

# Awake & Ready!

Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga™ Teachers Association  
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## PERSPECTIVE

### Keepin' It Simple

Earlier this year, I received an e-mail from a relatively new AYTT grad who had just begun teaching Ananda Yoga. In part of the message, this person wrote, "I don't know what in the world ever made me think that I could do this. Ananda Yoga is *so* complex."

I enjoyed the humor and the humility, but I was also a bit surprised. After all, this person is a very accomplished hatha yogi who had already been teaching yoga for many years before AYTT. And the spiritual dimension of Ananda Yoga was not new, because this person is a real yogi, a long-standing devotee for whom the spirituality of yoga was a given. All in all, I thought that teaching Ananda Yoga would seem fairly straightforward for this teacher.



Gyandev McCord  
Director

#### The Whole is Greater Than the Sum of Its Parts

Yet I can understand how teaching Ananda Yoga can seem a bit overwhelming in the beginning. Because our ultimate goal is spiritual, we are dealing with some aspects of the practice (energy, states of consciousness) that are not as concrete as the body. Teaching students to work with this is harder than, say, telling them where to put the left foot.

In addition, there are a lot of separate "pieces" to teaching Ananda Yoga: contraindications, safety issues, alignment, clear language, conscious movement, breath awareness, energy movement and control, states of mind, and oh yes, the affirmations. ("HmMMM, is it 'give me peace' or 'bring me peace'?") Plus the silent periods after you've offered the affirmation. And the Sanskrit names of the poses. And all the differing individual needs of the students. And as if that weren't enough, we're also supposed to be inspiring the students in some way? Whew!

It's like learning to drive a car that has a manual transmission. You have to think about pushing in the clutch, shifting gears, using the turn signals, looking back through the rearview mirrors, turning the steering wheel, checking the speedometer, looking ahead at oncoming traffic, etc. In the beginning, it's very complex.

And so it can seem with teaching Ananda Yoga if we look at it in terms of all its parts, all the details to remember.

How in the world can we do it all? Is it a race to see whether we can say everything that we need to say before the students collapse out of the poses from sheer exhaustion?

The image that comes to mind is that of the performer on one of the old television variety shows (anyone remember "The Ed Sullivan Show"?), who would set a number of dinner plates spinning, each atop its own tall, skinny, wooden pole. Then he or she would spend the rest of the "act" racing back and forth among the plates as first one, then another, then another would begin to wobble, in danger of falling to the floor and breaking. The performer would barely manage to save one plate from its demise by setting it spinning once again, then race to another pole to save the next endangered plate, and so on. All the time the audience would be shouting "Look out! Get that one! Aaaach!" It was fun to watch, but also quite nerve-wracking.

We certainly don't want our Ananda Yoga classes to be like that, for ourselves *or* our students. So we have two choices: we can toss overboard some components of Ananda Yoga in an effort to make it simpler, or we can find simplicity in Ananda Yoga "just the way it is."

I'm sure you know that I don't recommend the former (although certainly you're not going to emphasize every component in a beginning class), so let's talk about the latter. I'd like to offer three keys to finding simplicity.

First, and most obviously, teaching experience is vital. Just like driving a car with a manual transmission, we soon become familiar with the mechanics and we develop our own natural styles as teachers. Then we find much greater ease and more flow to our teaching, and we can relax into it. Nothing mysterious about this.

#### Making the Poses Your Own

The second key is to experience for yourself what makes each pose "tick." Underneath all the mechanics and align-

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## Keepin' It Simple

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ment, what is really going on in the pose? How does the energy move? What is its effect on the mind? In short, what is the overall *feeling* of the pose? Once we tune in to that essential feeling, the remaining aspects of the pose follow fairly easily. (More on that in a moment.) Why? Because we see how the physical pose is, at a deeper level, simply an outward expression of the feeling. The more we get into the feeling, the more the physical pose unfolds from inside us.

### MEMBER NEWS

#### Ever Wanted a "Do Over"?

Starting now, you can retake most Level 1 or Level 2 AYTT programs that you have already taken, and pay just, in effect, the *Relax & Recharge* (a.k.a. *Personal Retreat*) rate. Retaking Level 1 AYTT is slightly different: \$750 off the published price (that's cheaper than *Relax & Recharge*). Full details to come soon, and some restrictions apply. Contact Gyandev for information.

#### 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 before 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).

#### Received E-mail from AYSutra Lately?

For various reasons, we still get returned messages on AYSutra, our online Q&A forum—so many that we have to say, "Sorry, but we just don't have the time to keep re-sending and re-sending." But we do want you to stay connected, so 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](mailto:AYSutra@expandinglight.org) so we can verify your address in our records.

#### Free Memberships Are Still Available

We're always looking for articles for *Awake & Ready!* Would you consider writing one—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 page 10)—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 12).

Everything ties together in one neat package—alignment, energy, states of mind, everything. And that package is called, "feeling."

That's why I often characterize Ananda Yoga as a heart-based practice: the heart chakra is our primary instrument of feeling. I'm speaking not of emotional feeling, but of *chitta*, the intuitive foundation of our consciousness, to which Patanjali refers in his second sutra (and many others as well): *Yogas chitta vritti nirodh*, "Yoga is the neutralization of the vortices of feeling." Only when we touch that "feeling place" inside us during an asana are we really doing the pose. Everything else—alignment, breath, etc.—is just preparation.

How can we experience that essence? Unless we can meditate very deeply on the asana, I think there's only one way to tune in to that essence: through our own experience of the pose. It won't come through thinking, reading, or hearing about the pose—or even from doing it, if our "doing" is just on a physical level. It has to come from deep inside us. We have to make the pose our own.

I've told many of you about the worst class I ever taught. It was a great lesson—for me, not (unfortunately) for the students. I gave what I hoped was a solid exposition on an interesting topic (in fact, the students had chosen the topic). I figured I would be safe in basing my talk on the ideas Swami Kriyananda, who is without doubt an expert on the subject. However, I made the mistake of doing this without having dived deep into the subject myself. I knew the teaching, but I hadn't really experienced it.

It was dismal. I remember thinking, "Gee, the students don't seem very engaged. Come to think of it, even *I* don't find this class interesting." I'd prepared diligently, organized my notes, figured out exactly what I was going to say and when I was going to say it—but I'd left out one vital step: I hadn't made it my own, I hadn't lived it. Had I done so, I could have said the very same words with a much different result: the class could have been both informative and inspiring. Why? Because my own understanding would have shone through the words. Words are just the vehicles for the underlying vibration of our own understanding. They infallibly carry our understanding—or lack of it.

So it is with teaching Ananda Yoga. We must offer our students, through our instructions and demeanor, the vibration of each pose. And we can only do that when we've already experienced that vibration, made the pose our own.

Remember the AYTT class in which you spent a lot of time in just a couple poses, going deep into the inner experience, then came out and drew pictures of your experience with crayons? Many of you said, "Wow, this is so cool! I can really feel what's going on inside when I do the asana."

Well, have you done that "research" with *all* the poses that you teach? Have you ever done that again with *even one* pose? It's easy to get so focused on the details of teaching that we forget to lay the foundation for all of it. We think we can't afford to spend a big chunk of our precious personal practice time on "just one pose." The truth is, we can't afford *not* to do it. I urge you to do this exercise (or something similar) for each pose you teach—yes, even *tadasana*.

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# Miss Yoga Goes to Juvenile Hall

*Part 2 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. As Part 1 of the interview ended, Karen was saying that she begins each class with a wide-ranging discussion on yoga, ayurveda, karma, Sanskrit, and other topics that intrigued the students.

**Gyandev: How long would this go on? And how long was the entire class?**

Karen: The class was two hours long, and this discussion would last maybe 10 minutes. Then we would stand and do some Energization Exercises: get them running, moving their energy, get them tired so they could sit for awhile. Then we would do yoga with the affirmations. They would yell out, “I am free! I am free!” That was so ironic! Sometimes we would burst out laughing, and I could tell they were really crying, but it manifested as laughter. So we would laugh together.

I would play the music, lead a faster pace, and we would yell out the affirmations. I had to keep them moving. They wanted to yell, and usually their yelling was sitting in their cells hitting their heads against the wall or something like that. Instead we would yell the affirmations—with JOY: “Strength and courage fill my body cells!” I know Yogananda would be so proud. He was there with me. Every time I went in, I would ask him to be present just to help me take them through this journey. It was such a neat feeling.

Then I would sit them down for alternate nostril breathing. I would explain how we were balancing the left and right hemispheres of the brain and the neural-respiratory system. I explained how the prana was moving, how this is happening in their bodies. You see, they’re not usually in their bodies. It’s like their souls are lingering outside of them, slowly coming in.

If I looked around and they were gravitating toward the floor, or their eyes were glazed over, I would ask if they understood. When someone said, “No,” I would ask if anybody understood, and a few would raise their hands. I would say to one of them, “Okay, you translate it for him.” I felt that some of the kids were in there to help move some of the others. It seemed they were born with a deep understanding, but they rebelled against a world that didn’t understand

their understanding, and they ended up in jail—frustrated, purposeless. Now all of a sudden they had a purpose: they could teach the others, and they were eager to do it. This was a great tool.

**G: And very creative. How did you come up with these ideas?**

K: This is my dharma. All the ideas just came up as I was trying to keep them entertained, keep them from gravitating down to the floor. A couple years earlier I wouldn’t have been

so clear, so it was just timing. We ended up getting into Vedic psychology, too, like how they perceive the world, how they have chosen a particular identity in this life. A lot of them had been to therapists, but therapy doesn’t give an understanding like this, so it made the kids think deeply. Well, they got it. And of course the teachers on the other side of the mirror were thinking, “Oh my God.”

**G: I’m surprised you didn’t get thrown out on your ear.**

K: Yeah, I was walking on the edge. People would say, “That was way out there, you know, and so-and-so is watching you.” But I figured that if I’m doing God’s work, then God wants me to be here, presenting it the way I was taught, and He will help me be aware of when I’m going over the edge. And I really wanted the job. Anyway, I never got thrown out. All they complained about was the way I

dressed, and I could deal with that.

**G: Let’s get back to the class itself. You have the teens down on the floor and ...**

K: Yes, they’re doing some breathing. Then I tried to get them in touch with their feelings. I didn’t want it to turn into sharing their stories; they have counselors for that. So I would go around with paper and pencils. They usually aren’t allowed to have pencils because they might go crazy and stab somebody, but I got permission to pass out three colored pencils to each person. Three is the Trinity, so I figured I’d ask for three. I would go around and tell them to pick three colors that called to them, and with the opposite hand draw how they were feeling.

**G: With the opposite hand?**

K: I explained that if they drew that way they wouldn’t be so critical, as most people are once they get past primary school. Then I asked each one either to say what they saw in their picture, or have their neighbor do it for them. The process

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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.*



**Miss Yoga Goes to Juvenile Hall**  
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helped them see that each one of them is living in a box, that this is just their own personal perspective, and that everybody else is living in their own boxes, too. It was all about helping them understand that they have a limited perspective. Their rigid nervous systems, their rigid, constricted behavior, all of that is a limited perspective, and I was trying both to broaden their perspectives and to show them that everybody has his own perspective.

A lot of what I did was under the curriculum of “anger management,” and I would bring in ayurveda—pitta imbalance and all that. I also had them mirror each other, in pairs. I had them look at each other and say things like: “I’m Karen, you’re Gyandev, and I see Karen in you,” to get them to see themselves in other people. I would do whatever would come to my mind, depending on how restless they were, how I needed to move them, how I needed to get them to interact. I would come up with these things to try to get them to see their reflections in others, so they could see how they are projecting their anger on the world and then throwing stones at the world. Bulimia and wrist-slashing are big among the girls; manipulation—just another way of throwing stones. It all ended up however it ended up. Sometimes they were so happy and blissful that we would just laugh. Or cry. Lots of tears came up.

**G: How about anger?**

K: We never ended with anger. I think maybe they came in angry, and the class helped them begin to understand their anger a little better.

Once a kid blurted out, “I’m so angry,” so I went to him and asked, “Can I do an experiment with you?” He’s the kind who likes to be on stage, so he said, “Sure.” I sat next to him and had him breathe: expanding inhalation, constricting exhalation. I had him close his eyes, and I ran my hand up and down his spine so he could get the feeling of where he was going with his breath. I don’t do “therapy”—I strictly avoid it—but I did ask him to focus on his anger for a moment and see what it’s about. Very soon he opened his eyes, and his face was completely soft—no “I am angry!” look anymore

It turns out his mother is into yoga and herbs and New Age stuff, and in rebellion he had gone to the opposite extreme: drinking and getting high and stealing cars. In response, she apparently would say, “You are evil and dark.” You know, the usual family dynamics. I think that our yoga practice—plus the fact that, to them, I’m something of a mother figure—brought up his “mother issues,” and he got angry. When he saw what was going on, he softened; later he went home again. Unfortunately, he ended up back in jail in three months later. Well, it seems to be a safe environment for some of them.

**G: So you had two hours, but how much of that was for postures?**

K: An hour. They liked the postures and the music. They like rhythm, they like to dance.

**G: How about deep relaxation?**

K: I ended with about 15 minutes of savasana, enough so I could get around to everyone. I would also do some yogassage during the class, and that was huge. They’re never touched. They’ve been beaten, sexually abused, they’ve abused themselves. Then I come up and put a hand on their shoulder or give a little tug on their neck—they were like “Are you going to do that thing to my back?” There were so many in there, I had to leave enough time, because once my time was up, no matter what, the jailers would come in and the kids would have to return to their cells.

**G: So you started out with about 10 minutes of arranging the students and talking about Sanskrit words, yoga philosophy, Ayurveda. You had about 15 minutes of deep relaxation in savasana at the very end, plus an hour doing postures. And the remaining half an hour?**

K: Projects that popped up, because I sensed that would be a way to harness their energy and involve them. That came after the postures, because then they would be relaxed and more open to whatever was trying to move out of them. The very beginning was about getting them wondering about life, noticing things, and working with breath. They loved the breathing—it clears your mind, makes you feel light, open. Alternate nostril breathing, whatever, just to get them breathing and noticing their breath.

**G: When did you do the breathing in your class?**

K: At the beginning. I would start with alternating nostril breathing. Sometimes I had them slump forward on the exhalation, then straighten up and expand on the inhalation, showing them how we constrict and how we expand. We would do that at the beginning—after the discussion and before the postures—and sometimes also at the end before deep relaxation.

Sometimes we would skip the breathing and go straight into Energization. I tried to give them diversity. I’ll tell you, in Energization they look like they’re going to pop a vessel. They are *doing* it! Red faces, little veins bulging out.

**G: It’s usually a struggle to get people to put enough energy into Energization.**

K: Not people with that kind of anger! They are doing it just through their anger. It’s perfect for anger management: instead of screaming, they tense.

**G: When did you start teaching these classes?**

K: November 2000, six months after AYTT. I wanted to work since I had just invested in AYTT, so as soon as I got home I started getting my ducks in line: I did a resume. I started getting non-profit status for my business, Contemporary Healthcare, which I founded to help bring different healing modalities together and educate people about health and personal responsibility. And being the kind of person I am, I wanted it all to happen *right now*.

**G: Yogananda loved that attitude. He said the American spirit is, “Eventually? Eventually? Why not now?”**

K: Well, I try not be disappointed when it doesn’t happen as fast as I want. I have to remember that the rest of the world doesn’t move that quickly.

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# Therapeutic Yoga: The Lower Back

Part 1 of a 2-part series by Nicole DeAvilla

**P**icture this: You are about to begin teaching your Thursday evening yoga class when you walk a new student: a middle-aged man, slightly overweight, wearing glasses and a smile on his face. In making your usual introductions, you learn that his name is Randy. You ask him, “Do you have any injuries, or anything else that I should know about?”

“Well, just my back,” he answers.

“Oh? What part of your back?” you inquire.

“The disc at L3 [third lumbar vertebra] is herniated, and L4 and L5 are fused together from a previous surgery. I have sciatica, and sometimes the pain radiates all the way to my toes. I haven’t had any luck with physical therapy (P.T.), and the cortisone shots for the pain aren’t working so well anymore. My doctor wants another M.R.I. [Magnetic Resonance Imaging, a high-tech—and expensive—way to get a look at the inside of the body, especially soft tissues, which X-rays cannot reveal] before discussing surgery again. I keep hearing that yoga can help people with back problems, so here I am!” he concludes.

You try not to leave your mouth open with your jaw hanging and say “Huh?” Instead you compose yourself and say, “Did your doctor say it was okay to do yoga?”

“Well, he said he doesn’t know anything about it, and it was up to me if I wanted to try it, so here I am.”

“Are there any movements that you should not do?”

“No. I just can’t stand for very long, and I am never comfortable sitting, and I cannot lie flat on my back.”

## Don’t Just Stand There. Do Something!

Okay, now what do you do? Choose one of the following:

- A. Tell him to go home.
- B. Tell him to go to the hospital emergency room.
- C. Try to wake yourself up in case this is just a bad dream.
- D. Have him start with Surya Namaskar.
- E. None of the above.

Let’s look at these options:

- A. If you tell him to go home, after he has made the effort (consider his condition and you will realize how great the effort has been) to try a yoga class, he may never pursue yoga again. You might want to refer him to another class that might be more appropriate for him, and encourage him to take private classes at least at first. However, in the meantime, here he is. So unless you feel totally overwhelmed and uncomfortable, it would be really nice to be able to offer him a few conservative asanas and pranayamas that will give him a taste for what yoga is like. That way he can feel how yoga might be helpful for him—and you won’t have to change your entire class plan for his sake. So don’t choose A.
- B. His doctor hasn’t sent him to the hospital yet, so that choice might seem a little hysterical on your part. Scratch option B.

C. The reality is that as yoga becomes more mainstream, and as the media continues to publicize its many benefits, the above scenario will likely become more common. So C is not likely to work, either.

D. Hopefully, you learned enough in AYTT to know that if you choose this option, then at the end of class, option B may very well be a wise follow-up choice. In other words: don’t choose D!

E. This is the best option. Unfortunately, there is no simple and universal “this is what you do for students with low back problems” answer. The range of severity is great, and the causes and diagnoses for low back pain are many—and often complex. They range from a strained muscle due to an overly zealous workout, to ruptured discs, broken bones, and tumors. The onset of an injury can develop slowly over a period of years, or suddenly as in a car accident. Some back problems are hereditary or a result of poor posture. The list goes on and on. So, where do we begin in order to sort it all out and figure out what to do when students with lower back problems come to our classes?

Let’s start with the easy cases; we’ll come back to Randy later. The good news is that if you are teaching proper body mechanics and alignment as you move your students in and out of level-appropriate asanas, many students with minor low back problems will find that a balanced, level-appropriate class is all that they need to reduce or completely rid themselves of lower back pain. Additionally, simply using Ananda Yoga’s affirmations will help relieve more effectively many of the underlying emotional and psychological stresses that may be the root cause, or a continuing aggravation, of the lower back problem.

As a teacher you can further facilitate this process simply by knowing a few asanas and movements to avoid, as well as what to emphasize for your students with lower back concerns.



*Nicole DeAvilla has taught Yoga for 18 years. She teaches Therapeutic Yoga and Prenatal Yoga Teacher Training at The Expanding Light. Her background in sports medicine, chiropractic physiotherapy, and teacher training, coupled with having had many surgeries, and also injuries from dancing, horseback riding, and other activities, make her a knowledgeable and compassionate instructor.*

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## Therapeutic Yoga: The Lower Back (continued from page 5)

### Ask Questions

A student may come to you declaring a specific diagnosis for their back condition, or he may have some vague, general problem that he is unable to articulate well. I usually ask students in either category nearly the same questions to make my own evaluation of the situation.

I do this for several reasons. Sometimes a student assumes a particular diagnosis because he thinks it sounds like what

his friend has, when in fact the problem is actually not the same as the friend's problem. Or perhaps he was given a diagnosis from a doctor ten years ago, yet now his condition is different. The questions also provide insights into the severity of a condition. As an example, some students who have "sciatica" may have such a mild case that they can do perhaps most, if not all, of the same asanas that the rest of the class

*As important as it is to emphasize the need for "normal" students to maintain the spine's natural curves, it's even more important when you are working with students with back problems.*



does. Others may have a "sciatica" that is so acute that they can only do a few of the most basic therapeutic asanas. (To distinguish the severity, see the questions below that refer to type of pain and impact on daily activities.)

- Have your student touch where it hurts – it may be more than one place, and it may move from time to time.
- Ask the student what aggravates it, and are any of his daily activities (vacuuming, sleeping, walking, etc.) compromised because of it. This information will help you determine what types of asanas you may need to have the student avoid.
- Ask the student if the pain is dull, achy, sharp, tingling, numb, or radiating. A "yes" answer to any of the last four descriptions may indicate nerve involvement, and you should proceed cautiously to avoid further aggravation.
- Always continue to ask a student questions about how asanas feel during his or her practice as well as afterwards. This helps you to know what is working and what is not working.

Remember that you are not a doctor, so never tell a student what condition he has in any way that might sound like a diagnosis. In fact, as a yoga teacher you do not necessarily need a specific diagnosis. All you need to know is what works and what does not work for each particular student. If you have an accurate diagnosis from a qualified health care practitioner, it simply relieves you of some—but not all—of your problem-solving work. So for best results, ask questions and observe—and watch out for the old "it feels fine" response when the student's face is all screwed up with tension and sweat is dripping from his forehead!

### What to Avoid

To keep from doing any harm, the student should avoid:

1. Anything that causes pain or discomfort.
2. Sitting asanas, which in general put the most stress on the lower back.
3. Standing and seated forward bends, unless you are sure that the student can maintain the natural curves in his spine through the support of a wall, chair, straps, and/or pillows without discomfort, *and* that you can help him do the bend in such a way that he will feel the stretch, not in his lower back, but rather in his legs.
4. Backward bends that may put too much weight, pressure, or strain on the lower back. If you are not sure, ask the student if he feels, weight, pressure, strain, tingling, sharpness, or any other sensation that simply does not feel "right". If he feels any of those sensations, see if you can adjust his position so he doesn't feel the sensation(s); otherwise, have him avoid that asana.
5. Twists, unless you are sure that your student does not have a pinched nerve or bulging disc. You would know that it is a possibility if he has told you that is his diagnosis, or if he experiences, numbness, tingling, or sharp pain.
6. When having your student do sideways bends, it is essential that he does not inadvertently twist. Watch his alignment carefully, so that he keeps the stretch on the side and does not put pressure on the lower back.

### Cautions

1. *Delayed reactions:* Sometimes a movement or position that aggravates the lower back will feel okay, maybe even good, to your student at the moment. However, the injured area may in fact be stressed, and if so, the body will react by sending an increased amount of edema (fluid) to the area, i.e., "swelling." This is one of the body's natural reactions to an injury as it tries to protect the site from further injury by immobilizing it. Unfortunately the body is not so good at knowing when to stop and to remove the edema. This has negative side effects, such as muscle atrophy due to the decreased mobility as well as a degenerative effect on the surrounding tissues. The irritation of the nerve endings and/or the increase in swelling may take place over the course of an hour, or it may take as long as 24 hours. So the position might feel just fine at the moment, but then "mysteriously" the back will become more painful in an hour or the next day. Therefore go slowly and conservatively at first. Explain this phenomenon to your student and tell him to let you know how he feels the next day. This will also help to reassure him that you are going to stick with him and constantly reevaluate his yoga program to find what course of action is best for him.
2. *False comfort:* Similarly, heat almost always has an immediate soothing effect. However, in some cases, especially with nerve involvement, the heat can aggravate the problem within one to 24 hours. Ice may be the less

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## Therapeutic Yoga: The Lower Back (continued from page 6)

soothing, but more appropriate, therapy for some students. Avoid recommending hot baths and showers, heating pads, etc. unless you are confident that it would be appropriate (no nerve involvement), and explain to your student what to watch out for in case it turns out to not be appropriate: an increase in symptoms 1 to 24 hours after applying heat. If there is an increase in symptoms (and there is no other known culprit) then heat should be suspected as making the condition worse.

### What to Emphasize

I will explain and offer pictures of the asanas/exercises below in the next issue of *Awake & Ready!*. For now, I just want to make some recommendations, many of which don't even require a picture:

1. Supine (on one's back) asanas are usually the best. Knees bent and/or propped with some type of bolster is nice for everyone with a low back problem and essential for some of them while supine.
2. Asanas in table position (i.e., on hands and knees, with hands directly below shoulders and knees directly below hips) are usually good. Watch that your student does not hyperextend his lower back (i.e., go swaybacked), or twist if twists are contraindicated.
3. Asanas that reduce lower back pain—such as pelvic tilts on the back on the floor (i.e., “under curve” the lumbar spine by bringing the low back toward the floor), and bringing one or both knees to the chest.
4. Abdominal strengtheners such as yogic sit-ups and the psoas stretch, which do not aggravate the lower back.
5. Restorative asanas, such as inversion at the wall (supine with legs up the wall—be sure the lower back is resting comfortably on the floor) and other hip, gluteal, and leg stretches at the wall.
6. Supine stretches for the hamstrings, hip, and gluteal areas, such as the piriformis stretch (be sure to use straps and pillows/blankets so that the position is not a strain), and leg stretches with a strap.
7. Back strengtheners, such as (1) table pose variations, (2) low-to-the-floor single leg (ardha) salabhasana, and (3) a low first phase of bhujangasana (navel stays on the floor and the arms are active in this therapeutic version; buttocks are soft if tensing causes discomfort yet relaxing does not). These are good as long as the lower back does not feel aggravated in any way. With these and many of the other therapeutically applied asanas, more repetitions are better than holding a pose for very long.
8. Savasana can be wonderfully restorative, if done correctly. In general, lying flat on one's back is aggravating to a student with lower back concerns. Some students may not be able to lie on their back comfortably, even for brief periods, without bending their knees. So whether or not they are comfortable being flat on their back, place pillows, bolsters, or blankets under their knees—or have them rest their calves on a chair seat—and use any other props they may need to make them really comfortable.

(The photo below shows a rather small prop under the knees; you may find that you need a larger one that supports even more of a bend in the knees.) If all else fails, savasana can be done while lying on one's side with a pillow between the knees and a pillow for the head.



9. Communication! Repeatedly ask, “How does this feel? Better? The same? Worse? Or just different?” Make it a multiple choice question, or else you will get a lot of “It's okay” answers, when it's really not okay at all. “How is this asana for you *today*?” “How did you feel an hour after your last class?” “How did you feel the next day?” “Show me exactly where it hurts by touching it.” (Many students don't know anatomy and may get you off on the wrong track by using an incorrect term.) Through regular communication you will find that you are not only better serving your students, but the feedback will in addition be making you a more informed teacher. So ask, listen, and respond!

These are some basics that may help you with most of the students that come to your class with lower back concerns. Now, what do we do about Randy?

### Back to the Immediate Crisis

The fact is, an article of this length and nature cannot and should not try to cover a complete understanding of Randy's condition or give a specific course of action to follow. Additional course work in Therapeutic Yoga is what is really needed. However, you now know a few more questions to ask and have a few more answers to give.

Be honest with a student like Randy about what you feel you are able to do or not do for him, and do it in a positive encouraging manner. You could tell him that if he is willing to go slowly and communicate with you, that together you can come up with a yoga program that should work for him. Since he mentioned that he has been to a physical therapist, you can ask him to do some of his physical therapy exercises while you work with your other students on something else. Most students are happy to do this because they are often not motivated or feel too strapped for time to do their P.T. exercises on their own at home.

Do not try to do too many things in any one session—first of all because it may not be appropriate for him to be active for the entire class period, and second, the more you

(continues on page 9)



## Miss Yoga Goes to Juvenile Hall (continued from page 4)

**G:** *How long were you doing this before people became aware of you and you got other opportunities.*

**K:** Not long. Soon after that first class, I got a grant. Also, there was a guy observing at the first class. He works with the detention center—counseling, working with the parents. His name is Tom Grayson. He ran the mentorship program before I did the program. Now he has his own company, Golden Sierra Lifeskills, and he was just checking out the new mentor. His new company gives these youths tools, mainly for anger management. He told me he wanted yoga in his program, so I'm working with him.

**G:** *When did that start?*

**K:** About four months later. I began going twice a week to community schools, one in Rocklin and one in Auburn.

**G:** *The public school system? So it wasn't just angry kids in jail.*

**K:** After they got out of juvenile hall, they would go to these schools, not as regular students, but as a special population.

Tom and I are about to work together on another grant, through Proposition 10 (money from state taxes on alcohol and tobacco), where we will work with teenage boys in Placer County who have babies. I'll be teaching them yoga, meditation and proper breathing so that they won't shake their babies when they are angry. This is going to be a statewide project. We'll travel up and down California to train people to lead the program he's developed.

Early on I started getting clients who work in Placer County Health and Human Services, because they had read my grants or heard of the work. That was a big boost for my business.

Still I had to keep writing grants, because you can't keep submitting the same grant; each one has to be different. So I did an extension on the first grant—I called it Teachers of Wisdom. The idea is that once they have the knowledge that I'm offering them, it's their responsibility to pass it on to another person from their own understanding. Nobody has ever told them, "I am going to tell you some important things about life, and I want you to go out and tell others." Nobody does that; they're in jail, they're bad, they don't get any tools. The counseling they receive is just "talk therapy."

**G:** *All they want is for the kids to stop being problems. That's*

*very different from helping them be a solution for others.*

**K:** Exactly. In Teachers of Wisdom, each kid created a book. Each time I would start by talking for about half an hour and I would say, "Don't write anything yet; just let me talk." Later I would give them time to write it in their own words in their books, or draw it, or express it however they needed. Every time I went back they would add to their books.

**G:** *Fascinating. Is that still happening?*

**K:** It just ended.

**G:** *How long do these grants last?*

**K:** About three months. They're mini-grants.

**G:** *This doesn't make sense. You are doing something that's working, something with observable benefits, but they want you to change it.*

**K:** It's sad, isn't it? In fact one of the teachers who was coming to my yoga class at the gym—I did finally find other teaching opportunities—submitted a proposal to have me come in as a permanent employee at the detention center, to lead an ongoing program. She saw the changes, and so did others. In fact, now she does the same thing with them: she puts them in a circle and poses a question for them to wonder about. Anyway, the other teachers asked for more yoga, and she made that proposal. Unfortunately the people who make the budget decisions have no relationship with these youths. They don't see what's happened. It's really sad. Realizing this, I went to the main guy, the warden, before the Teachers of Wisdom grant, because he was new. The previous warden was very skeptical about what I was doing, so there was always resistance, questioning, politics. So I decided I'd better develop a working relationship with the new warden instead of having him find out about me by way of twisted rumors, which can be poison.

I love doing this work. Sometimes after class I'll be so shaken up, I'll just sit in my car and cry, having seen them open their hearts that way. Many hadn't felt that before.

**G:** *Was there anything else that you found worked or didn't work with those kids?*

**K:** Lots of things didn't work. For example, I found I had to allow them to gravitate to the floor a certain amount. Most of them are in *tamas*, so to expect them to sit up and pay attention, well, it just isn't going to happen. Okay, so maybe they'll get it when they are half-asleep on the floor.

**G:** *What types of poses did you use?*

**K:** Just a lot of the ones we do in Ananda Yoga. I tried to work first on opening the heart; once their heart was open I worked on the lower chakras to strengthen them there and get them to come forward and loosen up. I didn't try to work with the upper chakras.

**G:** *That's not where the issues are with this group.*

**K:** Right. The affirmations were wonderful, too; they create an opening for me to talk about the power of manifestation. And some of the kids started meditating in their cells—following the breath. I don't teach them to have their eyes up; one step at a time. And they would write me letters that they were meditating in their cells, telling me they really appreciate this. It was really powerful.

(continues on page 9)

## Yoga Alliance News

There are now over 4,000 Registered Yoga Teachers in the U.S. and abroad. If you haven't yet registered, all you need is the application (visit [www.yogaalliance.org](http://www.yogaalliance.org) or call toll-free 877-YOGA-ALL), your \$40 annual fee, and a current AYT certificate. If your AYT certificate does not say "Level 1 Training" or "Level 2 Training," you'll need a new one. It's easy: just send a check for \$10 (payable to The Expanding Light) to Lisa Powers (see p. 12).



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

**G:** *You're doing such an amazing service. I know that other Ananda Yoga teachers are interested in similar things. Anything more you can share about these mini-grants that might help someone get started?*

**K:** It's not hard. I had never written a grant. My father gave me some good advice: answer the questions very specifically, don't dance around the issues, be direct, really tell them what you plan to do. Also, I discovered that when people get familiar with you and your work, they start to tell you about other grants that are available. And some will even help you figure out what to say in your grant proposals, because they want to see it work for you—and for the kids.

Some people don't want to write grants because they seem mysterious, or are too much work, but when you are doing what you love, that's a pretty small issue.

**G:** *So the mini-grants are continuing. What other directions are you moving in?*

**K:** I also contract with Golden Sierra Lifeskills as a part of their program to empower youths. My newest interest is a coalition in which I'll team up with other members of the community to work on projects sponsored by the public school system and the Placer County Office of Education (Prevention Service Dept.). The coalition is volunteer-based, although some of the participants are sent by their employers ((e.g., Caring About Kids, Hewlett Packard, Health and Human Services). We're forming committees that will apply for grant money to fund various programs. There is a lot of grant money out there; it's just a matter of winning the grant.

My role in the coalition is to put together a Youth Health Clinic and develop an assets-building training program. This program is about reducing the stress of planning for the future by developing the capacity to make decisions here and now. And that requires better self-understanding. These are the tools I want to offer to youths. This is the contribution I want to make. ♦

*If you would like to contact Karen about her work, she will be happy to answer your questions. Write her at [abwoon@pacbell.net](mailto:abwoon@pacbell.net).*

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## Therapeutic Yoga: The Lower Back (continued from page 7)

do the more difficult it will be to evaluate what works and what does not work. Teach him some simple pranayamas and fill the time with some restoratives (not held too long since too much release, too quickly, is not necessarily good), and have him do a little longer savasana. Also after trying something new, I have found that having a student walk around the room in a pedestrian-like manner can help to alleviate over stretching or straining.

"Expect a miracle" as Rev. John Laurence, a direct disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda, always counsels. However, I

caution you to not promise miracles. Healing takes place on many levels, and even though outward progress may seem slow and partial, it does not mean that your student is not healing on other levels, as the practice of yoga is known to facilitate. And remember, if you are not seeing any progress in a reasonable period of time (and this goes for any student with any type of condition), do not hesitate to tell your student to see a professional health care provider for further evaluation.

Therapeutic yoga is about not taking a cookie cutter, "one size fits all" approach to yoga, but rather it's about serving each student individually—listening, praying, and responding. Perhaps the best advice that I can give is this: Take a deep breath yourself, be humble, and pray for guidance to come to you. Pray for all of your students' well being, smile, and don't forget good alignment!

Blessings to all of you on your journey! ♦

*In the next issue: "Therapeutic Yoga: Asanas for the Lower Back" will cover in detail how to teach many of the asanas mentioned in this article for students with lower back concerns.*

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## Keepin' It Simple (continued from page 2)

### A Unifying Element

The third key is simply the practical implementation of the second. When you know the essence of the pose—or at least part of the essence—you can use it to unify all the other aspects of the pose. It's as though that essence were a thread; teaching all the other aspects of the pose is like stringing beads on that thread.

For example, suppose you're teaching trikonasana and you want students to experience the dynamic openness and receptivity that the pose promotes. Then emphasize that from the very beginning of the pose: "Step your feet wide apart and turn your left leg out 90 degrees. Feel the openness through your inner left thigh and hip. Turn the leg back in—notice the difference? Okay, now turn it out again. Let's do this pose in such a way that we experience that openness throughout the body—and let's not do anything that decreases that openness." And so it can go, opening through the other hip, the pelvis, the torso, the shoulders, the face, the breath, etc. You don't have to be tedious about it; just carry the theme of openness through the pose.

Then your teaching will flow very naturally, and everything you ask the students to do will in some way help them deepen their experience of the pose. When all is in readiness and you offer the affirmation, inviting them to take it inside, they will resonate with it because they're already feeling it. In the ensuing silent time, it will feel entirely natural to practice the affirmation, and they'll feel even more energy and joy flooding their body cells. Then it becomes their own experience, their own higher awareness. And that's what Ananda Yoga is all about.

Simple, isn't it? ♦

**INSPIRATIONS**

## Happy 80th Birthday, Eunice!

*We're a bit late on this one, but we want to honor Eunice Lycke on the occasion of her 80th birthday, which happened earlier this year. She is certainly an inspiration to all who know her—and she was one of the most flexible students in the Autumn 2000 AYT. In celebration and sharing, she wrote the following about her experiences with Hatha Yoga as a student and teacher:*

**F**or many years I did step-aerobics until my legs were very firm—but nothing was benefiting my upper body.



Furthermore, I was getting bored. One day about five years ago, I talked with the aerobics director and asked if there was something else that I could do that would be for the whole body. When she suggested yoga, I recoiled and scoffed, "Yoga?!" I tried a few classes and fell in love with it, and I've continued to the present day.

Then one day, one of my yoga teachers suggested that I teach yoga. My immediate response was an emphatic, "NO!" Sometime later the subject came up again, and about that time I saw an ad for teacher training at The Expanding Light. I applied, was accepted, and graduated in November 2000.

Before going to AYT, my usual day would end at 4:00 P.M., but at AYT, some of the classes did not end until 9:00 or 10:00 in the evening. In addition to late classes, there was much studying to do, which again went well past the heretofore 4:00 P.M. end of the day. I was convinced that a Greater Power filled my body and helped me through those long, anxiety-provoking days. Also, I think the daily 6:30 A.M. Superconscious Living Exercises gave me energy to help me through each day. Now I begin all my classes with, "I'm Awake and Ready!"

Throughout the past five years I've continued taking yoga classes from several teachers, and I've learned much about yoga from each one of them, for which I am deeply grateful. I would not be where I am today if it were not for their support and encouragement. Here are some of the wonderful things that yoga has done for me:

- Before doing yoga my back was quite hunched over, and after doing yoga for about three years it straightened considerably. For a little more than a year I have been seeing a chiropractor, and my back and neck are now about in proper alignment. As my back was straightened, my chest has opened, and it's easier for me to breathe.
- During my working years, through my retirement years, and until about two years ago, I suffered headaches about half the time. Since I have been doing yoga, I have not had a headache for almost two beautiful years.
- Teaching yoga has been challenging for me, as I never feel comfortable speaking before a group of people. When I started teaching, I used a microphone, as my voice was

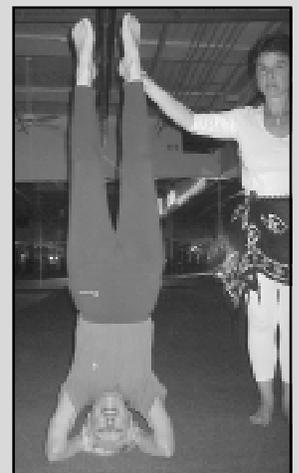
so faint that people could barely hear me. However, with practice I'm now able to speak loudly enough that I no longer use a microphone.

- Recently I was asked to speak before a group of COPD patients (those with asthma, emphysema, or other breathing problems) at Mercy San Juan Hospital. Before teaching yoga, I was so shy that not a word would have come out of my mouth if I stood before a group. I now have more confidence, and I was not even nervous as I talked about yoga breathing exercises and demonstrated some postures.
- The greatest benefit of my yoga experience has been spiritual. For most of my life I attended church regularly, but I had stopped attending church about two years before I started yoga (so yoga had nothing to do with my leaving the church). When I did attend, I was an ardent perfectionist, and I am sure that I was most obnoxious. However, religion had been more of an intellectual exercise. It was not until I had spent time doing yoga that I got into the spirituality of the practice, and it was a wondrous revelation. With continued practice I hope to go even deeper.

Needless to say, my whole body has benefited from yoga, and I am much more flexible. I have energy to continue past the previous 4:00 stopping time. I have benefited in all areas of my being: physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Overall I feel better than I did over 20 years ago when I first retired, and I heartily recommend yoga for everyone.

As for teaching, the primary feedback I get from my students is that they really like the affirmations, and in some classes they repeat the affirmations aloud after me. I always begin the class with the Superconscious Living Exercises, and I end the class with a few minutes of mediation in savasana. What they really like is that not only are the classes fairly gentle, but we get more into the spirituality of yoga, which I really enjoyed exploring during AYT. ♦

*Eunice lives in Carmichael, Calif. (near Sacramento). At right, she is receiving her 80th birthday present from one of her teachers: her first headstand! Eunice currently teaches five classes (10–20 students each) per week: two at the YMCA, two at California Family Fitness, and one at Lotus Gardens, a meditation retreat center. At the YMCA and Lotus Gardens, her students are primarily seniors. At CFF, her students are of all ages, male and female.*





*This page was just an  
AYTA membership  
renewal form.*



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### LEVEL 2 NEWS

## Level 2 Options Continue to Expand

In 2003 you'll enjoy a full menu of programs for Level 2 AYT certification. Here are some new and revised programs:

- *Restorative Yoga Teacher Training* (June 19–22, 2003), a 3-day weekend training led by Jyoti Spearin.
- *Prenatal Yoga Teacher Training* (August 3–8, 2003), a 5-day training program with Nicole DeAvilla, who also teaches *Therapeutic Yoga*.
- *Introduction to Sanskrit* (August 8–10, 2003), a weekend intensive with Dharma Widmann. (As we go to press with *Awake & Ready!*, there are still a few details to iron out with this program, but we think it will happen in this time slot.)
- *Special Needs Teacher Training* (August 17–24, 2003), now in a 7-day format. Led by Jyoti Spearin, Barbara Bingham, P.T., and Kay Erdwinn, M.D., you'll explore how to work with a variety of anatomical, physiological, and psychological conditions often encountered in yoga students.

Remember that AYTA Members receive a 10% discount on all Level 2 programs, which more than pays for your membership. And if you need financial aid, please don't hesitate to apply for it. (Call The Expanding Light for an application.)

In the schedule below, "★" indicates a required Level 2 program. For complete program details, please see The Expanding Light's program guide or visit [www.expandinglight.org](http://www.expandinglight.org). You should receive the next program guide (for April–October 2003) in the mail by March 2003.

3/6–16 ..... <b>Yoga of the Heart™</b>	6/29–7/6 ... ★ <b>Meditation Teacher Training</b>
3/23–30 ..... ★ <b>Meditation Teacher Training</b>	6/29–7/6 ... <b>Kriya Yoga Preparation</b>
3/30–4/12 ... ★ <b>AYTT Assistantship</b>	7/6–19 ..... ★ <b>AYTT Assistantship</b>
5/18–25 ..... ★ <b>Advanced Pranayama and the Subtle Body</b>	8/3–8 ..... <b>Prenatal Yoga Teacher Training</b>
6/15–20 ..... <b>Therapeutic Yoga</b>	8/8–10 ..... <b>Introduction to Sanskrit</b> (tentative)
6/19–22 ..... <b>Restorative Yoga Teacher Training</b>	8/17–24 ..... <b>Special Needs Teacher Training</b>
6/22–27 ..... <b>Sharing Yoga with Children</b>	9/28–10/5.. <b>Kriya Yoga Preparation</b>
6/22–29 ..... ★ <b>Essence of the Bhagavad Gita</b>	

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