

Oshadhi Spring Newsletter 2011



We are now well into 2011 and I expect the New Year resolutions have faded into the past. Perhaps you intended to meditate more often. With meditation when you begin to practice it can be intermittent and sometimes you can go a long time without doing any but do not use that to chastise yourself with, just start afresh and recommit to doing a daily regular practice. Ten minutes is a good start to build on, sitting quietly following your breath. It is the regularity that pays dividends and once you begin to do so, you will reap the benefits, then the practice is self sustaining. I am here to help you overcome the obstacles, so please ask. I have trod the path, know the pitfalls and the delights.

Meditation does not have to be restricted just to a regular practice, one should look for opportunities in one's daily life to fall still and follow the breath (when waiting, standing in a queue etc.) The reason for following the breath is to give the mind something to focus on. It is ever available and very tangible, really feel it entering and leaving the bottom on the nostrils. If thoughts enter the mind simply ignore them and refocus on the breath. Meditation is all about training the mind to be still and it can only be still if we minimise the mind chatter. You cannot force the mind to be quiet, as we all know too well, the mind loves to think but we can be discerning about what we think and what we focus on. The breath is neutral and we can easily concentrate on it (that does not mean with a furrowed brow) but with an open interest. Be the onlooker of the breath breathing the body, feel the movement of air in the body as it expands and contracts, sit in the wonder of the breath breathing the body – enjoy it.

The more I have focused on the breath the more wonderful it has become. I have just read Swami Rama's Science of Breathing, which sheds more light on it. In the East they have studied the breath as a science but in the West we missed its importance.

About a rainbow

White sunlight actually contains a wide variety of colours, which may be roughly classified as seven colours, namely, red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. Normally, we see the sun in white colour. After rain, there are still some tiny water droplets remained in the air. If there is sunshine a white sunbeam will be reflected and refracted by these tiny droplets. Different colours of light have different refractivity. They will be reflected in slightly different directions inside a water droplet. If we observe the sky from different angles of elevation, we will see different water droplets reflecting out different colours of light. A rainbow is formed

Yoga and Movement

Many of you know I have been inspired by the recent Yoga Anatomy Course I have been attending. It has changed my own practice and the way I teach it, it is all about rediscovering the spring in your body. We are designed to spring, the tendons have a natural elastic recoil which you can make use of. The muscles no longer have to do all the work. It is also about working with gravity, pushing against the ground to move your body. For example when you are in a **forward bend, push the soles of the feet into the floor to raise you up**. The focus is on the soles and the push; your body will float up.

When walking use the natural spring of the foot. Imaging chewing gum stuck to your heel as you walk brings the body upright. Also walk as though you are pushing the floor away behind you with each step. You will be surprised how you spring along in an upright stance. This knowledge is taken into the other asanas to find the spring by exploring the muscles as you go into a posture. It is re-educating the muscles and tendons to respond to the movement. You explore the movement, we can learn from our bodies as you come to learn what muscles moves, where it is attached to etc.

It has been fascinating to learn about the muscles, tendons and bones but a new aspect came in – **fascia (fas-ci-a)**. **It is a film like lining which surrounds every muscle, tendon, bone, cell** etc. It is what the whole body is wrapped in and through. It can be seen under the skin of a chicken. It has an elastic quality which is termed tensegrity, meaning it bounces back into its original shape. **There are planes of fascia that run through the body, front, back and sides and ones which also spiral through.** They often tie in with the Chinese meridians (lung/bladder etc). They are called myofascial meridians which run from the head down through the body to the feet, they have an integrity within their structure, meaning their elastic quality can be enhanced.

The best thing about these myofascial meridians is that if we have lost some of that integrity due to ageing or poor posture, we can improve it again. One example is lower lumbar/back pain which is due to bad postural habits or injury, we can use yoga asanas to bring the body back into alignment and tighten these fascial planes, so that no longer are muscles overcompensating to correct a problem. Some of my students have taken the recommended practices on and there have been positive results i.e. being free from back pain after a long period.

Yoga combined with anatomy gives you greater autonomy to help yourself, you are given the tools to work with and you do the practices with an inner awareness. Seeking to discover the natural spring and tensegrity in your own body, you become informed about how your body works and learn how you can work with it. It empowers you to help yourself, no longer do you just have to expect that you grow old and decline, you can bring that tensegrity back.

A way to explore this is with a breathing practice, becoming acquainted with the superficial frontal meridian plane which runs down from behind the ears, down the side of the neck, across the pectoral muscles on upper chest, down the front of the body through the rectus abdominus then into various thigh and legs muscles down to the feet. If you are in a seated position; breath from the pubic bone up the front of the body, feel and upward movement of the chest and the abdominal muscles tightening upwards. It is not sucking in the abdominals it is about getting the front elastic sheath to tighten up, which ultimately will hold the intestines back in place. So breathing up the front of the body then allowing the breath to roll over the shoulders and down the back, shoulder blades dropping down towards the pelvis (this involves the back myofascial meridian). Watch out that the neck does not pop out. This breath can be practised anywhere, the same when standing but incorporating the legs and feet. A lovely rolling breath up and down the body.

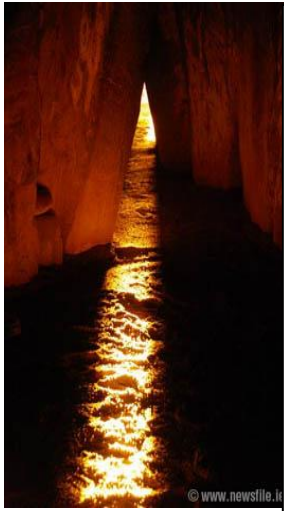
Dates to remember

*Classes restart after Easter week commencing 3rd May 2011
running through to July when we break for the summer
(no meditation on bank holiday Mondays)*

**The Summer Solstice will be held on Tuesday June 21st at 7 p.m.
in the garden as last year. All are welcome.**

**The Winter Solstice provided an opportunity for like minded people to
join together in satsang for a meditation and meditation with sound.**

Winter Solstice- Newgrange was built over 5000 years ago



Above the entrance to the passage at Newgrange there is an opening called a roof-box. Its purpose is to allow sunlight to penetrate the passage and chamber at sunrise around the Winter Solstice. At 8:58am a narrow beam of light penetrates the roof-box and reaches the floor of the chamber, gradually extending to the rear of the passage. As the sun rises higher, the beam widens within the chamber so that the whole room becomes dramatically illuminated. After 17 minutes the sunbeam leaves the chamber and retreats back down the passage.

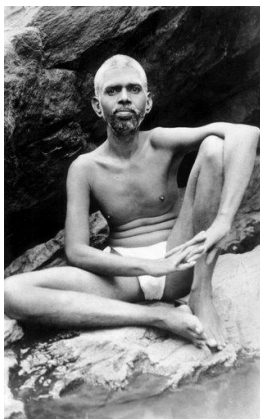
<http://www.knowth.com/winter-solstice.htm>

Student visited Chalice Well and recommends it to visit if you are near
<http://www.chalicewell.org.uk/index.cfm/glastonbury/About.Home>



The Chalice Well is among the best known and most loved holy wells in Britain. Many legends are attributed to its chalybeate waters, which flow ceaselessly at a steady rate and temperature that never varies. Not least among these is that they represent the blood of Christ miraculously springing forth from the ground when Joseph of Arimathea buried or washed the cup used at the Last

Supper. For others the waters are acknowledged as the essence of life, the gift from Mother Earth to sustain its living forms and so a continuous spring like Chalice Well is a direct expression of an unbounded life force. To be at the well head, to drink the water and absorb the atmosphere in the gardens can be a truly inspirational experience. As a Companion recently wrote to us: "While there are many reasons why I have returned to Chalice Well over the years, the one constant theme is peace; a deep inward peace that can carry me through the tides of life. I know of no other place that provides this so perfectly and so deeply as Chalice Well." To safeguard and protect this place the Chalice Well Trust was established in 1959 by Wellesley Tudor Pole to enable visitors and pilgrims to receive inspiration and refreshment from the waters and gardens.



Ramana Maharshi
Abide as the Self

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNXM4Sq-GIA&feature=related>

The Universe likes to create, to manifest, to experience the play of form. That's one movement. And you can see it in yourself, at some level. There is something else in humans, you can only really see in yourself, an inner phenomenon. The Universe wants not only to experience that manifested life, it also wants to experience peace and something that is not touched by the continuously fluctuating forms. It wants to know itself deeply, directly, in its essence. That really is the root of spirituality. The Universe not only wants the outward movement, but it also wants the inward – the return movement to the One. Every human being also embodies these two movements. It seems that you are torn sometimes between the outward movement into form, and the inward return movement to the Source where it all started. The Source that was never really lost, it is always there because it is timeless, and it is within you. You feel drawn back to that, and that is the pull toward spirituality, peace, Stillness.



I have been reading Swami Rama's book 'Living with the Himalayan Masters'. An inspirational read. He is one of our nearest living masters having died in 1996, he was a teacher of my teacher.

See website <http://www.swamij.com/swami-rama.htm> and there are plenty of informative videos on youtube

Chapter from Book – Sowing Seeds for spiritual growth

Empowerment

It is our birthright to be spiritual. We are all spiritual beings, the problem lies is not recognising ourselves as such. It is so easy to identify with our body and our minds, yet deep down we 'know' ourselves to have a spiritual dimension. At the back of our mind is the query 'there must be more to life than this?' more often than not unspoken. It is easy to ignore this question and pretend it does not exist, assuming it is for people with religious beliefs. There are moments when we naturally touch the spiritual, 'getting lost in space' whilst doing something, without intention we have entered the spiritual space and only to become aware of it when we come out.

In my first book I wanted to write for people who have touched that space and wondered what it was. They enjoyed its freedom and joy without a cause, which was its very essence. It is for people who are tired of the 'rat race' and all the stress it brings with it. Many people come to me who are stressed out with their work environment. I cannot change it directly but indirectly I can teach them how to deal with it better by opening up their spiritual side, to become the witness of habitual patterns that add to a busy stressful work schedule. Even when habits are not helpful one can still persist with them, thinking there is no alternative. Stress builds like building bricks, one activity on top of the other builds high until it topples. People come to me when it has toppled and becomes unbearable.

We have to empower ourselves in our working life and in our everyday life. It is not helpful to feel a victim of circumstance, with a 'why me' attitude. Blaming a situation or other people is not useful, it dis-empowers you and you start to feel helpless that you cannot alter the situation. You need to step back from the situation that is causing stress and view it objectively from a witness point of view. No blaming, judging, saying who is right or who is wrong. Accept what you see in front of your eyes without judgement, it is as it is, objectively see what you can do about it. What steps can you realistically take, it might not necessarily mean a big change, smaller steps can be just as effective.

This comes more to the fore front in those suffering with chronic ongoing diseases and complaints, where pain or lethargy or both can be the order of the day. Continual illness and pain wear you down, so that you feel totally dis-empowered and unable to anything but suffer enduring it the best way you can. I started a self healing class, as I felt able to offer certain

spiritual tools to tackle illness. I would love to be able to wave a magic wand and make illness disappear but that I cannot do. What I can do is help people to empower themselves by using the spiritual tools I offer. It also takes a leap of faith that there is something beyond the physical body and mind. Soon there opens up the dimension of silence which you can connect through by space. In that silence when you relax deeply you can sense your connection to the Divine Consciousness, you are supported in your suffering. With practice you can disassociate from your physical body and pain by returning to rest in its Divine Grace. For those brave enough you ask 'what you can learn from my illness', 'what it is here to teach me'. I have a lovely lady who had ongoing chronic problems, because of this she is no longer able to come to the meditation class, she is very debilitated by her illnesses but remains positive. She told me her meditation has greatly improved and that meditation has allowed her to cope better with the illness and its constraints it imposes. She is able to take what life throws at her in her stride and keeps things in perspective. I watch as she truly grows into a spiritual being and all by her own efforts not to let the illness overpower her. She regularly practices, which is necessary if you want to connect to the Divine consciousness. There is not magic wand.

In my box of tools that I offer there is relaxation, breathing, meditation, yoga, chi kung and reiki. It is up to the receiver of these tools to use them or not. I cannot do it for them; all I can do is give the tools. I encourage initially trying them, then using them regularly and seeing the benefits for themselves. The power is then in their hands. Too often our power is handed over to doctors and surgeons, we are at their mercy. We do not question their decisions in the belief that they know best. They might do but it is in their frame of working and they are reluctant to look outside of it. Alternative therapies can seem overwhelming, wondering which one to choose and can involve a lot of trial and error before a successful one might be found. With my skin complaint of over twenty years I tried so many alternative therapies, so many in fact that I felt I could write a book on them. Similar experiences have been had with my close friends, one with ME and another multiple sclerosis. I hear tales of it all the time, when you are desperate you are willing to give anything a go. What remains out of the question is that tackling it from a spiritual aspect might help. To understand that you are a spiritual being and working from the inside outwards. Besides improving your health and wellbeing it encourages a spiritual aspect to open up.

Stress and unease in the body can lead to dis-ease in the body then a full blown illness. It starts out of one's awareness in the subtle realm then settles in the body normally a specific point then builds into a physical complaint that you become fully aware of. Through inward focus you come to know where you are holding tension in the body and you can do something about it with breathing practices, focused awareness and gentle exercise. It encourages the body to optimise its health, you work with it not against it. The body is always trying to reach a healthy equilibrium; it is what it was designed to do. The body is an incredible machine performing a multitude of different functions automatically.

I was very fortunate to visit 'The Bodies' exhibition where human bodies are preserved in motion stances to show the muscles, ligaments and skeleton working. You can see all the digestive tract, nervous system, circulatory systems etc., it was absolutely amazing to actually see inside a human body for the first time. I was struck by the beauty of the human machine and its sacredness. The rooms were in semi darkness and filled with rapt attention of the visitors. It felt like a sacred space where we could worship our body. The body is so beautiful, in one particular room there were just the blood vessels and arteries of the organs all suspended in mid air. It was jaw dropping to understand the thousands of functions a body carries out without our awareness. If we want to smile there are sensors in each of the muscle cells, which receive the electrical/chemical transmission from the brain and carry out the action. Cabinet after cabinet I was enthralled I felt so fortunate to be able to see this exhibition for within two hours I learnt so much about the human body which no book or teacher could have taught you so well. It inspired me to do an on line anatomy course to learn more about our body. We tend not to regard the body as a temple for our Being, just seeing it instead as a means to get us around. A temple needs to be kept clean, sweep regularly, our

bodies similarly need to detox to be kept clean. You get a sense of this when over eating or drinking, your body is not happy. Eating the wrong type of foods, overindulgence in cakes and fried food. So diet is important in maintaining your sacred space, you need to take care of it for it has to last you a long time.

A healthy diet and exercise help to optimise your wellbeing but you also need to clear out on an emotional level, rid yourself of negative thinking and emotions. You have to prepare yourself to clear out on every level to make room for the spiritual to flow in. The Patanjali Yoga Sutras outline what steps are necessary to take along this route. These are teachings from thousands of years ago and are just as workable for the spiritual aspirant today as they were when first written (prior to that they were orally transmitted). In short succinct verses it tells of practises which can transform oneself, gain mastery over mind/emotions and overcome obstacles, it is very practical and relevant. The practice of Yoga is about the body, mind and spirit being united; understanding this to be so is part of the spiritual journey. Yoga as a physical exercise is just the tip of the iceberg you need to look underneath to see what is really there, when you see what is there you desire to swim deeper to its oceanic depths. With this book I want to give you the swimming lesson of how to swim deeper into it – the Divine Consciousness.

Empowerment means freeing yourself from the past and all its connotations, to be present in the body in the here and now, opening up to your spiritual dimension. It is about letting life flow through you like a river, if boulders get in the way, you flow around them. In fact you are that river, do not build dams to block its path, remove them. Or if dams are there, such as illness, gain the strength to flow by them or sweep them away. The Divine Grace is at your side, it never leaves you it is always there for support, never doubt it.

There is the poem called Footsteps, which is often read at funerals, it talks about a man walking along his beach of life and he sees two sets of footsteps in the sand, one was his the other the Lord's, he noticed at the most difficult and saddest times in his life there was only one set of footsteps. He questioned the Lord wondering why he had forsaken him in his time of need; the Lord's reply was "during your times of trial and suffering, when you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you". The Divine Consciousness carries you.

Connecting to the Divine Grace realises your own power and potential, you are not this small individual just reacting to life around you. You are the Divine Consciousness personified. Connecting to this Divine Essence broadens your horizons, start to think outside the box, see all the habits, perceptions, ideas that keep you inside that box. Choose to drop its constraints be open to new discoveries as to what is outside.



*With love, peace, blessings
and springtime wishes
Vanessa*