

# Awake & Ready!

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## The Yin and Yang of Yoga

Part 2 of a Series by Gyandev McCord

Last time, I discussed willpower, the “yang” element of yoga practice, and offered simple exercises that you can use to help students develop it. Now I’ll do the same for the “yin” element: “feeling.” Both Paramhansa Yogananda and Swami Kriyananda have long emphasized its importance, and I’ve come to realize from experience how absolutely vital it is to success in yoga. It also offers excellent potential content for more meaningful yoga classes.



Gyandev McCord  
Director

### The Essence of Feeling

We all have an idea of what “feeling” means, although it can be difficult to state, because it isn’t of the intellectual realm where definitions live. Feeling is a response that’s awakened in us as we focus our awareness on something: a person, an event, a circumstance, an idea, a perception. It’s a way of gaining understanding, but it’s very different from the way the intellect understands. The intellect understands via description and analysis, whereas feeling understands via relationship. The intellect understands from the outside, whereas feeling, in its higher expressions, understands from the inside.

Examples of feeling can be the speechless appreciation of a beautiful nature scene, or the sense of expanded awareness that comes from gazing at a sky full of stars, or a mother’s sense of complete self-giving when looking at her child. Feeling also has negative expressions: emotional reactions like anger, fear or despair.

Feeling is the only way we can really know something. Reason and intellect can easily be misled because they are forever at the periphery of their object; only feeling has the *potential* to penetrate to its essence. And when that potential is realized, we have the highest expression of feeling: soul intuition, your ability to perceive reality directly and accurately, as opposed to indirectly (and often inaccurately) through reason, study or sensory input. It’s only through intuition that we will realize the Self.

I emphasize “potential,” because feeling, too, can be misled. To the degree that we cling tightly to the ego, we tend toward emotion, which distorts our perceptions of reality. (See Figure 1 on page 2: “The Lens of Feeling.”) But as we calm, refine and clarify our feeling nature, we get a progressively more accurate picture of reality, until at last we see reality as it truly is. This higher expression of our feeling nature is what I will call “deep feeling.”

In contrast to willpower, which you can develop simply by doing (although as we saw last time, there’s much more to it than that), feeling is less about doing and more about awareness. It’s subtle, but not mysterious. It simply requires increasingly sensitive listening, from a place of increasing calmness, expansiveness, receptivity, and above all, impersonal love.

Let’s now explore how to use Ananda Yoga as a vehicle to refine these qualities, and deepen our feeling capacity.

### Listen, Listen, Listen

To truly understand something, we first must slow down and listen to it, *feel* it. Meditation is, of course, the ultimate listening exercise, but for many people, listening to the body can be an easier start. In our fast-paced culture, many people use their body only as a “beast of burden” to take them from one place to another, to do this or that. Many people will benefit greatly from the experience of being more aware of and sensitive to this miraculous vehicle, rather than merely ordering it around. Following are some ideas for listening to the body. (Note: I’m suggesting these as exercises to take your students through, but it’s simpler to write “you” when

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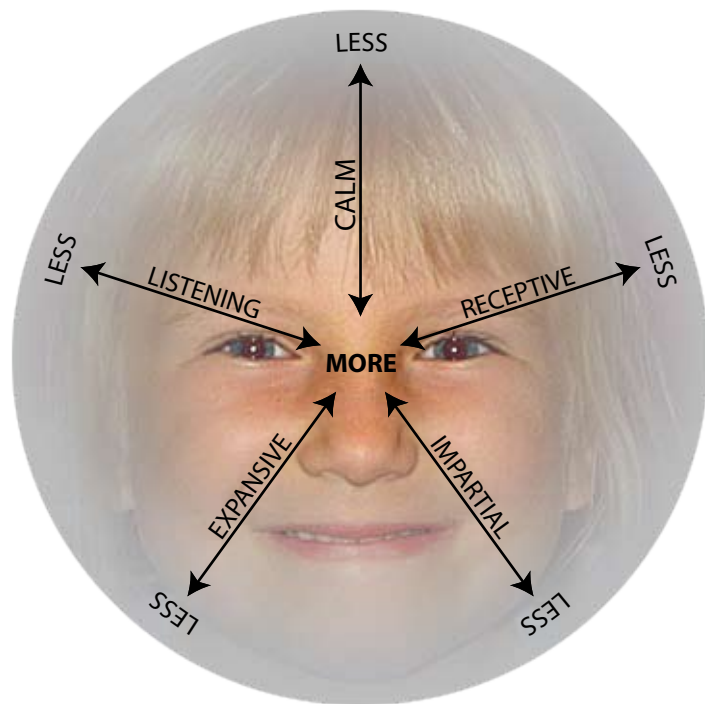
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describing the exercises.)

Move the body slowly, gracefully, with complete attention. Rather than imposing an asana on your body, “place” your body in the asana: take many breaths as you s-l-o-w-l-y enter the pose, noticing every little movement, so that you move consciously, with maximum awareness. Feel the different muscles as they engage and disengage. *Listen* to how that body part feels. Is it relaxed, or tense? Awake and alert, or dull and unresponsive? Comfortable, or uncomfortable? Participating, or spectating?

Then take it a step farther: Let your body tell you how to proceed. Don’t *think* what it’s telling you; instead, *listen*. Let the wisdom—not the habits—of your body lead you.

Try the same thing with the breath: In Diaphragmatic Breathing, for example, don’t force your will upon your breathing process. Rather, *consciously cooperate* with the natural process of breathing. Listen to the body’s efforts to breathe, and ask how you can help. Is there some tension inhibiting the breath? Does your concentration cause tension inside your nose, or in your tongue? If you become sensitively aware of the flow of physical breath (and/or the flow of energy in the astral spine), you’ll know if and where there are any breathing impediments, and you’ll be



**Figure 1. The Lens of Feeling.** Our feeling nature is lens through which we view reality. The more we are calm, receptive, impartial (i.e., not riddled with desires), expansive and listening, the more it can give us a clear, undistorted picture of reality as it truly is. At such times we look through the “optically correct” center of the lens, and we experience “deep feeling,” the highest form of knowing. At other times, when those qualities are weak or absent, we look through the more peripheral areas of our lens, which cloud or distort our perceptions of reality. Then our feeling nature expresses itself through emotion, not true understanding.

able to release them.

Here’s another example: Measured Breathing. As you inhale 6, hold 6, exhale 6 (or 8-8-8, or 4-4-4, or whatever), don’t impose your will too strongly on the breath. Yes, you want to ensure the equal counts, but listen to your body to find the *right* count for you, the count that best accomplishes the purpose of Measured Breathing, which is to calm the mind. Then when you go beyond Measured Breathing and lengthen the retention phase to its maximum, let the breath tell you how long it wants to be held. That will open a doorway into a much deeper practice.

Mundane as these listening exercises may seem, they can help you significantly to develop your listening capacity, which is crucial to your capacity to feel.

### It Begins with Heart

Feeling is centered in the heart chakra, so if we want to develop feeling, we must, as Sri Yukteswar put it, “awaken the natural love of the heart.” This suggests spiritual practices like chanting, japa, devotion, etc., but how can you bring this idea meaningfully into a yoga class, where not everyone is ready for such overt spiritual practices?

Backward bends are a good start, for they energize the spine, and often the heart specifically. But by themselves they’re not enough, because energy tends to go in whatever direction it *habitually* goes. In this case, if your heart’s energy habitually goes outward or downward, in the direction of emotion (which is also centered in the heart) and self-enclosure, energizing the heart may only take you farther in that direction. (Emotion is agitated or distorted feeling, an overly personalized reaction to what you perceive, rather than an inward understanding of it.)

So yes, let’s awaken the heart’s energy, but let’s also be sure to do something useful with it.

For example, alternate backward bends with forward bends. In the forward bends, cultivate a feeling of openness and relaxation in the spine, especially in the upper spine, so the heart’s energy *can* rise more easily. Then in the backward bend that follows, feel a sense of awakening in the area of the heart, yes, but also a rising inherent in that awakening, into the newly opened area of the spine above the heart. All of this is one reason why we interweave forward and backward bends in Ananda Yoga—opening the spine, then pouring energy upward through that openness. A perfect combination!

Try a similar exercise with a pranayama breathing technique, such as the Full Yogic Breath. Concentrate on the energy as it moves through the spine, and especially as it passes through the area of the heart chakra. Mentally chant AUM as it passes that point—as though you’re ringing a great silent gong, producing an energizing, uplifting influence on the heart’s energy during the inhalation, and a relaxing, internalizing influence on that energy during the exhalation.

Here’s practice: Use the simple “hand energization”

(continues on page 10)

# Three New Ananda YTTs are Born!

by Gyandev McCord

Over the past fifteen months, the Ananda Yoga Teacher Training universe has expanded significantly, with new programs beginning at three Ananda Centers. Here is some news about these happy new ventures:

## Portland, Oregon

The first of the new Ananda YTTs was launched at Ananda Portland in September 2006, and the first group of eight graduates emerged in April 2007. Portland's current YTT began September 4 with six students, and will end in late April when the students come to The Expanding Light for the last week of the March/April YTT.

They have classes every Tuesday evening, and every other weekend (two hours on Friday night and five-and-a-half hours on Saturday morning)—with holiday breaks. All of Ananda Portland's teaching staff helps with the course, with the Ananda Yoga portion being led by Uddhava (David) Ramsden, assisted by Laurie Chadwick.

Uddhava says: "It's been fun and rewarding to be able to take yoga students to their next higher level of experience with Ananda Yoga. Most of them have been taking yoga for many years, and it's gratifying to hear from them that the level of training we provide is above and beyond what they've been getting.

"I love teaching yoga; I can't think of a more delightful subject to talk about. It helps me tune in to the highest within myself as I teach, answer questions, and become a friend to our students in an uplifting spirit. It also helps bring me closer to feeling that Infinite Spirit within. Leading this course has taught me to be more patient and loving, as well as to keep holding myself up to the standards of being Master's disciple.

"I'm very grateful to all the staff who have developed this course to its present level, and to Swami Kriyananda, who continues to help us to tune more deeply."

## Assisi, Italy

In June 2007, Ananda Assisi began the first-ever Ananda YTT outside the U.S. This 200-hour program (Assisi also offers a 500-hour level) is modular, with participants taking seven one-week modules on Ananda Yoga, yoga philosophy, how to teach the Energization Exercises, etc.

The format is very flexible and individualized. Those who wish can complete the YTT in six months; others will do it in two years, usually not more. It's basically a hybrid between the common American format (all in one month) and the usual European format (one weekend a month for 4–5 years). Assisi's first graduation is scheduled for January 2008, with a graduating class of ten people.

The main Ananda Yoga teachers in Assisi are Jayadev Joerschke and Seva Devi Ena. Jayadev says: "Seva Devi

## More!

by Jayadev Joerschke

MORE—people everywhere seem to want it. "Show us more! We want to learn MORE!" MORE postures, pranayamas, bandhas, mudras, techniques of all types.

But how many asanas does the Hatha Yogi really need?

How many chants does the Bhakti Yogi need?

How many different insights for the Gyana Yogi?

How many different actions are really necessary for the Karma Yogi?

How many meditation techniques for the Raja Yogi?

The restless practitioner insists: "MORE—otherwise I will be bored, which means that you are not a good teacher, nor am I a satisfied student. Complexity feels good and rich."

Resourcefully, therefore, the yoga world has increased its repertoire enormously. Manifold variations are now offered; newly invented postures; novel entries and exits of the asanas; unexpected, original movements; practices from many traditions cobbled together. It all has to be fast, new, interesting, stimulating, and yes: there needs to be MORE of it.



But how was Hatha Yoga practiced originally? If ancient texts tell us the truth, it consisted of a rather limited set of postures. These few essential ones, it seems, were deemed sufficient by the ancient yogis. Was their approach rooted in wisdom?

Would even a few asanas, practiced deeply, be enough for the sincere Hatha Yogi?

Is even one penetrating insight enough for the introspective Gyani?

Is one continuous course of selfless action enough for the dedicated Karma Yogi?

Is one love-filled song to the Lord enough for the devotional Bhakta, to get His answer?

Is one meditation technique enough to expand the Raja Yogi's consciousness to the stars?

And is following one true spiritual tradition enough for the seeker, to find what he seeks?

Simplicity, sincerity, and ever-deeper awareness, using just a few pure tools: Isn't that recipe challenging enough for anyone?

And might that be the only way that really works, the way of the great masters throughout the ages? ♦

*Jayadev is an Ananda lightbearer and directs the new Ananda YTT at Ananda Assisi in Italy.*

# Ananda Yoga on the Road

by Gyandev McCord

Diksha and I had our fullest travel schedule ever in 2008. Our U.S. programs were in California (Los Angeles, Fresno, Boulder Creek and San Jose) Kentucky, Wisconsin, South Dakota and Virginia. And of course, the *Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga Retreat* in Kerala, India. (As I write this, a couple spaces are still available; for info please visit [www.expandinglight.org/kerala](http://www.expandinglight.org/kerala).)

In late August we went to Italy for our Ananda Yoga Intensive at Ananda Assisi, then our first weekend retreat in beautiful southern Austria. It was a magical trip. The Assisi topic was “Yoga with Gods and Goddesses,” and we delved into the rich hidden meanings in the Indian teachings, guided by Swami Kriyananda’s book, *The Hindu Way of Awakening*. It was a very deep course, attended by 57 students. On the lighter side, it inspired me to produce a new storytelling CD, *Dance of Divinity*, with some great tales of the origins and adventures of Hindu gods and goddesses.

Our topic for the main U.S. retreats was “Yoga to Magnetize Your Life.” It was inspiring to go deep into Paramhansa Yogananda’s practical teachings on using magnetism to make inward *and* outward life changes. In my new CD, *Magnetize Your Life*, I share some of the techniques.

We’ll travel less in 2008, due to the big celebrations during Swami’s visit in June through September. But we’ll still do a few weekend retreats, the major ones being:

Jan 4–6 ..... Rancho Palos Verdes, CA (Los Angeles)

May 2–4 ..... Nashville, TN

May 23–26 .. Willard, WI (Memorial Day Weekend)

July 11–13... McCall, ID

Sept 26–28.. Mount Saint Francis, IN (near Louisville, KY and Cincinnati, OH)

The Nashville topic will be “Yoga and Ayurveda,” and the Idaho topic is yet to be decided. The other three locations will focus on “How to Know and Trust Your Inner Guidance.” Diksha has made a superb new CD by the same title, sharing a number of techniques that we’ll explore in depth during those weekends.

For information on any of these programs or CDs—especially if you have friends near those locations who might be interested—please contact me: [gyandev@expandinglight.org](mailto:gyandev@expandinglight.org).

## Want to Magnetize Your Students?

If you’d like to create a greater sense of community among your students, as well as “fire them up” for more depth, a weekend retreat near you can be a wonderful experience. If you would like to help manifest a retreat that Diksha and I would lead, please contact me.

Let’s bring the transforming power of Ananda Yoga everywhere we possibly can. This world needs it!

and I are very excited about the possibilities for Ananda Yoga here in Italy. Many new doors are opening for us, for these days yoga is mightily on the rise in this country, as it was in the U.S. perhaps ten or twenty years ago. As evidence of that, in the last couple of years, *three* glossy, high-quality yoga magazines have begun in Italy, compared to *absolutely nothing* for decades. We feel very blessed to have received a lot of editorial coverage in those magazines—including feature articles about us. Ananda Yoga is highly thought of in Italy!

“At Ananda Assisi, we are swimming with this strong current—a flood, actually—and we’re eager to bring the inspiring Ananda Yoga approach everywhere we can. The response so far to our expanded outreach efforts has been extremely gratifying, and students tell us that we are offering an absolutely top-quality training.”

At this point, the entire course is in Italian only. Time will tell if that expands to other languages.

## Seattle, Washington

Ananda Seattle has the newest Ananda YTT. Ten participants began the program in mid-September 2007; the training will conclude on the last weekend in March 2008. The format is eight very full weekends (Friday evening 7–9:30 PM, Saturday 9 AM–6 PM, and Sunday 1–5:30 PM), plus five additional full-day Saturdays.

Participants also take Ananda Seattle’s Raja Yoga Intensive, which is offered one night a week (6:00–9:30) for fourteen weeks in the Fall and Winter, and in two different locations to accommodate individuals’ schedules. This class covers the material in *The Art and Science of Raja Yoga*: philosophy, meditation, diet, etc.

The primary asana teacher for the YTT is Willow Kushler, aided by Murali Venkatrao. Willow and all the students are greatly enjoying the program: “We try to create a retreat-like environment during the weekends. Beyond the classes and studies, the students pray, eat and practice karma yoga together—something everyone looks forward to.”

One interesting feature of this program is its Ayurveda component. “We include several classes on the doshas,” continues Willow, “and how to guide students on their journey toward optimal health and joy. Rather than having students bring bag lunches or go out for fast food, two of the students cook an Ayurvedic meal for the entire group. The students rotate, working in pairs, so that each participant comes early on two Saturdays to prepare lunch—first as an apprentice, and later to teach the next apprentice.

“It’s a joy and privilege for all the teachers to share these time-honored teachings of yoga. The training is a blessing for all.”

*May the great masters of yoga shower their blessings on these three new Ananda YTTs. Let’s all expand the light! ♦*

# Keeping On Track with Knees

by Nicole DeAvilla

Have you ever heard Raffi's rousing rendition of the children's song "Knees Up Mother Brown"? It goes something like this:

Knees up Mother Brown,  
Knees up Mother Brown,  
Knees up, knees up, never let the breeze up,  
Knees up, Mother Brown.  
Hopping on one foot, hopping on one foot,  
Hopping, hopping, never stopping,  
Hopping on one foot,  
Hopping on the other, Hopping on the other...

I can clearly remember not only singing along, but also dancing enthusiastically to it with my one year old son, Schuyler—so enthusiastically that I was holding him in my arms, too. And then my knee went off its track, and suddenly it wasn't fun any more.

Admittedly, my yoga practice as a new mother was rather patchy, as were my therapeutic knee exercises for old dance injuries. My knees had actually been talking to me during the preceding week, but I was "too busy" to listen. Later the next day when I was just walking around the house and my knee cap fully subluxed (got off track—more on this later), I thought that it had momentarily slipped three inches off to the side—impossible, but that was the feeling—giving me no sense of support. Now I heard my knee talking to me loud and clear, and knew that I had to get serious. I went to my old workplace, The Center for Sports Medicine, to see Dr. James Garrick, my former boss and knee specialist. (See, I really *should* have known better!) He prescribed a brace for me and reminded me to exercise my vastus medialis and to apply the RICE treatment.

## RICE is Nice for Knees

RICE is an acronym for Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation. The easiest part of this for me to follow was the compression part, having just been given a compression type knee brace with patellar support to wear. I went right to work on doing the exercises. "Rest" means not doing



Nicole teaches Therapeutic YTT and Prenatal YTT at *The Expanding Light*. Certified to teach Ananda Yoga in 1984, her background includes sports medicine and chiropractic physiotherapy. She teaches yoga and meditation near her home in Marin County, Calif., and leads an Ananda Healing Prayer group.

activities that aggravate the knee directly, or indirectly by overtiring it. Although I was not able to avoid carrying my young child from time to time, no one had to tell me to lay off dancing to "Knees Up Mother Brown"! I elevated my knee with a pillow at night in bed and the occasional legs-up-the-wall restorative pose when I could squeeze it in between diapers, feeding, etc. The least appealing part for me, yet one of the most important, was *icing* my knee, even though the swelling was enough to be visible. I would put my leg up on a chair (partial elevation) at meal times or whenever else I could to ice it for about twenty minutes—with a light towel around it to keep from irritating the skin.

Here is what my former boss, Dr. Garrick, says about knee injuries in his book, *Peak Condition*<sup>1</sup>:

"Gulp! Instability. That horrible word, resounding with all sorts of undesirable connotations, whether it be emotional, spiritual or physical. And when it comes to the knee, it's a word that you hear a lot. Over 25% of all sports injuries involve the knee (75% when it comes to surgery), and many of those involve some kind of instability."

As I mentioned in my article, "Can Being Too Flexible Be Harmful?" (*Awake & Ready!* Fall/Winter 2004—Vol. 9, No. 3), it used to be rare that yoga was the "sport of injury"; now it's more common. We are going to take a look at knee anatomy and alignment to help you to prevent knee injuries in your yoga classes and your practice, and to help those walking (or limping) into your classes already with knee injuries. Then we'll review what one should avoid and what one should emphasize in their yoga practice and teaching.

## Knee Anatomy 101

The knee is not only the largest joint in the body, but it also happens to be one of the most complicated joints as well. On the surface it appears to be a simple hinge joint—extending and flexing back and forth like a door on a hinge, opening and closing. Besides bending, the knee also has to be able to twist, move side to side, push and withstand immense pressure. The joint requires a delicate balance of flexibility and strength—a wide range of motion and stability—to do all of the tasks that we ask of it.

"Wait a minute!" some of you may be saying now. "Did you say that the knee needs to be able to 'twist' and 'move side to side'? Isn't that what we've always been told to avoid?" You may be surprised to learn that the knee joint should be able to move through 150 degrees of flexion,

<sup>1</sup> *Peak Condition*, by James G. Garrick and Peter Radetsky, Crown Publishers, New York, NY.

move 3–4 degrees sideways, and rotate 90 degrees as well.

Gulp! Does that make your knee hurt just thinking about it? (*Visual aid:* If you think of the right femur stacked on top of the right tibia, then lateral rotation is when the femur rotates laterally, i.e., “out,” relative to the tibia. Obviously, we don’t want 90 degrees of rotation while the knee is bearing weight!)

In fact, much of this movement takes place without our even knowing it. It’s when we go beyond the normal range that we get into trouble. First of all, the femoral and tibial condyles (i.e., the bottom end of the thigh bone and the top of the lower leg bone, which meet at the knee joint) are shaped in such a manner that there is “automatic” rotation of the knee every time one flexes or extends the knee. Further rotation can occur only when the knee is flexed and the ligaments are relaxed. In poses such as Rajakapotasana (Pigeon) or Padmasana (Lotus), we may be moving the (flexed) knee joint side to side within the 3–4 degree “safe” range, but we’re in big trouble if we go beyond that natural range.

So with that said, you can let what happens naturally happen, and never consciously try to twist or move your knee laterally (side to side)—or *let* that happen beyond the safe range due to lack of attention to alignment. In the *Therapeutic Yoga Teacher Training* course, under my watchful eyes (I have been called “Eagle Eyes” more than once...), we learn how to explore these movements safely. But again, we do this to understand the joint, not for the purpose of instructing others—or ourselves specifically—to attempt rotation or lateral movement in our asana practice.

Okay, so let’s continue. The three bones that make up the knee joint consist of the femur (thigh bone), tibia (shin bone) and the patella (knee cap). The main liga-

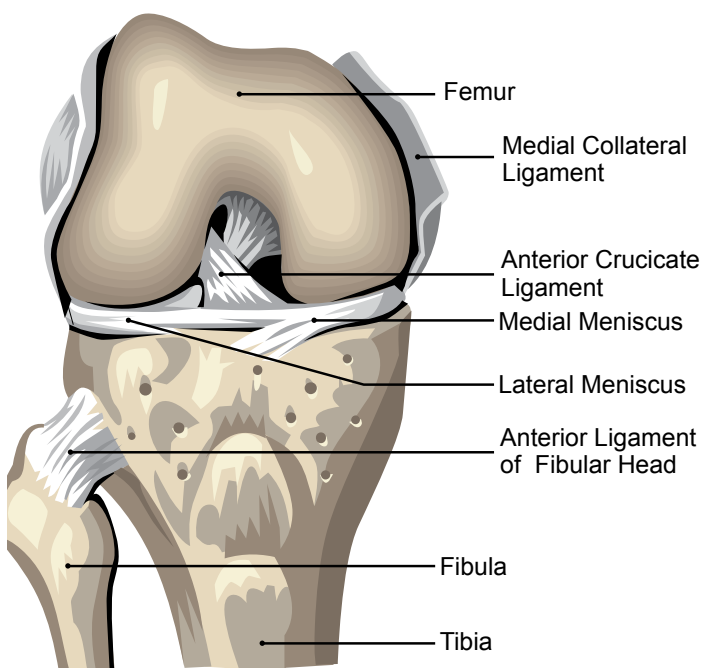


Figure 1—Anterior view of the right knee

ments that hold the bones in place are as follows: The medial collateral ligament (on the inside of the knee) and the lateral collateral ligament (on the outside of the knee) both prevent the femur from sliding too far to either side relative to the tibia. The anterior (in front) cruciate ligament and the posterior (in the back) cruciate ligaments are positioned crossways from each other and prevent the femur from sliding too far forward or backward relative to the tibia. Perhaps you have heard someone speak of having an ACL injury—it’s short for “anterior cruciate ligament”—and now you know that his or her femur probably went way too far forward! (Theoretically, it *could* have gone way too far backward, but that would be a very unusual injury.) And last but not least, attached to the rather interesting bone (the knee cap) that seems just to float in space when you look at knee joints in an anatomy book, is the patellar ligament. (See figure 1).

You’re no doubt familiar with the muscles mainly responsible for moving the knee joint:

- Four muscles collectively known as the quadriceps extend the knee joint. Their names are rectus femoris, vastus medialis, vastus lateralis, and vastus intermedius (underneath the rectus femoris). (See Figure 2—left.)
- Three muscles collectively known as the hamstrings flex the knee. Their names are semimembranosus (which constitutes the main bulk of the muscle group), semitendinosus and biceps femoris. (See Figure 2—right.)

I hope this does not sound too complex so far. Stick with me as we continue.

But before going on, are any of you wondering why that little kneecap hangs out there in front of the knee joint? Is it some sort of shield?

Yes, it does indeed protect against a blow to the front of the knee joint from either a fall or an outside force. Its prime function, however, is that of a lever—a lever so effective that it enables the quadriceps muscles to lift 30% more weight than they could lift without it. The quadriceps consolidate into a tendon that runs through the knee joint and attaches to the tibia. The patella actually resides within this large tendon and prevents it from resting on the joint surface underneath; this gives the quadriceps its mechanical advantage. This system is referred to as the extensor mechanism.

In order for the patella to act as a lever and provide this mechanical advantage, it must function properly by moving up and down the knee joint in little grooves, or tracks. And you guessed it: Mine was not functioning properly when it jumped its tracks during “Knees Up Mother Brown.”

This aberration of the patellar movement (often referred to as chondromalacia, runner’s knee, or quadriceps insufficiency) can have several causes: a blow or a fall, overuse injuries that happen over time, atrophy (underuse), and degeneration of the cartilage and/or bones. However, there is usually one common thread (a better fiber to mention than “thread” would be “muscle”—I

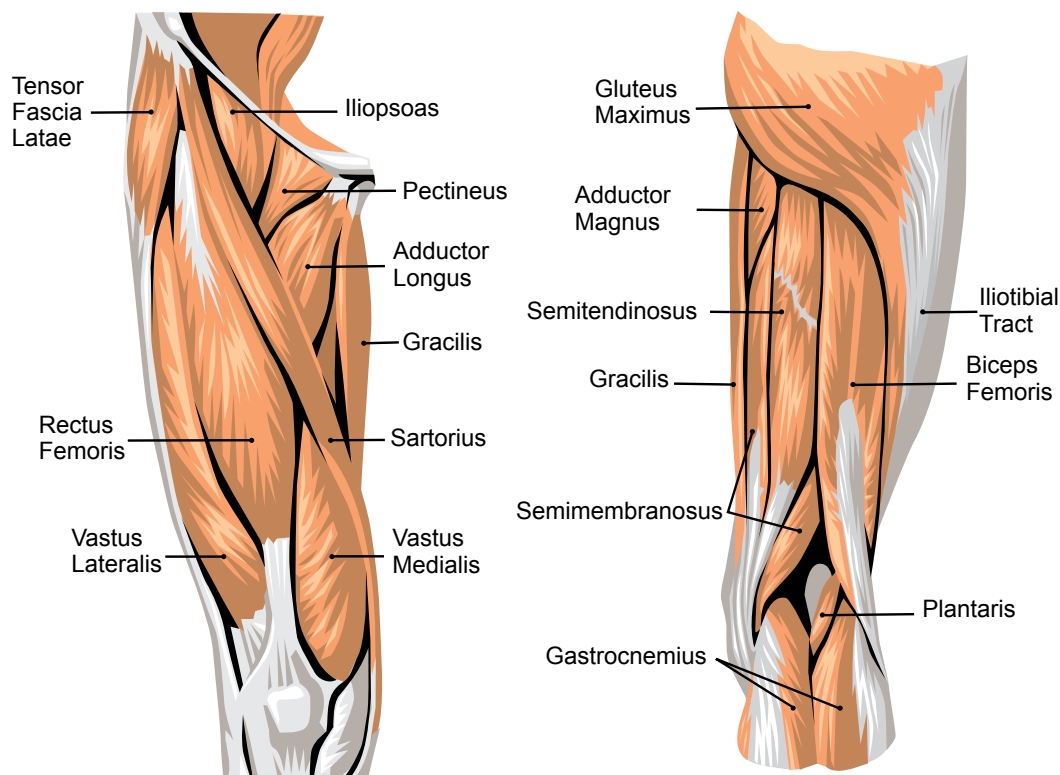


Figure 2: Anterior view (left) and posterior view (right) of right upper leg

hope you like my anatomy jokes more than my children do), and that is the vastus medialis. (See Figure 2.) In *Peak Condition*, Drs. Garrick and Radetsky state that *simply strengthening the vastus medialis can solve about three quarters of all knee problems*. Rather impressive, isn't it?

### Knee Anatomy 102

Later I'll discuss just how to go about strengthening this wonder muscle, but for now, let's talk about the other tissues that make up the knee joint. (I'll bet you hoped we were done with the anatomy part. But here we'll get into a little physiology, too—now I *know* you're getting excited!)

First, there are the tendons, which attach the muscles to the bones. We've already talked about one of them: the tendon that contains the patella. The lower portion of this tendon connects patella and tibia; it's called the patellar tendon. If someone has patellar tendonitis, there will be a pain specifically at the point just below the patella. Tendonitis is a general term for inflammation and irritation of a tendon. Other major tendons in the knee joint that you might hear about are the hamstring tendon (in back), the quadriceps tendon (the upper part of the tendon that contains the patella; it connects the quadriceps and patella), and the iliotibial band (also known as the "iliotibial tract" or fascia lata); it runs from the iliac crest, down over the lateral side of the knee, and attaches to the tibia). All of these can get "itis" attached to the end of their name if they are overused, abused or otherwise injured.

Now with all of this extending, bending, twisting, sliding and tracking going on in the knee joint, one would

hope to find some smooth surfaces and a little lubrication to help all of this motion along. And yes, there *are* some! They come in the form of two different types of cartilage: the articular cartilage and the fibrocartilage (meniscus). The articular cartilage coats the ends of the tibia and the femur, cushioning them and protecting them as it creates a smooth surface for the bones to glide over. There are two menisci: the medial meniscus and the lateral meniscus. They are dense, rubbery and C-shaped, and they function as shock absorbers. The menisci also help to distribute the weight of the body evenly across the knee joint.

The knee joint gets its fair share of lubricating fluids too. The joint is enclosed in

a capsule called the synovial capsule, which is filled with synovial fluid. (I'm sure you remember the importance of synovial fluid to feed and lubricate joints, as discussed in my article "The Perfect Warm-Up", *Awake & Ready!*, Spring 2005, Vol. 10, No. 1.) There are also many bursa sacs (filled with a fluid similar to synovial fluid) on and around the joint, which help cushion and lubricate tissues that glide over each other such as muscles and tendons over bones.

Sounds good, yes? Surely with all of this protection around the knee we should not run into too many problems with this joint. Well, think again. Remember people like me who are "too busy" to listen to knees that talk to them? Or the weekend athletes who want to go down the ski run "just one more time," and end up trading in their ski poles for crutches. Or the couch potatoes who suddenly decide they need to get in shape, and start off doing deep squats with weights? Or the yoga student who is absolutely determined to get into Padmasana (Full Lotus Pose)? I think you get the picture.

I'll list a few of the more common problems that can occur to the knee joint without going into the specific pathology (what is actually wrong): Sprained ligaments (e.g., ACL, MCL etc.), meniscus tears, extensor mechanism injuries (e.g., patellar dislocation, patellar tendonitis, quadriceps insufficiency, runner's knee etc.) and of course the usual broken bones, swelling and gelling (getting stuck). I hope none of this sounds familiar to you—or if it does, I hope it's because someone you know has it, and not you!

Instead of trying to cover the details of a lot of differ-

ent injuries (come to the new version of *Therapeutic Yoga Teacher Training* at The Expanding Light if you want more), this article is going to focus on maintaining a healthy extensor mechanism. That's what helps keep the knee joint stable, strong, flexible, and on track! The good news is that learning how to do that will benefit just about any knee injury that you may come across, whether you understand the pathology or not.

### Preventing Knee Injuries

Prevention comes first. Leg alignment is key in both preventing and rehabilitating knee injuries. The knee quiz in the previous issue of *Awake & Ready!* focused on the most common misalignments of the knee. Consistently practicing yoga (or other activities) without proper alignment can destabilize the knee joint and create extensor mechanism injuries. Once injured, misalignment will continue to stress the knee and not allow it to recover fully.

Sometimes it's difficult for a student (or a teacher) to know exactly when the knee is straight, and not hyperextended. Finding the center of the knee joint and aligning it is one of the alignment techniques that we practice a lot in *Therapeutic YTT*. In the meantime, whenever there is uncertainty, err on the side of having the knee being slightly flexed, not slightly hyperextended. Being slightly flexed will not injure the knee. In fact, it will slightly strengthen the quadriceps.

In one workshop, I had a student who was a chronic knee hyperextender, with very little upper leg musculature. To her, putting her legs into alignment and holding them felt like phase one of Utkatasana (Chair Pose); her knees also felt bent. However, she could feel right away how it took the stress off her knee joints. Similarly, many of your students may say that they feel that their leg is bent when you place it in proper alignment. Let them know that as they continue to practice correct alignment, the new position will soon feel like the straight position that it is.

In all yoga positions, we want to keep the sensations out of the knee joint itself. One does not get stronger by going into the pain or discomfort of a joint. In fact, one gets weaker through destabilizing the joint. Feeling sensations in the joint is not the way to become more flexible either. Again there will be a grey zone, which it will be hard to determine if what a student is feeling is (a) the effort or stretch of the muscle and tendon that attach to the knee joint, or (b) the ligaments holding it together, or (c) the other tissues that comprise the knee joint. When in doubt, back off. Strength and flexibility can be gained without going into the extreme position. Teach your students to be like the tortoise: slow and steady to get results instead of fast and impatient, which invites injury.

### Knee Tip Sheet

Here are some tips on what should be *emphasized* for knee injuries, and what should be *avoided* (which is every bit as important as what to do, if not more important in

some cases). We'll begin with several for your teaching:

#### 1. Do not show the incorrect way to place your knees!

This may seem obvious to most, but guess how I first injured my knee? I was teaching dance and yoga classes at the time. I was getting pretty smart about alignment (or so I thought), so I would show my dance students in particular how *not* to do their plies (knee bending exercises), i.e., how to avoid injury by turning their knees *neither* too much *out* nor too much *in* relative to their foot position. Sure enough, since I showed them regularly as a reminder, I was later able to prove (in a most unfortunate way) that I was indeed correct: I demonstrated hopping on one leg while in arabesque (other leg extended straight out behind) movement, and due to the instability I had created in my knee through my demonstrations, injured my knee right there in front of them. (I told you so!)

#### 2. Look carefully at your students' knee alignment!

This means walking around the room to observe alignment from different angles. *No hyperextension in any position!*

#### 3. Tell students that they should *never* feel the pose in the knee joint itself.

This is especially true in stretching asanas (in particular, those positions that stretch the fronts of the thighs) or weight-bearing with the knee(s) bent (e.g. standing poses like Virabhadrasana I and II).

Now for a few general tips for those who already have knee injuries:

#### 4. Other positions to avoid:

*Twisting the knee*—like Garudasana, Padmasana, and even simple cross-legged positions, all of which may put too much twist into the knee joint

*Balance poses*—The instability of being on one leg or other wise difficult positions to maintain balance will cause the knee to potentially gyrate and be stressed.

*Deep flexion of the knee*—like Utkatasana (second phase), Supta Vajrasana and Balasana; Maha Mudra, too

*Knee flexion with hyperextension of the hip joint*—like Supta Vajrasana, Dhanurasana and Natarajasana

*Pressure on the knee*—e.g., Table Pose, Ustrasana or Parighasana (Gate Pose)

*Inversions* that one could potentially fall out of and land awkwardly, stressing the knee—e.g., Sirshasana (Headstand)

*Medial or lateral rotation*—e.g., Supta Virasana encourages lateral rotation (this pose is like Supta Vajrasana, but with the heels out to the sides of the buttocks rather than directly beneath them); also, any Rajakapotasana variation encourages medial rotation.

#### 5. Do asanas that strengthen the upper legs

The safest one is probably Salabhasana (Locust Pose), which strengthens the hamstrings. Utkatasana leaning against the wall, with only a little flexion to begin with



(never go beyond a right angle), strengthens the quadriceps. (See photo at right.)

#### 6. Strengthen the vastus medialis muscle (VM)

This is the inner thigh muscle near the knee (see Figure 2; see also the sidebar at right for a specific therapeutic exercise). It is the most important muscle to strengthen to help with the healing and prevention of knee injuries. During *Therapeutic YTT* we spend a lot of time locating this muscle and activating it in various positions. In the meantime, just isolating it as described in the sidebar will help to bring relief to students' knees.



#### 7. Give it a rest

Use legs-up-the-wall pose, with or without the hips supported on a folded blanket. This not only gives the knees a rest, but also it helps reduce inflammation by keeping the knees higher than the heart. Support the knees with a bolster during deep relaxation as well.

Did you notice that, in the not-to-do list, Supta Vajrasana was mentioned twice? This was no accident! Vajrasana (Firm Pose) could have been added several places as well. These positions put a tremendous amount of stretch and pressure on the knee joint. They are often the culprits behind a knee injury from hatha yoga practice. For more on this see my article "Can Being Too Flexible Be Harmful?" (*Awake & Ready!* Fall/Winter 2004 –Vol. 9, No. 3).

Does this mean that you can never do these and other potentially knee stressing poses if you either want to avoid knee injuries or have had one? No, but some people may need to avoid them if the poses always put stress on their knees and if their knee(s) never fully recovers. Or they may need props to be able to do certain poses safely.

The key to going back to an optimal yoga practice is keeping the vastus medialis strong. Not just during the rehabilitation period, but forever afterwards. I regularly isolate and strengthen my vastus medialis. And if I forget, well, my knees talk to me, and you can bet that I now listen to them, even if they just whisper! When I hear them, I contract (my vastus medialis that is)! In fact you just might see me driving down the freeway—awake and ready—chanting to Crystal Clarity's new *Power Chants* CD, and you may wonder how I keep time to the music (well, maybe some one person out there might be wondering...). Well, here is my secret: I alternately contract my left and right vastus medialis muscles to the beat. And just thinking about that music has got me rhythmically contracting my VM's right now as I type this article—left, right, left, right...

## Isometric Strengthening of the Vastus Medialis

Start by sitting against a wall with legs extended in front, and with a blanket or sticky mat rolled up under the knees (see photo). The roll under the knees is very important as it prevents hyperextension while contracting the quadriceps muscles, and is helpful in initially locating the vastus medialis (the VM).

Place your fingertips about one inch above your knee caps, then move your fingers about one and a half inches medially (to the inner thigh). Contract the quadriceps muscles and try to feel the muscle underneath your fingertips contracting.

It may take a while to find and contract this muscle. Try pressing the knee into the roll, or turning the thighbone in or out a little from the hip. (If students find it difficult to locate this muscle, take the time to help them find it, so they will be able to practice on their own.)

Once the muscle has been found, contract and hold it for about eight seconds. Release and repeat three times. As long as the symptoms of knee pain or discomfort are still present, repeat the sets at least three times a day. Do not exceed 3–4 repetitions at one time, or else you may fatigue the muscle. A fatigued muscle is unable to support the joint properly, and the idea is to create more stability, not less! However, you may repeat the sets more often throughout the day, up to fifteen times. The muscle should feel "rock hard" under the fingertips; that may be difficult to achieve at first, but is necessary to strive for as the VM needs to feel at least as strongly contracted as the other quadriceps muscles.

As you gain more control and can easily contract the VM, you can practice these contractions in other positions: sitting in a chair, in bed before rising in the morning, even while sitting at a stoplight while driving your car. Gradually you should be able to consciously contract the VM during other activities, such as practicing yoga or hiking.



Integrating yoga therapy into one's daily life is key to preventing re-injury as well as moving forward spiritually. Not that I recommend that anyone try this while driving (unless they are really, really sure that they can handle the car—first try it while typing at the computer without slowing down). After all there are many other ways to strengthen the VM, and integrate yoga practice during the day. Be creative as you keep on track with your knees, chanting and other yoga practices! ♦

## The Yin and Yang of Yoga (continued from page 2)

technique that's part of the healing techniques that Paramhansa Yogananda taught: Rub the hands briskly together at least 30 times, then place them both over your heart, and send energy from the hands into your heart chakra to awaken your awareness there.

Finally, use that awakened heart energy to help develop your feeling capacity. Here's one simple, effective way:

Do 6–12 rounds of 12-count Measured Breathing. Focus on the heart chakra, and squeeze the shoulder blades together several times. Visualize a sphere of light expanding outward from the heart, at first only a few inches, then filling the room, then the neighborhood, and so on, until it encompasses all the universe. Feel everyone and everything bathed in that light. Sit quietly and, keeping the body relaxed, try to feel to an actual sensation of warmth or energy in the heart.

### Still Waters Run Deep

Calmness is also crucial to deeper feeling. Without it, even upward-moving energy can take us outward into the shallow feeling of emotion. In *Awaken to Superconsciousness*, Swami Kriyananda writes: "Calm feeling is intuition. When that calm feeling is disturbed, as only the ego with its likes and dislikes can disturb it, feeling becomes emotion. Calm feeling is like a lake without ripples; emotion is like ripples appearing on the surface of the lake, that change the appearance of whatever is reflected there."

Calm feeling means a calm heart. In a recent talk, Swami Kriyananda pointed out the importance of stillness of heart: "In teaching meditation, people speak of the need to calm the mind. In fact, it is the heart that needs to be calmed. That is why devotion is fundamental to success in meditation. When the heart is calm and one-pointed in its focus on God, the mind is also still because there are no restless feelings to disturb it."

"Calm" doesn't mean "inactive"; it's powerful and dynamic, yet refined and relaxed. Asana practice is a wonderful arena in which to cultivate a *calm* heart. Forward bends promote that calmness, it's true, but don't forget the neutral poses, which are so effective in fostering a serene *upward* movement of the life-force generally, and the heart's energy in particular.

For example, neutral poses like Vajrasana, Siddhasana and Padmasana give you not only time and space to lift the energy, but an inward impetus to keep the energy from moving outward. Affirmations such as Siddhasana's can be extremely helpful in this: "I set ablaze the fire of inner joy"—one can easily feel a rising sensation in the spine.

Or Vajrasana: "In stillness I touch my inner strength." Often I encourage students to notice how Vajrasana helps them see beyond the physical to perceive the life-force, which is one octave of inner strength. And Vajrasana can help them reach an even higher octave by stilling the heart, and thus deepening their feeling capacity.

So as you alternate forward bend and backward bends, see them as preparation for the neutral poses. As you use the physical stillness of the neutral poses to quiet the heart (not just the body or energy), you'll feel a natural rising of energy

and consciousness. It's a real awakening when students finally see what is going on.

The power of calmness came vibrantly to mind recently when Ananda Village had an all-day power outage due to a system upgrade. Meditation was *so* much easier without electricity running through the walls. Not only my mind, but my heart quieted down, and it was easy to see why Paramhansa Yogananda said, "We develop intuition by prolonging the peaceful aftereffects of the meditation techniques." When we don't give in to distractions—or when, as during the power outage, there are simply fewer of them—the doorway to deeper feeling opens.

### Self-Expansion through Asana

In *Art as a Hidden Message*, Swami Kriyananda writes: "An inward contraction upon the ego, in whatever way that contraction is caused, limits a person's ability to experience deep feeling." Think about the many ways in which people contract upon the ego: a superiority complex, an inferiority complex, selfishness, fear, greed, defensiveness, judgment, desire for fame or power—the list goes on and on. Swamiji's statement reveals an important key to deeper feeling: get out of the little self.

Here's a lovely way for your students to practice that in your class: Ask each one to secretly choose someone else in the class, and sit for a minute or two, trying to tune in to that person. Have them make a mental note, for later reference, of how well they were able to tune in to that person, to feel some part of that person's reality. Then tell the class: "Do your entire practice with the thought of sending the benefits of your own practice streaming to that other individual. Let every technique, every moment—even the deep relaxation—be completely for the benefit of that other person." At the end of the class, ask them to try to tune in to that individual once again, in whatever way they can. Most students will see that they're much better able to tune in to—i.e., have a "feeling" connection with—the other individual after having devoted their own practice to that person. The sender will feel very uplifted by the experience, often more than the receiver. It can be inspiring to have students discuss their experiences.

This is a wonderful, clear example of how self-expan-

*"In teaching meditation, people speak of the need to calm the mind. In fact, it is the heart that needs to be calmed."*

sion increases your ability to experience deep feeling.

### The Art of Receptivity

Receptivity is the subtlest of the keys to deeper feeling—and in some ways the most important. Receptivity is much more than openness, which merely prepares the soil; the seed lies in that openness being *magnetic*, which is to say, *intensely* and *expectantly welcoming* that which we wish to receive. And there is nothing that fosters such magnetism like love and sympathy. In *Meditation for Starters*, Swamiji writes: “By receptivity—not just mental receptivity, but a receptivity of feeling, of sympathy—you will develop the power of intuition, which is the fruit of superconscious living. So listen; be receptive; be relaxed. Without relaxation, mental as well as physical, you won’t be able to concentrate on listening; you won’t ever be truly receptive.”

Start with relaxation, then add a healthy dose of love and sympathy. George Washington Carver, the great American scientist and saint, put it succinctly, “If you love it enough, anything will give up its secrets to you.” By giving love, you begin to resonate with that which you love, and intuitive understanding comes.

Fine, but how can this fit into an asana class? Change the preceding exercise: Instead of asking students to give the benefits of their practice to the other individual, ask them to use the practices to cultivate love *in themselves*. Then, after all their practices, invite them to choose some other person, and give that love to them. (Hint: If they choose a person whom they don’t know, it’s easier to feel a deeper, *impersonal* love because there are no “reasons” to love other than that it’s their nature to love.)

End the class with a meditation on that love—a love that is self-existing because it’s not about *anything* or *anyone* they’re loving. Ask them to disconnect themselves from the personality of whomever they’re sending love to, and simply feel love in their own hearts, a love free from conditions—then offer that feeling upward. Beautiful!

How to use the practices to cultivate that love in the first place? Begin by energizing the heart chakra, as described earlier. But more centrally, as Swamiji writes in *The Art and Science of Raja Yoga*, “To practice the yoga postures *with spiritual feeling* is to find that they help to develop that feeling.” That is, to develop the feeling of love, make every movement *with* love. Love the vitality you get from the practice as well as the relaxation. Love the things you can do, and love the challenges of the things you can’t yet do so well. Love the process of ever-easier breathing. Love the quietness of body and mind. Love the company of other sincere yogis, however different they may be from you. Love the blessing of having received the priceless gift of yoga from the great masters through the ages. Enjoy your practices, and feel that enjoyment as a loving quality that always exists in your heart, even when you’re not practicing. The final act, that of sending love to the other person, then adds the vital element of expansiveness to

## ANNOUNCING:

# New Ananda Yoga Products

## Flashcard Decks

The new, expanded deck includes the asanas that recently received affirmations, for a grand total of 58 asanas. There’s also an “update deck,” with just the 13 additions.

## Asana Study Aid CD

This new CD has two tracks: Track 1 takes you through the Sanskrit names, English names and affirmations (in call and response fashion) for the 31 Level 1 AYTT asanas, and Track 2 covers all 56 asanas. (Mayurasana and Dandasana have no affirmations, so they’re not on the second track, but they are in the flashcard deck.)

## To Order

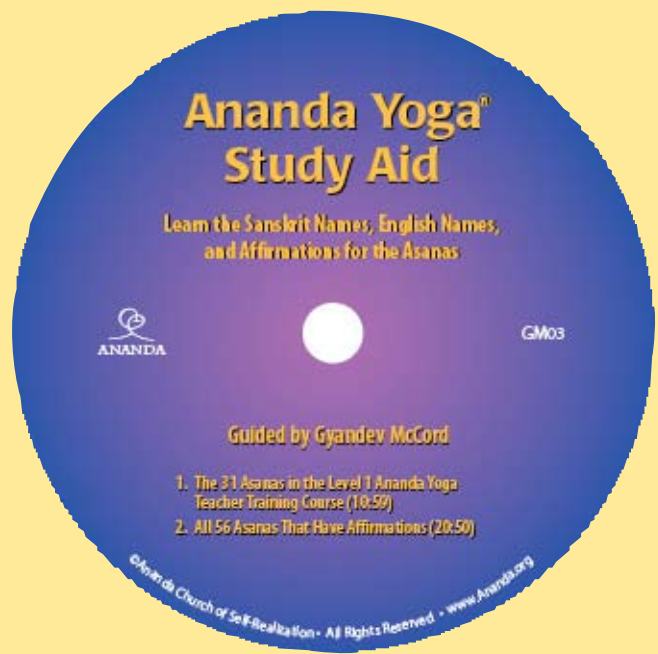
The cost for flashcards is \$12 for a full deck (25% discount if you order six or more decks), and \$3 for an update deck of the thirteen additions. The CD is \$8 until February 1, and \$10 after that. Add 7.375% sales tax on all California orders. The shipping and handling cost for U.S. addresses is \$2 for the first item, and \$1 for each additional item. Shipping for non-U.S. addresses is \$4 for the first item, and \$1 for each additional item.

Please order through Brook by:

- Sending a check payable to The Expanding Light, or
- Calling with a credit card, or
- Faxing your credit card info

See page 12 for address and phone information.

**Special Note:** We have some update decks on hand, so if you order early, you can receive your deck right away. Otherwise, you might not receive your order until after we place our final production order on February 1.



the whole process, helping you take that crucial step away from the small self. The combination and love and expansiveness is a powerful way to cultivate deep feeling.

### Give the Extraordinary

To say the least, the exercises I've shared in these past two articles are not ordinarily the focus of yoga classes. But there are lots of "ordinary" yoga classes in this world. Ananda Yoga gives you the opportunity to offer your students a whole lot more. Why not make your classes *extraordinary*?

I've used such exercises as these with more-experienced students, as well as with newer ones—and they work wonderfully. Yes, it can be a stretch for a teacher to guide students through these exercises with clarity and magnetism—especially these subtler "feeling" exercises—but it's a wonderful way to grow in your own teaching and understanding.

You might not be able to do all of these exercises with every one of your classes, but there's always something that will work. And when you have a group who's ready for the deeper ones, go for it! And afterward, please tell me how it went. I'm always eager to hear new ideas, as well as the results of old ones. ♦

## LEVEL 2 NEWS

# Ananda Yoga Intensive • July 20–26

Formerly *Advanced Yoga Intensive*, this course is a Spiritual Renewal Week for Ananda Yoga teachers. Gyandev and other teachers will lead you in long practice sessions every day (usually twice a day), integrating asana, pranayama, bandha, meditation and other techniques. You'll also enjoy sharing wisdom and insights during satsang with other Ananda Yoga teachers. It's a perfect way to build your magnetism for teaching and practicing Ananda Yoga.

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## Level 2 Calendar

Please remember that AYTA Members receive a **15% discount** on all Level 2 programs. If you need financial aid, please contact The Expanding Light for an application. All of the following courses earn Level 2 credit; those with "★" are required for Level 2 AYTT certification.

### 2008 Preview

*Note: Some of the course dates below for June and later are still tentative. Please check [www.expandinglight.org](http://www.expandinglight.org) after January 1.*

- 2/10–27.....Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga in Kerala, India
- 3/14–23 .....★Meditation Teacher Training
- 3/23–4/5.....★AYTT Assistantship
- 5/7–11.....Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 6/1–14 .....★AYTT Assistantship
- 6/11–15.....Ayurvedic Yoga Retreat
- 7/20–26 .....Ananda Yoga Intensive
- 7/25–8/3.....★Meditation Teacher Training
- 7/27–8/2....★Essence of the Yoga Sutras
- 7/29–8/3 ... Prenatal YTT
- 8/2–5 ..... Restorative YTT
- 8/5–10 .....Therapeutic YTT: Knees, Hips and Shoulders
- 8/12–16 ..... Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 8/24–31.....★Advanced Pranayama
- 9/17–21.....Yoga to Balance the Chakras
- 10/10–14.... Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 10/19–28....★Meditation Teacher Training
- 10/26–11/23★AYTT Assistantship

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