



STEADFAST FREEDOM YOGA

February 17, 2005: 26 Years Old - Loving Peru, Dreaming of New York: La Grama, Peru

Hola and Shalom Family and Friends,

Daily, I wish for your happiness and health. Although many of us have not connected by conventional means of communication for an extended moment, I give thanks that the energetic connections that keep friendships strong and beautiful remain powerful.

The last time I wrote was at the beginning of September 2004, six months ago. **Since then, each fulfilling day has continued to grant a balanced of Peace, Learning, Sharing, Challenges, and Happiness.**

PEACE is in every step. Each moment I live in peace with deep gratitude for life's blessings. **Everyday without fail commences with a long, three hour, heart centered Anusara yoga practice, where I explore my higher self, calm my mind, and strengthen my physical and mental being.** The tranquility established with my practice continues throughout the day while I cook fresh organic vegan meals with community members or take sunset walks along the serene river in my town, surrounded by the awe-inspiring Andes Mountains. **My twilight seated meditation stills my mental waves and brings me into a state of consciousness that helps me find joy through creating new positive channels in my mind, which are utilized to develop love, compassion, and cheerfulness that I can radiate to others.** Before each meal, I feel serene while praying, acknowledging my appreciation for my family and friends. **I offer thanks for the day's harvest, the nutritious food on my plate, and pray for an end to hunger in this world. I give thanks for the health of my family and friends, and pray for the healing of the sick and suffering. I am grateful for all of my blessings and hope one day that all beings will be blissful and free.**

LEARNING and SHARING are intertwined, as my primary focus in La Grama is an interchange of cultures. The community projects we are organizing continue to evolve slowly but surely, as most grass roots development efforts do. My foremost focus for the next ten months of my service is on sustainable endeavors, that the community can maintain when my time here concludes. I am not exactly sure yet what projects we will commence, as we are in the process of doing another needs assessment to see where the town wants to focus our energies for the future. The community Biointensive Organic Gardening initiative I have been working on for the past year will continue to extend

family to family. I am also writing a vegetarian cookbook in Spanish and will continue teaching vegetarian cooking nutrition classes. **The most essential lesson that I discovered years ago, but continue to cultivate, is to love life completely regardless of what obstacles may arise.**

CHALLENGES are inevitable when two distinct lifestyles are fused collectively. I am still befuddled by various cultural idiosyncrasies encountered during exchanges with some local villagers. As Mary Ellen Kelly once said, “Natives who beat drums to drive off evil spirits are objects of scorn to smart Americans who blow horns to break up traffic jams.” The list of challenges is lengthy, but these complexities make me a stronger person and also make the experience of living in my village intriguing.

HAPPINESS flows with smiling children pausing from their simple games of rocks and sticks hollering my name from a distance to say good afternoon. Happiness radiates from each flower and vegetable that grows in the scorching sun, and each person that proudly shows off his or her newly cultivated vegetable garden. Happiness and Harvest are two words that go hand in hand. Currently, we are celebrating mango and avocado season. Everyday, I head out to the expansive farms and gather mangos and avocados that are the size of softballs. The mangoes smell like the sweetest juiciest cake you have ever eaten and taste even better. The massive smooth like butter avocados’ sensational flavor brings a grin to my face as they dissolve in my mouth. I am also currently harvesting bananas, papayas, eggplants, cucumbers, spinach, peppers, tomatoes, beets, carrots, ten types of lettuces, zucchini, and many of my favorite herbs such as lemon grass, Thai basil, spearmint, mint, oregano, dill, and rosemary.

I am delighted that from March 25th until April 10th I will be coming home to visit New York!!! During this time, I will have the pleasure of celebrating my grandfathers 80th birthday, my fathers 60th birthday, and my brothers 30th birthday. I miss my entire family tremendously and am ecstatic to come home to New York, USA!

Namaste

I honor the place in you where the entire universe resides,
I honor the place in you of love, of light, of peace,
I honor the place within you where
If you are in that place in you,
And I am in that place in me,
There is only one of us.