

Awake & Ready!

Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga™ Teachers Association
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PERSPECTIVE

Rewire Your Circuits

Recently, Swami Kriyananda said something that is very relevant for Ananda Yoga™ teachers:

“In anything we do, we should never take credit to ourselves. It’s what we *do* that makes us the way we are, and if we *did* differently, we’d *be* different. We are the result, not of talents, gifts, or qualities, but of actions that *reflect* those qualities. When you don’t do well and you aren’t feeling good about yourself, it’s very important to think in terms of ‘What can I change, not in my qualities, but in the way I *do* things?’ It’s a matter of how you treat the world, of how you treat other people, of whether you’re putting out energy to serve others or drawing their energy back to you, to your ego.”



Gyandev McCord
Director

This is a very freeing thought: our character qualities (“good” or “bad”) may *describe* us at a given moment, but they don’t *define* or limit us. We have a quality because energy flows through us in a particular way—because that’s it’s flowed in the past. To change the quality, change the flow. If we express the quality through action, we strengthen it; if we don’t, it withers. As Paramhansa Yogananda often said, “The instrument is blessed by that which flows through it.” It’s a very potent, direct means to change ourselves: change our actions.

And it’s not just *what* we do, but *how* we do it. Two teachers can give identical classes, with identical words and actions. But if one gives selflessly *to* the students while the other tries to draw energy *from* the students (trying to get their approval, admiration, etc.), the results will be quite different—both for the teachers and for their students. The first teacher will expand, and her students will feel empowered: “I can do this!” The second teacher will contract, and her students will feel diminished in some way: “She’s so wonderful! (... and I’m not.)”

The Mechanics of Transformation

Yoga says that the actions that mold us are not only outward, but thoughts, emotions, motives, and desires—via the energy that animates them. In this article, I’ll explore how this inner transformation can manifest on the

physical level, and how that’s relevant to the practice and teaching of Ananda Yoga.

In his popular “brain class” at The Expanding Light, Dr. Peter Van Houten describes how the brain remains highly “plastic” throughout life. For example, suppose you begin to practice a musical instrument every day. In response to this new regular practice, the “musical part” of the brain literally begins add new neurons and develop new neural pathways. The brain becomes “more musical.”

Thus the adage “practice makes perfect” is about more than just gaining familiarity with some activity. It’s about enlarging and rewiring the brain to facilitate this new activity. Echoing Swami’s words, we change the brain through the ways in which we use it. The expression, “Use it or lose it,” has a positive side: “Use it and grow it.”

Mind into Muscle?

I’ve recently come across some interesting research on the topic of how thought can change us. Dave Smith, a sports psychologist in England, is a former strength training coach who has used visualization to improve his clients’ strength gains. This is not new; top athletes all over the world use visualization. But Dave wanted to prove the value of this practice, so he conducted an experiment to determine whether “mental workouts”—i.e., sitting still and visualizing oneself lifting weights—truly build strength. He gave each of three groups of men a different training regime: actual strength training, mental workouts (only), or nothing at all.

After four weeks, the first group showed a 33% strength increase, the second showed a 16% increase, and

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the third group showed no change. That's right: mental workouts are half as effective as physical workouts!

Keys to Visualization

Dr. Smith's prescription for *how* to do a mental workout is instructive. To be effective, he says, mental workouts must (a) be regular, and (b) take a particular approach to visualization. A mental workout shouldn't be like watching a home movie of yourself: "There's me, on my mental movie screen, lifting a 300-pound barbell." Instead, he emphasizes engaging *all* the senses: "Recreate the entire experience in your mind. Make it as much like actual weightlifting as possible: imagine your muscles straining and getting 'pumped up,' heart pounding, sweat dripping. In every way, *feel* yourself doing it right now!" He even encourages clients to wear their workout clothes during mental work-

outs, and to imagine the smell of the gym (how lovely!).

One reason that this approach works is that the motor parts of the brain (i.e., those concerned with moving your body) can't tell the difference between visualization and actuality. Their job is to get neurons to fire in the brain; they have no way of knowing whether the firing actually causes any physical movement. (Other parts of the brain *do* know whether there is movement, however.) If we do a convincing job of visualization, the motor parts of the brain will believe that the workout is really happening.

As a result, the nervous system changes: Dr. Smith has found that strength gains from mental workouts are primarily due to improvements in neural pathways in the brain, spinal cord, and peripheral nervous system that control the movements involved. Yes, it takes physical strength training to increase muscle *size*, but mental workouts can rewire us for more efficient *application* of our muscle power.

In addition to demonstrating brain plasticity, this makes a strong argument for controlling our mental processes. Anything we do, even mentally, is literally reshaping our brains so we can do that better, more easily, and more naturally—whether it leads us to happiness or not. So let's not leave our minds unchaperoned!

MEMBER NEWS

Special Benefit for AYTA Members

Here's a wonderful way to connect on a deeper level with your students—and give yourself a nurturing retreat, too. If you bring 4 or more of your students to The Expanding Light for any program between Nov. 1, 2002 and March 1, 2003, all of you will receive a 15% discount on your total cost. *In addition*, you (the AYTA member) will receive 2 free nights of Personal Retreat anytime within a year of your group's visit.

To make your reservation, please call The Expanding Light at 800-346-5350 (530-478-7518).

Heard from AYSutra Lately?

We are still getting some returned messages on AYSutra, our online question & answer forum. Usually, it's because we haven't been informed of e-mail address changes, or members have exceeded their e-mail quota on free services like hotmail, yahoo, etc.

If it's been more than a month since you heard from AYSutra, please send your name and e-mail address to AYSutra@expandinglight.org so we can verify your address in our records.

Want a Free Membership?

Are you enjoying the articles in *Awake & Ready!*? We certainly are, and we encourage you to consider writing your own—short or long—to share some of the wisdom you've gained. You don't need writing skills; we'll be happy to help you manifest it. We'll even do it in an interview format if that makes it easier. Short articles might be in the "Inspirations" section (see pages 9 and 11)—and if we use your longer article of at least 1500 words, you'll get a *free year's membership!* For more information, contact Gyandev (see page 12).

A Note on Energization

The Energization Exercises take it a step farther: they employ both physical exertion *and* visualization. So it seems safe to extrapolate from Dr. Smith's research and say that the EE's are an effective strength training regime if—and this is a big "if"—they are done correctly: with great will power and concentration. (Anyone who's ever tried the Charles Atlas Dynamic Tension System of bodybuilding will concur. It's *very* much like Energization. In fact, Charles Atlas was a student of Yogananda's teachings.)

Of course, strength is not the goal of the EE's. And the visualization technique is different: instead of visualizing muscles contracting, heart pounding, sweat dripping, etc., we visualize sending and withdrawing energy. But I'll wager that those elements of Dr. Smith's prescription are simply indirect ways to foster concentration and engage the will and feeling capacity. In Energization, we focus *directly* on using will and feeling—"Tense with will, relax and feel." Seems to me that such a direct focus might produce better results, even just at the level of physical strength.

Maybe this will inspire you in your Energization practice. Or maybe (and I hope) you're looking for more than just strength from the EE's. So let's go a bit deeper.

How about a Plastic Heart?

Recent research has shown that the heart is not just a specialized muscle. Neurocardiologists have found that 60–65% of the heart's cells are neural cells—exactly like brain cells, with the same types of connections and neurotransmitters. That's right: your heart is mostly brain, and it constantly converses with the "emotional brain" (i.e., the limbic system and its attendant structures, such as the amygdala and hippocampus). The emotional brain tells the

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Teaching Yoga for Round Bodies

Part 3 of a 3-part series by Kay Erdwinn, M.D.

In this issue, Kay concludes her discussion of adaptations for asanas in the *AYTT* manual to fit the special needs of fat people (“fat” is her preferred word, by the way). In the first two parts of this series, she described general issues with teaching fat people, and addressed all the asanas (in alphabetical order by Sanskrit name) up through *sasamgasana*.

Savasana

Entering this asana may require some extra “arranging” for the fat person. The arms and legs may need to be wider than with a thinner person. Mostly, though, fat is somewhat mobile (the jiggle effect that we so love in Jello, but for some reason hate in people ... go figger), and the fat student may have to squirm a bit until it is distributed evenly underneath and laterally. The feeling is similar to sitting on a cushion, but missing slightly, so that you are off-kilter. You need to rearrange the cushion to be seated squarely on it. With some experience, I’ve found that I know how to sit, lie down, or whatever in a way that minimizes the need for adjusting, but for a fat person just getting used to tuning into his/her body, there might be a fair amount of restless movement to get things “just right.”

In addition, a person with very large buttocks may need a cushion under the knees even in the absence of lower back problems, simply because the extra fat adds curvature to the lumbar spine. Some fat students may prefer to rest the legs on a chair seat.

Finally, because a fat student’s neck will tend toward the jackknife position (due to the fat pad on the back), a cushion under the head may be in order. Also, a neck roll may prove valuable in keeping the neck in a comfortable, supported, neutral position.

Setu Bandhasana

The difficult part of this asana for the fat student is the position of the arms and putting the hands together under the back. I simply have the student hold a strap taut between the hands, and otherwise perform the asana as usual. Breathing may be difficult, especially for large-breasted women. As in *savasana*, a cushion under the head may be in order.

Siddhasana

Most likely the fat person will prefer *Ardha Siddhasana*, in which one foot is placed in front of the other rather than on

top of it. As with any cross-legged position, the fat person may not be able to fold the legs as snugly (i.e., get as much knee flexion) as a thinner person. Some very large people may not be able to cross the legs at all. I have these students place their legs in as near to a cross as possible, and support the knees with cushions. This posture makes it tempting to round the back, so I make sure they are sitting well forward on a blanket or cushion so that the pelvis is tilted forward.

Surya Namaskar

Except for position 3, *Padahasthasana*, there are no positions in this sequence that are much harder for the fat beginner than for the thinner one, in and of themselves.

However, the transition between postures may be very difficult for fat people.

For example, lowering the hands to the ground between *Banarasana* and *Plank* pose may be hard to do because of the belly. Almost inevitably the front knee will drop to the side to accommodate the abdomen, and the person’s balance will be thrown off, especially since s/he must move the now out-of-alignment leg back for the next asana.

Likewise, moving from *Adho Mukha Shvanasana* back into *Banarasana* is also difficult since it requires the student to lift and bring the leg forward between the hands, again running into the belly. Most fat students will lift their leg out to the side, then forward, placing the foot beside the hands rather than between them. Both alignment and balance suffer with this move. The same problem occurs in the movement from *Banarasana* back into *Padahasthasana*.

I don’t know a way for a fat person not to run into this difficulty if s/he does the transitions the traditional way. Here’s

what I do personally: To move from *Banarasana* to *Plank* pose, I first lessen the intensity of the lunge by pressing down with my front foot and moving my torso back (making sure to remain upright, not to bend forward). Then I bring my front leg back to match the back one, so that I am kneeling. Next I place my hands on the ground, much as in “*Mad Cat-Old Cow*” (on all-fours), as far forward as I can, then lift my body into *Plank* pose. The hardest part of this is getting my front leg back to match the back one. The transition is easier if the knee drops to the side, but it is at least possible to do the move without doing that. Thus my body stays in alignment, I keep my balance, and my transition is reasonably smooth.



Kay teaches “*Yoga for Round Bodies*” in *Placerville, Calif.* She also volunteers at the *El Dorado Women’s Center*, a local domestic violence help resource.

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Teaching Yoga for Round Bodies (continued from page 3)

For moving from Adho Mukha Shvanasana to Banarasana, I leave Down Dog by re-entering an all-fours position, then I straighten up my torso by pushing my hands into the floor. From here, I step one leg forward (the very large person may have to lean back or move the leg outward slightly, and I honestly don't know a way around that), then move into Banarasana.

Lastly, for the transition from Banarasana to Padahasthasana, I again move my torso back, place my hands on my front thigh, and step the back leg forward as I'm pushing myself up with my hands, and enter the forward fold (as much as the old tum-tum will allow) smoothly, without ever having stood up completely. I'm not sure I like this last maneuver, especially it puts pressure on the front knee when I push myself up. It may be safer for someone with knee problems not to attempt this.

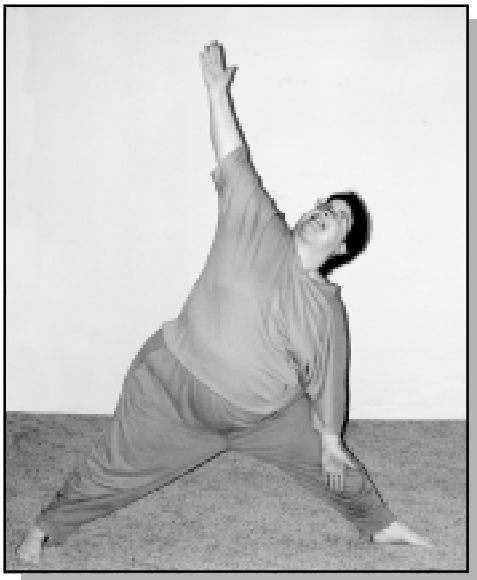
Actually, I'm a bit uneasy about all my adaptations in this sequence. Unlike my reaction to adapting a single asana, I feel a bit like I'm cheating, since the transitions are such a large part of the Surya Namaskar. However, it is the only way I've found that allows me to stay in alignment, keep my balance, and maintain the necessary flow of movement. I'd be curious to learn what other fat yogi/yoginis have come up with for this sequence. But so far, these adaptations work for me. I have not yet tried them in class, because the Sun Salutation is a bit advanced for my crowd.

Tadasana

The only difference for a fat person in this asana is that s/he may prefer the legs to be a bit wider for better grounding, balance, and comfort.

Trikonasana

I don't think this asana should be done any differently by fat people. Fat students need to pay special attention to not collapsing the underside of the rib cage because just the



bending alone will restrict breathing somewhat. Also, since the torso of the fat person weighs more, s/he may be tempted to rest a lot of weight on the hand touching the forward leg. This is a no-no for everyone, but especially if s/he has problem knees, it's easy to make things worse by doing this. Also, if the fat student's weight is primarily in the tummy, you should watch for swayback.

[*Note from Gyandev:* Some of you have heard me speak of a very heavy—okay, fat (whew, that was hard to say!)—AYTT student whose video workshop asana was trikonasana. You also saw me demonstrate the way she did it—rather narrow stance, very little sideways bend—and say “But her spine was straight, her pelvis, torso, and shoulders were opening, her breath was full and even, and she was vibrant, joyful. There was no doubt: it was a real trikonasana!” Well, that student was Kay. In the picture below, you can see how nicely her pose has evolved. Can't you almost feel the energy and joy flooding Kay's body cells?]

Ustrasana

In this asana, the fat student may have difficulty snagging the heels behind him/her without twisting and leaning back, which is clearly potentially hazardous for the lower back. The modification wherein the student places his/her hands on the upper back rim of the pelvis, then performs the backward bend, is usually easier. For those who are sure of the strength in their lower backs, holding a strap with both hands behind the body while doing the backbend is another alternative.

Utkatasana

Unless there are knee problems, most fat people are comfortable with the first phase of this asana. The second phase is harder for everyone, of course. The fat person performing this asana must be sure of his/her leg strength and knee health, since s/he must carry more weight. The most troublesome part is keeping the knees pointed forward as s/he completes the squat, due yet again to abdominal and thigh fat. I have found that I and other fat people unconsciously lean back in order to breathe better, which places stress on the lower back as well as hinders an already precarious balance. I teach fat students to go down as far as possible, maintaining alignment, then to come out of the asana.

Alternatively, they can start the asana from a slightly duck-footed and externally rotated leg position. We're talking a couple of inches, no more. This allows the necessary room for the thighs and belly as they squat. This changes the lower back stretch and which aspect of the quadriceps is working the hardest, but I believe that as long as the legs are opened from the hips, and the knees stay in alignment with the feet, there is no extra danger.

As with any student, if it's too hard to come straight up out of the second phase of utkatasana, a fat student can bring his or her hands forward onto the floor, resulting in an all-fours position. Then s/he can simply straighten up to “standing” on the knees and step up to tadasana.

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Miss Yoga Goes to Juvenile Hall

Part 1 of a 2-part interview with Karen Barbarick

Karen “Miss Yoga” Barbarick has been teaching Ananda Yoga and Ayurveda to teenagers in the Placer County (Calif.) juvenile detention center for nearly two years. When she told us about her extraordinary experiences, we immediately asked her to share her experience with all of the AYTA. Following is her interview with Gyandev.

Gyandev: How did you get involved with teens in juvenile detention?

Karen: After I finished AYTT in April 2000, I wanted to start teaching right away. I went to a bunch of different places—my church, gyms, yoga studios—but nothing panned out. Then I remembered that two years earlier, I’d met a woman who taught in the community schools. I’d told her that I was studying Ayurveda, doing yoga, and, as an outlet for all my energy, racing off-road vehicles and watercraft. Because of this (teenagers love off-road vehicles—very empowering) and my other background, she encouraged me to become a mentor of troubled teens.

G: What “other background”?

K: My college major was communications, mainly interpersonal and small group communications. That, plus having a past of my own, gave me the understanding of where the teens were coming from, and how to work with them. And besides, I have kind of a teenage mentality, even now at age 35 [laughs].

So when teaching yoga wasn’t happening fast enough for me, I reconnected with that woman I’d met. She gave me a contact at Placer County Health and Human Services for the mentorship training. I met the people, filled out the paperwork, got fingerprinted, took the training, and six months later, there I was at juvenile hall.

G: It took you six months just to get in the door?

K: To volunteer, right. They’re not real open to yoga. Yet they bring church volunteers right in without their having to go through all that red tape.

Anyway, I went in for my first class without much planning: the basics of yoga and Ayurveda, and some postures, but I really I didn’t know what to expect. There were a lot of people watching from behind a one-way mirror. They were skeptical because their impression of yoga was that it was a religion or a cult, and they wanted to see what I would do. I met a lot of resistance, and I’m sure it was just based in fear.

G: How many kids were there?

K: 20 kids, boys and girls. They keep the boys and girls very

separate from each other. Girls can’t bend over with the boys looking, so we had to have an awkward-shaped class, with me in the middle of two separate groups. It was challenging to teach and keep an eye on all the students.

G: Did these kids want to be in the class, or did they have to be?

K: A little of both. Some had resistance or said, “Yoga is against my religion.” But it was better than sitting in their cells, so they came. Most were very quiet and attentive.

G: How did you start out that first class?

K: I told them my name and my background. I had to be careful because they get really inquisitive about my story, and I’m not there to tell them my story. So I told them about how I moved out on my own at a very young age, that I went to college, and what I’d experienced in my life. I said that I was very graced considering what I had come from. I’d needed to channel my energy, so I got involved in sports, which led to yoga as well as Polaris watercraft racing, plus my husband’s and my Polaris shop, plus racing off-road vehicles.

G: I’ll bet that got their attention.

K: Sure did. I had to entice them, interest them in me. If I had come in all airy fairy, it wouldn’t work.

Then I got into what yoga is: union. I talked about the nervous system and how rigid, constricted behaviors often parallel the rigid constriction in our spine. I said that if we can just loosen up and relax a little, we can be more whole as human beings. I explained how yoga helps us see the big picture, get a healthier perspective on life, and that the point is to expand our consciousness. I introduced Ayurveda and some Sanskrit. They really liked that. I told them about the chakras, and how, if a chakra is blocked, certain behavior can result, so we need to get ourselves in line.

G: Wow, that’s a lot to throw at them!

K: I said, “Fasten your seat belts, ‘cause we’re goin’!” It’s a challenge to keep their attention. They gravitate to the floor. That’s the first thing I noticed: they got lower and lower until they were lying down while listening to me. I had to tell them to sit up. You see, they don’t know how to sit or relax or breathe, so I had to keep talking and entertain them. A lot of them were paying attention, and I think that on some level they got it. Maybe in 10 years they’ll really get it.

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Karen lives in Applegate, Calif. (near Auburn). In addition to being an Ananda Yoga teacher, Karen is a Clinical Ayurvedic Specialist, a Board member of the California Association of Ayurvedic Medicine, and the 1999 Personal Watercraft Racing World Champion.



Teaching Yoga for Round Bodies (continued from page 4)

Vajrasana

As with *balasana*, the thigh fat just doesn't know where to go in this asana! Therefore, the fat student may not be able to sit on the heels at all. For some, however, especially mid-sized people, the trick I described for *balasana*—rolling the muscle and fat on the calves and thighs laterally—may help. Usually, though, sitting on a cushion is required, and the legs will simply be as close together as the fat permits.

Another potential problem in this asana for the fat person concerns the feet. The heels bear more weight with a fat person, and the extreme plantar flexion that results may cause painful cramps. In addition, if the student (fat or thin) has plantar fasciitis (chronic inflammation of the connective tissue in the soles of the feet), this asana can aggravate the condition. To solve the problem, I use a large enough towel roll under the fronts of the ankles to make the angle of the ankle between 90 and 120 degrees, rather than the more-usual 150 degrees or more.

Viparita Karani

This is another asana that my neck protests, so I myself don't practice it. The main problem(s) for the fat person would probably be once again getting the elbows in enough to provide the necessary leverage, plus the sheer amount of weight that must be supported by the arms/wrists, which is a difficulty even for many thinner students.

When I was first learning this asana, I would lift my torso, then blithely sway, putting weight on first one shoulder, then another, in order to move the elbows in. It made the asana possible for me, but I was doing heinous things to my neck in the process. I have seen other strong fat people attempt the same maneuver, and I've had to rush to stop them. It's frustrating for the fat student who is otherwise ready to try the asana.

A way around the difficulty is to practice against the wall or with a chair. With the buttocks and feet resting against the wall, legs bent, it is possible to support some of the weight via the legs instead of the hands, just enough to shift the

elbows in without torquing the neck. However, it could place a little extra flexion strain on the neck, so one must use caution.

The notes about blankets mentioned for *halasana* also apply here.

Virabhadrasana

Fat people generally make excellent warriors! This asana requires strength, but extra fat doesn't get in the way of anything here. The extra weight does make an already challenging pose a bit more challenging, but that will be a problem only if the fat student has no prior physical conditioning. Watch for swayback in those who weight is primarily in the tummy.

Vrikasana

Except for the advanced half-Lotus version of this asana, wherein thigh fat would interfere with placement of the raised leg, this asana is usually no more problematic for fat people than for thin, unless the fat person is very out of shape. Sometimes, though, a fat person has less of a sense of his/her own balance than a thinner person, so it may take a little while to find it. Watch for swayback among those who weight is primarily in the tummy

Final Considerations

Yoga is an excellent exercise and spiritual discipline for people of any size. For some fat students, simply being made aware of body mechanics differences and being made welcome in a class are enough to bolster their confidence and allow them to progress. Others are extremely out of shape and will need lots of adjusting with cushions and straps—and if they have cardiovascular or musculoskeletal problems, some asanas may even be contraindicated. Still others may be at a reasonable level of fitness, but be so ashamed of and uncomfortable in their bodies that they need lots of nurturing before they can actually start tuning into their physical selves.

For these last two groups—those who need lots of technical help and/or lots of moral support—I truly believe that

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LEVEL 2 NEWS

Level 2 Program Options Continue to Expand

See page 12 for a complete calendar of upcoming Level 2 programs.

- On September 22–29, 2002, Jyotish and Devi Novak, Uma Meshorer, and Gyandev McCord will teach *Essence of the Yoga Sutras*, a stimulating immersion in Patanjali's great scripture of yoga. We'll also explore how to practice and teach a number of asanas that are more advanced than those in Level 1 AYTT. (At this point, we're not sure when—or whether—this program will be offered in 2003.)

New and revised Level 2 programs:

- *Restorative Yoga Teacher Training* with Jyoti Spearin (tentatively scheduled for June 12–15, 2003).
- *Prenatal Yoga Teacher Training* with Nicole DeAvilla (tentatively scheduled for June 22–27, 2003).
- *Special Needs Teacher Training* will move to a 7-day format, August 17–24, 2003. Led by Jyoti Spearin, Barbara Bingham, P.T., and Kay Erdwinn, M.D., you'll explore anatomical, physiological, and psychological conditions that one often encounters in yoga students.



Teaching Yoga for Round Bodies (continued from page 6)

having a separate class for large people is the way to go. As long as the teacher is compassionate, has no hidden weight loss agendas, and understands the differences for fat people doing yoga, the teacher's size probably doesn't matter. What matters is having other fat people around, supporting each other and improving together. Fat people spend their whole lives trying to fit into a world that neither fits nor accepts them. Having a separate space to explore one's physical self—and one's spirituality—with others who have the same goals, is tremendously healing. ♦

Next summer Kay will again be on the faculty for the Teaching Yoga for Special Needs Level 2 program, August 17–24, 2003.

Miss Yoga Goes to Juvenile Hall (continued from page 5)

G: What had these kids done to get themselves in jail?

K: Some had stolen their parents' cars and their parents put them in jail, or they had vandalized, or taken a weapon to school, or had been caught with drugs or fighting. Fighting is a big one—fighting, stealing, all the yamas.

I learned the hard way that I shouldn't ask individuals about their stories. There was one boy who was so sweet, so attentive, so wise. Why was *he* there? Well, I asked, and it turns out he was a peeper. That made me realize that I don't need to know each person's story.

I told them that I've seen that, for every quality we have that seems to be from the dark side, we have a corresponding virtue that wants to get out, and it's just a matter of unfolding it. Instead of dwelling on the bad stuff, I'd say, "Okay, you did that, so you have this going for you, and we just need to get it working right." They really connected with that. I had to keep them busy with their minds; otherwise they would fall asleep—just gravitate to the floor, and next thing you know, it was "lights out."

G: Did they have a sense that they had personal problems?

K: Not at first, but that changed when I said, "Everybody here who is suffering raise your hand." All of them raised their hand, so they realized that in some sense they were suffering.

G: Did they think it was suffering just from being in jail, or suffering from something within them that had landed them there?

K: Well, you have to start somewhere. A lot of them thought they were suffering from being there. They were justifying why they shouldn't be there—you know, "the cops just have it out for me," and victim, victim, victim.

So our first step was to do a forward fold, and I asked, "Is anybody suffering in their body?" Well, they were. They're so tight, so constricted that a simple forward bend felt like suffering. Once they acknowledged that they were uncomfortable in their bodies, they were better able to look at being uncomfortable in their minds, and to look at whether the

world really is out to get them, and how they really want peace. I said, "Peace is your natural birthright. How can we get there?"

I let them know that I'm suffering as well. We're all suffering together. I may be one step ahead of them, shining the light, but we're all on this journey. That opened a door. They realized that their bodies were uncomfortable, and their minds were uncomfortable, and slowly they started to become aware of the microcosm/macrocosm: you are suffering "in here" and you feel the victim, and that is going to be mirrored "out there." God's gift is to show you, "Look at this. Here is what the universe is showing you," instead of, "The world is this terrible place."

You see, a lot of them have tried to commit suicide multiple times, thinking "The world is out to get me." I said, "No, the world is just a mirror to let you know what's going on inside you, and if you can just get the right perspective, you can weed out some of your problems. When you're ready." That was my approach.

G: What else was an important part of your approach?

K: I found that I needed to use music, because quiet is too quiet for these kids. They were very tamasic, and tamasic plus quiet equals sleep. I needed to move them into rajas. And I'm the perfect person to do that [*laughs*].

So I used alternative rock-and-roll that teaches, uses Sanskrit words, talks about the illusion, talks about God, and what God is like, stuff like that. They don't get to hear any music in jail, and they liked this, so I was able to get their attention with that.

I would take the words or phrases out of the songs and explain. For example, one of the songs talks about *maya* (cosmic illusion). I would explain *maya*, then play the music. Of course, many of them didn't understand all this, but that didn't matter. I was using music to change their cellular memory, so when they hit the streets again and hear rock-and-roll music, they won't have only the memory of hanging out with their friends and getting high. I wanted them to remember the peaceful feeling they had, to help them plug into a more positive experience. I used both masculine and feminine music—some very sentimental, about being held and being loved, because they needed that nurturing, too.

I had to take them through different stages. I started with fast music. I would say, "Let's move with the music. Let's stretch our arms up to the music." Gradually I slowed it down, and eventually I just shut it off for savasana.

It was the first time many of them had been comfortable in their bodies. Just thinking about it makes me teary-eyed, because in some of them, you can see it in their posture [*her chin sinks down into her chest*] ...

G: Defeat.

K: ... and a lot of others were glaring defiance at me. From my own background, I could see what was going on. So I told them, "People will respond to you based on your posture. The hardest thing in the world to do is to see ourselves. We see ourselves from the inside, looking out, but how does the world see us?"

(continues on page 8)



Following Dharma in Teaching Ananda Yoga™

Some of you have asked about the dharma/legalities of representing yourself and your classes, as well as using Ananda Yoga artwork/affirmations. Following are a few clarifications. If you have questions, please contact Gyandev (see page 12).

Representing Yourself and Your Classes

- A graduate of AYT (one who has actually received the certificate) can call her/himself a “certified Level 1 Ananda Yoga teacher” (or Level 2, if true).
- Only classes officially sponsored by Ananda Sangha may be advertised as “Ananda Yoga.” (Otherwise, trademark law would compel Ananda to begin licensing the use of “Ananda Yoga.” So unless you teach through an Ananda Center or Sangha branch, flyers should not have an “Ananda Yoga” headline. Also, if your business card just says “Ananda Yoga,” it should be changed to “certified Ananda Yoga teacher” next time you reprint.)
- If someone asks you what style you teach, then of course you can answer, “I teach in the Ananda Yoga style” (if in fact you *really do* teach Ananda Yoga—e.g., with the affirmations, an emphasis on lifting the subtle energy, pauses between poses, etc.).
- If you *really do* teach Ananda Yoga, your flyers can include a short “What Is Ananda Yoga?” blurb. You’ll find a sample below.

Using Artwork, Affirmations, Etc.

- You may use Ananda’s asana drawings and affirmations in handouts, provided the following credit appears on each page that contains the material: “Courtesy Ananda Yoga Teacher Training, © Ananda Church of Self-Realization.” (Use of the artwork in books or other for-sale items requires special permission.)
- If you make products that include the affirmations, credit should also be given, e.g., “The affirmations in this video are part of the Ananda Yoga™ system.”
- The Ananda Yoga logo (see page 1) may be used only for classes officially sponsored by Ananda Sangha.

What is Ananda Yoga?

Ananda Yoga™ is a classical, relaxation-based practice that works with the body’s subtle energies to raise one’s level of awareness. It is usually practiced in conjunction with meditation. Two unique features of this system are (1) special exercises to recharge the body with energy, and (2) the practice of silent affirmations while in the poses. Ananda Yoga was developed by Swami Kriyananda, a direct disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda, author of the spiritual classic, *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

Miss Yoga Goes to Juvenile Hall (continued from page 7)

K: It was all inspiration, because I went in with almost no preparation or intention, mainly because my life was so darn busy. I took in some notes of how I wanted to start, but mostly I just prayed. I knew I was doing the right thing, and I relaxed because I didn’t feel intimidated by them. After all, they’re just teenagers. It was really incredible because some of them who had been so wound up and tight just started crying—and this was the first day!

When the class ended, everyone thought they were tired. I said, “You’re not tired. You’re just centered and grounded for the first time, and this is what it feels like. You are relaxed, you are in your body.” You see, they are used to being stuck in their heads.

When I walked out of that first class, a woman who works there came up to me and said, “You’re really good with those teenagers.” Another person came up to me with a piece of paper and said, “Somebody put this on my desk this morning, and I think it belongs to you.” It was an application for a mini-grant from Placer County Health and Human Services, and what I was doing fit the grant requirements perfectly.

G: Tax money.

K: Yes, and they all wanted me to come back.

G: The kids too?

K: Oh yes. They all called me “Miss Yoga.” Even the teachers called me that because they couldn’t remember my name. I kept going back and doing it—and being very moved by them.

There was an incredible story: I had a dream one night before my class. I was with this girl who wanted to spit at me because she was so angry with me. I was trying to help her, but she started scaring me because she was so out of control. I started to run from her, but everywhere I went she was there. Then suddenly I was in my children’s room, sitting by the window looking out at the creek, happy to be home, and the water is so still. Then I was in bed with my husband, and I thought, “I’m safe.” But when I rolled over and opened my eyes, she was there. I screamed and bolted upright in bed. Next day, there she was in my class.

G: You recognized her from the dream?

K [*nodding*]: I said, “I had a dream about you last night.” I have to have some mystery about me, to keep them in suspense; it entices them to come back. I went to adjust her and she had bandages around her wrists. She had slashed her wrists the night before and died—had to be resuscitated. That night they put her in juvenile hall. I guess some of the kids told her, “Miss Yoga is coming tomorrow,” so she came to class the next day. Meanwhile, I guess a part of her had still been wandering outside her body while I was asleep. Well, it freaked the heck out of me to see her. But things like that happened.

(continues on page 9)



INSPIRATIONS

Sindbad the Superconscious Parrot

by Meenakshi Key

Parrots are known for their ability to talk. In fact, you may have heard of ancient pirates with parrots that had some rather ... er ... let's say "spicy" vocabularies. A parrot in the hands of an Ananda Yoga teacher, however, is an entirely different matter in terms of language.

I practice my asanas in my front room in the presence of one of these intelligent and beautiful feathered jewels. Our parrot, Sindbad, is a 12-year-old, blue and gold macaw who has taken quite a liking to participating in Superconscious Living Exercises (SCL exercises) with me.

It started right after I was first certified in Ananda Yoga, back in 1991. I would practice out loud in preparation for teaching my classes. Back then (and today as well) I usually began my asana set with SCL exercises. Amazingly, I found that Sindbad tried them and liked them as well!



Meenakshi Key teaches Ananda Yoga in several locations near her home in Montague, Calif. (near the Oregon border). In his latest endeavor, Sindbad is trying to master garudasana (eagle pose). He's a natural with the "folded wings" part; his challenge is to go deep into the feeling quality of the affirmation rather than just "parroting" it.

Here's his technique: "I am awake and ready!" translates into parrot as "I'm awake! I'm awake!" with his eyes flashing. "I am positive! Energetic! Enthusiastic!" translates into parrot as "I am pos" with a garbled-sounding "Energetic! Enthus ... ," with wings lifted!

Sindbad makes a game attempt at the others as well, and in any event, he certainly embodies the positive spirit of SCL exercises.

In the diverse and sometimes confusing "yoga patchwork" of methods and styles out there today; SCL exercises are unique to Ananda Yoga. We have the opportunity to offer our students a direct method that can bring us into the spirit of yoga. Sindbad would certainly agree.

Next, we'll be working with affirmations: "Peaceful parrot. Blissful bird. Mellow macaw." Wish me luck! ♦



I am positive! ...



... Energetic! ...



... Enthusiastic!

Miss Yoga Goes to Juvenile Hall
(continued from page 8)

G: Were there other teachers at juvenile hall?

K: Oh yes. They taught regular school subjects. I came in under the "health" category—not that I know that much. I was teaching them health in Sanskrit [laughs].

Eventually the other teachers started participating and seeing the changes happen. Some people didn't like what I was doing, and they complained about the way I dressed—too suggestive. Whoa! I wore baggy pants and an even baggier shirt; if I had worn a burlap sack I guess that would have been even better. The irony was that other teachers

dressed, well, almost racy. But I had to keep my ego out of it, just work through it and not take it personally. I knew that those kids and I really needed each other, that I was growing immensely from this, healing a lot of my own wounds.

Whenever I would bring in metaphysical understanding, the Christians would object. You know—religions, dogma. At a mystical level they're all doing the same thing that yoga is doing, but on a surface level there was friction. So I constantly had to be creative, I had to find language that wouldn't offend the people who were watching behind that one-way mirror.

(continues on page 10)



Miss Yoga Goes to Juvenile Hall (continued from page 9)

G: How did a typical class unfold?

K: First I would rearrange everybody. Usually the most vocal ones were in the back, and they would destroy all the energy, so I moved them right up front. I told them what I saw about their posture: “Here’s how you look. This is what your body is presenting to me, and the universe is going to respond to you based on how you are presenting yourself to it.” That usually got them to toe the line. A couple times I had to ask someone to leave because he or she was disrespectful to the others. I didn’t do that in the beginning, but I soon realized that I had to. When they came back the next time—it was still better than sitting in their cells—they would be quiet.

After rearranging everybody, I would sit them down and introduce some Sanskrit words. We might even have a discussion; they have a lot of energy and want to talk. Eventually the class moved into circle. They were interested and had questions. We talked a lot about maya. This process was demolishing their reference point, so they didn’t have anything familiar to plug in to. It created a perfect opening. ♦

The conclusion of this interview will appear in the next issue of Awake and Ready! In that part of the interview, Karen gives more specifics of the structure of her classes with these teens, tells how she worked with government administrators, and describes the broader work that she is beginning to do statewide in California.

Yoga Day USA 2002

October 26, 2002 is Yoga Day USA, a yoga-awareness-raising event that can help raise your visibility in your community as well as support Yoga Alliance. You can participate whether or not you are a Registered Yoga Teacher. For a participation packet, contact Yoga Alliance at 877-YOGA-ALL (toll-free) or info@yogaalliance.org.

Rewire Your Circuits (continued from page 2)

heart about your experience of the world, from a “how do I feel about this?” perspective. The heart responds by telling the emotional brain what to do about it—e.g., fight or flee.

In fact, the heart’s responses generate a powerful electromagnetic field that influences the entire body, and in particular, the brain. This may be an outward manifestation of an important inner truth that Paramhansa Yogananda often cited: “Reason follows feeling.” That is, the intellect tends to look for—and find—ways to justify what we are feeling emotionally.

Next time you find yourself justifying some behavior of yours, check to see if you might simply be defending an emotional response. Perhaps your heart’s magnetic field is lending physiological bias to your brain function, swaying the brain to align with the emotional response. That’s mere

speculation on my part, but it certainly seems possible.

So science already knows that when the mind expresses in a particular way, the brain grows and reshapes itself to facilitate that particular expression. Well, if the heart is largely a brain itself, might not the same thing happen with the heart? And if our feeling capacity expresses outwardly through the physical “heart brain” and emotional brain, might our exercise of feeling rewire the heart and brain to be better instruments to express feeling?

I wouldn’t be surprised, even though it’s not been proven physiologically. The yoga teachings back it up in this sense: when we do something regularly with the mind or feeling capacity, it becomes easier and more natural to do it. And the more feeling we put into it, the easier and more natural it becomes—whether it leads us to happiness or not!

“I joyfully manifest the power of God!”

All of this ties in directly with Ananda Yoga practice. For example, the energy awakened within us by an asana has a particular quality to it: joy, or peace, or love, etc. That energy flow will transform us according to the quality of the energy, the strength of the flow, and the amount of time we spend channeling it through us. So Ananda Yoga is a perfect example of self-transformation *through what we do*.

Now we can more easily see the power of affirmations. They help transform us by strengthening the energy flow, helping us more deeply experience divine joy, peace, love, etc., that are promoted by particular asanas. But it takes *true* affirmation, not mere mental repetition, which is like the mental movies that Dr. Smith mentioned: perhaps beneficial, but not especially powerful. The real key to affirmation is to directly engage all of yourself in the practice—not the senses, as Dr. Smith counsels for strength training, but your feeling capacity, intellect, and will.

In this way, we begin to take control over our inner energies, to bring them inward and upward. With practice, we get better and better at doing that because we literally rewire our inner circuitry to facilitate it. And yogis would say that this inner circuitry is not just our physical nervous systems, but our astral nervous systems as well.

This also suggests a way to practice asanas when we can’t attain the full pose due to injury or inflexibility: use visualization—and use it strongly. Make it a body/mind/feeling experience, not just a mental movie. Take what you know from experience—perhaps from other occasions when you could do the pose better, or from similar poses that you *can* do—and use mental imagery combined with willpower and feeling to go deeper into the pose on non-physical levels. Visualize more physical opening, stronger energy flows, and above all, a deeper experience of the associated psychospiritual qualities. It really works!

A Key to Teaching Ananda Yoga

All of this shows clearly the value of teaching Ananda Yoga with deep feeling. If we will magnetically invite our students into their own realistic feeling experiences, we’ll create an atmosphere in which they can fully absorb

(continues on page 12)



INSPIRATIONS

Famous Last Words

or, "How I Came to Love Teaching the Superconscious Living Exercises"

by Jeff Moore

It was during the July/August 2001 AYTT that I was first introduced to the Superconscious Living Exercises (or SCL's, as I call them). It may have been in the second or third week of the training. All I remember is that for some reason I was not in the mood for class. I wanted to rest. I wanted to be left alone. It's quite possible that the next day we had student teaching or something else that I was dreading. I suspect that most of our group felt the same way.

We were just about to start an afternoon class. As people were straggling in I could see Gyandev scanning the room. He didn't look as happy as usual; in fact he looked worried or concerned. I guess he sensed our lack of enthusiasm. We were all sitting down and many of us had pulled out chairs.

Instead of beginning with chanting as usual, Gyandev just said "Okay, let's stand up." I remember feeling surprised. We stood up, and Gyandev began leading us in the SCL's. I know that most of us had never seen them before because everyone looked so confused. As we began we were looking at each other in disbelief, as if to say, "Is this for real?" But moments afterward we were smiling and laughing. Our energy was back and we were having fun. I remember how good it felt to throw my arms up and affirm my enthusiasm. Still, when we finished I leaned over to a friend and whispered, "I'll die before I ever have the guts to teach those to anyone."

I was wrong.

Recently I was preparing for some yoga and meditation classes I was to teach in a local hospital. The situation was new to me. The three classes were each only fifty minutes long, and they were offered to the public as free demos during an open house.



"I am awake and ready!"

I had no idea what to expect. I had taught only in a yoga studio before this. As I prepared I became concerned about how to fit a talk and an "experience" into such a short format—and make it work for a mixed group that I didn't know and would probably never even see again.

I decided to mention a little about energy and how we work with it in yoga and meditation. I figured there was no point in using a short version of the Energization Exercises because almost no one "gets it" the first time. I wanted them to have energy because I was bent on offering an experience that would

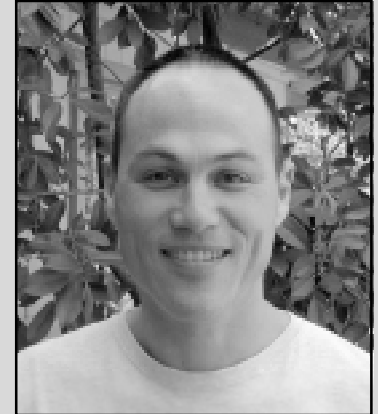
make them want more. I thumbed through my manual and came across the SCL's. I was so bummed. I had no choice. I just had to do it. I couldn't come up with anything to take their place in this situation. The students didn't have to understand them; they only had to follow along.

I used the SCL's in all three classes. I had a very diverse crowd: ages from about 8 years old to 80. Everyone laughed, and it fit right into the theme of energy. No one could deny that they felt better after the SCL's. The remaining portion of the classes was easy because everyone was "awake and ready!"

I had taken with me the page out of my AYTT manual which describes the SCL's, because I had never practiced them, much less taught them. It was laying on my harmonium for easy reference. At the end of one class an elderly woman asked if she could take my page home with her. When I told her that I needed it for my next class, she looked as if she wanted to grab it and run! I had to promise to make her a copy. She actually stayed for a second class and has since signed up for classes with me.

There was also a man who came in with his wife and two kids. His face and posture said loud and clear that it was not his choice to be in my class. He was a big man, and he slouched in a chair, with his arms folded defiantly across his chest. When I began speaking about energy he seemed to be looking at me, but his eyes were glazed over as though he were really asleep. He looked like was going to try to sit out the SCL's, but his daughter made him get up. As he did the exercises, he soon had a big smile on his face, and it was very cool to see his whole family smiling and laughing together. Afterward his eyes looked like those of a happy child full of energy and joy.

This experience proved to me how valuable the SCL exercises are. It also confirmed that I have to put my heart into my teaching. I was so scared that no one would join in that I gave it 150%. I smiled through my fear, and they smiled back. After that I was fine, and I knew it would be okay. In fact, it was more than okay—it was great! ♦



Jeff Moore recently opened his own studio, Ahimsa Yoga, in Torrance (the Los Angeles area), where he teaches Ananda Yoga and meditation.



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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. See page 6 for additional news on Level 2 programs. For complete program details, please see The Expanding Light’s program guide or www.expandinglight.org. You should receive the next program guide (for Oct. 2002–May 2003) in September.

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|--|---|
| 9/19–22 The Healing Path of Yoga
(Nischala Joy Devi) | 6/12–15 Restorative Yoga Teacher Training (date tentative) |
| 9/22–29 ★ Essence of the Yoga Sutras | 6/15–20 Therapeutic Yoga (date tentative) |
| 9/25–29 Meditation Immersion | 6/22–27 Prenatal Yoga Teacher Training (date tentative) |
| 10/6–13 Kriya Yoga Preparation | 6/29–7/4 ... Sharing Yoga with Children (date tentative) |
| 10/10–20 ★ Meditation Teacher Training | 6/29–7/6 ... ★ Essence of the Bhagavad Gita |
| 10/20–11/2 .. ★ AYTT Assistantship | 6/29–7/6 ... Kriya Yoga Preparation |
| 1/12–25 ★ AYTT Assistantship | 7/6–13 ★ Meditation Teacher Training |
| 3/6–16 Yoga of the Heart™ | 7/13–26 ★ AYTT Assistantship |
| 3/23–30 ★ Meditation Teacher Training | 8/17–24 Special Needs Teacher Training |
| 3/30–4/12 ... ★ AYTT Assistantship | |
| 5/18–25 ★ Advanced Pranayama and the Subtle Body | |

Rewire Your Circuits
(continued from page 10)

themselves in the qualities of the affirmations.

That can’t be done through pretending. We must ourselves be in—and radiate—those qualities. The more we experience them, the more we will convey them on a vibrational level through every-

thing we do in our teaching: our words, our touch, even our modeling of the poses. It’s not about talking loud or having a forceful or dramatic teaching personality; it’s about *being* in those states, and teaching from those states.

This means experiencing those states in our own practice of asana and meditation. It means becoming so familiar with them that we can tune in to them while teaching, even if we’re

not doing the poses ourselves. It means, when we offer the asana affirmations to our students, offering them with *vibrant feeling*. Make them so natural, so inviting, so magnetic, that students will *want* to dive in.

When we do this, we’ll be giving our students the key to their own higher experiences from their practice—and a valuable tool for “rewiring themselves” for their own highest happiness. ♦

The Expanding Light

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