

Reflection from Below

Om echoing through space, and beneath this pulsing source of light, my body, waiting.

“Here I am,” I thought, “Damn.” However firmly I tried to concentrate, I could not lose my awareness of myself, sitting there on the floor, amid dozens of other *sadhakas*, at Sri Dharma Mittra’s shala (Dharma Yoga Center) in New York City. “Be patient,” I whispered silently, “and be gentle with yourself.” I opened my eyes and the booming, buzzing world came flooding into my senses with an irrepressible force. Heat ran up my spine, and I felt myself tumbling in the vibratory surf. I wanted to swim back to where I had been, but I had no idea where I was. The colors and sounds were swirling around me in an incoherent mess. The currents soon began to subside, and I felt myself settling back into my skin. The lights, colors, shapes and sounds of the shala came back into view and I regained my sense of place. Only a second or two had passed. I saw faces all around me teeming with life. Everyone seemed more vivid, more alive than before, and the room seemed to be drenched with light. I followed the rays to their source and there, at the center of the moon shaped circle, was Sri Dharma Mittra, beaming me with his youthful and knowing smile.

As with so many other *sadhakas*, I was first attracted to the traditional yogic teachings of Sri Dharma Mittra because I long to enter the blissful state of consciousness known as *samadhi*. I have never encountered another person who exudes such bliss and wisdom as Sri Dharma. Indeed, he is the most vivid example of *samadhi* that I have ever been blessed to meet. So I was greatly honored to meet the opportunity to travel to New York City and study his yogic techniques last June during a 200hr DharmaYoga Life of a Yogi Immersion program. What did I learn from Sri Dharma Mittra about *samadhi*?

In the *Yoga Sutras*, Patanjali describes the eight-limbed practice of yoga, and he places *samadhi* as the eighth or highest limb. This can lend the unhappy impression that one does not reach even the lowest stage of *samadhi* until one has achieved full mastery of the other seven limbs, hence, the ethical restrictions and observances, (*yama* and *niyama*), physical postures (*asana*), breath control (*pranayama*), withdrawal from the senses (*pratyahara*), sustained concentration (*dharana*) and meditation (*dhyana*). In consequence, many aspirants think of *samadhi* as an ultimate and distant ideal, something toward which yoga practice is theoretically oriented, but something that only rare masters of yoga like Dharma Mittra ever get to taste. Many yogis practice diligently anyway, reaping the amazing health benefits of yoga, and being satisfied just with that. This was my attitude toward *samadhi* when I first went to the Dharma Yoga New York center.

Being around Sri Dharma Mittra and his senior students woke me up to the possibility of experiencing *samadhi* right now. They helped me to understand that *samadhi* is not just a distant ideal but a state of mind that comes in many shades, and even I can have a taste of *samadhi*...if only I can get myself out of the way. The yogic techniques taught by Sri Dharma Mittra are profoundly useful in this regard. They are designed to help us overcome the illusions of ordinary ego consciousness, so that we can get ourselves out of the way and start having a more direct experience of life. This is how we begin to attain the bliss of *samadhi*, by stepping out from behind the veil of our egos and engaging directly with life itself, unconcerned by our attachments. The bliss of *samadhi* is not the bliss of sensual pleasure, but the deeper bliss of accepting the full reality of the present moment and savoring whatever it brings to us, rain or shine, undisturbed by threat or opportunity, gain or deprivation. To cultivate such acceptance of the world, we must learn to distance ourselves from our grasping, suffering egos (while maintaining compassion for them!) and realize the egoless consciousness that connects us all. That, in my humble opinion, is what *samadhi* is all about.

Of course, since there are shades of *samadhi*, we must practice with great devotion and determination to move closer toward the goal of establishing ourselves firmly in *samadhi*. The level of *samadhi* that Sri Dharma has attained, for example, is the culmination of a rare life of intense and devoted yoga practice. Dharma Mittra graces us with his loving wisdom by sharing the ancient techniques of yoga with us, and through his tireless life of yogic service to humanity, he gives us a profound and inspiring example of what these practices can help us achieve. I learned many things during my time at the New York Dharma Center, but nothing was more instructive than Sri Dharma’s quiet and unassuming example. Through everything that he does, he shows us what *samadhi* can be. *Samadhi* is bliss, wisdom and Dharma.

Om Thank You, Ty Landrum, LOAY 200, June 2009

