



Ahimsa: acknowledging our inner goodness ~ David Life

Date: Nov 5, 2005

Focus: Ahimsa

Setting: Workshop Class

Place: Jivamukti Yoga, NY

Thanks everyone for coming, I appreciate it. I appreciate those of you who've been here consistently all week; and those of you who have jobs, who've only been able to come today. I thought, maybe I could give a little recap of the things Sharon and I have discussed in the workshops through the week, a very brief recap.

As most all of you know, the focus of this month is non-violence -- in all this confusion, difficulty, painfulness and truth. When we started off the week, I talked a little bit about how if we look in the world around us and we examine the task of making a reality out of ethical standards being a guideline for living, and we look at all the wars and the suffering that is going on (the lying, and stealing, and cheating, and hurting each other) it can be very daunting, thinking, "*What can I possibly do, against these great forces that act in the world that seem to keep in place the violent atmosphere that we all live in and share?*" The answer really is very simple, you do it one person at a time, starting with yourself. That you embody the peacefulness that you wish to see in the world around you, and you do that in simple ways like being kinder to the ones that are closest to us, in extending that kindness into the community that we live in, the people that we live around, in all the different ways that we know how we could be kind to them, and extend our compassion to them. So rather than tackling the big problems of the world like war, by trying to end the war, by next Wednesday, it's a much more practical approach to declare a truce with your little wars that you kind of uphold in your life, and to see that as really making a major contribution to the world. Setting a good example by your own actions, and inspiring others to act equally compassionately and non-violently.

Then we sort of investigated the sources of violence within each one of us. What it is that causes us to react with violence. And Sharon spoke very eloquently on several occasions about how the kleshas, which we chanted in the beginning of class, are the root cause of our tendency to lash out in violence. Starting with excessive attachment to personality, name and form, as being separate from the other names and forms we see around us, because that separation allows the violence. If wherever you looked you saw yourself, no matter where you looked, how could you be violent? How could you lash out at yourself? But when you see another when you look out, another whose suffering is separate from your suffering, it's easier to either consciously or unconsciously impose upon them a condition that we might find very difficult and filled with suffering, either directly or indirectly by our actions. I'm not talking just about people; I'm talking about everything. I'm talking about trees, for God sakes, you know? If you see it as other, it's easy to chop it down. That doesn't affect me. But if you see it as a living, breathing manifestation of the divine light, with life-giving nourishment pulsing through its veins, and a desire to reach up to the light in the sky, it's not quite really different at all from you, you know? Then, oh my God, how could I take an ax and just cut it down with a chainsaw, or whatever it is? I use tree as an example because it's probably real easy for us to see it as different than us, but not quite so easy to see it as the same as us. But that also extends to the animals, and to other people. We create all kinds of reasons to set ourselves apart. And that's all based on not knowing who we really are, you see, it's a misunderstanding called avidya.



Also, I just wanted to mention raga and dvesha. That means things we really like, and things we really don't like; and our tendency to want to get more of what we like, and get rid of what we don't like. That tendency in our lives, which is considered quite normal, and actually it is normal for people who don't dig deeper into these things. For us who are making this examination under the light of non-harming, we realize that a lot of the harming is based on anger at not getting what we deserve, or anger at having what we deserve taken away from us that causes us to lash out. Jealousy about what others have and we don't have, and so forth and so on. I think you get the point. So, rooting out these underlying causes for the violence that we ourselves perpetuate is a really important activity for all of us. The good news is that we have all the practices available to us that will allow us to make this examination.

Did you notice during the breathing exercise in the beginning, in some of the positions it was easier for you to breathe consistently than in others? What caused that? Isn't it raga and dvesa? Some you liked, and some you didn't like. Isn't that at the root of it? I mean, we didn't do hard things -- they were all relatively simple. Just standing there, or just hanging down, or just sitting in between your feet, or doing downward facing dog. I wasn't asking you to jump up in the air, flip over three times and land on your head! I could understand your breathing being affected by that. And even more to the point, when your breathing was difficult in one you think about it, you think well, *"I didn't really like it."* You start to understand how noticing the breath lets you know about what's going on in your mind that is affecting your ability to act in the world with clarity, insight, freedom, and bliss. It's not there if your mantra is, *"I hate this one, I don't like it. I liked the last one, but I don't like this one."* Right? That should become more and more apparent with you in an asana practice. You see your likes and dislikes with a little bit of detachment. No longer is it *my* dislike or *my* like, it's just, *"Oh there is, I see there's this feeling in me, I'm attracted to this one, and there's a feeling in me I'm attracted to that one, that's interesting."* And you let it go. And then you act out of freedom, rather than out of that desire for something to end and something else to begin. So you just keep each new moment in an asana class, each new breath, as an opportunity to get at those sort of root causes in yourself; which brings up all kinds of emotional responses, leads often times for us to impose our will on others, or to act out violently, or even just to think badly about someone else.

Which is another place that we moved our discussion during the week the tendency of spiritual people to judge others harshly. I can't tell you how many times I've heard this: *"You know, I started my spiritual journey about a year ago, and my partner just won't get on board, and it's really become a problem in our lives and I think we have to separate. Finally, after 20 years of living with this person, I got spiritual and I realized it was all their fault."* Or, *"You know what, I was out the other night and I was walking by a bar and you wouldn't guess who I saw there, **stone drunk!** And they were smoking **cigarettes!** Do you believe it, and they come to yoga. They don't get it!"* (laughter)

That's a poison and guess where it started...right inside our little poison cauldron up here [*points to head*], and it's infecting all of our cells in our body, and then we try to, like, worry about SARS? Worry about this one, you know! You hear it and you go, *"Yeah, I can't believe it. I saw them the other day, too, and they were drinking **coffee!**"* So, you know, we can use any situation to set ourselves infinitely apart from others, and as soon as you do that, it's really easy to be unkind. You're justified in it. You're conscious now, and they're *obviously* not.



I'm trying to get some practical things that we can do being kind to others close to us, and also being aware of how we're positioning ourselves, as separate from others, even as spiritual people compared to everybody else, and that how we can poison ourselves, how that could lead to thoughts of ill will, blame. How we have access to all of these emotions through the physical practice of asana, meditation, chanting. You feel this in your body. There is an actual physiological response that goes on. You manufacture the chemistry of harmfulness. No matter what form it comes out in. And you're sitting in the driver's seat the whole time. You experience that in an asana practice that shows you, you know, ok the blame thing. Blame is really so easy. You know? Maybe you've seen this, maybe you've done it walking down the street, right? (*Mimes walking down the street and tripping then angrily looks at the ground as if to blame it for his clumsiness. Laughter*) It's a curb! It's at the edge of every street, you know? [*Sharon interjects, "It's the Mayor's fault!"*] Yeah, right 'Where's the City when you need 'em?' (*jokes*)

So, the blame thing is really easy, and you'll see it in your asana practice, once again. You'll stumble a little bit. So whose fault is it? Obviously, it's the mat, I have the wrong mat. Obviously it's that teacher who's giving me things that are beyond my ability to deal with. Obviously it's my parents' fault, because they didn't let me join gymnastics when I was little, and on, and on... And it's the government's fault, that's a good one, right. We can blame everything on them. All my unhappiness, my low bank account, my indebtedness, you know, my troubled relationship, it's the government's fault. It's the President's fault. So the blame thing once again, this is a poison that we generate ourselves according to the thoughts that we choose to attach importance to. And you can root that out in an asana practice too, first and foremost by being aware of when it's rising up in you. Because most people just really don't even see it happening.

The other night I was watching a television documentary about a cattle farmer, somewhere out west, on PBS. It was mainly focused on his struggle, and how difficult it was to make a living being a rancher, and it was like about a bad year, where he wasn't gonna be able to sell his cows for as much as he could the year before. It goes through his work and stuff, and at the culmination, he's rounding up all the yearlings, putting them in trailers and sending them off to an auction, and all the moms are standing there also, but the moms stay behind; they get re-impregnated for next year's crop. But all the moms were standing there, it was such a poignant scene, and the rancher guy is standing there with some extended family, some helpers, some boys, there were some on horses, some standing there, and they're all staring at about a hundred momma cows, all like this: "waaa-waaaa." You know, screaming.

And the rancher, he looks back at the camera and he goes, "*You know, they'll stand there for three days and bawl for their babies. Finally they get the message, duh, and they wander back out into the pasture.*" Like completely, on one level, you know he's seeing it, and he must see it every year, so the input is going in, but somehow he's hardened to it, and doesn't perceive it as a poignant situation, maybe, where there's some suffering being endured. It sort of doesn't make sense in a certain way. So there are many ways in which we become hardened as people who are interested in a more conscious lifestyle, we become hardened in that, too, and we lose our compassion for others struggling with the same. You know, it's not a different set of problems for every person, it's the same basic problems, and they're dealing with it the way they can deal with it. But we tend -- me, us, all of us -- we forget what our real project is, which is just rooting out the causes.



Oh, I wanted to say this: when you're doing something bad, don't you always have the feeling that somebody's watching? Do you? Like, even just a little bit, like isn't that part of what colors it as something bad? Right? I would say, what is that manifesting? It's a belief in a higher power, from my point of view. *(jokes)* The people in my neighborhood would say, *"It ain't no higher power, I'm afraid of the police!"* Right? That's a higher power. What do the police represent? In the best of all situations, of course they represent trying to keep people from stealing, and lying, and cheating, and killing each other, right? Isn't that what a belief in a higher power is all about? So, I just wanted to say that we should acknowledge that's inside of us, and not deny it, and let it have more of a profound effect on us, and you should know that you are always being watched over.

You are always being watched over, and that's different. It's not watched in judgment, it's not a judging goddess I'm talking about. This is a goddess of love, who loves you, who gave you this opportunity to make it, to evolve your immortal soul. And she's right there to support you the whole time. So talk to her. Let her speak to you. Don't turn around when you see that no one is standing there, in the form of a cop, that then it's ok to go ahead. But turn around when you see the wall, you see her, and you say, *"Hi, Ma. Ok, I'm not doing it!"* *(laughter)* One of our teachers said that you should do your asana practice as if you were at a photo shoot with God, and she's the photographer.

So that's a good idea, once again, allowing it to come into your consciousness. Let it affect your actions even more. In other words, be receptive, hear it. Don't just look superficially around, and if you don't see a badge, it's ok to go ahead, or whatever form it takes for you. But hear it as your own inner voice, the part of you that really knows how to act non-violently.

Ok? That's a little review of things we've talked about during the week. Sharon and I both hope that you feel empowered by this month's focus on ahimsa. That you wouldn't feel that you come to Jivamukti and you get a finger shaking at you, how bad you are, how terrible you've done. That you feel there's a possibility here, *"I could do that, I could be better, starting right away I can be better with the person I live with. Or with my cat, or my dog."* Whatever it is, if you live alone and you walk out in your hallway and you see your neighbor's garbage bag sitting there, how often do you grab it and carry it down with you? Have you *ever*? Why not? *(mocks)* *"It's not my garbage."* Really? Who are you? *(laughter)* Ok, go back to your mats, and we'll do some asana.

