

Awake & Ready!

Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga™ Teachers Association
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From the Director

A Burst of Energy

If you're like me, you've long been wishing for affirmations for poses that don't have them. Well wish no more, because in May, Swami Kriyananda gave us 18 new asana affirmations (see page 5). It's the first time in many years that Swami has given such a large boost of energy to Ananda Yoga, and it came at a perfect time in Ananda Yoga's growth. I encourage you to begin to incorporate the affirmations into your teaching. I think you'll find that they help expand Ananda Yoga toward wonderful new horizons.



Gyandev McCord

We may explore some of these asanas and affirmations in future issues; right now, let's focus on just one:

Tadasana Gets an Affirmation

If you were going to develop an affirmation for tadasana, what would it be? On what quality would you focus? Why not go into the pose right now and think about it for a moment?

Is it groundedness? We've all heard yoga teachers focus on using tadasana to get grounded, become stable, connect with the earth, etc. Certainly some people need to be more grounded, but I think that groundedness is the least aspect of tadasana. Besides, far too many people are far *too* earthbound due to desires and materialism. And I've never heard of a great master of yoga talking about drawing upon "earth energy" for upliftment of consciousness—whether in or out of an asana. Earth currents draw energy *down* into the body, which is good for healing, but not for lifting consciousness. That's why yogis recommend meditating while sitting on fabrics (wool, silk, etc.) that will insulate us from those currents.

If not groundedness, what? Centeredness? Easy breathing and the free flow of prana in the spine? Relaxation? Certainly tadasana is great for all these, as Swami wrote in the *14 Steps*:

"Right posture is vitally important to the yogi. A bent spine impairs the flow of energy. It also cramps the breath, making it almost impossible to breathe deeply. Right posture, however, from a standpoint of yoga, is by no means the rigid stance of a soldier on parade. One must be relaxed even while standing straight. Indeed, until one can learn to keep his spine straight he will never know how to relax perfectly. Stand in such a way that you feel yourself centered in the spine, with the rest of your body suspended from the spine in much the same way as branches are suspended from the trunk of a tree. The chest

should be somewhat (but not too much) out, the shoulders a little bit back, the head neither hanging forward nor drawn back too rigidly. If you stand perfectly straight, you will find that it takes very little strength to remain standing—only enough strength to maintain your balance."

Nevertheless, Swami felt that these qualities are not at the heart of tadasana. Nor is self-reliance, the point of his oft-quoted remark in *Yoga Journal*, "The most important yoga posture is the ability to stand on your own two feet." No, his new affirmation is, "I stand ready to obey Thy least command."

First Reactions

The truth is, I really hadn't been wishing for a tadasana affirmation. I've been using tadasana more to integrate the effects of the preceding pose than for its own sake. So I was a bit surprised to see this affirmation, and my first thought was, "It's going to be very interesting teaching this to Americans"—who, as you've no doubt noticed, don't like to obey *anyone*, including—and sometimes especially—God!

My next thought was that we teach tadasana on the first day of AYT, when some of the students are wondering just exactly what they've gotten themselves into. They'd known before coming that they wanted a spiritual approach to Hatha Yoga, but for some reason it hadn't registered with them that "spiritual" involves Spirit. So, this new affirmation is quite a baptism!

My third thought dissolved both the first two as well as my anxiety: "This is the *perfect* affirmation for tadasana!" And the deeper I went into it myself, the more I felt that way.

Think about it: What are we trying to do in yoga—not just in Hatha Yoga, but in, as I like to call it, The Big Yoga? It's not just about getting grounded, or centered, or breathing more easily, or more being alert. All those are important, but the essence of yoga is to align our consciousness with God's

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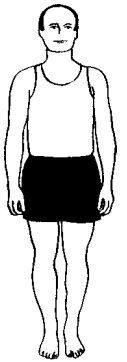
A Burst of Energy (continued from page 1)

consciousness. More than just align with it—absorb ourselves in it. This takes receptivity, big time.

Expressing Receptivity

Then what better way to begin our asana practice than to plant the seeds of receptivity via both body and mind? “I stand ready to obey Thy least command.” Stand tall with an open heart. Drop the postural habits and tension that make you feel heavy, inert, restricted. Enjoy the free, easy, natural flow of the breath. Try to feel the pulsating life-force in every cell of your body. Find the standing posture that makes your body—and more importantly, your consciousness—feel as light and open and free as possible.

In the *14 Steps*, Swami noted that when we stand or walk with our weight back on our heels, it makes our consciousness feel heavy. As we shift our weight forward toward the balls of our feet, our consciousness becomes lighter. Yet if we shift our weight too much onto the balls of the feet, tension creeps in—physically and psychologically—and the lightness diminishes. So find that intermediate point that enables you to feel the lightest on all levels.



This balance, centeredness and lightness is the beginning of the pose, your foundation for receptivity, for cultivating that attitude that is so central to yoga: an attitude of intense inner opening and listening to God.

If some people balk because they see this as an attitude of meekly bowing down to some Cosmic Tyrant—that’s their problem, not God’s. After all, God is our own Self. Who would want to resist guidance from his or her own Self? It’s exactly what we all want! Therefore magnetically draw it to you: “I stand ready to obey Thy least command.” Affirm it in every limb, cell, atom, and filament of thought and feeling. Take it beyond mere verbal affirmation; make your body, mind and heart into living expressions of this attitude. *Then* you’re in *tadasana*.

Yes, the ego resists this attitude. When I mentioned to Swami that I thought this affirmation might raise some hackles—students’ as well as teachers’—he got right to the point: “If it raises people’s hackles, tell them that that’s the ego complaining, which is just what we want to get out of. If not for our ego, who would have any objection to this affirmation?”

Tadasana Sets the Tone

Tadasana has a very special purpose: as the first pose of our routine, it sets the tone for all that will follow. And as the “neutral pose” between other standing poses, we keep coming back to *tadasana* over and over. Therefore it’s an extremely important pose—perhaps more important than any other.

I’ve come to understand that *tadasana* and its affirmation are not merely to be done once—or even many times—in the routine and then forgotten. No, together they should establish the *bhav* (spiritual mood, vibration) of the entire experience. This wordless vibration should resound through every aspect of our practice, infusing every asana and pranayama with its spirit of alert—even hungry—receptivity and willingness. Then we’ll feel the life-force more fully in all the asanas; we’ll experience the upliftment of consciousness more clearly in all the asanas; and our meditations will be filled with the magical spirit of receptivity.

All in all, what affirmation could be better for Ananda Yoga?

Yes, But ...

I know that many of you teach in situations where you simply can’t say “God.” Perhaps your students aren’t ready for it. Perhaps you’ve chosen to reach out to a special group whom you knew from the start would not be open to God. Perhaps your employer would be displeased if you were to mention “God.” Or perhaps you’re not ready ...

Whatever the case, it’s fine. Each teacher has to find his or her own way. Whether you *need* to avoid “the G-word,” or simply *prefer* to do so, the question is, What to do about the God-oriented

Member News

AnandaYoga.org is “Live”

Now it’s even easier for students to find you on the Web. So far, AnandaYoga.org offers information on Ananda Yoga, AYT and the AYTA directory, with phone numbers and e-mail addresses. There’s lots more to come—it’s still a very simple site—but it’s a start. By the way, Ananda’s ads in the November *Yoga Journal* Teacher Directory will refer readers to that site.

Want a Free Membership?

Have you had insights—simple or profound—on teaching Ananda Yoga? Instructive experiences with the student/teacher relationship? Creative teaching ideas (see page 9)? Promotional revelations? An amusing yoga experience? Then please consider contributing an article—short or long—for *Awake & Ready!* No writing skills are required; we’ll be happy to help you manifest it. Short articles might be in the “Inspirations” section (see page 9). And if we use your longer article of at least 1500 words, you’ll get a *free year’s membership!* For more information, please contact Gyandev (see page 10).

Want Some Good Karma?

Do you have desktop publishing skills? We *really* need help with the design and production of *Awake & Ready!* If you can offer service in this way, please contact Gyandev (see page 10).

Use AYSutra Today

If you haven’t yet joined AYSutra, our e-mail Q&A forum, you’re missing out! It’s the place to be for questions on teaching or practicing Ananda Yoga, sharing experience with teaching “special needs” students, even prayer requests in times of need. It’s easy to sign up: all you need to do is send a “sign me up” e-mail to AYSutra@expandinglight.org.

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Exploring the Essence

Asanas Can Teach Us the Deeper Side of Yoga

Bhakti Yoga—The Yoga of Devotion

Part 2 of a 3-part series by Maria McSweeney

Bhakti Yoga is about creating a dynamic flow of energy from the heart chakra toward the object of one's longing. It is not a sentimental or sappy kind of love; it is pure, strong, one-pointed and calm. The heart becomes the vehicle through which the soul unites with the object of worship.

Some people don't consider themselves naturally devotional and therefore feel Bhakti Yoga to be irrelevant to their practices. However, devotion is a central to everyone's spiritual life; we can and should develop it. In his book, *The Holy Science*, Sri Yukteswar, whom Paramhansa Yogananda described as a *gyanavatar* (incarnation of wisdom), gave a highly scientific, esoteric, and intellectually challenging presentation of the history of yoga and the nature of man. Nevertheless, he concluded by saying that all that really matters is love! So you see, even a *gyana yogi* testifies as to the all-importance of cultivating the natural love of the heart.

One reason that devotion is so important is that it can take us beyond technique. Eventually we realize that neither intellectual knowledge of yoga nor outward practice is enough. We crave the inner experience, the intuitive perception that is felt in the heart.

How can we cultivate devotion? The ways are as diverse as the individuals who seek it. Below are some suggestions that I hope will help you and your students. But remember, there is no prescribed formula. As Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "Even a flower or a leaf, offered with devotion, is acceptable to me." Ask yourself, "What awakens devotion in *me*?"—and proceed accordingly.

Putting the Heart into Asana

It can be very helpful to bring your practice of Bhakti Yoga into your classes—both for your sake and for the sake of your students. Before class, meditate and center in your heart. Pray to be guided in devotion, to feel the heart's natural longing for deeper meaning and experience. Pray for your students, that their hearts may be opened. If your class setting permits, invite your students to join in an opening prayer, aloud or silently.

Even newcomers can benefit from this. Recently, a first-time student came up to me after class and said, "I've received just what I needed to help set the tone for the corporate training sessions I'm leading." Her own openness and heart-centeredness had been awakened, showing her how to help others have a similar experience—even in the environment of big business!

One of my favorite Hatha Yoga quotes by Swami Kriyananda is "The yoga postures are the outward expressions of the inner movements of the soul." This gives us profound insight into how to develop devotion through Hatha Yoga. The yoga postures are like a dance, a form of worship, or an *arati* (a traditional Indian ceremony that involves waving a lighted lamp before an altar, as in Ananda's Festival of Light).

Consider *surya namaskar* (sun salutation). The flow of movements that comprise this asana sequence are like a dance; coordinating them with the breath encourages fluidity and grace. The very word "salutation" connotes an act of honoring, of reverence. When we begin by placing the palms together ("pranam position") at the heart, our attention is drawn there. With just a little effort, we can start to generate a current of energy in the heart.

In all the asanas, draw your students' attention to how they move their bodies. Remind them to bring what they want to



Maria McSweeney and her husband, Ananta, direct Ananda Sacramento, where she also leads an Ananda Yoga Teacher Training program.

experience into what they're doing—rather than waiting for it to happen "magically." Ask them to initiate every movement from an awareness in the heart, to be motivated by love and the desire to live more in the heart.

At first, this may feel artificial to some students, but with practice, it will soon become their actual experience. You can help speed this process by reminding them of this important truth: "If you want to feel grace, move with grace. If you want to be more heart-centered, connect with that part of your body so you can feel your energy there. Practice the asanas from a center of awareness in the heart."

Here's another way to help students experience this: In *trikonasana* (triangle pose), start with the hands at the heart in *pranam* position. As you inhale, extend your hands out in front (still in *pranam*) and then open to the side, thus physically expressing a heart expanding and opening. Stay in this position for a few moments to feel the fullness of the heart before moving into the actual pose.

An Inner Offering

Another posture that helps cultivate an inner offering of the heart is the *yoga mudra*, the "symbol of yoga." Its affirmation—"I am Thine; receive me."—emphasizes two important elements of Bhakti Yoga.

The first is self-offering. Selfless love is one of the quickest ways to relinquish the desires of the heart that keep us from Him. While inwardly affirming "I am Thine," think of God in personal, human terms: as Father, Mother, Friend, Beloved. Such a personal view can help you awaken and direct love toward God. In my classes, many students have found this very helpful and person-

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Asanas Can Teach Us the Deeper Side of Yoga

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ally inspiring. If your class setting doesn't allow you to guide students in this way, still, if you practice it yourself, the benefits will spill over to them.



The second important aspect is listening. While affirming "Receive me," consciously listen for a divine reply. Your ability to listen is enhanced by releasing tension in the body and in the heart;

breathe it out of the body. Focus in the heart, feeling it as a powerful magnet drawing the Divine into your life.

Another way to cultivate an attitude of sacredness is to use the Sanskrit names for the asanas. The vibration of Sanskrit can help you think devotionally, more in the *bhav* (spiritual mood) of true yoga. Students often report that it helps them, too. It's well worth the small investment of time and effort required. (Of course, do this only if it feels appropriate and your motivation is sincere, not born of a desire to impress your students.)

Breathing Techniques and the Heart

Because breathing is governed by the heart chakra, breathing techniques are powerful tools for becoming more heart-centered. They directly influence *prana* ("life-force"), giving us some control over it; hence they're often called *pranayama* ("energy control") techniques. But remember: breathing techniques are less about breathing and more about heightening our awareness of the life current, directing it, and ultimately controlling it.

Pranayama is often overlooked in yoga classes. To the untrained eye, focused on the goal of "a good workout," pranayama seems but a filler. However, it can be invaluable for opening the heart, for it helps students become still and relaxed. Only then will they feel comfortable enough to open their hearts. (To test this statement, observe yourself the next time you feel agitated or upset. You'll see that it's very difficult to be open and to lead with your heart.)

In Ananda Yoga we begin with pranayama to help calm and center our being. Of course, some students may initially resist this "slowing down," but as they breathe consciously, relaxation seeps in. And as they relax, the energy starts to move upward, more naturally centering in the heart.

Creating a Heart-Full Outer Environment

Although I've been talking about inner matters, the outer environment of your class is also important for the heart—and no matter where or who you teach, you can influence that environment. Think creatively—you'll be amazed at what you can do.

Obvious touches that come to mind are incense (provided students aren't sensitive to it), harmonious music, soft lighting, candles, soothing colors. Green, for example, is associated with the heart center.

Also consider personal hygiene. You may be physically clean, but did you just run in from your other job or a hectic day? If you have the option, a shower can do wonders by minimizing body consciousness, making it easier to lift your awareness to the heart center. (By the way, end your shower with cold water; Paramhansa Yogananda said it helps to magnetize the body.)

Consider your clothes, too. I have clothes that I only use for my asana practice. They have a particular vibration, and I feel that in a small way they help support overall harmony. It's the same with a personal yoga mat and blanket. Everything has a vibration, and these vibrations can subtly support—or hinder—movements of energy upward to the heart.

Bring Heart Energy into Your Voice

According to the ancient teachings of India, the most perfect of all human instruments is the human voice. No other instrument expresses so perfectly the nuances of thought and feeling. For this reason the voice is a very powerful tool for helping us connect with the energy of our heart. As the Bible says, "Out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaketh."

As a teacher, your voice does more than just lead others; the vibration of your speech affects your students. Concentrate, therefore, on projecting a positive tone and vibration in your voice. It's a challenge to be this aware, but it develops naturally as you focus on living more from within.

In fact, it's said that one of the early signs of progress in yoga is a growing sweetness in the voice. You can also develop the voice by using it in more naturally devotional practices, such as singing or chanting. As you use music and your voice to express the love of your heart for Divine Mother, your voice will change and take on the energy of the expanded heart.

Your students, in learning to use the asana affirmations deliberately and with feeling, will discover the relationship between the voice and energy. If they repeat the affirmations from an awareness in the heart, they will receive added support for their practice. Of course, not every affirmation is about "heart qualities"; however, effective affirmation always requires *feeling* the quality you're affirming, and your feeling capacity is centered in the heart. For this reason, it can be helpful occasionally to invite your students to repeat the affirmations aloud and with devotion or longing. After all, these affirmations represent states of consciousness that everyone longs to possess, and that longing comes from the heart.

Project Outward from Your Heart

One of the most powerful ways to open the heart is to invite others in. The new affirmation for the half spinal twist (*ardha matsyendrasana*)—"I radiate love and goodwill to soul-friends everywhere"—is a perfect vehicle for this. Encourage your students to use it consciously to expand their bubble of joy to include others. Tell them that if at first this seems difficult or insincere, be patient. As they proceed in their practice, deepening relaxation will so soothe and melt their hearts that this outflow of love will happen naturally.

Similarly, when you finish your practice or your class, share your joy, your love, with everyone. Send out vibrations of unconditional love to all. Remember how meditations usually end at The Expanding Light: with healing prayers to share with others in need. Although your students may be unfamiliar with this practice, most will recognize the truth behind it. You can even offer it as a mental exercise—with no raising of the arms or chanting "AUM"—in order to give students space to respond according to their own inclinations.

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New Asana Affirmations

Below are the new affirmations recently given to us by Swami Kriyananda, listed in alphabetical order by Sanskrit name.

1. Asanas Now Having Affirmations

Adho mukha shvanasana—Downward-facing dog pose
Calmness radiates from every fiber of my being.

Balāsana—Child pose
I relax from outer involvement into my inner haven of peace.

Jathara parivartanasana—Supine twist
I open to the flow of God's life within me.

Natarajasana—Dancing Shiva pose
While I move through life, I am anchored in my Self.

Navāsana—Boat pose (also, V-pose, Balance pose)
Within my every breath is infinite power.

Parsvakonasana—Side angle pose
I am a fountain of boundless energy and power!

Pavanamuktasana—Wind-freeing pose
I release my spinal energy to rise in light.

Purvotanasana—Front-stretching pose
With a burst of energy, I rise to greet the world!

Salabhasana—Locust pose
I soar upward on wings of joy!

Level 2 Keeps Growing

Here are some wonderful new developments for the Level 2 certification curriculum at The Expanding Light:

1. Jyotish and Devi Novak will teach both the *Bhagavad Gita* week and *Yoga Sutras* week in 2002. (This year's *Sutras* class was all we'd hoped it would be: stimulating, insightful, inspiring, lively and fun.)
2. *Ananda Meditation Teacher Training* will change from 7 days to 10 days (as of the March 2002 offering) to allow time to explore the material in more depth and get more practice teaching experience.
3. *Special Needs Teacher Training* (June 2002) will explore how to work with seniors and students who have injuries, chronic illness and/or very limited flexibility. Valuable for *any* yoga teacher! Program leaders will be Jyoti Spearin and David Ramsden. (This program is a Level 2 elective.)

See the calendar on page 10 for these programs' dates.

New Asana Flash Cards

The new flash card deck has all the new affirmations, plus typographical corrections to a few others. Also available is a smaller "update deck" with cards only for the new affirmations and typographical corrections. The full deck includes pavanamuktasana; the update deck does not. The full deck costs \$9.99; the update deck costs \$3.

The *Asana Study Aid* audio tape—which has Sanskrit names, English names and affirmations for all 31 asanas of AYT—has also been updated. Its cost is \$2.

To order any of these items, call The Expanding Light at 800-346-5350. Tax and S&H will be added to all orders.

Setu Bandhasana—Bridge pose
I offer every thought as a bridge to divine grace.

Simhasana—Lion pose
I purify my thoughts, my speech, my every action.

Surya namaskar—Sun salutation
Salutations to the sun, to the awakening light within, to the dawning of higher consciousness in all beings.
(Note: This affirmation has not been changed; it's rather that now it finally has "official approval," rather than just an informal history of usage.)

Tadasana—Standing mountain pose
I stand ready to obey Thy least command.

Ustrasana—Camel pose
With calm faith, I open to Thy Light.

2. Asanas with Changed Affirmations

Ardha matsyendrasana—Half spinal twist
I radiate love and goodwill to soul-friends everywhere.

Halāsana—Plow pose
New life, new consciousness now flood my brain!

Sasamgasana—Hare pose
I am master of my energy, I am master of myself.

Vajrasana—Firm pose
In stillness I touch my inner strength.

Virabhadrasana—Warrior pose
I manifest joyfully the power of God.



A Burst of Energy

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affirmations? (By the way, many of the new affirmations refer to God in some way. Perhaps this is Swami's way of keeping us pointed in the right direction, in the face of the widespread dilution of yoga that is occurring in the West at this time.)

Here's a perspective that I hope will help: Don't get into an "either/or" state of mind. It's not a choice between using a God-oriented affirmation or using no affirmation at all. Nor is it a matter of "I'm into God" or "I'm not into God"—for you or your students. Rather, it's a matter of direction: we're all moving toward our own divine potential—consciously or unconsciously—and an Ananda Yoga teacher's job is to help students move along their own paths. That means being sensitive to where they are and what they can relate to right now.

If this means modifying an affirmation, then do so in such a way as to match the spirit of the original. For example, "I stand ready to obey Thy least command" might become "I stand ready to follow the inner voice of wisdom." Both of these affirmations share similar qualities of inward listening and readiness to respond—and as you know, it's tuning in to the qualities that's important, not the words themselves.

However, to my mind, the modified affirmation has neither the clarity of direction nor the power of the first. If that's true, then the first affirmation would make it easier for a person who is comfortable with God to tune in to the quality of receptivity. It's not about whether you use the word "God"; it's about helping your students move toward the Self rather than the ego. For some people, "God" is too big a step. For others, "God" is the next step.

Can you think of a better modified affirmation? Quite possibly, but in any case I'd like to recommend that you not to let a modified affirmation become the default, the one you'll use now and forever. Students will progress spiritually through their practice, even if you don't emphasize the spiritual. Sooner or later, they'll be ready for a "head on" approach to the Self, ready to experience more of the heart of yoga. Stay alert for that time so you can help them have that experience, help them draw upon the real power within them: the power of God. This is where that original, God-oriented affirmation will serve you—and them—by helping them open to a higher experience.

(By the way, I don't want to give the impression that I think

Swami's asana affirmations are the only "real" affirmations, or the only powerful affirmations. Certainly there could be other good affirmations. Besides, since an asana might have more than one effect on one's consciousness, it's clear that there could be several good, but different, affirmations.)

So remember: even if your students aren't yet ready for God-centered affirmations, someday they will be ready. In the meantime, do whatever you can to keep them moving away from ego-centeredness and toward the Self. If you stay "ready to obey Thy least command," you'll be keeping the channel open to understand intuitively how and when to help your students go into the deeper dimensions of their practice—and through that, toward their own divine potential. ♦

Asanas Can Teach Us the Deeper Side of Yoga

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The Goal of Devotion is Calmness

Emotion, too, is felt in the heart, but when it is spiritualized, emotion becomes devotion. Devotion is a refinement of the heart's energy. It lifts our souls heavenward until we become one with God. As Swami Kriyananda wrote in the *14 Steps* (Step 2): "Those true saints in all religions, no matter how eagerly they prayed, sang, or danced in their devotion, reached a point in their development where deep inner calmness took over. All movement ceased. Saint Teresa of Avila reported that in this state she could not even pray, so deep was her inner stillness. Truly, she was a yogi though she had never heard of yoga. But because she was not aware that such perfect stillness is the goal of the spiritual search, she wasted many years (as she later stated) in trying to force her mind to return to superficial devotional practices which the soul was endeavoring to transcend."

In light of the experience of those who have gone before us, we must realize that even our Hatha Yoga practice, which we so love, will someday fall by the wayside, giving way to perfect stillness and inner communion. You can hasten that "someday" by letting your practice be motivated by love: Love what you're doing! Love what you're sharing with others! Love the science of yoga and the divine art of Self-discovery! ♦

Yoga Day USA—Your Chance to Shine

On October 27, 2001, Yoga Alliance will celebrate the 3rd annual "Yoga Day USA." It's a terrific opportunity to gain local visibility (and even free publicity) for your teaching. It also helps generate financial support for Yoga Alliance. And on the grandest scale, Yoga Day USA helps raise public awareness of yoga and local yoga teachers.

How can you participate? There are many ways, ranging from holding a special class on (or near) that day and giving a portion of the proceeds to Yoga Alliance, to simply making a (tax-deductible) donation. If you hold a special class, Yoga Alliance will send you a flyer template and a sample press

release that your local newspaper will very likely run, since Yoga Day USA is a public-interest event. (Yes, you can choose a day other than Oct. 27 if needed.) If you contact Yoga Alliance (877-YOGA-ALL or info@yogaalliance.org), they'll send you an information packet.

Ananda Yoga teachers haven't had a particularly high profile in this event in past years—perhaps because of short lead time, or perhaps because we didn't twist any arms—but we hope that more of you will participate this year. Please consider it, because so far, Yoga Alliance has been a very worthwhile and valuable instrument for yoga.



Nuclear Yoga

Or: There's More Than One Way to Make Yourself Glow in the Dark

by Trina Ford

Recently I was asked to do a four-hour seminar for stress reduction at the Savannah River Site (SRS), a nuclear facility near my home in South Carolina. I was very surprised and excited to have this opportunity. I've done short presentations before for the U.S. Department of Energy, Westinghouse, and Wackenhut at SRS, but never a seminar. This was new and something I have been looking forward to. I immediately said, "Yes!"

I'd like to share with you my experience with this seminar, so first let me tell you a bit about SRS and about myself.

The Savannah River Site was established in the 1950's to support the national defense during the Cold War. After the end of the Cold War, the mission of the site changed from production of nuclear materials to, primarily, cleanup (reprocessing) of "used" nuclear materials. The site, which occupies 310 square miles, has also been designated as a National Environmental Research Park and is home to many endangered animal and plant species, which are now protected accordingly. Wackenhut Services, the security contractor for the site, specifically asked for yoga and other stress-reducing techniques such as massage and reflexology.

I've been involved in yoga for over 20 years, and teaching for more than 12. When I received Ananda Yoga Teacher Training in 1998, I felt truly blessed and enriched in so many ways. All my experience couldn't match what I received in that month of training. It gave me the confidence I needed for this seminar. Also, my National Certification in Massage and Bodywork complements yoga in many ways, and has only enhanced my yoga life and career. I have a yoga and bodywork center — Integrative Bodyworks—with a staff of three therapists and five yoga teachers. We are doing well and keeping the teaching pure and simple. Our bodywork and/or massage therapy also reflects our yoga practice. Yoga is at the center of all we do.

Overview of the Seminar

The seminar was four hours long. The first two-and-a-half hours were entirely yoga practice. We began with introductions and Energization Exercises, which I believe are essential for the beginner. Then I led them in warm-ups and gentle foundation postures such as padahasthasana and bhujangasana. I also talked about affirmations and how to use them in stressful situations—"I am calm, I am poised" or "I rise joyfully to greet each new day." We ended the yoga section with savasana and a short meditation.

After a 15-minute break, we concluded the seminar with an hour-and-a-quarter section on bodywork.

Following is a step-by-step description of what I did:

Introductions

I had been told in advance that most of the 40 participants (there were a few more who came and went because of their schedules) would be administrative staff, with a few supervisors. On this basis, I had developed a class plan, but I still wanted to know why these particular individuals signed up. So I asked them to gather in a circle, then I asked them to state their names and why they were attending. This is important because it gives me a general idea of where the group is coming from and where my focus should be during the seminar. So I always ask!

As I had expected, most were interested in stress reduction—and a few, to my delight, were interested in meditation. I did not have to change my plan, but I was more confident now that I knew where most of the focus should be. This introductory process took about 20 minutes.

Affirmations

To prepare them for the asana affirmations we use in the postures, we discussed affirmations as a tool for positive thinking and letting go of the negative. We discussed using "I am" in statements instead of "I will" or "I'm not." When I saw that their response was one of nodding and acceptance, I knew we could take the whole class in this direction.

In fact, they were so receptive that I would have liked to go into it even more, but time was an issue and I felt I needed to stay with the plan. Next time I will surely spend more time on this.

Energization

We began our yoga with Energization Exercises (I call them Energization Techniques, or ET's for short). These profound techniques are essential to body and mind awareness. They can be done by anyone, anywhere, and in any attire. They bring not only awareness of energy, but also body awareness.

We moved through the ET's slowly, and I taught them how to contract each muscle mindfully: low, medium, high in a smooth progression, visualizing energy drawing to that area. This is always essential! Most people simply don't know how to contract a muscle, and it takes time before they get it. Many commented "I didn't even know I had that muscle!" I explained how to contract specific muscles, such as "lift the knee cap to contract the thigh" or "soften the knee and gently press into the floor with your foot to contract the calf muscle." (*Anatomy of Movement* is a good book to learn this; you can order it through The Expanding Light.)

Equally important, they needed to learn how to release the tension (and therefore the energy): high, medium, low, completely. As you know, many miss that specific and vital effect.

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Trina does massage and teaches Ananda Yoga and 14 Steps classes at her center, Integrative Bodyworks, in North Augusta, SC.

Nuclear Yoga

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When they've learned these two simple processes—tense and relax mindfully—they can make a big change in their lives and yoga practice: they sense more quickly when a muscle is tense, and they *know* how to release that tension.

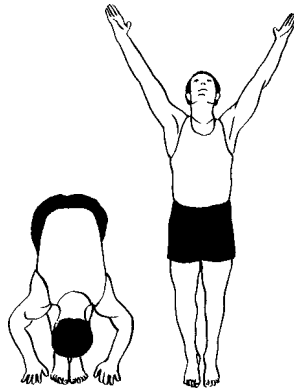
After ET's, the students were completely in touch with their entire bodies and enjoying the benefits immediately. It was a lot of fun and they got the point. This took around 50 minutes.

Warm-Ups

The full yogic breath flow was our first warm-up, to prepare the students for asanas. I began by explaining the three-part breathing (full yogic breath). Then we did the flow.

After that came the "1000 Petals," which I created as preparation for forward bend. It's much like full yogic breath flow, except that we bend forward with a long spine, bent knees, arms out to the sides; then we roll up (i.e., curl upward through the spine). I explained the importance of bending forward from the hip joint instead of through the spine. I had one of my yoga teachers there with me (Wendy) to help demonstrate as I taught the technique.

Then we did three rounds of the Circle of Joy: I am sure you all know this one. A beautiful movement to open the heart.



Asanas

I knew that no one was familiar with yoga, and there were a wide variety of body structures and ages, so I gave careful attention and time to explaining the asanas, using Wendy as a model. I didn't ask for specifics on their physical conditions, but I did urge them to listen carefully to their bodies. I also asked that anyone with specific conditions such as heart problems, high blood pressure (uncontrolled), or recent surgeries see their physician before doing this or any yoga class.

By the way, I had asked in advance that participants bring a pillow and a towel or Mexican blanket, and wear comfortable, nonbinding attire such as sweats and T-shirts or leggings/running shorts. All were barefoot—they were ready!

Padahasthasana: 1000 Petals had somewhat prepared them for this pose, which we did first with arms to the sides and hands at the hip joints, then with arms out to the sides and knees bent. As we held the asana for five deep breaths, I gave the affirmation—"Nothing on earth can hold me!"—and asked that they mentally affirm it.

Virabhadrasana: First we did it with hands at the hip joint, concentrating on staying in the spine. We then did it again with arms out, affirming the qualities of the warrior: strength, courage, will and a big heart.

Bhujangasana: We did cobra by using the arms for support only—not for pushing up—concentrating on tucking the pelvis and opening the heart. Again, we held for a few breaths and used the affirmation: "I rise joyfully to meet each new opportunity."

Balasana: Here we nurtured our bodies and went inward for a few breaths, turning our attention to energy moving in the spine.

Setu Bandhasana: We did what I call "Moving Bridge." That is, we kept a flow going instead of holding the pose or giving support via the hands, which I felt would be too much strain for some of the students.

Savasana: I began with the affirmation—"Bones, muscles, movement I surrender now . . ."—asking them to listen carefully with full attention at the mind's eye. (I did not use the term "spiritual eye" during the seminar for various reasons.) We then moved to simply dissolving and letting go with every exhale. I continued the guided portion for about ten minutes, then silence for five minutes. I took at least five more minutes to bring them out of relaxation mindfully.

Meditation

We discussed meditation in detail before continuing, getting any preconceived notions out of the way. After all, South Carolina is in the Bible Belt, and there's a lot of fear surrounding meditation. We talked about posture, the wandering of the mind and breath, and ended with ten minutes of silent practice. The following were my main points:

Asana: Posture is of utmost importance, as you know, so we spent a lot of time with sitting correctly. I explained how an upright and balanced spine was the key to comfort, and I made sure that all were supported either in a chair or on the floor.

Releasing tension: We did a few double breaths to encourage continuous relaxation with the attention focused at the mind's eye.

Breathing: Our concentration was at the nasal passage with attention on the coolness of inhalation and warmth of exhalation, with gentle reminders of staying present. I didn't offer a mantra; we just watched the breath.

Time Out for Treats

We next took a 15-minute break. In preparation for the seminar, I had secured some wonderful, healthy donations from our local health food stores, specifically for our seminar. Now we ate the goodies! It was good advertising for the stores, and a welcome treat for the students and me. I encourage you to do something similar if you give a long seminar.

Massage and Reflexology

After the break, we concluded our seminar with about one-and-a-quarter hours dedicated to massage and reflexology techniques that everyone could use at home or with their coworkers: Shiatsu, Thai massage (which is assisted yoga postures) and aromatherapy with reflexology (reflex points in the foot or hand that relate to meridians in the body). One of the therapists at the center, Jan, did the reflexology, assisted by Cherie.

Needless to say, all of the participants were Divine Mush when they left the seminar!

Winding Up

Question and Answers: At the conclusion of the seminar, I opened the floor to questions from anyone who wanted to know

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more. There were lots of questions—they were still asking as we were trying to pack up. What a great group!

Door Prizes: We gave away a lot of information and products on yoga and other stress reduction modalities. Some of our giveaways were T-shirts, videos, massage services, beginner yoga classes—and everyone received a coupon for \$10 off a massage or yoga class. The group loved it and were very appreciative. All our gifts were educational and encouraged people to drop by my Center (of course). Planting seeds for the future ...

Feedback

We had a fantastic response! The next day we received a call from SRS saying they were flooded with enthusiastically positive e-mail. Participants loved it, and SRS asked if we would be interested in returning. Of course, I said “I would love to.” Even now I’m still receiving comments from personnel on the professional attitude of our staff and how well the program was presented.

10 Ways to Get Started

How did all this happen? As I mentioned earlier, I’ve given short presentations to the Department of Energy and Westinghouse Corp., and for years I’ve done community work in hospitals, colleges, civic groups—you name it! That is what it takes: willing to be out there.

If you would like to do a seminar like this—and I highly recommend it as a way both to serve and to get your name out there—here are some things you can do to make it happen:

1. Know your stuff—backward and forward! Any speakers’ guild will tell you that is the key to public speaking.
2. Practice what you preach! Do I have to say more?
3. Do what you love! If you don’t love it, then let someone else do it.
4. Say “Yes!” to all those who ask you to come speak (civic groups, hospitals, etc.) at no charge. It’s a “karma thing.”
5. Do good work! Quality—not quantity—is the way of yoga.
6. Get your name out there! Brochures, business cards, newsletters, ads, etc.
7. Open House! Invite all to come and see what you do.
8. Integrity! This will get you anywhere.
9. Join the Chamber of Commerce (this helps people know you are there).
10. Keep a learning attitude—when we stop learning, we stop growing.

Thank You’s

Thank you, Ananda, for all your continuous support. Thank you for those at Wackenhut who gave it a chance. This is a ripple in the water ... ♦

Inspirations

Teaching “The Big Yoga” in a Small Town

by Lynn Lloyd

I live and teach in a small rural town of about 5,000 people. So of necessity, my classes are very mixed: prior exposure to yoga ranges from zero to people who have pursued it with enthusiasm for many years. Spiritual backgrounds range from none to Christianity to New Age.

While organizing my first class, I pondered a lot about how to include the spiritual and philosophical underpinnings of yoga. I wanted to talk about subtle energies, attitude and use of the mind in ways that would be accessible and nonthreatening, even to the 70-year-old, Roman Catholic, rancher’s wife in the back row.

What I came up with was “The Quote of the Week.” Each week I write a quote on a sheet of newsprint and post it on the wall. (You can get an “end roll” from your local newspaper—it’s cheap.) I pull from Eastern and Western sources, poets, philosophers, artists, humorists—and yogis, of course—to illustrate some facet of yoga.

The students love it. Many write down the quote each week, some request copies of all the quotes, and some even stay after class to discuss them. All in all, it adds a lot of life to the class—and gets students thinking about what’s really going on here.

I introduce the quote at the beginning of the class to pull them all into focus, then I expand on it via a short talk (3–5 minutes). In addition, I often refer back to the quote during class as appropriate.

For example, one quote I’ve used is Patanjali’s second sutra: “Yoga is the neutralization of the vortices of feeling.” I explain who Patanjali was, expound a bit on “vortices” as attachments, judgments, stuck energy, etc., and then begin the asanas. At some point, perhaps on “thread the needle” (supine gluteal stretch), I suggest that they hold the posture for an extra couple of breaths and “breathe into the vortices of feeling that are stuck in your butt.” They all chuckle, and they all “get it.”

Good sources for quotes include all of Paramhansa Yogananda’s and Swami Kriyananda’s books (particularly quotable are *The Essence of Self-Realization*, *Awaken to Superconsciousness*, *14 Steps*, and all the *Secrets of ...* books), as well as spiritual writers from other traditions. Julia Cameron’s books (*The Artist’s Way* and others) have lots of quotes. I often glean a good quote from yoga magazines. And now that I’ve established the tradition, my students often bring quotes to me!

I’ll be happy to share some good ones with you—just send me a self-addressed, stamped envelope at 403 Old McCloud Rd., Mt. Shasta, CA 96067). ♦



Lynn teaches Ananda Yoga and offers massage in Mt. Shasta, Calif.

Do you have an inspiration to share? Teaching tip? Or even an amusing yoga story? Please send it to Gyandev (see page 10) for possible inclusion in a future issue.



AYTA Contacts

AYTA Steering Committee:

Gyandev McCord
The Expanding Light
530-478-7518 ext. 7081
gyandev@expandinglight.org

Doug Andrews
831-338-9850/2103
rdwdyoga@aol.com

Lisa Powers
The Expanding Light
530-478-7560 ext. 7087
lisa@expandinglight.org

Bent Hansen
Co-Director, Ananda Portland
503-626-0493
anandap@europa.com

Maria McSweeney
Co-Director, Ananda Sacramento
916-361-0891
anandasac@jps.net

The Expanding Light Retreat
14618 Tyler Foote Road
Nevada City, CA 95959
800-346-5350, 530-478-7518
530-478-7519 (fax)
info@expandinglight.org
www.expandinglight.org

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. For program details, see the Expanding Light program guide. (In September, you should receive the next one, which covers October 2001–May 2002.)

- 8/12–17 ... **Sharing Yoga with Children** (using yoga to bring out the best in children—with Nitai Deranja)
- 10/7–12 ... **Kriya Yoga Preparation** (with Dianna Smith)
- 10/7–14 ... ★**Meditation Teacher Training** (with Savitri Simpson)
- 10/11–14 . **The Healing Path of Yoga** (with Nischala Joy Devi)
- 10/14–27 . ★**AYTT Assistantship** (with Jyoti Spearin)
- 1/6–19 ★**AYTT Assistantship** (with Jyoti Spearin)
- 3/7–17 ★**Meditation Teacher Training** (with Savitri Simpson)
- 3/17–30 ... ★**AYTT Assistantship** (with Jyoti Spearin)
- 5/5–10 **Kriya Yoga Preparation** (with Dianna Smith)
- 5/12–19 ... ★**Advanced Pranayama and the Subtle Body** (with Gyandev McCord, Uma Meshorer and Savitri Simpson)
- 5/19–24 ... **Therapeutic Yoga** (with Nicole DeAvilla)
- 5/30–6/9 .. **Yoga of the Heart** (with Nischala Joy Devi)
- 6/16–21 ... **Special Needs Teacher Training** (with Jyoti Spearin and David Ramsden)
- 6/23–30 ... ★**Essence of the Bhagavad Gita** (with Jyotish and Devi Novak)
- 7/4–14 ★**Meditation Teacher Training** (with Savitri Simpson)
- 7/14–27 ... ★**AYTT Assistantship** (with Jyoti Spearin)
- 9/29–10/5 ★**Essence of the Yoga Sutras** (with Jyotish and Devi Novak)

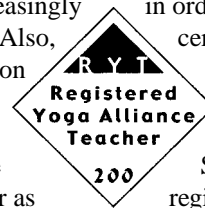
“Centeredness in the spine is important not only for spiritual awakening, but even in sports and in other daily human activities. One who can remain consciously centered in his spine will always be poised, ready to meet any situation that arises.”

— Swami Kriyananda
14 Steps to Higher Awareness

Yoga Alliance Update

More than 2000 yoga teachers have registered with Yoga Alliance, and “RYT” (Registered Yoga Teacher) is increasingly a criterion for selecting a teacher. Also, RYT names and contact information are posted on the Yoga Alliance website: www.yogaalliance.org.

All Ananda YTT graduates are eligible and encouraged to register as RYT’s. Yoga Alliance charges \$40/year to be in the registry.



If your AYTT certificate doesn’t say “Level 1 Training,” you’ll need a new one in order to register. To receive a new certificate, simply send a copy of your old one 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 Lisa a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

The Expanding Light

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