

Life Of A Yogi Teacher Training 200 hour June 21-30, 2007



I write this with all due respect to Dharma, Eva, all of the Teachers, Staff and fellow trainees present at the LOAY Teacher Training in June 2007. The following comments, observations and impressions are my own.

I had downloaded and filled out the application for the June Teacher Training in January. I had never met Dharma or been to the Center. I was looking for a way to increase my knowledge of yoga and on the practical side, a way to enhance my resume. After reading almost everything on Dharma's website, I decided that this was the place for me to study. I had visited a few other Studio/Centers and none of them resonated with me. I decided to attend a Maha Sadhana to get a taste of his teaching. Very soon after entering the Dharma Yoga Center I felt the connection. This connection was not intellectual; it was experienced by the body in the same way that you sense heat, cold, hunger or love. After 5 minutes into the Maha Sadhana, I made up my mind to submit the completed application that I had brought that night. This was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

It's now Thursday, June 21st. I arrived at the Center before 7:00 a.m. It's the first day of school and there are about 30 students present. We all seem a little anxious and are looking for a friendly face and instructions. We are asked to gather at one end of the floor and are led through pranayama and meditation. We are then instructed to briefly state our name, where we are from and why we are here. I state that I would like to share what I learn with my granddaughter. There are students from Viet Nam, Israel, Norway, Japan, Australia, South Africa, Brazil and other exotic places like Brooklyn and New Jersey. After meeting each other, we are divided into two large groups: A and B. Next we are divided into small groups of 6 or 7 and assigned two teachers as mentors. Our group receives Bernadette and Chandra Om as our mentors and teachers. Each small group finds a space and we begin teaching and participating in Dharma's Level I series. Immediately following each class, the student teacher receives feedback from the other students and then from the mentors. These exchanges seem to reveal more about the person giving feedback than the instructor.

Each group is assigned Karma yoga duties to help support the teacher training and operation of the Center. Our small group is assigned to cleaning the Center at night in preparation for the next day. I was asked to keep the bathroom clean.

We take our first classes that are mixed with the public; a Level I at 10:00 and a Level IV at 12:00 with Dharma. Dharma says to copy the teacher in all ways: see what they are seeing, feel what they are feeling. Keep copying and then it becomes reality.

I received wonderful instruction and assists during the Level IV class. I was able to move into Firefly for the first time. This was the beginning of many firsts in my practice during the training.

This morning we were introduced to Chandra Om. She moved softly and beautifully. When I happened to meet her face to face for the first time it was if she was looking right into my being. Her energy entered the space between my eyebrows and she

was reading my heart, mind and spirit. This was a little frightening at first but she is so gentle that I relax and let go of any defenses. I'm trying to be receptive to all that is offered. I'm trying to let go of judgments for myself and others. Chandra spoke to all of us about becoming a real yogi. This means constantly, 24/7. We must work at it in everything.

We are asked to observe Mouna (silence) whenever possible. No idle chatting. The more I practiced Mouna, the more clearly I observed my thoughts. Chandra directed us to look beyond name and form. We are all working out our Karma. Everything is a direct result of our previous actions.

It's our second day, Friday, and here are some of the lessons we received today: We learned about collective consciousness. Just as animals in a group move together, we must try, with pure effort, to move together. If you break away because of a lack of courage, you break the group consciousness. You have a duty to carry your burden as an obligation to the group. A teacher is someone who transmits their being. To become worthy of transmitting to anyone, we should copy the Guru. How would he act, sit or eat? To reduce or eliminate the ego do Everything as an offering to the Lord. Never put anyone out of your heart. Don't condone their behavior but keep the feeling of love. Yogis don't disturb anyone...let them be as they are and send your energy from a distance. A clean, sattvic diet will calm the mind. Follow a vegetarian diet. Get clean in action and thought.

Tonight we have a Purification and Psychic Development class followed by Kirtan at 8:30. I fumble through the Hanuman Chalisa until after 10:00 and now it's time for Karma yoga.

It's early on Saturday morning and I have tears in my eyes as Chandra looks at me. I feel the pure love coming from her and the tears come without warning. I try to pay attention to her words but I have to look away to stay focused.

There are whisperings about a special event today: Krishna Das will be with us this afternoon! Around 2 p.m. we greet Krishna Das and some of his Ever changing Kosmic Kirtan Posse. We spent the next 3 hours in Kirtan, story telling and discussion. He told us several personal stories that were humorous, inspirational and emotional. He told us of how and when he first met Dharma years ago. He quietly stated that we could all study for a thousand years and have but a fraction of the knowledge that Dharma possesses. Krishna Das told a very moving story of his relationship with his Guru, Neem Karoli Baba. He detailed his experiences before, during and after his Guru's death. Here's what he said about why he continues to perform kirtan today: "I can't do anything else! I don't know anything. It saves my life every day. I sing a little bit and people seem to feel better."

I sat in the back of the room and cried for most of the 3 hours that he was there. At times there were large waves of emotion and my chest heaved with the release. Other times, the tears rolled down my face as I sat quietly. This was due to many factors: hours of devotional asana, pranayama, purification mantras, the Kirtan, the emergence of a strong sense of love, Krishna Das' stories of devotion about the human struggle and acceptance of our Dharma; plus the collective energy from the rest of those in attendance. It was a wonderful, transformational experience.

I received a very strong message towards the end of our time with Krishna Das: This big love is for me too! (Not my words...it's exactly how the message came to me). I was no longer just an observer. This force, this love, is for me to have and share with everyone.

Sunday morning follows our normal routine. Meditation, pranayama, teaching methodology and asana practice. In the afternoon, around 3:00, we gather outside for a field trip to Brighton Beach. Dharma will meet us there. I feel uneasy waiting for

everyone to gather on the street. There is a street fair in full swing. Vendors are everywhere with all types of people strolling, eating, talking loudly, music blasting, etc. I feel overwhelmed by the sensory overload and want to go back upstairs and stay in the Center, but Dharma is waiting. I feel a little better as we start to move through the fair and find our way to the train station.

I struggle to make some small talk when spoken to during the ride to the beach. I don't want to be rude, but I feel that as we chat about worldly events we begin to lose the energy we had gathered over the last few days in the Center. As we leave the train our group struggles to move together. We finally arrive at the beach and are greeted by Dharma, Eva, Veronica and Dr. Jeffrey. We roll our mats out in the sand and Dharma leads us through his Level II series. As I move through the series I begin to feel better and more at ease. We soon become a popular attraction on the beach. I can hear hooting, cursing, mocking, whistling and a complete narrative by onlookers. Several people try to copy our practice in earnest. I soon hear their comments shift to comments about the difficulty of the poses. The narrative fades or I begin to tune it out as Dharma calls out the postures. After asana, we line up two by two, and are led by Dharma on a walking meditation. We cast our gaze downward and tried to move slowly and in unison. We eventually stop and turned to face the ocean at the end of the walk. I thought we were at least a half mile down the beach or more. We had gone a few hundred feet! We returned to the start and shared some food before returning to the Center.

Monday morning meditation and pranayama are a welcome return to our schedule. We break into our small groups to teach. Chandra directs me to teach this class. I try my best to honor Dharma, Chandra and Bernadette who are observing. I lose my place a few times but am given gentle reminders. What an honor to teach a class at Dharma Mittra Yoga Center! I receive positive feedback from my group: "It seemed that you knew just what we needed." And "I heard Dharma's inflection a few times in your instructions." This was all because I did as instructed and copied the Guru to the best of my ability. I tried to use Dharma's words, his timing and his energy. I tried to remove myself and let Dharma flow through me.

After my class, Chandra asked everyone, "What happened at the beach yesterday?" Everyone agreed that our energy seemed weak and scattered this morning. Chandra had all of us lay down and then guided us through a wonderful meditation. This helped us regain our focus and concentration. The Level IV class that followed was, as always, intense.

During our afternoons we study anatomy, body mapping or Ayurveda with Dr. Jeffrey. His patience and sense of humor are appreciated by all. He shares his knowledge in terms we can understand and remember. He also shares great stories of his 20 plus years with Dharma.

It's Tuesday, Day 6 of our training. The daily schedule remains the same but there are changes everywhere. I've been primarily monitoring the changes in myself but today I notice the visible changes in others. There are some who were loud and talkative but are now quiet and reflective. There are a few who seem to be moving only on the surface of things. Their comments and conversations were the same as the first day we met. I felt sorry for them. There was something wonderful and powerful happening all around them but they were not receiving it. I was reminded of the verse spoken many times at the end of asana practice, "Be receptive to the grace of God".

It's Wednesday and each day seems to passing faster. I'm reminded of something Dharma stated at the beginning of our training, "After a few days you will become very comfortable. You will want to stay." As always, he is right.

I'm midway through the noon, Level IV class, and my body is exhausted. In plank position, I struggle to hold myself up. As Andrei Ram glides by my mat he

whispers, “If you need it, it is okay to ask for Supreme help.” I follow his advice and offer my feeble Hanuman posture to God. I ask for help and it comes immediately. With my left leg extended forward and my hands on the mat for support, I lift my chest and my face toward the sky. At that moment, with eyes closed, I can see my leg and foot extended. There is such a bright and warm light coming at me that I feel as though I am jumping into the Sun. I am consumed by the warmth and light as it hits me and I feel my chest open. Untold stress and emotional baggage lay burned and scattered behind me as I continue to move forward in my leap. I really don’t remember changing postures but I was now very much aware of the increasing amount of muscular tension gathering between my eyebrows. It was quickly becoming very intense and commanding my full attention. Then the tension quickly released. I really don’t remember the rest of the practice. When the class ended, my body felt light and there was a strong, physical sensation of openness in my face and head. I seemed to be glowing with energy. As I passed Kim, she stated with a smile, “You look like you’re out there.” I think I replied, “I’m gone.”

The remainder of Thursday, Friday and most of Saturday blended together. It wasn’t until we gathered to say our goodbyes on Saturday that I began to believe that the 10 days were over. We each took turns addressing the group with Dharma, Eva and all the teachers in attendance. I struggled to find words that would express how I felt about everyone I’d met and all of my experiences during the past 10 days. Tears came again and I couldn’t find the words. I once again copied Dharma. I stood with my hands in prayer position and conveyed my love to all through the Spirit.

In Reverence to Sri Dharma Mittra,
Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti.
By Jeff Seymour

