

February 13, 2014

I don't think I need you...

It's Friday night and I'm gathered around a small fire pit in the middle of a yoga studio attending my third Vedic fire ceremony (Agni Hotra). The purpose is to symbolically offer something into the fire for transformation. A brick of cow dung and ghee are lit on fire, symbolizing an offering of the highest and lowest parts of the sacred cow. As the sun sets, we chant and one by one offer rice to the fire, with the gently (yet fiercely) intelligent [Nicolai Bachman](#) tending the fire and leading the chant. (Oh, if my grandma could see me now.)





Rewind. A few hours prior (before his remarkable lecture on the origins of yoga), Nicolai gave us time to think of what we'd like to offer to the fire. The question lingers heavy: *If you could be rid of anything, what would you be rid of?* There is a part of me that still believes in magic, like Nicolai might pull a genie out of the fire to grant me one wish. But the offering has actually taken a considerable amount of work in my daily practice for several years. And now I know what I need to release. This particular block feels too heavy and unnecessary. I'm ready to let go of the sticky, dark thought that keeps me squirming and unsettled: ***I am not worthy.*** (I made the Wayne's World reference too, even in my deeply serious moment.) ***Whatever I do, it's not good enough.***

As we prepare for our offering, Nicolai asks us to finalize what we will offer for transformation. And then he gives a warning: ***Choose wisely. Once you let it go, you can't get it back.*** I have a strange moment of panic. You know that record scratching/halting sound? That happened in my brain. *Well, maybe I should just focus on surrendering that pie weight from the holidays. That's useful, right?! After all, maybe I NEED a little unworthiness to keep me going! Maybe that's what motivates me to try so hard. Will I still be successful/loveable/kind if I feel worthy of it? Who will I be without this pain?*

Why do we do this? I know enough people to know I'm not the only one. Why do we cling to our pain? Why do we resist letting go of what **we know full well** holds us back?

I sat and stared at that fire and thought about that pretty seriously. I know there is not a simple answer and I can really only speak for myself. But fundamentally, I think we cling to the definitions of ourselves as static. We cling to the idea that this is **ME** and it's solid and unchanging. It's **who I am**. And when someone tries to coax us into the idea that we are actually more like a river than solid ground, there is a little panic. Yoga philosophy makes an important distinction between prakriti (what changes) and purusha (what is timeless). The tendency to cling to prakriti as if it is unchanging is a setup for unhappiness. Somewhere along the way, I decided that who I am includes "unworthy"; "not good enough"; "try harder...and harder still...still not good enough." But it's not true. It's an illusion.

As I offered my rice to the fire, I felt a quickening of my heart, like I was about to step into an unfamiliar place. And I guess I was. At exactly sunset, Nicolai began to let the fire die out, and we all watched as the flames subsided.

On the way home, the familiar city seemed new. And some quiet, deep voice spoke a line from a song: *I don't think I need you.*

So. What are you ready to let go of, reader? No takebacks...

