

The barrel is full of mud

Last night yoga session went very well in the absence of a “lesson plan.” There was a short meditation in the beginning to center the mind in stillness, a routine of asanas where the mind stayed focused on body and breath, and then deep relaxation to take the awareness deep beneath the surface mind. Then a question and answer arose.

Question: After doing asanas and relaxation before going to sleep, I had very vivid and almost disturbing dreams on three occasions. What’s going on?

Answer: The practice of yoga is like putting a garden hose in a barrel that has partially filled with mud. The water is clear consciousness, the mud is consciousness that has been trapped in memories and feelings that are kept down in the bottom because they don’t fit what the mind expects one’s self to be. So, with the pressure of consciousness, the mind’s trapped contents are stirred up and come to the surface.

If we don’t identify with it and just observe the mud coming to the surface, allowing it to move, it will flow over the top of the barrel and be gone. Gradually, the barrel, which had been only half full of available consciousness energy, will become clear and one becomes more conscious, more present, and more full of life.

A Basket Case

Baskets have always been a part of human life, going back to the earliest digs of human inhabitation. And each cultures, large or small, made its baskets with its own unique design. Today, at craft shows and shops we are attracted to beautiful baskets and find ourselves bringing them home for various functions, or to just sit there and be attractive. Baskets and the human mind are best friends.

We can see where this love affair begins by observing infants fascinated with containers, putting objects in and taking them out. The adult mind, however, is more interested in the contents of the basket, what the basket holds, rather than in the joy of just the putting in and taking out.

Suppose our mind were a basket that we are given as an infant to play with, and it is given a name called ME. But we are never told that our name is only a basket and not our real I. Our entire educational process, both at home and at school, reinforces the notion that ME is real, and that the purpose of ME is to fill the basket with concepts, beliefs, and experiences, which we call knowledge. We lose awareness that we are putting things into the basket, and all we now see are the things and ideas that we need to put in the basket. We see our life as a continuous shopping trip where we select good things and reject bad things for our basket.

Conditioned to go through life always focused on the contents of the basket, we compare our basket to other baskets, and always, no matter what kind of basket we have, feel that it is never filled, never enough. There is always more to be put in the basket of ME, something that is in the future that will complete the basket and remove the anxiety that the basket may not be real.

We can't get rid of that anxiety, that deep existential emptiness, because we know that everything in the basket and even the basket itself will die, and if something can cease to exist, then it can't be real. We worry as the first signs of the basket's unraveling begin to appear. We call it "aging," and we put that idea into our basket, saying, "I am getting old." Once we put something like that in our basket, we can't take it out because it becomes part of our story of ME.

At some point in every one's life (or future lifetime if one puts reincarnation in one's basket), the awareness dawns that there is something that holds the basket we call ME. There is space around our basket, like the space around a planet, like the space around our morning cup of coffee, and like the space around every thought we put in our mind.

We can't analyze our basket, because these thoughts are also the content of the basket. The basket also contains time, psychological time where thoughts run from the past to the future and back. So going back in time to when the basket was woven doesn't help seeing the basket. Analysis just rearranges the content of the basket so there is more order in the basket, a better ME. But this idea of order is just something else put in the basket.

The awakening of the awareness that there is a basket comes from an awareness that is outside of the basket. Like the infant with his first basket, we return to the process of putting in and taking things out of the basket. And we observe the putting in and the taking out without judgment or resistance. We observe with the innocence of the infant. As our inquiry begins digging into the basket, tossing out it's content, our awareness says, "I am not this, and not this, not this belief, not this gender, not this experience, not this feeling, not this thought...."

Our inquiry finally brings us to the place where we become aware of the empty basket itself. Awareness has shifted from the contents of the basket to the space around the basket. We awaken to a new sense of Self. In deep moments of presence, the basket just disappears, and we become the space that never dies, that never needs anything, and that is complete and filled with peace. We become aware of awareness.

Once seen, the basket that was hidden has now changed its function. The basket remains as our ME, but no longer as anything other than a basket that we keep to hold our important information. No longer identified personally with the contents of the basket, we discover that our hunger to fill the basket and our anxiety that the basket will die is gone. The basket has become just a basket, and the story of ME just a memory. If we drop the basket, that is okay because we know that we are not the basket. We are the space consciousness that knows the basket, and that is enough.

That space consciousness is the basket maker...but don't call Him God, because that is just another idea we have put in the basket.

Bonsai Bondage

I forgot to cut the wires from the small pine tree that my pond designer, Guy, wrapped around its limbs to make a bonsai this summer. The wires had cut deep into the bark that were forcing the tree to grow into a form that the human eye found more pleasing than the one nature designed. I felt like I was removing a bandage from a “cosmetic adjustment” that had gone wrong and caused a wound. How this wire must have hurt the tree, and, like a prisoner in a cell, it’s suffering was made worse by no one hearing its cry.

The little tree with its small limbs cut by the wire—forced into a shape it never intended to take—reminded me of our human minds that have been forced to take unnatural shapes by the bondage of conditioned thought. We become what our parents expect, or the opposite of what our parents expect. We become what our fears outline in our unconscious, and we shape ourselves to fit our beliefs of who we are, taking our shape from the sketches of a group or some authority.

And the wires are no longer visible as we grow, but the pain is felt, and we know not where it comes from. Whatever shape our mind takes, the world fits itself to our mind like a glove. When we feel that the world is not as it should be, we mistakenly think it is the world’s fault, and we suffer because we never seem to be able to fix it.

So we struggle against the world as if it were the world that bound our life, never seeing that it is the wires holding us tight to some predetermined shape because the bark of our consciousness has grown over them...and when we look, nothing is there. So we return our focus to the external world and double our efforts to make it bend to the shape we want—as if we wanted to make the world into our bonsai tree. But as long as the wires remain intact, we limit who we can be. We never realize that our suffering comes from limiting who we are by an idea of who we are.

We need to remember our bonsai, our innocent original self, and release ourselves from the bondage of the wires of our past. Guilt, doubt, anger, frustration, depression, cravings, all these negativities that we experience come from the wires of our bondage to suffering. Because suffering is all we know, we become dependent on suffering to know who we are. The wires have become part of the tree.

We cut the wires free when we have compassion for our inner tree. To have compassion is to accept ourselves in the shape we are in this very moment. We are our shape—the cause no longer matters. The idea of who we are no longer matters.

What is important is to tenderly feel the wires and remove them through self love. We tell our inner tree that it is beautiful just the way it is.

When the wires are gone, we allow ourselves to become who we wanted to be...before the wires were put on.

Confessions of a yoga teacher

This morning my writing turns to teaching. How does one teach, and when is one ready to teach? Since I have become a yoga teacher and make myself open to whatever else comes out of that, how do I know that I am ready? Will I ever be ready? Should I get some kind of certification? Some authorization that says I am ready? I have none. But do I need a stamp of approval to do what I am doing? At the age of 70, I really don't have that much more time to wait for an answer.

We are so conditioned to believe that all teaching is an exchange of mind content. The teacher prepares to teach by filling his mind with a specific content—ideas and concepts that are in some order around a subject—and looks for students who want, or think they want, that content.

Teaching in this manner is merely an exchange of things, thought things, in the belief that these things will make one's life better. Our whole educational system is an exchange of thought things, a filling up of a person's mind with the collected things of a culture.

But is this exchange of thought goods really teaching anything new? Does it bring us closer to truth? Oh, the thought is new to the student, but the thought is already old before it gets to the student's mind. Thought is always past. Thought as knowledge is from memory and that is past. Thought is also future when our past experience is projecting into the future. So thought needs time to function. Thought is time, psychological time.

So teaching, as we know it, is a function of time. We learn knowledge of past collective experience for a future purpose. And that purpose comes from a desire to use this knowledge to complete ourselves, to make ourselves happy, not now but in the future. Does education make us full of joy now? Does it complete us now?

People even come to yoga with this idea that they will learn something that will make them happy or stress free in the future. This seems to be the way our minds work. To the mind, everything is a means to an end. The way to the future is through the past, the mind believes. And thought is the highway.

As a new yoga teacher, I've fallen into this belief system, too. "I need to teach something that will help them in the future," I would think. So I would make space in the yoga session for me to teach some thought content about yoga.

But yoga refuses to fit into this belief system that thought things must pour from one container into another. The purpose of yoga is to empty the mind, not fill it. So as a teacher of yoga, what I have to do is accept that condition that I have nothing to teach, and to be comfortable with that state of emptiness. Therefore, the paradox of yoga is that the more unprepared I am, the more prepared I am to teach, if we can use that word.

In yoga, one leaves the highway of thought and takes off through the fields, letting the legs go where they want to go, letting the eyes see without naming everything, and letting the ears notice sounds never heard before. Yoga is leaving time and entering the present moment, where thought cannot come. A yoga teacher just invites others to come along, casting off their packs of knowledge, throwing down their coats of security, and just letting the present moment reveal itself.

One cannot think about the present moment because thought is of the past. One cannot learn about the present moment from anyone, because no one has ever been here in this moment before. Our collective knowledge knows nothing about this present moment. One cannot even talk about the present moment because talk is thought, and it is already past.

One can only be the present moment. Being and thinking are, to me, incompatible states. One can't be and think at the same time. Being is a state of rest, while thinking is a state of mind movement. Being is free consciousness, while thinking is conditioned and limited consciousness. Being is our true Self, while thinking is our false self.

Being is the sunlight that fills the whole room; thinking is a candle. Yoga is the light that comes from both.

Everyone is doing yoga

Last night opened the second 6-week course in Level I yoga here at the Blackstone Yoga Center. None had practiced yoga before and had little idea of what it was. Most agreed it was some exercises that made you feel good. The first 20 minutes of class is when I introduce a new understanding of the many faces of yoga, and on the first night I go right to the oldest definition of yoga as a practice to still the mind.

The mind that we want to still is the hamster-on-a-treadmill problematic mind that we can't get away from. People complain that they can't stop their mind from worrying. It just spins and spins inside the self. They can't sleep or enjoy life, and the only time the hamster stops running is when they take some entertainment.

Whatever the form of "entertainment" we choose, we measure its success by how long the hamster stays off his treadmill. A good movie can stop you from thinking for a couple of hours. Or sports can focus the mind on the present moment and the hamster takes a break. Anything that we enjoy doing is because it helps us take our mind off our mind. And there are brief moments in our day, flashes of wonder and beauty, of love and giving, when our hamster mind is allowed to rest.

We always feel refreshed, a little more alive after these breaks from the mind. But the mind is always there waiting for our attention to come back, and the hamster starts running again. "I've got this problem..."

This is unconscious yoga. We still our minds through external means, most of which we have to pay for and are always short lived. We even become addicted to our mind relief, especially if it comes in the form of drugs and alcohol, or even sex.

But it goes deeper than this. Anytime we have a craving, we are unconsciously seeking to still the mind. You can observe this yourselves. We have a craving for an object and the desire creates either mild or extreme suffering. We feel that we can only be complete or whole if we possess the object of our desire, whether it is another person or a car.

Then, the moment we get the object, there is a collapse of this imagined separation between our self and the object. The mind becomes whole and at rest. "Ah, I have it!" The mind is still for a while and up through that relaxed tension, a state we call pleasure rises. But it, too, is always short lived, because another desire soon rises, and the hamster is off again. "May I won't get it..." Fear and desire, the two handmaidens of stress.

In this way, we are all practicing yoga by spending most of our waking time yearning for a few moments when our mind will be still and we can have peace. Our lives become a few brief moments of peace sandwiched between huge slices of stress.

When we practice the real yoga, however, we are consciously learn and practice how to still the mind so that we can live in stillness permanently and peace will be our natural state. Real yoga begins when we are become aware that the possibility of inner peace is real and obtainable.

Without that awakening, all we have are quick fixes.

When the house is quiet

When the house is quiet, the cat sleeps off its morning can of beef and salmon, the gas stove in the living room ticks as it cools down from its last burst of heat, and the waterfall in the corner bubbles and drips like a creek running over rocks.

When the house is quiet, cars traveling the outside street are pushed into the distance by the stillness within. Silence has a way of opening up from the inside and pushing outwards, softening noises, pushing other sounds into the distance and oblivion.

Even the mind cannot stand the onslaught of this stillness. Thoughts cannot rise without tumbling into the abyss. Even the thought of ME has its boundaries attacked and broken, like a wall being eroded by a flood.

When the house is quiet, there is not even a place for the names of things. Names are noisy thoughts and they cannot get a grip on silence. Like cats without claws, they just slip off the wall and fall to the ground.

When the house is quiet, action walks without leaving any footprints. Movement does not disturb the house, as the reflection of the moon doesn't disturb the pond. If I am writing, there is just the writing. My fingers wait for the next command in the silence between the words.

The whole universe seems poised on the end of the fingers. The click of the laptop keys are heard on Jupiter and Mars. The entire creation from the beginning of time and beyond has brought itself forth to express this moment. Everything that has happened in the entire cosmos is potentially here in this moment. Everything that will happen in the future is potentially here in this moment.

When the house is quiet, this moment could not be other than it is. This moment is all in all....and is eternal.

Let there be light

Each night this week in our yoga classes I've been talking about yoga being a practice of stilling the mind, and how we are all seeking the experience of a still mind in today's mad world, only in the wrong places. We don't see this, but it is only in a moment of mental stillness that we experience the fullness of life. And the reason we don't experience life in its fullness of joy is because we don't believe life is joy, or bliss, which is a low-burner type of joy. It is our belief system that is killing us and making life an burden to be suffered...our cross as some believe. If we believed life was joy, then we would be full of a deep inner joy no matter what the external situation was.

It is ironic, but having a strong belief system is touted as a measure of character and spirituality. Yet, when one goes to a master for help on the spiritual path, he says, "Come back when you have no beliefs." No one can be a malleable disciple if they are encased in a rigid belief system.

When we live in a "belief system," we are living in a preconditioned reality, one that we actually perceive in the shape of our belief. So a belief system is a shaping system, one that cuts life up into acceptable and unacceptable pieces, like a butcher carving up a side of beef. "Here are the choice cuts, and here are the scraps for dog food."

So why do we have a belief system, anyway? Well, if we have an identity that we call "me," we have to have a belief system to wear. Without the clothes of a belief system, we couldn't see ourselves as separate from other "me's." And a "me" has to be separate in order to be a "me." So, one can't have a "me" without a belief system to give it a shape. They are the same.

As we move into this inquiry, we notice the word form coming up. A belief system is my form. Actually, the perception of myself as being separate from the rest of the world, one object among all the rest of the objects...is a belief system. This, one could say, is the root belief upon which all the other beliefs about me and the world rest. What would happen if we didn't believe we were separate? What would happen to me? At the root of the belief of separation is this fear of the death of my belief system.

Yet, would I cease to exist if I had absolutely no belief system? "If I didn't believe in something, I would be no thing," my belief system says.

But I say, "If I didn't believe I was a light bulb, wouldn't I just be light?" Which "I" should I believe? And, just to drive us mad, if I believed that I didn't have a belief system, wouldn't that be just another belief system and a new set of clothes for me to show off. The master would say, "You have to drop that too."

Miracles can happen

“When we don’t expect anything, miracles can happen.”

This thought caught hold of me as I listened to Eckhart Tolle this morning. There is a lot of space between his words, and out of that silence insights seem to rise up between us. Listening to a spiritual teacher is an invitation to allow something new to happen, a miracle, if you will.

Now, I’m defining miracle in this context to be some thought form appearing in consciousness that is not conditioned by one’s knowledge, which is always from memory. An insight is a miracle because it doesn’t come from “me” and what is called the “known.” Our “me” lives entirely in its “known” world, which is a place frozen in sameness.

And miracles can’t happen when we expect one to happen, because expectation is a desire that reinforces my sense of “me.” And “me” is entirely made up of the “known.” This is like telling a child to do something spontaneous. This ties children in knots. Miracles come from the free land of the unknown.

So, how does one get from the “known” to the “unknown?” How can we get a miracle to happen if we think we need a miracle? This is a classic double bind. The “unknown” is a space of stillness, yet, wanting to get there is the movement of desire. This is like trying to make the pond still by smoothing it out with the hand. Obviously, “me” (which is the known) can’t get to the still space of the unknown. To give up what is known would be to give up being “me.” And who can do that? That is just the mystery. We can’t do it!

The Bible tells us how to not do it: “Be still and know that I am God.” Being still means making no effort to judge, change or avoid the present moment. Being still is accepting what is and just being aware of whatever form the present moment is manifesting. Being still is allowing the space of awareness to surround the thought or feeling that takes form in our consciousness. Being still is just being!

Being still is being aware of the space in a room as well as the objects in the room. The room is the totality that holds the things in the room. In the mind, the room is the consciousness that is aware of thoughts and emotions. Consciousness is space. The totality of consciousness before it manifests as thought form is I AM. “Be still and know that I AM.”

So, when we are still, expecting nothing from this moment because we accept this moment as it is, we allow miracles to happen, something new, something beautiful, something creative, something unexpected....

The unexpected can’t happen until we let go of expecting.

Olympics yoga?

This blip came up on this morning's internet radar. There seems to be a movement among extreme hatha yoga enthusiasts to make yoga a sport and qualified for the Olympics. While this may attract more people to yoga, is the right kind of yoga? Is yoga about who can become the best pretzel?

This is like making religion an Olympic sport. Lets see who can get to God the fastest. Which religion could put themselves into the most complicated conceptual posture? Each religion could compete to become the absolute truth, and any means to that end would be acceptable. No rules of logic need be applied.

In fact, the winner would mostly likely become the religion that could get itself into the most extreme theological position possible. By what other means could a religion be judged as a winner, if not by the advancement of belief in its unique posture. Each religion would have its signature position, its style, and fans would collect round their favorite, even wearing T-shirts and hats with their teams' symbols.

At the Olympics, religion would be judged on the number of people that each religion can get to vote for it. The gold goes to the religion that can get a perfect ten. If everyone agrees that it is the best truth, then it must be the truth.

OM4all

While looking at signature license plates yesterday on the way to Richmond, it popped into my mind: Om4all. "That's what our license plate should be," I told my wife. Our current plate is MYDLYF, which my wife was in when she got the car. But my wife is now passed that. I think she is in FULLYF, but that's another story. So, I tapped the picture of Swami Satchidananda, 1914-2002, in his blue VW that is velcroed to our dash, and said, "After all, it's his car."

For those of you who haven't read that far back in this journal, Swami Satchidanada, was given a blue VW like ours. When we started going to Yogaville, I noticed that some heads would turn sharply to look at us when we passed. Then I saw the pictures of Gurudev in his blue beetle, and I thought, "Oh, maybe they thought he had returned."

Anyway, when we got home, I immediately went to the DMV here in town and ordered the plate. OM4ALL was available! Usually, getting your signature plate on the first try is like getting your user name on the first try on the internet. What you think is an original has been thought of by 2 million people. But not OM4ALL.

In case you don't know, OM means God. But unlike the word God, OM is not only a word but also an experience. While the word God only stands for a belief or concept in our minds, OM when made vocal, is a sound full of meaning in its self. The meaning of OM is in the sounding of it, not the thinking of it. When OM is made fully conscious and the sounding of it is all the sound there is, and when thoughts and even the mind have vanished into the sound....then OM is God. Om becomes the vibration of pure awareness. Existence is OM—The Word of God, is you will.

The huge, huge difference between the God of theology and the God of wisdom, is that the former is a thought, while the latter is to be experienced beyond thought. And one cannot experience God through thought. For then, God would not be God, but just another thought or concept or image in the thinking mind. The thinking subject would still be separate from its object. But when God is present, the subject and object are one.

It's as simple as this. Can you know silence by thinking about silence or by being silence? So...can you know God by thinking about God or by being God. If God is the Unknown and Unthinkable....then when we slip into Unknowing and Unthinking...we become That. Perfect stillness. But, we can't "know" we are God, because then the knower would be separate from that which is known. God cannot be divided. Being in God is knowing without the known.

What does it feel like to allow God to be in you? Whatever you want to feel like is okay. Every thought, every feeling, every imaging is God being in you. Not resisting what rises in our mind is allowing God to be in us. "Thy will be done," means "I accept this moment as Thy will." It's all in the Bible, only it's been translated into the theology of the mind by the mind, which short sightedly says absolutely that God is separate from man and His creation.

To experience God being within is the experience of being okay and at peace with oneself. The experience of God is the experience of peace, inside and in the world. To experience God is also to experience the world as being an expression of God's play. This is a fun place to be. "One must be as a child to enter the Kingdom of God," said Jesus, and he meant that literally. To be as a child is to be without a labeling mind, without right or wrong, without good and evil, to be innocent, and to experience the world as creative play. Life is extremely enjoyable when God is experienced within.

But what has to leave before God can be experienced within? The present tenant must be evicted. And the current tenet is a sour puss who sees the world as a place of combat: "It's Me against the world." And this guy is always in a posture of resistance, always finding something wrong, always wishing he was in some other moment than the present one, and the only will that he wants done is his own. This guy is our ME.

Silence can get rid of this noisy guy. Just practice interior silence and he will soon leave of his own accord. Saying Om consciously is the practice of dissolving into silence and God.

So for OMMMMMM to come in, MEEEEEEEEEE has to go. And as ME jumps out the window (given you live in a tower apartment), you'll hear this cry: Om4ALLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLL.

You see, even the ME is God, too.

Renaissance man

After seeing the movie, *The Da Vinci Code*, the other night, I got out the set of DVDs about the Renaissance, which had been a TV series, and watched the first two discs, about the life of Da Vinci himself. Da Vinci, the epitome of The Renaissance Man, was interested in all of life, and was driven to know how things worked. A keeper of voluminous notes, his biographers can trace much of his life in his own handwriting and drawings.

The 15th and 16th centuries were an age when the divine feminine principle was fully awakened in the minds of man, especially in Italy. As with the flowering of consciousness in ancient Greece, the Renaissance of Italy bloomed among the city states whose competing rulers made art their weapons of status. Artists like Da Vinci could exist on the commissions of these patron families who wanted to display these works of art in their churches and palaces. This was the compost for some of the greatest works of art man has produced.

When the garden is ready, the flowers will grow. And the flowers of consciousness grow best when there is no judging mind to condition what the flower should be. Before the Renaissance, life in Europe was preconditioned by the prevailing cultural myths, which preconditioned perception to see only a specific reality. Minds like Da Vinci's were entirely free of conditioning, and drank in everything fresh and whole. Suddenly, man's consciousness was free and everything was beautiful and full of wonders to be revealed. The world of form was their playground, and art was their play.

While the Renaissance man was the child, the parent—which every child needs—was the church. It is the seriousness of the parent whose energies are focused on security and correct behavior that creates the need for a child in us. Whenever the conceptual yard we live in becomes too constraining, and the possibilities for adventure exhausted, our child will break out and force the walls of the mind to fall.

History seems to be a play between these two forces, the parent and the child, one restraining and containing, one pushing out to be born anew. The Renaissance painters spent a lot of oil on the Madonna and Child, and for good reason. They were the child and the church was their mother. When the church is the loving mother of the Madonna, the divine child will play. When the church is the Father, the child must be good by following the law, and stay home and do something practical with his time. With the Madonna, now is the future. With the Father, the future is now. Let us be, says the Madonna; let us become what is prescribed, says the Father.

And so goes our civilization, bouncing back and forth between the Father and the Mother, between becoming and being. With only the Father, there is too much judgment and restraint of the present. With only the Mother, there is no seed of inspiration to transcend.

Occasionally, the two divine principles get together...and we have a divine child...a Renaissance.

The practice of yoga as a wisdom teaching is to bring about our own personal renaissance, where we can be who we are and become who we are meant to be at the same time.

(from a letter to a friend)

Everything depends on the consciousness of the teacher. If the teacher is established in yoga, then whatever is done is yoga. Yoga means union with....Self or Life. And all life is one. So in yoga, the student and the teacher become one. That seems to be what is happening to me. Being established in yoga for me means that it is what I am...can't help myself. Yoga is what I do.

Whatever we do, if we are established in it, we can't help but do it. We don't do it for fruit, we do it because we must. And, too, the giving of what we do makes one more established in it, just as the giving of ourselves makes us more our true self.

My yoga classes are a nice meditation for me. I go through the opening meditation, asanas, relaxation, let talk rise up in the sharing session...and all with very little mind activity. It seems to be just the doing of it.

I had a little shadow of "where is the fruit?" the other day. "Was I really teaching or helping anyone?" I wondered. But then a smile rose up and the shadow of doubt ran for its life. An inner smile is so powerful. It is the smile of freedom. I have a choice! And each time a shadow tries to invade my space, and my smile greets it, the smile gets stronger. Some times I just have to glance at a shadow, and it leaves before I can even smile. It knows what's coming.

So whenever the world tries to trick me by throwing an unexpected demand, something new I hadn't seen before that it thinks will cause me stress and to lose my peace, my smile is ready...or maybe it is just there all the time. I call that smile the Mona Lisa....or Julia Roberts is just as good.

The world is my best friend. It tries its best to make me lose my peace because it knows that this is the only way I can exercise my smile and strengthen my peace.

I am reminded of Peter Sellers in the Pink Panther, who had his valet, Kato, jump him when he was least expecting it so he could strengthen his karate.

Thought machine

Now that we've started opening each yoga session with a ten minute meditation to center us in the present moment before moving into a set of asanas, some are discovering that their mind races like crazy just when they want it to be still. "I couldn't believe the trash that was coming up," one person said.

Meditation is like putting our foot on the clutch of a car (if you have ever driven a stick shift) and disengaging the engine from the load of moving the car. The engine races crazily until you take your foot off the gas. When we sit for meditation, we are focusing on the breath or a mantra (some sound syllables), and taking our attention off our thought engine and our thought based sense of self (which is like the car). So, quite naturally, the thought stream, once free from having to move our identity, runs faster. As we take our foot off the gas, the engine and the car both slow down and eventually come to a stop.

Putting our attention on the breath is like taking our foot off the gas. The thought machine only exists when we give it our conscious energy, and when we shift our attention from thought to just being aware of our breath (which is life), thought begins to run down. We discover that we can be free from the thought machine. In time, the mind becomes one pointed on our object of meditation, and thought grows weaker and weaker.

This, however, is not the end of thought. There is nothing wrong with thought as long as it doesn't fill our mind with problems and trash talk. A peaceful mind is a still mind. In a still mind, thought rises as creative insight or as useful commentary that carries no weight or stress. It is just some thought, little movements of the mind, like geese flying over a wide blue sky. The sky is not disturbed by the geese.

In a still mind we begin to live in the present moment where awareness enjoys life as it is, without labels or preconceptions of what life should be. Simple things become fascinating, like the stirring of a cup of coffee. The musical sounds of the spoon and the changing color of coffee, from dark chocolate brown to blond as milk is added, absorbs our attention. We discover that our everyday world is alive with designs that are like works of fabulous art or photographs. For the still mind, the eye is God's paint brush, and the world is ever fresh and full of delights.

But, for the mind trapped in thought, the world is old, and today is always the same as yesterday. Tomorrow is only a fading hope that we will somehow experience life as we know it should be. But we never do, because thought is a product of memory and past experience, and it is always old. Thought also creates the false sense of me, which wraps itself in a story and goes through life lugging this heavy baggage. And the only thing we are taught to do is add more stuff to our baggage, falsely thinking that it will complete our thought created self. But it never does.

So the practice of meditation is in itself an act of freedom. We say, "Here I will sit (for one minute, ten minutes, or whatever) and just be who I am...I am unplugged from the thought machine...I put down my script and my program. I am not my thought...but who am I?...Let me see."

Welcome to the Blackstone Yoga Center

Welcome to the practice of yoga. No matter what your yoga experience is, yoga is like my great old house, which says to all my needs, "I've got just the space for you." Whether you are really disciplined and can make a 45 minute space each day for your yoga practice, or—if you are like the most of us and can only find a few minutes, if that, for a yoga mat—the point is not how much time you give but the quality of what you give. If you give yoga just a few moments of full attention, then yoga will begin to make a space for itself in your life without any effort from you. That is the mystery of yoga.

The yoga session offered here at the center is a space for you to practice awareness, and to learn how to apply awareness to your everyday world, at work and at home. Applying awareness is like applying sunshine to a cloudy day. The sun makes no effort to shine. The sun just is. And the clouds do not have to be forced to leave; they just do.

The practice of yoga is discovering how to get in touch with the light of awareness that is the background to every thought, feeling and action we make. Yoga is the practice of shifting our attention away from compulsive thinking which is the mind, to the space that holds the thoughts. That space is our true Self, our essential being. Yoga is asking the question; Who am I?

But the mind that is full of waves cannot reflect our inner smile. Yoga, as the sage Patanjali wrote, is the stilling of the mind. When the mind is still, we can see reality with a clear eye, and we can allow insight and joy to arise from within where it has been hidden by our limiting sense of ME. The practice of yoga is learning to let go of the nagging feeling that there is more to life and that fulfillment lies in the future. Yoga is the rising awareness that we are okay as we are, that just simply being is enough.

As you allow yoga to work its magic in your life, you will find that you become more here to the present moment. Being aware of your breath during the day as you walk to the kitchen or the water cooler, for instance, or using the time spent at a traffic light to become mindful of your present moment is practicing yoga. It matters little when you become mindful of your present moment. In fact, there is more benefit to being present and aware during an argument than on a yoga mat, where being mindful is easy. Yoga, as we are practicing this ancient science of liberation, is portable and directly shines its light on our shadowed world of confusion and conflicted thought. Like a flashlight, yoga can be kept in our pocket to throw light into the mind where ever we are. Darkness cannot stand the light of yoga.

I encourage you to bookmark the Blackstone Yoga Center web site, because it is an extension of our sessions and enables you to experience what is happening in those sessions you don't attend. Many of the questions and answers, the insights, and the helpful tools of yoga are posted there in the section What's New. Also, the Spiritual Journal is a running commentary on what is being discovered daily by this writer in his practice of yoga. There is no arriving in yoga. There is only the unfolding.

So, again, welcome to the present moment, because that is where your practice of yoga begins.

Om4All

Ed Conley

www.blackstoneyogacenter.com

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What is suffering?

What is suffering? It seems we all have it in large or small doses, like a virus that is always present and ready to flare up at any moment. Tragedy, upset, irritation... we can lose everything, even our bodies, at any moment. Like HIV, there is no apparent cure, and we always seem to get suffering by doing what we think will remove suffering.

A huge economic industry exists to reduce our suffering, either through medicine and surgery or some form of entertainment to take our minds off it. We choose our belief systems to escape suffering. We all have it. We all want to get rid of it. So what is it?

Lets get right to the ground from which all the different forms of suffering grow. Suffering is the human mind. You mean this paradigm of thought that man has been given above all animals and plants, which can build tall skyscrapers and can blow them up equally as well, is the root of suffering? What cosmic joke is this?

But, if this were not true, then there would be no human suffering, because we would simple be able not to choose it.

Buddha said, "I teach suffering and the end of suffering."

Christ suffered on the cross to teach us something about suffering in a more dramatic way. Both were pointing to suffering as the only door out of suffering.

But if our minds are the cause of suffering, then, obviously, the mind cannot show us the way out of suffering, because suffering is built into what ever method or belief system the mind creates to escape or remove suffering. The thinker is the thought.

Realizing this fact is to discover the way out of suffering. At some point, in some lifetime, we all come to this realization: "We can only transcend the mind when the mind is seen as the cause of its own discontent." When this blade of light penetrates us through our womb of the mind, we begin to "awake."

The shaft of awareness that breaks through our sleep in the mind stirs our consciousness. We begin to kick the outside walls of our being. "Who is this unknown being kicking on the inside of me? Who am I?" we ask."

This insight, this awakening moment, shakes our mind like an earthquake. We suddenly realize there is more then "me." There is something on the outside of me that is an "I AM," bigger and vaster then we ever thought we were. There is some being on the other side of suffering!

This insight can come from whatever spiritual teaching we are ready for. The words or the vision may come from anywhere, but not until we are ready for the birth. Spiritual teaching, no matter what form it takes, is our midwife. Suffering...is our labor.

We are our own mother giving birth to our Self. We are also our own father, because the shaft of light that awakens us from our sleep is also the same consciousness that is dreaming.

We are the divine child being born this holy instant...that is always now.

What is truth?

We all want the truth. There are trials and studies and committees and experts of all types put in search of the illusive truth. We spend years searching for truth in universities or the ashrams of India and the temples of Tibet. A vast empire of media and newspapers are devoted to finding the truth. Everyone wants the truth!

And, oddly enough, whenever someone reports back that they have found the truth, we are suspicious. There are those that say, "This is the truth." And there are those that say, "I am the truth." For the former, we have our own experts to contest his claim. For the later, we usually say, "Who made him God?"

Why is truth so difficult to uncover? I listened to an interesting statement by Eckhart Tolle this morning (we always listen to his retreat tapes during tea). "You can't take truth home with you because you are the truth." What Tolle is saying is that truth is what is. And what is is this present moment, which can only be perceived with a still mind, an innocent mind, and a mind that is not labeling. We are always in the present moment, whether we like it or not...and most don't like it.

What he is saying is that truth can only be known when we become truth. Truth is not an object to be known. Truth is pure subjectivity, a subject without an object or a thought. Truth is discovered when we stop searching for truth, because truth is never in the future. Truth is always right here now. We are truth, whether we perceive it or not.

When we are totally present, we are what is...and when we are not totally present..we are what is...and that is the truth.