

Rikhia

There was a time in my life when there was so much unresolved emotional trauma that I sought to dampen the pain of being alive. I don't know if you have ever been through this or indeed if you still regularly seek anaesthetic experiences? For me, this manifested in some serious addictive behaviour with alcohol and narcotics to begin with, the drive towards truth moving me out of this addiction I fell into addictive behaviour with food, using food as a source of emotional comfort. It was at this time that I had a fall and another accident that hurt my back so badly I could not walk without agonising pain. This was when I encountered Yoga. Since I could no longer work I was also in dire economic straits. The Yoga was initially intuitive, movements that helped alleviate the pain. Then a good friend of mine showed me a Yoga book, in which all the shapes I had been making with my body and more were there. Fascinated, I learned more, initially from the book and then from a few teachers.

One day one of my regular teachers was absent and instead there was a woman dressed in orange teaching, she gave me a phone number so I could check some other teachings.

This was how I encountered a teacher who became a very special and influential part of my life, a teacher who still holds my reverence and respect for her presence, her person and her powerful teaching. This is Swami Pragyamurtiji of the South London Satyananda Yoga Centre. The cleansing practices she taught me that facilitated a change in relationship with food and my own intestinal tract; the asanas that allowed greater life-energy flow in the physical structure; these in conjunction with pranayama that encouraged deeper purity and flow of prana; the wonderful and magical practice of Yoga Nidra, the deep relaxation and transformation practice of the 'sleep of the Yogi'; Yogic concentration practices (dharana) and meditations from the Bihar school such as Antar Mouna, the practice of Inner Silence; all these helped lead me step by step to greater health and wellbeing, clarity and focus of mind and a movement from

pain and distress to greater ease and relaxation in my own existence.

Two years later I travelled to Northern India to the small town of Rikhia in the company of some of the Satyananda (Bihar school) Swamis. The journey an adventure in itself, I experienced here the presence of Paramahamsaji (an honorific title meaning beloved supreme swan) Satyananda, and engaged in Satsang, being in the presence of the teacher, sitting with truth is what it literally means.

The experience in Rikhia seemed to lead to new focus and new direction and purpose. Returning to a cold grey UK in February having lost my partner, my home and my income was however tough. Then one night in my dream I was in N.India and there was a Tata bus and in the bus was Satyananda, I turned towards him and the bus dissolved. I sat down with Satyananda, he turned into a radiant shining child laughing joyously! I also laughed and laughed and woke up laughing. Nothing seemed a problem anymore. A home arrived, work arrived, happiness seemed easily and softly present.

Now as a full time Yoga teacher, I honour these teachers and the teachings, teachings that continue to influence and transform many peoples lives.

So it is that this year I once again travelled to Rikhia now in the state of Jharkand. Jharkand and Bihar are two of the poorest states in India, with rich landlords and poor peasants, high illiteracy, high child mortality and grinding poverty. Satyananda has passed the mantle of the Yoga school and it's global work over to his successor Paramahansa Niranjananda. He is leading the school whose main base is currently at Munghyr into being a Yogic university.

Satyananda moved to Rikhia following a dream and lived with a few followers in tents, the aim was for him to deepen his sadhana (spiritual practice). Satyananda became the first practitioner in centuries to complete a demanding sadhana called the panchagni (five fires) and is considered in India as a Saint. Indian people will go on pilgrimage for days to be in his presence and have darshan of this great man..

Rikhia was to become a space for the deepening and development of the Paramahansa tradition.

Circumstances however change and there is now a thriving and growing ashrama being built around Satyananda, who on occasions still gives darshan.

There are no asana classes here, no meditations, no Yoga Nidras. There are strict rules, early rising and plenty of beautiful cold spring water to wash with in the cold Jharkand winter mornings. The food is simple yet magnificent, highly tasty, very simple sattvic diet in abundance. Accomodation is as simple as is possible and there is minimal electricity.

The practices here are service to the teacher, Karma Yoga and Bhakti, devotional singing. For Karma yoga you might find yourself sweeping paths, cutting vegetables, chopping wood or distributing offerings to the local community.

The Tapavin kutir is the site of the dividing and collating of the bundles of food, clothing, blankets, tools, seeds and whatever else can be given. Satyanada's organisation works closely with the headmen of the local Santali tribes to ascertain local need and the bundles of 'prasad' are

given in celebration to the locals, all to the drumming and singing honouring 'Ma' the great mother, source of all.

Giving is a big part of the programme here and it includes bicycles, cows, rickshaws, sewing machines, agricultural or carpentry tools. The basic principle is satisfying both immediate need and providing resources and tools for longer term sustainability. Satyananda's programmes have also supplied water and radically enhanced the local education system, girls education is now existent!

I am in no position to judge either the effectiveness of this programme or how well it meets local needs, what little I have seen is highly inspirational and indicates what can be done with the will and the resources. Satyananda is the reason people give and he passes it on.

Satyananda radiates with light, shimmers in a golden aura. He speaks mostly in Hindi nowadays, is a powerful speaker with a deep sense of humour and a great and welcoming love of children. Laughter is a theme in his speeches. We can learn simply by feeling the resonance of someone who has completed such a journey, hearing and understanding the words is good, yet resonance is our

main means of perception in the deeper world of energy and realisation of truth.

It is good Yoga to honour the sources of our practices and teachings, many people in the west use practices such as Yoga Nidra and do not even acknowledge the roots of the teaching let alone offer respect. Acknowledgement contributes to the deep recognition of the Great Chain of Being, it also frees us from the egocentricity of being a perceived source of these practices and also allows others to access deeper into source.

Satyananda does sterling work and certainly for me, I experience a sense of substantial gratitude for the way these teachings offer benefit to so many lives, amongst these my own.

Gratitude and devotion are the central theme of the second practice engaged in here, devotional singing.

Devotional singing praises the absolute in form, in the form of the divine feminine or the divine masculine. All the names chanted and sung are in truth the names of our own heart and the practices of emotional Yoga open up this heart space, moves us into deeper connection with

ourselves and all the manifested energies of the multiverse.

There are westerners here who have become full sanyassins and whose life is now totally involved with this work. This is not everyones path, it is not mine. Yet to experience the sanyass life style, to engage in focused service to the work of the teacher with no reward, and to sing in gratitude and praise of the absolute manifest. This is a profound experience. To be within the energy field of a Saint is totally profound. Maybe this journey is one you might wish to experience, maybe it calls you?

You can find out more about courses and possible engagement with the Bihar School and the Sanyass courses they run from the Satyananda Yoga Centre, 70 Thurleigh Rd, Clapham South, London. Also

www.syclondon.org

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1417 words.