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## YOGA OFF THE MAT: Darshan in the Streets

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### Zen Starbucks

You can find enlightenment at any time and in any place. Tonight it zapped me at the Starbucks at the corner of State and Main in Doylestown, PA. There I sprawled in a comfy chair across a low table from my friend, Deev (short for Diva) as we sipped favorite drinks; coffee for her, chai for me. Deev is a work of art, colorful, inspiration and imagination incarnate. Her new project is gathering creative souls together to help her paint a "1989 dark grey Buick Sky Hawk into an art car, covered with suns and stars and swirls of galaxies; and on both sides, the words 'dream' 'believe' 'achieve' 'inspire.' Imagine the conversation that branched out from there. We were talking about relationships and she shared a bit of well-meaning, but rather flawed (in my humble opinion) wisdom that came from her mother, who told her that your partner is responsible for 90% of your happiness and unhappiness. I countered with the thought that if you allow someone else to be the source of happiness or unhappiness, then you are always at the mercy of someone else's whims and actions.

Then she asked me what I thought I could count on for certain in my life. I said, "Only two things: that I was born and that someday I will die. Every person in our lives is on loan to us and every experience passes. Change is the only inevitability. That can be frightening or exhilarating. These days, I'm leaning toward exhilaration."

From there, we meandered into one of the most challenging spiritual lessons I often encounter. She referred to the concept of emptying out, totally letting go of it all to allow for the new and healthy to enter our lives. The beautifully simple example she gave was of changing the water in her cat's dish. She doesn't just top off the water. She empties the used water out. She doesn't just add new water. She washes the dish. Even then, she takes it a step further by wiping it dry to remove any remaining residue. And from that point, she doesn't just add tap water. For her cat's well-being, she replaces it with distilled water.

This entire process may only take a few minutes but it is powerfully symbolic of the care that we can also put into our own clearing process. In order to fully let go, I know I need to trust implicitly that I can live with the in-between, not knowing, in the meantime, free-fall stage. Terrifying at times, it embodies my spiritual amnesia, because inevitably the answer, the re-fill, the manna-festation (as my friend Kim calls it) arrives even more gloriously than I could have imagined. I forget at times, that all is well and in Divine order.

I am there now in my life, as I let go daily of all I thought I knew to be true. Surrendering over

and over, my old beliefs, expectations, understandings, perceptions of the people in my life, just letting be. I would call it a cosmic colonic; a complete and total psycho-spiritual cleanse. Sometimes the cleanse comes in the form of tears that accompanied a painful revelation, [as it did while I was driving to meet Deev after work UNCLEAR]. Sometimes it arrives as a side-splitting laugh in recognition of an inside joke shared with a co-worker. Mostly it is there through the process of life, in the ebb and flow of relationships and interactions. Being willing to give it all up to allow for something even better. Let's make a Divine deal. Door number one or curtain number two? It's anybody's guess. Either way, you win.

Wishing you satori....

## **Darshan**

Recently, I had an experience that I had anticipated for weeks and a few that I had not expected as a result. After receiving several emails and fliers, I ventured into Philadelphia to be in the presence of an esteemed teacher from India called Amma, which in the Telugu language (one of many spoken in India), means Divine Mother. She is also known by her given name Sri Karunamayi and is considered an incarnation of the Divine feminine emanation. Having heard from friends that they experienced a sense of unconditional love while with her, I felt called to have a first-hand understanding of her presence. I knew that magic would accompany those who attended the gathering. (Her website, for more info is [www.karunamayi.org](http://www.karunamayi.org) )

I arrived early, had dinner at an Indian restaurant near International House where the evening's Darshan was to be held. After I was comfortably fed, I walked a block or so to where my car was parked, to feed the meter. A man stood a few feet from my car and asked me how far it was to Broad Street. At the time, we were near the corner of 37<sup>th</sup> and Chestnut Streets, so he had at least 23 blocks to go. His ultimate destination was a shelter in a town a good distance away. He was homeless and early on in the conversation informed me that he had AIDS, but that I shouldn't worry because I wouldn't catch it by simply speaking with him. I assured him that I knew that and had no worries. He had come to Philadelphia to get food and work in a restaurant called The White Dog Café, owned by Judy Wick; a woman well known for her compassion and social activism. He wasn't looking forward to walking the miles it would take to arrive at the shelter. I felt moved to ask him if he knew what bus fare would cost. He informed me that it was \$5.75. Immediately I reached into my wallet and handed him the fare and a few dollars more, which was pretty much what I had left. I felt no fear or hesitation. He smiled, thanked me and said, "At least you're from this planet. A police officer that I asked for directions actually covered his mouth when he spoke with me." Off he headed down Chestnut Street to catch his bus. That interaction had been natural and easy compared to what awaited me.

I walked into International House, which was slowly beginning to fill with people eagerly awaiting Amma's presentation. I stood by a table bearing incense, cards, books, tapes and jewelry. As I was surveying the wares, a man stood next to me. From a few feet away, I caught the aroma of stale sweat, as if he and his clothing had not been touched by soap for quite a while. I politely took a few steps away. He casually followed me. A few minutes later, I walked into the auditorium and sat next to a friend and co-worker whom I met there. It seems that she and I were about to have a shared experience that we had spoken about at work today. The

man entered and sat down, across the aisle, one row in front of me, still in olfactory range. I rolled my eyes depreciatively and thought, "How am I going to enjoy this experience?" I'm not proud of these thoughts, but I am recording them as they arose.

As Amma spoke, her words were about love, compassion, service and seeing the Divine in all beings. My judgments about this man began to dissolve like sugar in water. I could still smell the strong aroma emanating from him, but instead of disdain, I felt a sense of acceptance. I meditated throughout much of the three hours there, focusing as much attention as I could on breathing and being.

After the presentation, she offered darshan, which translates as 'vision,' 'visit,' 'meeting,' 'sight,' 'seeing' or 'beholding.' It's a blessing given by a spiritual teacher. As people lined up to receive it with a touch on the third eye, accompanied with a substance called vibhutti or ash that is observed to have healing properties, guess who was standing right behind me? My teacher for the evening. The most amazing thing was that I could no longer smell an unpleasant scent, only the delightful fragrance of incense.

I had been called on to live Divine Mother's example and moved through the lesson with less grace than I had hoped for, but more humility than I could have imagined. For that I am grateful.

Om Shanti....

## **Lila**

Today, I had the wondrous experience of 'lila' (pronounced lee-la) which in the Hindu tradition is translated as 'play.' One of my favorite play-buddies is my friend Peter. He and I have been teaching together for nearly four years. Hard to imagine that a 47 year old and a 51 year old can earn part of our living by teaching kids in grown-up suits how to just have fun. By most people's observation, neither of us looks our age. Could be because on the inside, we just aren't. Like all of you, we are ageless. A few months ago, we were invited to offer our workshop entitled "Happiness Is Just The Icing, Joy Is The Cake" at a conference for early childhood educators. Peter happens to fit that category through his Music Experience For Young Children, which he takes to day care centers and pre-schools – singing, dancing, drumming and reading with little ones. He is also a singer-songwriter who performs in concert. I joke with him that his groupies are usually under four years old and under four feet tall. That's what keeps this father of four, whose oldest is almost 26, looking youthful. Not sure if I can attribute my youthful appearance to good genes or if it is true that attitude IS everything.

I eagerly looked forward to the opportunity to see just how free and open these teachers who work with munchkins ranging from ages two to four could be. I was delighted to discover that this afternoon.

But first I had to fulfill my more 'serious' obligation at my 'full time salary and benefits gig' as a social worker in a psychiatric hospital. I went in this morning, handled details of discharge for a few patients and did a couple's counseling session before heading out the door to the presentation. I checked the address, thought I knew where I was going, only to find that I wasn't

as certain as I initially imagined. I kept driving in circles, a bit concerned about being late. I breathed, asked the AGS (angelic guidance system) and a gentleman at the local post office who may indeed have been an angel himself. Back on track, I pulled into the parking lot, hyperventilating a bit as I hauled the bag of handouts and props toward the building. It wasn't too terribly heavy, because some of the items were feathers which I give out at all of my workshops as a reminder to participants to lighten up, telling them that it can be used "to tickle your fancy, or whatever else you have in mind." I was halted in my tracks at the sight of another reminder to lighten up and just play. It was an iridescently glowing green plastic child with the word 'SLOW' written across him. Deep breath, smile and pause before entering the building.

For two hours, sixteen participants laughed, cried, shared, danced, sang, listened to and supported each other through pure play. We invited them at the onset to fully engage themselves in the process, telling them that life is like the hokey pokey. It's more fun if you put your whole self in. The afternoon flowed effortlessly, as does anything that you love as much as we love doing this work. Row-row-row your boat, side by side with Ella Fitzgerald belting out: "It don't mean a thing if you ain't got that swing." as Peter encouraged us to trying 'scatting' along with her. He taught us a silly participatory song that involved "thumbs up, elbows back, feet apart, knees together, bottoms up, tongues out and eyes closed." Got it? He will be challenging 800 or so participants at a larger conference later this month to join in. Heck, it could be the start of a revolution.

When was the last time you really allowed yourself to engage in 'lila,' not in the presence of a chronological child? So many of us have restrictions on when play is acceptable and in whose company. It's the recriminating voice in our heads; as my friend Michael Buck refers to it, the 'drunken monkey,' the inner critic that wags its finger at us, reminding us not be frivolous or waste time. Play is as nourishing for our souls as food is for our bodies. Without it, we shrivel up inside and age rapidly on the outside.

Most of the seniors I know are phenomenal role models for vibrance because they haven't forgotten how to play. My parents and Peter's mom are among them. My friends Gary and Denny who lead Spirit Dance gatherings are in that ageless fold. My Aunt Kate who died when I was in college was an amazing role model for enlightened lila. My last clear memory of her was on New Year's Day circa 1980. Friends and I had gone to her apartment to warm up after nearly freezing our butts off watching the Mummer's Parade. When we walked in, there was this eighty-something year old woman, in skirt, blouse and stocking feet doing the Mummers strut in front of the TV as she enjoyed the parade.

Who are your role models that entice you to play? Wouldn't it be cool to be that for someone else? What would it take for you to step out of your comfort zones and just dive in heart-first?

My goal for myself is to leave the drunken monkey at home, munching on bananas, as I dance out into the world, 'true colors shining through' as sings Cindy Lauper, the sometimes kool-aid hair colored poster child of a 'girl just wantin' to have fun'.

## The Two Made One

*"What was sundered and undone shall be whole - the two made one."*□

Got to experience a treat last night in the form of one of my favorite movies that fascinated me when it first came out 13 years ago and with each viewing, I gather more spiritual seeds. "The Dark Crystal" from the phantasmagorical imagination of muppeteer Jim Henson, relates the Hero's Journey that Joseph Campbell spoke of, the balance of dark and light, good and evil, and the union that exists in all life, regardless of appearance.

The evening started with an irresistible invitation from my friend Alan who is a renaissance man; veterinarian, poet and energy healer in one loveable package. He asked a few friends to come over for dinner; homemade soup, salad and crusty bread, finished off after the movie with pumpkin pie from Merrymeade Farms that we picked up on the way over to his out in the woods home (if you're from this area, you know how good their stuff is ). Pat, Glenda, Julia, Alan and I settled down in his high ceilinged living room, eclectically decorated with angels, animal images, a bird kite soaring down from the rafters, candles and crystals. The perfect setting to watch a movie with mystical content.

It begins in an otherworldly setting, populated primarily by two races of beings; the beady-eyed-evil bird-of-prey-meets-lizard Skeksis and the slow moving, om chanting, music playing, labyrinth drawing Mystics. To look at them, you would think they have nothing in common. The Skeksis are vain, wearing layers of ornamentation, vividly colored robes and jewelry over their scrawny bodies. Their castle, dark and foreboding, is decorated in rich tapestries, as if in an attempt to cover over the depth of the darkness that permeates the structure. The Mystics and their environment are earth toned, muted, simple. Their wisdom is basic. The scene is set as the leader of the Skeksis (the emperor) and the leader of the Mystics (the master) lie dying simultaneously. The other 9 bird-lizard dudes wait with baited breath for his passing, because each of them has his eye on the throne. The other 9 Mystics wait with a sense of sadness at the passing of their master; the wisest among them. There is one other who holds vigil with them; an elfin creature named Jen. His race, the Gelflings was all but wiped out by the Skeksis, because according to prophecy, a Gelfling would obliterate their rule. A thousand years earlier, these two seemingly opposite races appeared when the dark crystal was split off and a piece (called 'the shard') disappeared. A Gelfling was to reunite this piece of the whole, thus bringing peace to the fragmented world.

Before the master dies, he instructs Jen that he is the one named in the prophecy and that he alone can save their world. When the master, in sparkling light, moves on to the next realm, Jen begins his journey to find the shard and place it back into the crystal; heart pounding in fear, but taking the steps necessary to complete his mission.

His first meeting is with Aughra; an eyeball removing, toothless, grey haired wild woman who dispenses Yoda-like wisdom. Played by Frank Oz, she even sounds like the green skinned Jedi Master. Jen talks to her about needing to prevent the end of existence as they know it, by repairing the crystal. Her response? "End, begin, all the same. Big change. Sometimes good. Sometimes bad." How zen is that?

Shortly afterward, he encounters Kira, another Gelfling. Each thought that they were the last of their kind but to their delight, discovered their soul mate. When their hands touch, they found they were "dreamfasting", kind of like a Vulcan mind-meld of Star Trek note. They are sharing

memories of the death of their families and the nurturing they received from those who raised them. While Jen was raised by the Mystics, Kira was cared for by the Podlings, a clan of sweet faced little beings whose life force energy is drained to feed the Skeksis.

In the end, puzzle pieces are put together, and there is a realization that darkness and light need each other to exist and that within even the brightest star lies a shadow side. There is a recognition as A Course In Miracles teaches, that "what is not love is always fear and nothing else."

When we look at the fragmented pieces of our own lives and the ways in which we deny love because fear is so much more familiar, we miss out on the beauty that exists all around us. When the two become one, we recognize our own wholeness and can reflect that truth in every encounter.

**Rev. Edie Weinstein-Moser** is a writer, speaker, interfaith minister, clown and reiki master. Her work is in being a way-shower, encouraging people to 'be their bliss'.

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