

On the Eve of the New Year...Reflections from Peentz

“Beginning well or beginning poorly, what is important is simply to begin, but the ability to make a good beginning is also an art form. Beginning well involves a clearing away of the crass, the irrelevant and the complicated to find the beautiful, often hidden lineaments of the essential and the necessary.” (Excerpt from David Whyte’s essay “Beginning” found in his book Consolations.)

I am writing on the cusp of a New Year, a new beginning. This is a kind of “threshold”; the moment when we step from what was into what will be. It is a precious time for reflection and pause and a time to consider where we have been and where we are going; who we have been and who we are becoming. John O’Donohue speaks of this as a sacred moment, one to be ritualized, as we often do on New Year’s Eve. He speaks of significance of thresholds in his book, To Bless the Space Between Us: “Ask yourself, at which threshold am I now standing? At this time in my life, what am I leaving? Where am I about to enter? ...A threshold is not a simple boundary; it is a frontier that divided two different territories, rhythms, and atmospheres. Indeed, it is a lovely testimony to the fullness and integrity of an experience or a stage of life that it intensifies toward the end into a real frontier that cannot be crossed without the heart being passionately engaged and woken up. At this threshold a great complexity of emotion comes alive: confusion, fear, excitement, sadness, hope. This is one of the reasons such vital crossings were always clothed in ritual....To acknowledge and cross a new threshold is always a challenge. It demands courage and also a sense of trust in whatever is emerging.”

As the eve of the New Year is upon us, I too am pausing to reflect on what has been and what awaits us, as individuals and as a world community. As I reflect on this past year, much has unfolded in ways I could never have imagined at last year’s threshold. In many ways, the world seems changed beyond recognition and many hopes have been thwarted. Yet amidst all the chaos and upheaval there have also been moments of profound beauty...acts of tenderness and kindness, times when we have been welcomed into the loving arms of another, moments when the best virtues of humanity (such as kindness, love, compassion and generosity of spirit) have prevailed.

As yoga practitioners, we understand that the truth of the material world is to change. The yoga sutras speak of the “trigunas”, the qualities of nature which are always in flux and differing ratios. These are the qualities of Tamas (stability and inertia), Rajas (mobility and movement), Sattva (luminosity, clarity and balance). Our yoga practices help to maximize Sattva, returning us to an awareness of our inherent wholeness and Oneness with the world.

As we move through these waves of change that take us from darkness to light and back again from light to darkness, we pause to remember and recognize ourselves as both human and divine beings, two parts of a whole. Our practices help us to remember the divine spark of light contained within our human form and to honor it through our respectful and loving relationships with others. It is our responsibility and honor to choose wisely how we respond to life’s ever changing parade of events. From this place of awareness, I have chosen to cross the threshold into the New Year by pondering again the meaning of the very first yoga sutras of Patanjali.

1.2 Atha Yoganusasanam

“With prayers for divine blessings, now begins an exposition of the sacred art of yoga.” BKS Iyengar

“With humility and open heart and mind, we embrace the sacred study of yoga”. Nichela Joy Devi

BKS Iyengar often said “Be fresh”! He admonished us to not do yesterday’s pose, but to see what is coming NOW, today, in this present moment. It is a reminder to be fully present and to bring our divine humanness wholeheartedly to this moment in time.

1.2 Yoga citta vrtti nirodha

“Yoga is the uniting of consciousness in the heart”. Nichela Joy Devi

“Yoga is the cessation of movements in the consciousness”. BKS Iyengar

When we pause and return to an awareness of ourselves as Divine beings, we are in the unitive state of yoga. Yoga is the practice of remembering the Self within and recognizing this divine light as it exists in all other creatures in the world.

1.3 Tada Drastuh Svarupe Avasthanam

“United in the heart, consciousness is steadied; then we abide in our true nature...joy” Nichela Joy Devi

“Then the Seer dwells in his own true splendor”. BKS Iyengar

When we are able to remember and recognize this divinity, this Self or soul within each of us, we begin to live more and more from that place. We choose to act from the virtues of humanity which join and unite us all. We choose to celebrate our individual uniqueness within a cultural world community and we work to diminish those things that would dismantle, divide and separate us from each other. In choosing to act from a place of Sattva (wholeness and clarity), light-giving qualities flow into the world through our words, actions and presence.

May we each pause and reflect on how we choose to cross the threshold into this New Year.

As my New Year’s gift to you, I share with you the poetry of Mary Oliver, who inspires me daily:

When I am Among the Trees

***When I am among the trees,
Especially the willows and the honey locust,
Equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
They give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.
I am so distant from the hope of myself,
In which I have goodness, and discernment,***

*And never hurry through the world
But walk slowly, and bow often.*

*Around me the trees stir in their leaves
And call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.*

*And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
Into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
With light, and to shine."*

(Mary Oliver, from her book Thirst)

Blessings to all of you! I look forward to seeing you in the New Year, wherever we shall meet!

With love,

Peentz