

A Peak Experience at Tanglewood

By Carolyn Reynolds

Nestled in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts is Tanglewood, the summer home of the Boston Symphony. Having been there I can attest that it is truly magical in that the passion for the world's greatest music and live performance is woven into the air. Local folk take blankets and picnic lunches to the outdoor amphitheater and sit on the beautiful grounds to listen to the best of the best, and to the young aspiring best musicians of the future. During those summer months Tanglewood's Fellows, the top young musicians from around the world come to study with masters such as Seiji Ozawa, Kurt Masur, and Phyllis Curtin.

Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health is a short stroll down a windy, two lane road from Tanglewood. Recently, several residents from Kripalu, including Stephen Cope, psychotherapist and the senior scholar-in-residence, sat on the hillside listening to one of the young musicians, Brian. Brian begins tentatively, not fully committed. Then, within moments, everything changed. Brian became absorbed in the Beethoven sonata, playing so effortlessly he seemed to disappear, giving himself entirely over to the music and the spirit of Beethoven. Stephen describes the end of the performance: "The whole audience became absorbed with Brian in the music-joined together in a state of concentration and delight. When Brian hit the triumphant ending chords of the piece, there was utter silence in the hall. After a hushed moment, the audience spontaneously leapt to its feet, cheering what had become something beyond just a performance."

Brian, and the audience as well, experienced a state of flow in which all dissociate from awareness of the self and become part of something greater. These flow experiences are the ultimate highs of our life experiences because they result in profound states of concentration and bliss.

That summer Kripalu had designed a meditation and yoga program for the young musicians of Tanglewood's Fellows program for Brian and his inspiring colleagues. Throughout the summer this group of musicians meditated together each morning and practiced a regular program of hatha yoga. They increased their knowledge of body mechanics and its relationship to their particular instrument. And many took their meals at Kripalu to add the power of a yogic diet.

Kripalu will publish the empirical data from this controlled study in the future but it is clear from the enthusiastic response of the musicians that the summer of yoga and meditation profoundly enhanced their concentration, stamina and focus. Stephen states that what was also clear to him was that yoga and meditation enhanced their capacity to remain present and that it increased the subtlety of their connection with their bodies and their instruments.

Stephen writes, "Throughout the summer, many of the Kripalu staff attended the concerts of these young musicians regularly to observe and celebrate their progress. And we

continued to notice that when a performer became highly concentrated, the whole audience was affected as well. It turns out that these delightful states of flow-just like states of meditation-have a profound “field effect.” They affect not just the performer, but the entire field around the performer.

As yogis have always known, our minds are more connected than we commonly think. Musicians in states of flow, and yogis in states of meditation, experience delightful moments of oneness with all things when the separate sense of self disappears for short periods of time, and we know ourselves to be something greater than only our bodies, minds, and personalities. We know ourselves to be a part of the great Mystery.”