



Help Name Me!

(... and win a free membership—see below.)

Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga™ Teachers Association
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Exploring the Essence

What is Ananda Yoga?

by Gyandev McCord



Gyandev (Rich) McCord, Director of Ananda Yoga, received his spiritual name from Swami Kriyananda in September.

What do you say when someone asks, “What is Ananda Yoga?” Probably you give a brief and rather general answer, tailored to what you think he or she will understand. But what is Ananda Yoga, *really*?

There is no simple definitive answer, but in this article I’ll highlight the essence of it. I hope it will help your teaching as well as your practice. You might even find a surprise or two.

It’s Not a List of Asanas

First, I’d like to banish a common misconception: Ananda Yoga is *not* limited to the asanas mentioned in the *14 Steps*. A list of “permissible” postures would be a nice, easy definition of Ananda Yoga, but it would completely miss the point. Swami Kriyananda doesn’t work that way. He’s often said that his work is seminal. In the many

topics he’s addressed—education, leadership, relationships, Ananda Yoga, etc.—he’s usually established a framework and a direction, leaving it to others to continue that direction, expand upon what he’s said, and apply it practically.

Similarly, AYT is a seminal training: we explore a limited but well rounded set of asanas that you can teach to most students. Our hope is that the training will enable you to expand on that set, to understand and teach other asanas from the Ananda Yoga perspective.

On the Other Hand ...

That doesn’t mean, however, that “anything goes” in Ananda Yoga—or in any genuine tradition, for that matter. That would be chaos, which I think accurately describes the current American yoga scene. In the name of freedom, many teachers have committed themselves to eclecticism, lumping together techniques and approaches from many different traditions.

As I was remarking on this not long ago (while rolling my eyes, I admit), someone challenged me, “What’s wrong with that?” I replied, “Nothing, except that it has no spiritual power.” True yoga is not just a collection of techniques; a genuine yoga tradition holds to a specific ray of divine grace because that ray is the source of its power. Things are done in a certain way—not out of dogmatism, but because that’s how one can best tune in to that ray. Spreading oneself over multiple traditions inevitably results in being unable to go deep in *any* of them.

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Free Membership

Would you like this newsletter to have a spiffier name than it’s had: “Ananda Yoga™ Teachers Association?” And would you like to win a free year’s membership in AYTA? That’s what the prize will be for the winner of the “Name the Newsletter” contest. (Renew now for 2001 and win a freebie for 2002.)

It’s easy to enter:

1. Think of a great name for the newsletter—something that not only works as a newsletter name, but suggests yoga or yoga teachers and has a distinct Ananda “ring” to it. It can be serious or fun, English or Sanskrit. For example, one leading contender for the new name is “*Awake and Ready!*” (So don’t suggest that as your entry!)
2. Send your name to Gyandev McCord by January 31, 2001. (See “AYTA Contacts” on page 8.)
3. Sit back and wait to be announced as the clever and lucky winner.

The judges’ decision will be announced in the next newsletter (late winter 2001). Good luck, great souls! ♦

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Member News

It's Time to Renew Your Membership!

Almost everyone's membership will expire by December 31, 2000, so now's the time to renew. (Check the mailing label to see when your membership expires.) The fee is still just \$30 for one year (\$35 for those outside the U.S.). If you graduated in May 2000, subtract \$10 from your fee; if you graduated in August 2000, subtract \$20 from your fee. Renew today so you can get in the 2001 Directory and continue enjoying all the other great AYTA benefits (checks payable to Ananda YTA, sent to The Expanding Light, Attn: Lisa). Speaking of benefits ...

Join AYSutra Today

AYSutra, our new e-mail Q&A forum, is up and running. AYTA members are already sharing solutions about students with multiple sclerosis, students with foot cramps, and more. If you haven't yet signed up, send an e-mail today to AYSutra@expandinglight.org.

Free E-Mail Service

No computer? No e-mail? No problem! Just visit yahoo.com or hotmail.com via your local library or internet cafe (staff can help you). Either website will give you a free e-mail account—then you can join AYSutra!

Everyone Is Interested in You

Have you had insights on teaching yoga, or on the student/teacher relationship? Found effective promotional techniques? Received inspirations on your practice? Then please consider contributing an article for the AYTA newsletter. If you like, we'll even help you write it. Please contact Gyandev (see page 8) for assistance.

Thanks, Willow – Can Anyone Else Help?

Blessings & thanks to Willow Scheel-Kushler of Seattle for her splendid service in desktop publishing the two preceding newsletters. As she's a new mom, she can no longer continue in this role. Can you help out with this task? If so, please contact Gyandev (see page 8).

Helping Students Find You

Soon it will be even easier for students to find Ananda Yoga teachers. Our separate AnandaYoga.org website will "go live" early in 2001, listing the AYTA directory of members, with phone numbers and e-mail addresses.

New Liability Insurance Coverage

We have a new carrier and policy, with annual premiums from \$100 to \$160, depending on the coverage and how much you teach. For an application, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Lisa Powers at The Expanding Light. (Existing policies will continue until the expiration date.)

What Is Ananda Yoga?

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Many people don't like to hear this, of course, thinking that it limits their freedom. But as a chiropractor once said to me when I complained about what he said was necessary for my recovery, "Hey, I don't make the rules!" In hatha yoga, eclecticism is fine if all one seeks is a physical workout, but "the rule" is that it takes focus to attain the highest.

The January 2001 issue of *Yoga International* reinforced this point: "The instructions [from the teacher] must flow from a genuine tradition, and you need to remain with the teacher who is fully connected to the tradition. If you are still working on the preparatory steps ... it is all right to shop around. But if you wish to discover the inner dimensions of yoga that guarantee everlasting peace and happiness, you must study under the guidance of an experienced teacher and follow their instructions precisely."

The Central Goal

How does this apply to Ananda Yoga? Last spring, describing his thought process in developing Ananda Yoga from the teachings of Paramhansa Yogananda, Swami Kriyananda told me:

"Yoga's purpose is spiritual, and since hatha yoga is the physical branch of Raja Yoga, hatha yoga *must* have a spiritual purpose. It can't be just to give you a good body. ...

"As I meditated on it, I realized that there is a very close connection between the positions of the body and the attitudes of the mind, and also of the soul. For example, a spiritual attitude is going to make you graceful, not awkward or hasty. It will lead you to relaxation, not tension. I also thought about how to use the postures to advance the purpose of the foundation of hatha yoga, which is Raja Yoga: to awaken the energy, loosen the spine so the energy can reach the brain more easily, bring it up the spine to the brain, and give you the experience of centeredness and upliftedness."

That's the key. Ananda Yoga is not just about getting "a good buzz," as one person put it while enthusing about a particular technique. It's about *generating and increasing an inward and upward flow of energy in a safe, balanced, conscious way*.

Therefore, every part of Ananda Yoga—including and especially one's attitude—should contribute to this goal. All else is distraction (or worse). And yes, that means that some asanas and pranayamas—and nearly all "flows"—don't fit within Ananda Yoga because they don't harmonize with the rest of Ananda Yoga to take us toward this goal.

From the Vine to the Branches

But let's focus on what *does* fit. Consider, for example, how some familiar aspects of Ananda Yoga take us toward the goal:

Energization Exercises: Mastering Energization takes our practice to an entirely new level. It's the technique *par excellence* for increasing energy and our awareness of it. Only with awareness can we draw energy inward and upward—without awareness, all the energy in the world won't do us much good. Energization also prepares our nervous system to handle more and more energy. It's a prime contributor to the overall goal.

Sequence: Ananda Yoga routines are sequenced to bring energy inward and upward. Standing asanas come first, to center

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Yoga as a Healing Modality

by Cecile Martin

Last May, the University of Southern Indiana School of Nursing and Health Professions asked me to talk on “Yoga As A Healing Modality” to their Case Management Seminar. It was quite a new topic for the participants (nurses, nurse practitioners, physicians, and corporate health insurance managers), as evidenced by other Seminar topics such as: “The Future of Case Management,” “Prospective Payment System Design for Rehabilitation,” “Managing Mental Health Issues in Your Practice,” and “Economics in Cardiology Care.”

But they were more interested in yoga! My talk was “standing room only,” drawing far more people (approximately 60) than another concurrent workshop. It was quite an experience for all of us.

My friend Eddie demonstrated asanas as I spoke. I paused as he moved into a posture, then he said the affirmation and I repeated it. I didn’t explain the affirmations; I offered just a taste, letting them speak for themselves. I also addressed the chakras only briefly. After all, “yoga as a healing modality” was new to this group, so I stayed primarily with information they could relate to: physical (for this audience, “yoga” is hatha yoga). Eddie’s demos and some overhead slides (both shown in italics) proved *very* helpful.

Here is the text of the presentation:

Hello, my name is Cecile Martin.

Eddie: Chandrasana

I am a nationally certified massage therapist, owner of “Bodyworks: Massage Therapy with Heart!”, and a therapeutic massage teacher with the Indiana College of Bodywork Modalities. I’m also a yoga instructor. I have studied yoga as a healing modality for almost 10 years now and have been asked to share with you what I’ve learned in my yoga training.

(I then introduced Eddie.)

Eddie: Forward bend (and variations) until trikonasana

Overhead: Movement Is Life!

I was first introduced to yoga in 1991 through a friend from California who was visiting the Midwest for an extended time.

I witnessed this friend practicing yoga postures and meditation, wondering what in the world could the benefits be of that? Holding the body for 30 seconds or longer in these weird-looking postures? Sitting motionless, eyes closed, for up to an hour at a time? I simply could not relate to it—until through some physical, emotional and mental challenges of my own, I ended up with a scheduled surgery in early 1992.



AYTT graduate Cecile Martin lives in Newburgh, Indiana. She teaches yoga and massage, does massage therapy, and leads an Ananda Yoga & Meditation Group.

The closer the day came, the more I found myself opening to my own practice of yoga. Reading books, learning postures and breathing techniques, practicing creative visualization and affirmations, and eventually learning that the joy of yoga is not just the physical action ...

Eddie: Trikonasana

... but the inner awareness that arises, seemingly from nowhere, while moving through the postures.

(I paused to watch Eddie and repeat after him: “Energy and joy flood my body cells! Joy descends to me!”)

I have learned that, like any other science, yoga is applicable to people of every clime and time. Yoga is a method for restraining the natural turbulence of thoughts, which otherwise impartially prevents all people from glimpsing their true nature of peace.

Eddie: Vrikasana

The thoughts of most persons are restless; a needs exists for yoga: the science of mind control. Yoga requires no formal allegiance; because the yogic science satisfies a universal need, it has a natural universal appeal.

Eddie: Virabhadrasana

There are a number of great men and women, some of whom live among us today, though they may never have heard the word “yoga,” are yet true exemplars of the term. Through their service to mankind (*overhead: photo of Mother Teresa*), or through their mastery over passions and thoughts (*overhead: Dalai Lama*), or through their single-hearted love and compassion for their fellow human beings (*overhead: Abraham Lincoln*), or through their great powers of concentration (*overhead: Michael Jordan*), they are, in a sense, yogis.

Among many thoughtful tributes to yoga may be mentioned one by Dr. C. G. Jung, the famous Swiss psychologist :

Eddie: Sun salutation

(overhead:) “There is good cause for Yoga to have many adherents. It offers the possibility of controllable experience and thus satisfies the scientific need for ‘facts.’ The manifold, purely bodily procedures of Yoga mean a mental and physiological hygiene which is superior to ordinary gymnastics and breathing exercises, inasmuch as it is not merely mechanistic and scientific, but also philosophical; in its training of the parts of the body, it unites them with the whole of the spirit ...”

Yoga comes from the Sanskrit root *yug*, which means “to join together”—the joining of the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual bodies. That is a grand concept to try to grasp. So we will begin with the physical body.

Eddie: Chandrasana

The physical body is made up, first, the skeleton, and in particular for the purpose of this talk, the spine.

Overhead: The spine

The spine “happens” to be in the center of our bodies, and it is particularly central

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Yoga as a Healing Modality

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to the practice of yoga. Take note for a moment the position in which your spine is resting at this moment. Hatha yoga, the physical science of yoga, focuses on alignment of the spinal column. It is believed that the way we carry our bodies is a direct communication of what we think, or how we feel. When the shoulders are curled forward, chest caved in, spine curved, it is almost as if our bodies are saying to us “Hey, I’m carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders.”



Eddie: Standing backward bend

When the spine is straight, with a gentleness to the action, the shoulders slightly back, chest slightly upraised, we immediately feel better. The “weight” is no longer pulling us down.

(I then guided them in experimenting with this.)

So the body responds to how we think. If we think “heavy,” so our bodies respond. If we think “light,” our bodies respond to that also.

Eddie: Circle of Joy

(Here I asked Eddie, rhetorically, “What is this about?”)

Overhead: nervous system

The nervous system is like the wiring of a computer. There are two systems of nerves: the *central nervous system* in the brain, medulla oblongata, and spinal cord; branching out from that is the *peripheral nervous system*, which connects the nerve centers to the different organs of the body and carries energy to them.

Eddie: Half-spinal twist

The brain is the core element of our central nervous system. Messages put into our bodies via thoughts through the brain, are sent directly down the trail of nerves into the body. For example: when we’re rushed, the kids needed to be at school 10 minutes ago, and at this point you know you will be at least 15 minutes late for work, the message your entire body is receiving from the brain is “rush, rush, hurry, hurry.” This throws all systems of

the body into what is called the ...

Eddie: Mime “fight or flight”

... “fight or flight” syndrome. Hormones secreted by the brain during this activity tell the adrenal glands to release more of the precious hormone adrenaline so that our bodies may meet the demands that our thoughts are telling us we must meet or else! The “wires” of the nervous system are on overload, and they quickly become worn or burned out.

Eddie: Slump to child’s pose

It is like hooking a 110-volt system to a 2000-volt outlet. The 110-volt nervous system just cannot handle the incredible output of the 2000 volts of emotional and mental activity.

The practice of hatha yoga postures helps to relieve this overload of the nervous system, and relieve the mind of “toxic” thoughts that feed our nervous system. Therefore, our minds become calm, sending messages of peace and harmony throughout the body. From this feeling of peace and harmony, comes strength.

Eddie: Pull up to vajrasana

Strength in mind and in body. When we are strong in our thoughts, we are not as susceptible to misperceiving what others may be doing, or even how awful our lives may be. When we act from a center of peace and harmony, even when

we realize we are running late, there is also a realization that there is not much we are going to be able to do about it anyway.

(Eddie, then I, affirmed: “My mind is firm and steadfast as a rock.”)



A special focus of hatha yoga postures happens to be breath awareness. Notice right now how your breath is flowing. Is it short and shallow? Long and deep?

Eddie: Places hands on abdomen, then ribcage, then upper chest as an example for them to follow.

Settle into your chair, close your eyes and follow the movement of your breath. Extend the inhalation, then extend the exhalation. Place your hands on the abdomen as you breathe ... then the bottom of the ribcage ... then place tips of fingers at the collarbones. Notice the

changes that take place by just this simple practice.

The breath is intimately tied to our thoughts. When we are functioning in the “fight or flight” or “fear” syndrome, the breath becomes quick and shallow. It is at that point that, what happens? The body becomes oxygen deprived. Oxygen is energetic food for the body. For the brain. So see how all of these systems are very intimately related to each other.

Eddie: Three deep, full yogic breaths as I watch

Yoga is the practice of mastering our thoughts and emotions. Such mastery is impossible when our nervous systems are over-amped. Yoga helps us regain enough control to begin to watch how we react to situations—and begin to realize that we have a choice: we can consciously *respond* or unconsciously *react*. Though our actions often seem to be totally outside our conscious control, it’s only because of an overloaded nervous system.



(After a pause for questions, I briefly went over the chakras:)

Overhead: Chakras superimposed on physical body

Now I would like to talk about the aspect of yoga as energy medicine. Right behind the physical system of the body, we have an energetic system called the Chakra System. As you can see by the picture, the chakras are shown along the physical spine. The chakras are located in our energy bodies, not in our physical bodies. So you are not typically able to touch or see them, though there are people who can and do.

(I had the group rub their hands together, then hold the hands several inches apart to experience the feeling of energy.)

Energy healers work with the energy, or chakra system of the body. These chakras, or energy centers have corresponding locations in, and a great influence on, the physical body. As you can see by the picture, the energy body is superimposed over the physical body with the chakras as connecting points.

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(I asked them to partner up: one seated, the other standing behind, first resting hands on shoulders, then holding hands an inch or so off the head and encouraging both partners to “feel.” It was a great experiment for them.)

I would like to jump back to the nervous system for a moment and show you how closely the physical nervous system is aligned with the energy or chakra system. Each of the major nerve plexes (or gathering centers) has a corresponding chakra. Or perhaps it would be more correct to say that each chakra has a corresponding nerve plexus, because the energy body precedes or causes the physical body to exist; the physical body is just a projection into matter of the subtle energy body.

The English names of the chakras are derived from the sections of the physical spine located closest to and controlled by that chakra.

Overhead: Chakras chart showing English name, location, faculties governed, and spiritual qualities.

(I then briefly took them through the chakra chart.)

So how do yoga postures free up tension or “energy blocks” within the body? There are many ways, but let’s focus on just one as Eddie does a series of postures called the Sun Salutation.

Eddie: Sun Salutation

Notice that his spine is moving in ways so as to release muscular tension along the spine. Though our awareness may be on physical movement and release of tension, there’s a subtle, energetic aspect to it. As I said earlier, the physical body is a manifestation of the energy body—you cannot affect one without affecting the other. Releasing physical tension in the physical spine helps release energetic blocks in the energy spine.

Hatha yoga is an ancient science, developed in India long before the time of Christ. What the ancient yogis have passed on to us, through millennia of practitioners, is how, by hooking up the “wires” of the nervous system via these different postures, we can bring about definite physical, mental, emotional and spiritual evolution.

Overhead: Physical benefits of yoga

Yoga asanas (postures) are designed to

Inspirations

“Holding to Your Ideals,” by Mark Beach

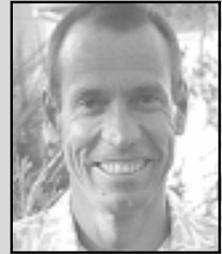
I had no students for the first week I taught at the studio I rented, so I would teach myself a class. I felt the Masters supporting me, and their presence was so strong that I felt I was right where I needed to be. I also felt I was being tested a little, as in, “Let’s see how dedicated you are, son”!!! People would stand at the door and watch but not come in.

Sometimes the fear of rejection can paralyze an honest effort. When no one came I felt like it was because I wasn’t good enough, I didn’t know enough. The truth is we can’t do it for anyone but ourselves. It is our discipline and love for Yoga that attracts students to our vibration. And actually, having the studio to myself was great to work on sequencing and time management.

Finally one woman came, and she’s come to every class since—she’s had relief in her right hip joint and is so excited. That’s when I knew I was doing what I should be doing: showing up for myself and in doing that, being present for my students as an example. We heard that in AYTT; now I see why.

Then others started to come as well. One woman remarked that she could feel my compassion and my dedication to Yoga as a lifestyle, and she appreciated that I wasn’t compromising what was true for me: the path of the great Masters as I understand it. She said that most teachers won’t talk about things like the astral spine, chakras, spiritual eye, etc., because they might lose students for religious reasons. I understand this, but I feel the need to be who I am. At The Expanding Light, Savitri once said to me, “Swami Kriyananda told us to hold to our highest ideals, and that by doing so we’ll give people a chance to rise to the occasion and be the best they can be.” Now I understand.

Do you have an inspiration to share? Or even an amusing yoga story? Please send it to Gyandev (see page 8) for possible inclusion in a future newsletter.



AYTT graduate Mark Beach lives and teaches yoga on Kauai, Hawaii.

give maximum flexibility and strength to the skeletal, muscular and nervous systems, with special emphasis on building a strong and supple spine, to the capacity of each individual. Asanas also massage internal organs and improve circulation, causing the release and distribution of vital hormones as well as supplying the brain and other cells with oxygen and other nutrients. Stretching asanas gently work out muscle tension so that muscles are able to relax more easily. The gradual strengthening of the nervous system builds concentration, poise and a more stable emotional nature.

Thank you very much. Any questions?

To AYTA members: If you have occasion to give a similar presentation, I would be

happy to help you however I can. You can contact me at ckaruna@aol.com, 812-853-7242, or 812-476-6323.

Editor’s note: Participants were extremely positive about Cecile’s presentation. Their evaluations indicated that they now felt better able to (1) discuss the practice of yoga as it relates to the enhancement of physical, mental, and spiritual health, and (2) describe how yoga may be utilized as an energy medicine modality. They also felt that Cecile’s expertise and teaching strategies were very appropriate for the topic, and that her presentation was relaxing, enjoyable, informative, inspiring, and very interesting. Congratulations and well done, Cecile! ❖



Get Medical Clearance For Your Students

Have you ever had a student with a questionable medical condition? Did you wish his or her medical provider would tell you whether it's okay for this person to do yoga? Yes, we've all been there. So has Damini Branen, a yoga teacher from Eugene, Oregon, who has generously shared with us her solution: she asks such students to get their medical providers to sign a simple clearance form (shown below) before attending classes. As a former medical administrator, Damini is well qualified to design a form that works—for yoga teachers *and* for the providers.

Several parts of the form will have to be tailored to your specific situation. As you make changes, please keep in mind two very important things:

1. Describe accurately (but briefly) what the student will be

asked to do in your class. Medical people do not necessarily know anything about hatha yoga.

2. Make it as easy as possible for the medical provider to respond. This is vital, as providers aren't always able to spend extra time on their patients. The more you can reduce the provider's role to "a quick read and sign," the greater your chances of getting a response.

We recommend that you attach to the form a copy of your class flyer/brochure, in case the provider wants more information.

If you'd like to save yourself some typing, Gyandev will be happy to send you this form via e-mail (see page 8). You'll probably have to reformat it, but at least you won't have to type everything from scratch.

Medical Clearance for Yoga Classes

Dear Medical Provider,

Your patient, _____,
(*print name and date of birth*) plans to participate in a class involving gentle stretching, breathing exercises and relaxation. Each weekly session lasts 90 minutes.

Stretches are done while standing, sitting, lying prone and supine. Stretches include forward bending, backward bending, sideways bending, twisting, and inverted positions (i.e., the head is lower than the heart). Progressive relaxation is also taught.

Participants are encouraged work at their own capacity, and the instructor will help them make adaptations as needed. Participants are asked to refrain from any movement they are unable to do or are uncomfortable with. In particular, your patient will be instructed to refrain from any movement that you designate as inadvisable.

If there is no physical or psychological contraindication for the above-named person to participate in the course, your approval is requested below:

Participation in the class is medically acceptable: Yes / No

Please indicate any physical restrictions that should be observed in her/his participation: _____

Provider's Signature _____ Date _____

Provider's printed name _____

Professional degree _____

You may reach the instructor, Jane Yogini, at 123-4567 (h) or 765-4321 (w) for more brochures or information.

Please return this form to: Jane Yogini, Certified Yoga Instructor
1234 Samadhi Street
Blissville, CA 98765



What Is Ananda Yoga?

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our awareness in the spine and begin to tune in to energy. Then we move to a variety of floor poses, designed to stretch and open the spine, and focus energy there. Inverted poses follow, to draw the awakened energy to the brain with the aid of “subtle gravity.” Deep relaxation in savasana then helps us internalize this energy in the brain (*pratyahara*, in Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga). Finally, meditation brings energy to the spiritual eye.

Continuous awareness: We move slowly, smoothly and consciously into and out of the asanas, so as not to diminish or interrupt our awareness of energy flows generated through the asanas. Indeed, by moving in this way our awareness will increase throughout the routine—and as awareness increases, so does the energy. Similarly, we never strain with the asanas, because that would diminish both the energy flow and our awareness of it.

Pauses: Why do we pause in a “neutral” pose between “active” poses (e.g., in *tadasana* between two standing poses)? It certainly runs counter to most of the hatha yoga we see in our restlessness-addicted culture.

Swami was quite blunt when I mentioned this trend: “It’s not good yoga. If you hold a position, that’s when you can get into the consciousness behind that position. Constant motion isn’t the answer. It just becomes calisthenics.” He later expanded on this comment: “Ours is a path of constantly coming back to the center, to the spine. That’s the core of it, and you can’t do that if you’re always moving from one asana to the next. The time between poses is very important.”

So the pause is not just to rest; it’s to move toward the goal by working with energy and consciousness to assimilate the benefits of the preceding pose. We would lose this opportunity if we moved into the next asana without pausing. The pause is, to a great extent, the completion of the preceding pose.

What About Affirmations?

If there’s one thing that’s unique about Ananda Yoga™, it’s asana affirmations. It’s tempting to say, “Ah, *here’s* something definitive: without affirmations, it’s not Ananda Yoga.” Well, Swami Kriyananda doesn’t view it this way. He told me:

“Obviously, the center of Ananda Yoga is not the fact of having affirmations. The center of Ananda Yoga is the way in which it helps our meditation, our stillness. Sometimes those affirmations can seem a bit childish, and I can see how people might resist doing them and still feel they were working with the energy and so on. Nonetheless, they’re a good thing, and they *do* help your consciousness. Beyond that I don’t know what to say; you’ll have to use your own intuition on the matter.”

I won’t try to sell you a once-and-for-all interpretation of this statement, but I will share with you the understanding I’ve gained so far (with luck, I’ll gain more over time): It’s not a question of whether we can do Ananda Yoga without affirmations. We *can*. The real question is, what leads us most quickly to our goal? Whatever that is, we’ll do it if we’re serious about the goal. Affirmations are not the goal; raising consciousness is the goal. But as Swami put it, affirmations “*do* help your consciousness,” i.e., they are a means to the goal. It seems clear to me that, in the absence of an equal or better tool, a serious Ananda Yogi will *want* to use the affirmations.

Remember, an affirmation is not an attempt to define (and therefore limit) our experience of an asana; it’s a tool for attuning ourselves to the essence of the asana. In the beginning, we might simply repeat it over and over, trying somehow to “catch the wave.” But our use of the affirmation will evolve as our practice deepens.

My own approach is more like this: Over a long period (weeks, months), the affirmation helps guide me to a more intuitive, more “feeling” understanding of the asana. As my understanding grows, I’ll repeat the affirmation less—eventually just once or twice, to give direction to my attunement efforts. It’s not the affirmation that takes me into that essence; it’s my feeling capacity, guided by the affirmation.

It’s as though the affirmation guides me through a doorway into a deeper experience of the asana. Once I’m through the doorway, I don’t need the affirmation anymore; I return to it only if my attention wanders. But make no mistake: it takes focus to unlock the door, and I’ve found Swami’s affirmations invaluable for that.

In teaching classes, I encourage use of the affirmations because they help students break the hypnosis of physicality, begin to understand the asanas, and bring their energy inward and upward. When their practice deepens, I advise students to let their feeling nature take over so that they may go deeper still—but as I said, not to discard the affirmation entirely.

The Ultimate Criterion

Above all, what *really* defines Ananda Yoga™ is the vibration of Paramhansa Yogananda. Earlier I said that each yoga tradition is a “specific ray of divine grace.” In Ananda’s case, that ray comes through Yogananda. You experienced that ray when you took AYT. Swami Kriyananda drew upon that ray in order to develop Ananda Yoga. When I asked Swami how to be the best Ananda Yoga teachers we can be, his answer was basically, “Try to tune in to Master.”

It doesn’t matter whether you are a disciple or not. Masters will aid anyone who calls upon them. If you really want to feel and teach the essence of Ananda Yoga, call upon Paramhansa Yogananda. Ask for his guidance, and try to tune in to his consciousness. As you refine your efforts, you’ll not wonder what is and what is not Ananda Yoga™. You’ll know.

Gyandev welcomes your comments, especially suggestions for future “Exploring the Essence” topics—practice or teaching. You can e-mail him for a free transcript of his interview with Swami Kriyananda; for a printed version, send \$3 to The Expanding Light, Attn: Lisa. See AYTA Contacts (page 8) for details. ❖

Don't Miss Out!

If your AYTA membership expires by Dec. 31, 2000 (check your mailing label), you should renew today to be listed in the 2001 directory, continue receiving this newsletter, be able to use AYSutra, get student referrals from Ananda, get a 10% discount on Level 2 programs, and more. See “Member News” on page 2 for details.



AYTA Contacts

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Upcoming Level 2 Programs

AYTA Members receive a 10% discount on all Level 2 programs, which more than pays for your membership! In the schedule below, “★” indicates a required Level 2 program.

- 1/7–19 ★AYTT Assistantship
- 2/18–25 ★Advanced Pranayama and the Subtle Body (next offered in 2002)
- 2/25–3/2 ... Therapeutic Yoga
- 3/2–4 Meditation for Self-Healing
- 3/8–18 Yoga of the Heart—Cardiac Teacher Training with Nischala Joy Devi (next offered in 2002)
- 3/18–25 ★Meditation Teacher Training
- 3/25–4/6 ... ★AYTT Assistantship
- 5/6–11 Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 6/17–24 Yoga Teacher Workshop (This is not actually a Level 2 program; it enables qualified non-Ananda yoga teachers to learn Ananda Yoga™ and enter AYTT Level 2—so tell your yoga teacher friends!)
- 6/24–7/1 ... ★Essence of the Yoga Sutras (a rare opportunity for in-depth study with Jyotish and Devi Novak, Ananda’s Spiritual Directors; includes asana teaching skills, too; probably won’t be offered in 2002)
- 7/1–8 ★Meditation Teacher Training
- 7/8–20 ★AYTT Assistantship
- 7/15–20 Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 8/5–10 Teaching Yoga to Kids (hatha yoga plus other growth-promoting activities; based on Ananda’s Education for Life system)
- 8/9–12 The Healing Path of Yoga (with Nischala Joy Devi)
- 10/7–12 Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 10/7–14 ★Meditation Teacher Training
- 10/14–26 .. ★AYTT Assistantship

Yoga Alliance Update

Fees to Increase Soon

Yoga Alliance is raising its registry fee to \$40/yr—but you can get the old \$25 rate if you register (or renew) by Jan. 1, 2001.

All AYTT grads are eligible to be RYT’s (Registered Yoga Teachers), but if your AYTT certificate doesn’t say “Level 1 Training,” you’ll need a new one to register. Send a copy of your old certificate and a \$10 check (payable to The Expanding Light) to Lisa Powers (see left). She’ll also send you a super-easy registration

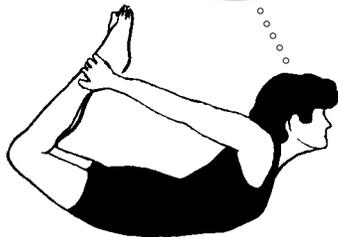
form; if you need only the form, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope.)

Blue Cross Insurance

The Healthy Extensions program of Blue Cross of California now recognizes RYT’s. It doesn’t pay for yoga classes; you’re simply listed in a directory *and* you agree to give policyholders a 10–25% discount on classes. You’ll also need professional liability insurance (see page 2).

To participate, call Blue Cross of California at 888-231-5036.

I recall my scattered forces to renew my AYTA membership! (see page 2)



The Expanding Light

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Here’s Your AYTA Newsletter!