

There's a certain feeling that you get, a level of energy, a height of soaring bliss that imbues your very being when you, see, smell or taste something that is beyond the familiar. It's that feeling when you hear something you know to be completely true but have never before been able to articulate. This was the exact sensation I experienced during the weekend long workshop led by Dr K. L. Shankaranarayana Jois (also known as Acharya, or great teacher) and his wife Vijaya at Moksha Yoga Center's Riverwest Studio August 2-5.

The husband and wife are from Mysore, India and are by lineage Brahmins, which means they are of a high birth and have been steeped in the traditions of Yoga from a very early age. Both hold degrees in Yoga and Sanskrit and are deeply schooled in various other Indian arts and sciences. It is their goal to share the knowledge of such subjects with others, and their primary way of doing so is through the charitable trust, Bharti Yoga Dhama, that they founded in Mysore. Students at Moksha, though, were lucky enough to sample the vast and profound knowledge of Acharya and Vijaya.

Each of the five lectures began with a song of beauty and empowerment which was chanted by Vijaya in order to inspire Acharya's forthcoming speech. The workshop was based on the 8 Limbs of Yoga, but Acharya had a unique way of tunneling his own path through the philosophical jungle of Yoga. Each session was more of an itinerary on how to live life well: a practical review of how to act, when to act, how to understand your own actions, and when to know if those actions are worthy of your true capacity as a human being.

On Thursday Acharya started at the beginning of beginnings with the 3 Gunas: the three basic energies that comprise our world, our actions and our presence as beings on this planet. These energies, or qualities, are sattva, rajas and tamas. Each being has a natural tendency toward one particular quality, and that person's mindset and desires correlate with that quality. Traditionally, one who is sattvic is naturally calm, one who is rajasic is naturally energetic, while one who is tamasic is often sweet and settled. Acharya, went beyond the traditional in describing sattva as the natural tendency to ascend or move upwards, rajas as the nature to move horizontally, and tamas as the inclination to move downward.

I thought of those moments when you can't help but sit vertically, your attention captured and captivated by a central idea - the way I felt during Acharya's lectures. These I realized are moments of sattvic awareness that are innate to human beings. Conversely, when our animal instincts kick in and we are so full of energy that we desperately feel the need to expend through physical activity, we are experiencing rajas. In moments such as these, we tend, both literally and metaphorically, to move and think on a horizontal plain as animals do. Finally, when we are tired and unable to sit up straight or keep our eyes focused and open, we are experiencing tamas.

Though it appears that there is a hierarchy in terms of these qualities, Acharya was careful to point out that all of the qualities must be in balance for a being to be able to meditate and thus to find Samadhi, or bliss. It was shocking to think of tamas as being present even during meditation. Acharya explained though that without tamas we wouldn't be able to ignore outside distractions while meditating. Similarly, rajas is what provokes breath and life, and without it we would not be alive to be able to meditate. Sattva, of course, is the very energy which provokes meditation. Thus, without the interconnectivity of all three gunas we would never even have the opportunity to reach Samadhi.

Acharya further clarified that this bliss is an innate state of being, something to be found within the self, not something one must go looking for. Metaphorically, Acharya likened happiness to blood – it is already inside of us and though when we bleed we often blame an external force (ex: the knife that cut

us), the blood is truly coming from within. Just as with happiness we may be apt to attribute the source of such happiness to an event or a person, the happiness is actually coming from inside of ourselves.

What Acharya stressed most of all is that no matter what one's dominant energetic composition is, it is possible for *all* beings to be happy and to find peace. It is may be easier for those of a sattvic disposition to attain samadhi because they are, by their nature, more apt to meditate and thus are more quickly able to understand that life is Maya, or an illusion that must be transcended. For those who find meditation difficult, Acharya suggested beginning a practice in stillness by meditating with open eyes. Revolutionary to me was the idea that one should meditate on the space that an object occupies rather than on the physical object itself.

More important than what one meditates on, though, is that a person must expect nothing from the act of meditating. Once desire and expectation take root, discontent is cultivated. In the same way that bad things often happen to good people and vice versa, the results of an action do not often match the initial action in the way that they are expected to. There is no explanation, beyond our karma, which can justify why a certain event has unfolded in the way that it has, and we cannot spend our lives willing the world to be other than it is.

One major hindrance in achieving Samadhi is that even after making the conscious decision to follow the higher path of Yoga, people often *desire* or expect to achieve realization. However, one cannot sit to contemplate realization with the goal of attaining realization; instead, she must contemplate only with devotion and intention toward her action. As Acharya explains it, "Yoga is a conditioning that leads to an unconditioned condition." We condition our minds to be at peace in order to one day no longer need to put forth such effort: we are only then afforded the possibility of returning to the natural sattvic state of Samadhi.

Acharya was extremely accessible throughout the entirety of the workshop, and he engaged the attention of all the students present with power and ease. There was no judgment in his tone, and instead of appearing as some untouchable Brahmin (though he really is a Brahmin who we couldn't touch) he spoke of the universality of human beings and the innate power of all living beings. Acharya left us with the empowered notion that every yogi is important, and a single yogi can make all the difference in the world. None of us should cease to act or be active in the world – not even to enter a perpetual state of meditation or to constantly be practicing Yoga – it is our duty as human beings to act, serve and devote ourselves to whatever it is that our dharma may be.