. Here's the opportunity
to invite those friends who live too far from
SRY to join in a fun And for those of us
who yearn to deepen
our experience and spend more time in
practice and study w/ Kirin. Here's the
retreat together and finally see what we've
been raving about!

Feb 13-17th

Pendle Hill, Wallingford, PA
ACTIVISM AND CONTEMPLATION

May 15-19

Pendle Hill, Wallingford, PA
KEY ELEMENTS OF SPIRITUALITY

June 25-June 30

Kripalu Center, Lenox, MA
A RIVER FLOWS - IMMERSION IN THE
SARASWATI METHOD

reel justice presents:

WALMART

the high cost of low prices

1-28-06 7pm

SARASWATI RIVER YOGA

415 South York Road • New Hope, PA 18938 • 215-862-4520

www.saraswatiriveryoga.com

CONNECTING TO THE INNER RIVER OF BLISS, WISDOM AND CREATIVITY