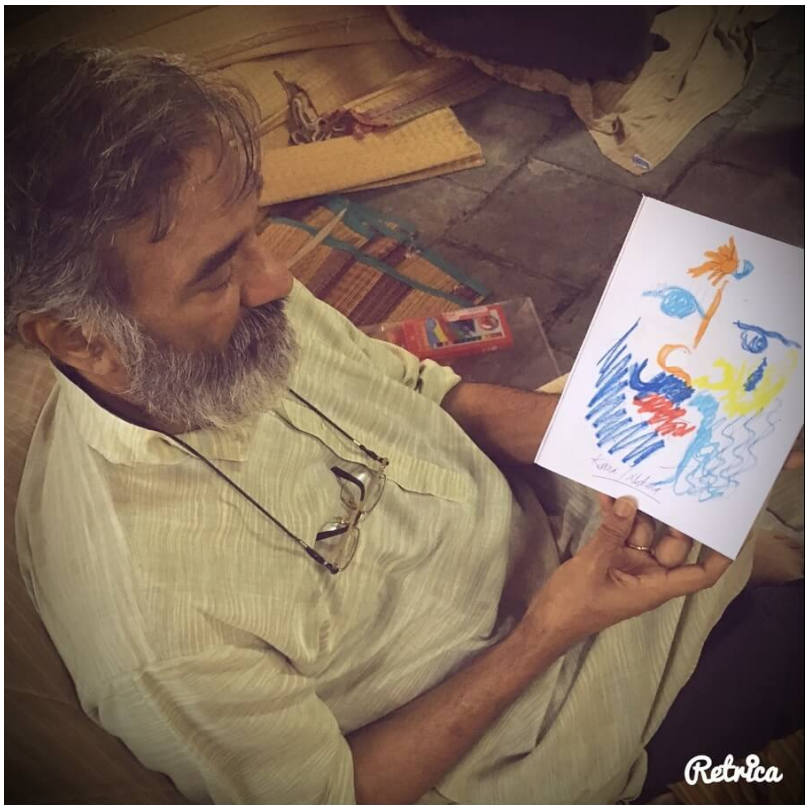
Living a life filled with dharma and joyousness



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Yogacharya Krishnamcharya's definition of a mature person is "one who can act in the world with the appropriate *rasa* (please read the rest of the paper to comprehend this untranslatable word) and return to *śānta* (serenity)*".* This definition defines his approach to Yoga Sādhana. It has fundamentally altered the way I have understood and taught Yoga Sādhana. Let me share with you why.

Ahiṃsā* and *dhyāna

One cannot progress to the practice of *dhyāna* (sustained pure attention)as described in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali without diminishing the power of conditioning. A person responding to the world from a conditioned mind not only experiences *duḥkha* (suffering), they are the

slaves of feelings, thoughts and actions that are beyond their choice. Also, the energy of conditioning predisposes a person to act in ways that do not conform to the notion of *ahiṃsā* (abstaining from harming others and oneself). *Ahiṃsā* forms the basis of all ethical behaviour. The most compelling assertion of Yogacharya Krishnamcharya is that while one can see whether a yogi practices *ahiṃsā* with ease and grace, one cannot see whether his *dhyāna* is deep! The mark of a "Yogi" is therefore, one who spontaneously feels, thinks and acts with *ahiṃsā.* One must be anchored in śānta (serenity) to get to this state of being. One leads a *dhārmic* (deeply ethical and enlivening) life, which is also replete with *rasa* i.e., a life that is joyous and full.

Understanding *rasa*

To get a sense of the word *rasa* one must bring together in one's mind a few meanings of the word: *rasa* means sap, it means taste, it implies emotion. I find it useful to hold the notion of the subtle experience of the flow of *prāṇa* (life energy) with its flavours to apperiate *rasa*. The idea of qualia might be similar to *rasa*. However, to understand *rasa* one must comprehend the Indian cosmology. Consciousness is referred to as Citi Shakti in Yoga and is the changeless "knower" and the ground of all Being. All manifest phenomena are the manifestations of an ever-changing *Prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* comprises four levels namely, the superficial level where distinct and differentiated objects exist, the undifferentiated cloud-like deeper level of interconnectedness, a profound level of oneness of existence and an even more subtle completely quiescent level which is replete with manifestation potential. *Prakṛti* is constantly evolving from the quiescent substratum to the differentiated phenomenon and back in a cyclical movement. Human beings are one form of *Prakṛti* and share all these levels of existence with all of manifestation. *Rasa* is the most subtle human experience. It co-arises with the transformation of *Prakṛti* from the substratum. Most of us experience the gross movement of one's self as the rasa goes through the cloudlike state and transforms into the differentiated form of the person. Through the practice of yoga (in its holistic form) one becomes more and more sensitive and subtle and becomes aware of the arising of *rasa*. There are eight *rasa-s*– Love- *śṛṅgāra;* Humour– *hāsya;* Compassion- *karuṇā*; Anger- *roudra*; Courage– *vīra:* Fear- *bhayānaka*; Aversion- *bībhatsā;* Wonderment– *adbhuta.* To experience and savor *rasa* one must abide in *śānta*- inner stillness and silence. Abhinava Gupta includes this as the ninth *rasa.* One experiences *śānta* when one is located at the profound level of self that is silent and still.

Rasa and the conditioned mind

However, one's "normal" experience of emotions is not a streamlined flow of the arousal of *rasa*. As the *prāṇa* flows through one's subconscious it gets coloured and disturbed by

one’s conditioned structures of feeling, thinking and doing. The theory of dance says there are about 250 ways in which the *rasa* finally gets expressed! This is due to various admixtures of *rasa* as well as the habitual patterns that are embedded in one through socialization and acculturation. While we assume that we are triggered by external events and expressions we perceive, *rasa* theory says it is a complex phenomenon where profoundly subtle processes and bodily responses combine to create emotion. The more one becomes aware of *rasa*, the more one becomes choiceful, the more authentic and the more powerful and clear one’s expression and communication. Learning meditative awareness through Yoga Sādhana is essential to comprehend *rasa*.

***Yoga Sādhana*– the practices**

What practices will help one stay anchored in *śānta* for the most of one’s day? The path lies in appreciating beauty. Yoga theory states “Divine manifestation is replete with order and beauty. When a person touches order and beauty within, they experience the Divine”. The Upanishads also state that every part of manifestation is a reflection of Brahman. Refining oneself through the pursuit of art is called the sixfold way: In words through poetry, in sound through music, in space through architecture, in form through sculpture, in the body through dance and in the mind through mathematics.

Contemplative art

The practice of contemplation through art can start anywhere and is not an invitation to take special classes. In fact, the stylized practice often makes experiencing the simplicity of these six possible ways more difficult! Just take a sheet of A3 size white paper, have a box of pastels (avoid pencils and pens that make clear lines) and allow a free exploration of colour and form as you let yourself meander through your feelings. Let’s say you spent a nice evening walk in the park with your friend. Don’t depict anything specific, take a few moments and savour the experience. You are not going to show the “piece of art” to anyone. You are discovering how to touch a subtle level of your mind beyond words. You can do this with unpleasant experiences too. Don’t analyze the work. Just let yourself become introspective as you reflect yourself to yourself off the paper. Flow with what emerges. Often, the space created by this process will enable insights to bubble up. I have seen people who do this after an hour of *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* practice followed by a few minutes of sitting quietly experiencing catharsis, remembering both beautiful and hurtful experiences lying buried deep in one’s unconscious. When this is followed by lying down and breathing slowly with awareness into one’s body (*śavasāna*), they experience a profound unknotting of *prāṇic* pathways and spontaneous joy.

Drawing is the most accessible, but working with the body in free-flowing dance with music or nature sounds enables contemplation. Taking a chance cue from a bird song and singing along, or writing poetry are practices that have the same profound possibility. Working with clay is especially therapeutic. The key is to let the outer flow happen and take you inward simultaneously. It is especially helpful to practice *āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* preceding the work and *śavasāna* after one finishes. One will find that this practice spills over, slowly into everyday activities.

Rasa **in everyday worship**

All the Hindu celebrations *(pūjā)* are replete with simple gestures done mindfully. Like lighting a lamp, making very simple food and offering it to one's favourite deity, circumambulating a temple, or the home altar, decorating the deity with flowers and drawing mandalas with coloured powder *(raṅgavallī)* or any everyday action with mindfulness and as an offering to one's deity are examples of using art in contemplative ways. Hindu temples are works of art architected with great precision using ratios and proportions. Every aspect of the temple is measured using one measuring rod (and proportionate divisions in it). The meausring rodwill be carved out in a prominent place as one enters the temple.

Finding one's measure is meditation. Living in a way that every action, gesture and word is proportional to one's unique inner rhythm is *dharmic* and joyous.