

Staying Grounded in Chaos

By JJ Gormley-Etchells

There's no longer any doubt that a never-ending array of technological gadgets (E-mail, Personal Digital Assistants, etc., etc.) has accelerated the pace of our lives, supposedly to simplify things. Indeed, these gadgets do simplify matters, but I fear that because they offer us more choices, we end up taking on so much that our lives become increasingly chaotic. The toll this chaos takes is manifested in increased stress levels and dour attitudes.

Perhaps because everyone else partakes in this accelerated pace of life, it seems to take longer to get things done. Getting an electrician to come to your house to perform a simple task requires extraordinary effort simply to find someone and then coordinate the effort. Getting a car repaired these days—even a minor dent—takes twice the time it used to accomplish, or so it would seem. Stress levels go up, as do the costs of getting anything done (for example, procuring a rental car during your lengthy car repair).

People I meet in the supermarket, at the gas station, in the bank, invariably seem on edge, less communicative, and in the case of people in the service industry, almost annoyed by the presence of a customer. Everyone seems to be racing

around, which seems to contribute perversely to making me feel more compelled to rush around, too.

Not surprisingly, the faster pace of life has invaded yoga studios. Fifteen years ago, I ran a relatively small yoga studio in Arlington, VA, and ran it for the most part on my own. Fewer students of course meant a lighter and simpler amount of office work. The teacher-training program then was comparatively trivial to today's program. Then, I simply met with a handful of eager students one weekend a month and taught them as much as I could. Now, I have over 60 eager students in eight programs. That little studio grew into two and that grew until it outgrew me and I ended up selling it in 2006 as I began reminiscing about how simple my life once was. And while I simplified one area of my life, other areas picked up to deliver chaos to me in one form or other. A move across the country, a new relationship, the death of my niece and then my father, alcoholism in my new spouse, another move back across the country, the decline of the economy affecting my income, etc. etc. And so my dreamy simple life disintegrated into chaos again.

When this feeling of chaos overwhelms me, I must really rely on my practice to keep me grounded. I really used to rely upon the asanas and their magic to ground me, but now I become increasingly reliant on my meditation practice to achieve the true grounding energy I require. The difficulty is finding enough time in a day to do as much meditation as I sometimes need to stay even-keeled during chaotic periods in my life. When I don't spend enough time in my seated

practice, I feel myself getting anxious, angry, and upset when those around me are displaying similar feelings. I tell myself that my sensitive body is just picking up on the energies around me, but I do really know better. I'm not spending as much time as I need to keep myself well grounded.

I hope that we can all allow ample time for centering, meditating or grounding work. If so, we would find that such a practice would help keep the chaos that we are dealing with from affecting our ability to stay even-keeled. Please take a few minutes right now, to breathe and center and do get a practice going at home to take a few minutes each day, this will move us in a direction more suited for today's accelerated pace of life.

Namaste,

JJ