

# Awake & Ready!



Support  
Education  
Inspiration

The Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga Teachers Association • Vol. 13 No. 2 • Summer 2008

## The Other Anniversary

by Gyandev McCord

2008 is a big year for anniversaries: Ananda's 40<sup>th</sup>, Swami Kriyananda's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of discipleship to Paramhansa Yogananda, Ananda Portland's 20<sup>th</sup>. And guess what: it's also the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of Ananda Yoga Teacher Training. So I'm devoting this article to some interesting, informative and amusing highlights from AYTT history. I think you'll enjoy it.



Gyandev has an anniversary, too. Can you guess it?

### The Champion Arrives

Ananda Yoga, of course, began when Swami Kriyananda organized Paramhansa Yogananda's approach to hatha yoga into a specific system of postures. But formal Ananda YTTs began with Prakash Van Cleave.

"When I came to live at Ananda in 1974," Prakash recalls, "my first teachers were Shivani [now at Ananda Assisi] and Satya. I was at the Meditation Retreat [the guest retreat at that time; The Expanding Light came later], and they taught me everything. Satya [Ananda's first resident, who still lives at the Meditation Retreat] led all the sadhanas in those days, and I went to every one of them.

"I immediately loved the meditative aspect of the Ananda approach. There wasn't much talking, and what talking there was, was so spiritually oriented, with the affirmations and such. There was a little instruction, then the affirmation, then silence. You learned to take the affirmation inside and actually experience the pose, because there wasn't an endless string of 'Do this, do that.' I found that I was meditating during the postures, not wanting to come out of them—and loving the pauses between active postures even more than the active postures themselves. I think that's a sign of successful yoga, and I was just thrilled with it. I realized that the more complex one gets, the less of that one has.

"When I first read Swami's lessons [*The Art and Science of Raja Yoga*, then called the *Fourteen Steps*], I was deeply inspired. I couldn't wait for the work week to end so I

could sequester myself out on Bald Mountain, study the lessons, and do all the stuff he wrote about—every bit of it, even the cooking!

"At one point, Satya had to leave for two weeks, and he asked me to take over leading sadhanas. I had already been a yoga teacher before coming to Ananda, and I felt that I understood Ananda Yoga well enough, so I said, 'Okay.' That was the beginning of my teaching here." (It wasn't called "Ananda Yoga" at that time. Swami had named the system "Yoga Postures for Self-Awareness.")

Being energetic and highly capable—as well as intent on tuning in

to Ananda's vibration—Prakash was soon given a major responsibility: leading the Apprentice Program. It was a bit like today's Karma Yoga program, except people learned a skill as they worked in the garden, or the dairy, etc. It was a popular program, but he felt it lacked something.

"To me, the essence of everything was the *Fourteen Steps*. That's where people really got connected, where they tuned in to Yogananda's teachings. I wanted everyone to study it, not just work—and stay here long enough to go through *all* the lessons."



Satya and Prakash—mid 1970s

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*"I was meditating in the poses, not wanting to come out—and loving the pauses even more than the active poses. That's a sign of successful yoga—I was thrilled with it. I realized that the more complex one gets, the less of that one has."*

He asked Seva (then the Village manager) whether she thought it would be a good idea to start a YTT as a way to accomplish this. Seva gave a go-ahead, and in 1976 a new program was born: Fourteen Steps to Self-Mastery, a three-month hybrid program in which attendees worked in the mornings as apprentices in the garden, dairy, etc., and were *Fourteen Steps*/YTT students in the afternoons.

### What Was It Like?

The program took place at the Village. Everyone camped in the meadow around where The Expanding Light would later be built. The main—in fact, the only—building for the program was a small old farmhouse (it has since been demolished), located where one turns off Tyler Foote Road onto Ananda property.

In summer, Energization and postures were outdoors in the meadow; meditations were also outdoors, or in the remodeled garage of the farmhouse. They used Swami's suggested routines from the *Fourteen Steps*. There were evening classes of chanting and long meditations. Weekends were free. Prakash led both parts of the program, calling in nuns (Ananda had a monastery then) and other experienced residents to teach the philosophy classes.

"Shivani propped me up," says Prakash. "I hadn't even been here a year yet. She developed the manual for the course, taught some of the philosophy classes, led some sadhanas, and even made a recording of leading the yoga postures and affirmations."

The course included aspects of how to teach asanas, Energization, etc., and not a huge amount of asana mechanics and alignment. "Never having been taught anything about that," says Prakash, "I just did what Swami said. I really didn't know all those details because Swami didn't explain them in the lessons. I certainly didn't know what muscle groups were involved. I learned along the way, doing things intuitively, and I soon learned to see how to align someone in a pose.

"I've come to understand the wisdom of that approach. It's easy to lose your focus when mechanics become too high a priority. Today's broader yoga community focuses almost *only* on mechanics, with the rationalization, 'Look, it will help you go deeper in the practice.' But what I've seen is that people don't get beyond it; they stay at a surface level. It becomes a sport—great for the body, but it stops there. We weren't sloppy with alignment in AYTT; we

were just taking 'the middle road' with the asanas, keeping our main emphasis on going deep in meditation."

In student teaching, each student chose a target group: e.g., children, adults, elderly, or career women. Then they taught a sample class—all the basic material, but an approach customized for that group—to Prakash and their classmates, who later critiqued it. They also developed a six-week class series, spelling out how it would fit their group, what they would do, etc.

Who could come to a *three-month* program?!

"Lots of young people," says Prakash, "many just out of college. They had time, not yet much of a life direction, and the course was *really* cheap, so they could afford it. It was 'bring your own tent,' although later there were cabins with heaters for colder weather. That was partly how Ananda Village grew so quickly: anyone could afford to come, community living held a lot of appeal, and many people just stayed."

### The Great Mutiny

Each year had its own special character. "My first summer, 1975, was the Summer of Love," says Prakash. "Very easy, relaxed, flowing. Swami came over at one point, looked around, and said, 'No one seems to be in charge here.' So the next year, 1976, became the Year of Discipline. It was also the Year of the Mutiny."

Mutiny? Tell us more.

"During the Summer of Love, we had a few 'crazies' in the program, and in hopes of helping me be more discriminating in the future as to whom to accept into the program, one of the nuns had been appointed a 'hatchet man' (that was the term that was used) to help weed them out. It didn't work real well. Yes, the Summer of Love had brought some crazies, but they were harmless ones—just sweet or sad ones. Now, in the Year of Discipline, we again had a few crazies, but these were rather unpleasant ones.

"Anyway, someone was *definitely* in charge during the Year of Discipline: I was—*too* much in charge. I was like a drill sergeant. That year I was trying to conquer sleep, so I would go to bed at about 11:00 P.M., then get up at 2:00 A.M., jog over to the farmhouse in my work boots (that

*(continues on page 7)*

## Calling All Saints!

*Awake & Ready!* needs your input: entertaining tidbits, inspirational stories, funny episodes, excellent adventures, embarrassing moments, etc. Please share your experiences with other teachers. We'll even help you with the writing.

For more info, please contact Gyandev McCord at [gyandev@expandinglight.org](mailto:gyandev@expandinglight.org).

# Working with Osteopenia & Osteoporosis

by Barbara Bingham

Researchers estimate that 50% of women over the age of 50 have osteoporosis—as do 25% of men over 50. A decline in bone mass is common with aging, but osteoporosis and its precursor, osteopenia, are pathological decreases. They manifest as a gradual, silent loss of bone tissue, which makes bones more susceptible to fracture and possible disability. In fact, the incidence of fracture is rising in the U.S.—and inevitably, you're going to have students who are vulnerable to such fractures.



Barbara is a Physical Therapist, Ananda Yoga teacher, and Ananda minister. She teaches most of the Anatomy & Physiology in AYT. She has produced three videos: Yoga for Menopause, Sadhana, and The Energization Exercises.

One major difficulty with osteoporosis and osteopenia is that they are often painless, so people may not know they have this disease—and even if they know, they may not be receiving pain messages that would tell them which movements or positions to avoid. That's when fractures can occur. So you must take care in trying to help your students who may have osteoporosis or osteopenia

## Boning Up

With any health condition, the first step in “taking care” is to increase your knowledge about the condition. So here are a few important facts about your bones:

Throughout life, your bones are *remodeling*: bone tissue is lost (*resorption*, it's called), and then the body replaces it. This constant bone turnover is critical to overall bone health, because it repairs microfractures and remodels the bony “architecture” in response to the way the bones are stressed, making them better able to handle those stresses.

Until around age 30, your body is not only remodeling your bones, but adding to their mass. After that, bone remodeling continues, but in some people, the replacement rate falls behind the resorption rate, so bone loss results. When that loss becomes pathological, that's osteopenia or osteoporosis, and bones become fragile. In most women, the rate of bone loss increases for several years after menopause, then slows down again, but continues. In men, the bone loss occurs more slowly, but by age 65 or 70, most men and women are losing bone at the same rate.

It's important to know where this bone fragility tends

to occur. To understand this, it's helpful to know the two kinds of bone tissue: *cortical* (dense, or compact), and *trabecular* (spongy, sometimes called *cancellous*). (See Figure 1.) Cortical bone tissue is very compact and heavy, and makes up about 80% of our bone mass, primarily the hard outer layer of bones. It gives bones their smooth, solid, white appearance. Trabecular bone tissue is the porous inner layer of bones; it has a lattice structure (think of Swiss cheese—see Figure 2, left), which allows room for blood vessels and bone marrow. Although it makes up only about 20% of our bone mass, it occupies nearly ten times the surface area of compact bone. All bones contain some of each type of bone tissue, but the proportions can be different in different areas of the body.



Figure 1—Cross-section through the femur head: outer layer of compact bone and soft center of trabecular bone, filled with red bone marrow and a spot of yellow bone marrow (white bar = 1cm)

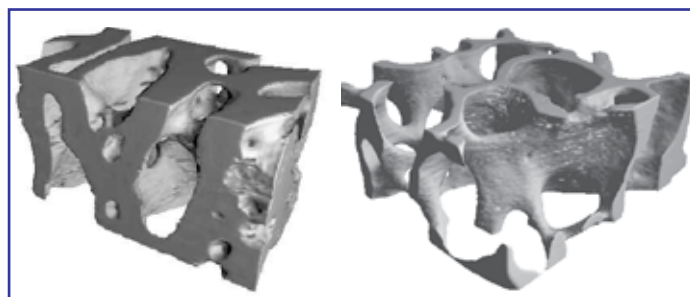


Figure 2—Bone tissue: healthy (left) and osteoporotic (right)

Osteoporosis causes loss of both types of bone tissue, but because of its higher prevalence and lower density, a loss of trabecular bone tissue can have significant effects: The Swiss cheese becomes even “holier” (see Figure 2, right) so the bone becomes more susceptible to fracture. This means that, with osteoporosis, areas with greater amounts of trabecular bone are more at risk for fracture. These areas include the vertebral bodies of the spine, the neck of the femur (the upper part of the thigh bone, just below where it fits into the hip joint), and the wrist, all of which have a relatively thin coating of cortical bone.

A lot of osteoporosis research data is emerging. The prevalence of low bone mass and the high risk for frac-

ture is disturbing, but there is a growing body of research that shows that proper diet and exercise, medication, and attention to body mechanics and safety can decrease the rate of fracture.

### My Diagnosis

I was diagnosed with osteopenia five years ago via a bone density scan (called a DEXA scan). I had suspected that I was in a high-risk group because of certain risk factors. I have been tested twice more since then and have seen the numbers (my T-scores) fluctuate a bit depending on my lifestyle—most importantly, my exercise level.

I recommend that you talk to your health care provider about a DEXA scan. I also recommend that you become familiar with the risk factors for low bone mass, several of which we have no control over: being female, or aging, or post-menopausal, or having a family history of osteoporosis. However, there are other risk factors that we *can* reduce and thereby have positive impact on bone density: e.g., smoking, sedentary lifestyle, high fat or high protein diet. One very interesting risk factor for low bone mass is stress.

A diagnosis of osteoporosis can be traumatic, but it need not be devastating. I've found it very empowering to become more aware of the position of my spine, and to strive to grow stronger and more centered in every movement.

### What to Avoid

While exercise is important, and yoga can be a valuable exercise for living with low bone mass, there are certain moves that nevertheless must be avoided in all exercise and activities of daily living in order to keep the spine safe from fracture.

With osteoporosis, fractures in the spine can occur due either to a fall or to forward flexion of the spine. Forward flexion puts pressure on the vertebral bodies, causing them to compress—and if they are already weakened by osteoporosis (vertebra have a high percentage of trabecular bone tissue), they may fracture. This type of fracture is called a *compression fracture*. It contributes toward the loss of height and the rounded spine that you've no doubt observed in some people.

In fact, compression fractures can also occur through lateral flexion and rotation of the spine. That is why, for students with osteoporosis, we yoga teachers should caution against not only forward flexion, but also lateral flexion and twisting. The goal should be to perform yoga, exercise and activities of daily living with the front of the spine being *long* and *open*.

The basic rules for safety are:

- **No forward flexion of the spine.** There is an impressive landmark study to back up this precaution. This means no “relaxation phase” of forward bends, no Sasamgasana—not even an unmodified Balasana! No sit-ups or crunches, either. All movement should be done with the front of the spine long and open.

- **No twisting**, especially if someone has a history of fracture, loss of height, or a rounded spine (“dowager hump”).
- **Especially no forward bending combined with twisting.** We see this combination of planes of movement in the wide-angle version of Janushirasana, in poorly executed seated spinal twists, and in improperly done Ardha Chandrasana.
- **No side bending**, which is actually a combination of flexion and twisting. There is a variation of Ardha Chandrasana that is safe for some students with osteoporosis, but it is not a place to begin.
- **No Rajakapotasana (Pigeon Pose)**, which puts too much twisting pressure through the hip joint. Use the Figure 4 Stretch instead.
- **Caution in Cross-Legged Poses.** For someone who is very tight in the hips, forcing herself (or himself) into a cross-legged position can put too much stress on the hip, specifically the neck of the femur.

These rules eliminate many asanas, and that can be discouraging. It's therefore important to research what movements *are* safe, and build your practice from there. If you create routines based on these safe moves, you will soon find that there are plenty of asanas to choose from.

### What Can We Do?

In fact, some of the poses that I've contraindicated here could be fine for some students, depending on the students' experience, condition, flexibility, strength and body awareness. To explore such a more-advanced approach, please see the resources at the end of this article. Meanwhile, let's continue to focus on beginning steps.

Two goals of any exercise routine for osteoporosis are:

- Educate your students in safe movement and good body mechanics, the principles of which will follow them into daily life.
- Optimize posture and develop awareness of proper posture in all asanas. Teach them to elongate through the spine, and keep the front of the spine open.

This sounds like it would be good for all of us doesn't it? After all, in addition to spinal safety, good posture benefits breathing, well-being, and the upward flow of energy toward the brain. Remember, however, that improving posture should be directional; it's not accomplished overnight. One important contributor to proper posture is to increase the strength of the extensor muscles along the back of the spine; this has been shown to help decrease the incidence of fractures.

Much of what can be done with a student depends upon your experience as a teacher and your student's experience as a yoga practitioner, as well as flexibility, strength, and body awareness. In general *it is better to err on the side of caution*. Here are some guidelines:

- **Standing poses** are good, e.g., Vrikasana (Tree) and its variations, Utkatasana (Chair—especially the first

phase), Standing Backward Bend, and Virabhadrasana (Warrior) I and II. These are good because they are weight-bearing poses for the skeleton (this helps build bones), they help develop balance and lower extremity strength, and if done with awareness, they improve posture. To promote an easeful, strong and stable spine, be sure to maintain a neutral spine during these poses (Standing Backward Bend, of course, does bend the spine backward), use props as needed—including the wall or a chair to ensure safety by preventing falls—and don't go in poses so deeply that posture is compromised. And don't forget the affirmations!

- **The Reclining Big Toe Pose** (Supine Leg Stretch) with a strap is a safer alternative to forward bends, and can help stretch tight hamstrings while keeping the spine flat and stable against the floor.
- **Floor-based spinal extension asanas** such as Bhujangasana (and its variations, including Sphinx) and Salabhasana are great for strengthening the muscles of the back of the spine. They also open up the front of the body, energize the spine, and generally make us feel good. For more-advanced students, Ustrasana or Dhanurasana could also be done.
- **Setu Bandhasana** strengthens the legs and spinal muscles, and stretches the front of the thighs and hips. To avoid compression of thoracic vertebrae, the student must be able to lift the thoracic spine off the floor.
- **Bent-knee Savasana**, using props as necessary for proper body position, is a very restorative position. Relaxation and breathwork in this supine position can be calming to the nervous system, and help students deal with stress and fear (remember, stress is a risk factor for osteoporosis) as well as to help optimize posture.

I repeat: this is a conservative approach. As your students gain strength and body awareness, additional poses become possible; see the resources below for further study.

### Keep It Simple

Remember, the basic rule for safety: A long spine and an open front of the body will prevent compression of the vertebral bodies. Avoiding flexion of the spine is very important in any activity—not just exercise, but even sitting at a computer, or bending over to pick up a pencil—and building up the strength of the muscles on the back of the trunk to promote good posture goes a long way toward protecting oneself against the possibility of fracture.

Exercise is important in the treatment of osteoporosis; however *proper* exercise is even more important. Bearing weight through the bones helps to maintain and increase bone mass, because it stimulates the remodeling process. Walking is good exercise for most people. Good shoes and a safe place to walk are all that is needed. However, good body alignment remains important here also, as it helps improve the muscle action and weight-bearing forces on the body—and yoga can help with this.

## Ananda Yoga on the Road

by Gyandev McCord

Diksha's and my recent programs in Tennessee, Wisconsin, and Idaho went extremely well. We have one more "road trip" this year, but more coming in 2009:

Sept 26–28 ....Mount Saint Francis, IN (near Louisville, KY and Cincinnati, OH)—"How to Know and Trust Your Inner Guidance"

Jan 2–4.....Rancho Palos Verdes, CA (Los Angeles)—topic to be announced

Feb 8–25....."Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga Retreat" in Kerala, India

May 8–10.....Chicago, IL—topic to be announced

June or July ...McCall, ID—topic to be announced

Oct 2–4 .....Mitchell, SD—topic to be announced

Oct 9–11 .....Monteagle, TN—topic to be announced

For more information—especially if you have friends who might be interested—please contact me, or visit Diksha's and my website: [WaysToFreedom.com](http://WaysToFreedom.com).

### Spreading the Joy

A weekend retreat near you is a great way to create a sense of community among your students, and "fire them up" for more depth. If you would like to help manifest one, please contact me. We're already booking into 2010.

Let's spread the power of Ananda Yoga everywhere!

### Ananda Yoga Can Help

It's true that we are not the body, but sometimes we are called to care for the body in specific ways. It's our vehicle for service, after all. Done with these basic safety guidelines, and with appropriate asana modifications in mind, Ananda Yoga can be a valuable aid to enhancing the well-being of that vehicle. The practice can increase strength, help maintain a higher level of function, and improve posture and awareness. The asanas and affirmations together help decrease stress and raise consciousness, which even has a physical benefit: a calm, uplifted consciousness tends to straighten the spine.

Come what may, Ananda Yoga helps us to remember that no condition of the body can determine our state of mind, our peace, or our joy. While always helping us on the physical and emotional levels, it's invaluable for helping us to remember who we really are: beings of light. ♦

### Recommended Resources:

*The Physical Therapy Management of Bone Health: A Clinician's Guide—The Meeks Method*, Sara M. Meeks, PT, MS, GCS.

(continues on page 11)

# The Makings of a Yoga Day

by Carol von Borstel

The members of our yoga cooperative had been fantasizing about a Yoga Day for over a year. We envisioned it as a celebration of the closeness of the yoga community that had formed around our twice-weekly classes. We also wanted to offer, through this special day, a more detailed exposure to several aspects of hatha and raja yoga.

In late March of 2008, we decided to commit to a month of planning classes and arranging logistics so our dream of a day devoted to yoga would not have to be shelved until summer travelers returned to our rural coastal communities of Sequim and Port Townsend, on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state.

I teach yoga part time in our local community center along with Barb Boekelheide, another Ananda-trained yoga teacher, and three other experienced teachers. This yoga cooperative predated my entry on the scene. It was started by a group of women who met weekly in homes and took turns leading a session of asanas. By the time I retired and moved to the Olympic Peninsula in 2004, the little cooperative had grown to about a dozen participants with trained and paid instructors. Classes were held in donated space in a lovely old community center with hardwood floors and large windows facing Washington's San Juan Islands.

Yoga classes in the Gardiner Community Center are held on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. Students are primarily retired women, with a few men also attending. Most of the participants are between 50 and 80 years of age. Students customarily donate \$3-\$5 dollars when they attend. The donations are used to give the teachers a stipend, with most of the remainder given back as a "thank you" to the Community Center. The "remainder of the remainder" constitutes a small "kitty," which in this case was enough to cover Yoga Day expenses: rental fee for the building, a modest honorarium for each instructor, printing costs for a few handouts, and groceries for the meal that was provided.



*Carol graduated from AYTT in April 2004. She lives and teaches on the Olympic Peninsula of Washington state.*

## Getting into Gear

The budding plan for a Yoga Day, like all other plans for the cooperative, was discussed informally with the Consensus Group (a subcommittee of class participants, which offers feedback and planning for the "bigger picture" of managing the cooperative). The energy and talents of class members were happily volunteered, and we all went to work. Regular classes are now averaging 20 members, so there were lots of helpers and lots of ideas. It was decided that we would have as our theme, "The Energy of Yoga," and that all presentations would explore some facet of this theme.

As the sign-up sheet made the rounds over the following weeks, it became clear that upwards of 40 students, all current and former members of the cooperative, would attend the Yoga Day activities. This was more than we had expected, so we revised the logistics to comfortably accommodate a group of that size. Our retired engineer, also a certified yoga teacher, figured out a configuration of yoga mats that would allow 40+ people to do asanas in the large upstairs room. Another co-op member, this one a nutritionist, volunteered, along with two other talented cooks in the group, to prepare our lunch. We pooled our



*Yoga Day Faculty: Five yoga teachers (AYTT grads Barb Boekelheide and Carol von Borstel are in the middle of the front and back rows, respectively), two alignment assistants, and one massage therapist)*

blankets, straps and blocks for a restorative class. Group members signed up for set-up and clean-up. Downstairs rooms were made ready for group workshops. Teachers contributed to a list of their favorite resources, and brought personal books for a display.

### The Big Day Arrives

The Yoga Day presenters (*see photo*) were our five regular teachers—two of whom (Barb Boekelheide and myself) are Ananda-trained—as well as a co-op member who is a massage therapist. A yoga teacher in an adjoining town asked if she could come and “assist” in the large class session. Thirty-minute sessions were planned and scheduled with a ten-minute “quiet” passing time between each group presentation. Participants would be together for the first hour and then would have the opportunity to choose three additional sessions during the morning. The sessions taught to the following topics: “Chakras,” “Knees, Backs, and Shoulders,” “Yoga Philosophy,” “Pranayama,” “Restorative Poses,” “Self-Massage Techniques,” “An Introduction to Meditation,” “Meditation Questions and Answers,” and “Individual Assistance.”

The schedule for the morning started with a welcome and brief focus message given by one of the Ananda teachers followed by the usual centering meditation that begins and ends most of our classes. We then had a 50-minute asana class with the entire group of 45. Participants did not need to commit beforehand to sessions, but the flow from group to group was smooth and equitable.

We had asked in the opening that participants bring quiet attention to the activities of the morning and save visiting until lunch. At 11:50am the final gong was sounded and we gathered for a prayer and the banquet that had been prepared for us. The long and relaxed lunch that followed gave us ample time to get to know one another better.

### Inspiration to Continue

It has been more than three months now since Yoga Day, and students continue to discuss our time together on that day with enthusiasm. Teachers as well as students regularly bring forward new ideas for our “next” Yoga Day. Class members have also requested some forum in which they could explore topics from the Yoga Day sessions in greater depth. Toward that end, two of our teachers have recently returned from an intensive week-long course on restorative yoga.

It was definitely a group effort, and pride in our combined contributions was shared. The exposure of this day gave participants a much broader picture of the breadth and depth of the science of yoga, as well as a closer connection to fellow students and teachers in the yoga cooperative.

After the summer, I suspect that we will be back to the drawing board, planning the next Yoga Day. ♦

### The Other Anniversary (continued from page 2)

took about fifteen minutes), do Maha Mudra for an hour, Kriya for another hour, and then ring the wakeup bell at 4:30 A.M. I had to keep moving, because I was so sleep deprived that if I stopped moving, I would fall asleep.

“The 80 participants were camped out all across the meadow. The ‘bell’ was an oxygen tank, suspended from a tripod of poles, and I rang it continuously until everyone woke up. And disciplinarian that I was, they *did* get up. This went on for a while, until the ‘hatchet man’ decided to expand her job description (or else felt that I had become one of the crazies): She and an accomplice wrapped the bell in old clothes, then duct-taped it so completely that it wouldn’t make a sound. When I arrived at 4:30 and found myself thwarted, I charged down the hill to the farmhouse kitchen, got a knife, ran back up and cut off all the tape and clothes, then rang the bell with considerable vigor. Eventually, they all came sheepishly out of their tents and into the meadow for sadhana.

“I felt attacked, though, and I wondered if I was going in a wrong direction, spiritually. I trusted Swami to know, so I went to him and asked, ‘Is there anything I’m doing that’s not pleasing to you?’ Swami was kept well informed of what went on at Ananda, so I assumed I didn’t need to cover details. He said no, he wasn’t aware of anything like that. That was all I needed to hear. I went right back to the farmhouse and called a meeting: ‘Anyone who doesn’t want to be here, can go. But if you *do* want to be here, then you should do what we’re doing.’ I looked around the group, giving them the ‘laser eyes.’ [Note: Prakash was a monk at that time, so he wore the yellow “pajamas” that all the monks wore. He also tied up his long hair in a topknot (*see photo*). With that and his drill sergeant demeanor, he was no doubt intimidating.] They all nodded a meek or grudging ‘okay,’ although two of them came up later wanting to leave, and I refunded their money.

“Not much more came of it, but eventually we adopted a later rising time—5:30 A.M., I think—and by 1977, we



Prakash in the mid-1970s—behind that soft smile: the “laser eyes.” And do you recognize Anandi?

had found all-around balance. Maybe that meant I was done, because that's when Jyotish and Seva decided that leading both programs was too much for one person, so someone else took on the Apprentice Program, and I stayed with AYTT."

### A New Expression of AYTT

The next year, AYTT moved up to the Meditation Retreat as a concentrated, stand-alone course. The first offering was five weeks long, and it began on January 4, 1978. (Note: So 2008 is the thirtieth anniversary of the *stand-alone* AYTT; the *very first* AYTT was part of the combination Apprenticeship/AYTT program, which began in 1976.)

"I'm glad it wasn't the era of lawsuits," says Prakash, "because that first course had the famous borax nasal douche episode. I had read in the *Fourteen Steps* [see the Healing section of Step Five] about using borax in a nasal douche, and I thought, 'Great, we should do that—and I know exactly where some of that stuff is.' I went to the retreat kitchen, picked up something called Boraxo, and thought, 'Well, borax, Boraxo, must be the same thing.'"

I mixed it with water according to Swami's instructions, and everyone poured it into their noses and nasal cavities. Soon, foam started to pour out of their noses. You see, although Boraxo does have borax, it's basically a detergent. It contains lye and pumice too, so it's both caustic and highly abrasive—not great for sensitive nasal tissues. It's really for people like mechanics and farmers to clean their hands, which get very dirty doing their work.

"Some of the students already had things going on with their bodies—past alcohol problems, one woman was pregnant, etc.—so it wasn't quite what everyone needed. But I'm a 'plow ahead' sort of person, so I just sat there like nothing was wrong. Soon I began to feel invisible rays of wrath directed at me by the students, as they sat there with their nasal passages burning and foam coming out of their noses. It was merely doing what detergents do—cleaning deeply, probably right up to the brain—but it wasn't going over very well with the students."

Current Ananda Village resident Ray Noble remembers the episode vividly: "I was young and new to Ananda, and so in awe of being here—and there was Prakash in his



# Ayurvedic Healing & Yoga Retreat

Kerala, India ✨ February 8-25, 2009

Led by Diksha & Gyandev McCord

## Imagine ...



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*It was the best vacation I have ever had. — AYTT grad Lan Gluckman*

*There aren't enough superlatives to describe this trip. I vacation a lot, and have been to many places in the world, and this was without a doubt the best vacation experience I have ever had. I want to go again! — AYTT grad Charlene Gier*





topknot and yellow pajamas. I treated everything with absolute reverence, which made the whole nasal douche episode really funny. I was from New York City, so I'd been breathing gunk for a long time. Well, the Boraxo nasal douche took every single thing out of me. I had no idea my nasal passages were so large. Everything just drained out. It wasn't particularly painful, but it wasn't much fun, either. It was sort of like if you didn't know what garlic was, or maybe what neem paste was, and you saw a bunch of it on a plate and started wolfing it down. It completely fried my head."

"They were exhaling bubbles for a few hours afterward," chuckles Prakash, "but they got over it—although some of them couldn't smell for a few days. Later I inserted a warning into the *Fourteen Steps*: 'Be sure to buy U.S.P. Grade borax (available from a chemical supply house). Borax is not to be confused with Boraxo, a detergent containing lye and harmful to the nose and sinus cavities, or with boric acid.'"

Would the right type of borax have caused any burning or bubbling? "I don't know," Prakash told me. "For some reason, they weren't keen to try the nasal douche again after that, and neither was I. Anyway, a saline nasal douche—which Swami had also recommended—might have been a better idea."

No doubt many of the students still recall the course as a high point in their lives—although their noses might have a different take on it.

### The Maha AYT

These courses were very intense for Prakash. "Since I taught most of it myself—everything but anatomy and physiology and a few philosophy classes—I was wiped out after those five weeks. When we had an outing at the end, all I could do was sit and stare straight ahead, with a blank look on my face."

But that must have been easy compared to the three-month version of AYT! Here too, Prakash taught the vast majority of the classes. The daily regime was sadhana, breakfast, class, meditation, lunch, karma yoga, class, sadhana, dinner, class or study time. Occasionally, an evening was free, and there was some free time (not much) on weekends—for homework, of course. There was a short break at Christmas (most students attended the annual 8-hour Christmas meditation), and a week off in January. In addition to learning to teach asanas, students learned to play the harmonium and lead chants, and to teach Energization and meditation (both Hong-Sau and the AUM technique). They even led sadhanas. Their classes covered a much wider variety of subjects than today's AYT: e.g., there were classes on various saints and on how Ananda Village works. A week-long seclusion (fasting recommended) was part of the program too.

One of those three-month groups (Dec. 1979–March 1980) included seven people who later became Ananda ministers. One of them was Nancy Mair (author of *Simply*

*Vegetarian, The Intimate Vegetarian and The Spirit of Gardening*), who recalls: "By the time the weekend arrived, no one seemed to have enough energy remaining to go anywhere or do anything else. Then again, we didn't really want to get out of that 'total yoga' space. The course was a real commitment—and a blessing! It was the time of our lives. There was no room for anything else, and that was perfect. We loved that course; it was absolutely magical. We were *such* a close group, and we all knew that we'd probably never have an experience like that again, so no one wanted to leave. By the end of the course, we were really solid in Ananda Yoga and Raja Yoga. We were yogis!"

Another minister/graduate, Stephanie Sandin (now at Ananda Seattle), recalls some rugged conditions: "At one point, it rained for ten days straight. It snowed several times, too. Rooms had kerosene lamps for reading, and 'tin lizzie' woodstoves. There were only outhouses, and

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just one shower and sink for men, and one for women. We had a fabulous time, though. Prakash was a terrific teacher—we learned a lot and laughed a lot."

See how easy you had it in your AYT course? Personally, I would love to have had that fantastic experience—but as a student, not as the teacher. I can't imagine how Prakash did it. Well, yes I can: He has extraordinary inspiration, dedication and willpower.

Those students chose some unique "target groups" for their student teaching. Prakash remembers: "Nancy had a hot air balloon business back home in Seattle. She trained people to be balloonists, and she would also take people up for a ride and serve them an in-flight gourmet meal—with champagne, of course. Her target group for the student teaching was basically her customers. Her sample class was a hoot."

Larry Rider (co-founder of Ananda Rhode Island, now at Ananda Seattle), whose target group was "back to the landers," recalls: "I was convinced that many people in my home state of Maine were ripe to respond to the message of yoga. My desire to share this was finally realized when we began Ananda Rhode Island in 1999. Unfortunately, though, I had to accept the fact that people on the East Coast—and especially in independent-minded Maine—are no more ready to embrace the high yoga ideals than people anywhere else. As Krishna says in the Gita, 'Out of a thousand, one seeks me.' That's about right. But I was transformed by AYT with Prakash. He was simply great, and I've been deeply committed to this path ever since."

*"Swami told me to keep it simple, but I said, 'People want lots of advanced postures and variations.' He replied, 'They may want it, but I'm not sure it's good for them.' I got it: the true spiritual purpose gets lost when complexity enters."*

Nancy met her husband, Kerry, in the program. (Theirs was the very first "met during AYTT" marriage!) Kerry chose Christian fundamentalists as his target group. His family were fundamentalists, so he knew all too well their language and mindset. "Kerry could really thump that Bible," laughs Prakash. "He perfectly mimicked the tone of voice that fundamentalist preachers use, and their vocabulary. He was just wailing on us. It was all yoga, but his method of delivery was like being in a tent revival."

Kerry strove valiantly to give his hypothetical fundamentalists a taste of what yoga could give them. Perhaps he even dreamed of trying to teach real fundamentalists someday, but later he realized that it just wouldn't be possible: Where there is no openness, even the finest teachers cannot do much. What people receive from our classes is a matter not only of how well we teach, but also of how open and hungry the students are.

### Other Places, Other AYTTs

In 1980, Prakash was asked to move to Ananda Sacramento and teach there. Somehow, he ended up in Stockton instead (that's another story), so Sacramento YTT students had to drive an hour to Stockton. Those YTTs were six months long, meeting every Friday evening for four hours, and all day Saturday once a month. The Village AYTTs had mostly devotees, but in Stockton, "We had some devotees," recalls Prakash, "but we also had 'others.' For example, one guy's altar had a photo of Master, but also an image of Beelzebub (Satan, in Christianity). Just covering his bases, I guess."

Prakash continued to teach AYTT in various urban Ananda centers. "After a while, I think the influence of the city began to get to me, because I started reading all these other books about yoga: lots of warm-ups, and complex variations on the asanas. Swami had always told me to keep it simple, but I said to him, 'People want all those more-advanced postures and variations.' He replied, 'They may want it, but I'm not sure it's good for them.' I got it: the true spiritual purpose gets lost when complexity enters the picture, so I kept it simple after that."

Prakash left teaching altogether in the mid-1980s. That, too, is an instructive story:

"One day a student said to me, 'You should take such-and-such a workshop.' Immediately I thought: 'Yeah, it would be really good to add that to my repertoire.' That

really scared me: the 'yoga teacher ego' thing. I hadn't felt it before, that pressure to keep having something new for the students, something more, rather than something deeper. So I wrote Swami and asked if I should stop teaching. I didn't even tell him what had happened; I just asked the question. Maybe Swami could feel that I was too obsessed with teaching, too attached, and didn't have the temperament to keep doing more and more without losing my balance. I would have kept working from that same center of willpower, trying futilely to bring everything within reach of that one limited faculty. Then too, maybe it was just that other people needed to have their own opportunities. At any rate, Swami didn't hesitate: 'Yes, stop teaching as soon as we can send a replacement for you.' When my replacement arrived, I moved back to the Village and worked in the maintenance department."

He's been in that realm ever since. Today he can be seen driving various pieces of heavy equipment: bulldozer, tractor, dump truck. His selfless efforts have made him the person most responsible for Ananda looking so much more beautiful and park-like—and being far more fire-safe—than it used to be. Remarking on the former wildly overgrown state of much of Ananda's land (due to human prevention of the wildfires that naturally keep the forest floor clean), Swami Kriyananda has said: "That sort of thing attracts *rakshasas* (lower astral entities)." For remedying that *and* for founding AYTT, we thank you, Prakash.

### The Baton is Passed

When Prakash moved to Sacramento (er ... Stockton), others stepped in to teach AYTT. Over the next couple of years, AYTT stabilized as a four-week course. In the early 1980s, Swami Kriyananda asked Jyotish and Devi Novak to take over AYTT, which, post-Prakash, had strayed a bit "off course"

as to what Ananda Yoga really is. When they protested, "But we're not that deeply into hatha yoga!" Swami simply said: "That's okay. You will be. Just give them the vibration and the teachings. They'll get it."



*He drives a tractor now, but he never forgets his pre-Ananda days as a professor of English.*

That conversation took place just *one week* before the next AYTT was to begin! Jyotish and Devi immediately packed up their belongings and relocated to the Meditation Retreat, where they began renovating their “new” home: Swami’s old dome house. Somehow, they managed to sheetrock, tape, mud and paint the entire inside of the dome—and then move in and prepare for the course—in just that one week. They were already experienced teachers, so teaching itself was not a problem; the “only” problem was that they weren’t strong hatha yogis, and they had to prepare a four-week course that they had never taught before. (Interesting note: Jyotish is the first-ever AYTT “graduate,” having been trained—just to practice, mind you, not to teach—via Swami’s San Francisco Bay Area classes in the late 1960s. One day, however, Swami asked Jyotish to start teaching, and that was that! Aren’t you glad that you had all that practice teaching in AYTT?)

Jyotish and Devi directed AYTT for a couple of years, bringing it back into the center of what Ananda Yoga is all about. Jyotish vividly remembers one group that was a struggle from start to finish. “We had gone to Hawaii with Swami and a few others, and it all began with the frustration of having to cut our Hawaiian vacation short to come back to teach AYTT. Many of the students were quite challenging. One argued with virtually everything we said for the entire course. Another, during the philosophy classes, would simply sit in the back and read a book. It could have been worse, I suppose—it was a commentary on the Gita, after all—but still ...”

After the course, both of them (the two students, not Jyotish and Devi) sent letters of apology for their behavior. The argumentative one actually went on to teach (maybe his students argued with him, too), which was unusual for graduates in those days: Most people took AYTT simply as a way to go deeper into the teachings, or to fill a time gap in their lives, or for a vacation (not any more!).

“To help students become more comfortable up in front of people,” says Devi, “each one had to do a skit [a short play—usually funny—on some topic].” One student chose nonattachment as her topic. She and a classmate walked into the Temple, each trailing a long rope that was tied around one ankle. Tied to that rope—and thus dragged into the Temple behind them—were a number of items representing attachments, each corresponding to a particular chakra: a fake treasure chest for the first chakra, a picture of a scantily clad female for the second chakra, and so on. One item at a time, she gave a brief talk about what it means to give up that attachment, and proceeded to untie the corresponding item from the rope. When the last item was untied, voilà: freedom! It was very funny.”

Another student’s skit became Jyotish’s most memorable deep relaxation: “He started out by having us relax the body, relax the breath, etc.—the usual stuff. ‘Now,’ he said, ‘imagine yourself lying on a beautiful, lush jungle floor—a cushion of soft green leaves underneath you, caressing your body, a gentle breeze blowing through a gorgeous

tropical canopy of trees overhead, the sweet calls of many different birds. Relax and soak it all in. ... Now you hear the soft padding of feet slowly coming closer and closer. You lift your head and open your eyes, and you see, standing a short distance from your feet, a ferocious-looking Bengal tiger, slowly licking its lips. Take a long, slow, deep inhalation, and as you exhale, lay your head back down, close your eyes again, and relax. ... The tiger walks up to you and begins to nibble your toes off, one by one. Let them go. ... Next he bites off the remainder of each foot. Again, just let it go ...’ He proceeded up through the entire body this way, amid gales of laughter from all of us. It was a novel way to get beyond body consciousness!”



*Jyotish and Devi Novak—circa 1985*

Jyotish and Devi continued in that role for a year or two until it became clear that they needed to take on larger duties at Ananda: They are the Spiritual Directors of Ananda Village, and Jyotish is the Spiritual Director of all of Ananda. The guest retreat function moved to The Expanding Light in 1984, where both it and AYTT have resided ever since.

There have been a number of different AYTT directors over the intervening years, including some who are familiar to many of you, such as Savitri Simpson, Pranaba Hansen and Adam Bornstein. Along with them have come a number of stories—some funny, some inspiring, some alarming, all memorable. Tales for another time, perhaps.

Meanwhile, I’ll conclude by mentioning yet one more anniversary in 2008: it’s my tenth anniversary of directing Ananda Yoga and AYTT. It’s been a joy and a privilege to serve in this way. Cheers! ♦

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### **Working with Osteopenia & Osteoporosis** (continued from page 5)

*Walk Tall*, Sara M. Meeks, PT, MS, GCS. I especially recommend this for a good foundation in the concepts of osteoporosis and yoga modifications for this condition. She travels around the country teaching *Safe Yoga for Osteoporosis*; I took that workshop and found it very helpful.

*The Osteoporosis Exercise Book*, Sherri R. Betz, PT. This book is on safe Pilates, but it also has a lot to offer the yoga teacher. Sherri and Sara Meeks sometimes teach a class together in the San Francisco Bay Area.

*Strong Women Have Strong Bones*, Miriam Nelson

**UPCOMING LEVEL 2 HIGHLIGHTS**

**Kriya Yoga Preparation (Oct 15–19)**

Did you remember that “Kriya Prep” is a Level 2 program? That’s right, and if you’re thinking that Paramhansa Yogananda is your guru, and you’re ready to take your meditation practice and attunement to a deeper level—even if you’re not ready for the Kriya Initiation itself—consider this program. Taught by Dave Warner and other Ananda Kriyacharyas, it’s a fabulous way to put new life into your meditations.

**★Meditation Teacher Training (Oct 17–26)**

More and more people want to learn to meditate. Many physicians are even prescribing it. And many hatha yoga students are realizing that meditation is their next step. So maybe it’s time to add a new dimension to your teaching—and develop new teaching opportunities. Under the expert guidance of Savitri Simpson and Diksha McCord, you’ll learn how to teach a variety of meditative techniques, how to help students find their perfect sitting position, and how to answer the tough questions that students will ask, and more. Your asana students will love the greater depth that meditation brings, and your practice will deepen, too.

**AYTA CONTACTS**

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*Brook & Maitri*

Brook Dunwoody is moving to Los Angeles to teach yoga and help with Ananda’s new center in Santa Monica. Maitri Jones will take her place in AYTT and the AYTT Assistantship. Bye bye and thank you, Brook! Welcome aboard, Maitri!



**Level 2 Calendar**

The 2009 calendar is still a work in progress, so we can’t yet give you dates for Summer 2009 Level 2 courses. But as always, for the benefit of those who live far from Ananda Village, a number of Level 2 programs will be “strung together” in the summer. Meanwhile, here the Level 2 programs for the upcoming months.

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**

- 8/24–31.....★Advanced Pranayama
- 10/15–19.... Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 10/17–26....★Meditation Teacher Training
- 10/26–11/23 ★AYTT Assistantship
- 12/14–18 ...Ayurvedic Yoga Retreat for Balance & Harmony

**2009**

- 2/8–25 .....Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga in Kerala, India (see page 8)
- 3/13–22 .....★Meditation Teacher Training
- 3/22–4/5.....★AYTT Assistantship
- Summer.....★Meditation Teacher Training
- Summer.....★AYTT Assistantship
- Summer.....Ananda Yoga Intensive
- Summer.....Essence of the Bhagavad Gita
- Summer.....Therapeutic YTT

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