

# Awake & Ready!

Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga™ Teachers Association  
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## PERSPECTIVE

### Teaching the Art of Discovery

Part 1 of a Series

Does this feel familiar?—You’ve been teaching a group of students for a while, and you’re seeing signs that they’re bored with the “same old poses.” One or two of them might even have said so, or lobbied for more-advanced poses. What should you do?

All of us have experienced this to some degree, but when I read David Ramsden’s excellent article on it in the last issue of *Awake & Ready!*—and when a few other teachers recently lamented facing similar challenges—I decided to address it in this column.



Gyandev McCord  
Director

#### The Root of the Issue

Paramhansa Yogananda used to marvel at how Americans love change. Coming from tradition-steeped India, he found it strange to see a culture that changes jobs, houses, cities, spouses, and yes, gurus, at the drop of a hat. I think it’s safe to say that, in the years since then, that love of change has grown even stronger. “New” has become nearly synonymous with “better.” (If you doubt that, simply look at advertisements and product packaging. The advertising industry has spent a lot of money to acquire this knowledge, and they spend even more taking advantage of it.)

Certainly *openness* to change is good—even vital, for it helps us let go when we need to let go, rather than clinging to the past. But when we grow *addicted* to change, wanting change merely for the sake of change, it is dysfunctional. It fosters restlessness, inability to focus—and without focus, we’ll get nowhere in life. Deluded into thinking that variety of experience is more important than depth, we perpetually skim the surface of our lives, never going beyond superficial achievement or enjoyment.

This is a universal human condition, not just an American condition (although, typically, Americans may be the most extreme). In the forthcoming book, *God Is for Everyone*, (Swami Kriyananda’s rewrite of *The Science of Religion*, which was originally ghostwritten from Paramhansa Yogananda’s outline), Yogananda observes: “Because human beings are habitually restless, they feel attracted to complex-

ity and shun divine simplicity. They embellish with ego-gratifying variations the pristine melodies of the soul.”

Is it any wonder, then, if at times our students become bored? What can we do about it?

#### What Not to Do

Ananda Yoga teachers aren’t the only ones who face the boredom challenge. In fact, teachers who don’t know how to take students inward face a much tougher challenge than we do, because as long as students remain merely on the physical level, boredom is inevitable. Over the last 5–10 years, I’ve noticed yoga teachers gravitating toward “solutions” that I don’t believe serve their students.

Some teachers actually *cater* to restlessness: “new is better.” As they run out of techniques from their own traditions, they desperately look to other traditions for more. No matter that their students never go deep into anything—at least they’re being entertained as their addiction to change gets strengthened. (It also creates trouble for the teachers: sooner or later, they run out of new things to teach. What then? Get a whole new crop of students?)

Quite apart from the fact that this eclectic approach has no power—for reasons I’ve shared before—I recall Swami Kriyananda’s common-sense advice: “Stay with what students will actually practice.” New or unusual techniques may titillate students’ curiosity, and students will be glad to learn them, but they won’t do any good if the students get confused or won’t practice them—or more likely, both.

Worse yet, some teachers introduce more-advanced poses to students who are not ready. Why? To wow them? To capitulate to student demand? I read recently of a beginning series in which headstand is taught in the first or second session. That’s crazy and dangerous! And again, if students

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## Teaching the Art of Discovery (continued from page 1)

aren't yet able to practice poses safely and/or effectively, why teach such poses to them in the first place?

Certainly there is a time for more-advanced poses (I'll address that later), but when you know in your heart that the time hasn't yet come for the student(s) and poses(s) in question, then dharma demands that you say, "Not yet." I salute all teachers with the courage and integrity to resist this temptation—even in the face of possibly losing students to another teacher who will give them what they want.

### Look at the Big Picture

So, does this mean that we should always teach the same poses, hoping that somehow students will learn to go deep? Obviously not. But we do need to take a larger perspective.

First, remember that *we*, as teachers, are a crucial part of this process. It's not merely about which techniques we know how to teach; it's about the vibration that we bring into the classroom. We need to make sure that we are inspired, creative, and able to give whatever needs to be given. Without that, we cannot succeed as teachers.

Second, we need to understand *how* to teach new things to our students. Here I mean, not only how to do a new pose, but how to teach new *and* old in such a way as to bring students toward a better understanding of their yoga practice. This means both broadening and deepening their experience of yoga.

Now I'll offer some specific strategies in both of these arenas. Certainly every circumstance is unique—your knowl-

edge and skills, your students' abilities and level of experience, the type of classes you teach, your personal obligations outside of your teaching, your willingness to take risks, etc.—so there's no one-size-fits-all strategy. Nevertheless, there are many points to make and possibilities to explore.

### First Things First: Take Care of the Teacher

It all begins with you. Your classes will feel fresh and alive if—and only if—you feel fresh and alive. When you teach creatively and magnetically, your students will not be bored, no matter what you do. Creativity and magnetism come from feeding yourself spiritually and staying inspired. So ask yourself, "Am I feeling the inspiration I once felt?" If your answer is, "No," then do whatever it takes to *become* inspired.

For example, are you so swamped in your teaching and other obligations that your private sadhana has slipped? Then you know your first priority: let go of what Paramhansa Yogananda called the "unnecessary necessities" of your life, and restart your sadhana.

Have you stopped journaling or reading inspiring books or whatever other inspirational activity has fed you in the past? If so, rearrange your priorities to start again, even if only a little bit.

Do you spend time with people who inspire you? If not, find a way. Remember Yogananda's words, "Environment is stronger than willpower," and fashion a supportive environment for yourself and for others. For a yoga teacher, this should not be difficult. (See my article in the last issue for suggestions.)

And speaking of environments, how long has it been since you visited The Expanding Light? If you want inspiration for teaching Ananda Yoga, what better environment could there be? Come in whatever way inspires you—for Level 2 training, or Personal Retreat, or Yoga in Action, or whatever appeals to you—but come. (Remember: there are financial aid opportunities for most Level 2 programs.)

So you're the #1 priority here. It's not selfishness—it's about giving your best to your students. If you're not going to take care of yourself, anything you do outwardly to enliven your classes will have at most a fleeting benefit—and you might as well stop reading this article right now.

### Give Students "Something More"

Still with me? Great. Now let's talk about specific strategies for keeping your students interested and engaged.

I want to begin with another word about newness: there's nothing wrong with it. On the contrary, newness is inherent to the process of learning. But it needs to be newness in the sense of *discovery*, not mere novelty or distraction. If we can give our students an experience of discovery and foster their desire for more—whether we are teaching new poses or familiar poses, or even no poses at all—then they will learn how to work *constructively* with their innate human restlessness rather than merely indulging it. Then we will really be teaching yoga, and students will always be hungry for more.

Swami Kriyananda puts it this way: in teaching Ananda Yoga, we need to let students know that there is always

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## AYTA MEMBER NEWS

### Sorry to Keep Nagging, But ...

Have you changed your e-mail address and not told us? If it's been more than a couple weeks 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.

### We Need Your Wisdom

Help! We need articles for *Awake & Ready!* Are you willing to share interesting teaching experiences or wisdom you've gained? You don't need writing skills; we'll help you manifest it, or even interview you. Short articles might be in the "Inspirations" section (see page 11)—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).

### Retaking Level 1 or Level 2 Programs

Now AYTA members can retake most Level 1 or Level 2 AYT programs at greatly reduced rates. For example, retaking Level 1 AYT costs \$750 less the published AYT price. Contact Gyandev for details.\



# Lessons in Love and Courage

## What I've Learned from My Favorite Group of Students

*Part 2 of a 2-Part Series by Christine Reeves*

*In the last issue, Christine began to describe her experience teaching yoga to students at Wellspring, a very progressive cancer treatment center near her home in Toronto, Ontario. She wrote of the difficult personal issues facing the students, lessons she has learned about teaching yoga to this special population, and a number of aspects of Ananda Yoga that are particularly helpful for this group. Now she concludes her chronicle with more on the issues and benefits of yoga practice for these students, and some of the insights that they have shared with her.*

### Affirmations and God

**A**s my relationship with my students unfolded, I began to love teaching at Wellspring more than any other place.

These people are not there just for a good stretch and relaxation. They are more open than any other group of students, and their openness has inspired me as a teacher. They are all, without exception, open to yoga as healing, as mind/body/spirit work. They have a willingness to learn and to change.

For this reason the use of affirmations has been an effective tool with this group. Using the affirmations helps to draw their awareness to themselves as spiritual beings and energy bodies, rather than just physical bodies. Many of them feel that their bodies are failing them in some way, so taking their awareness beyond the physical is freeing for them. Affirmations help transform the negative mind to one of positive upliftment, peace, happiness, and contentment.

Many people in my classes relate well to the concept of God, and find great comfort and peace in that. However, my groups are usually very culturally diverse, with a broad spectrum of religious backgrounds, so I am careful to be nonsectarian in my words. I do not wish to offend anyone or have anyone feel that he or she doesn't fit in. Also, sometimes people who are facing the fear of death may feel abandoned by or angry with God. For these reasons, I generally do not refer to "God" in my talks or in the affirmations. Instead I refer to the Divine, the Universe, the Soul, Spirit, or their Higher Self or Higher Consciousness. If I can adjust the affirmation slightly in this way, I do.

Sometimes I offer them a choice, inviting them to think upon or call upon whichever divine form they relate to, be it God, the Buddha, Divine Mother, or some other form. Other times I simply invite them to experience the essence of the posture, describing or outlining the state of consciousness or the flow of energy that the asana creates and invokes—and that the affirmation reinforces.

Many of these students have a myriad of emotions and thoughts about having cancer, thoughts they have not been able to process or come to terms with. So along with the use of affirmations to cut through the mind's constant chatter, I also encourage quiet, meditative silence and inward focus on sensation and the breath. This too seems to help them connect with and accept their truth, and hear their inner wisdom. I apply this technique while guiding them through the many "special needs" warm-ups and stretches, which don't have affirmations, and also during the pauses. I also constantly refer to yoga as "union" and invite them inside themselves to find that feeling. They understand well the idea of leaving the outside world of doing and thinking, and tuning their attention inward to their body, breath, and inner voice of wisdom.

When I asked my students how yoga was benefiting them, one replied: "I find that yoga is detoxifying, not just in the physical sense, but also on an emotional level. I love the twists and other postures that help to massage into the chest and belly. I feel that the physical massage into these areas helps me to become aware of my feelings."

"Yoga has helped with the emotional ups and downs," said another. "When I was diagnosed with cancer, it became me against my body, but yoga helped to change that relationship. When my white blood cells were down so low that I couldn't even do my treatments, I actually felt I was crying tears of compassion for my cells, recognizing and appreciating how hard they were working.

Yoga has taught me how to love my body. It's not me against my body anymore."

A third responded, "Yes, I agree, it has helped me to love myself and love my body. It's taught me to listen to each part of my body individually, like 'Oh, my knee needs a little prop under it here.' I have learned to listen to what the body wants and needs. I'm no longer driving it like a machine."

### The Courage to Live More Fully

Needless to say, their openness to yoga as healing and their ability to connect with the divine love and wisdom within them are intoxicating to me as a teacher. I find they draw the very best out of me as a teacher because they are so hungry to learn and change.

At the same time, my students at Wellspring have become my teachers. I learn so much from them about courage as I hear their stories from week to week, and witness their fighting spirit. These people are not about to become victims

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*Christine lives in Toronto, Ontario, where she teaches yoga in various locations to a variety of student populations.*



## Lessons in Love and Courage (continued from page 3)

of fear and stop living because they have cancer. Instead they are facing their fear of death. They are dealing with pain and with the loss of body parts and bodily functions. Most are experiencing an enormous amount of hellish symptoms and side effects from their treatments or drugs. Yet they get themselves to yoga class weekly without fail. They come like soldiers each week to help themselves feel better on some level that they may not even be able to articulate. They come exhausted, they come feeling sick or achy, they come depressed, sometimes lonely, sometimes fearful, but they come—despite the long list of symptoms—with a positive attitude. And they leave feeling better about themselves and about life in some way.

If that isn't a lesson in yoga, I don't know what is. There have been times when I have dragged myself in to teach, feeling down about some disappointment in life, or discouraged and hard on myself because things aren't going the way "I" think they should. But when I can be fully present and in the moment with their experiences, without exception, I also leave feeling better or uplifted in some way because my own fighting spirit has been invoked by witnessing theirs. They are living in the way that Yogananda would have all of us live: not trying to escape our problems, no matter how dark or threatening, but rather, rising above circumstances with heroic courage, awakening the sleeping hero within.

As for my original fear of working with people who were "dying of cancer," it wasn't long before I recognized it as my own projection of fear. I saw clearly that my students at Wellspring were living more fully and with more conscious awareness than most "healthy" people I know. While most of us are caught up in the sweep and swing of external life—busying our selves under the illusion that we have lots of time—these people are dealing with a "terminal illness" that brings them front and center to the awareness of their own mortality. They are more aware of the brevity of life—and therefore the preciousness of it. They are less caught up in the delusions of our busy, fast-paced, materialistic lives. I have watched as many have tuned in to what is really relevant and meaningful for them.

### Yoga as a Tool for Change

Just as having cancer has made them more open to making changes in their lives, yoga is the tool that supports them in *how* to make that kind of shift in consciousness. As one woman told me: "I had to make sure, though, that I was not making deals with the universe; that I was not coming to yoga to live longer or to 'beat' the cancer. I needed to come to yoga so that I relate—to myself, and to being here now. Yoga is life-changing. It's about the outside versus the inside. The outside is about doing, versus the inside where you learn how to listen. Yoga helped me to hear different messages other than society's 'be productive, keep busy, then you're good.' It helped me connect with the inner voice, which says, 'It is good and essential to be kind to yourself; to rest, to nourish, to replenish and en-joy.' It takes a jolt like illness or otherwise to realize how important it is to take care of

ourselves. I guess I needed that push."

Another woman offered: "As a child I felt it was selfish to sit in bed and read. Now I'm learning that I must care for myself in these ways. Yoga helps with not finding happiness out there, but inside. Besides, what is luxury anyway? Is it a new car, or is it giving yourself a nice foot bath and caring for yourself in some way? Upon reflection I feel that the happiest moments in life, the ones where I have felt the best, have been when I was doing things that were good for me, like sitting on a rock by water at the cottage, or playing an instrument. Yoga is like that."

When they practice Hatha Yoga as a "meditation in motion," all of their awareness can be brought into the present—into this very breath. They can breathe their awareness into every part of the body, as well as into their hearts and spirit. Yoga teaches them to be in the present moment—not in the past, not in the future and not in reaction. When you are facing the possibility your own death, these are essential life tools indeed.

### Students Share the Benefits of Yoga

The benefits of yoga for cancer patients are endless, both physically and mentally. But rather than me spouting out the benefits of this posture or that pranayama, I thought you might like to hear some more directly from my students about what they have gained from it.

- "I had stage 1 breast cancer, and they had to remove all seventeen lymph nodes. It left me with numbness. My arm was stiff and I had some loss of use, but the yoga helped me get that back."
- "For the first time in thirty-six years I wasn't able to work, so my life was changed. Yoga helped me slow down. It helped with breathing, body awareness, self-awareness, letting go, and posture. Yoga helped me fill that space with my creativity."
- "In the beginning you are swept away with having cancer, and it is unbelievable, but it's in your face. Yoga helped with the mental stress of coping."
- "Yoga helped with the emotional ups and downs."
- "I like the fact that I can take little bits of what I learn in class, out onto the streets and into my life. When I get anxious, I remember to take a breath."
- "They put me on anti-hormone drugs, which put me into early menopause. The yoga helped make the excessive sweating and hot flashes bearable."
- "I had worked out consistently for years. When I got cancer, yoga was the one thing I could still do, and it kept me supple. I had to let go of other routines because I was too weak. Yoga was a 'kind' form of exercise."
- "Going through treatments, you are so assaulted with these chemicals. I could feel the yoga clearing the toxins out. For the next day or so after class I would generally feel better because I felt so cleansed."
- "The toxins from chemo and radiation can cause the bowels to seize up causing horrible constipation, but the yoga got me moving again."
- "While I was going through the treatments, the yoga helped me with breathing, and the anticipation of going to class gave me a lift."



- “Going to class with other cancer people is a nicer feeling because no one is judging you or staring at you. Community is important, and so is feeling at ease in the class.”
- “The yoga class has become something to look forward to in the week. Amongst all the doctor’s appointments is the yoga class.”
- “I had my thyroid completely removed and some of my lymph. They followed that with radiation treatment, which left me with no energy. I could barely walk or talk. I had to wait several months, but once I started, the yoga helped to regenerate and boost up my energy levels a great deal. It also helped me to relax, and I can sleep better now.”
- “After my second surgery I was stiff at first, with aches and pains. I had to wait two months, but when I came back to yoga it made a big difference all over.”
- “I found that my concentration had been affected. I could hardly read a page. I would read the same paragraph over and over again. Yoga helped me to focus my mind. It also helped me to put my attention where I wanted it, rather than always on racing thoughts. I would let them come if they had to and let them go.”
- “When the pain came, I would think ‘Oh, why is it here?’ But with yoga I started to think differently: ‘It’s there, I can handle it; it’s part of my body. What can I do to make it feel better—breathing, stretching—find ways to own it?’”
- “After my eye surgery I had to remain in a face down position for ten days. You can imagine how challenging that was for the neck, shoulders, and upper back. During those days I found great relief from some yoga postures, especially the face down ones. I was grateful to find after the ten days I could add other postures, and my neck and shoulders recovered quickly.”

### The Miracle Story

The most incredible story is that of my student Neil, who has been battling cancer for five years now. Originally he had kidney and bladder cancer; he had a kidney removed and his bladder operated on, and the chemo cleaned up the surrounding tissue. Two years later he was diagnosed with stage 3 prostate cancer, metastasized into the outer bladder. They suggested a removal of his prostate, but he didn’t want that. Instead, he opted for external beam radiation.

Then he became part of a study group undergoing “Brachy Therapy,” in which they implant little radioactive beads right into the prostate, so that there is a constant pulsing of radiation being given off. The symptoms were huge: nausea, abdominal bloating, headaches, fatigue, and lots of pain that would start at the source and radiate up into other parts of the body. There was pain in the pelvic girdle bone, the perineum, and testicles, sacral-lumbar pain, moving up to the mid-thoracic area, and a needle-like pain in his lower ribs. Neil had been taking prescribed morphine every day for the pain, along with some anti-anxiety drugs, sleeping pills, muscle relaxants, and anti-nausea medication. On top (or perhaps because) of it all, he was dealing with anxiety attacks and depression.

When he came to yoga, Neil said he felt an improvement after the very first class: a minimizing of the back pain, and it lasted for one day. After the first week of class, he began to

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## INSPIRATIONS

# Start-Up Story

by Sylvia Kabusk

Right after AYTT, I came home to Vermont and began to lease space for my own classes in the community. I left Ananda knowing that I would run a beginner’s series, which would be a way of lessening the “intimidation” factor for folks who want to begin the practice, but who feel uncomfortable jumping into ongoing classes held at health clubs or yoga studios. These series-style classes give me a chance to introduce the affirmations gradually. Folks really appreciate them and want more! So many, so early in their practice of yoga, are sincerely touched by the depth that affirmations offer.



These 1-hour series-style classes have become a “feeder system” for my longer 90-minute classes. I lease inexpensive evening space in the community, usually it’s just \$5/hour for music rooms at local schools! These rooms are carpeted and spacious, yet intimate. Most participants come from word-of-mouth and from free advertising in health food shops. My classes have grown from 8 to 16 in one season!

The classes are divinely inspired by the gifts I received while at Ananda. I continue to reflect upon the postures and their affirmations in order to present the affirmations in a way that feel most natural, while maintaining the essence of Swami’s work. I remember Gyandev saying that the affirmations should flow “so that they don’t sound as if they come from left field!” As a teacher, this takes time to develop. I believe that my presentation of them will continue to evolve as I continue to use study them in harmony with the postures. My sharing has evolved so much!

I’m currently working on three workshops for this summer. In “Yoga For Balance,” I blend the affirmations with the study of symbolism of the asanas. Symbolism and affirmations harmonize beautifully.

AYTT gave me the confidence to take my teaching to a level far beyond my greatest expectations. Sharing yoga now is opening me to be an instrument of the divine flow. It’s so comfortable, like coming home! There is so much gratitude and love from the participants in my classes upwards to the divine. It is evident that they feel the oneness of our Ananda family, the wholeness of this gift we call yoga. ♦

*Sylvia lives in Burlington, Vermont. Since writing this, Sylvia has begun teaching at Yoga Vermont, one of the largest yoga studios in New England.*



## Lessons in Love and Courage (continued from page 5)

practice a few postures every day at home. After four weeks, the pain was diminished for two or three days after the class. By the end of the eight-week course, the pain was diminished for three or four days.

Neil continued to take several eight-week cycles of class with me. After his second cycle, the back and pelvic pain continued to diminish, and the thoracic needling went away completely. The abdominal pain, bloating, and nausea were markedly reduced. By the third cycle, the effects of the yoga would last longer, sometimes a week. He was also able to reduce his medications substantially.

The anti-anxiety/depression meds went from 800 mg to 500 mg per day. The sleeping pills went from 100 mg to 50 mg per day. The muscle relaxants and anti-nausea meds went from daily to “as needed.” And most astonishing of all was the fact that he was able to get off the morphine completely.

When Neil’s doctor, head of oncology and urology, learned of this miraculous pain reduction through yoga, his initial thought was that Neil must have been on the placebo drug in his study group. He was not. Then his oncologist, also in disbelief, privately phoned Neil’s psychologist to find out if he had been put on some other drug that may have been affecting his treatments. Of course, there was none.

Neil’s pain never went away completely, but it did go from what he considered to be an 8 out of 10 (10 being the maximum that anyone could handle) to a 2 or 3 out of 10.

Since that time, Neil has had a relapse with his prostate cancer, which caused him to become so badly anemic and exhausted that he had to stop his asana practice for a while. Nevertheless, he continued to do the breathing and relaxation practices at home until his physical strength was somewhat restored. Amazingly, his back pain never returned to what it was. He told me, “Maybe I am an anomaly in this way, but I want people to know that yoga may help them reduce or even eliminate medications. My whole general outlook improved, fatigue lessened, and the pain reduction meant the world to me.”

Neil is now back in yoga class and feeling better again.

### In Summary

I would like to say two things to other Ananda Yoga teachers who may be considering working with cancer patients. First, I feel Ananda Yoga is probably the most suitable style of yoga for this particular group because it has certain components that other styles don’t have. All the aspects of Ananda Yoga help these people to have a full body/mind/spirit experience. What better time to have help tuning into the Divine, than when one is facing a life threatening illness? And just for the record, other yoga teachers offer other styles at Wellspring, but it is the Ananda class that has a waiting list of people wanting to take it again.

Second, I want to express just how absolutely inspiring

and rewarding it has been to work with this group of people. Hearing the trials of their personal journeys with cancer, and how yoga helped them to cope, has melted my heart. They have taught me so much about life, courage, love, and about how yoga supports us in our process of becoming more conscious. Never in my life have I been so inspired to stand up to my own fears, weaknesses, bad habits, and doubts as I have been after

working with these people. They have been shining examples of bravery, courage, and perseverance. Their receptivity and positivity are contagious.

As teachers we give them the tools and create the sacred space for the experience to happen. We are loving, safe, caring, respectful, encouraging, and positive. We guide

the yogic experience and teach them how to create it for themselves. The real magic happens when they open the door to that process—to the divine energy and presence within themselves—and use their will power to take charge of moving forward with that.

For me, this whole process has been a lesson in love, especially self-love. I have realized that to practice yoga is to practice love, acceptance, compassion, and surrender. It is a practical application of will power that allows us to tap into, or draw upon, an ocean of love within us. It helps me to come into relationship with myself, discover my truth, and recall my goodness and my divine nature. As I have witnessed this process in my students, their fighting spirits have reminded me that it is my sacred duty to connect inwardly, and to find and give love and support to myself in the same way that I give to others—and in the same way that God gives to all of us. Through teaching at Wellspring, I have realized that this is what yoga is for me.

I offer my love and gratitude to all of the people at Wellspring. ♦

*“Ananda Yoga is probably the most suitable style of yoga for this particular group because it has certain components that other styles don’t have.”*

## *AYTT Manual Correction*

On page 3-7 of the current AYTT manual (it may be on a different page in earlier editions of the manual), in the description of a shortened form of the Energization Exercises, the “swinging arms side to side” exercise is described as calling for tension in the back, not the arms. However, there is tension in *both* the upper back and the arms. It’s not the “absolute maximum” tension used in many of the Energization Exercises; that would make the side-to-side movements very stiff, cardboard-like. Yet there is tension nonetheless. To have no tension at all in the arms would mean swinging them like cooked spaghetti noodles, and that’s not the technique at all. In any case, that tension should be released when you reach the very back of each side-to-side swing.



# Insights into Satya

by Erica Osmann Trexler

Teaching yoga is such a wonderful way to deepen the understanding that we are all divine. One way I've come to see this more and more is through teaching three sections of a 15-week, three-credit yoga class at Frederick Community College in Frederick, Maryland. I'd like to share with you some of the inspiration that I've felt in doing this.

But first, a bit about the course: Each class is two-and-a-half hours long: about an hour of lecture and/or group discussion, followed by 90 minutes of asana, pranayama, and meditation. In addition to some aspect of asana, each lecture/discussion covers some broader aspect of yoga. For the first three weeks we explore the meaning of yoga, the breath, and the concept of balancing the "ha" and "tha" elements in one's yoga practice and life. Then, after an introduction to the *Yoga Sutras*, for each of the next ten weeks we look at one of the ten yamas and niyamas, in order. Later on in the course we delve into such topics as meditation, mudras, affirmations, yogic diet, and the chakras.

I try to provide something for everyone, knowing that I might not please all the people all the time, but asking them to be willing to try something new. I like to open doors to new subjects, and point the students more deeply in that direction if they want to find out more. There is usually some way to spark even the most walled-off person. I try not to push anything on anyone, but to create an atmosphere of openness, acceptance, and non-competitiveness.

As part of this process, each week I also assign some reading (one of the texts is Swami Kriyananda's *Ananda Yoga for Higher Awareness*) and ask students to journal responses to questions that I give them. The questions are intended to help them think about how to apply in their lives what we learned in class. Quite early in the course, students begin to write about the many ways they are doing this: daily asana practices, meditating, using affirmations, utilizing pranayama in their lives, the power of the breath, and coping with life differently through insights that the yoga teachings have offered them.

I feel that, as people begin to explore yoga more, they begin also to believe more in themselves. Even young men in their 20's, usually concerned with having a tough image, have written in their journals about how great affirmations are, and how they are using them often now, when they thought they were kind of goofy in the beginning. Now that's certainly a different kind of strength than being a "tough guy"! I'm so thankful for all that I continue to learn from my AYT. I greatly enjoy reading the students' journals, and I learn

so much from them. Most students are in their late teens or early twenties (with the occasional older returning student), but whatever their age, background, or lifestyle, reading their words each week is an ever-deepening reminder that we are all divine.

## The Study of Satya

To illustrate this, I'd like to share with you part of our study of the yamas and niyamas. I was very inspired when I learned about these principles in AYT, and I feel it's important to pass them along whenever possible. I emphasize that the yamas and niyamas are not about "going to hell" if one does not practice these things; they are just a guide that can take one into deeper places of peace, joy, and union—yoga, if that is where they decide they want to go. I tell them not to take my word for it, but to give these things a try and see what happens!

For most of the journal questions about the yamas and niyamas, I include a quote from a book or lecture for students to comment on. I've recently read about fifty papers on *satya* (truthfulness), a yama that I've found students get very passionate about! I was very struck by their creativity and insights on *satya*, and I'd like to share some of that with you.

Here are the journal questions that I had assigned:

1. What does truthfulness mean to you?
2. What are your strengths and challenges with truthfulness?
3. How might you be more truthful with yourself?
4. Have you lived with an untruth? If so, how does (or has) that affect(ed) you? How do you feel you can most effectively handle this situation, also with the spirit of nonviolence? [We had studied *ahimsa* the week before.]
5. "Truthfulness doesn't mean that you have to put it all out there. It means that you are moving from your own heart" (Uma Meshorer, lecture at The Expanding Light, February 2000). What does this mean to you?
6. How do you live in accordance with your heart and soul's deepest desires? How do you find that you work with these dreams, and harmoniously blend them with social realities, obligations, or where you are now in your life?

## Responses to Uma's Quote

While reading these papers on *satya*, I was particularly struck by how students responded to the quote by Uma: "Truthfulness doesn't mean that you have to put it all out

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*Erika in an impromptu natarajasana. She lives in Rocky Ridge, Maryland.*



## Insights into Satya (continued from page 7)

there. It means that you are moving from your own heart.” Here is what those words meant to some of my students:

- “Truthfulness doesn’t necessarily mean a verbal communication. It also deals with the heart. Our heart must be accepting in order for truth to be permitted.”
- “People are like multi-layered roses. Truthfulness allows us to peel off some petals, helping us to deal more directly with what is important.”
- “This passage means to me that you don’t have to tell the whole world the truth, you only have to make it right with yourself. You may only need to tell one other person the truth. You may need to tell a whole group of people. You have to do what is right in your own heart.”
- “There is no set formula for what is truth or life; you have to let your heart decide.”
- “I agree that it doesn’t mean that you have to put everything out in the open air. I also believe that you must be truthful with yourself before you can be with anyone else, so following and moving from your own heart is essential to being a truthful person.”
- “I guess I need to keep in mind that intention is the most important part of truthfulness. If I lie to deceive someone, then this will damage my heart. If I keep quiet about something to protect someone I love, then my intentions are good and I can feel more peaceful about that.”
- “In a nutshell, ‘What is my intention?’ I am coming to believe that all of my life should be judged on the question, ‘What is my intention?’”
- “To me the quote means that while it is important to be truthful, you don’t have to reveal all of your thoughts, opinions, and personal information. Sometimes it is not necessary to reveal all of yourself to still be honest.”
- “I believe everyone should live by this. Being true to your heart is the only way to be truthfully happy.”
- “Truth is a way of life. When you have become one with it completely, all of your actions are an expression of a genuine compassion that springs from your heart.”
- “It is most important to be truthful to yourself. Only you know what is really true in your life, and it is up to you to accept this.”
- “I think it means that you are coming to accept things in your heart and moving from your heart, away from your worries.”

### A Second Look

I began to wonder, “What did *you* mean by those words, Uma?” As I pondered this, I felt inspired to look in *Affirmations for Self-Healing*, by Swami Kriyananda, and I found these words that feel relevant: “Truthfulness is not caustic statements of unpleasant facts and unflattering opinions. Such statements are usually born of pride. But truthfulness is the effort always to see the divine truth behind appearances. It is the effort to express always that aspect of truth which may prove the most beneficial.”

Now I was *really* getting into this, so I decided to ask Uma to elaborate on her statement. Here is her response:

“Truthfulness, as with most spiritual truths, has both obvious and subtle meanings. Jesus Christ said to look at the letter and the spirit of the law (in this case, the law of truthfulness). When we think of truthfulness, we immediately think of not lying: we must speak the truth. This is the *letter* of the law of truthfulness.

“How this plays out for us in real life however, can be much trickier than it appears. For instance, if I see someone who I think is not very attractive, in dress, in personality etc., should I tell the truth and say so? This would be speaking the truth, wouldn’t it? Or would it?”

“All spiritual precepts are designed to lead us away from self-involvement and isolation, into the oneness of spirit. Spirit has been described through the ages as joy, peace, love, and unity—these states, when experienced, create a sense of connection and compassion. With this understanding, to speak the truth merely because I want to is not the point.

“Clearly, the purpose of truthfulness is to compel us to search our own hearts to find what is motivating our thoughts and behavior. Are you motivated by anger, fear, or simply a mood? Are these reactions based in reality? Are they true? In other words, you may have a fear of heights, but heights themselves are not set on making you afraid. To reach beyond your own perspective, and include another point of view, is the purpose of truthfulness. Instead of feeling, ‘I should be able to speak my truth,’ question the relevance and impact of what you want to say, before you say it. Sometimes it really is more truthful to say nothing at all. This is the *spirit* of the law of truthfulness.”

### More Truth about Truthfulness

It’s amazing how many layers and shades of meaning this principle can have. Here are some additional gems from students’ journals:

- “Truthfulness, to me, is reflected in complete honesty in interaction. Since the tests of truthfulness come during each interaction with another person/the world, it seems that the relationships one has with other people are indicators of a true or deceitful inner nature. If you are a different person from one hour to the next, depending on who is around you, in an attempt to lie to the external world, you end up lying only to yourself. If you act from a centered place, beyond ego, with equanimity at your core, the correct action and speech in all circumstances will be known intuitively.”
- “To me, truthfulness means expressing actual reality, whether to yourself or others. Truthfulness is also having the courage to accept what is real.”
- “If one does not truly forgive, but says that he does, then the forgiveness is invalid; it becomes an untruth.”
- “For me it is hard to be truthful with myself when I judge myself harshly based on what society imposes upon women. I often want to be something I am not, and although I know it is unreasonable, I fall into the trap.”
- “It is my opinion the people who live with lies probably worry about the truth coming out. It seems as though it would be a huge stress on the mind and body.”

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## Teaching the Art of Discovery (continued from page 2)

something more for them, a higher level to reach for, if they are interested in pursuing it. This means not merely *telling* students that there's more, or loading them with techniques that they cannot or will not practice, but *showing* them through their own experience that there is something more *inside of them*.

Yes, this is challenging, but it is also a great opportunity to be creative with our teaching—and when we're creative, we too get recharged. I'll now describe a few of the ways in which we can foster our students' spirit of discovery. Whether they're new or familiar, I hope they will spark creative thoughts in you.

### Back to Basics

One way to spark renewed interest in familiar asanas is to offer special focal points for asanas, new territory to explore. How? One possibility is to go back to basics, emphasizing building blocks of poses. It's remarkable how, in their hurry to do more and more poses, students forget important foundational aspects, and their practice bogs down.

For example, you might take an "asana of the week" approach: focus on a particular asana, break it down in detail, emphasize specific aspects of it, repeat it several times with different emphases each time, really getting intimate with the pose. Have students do it mentally as well as physically. Take time to discuss the affirmation with your students, guiding them (or helping them guide each other) to a deeper understanding of how it can "complete" their practice of the asana. Encourage them to make the affirmation visual and feeling-oriented, not just verbal, so their experience will be fuller.

In fact, how about doing your version of the "drawing class" from AYT, having students draw a picture of their experience in the pose and create their own affirmation? It's a great exercise for teaching students how to go deeper in their experience of any asana—and crayons are cheap. (I'll be happy to e-mail you an outline of how to do this.)

Of course, in an "asana of the week" approach, you'd do other asanas as well, but you'd give the bulk of your time to just a few asanas. This approach can even help turn an asana from a nemesis into a friend—see Lynn Lloyd's mini-article in "Inspirations," page 11.

### New Tricks for Old Downward Dogs

Here's another approach: explore asana variations that give new emphases—and new life—to the physical dimension (and hence the energetic dimension) of a pose.

Consider, for example, trikonasana. In AYT, we teach it in a way that suits beginners, but there are many variations that highlight different aspects of the pose.

You could bring the top arm's biceps down alongside your ear, parallel to your spine instead of vertical; then stretch through the crown of the head, toward that hand, and stretch the bottom sitbone away from that hand (Figure 1). This is helpful for getting more length in the spine and a



deeper crease in the leading hip, helping students stay naturally open through the underside of the rib cage. After holding this variation of a number of breaths, bring the arm back to vertical. Now the opening that

students experience in the basic pose will likely feel much more dynamic because their spines are much more open.

Or use the wall to deepen the hip crease and create more openness: Stand away from the wall and perpendicular to it, positioning yourself so that when you come into the pose, your lower arm can stretch out to the side and slightly up, resting on the wall (Figure 2). As you hold the pose, press into the wall to help move the lower sitbone away from the wall, deepening the hip crease and enabling you to come farther into the pose without closing off the underside of the rib cage.



Another way to foster openness is to wrap the top arm behind your back, with your fingers on the inner thigh of the leading leg (Figure 3). (A strap around the thigh will work for those who cannot reach the inner thigh—see Figure 4.) Draw the hand (or pull the strap) back to help you rotate open through the pelvis and torso without compromising the leading leg's knee alignment. Be sure to keep the focus in the pelvic region—there is a tendency to use this variation simply to open the shoulders further, which adds nothing to the pose if the chest is already facing straight ahead.

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## Teaching the Art of Discovery (continued from page 9)

Or use a wall to help maintain knee alignment: Stand with the leading leg's outer thigh and buttock against the wall. Draw the trailing pelvic rim toward the wall to open the pelvis without losing leg contact with the wall. After coming into the pose, bring the top hand down to the trailing pelvic rim and again draw it toward the wall, fostering more openness. Be careful not to compromise knee alignment: keep the leading outer thigh and buttock pressed against the wall, and adjust the trailing leg and foot as needed.

Or lengthen both arms overhead, in line with the spine (Figure 5). This challenging position teaches students to engage their leg and trunk muscles more, giving the pose a stronger foundation and allowing students to give over more of the upper body to the opening/receiving process that is the heart of the pose.



### Compare, Contrast, Discuss

One key to kindling students' interest is to help them experience and enhance the "feeling" of a pose, the state of consciousness toward which the pose moves us. Once they realize that they can bring their mind into dynamic partnership with the body to lift their awareness, they will never be bored with that pose again. And they'll eagerly seek the same experience with other poses.

This isn't always easy to teach, but one way is to have students do a pose in two or more different ways, and discuss how the experience of the pose changes. For example, try different entries into an asana as a way to understand the pose more deeply, and invite your students to share their experiences.

Consider chandrasana. In AYT, we teach a very simple two-breath entry that's straightforward for beginners. Someone who knows the pose, however, is likely to prefer entering on just one breath: inhale up, exhale to the side. Better still, someone with good body awareness can do the entire entry on the inhalation alone: inhale up and over to the side, just as one would inhale up and back when entering a backward bend. Yes, lots of parts moving are simultaneously, but those who can maintain their alignment will feel much more "strength and courage" filling their body cells. Try it with your experienced students, and invite discussion.

Or, try entering dhanurasana or setu bandhasana in two different ways: once on an inhalation, as we teach in AYT, then on an exhalation. Invite students to notice the difference. The second way makes it easier to keep the pelvis tucked—at the expense, perhaps, of some of the vitality, openness, and spinal length that come with entering on an inhalation. Then have them enter the pose again, on an inhalation this time, but resolutely maintaining the spinal/

pelvic alignment that came from entering on an exhalation. Then have the students discuss their experiences. Chances are they'll now have a better idea of how to enter on an inhalation, reaping all the benefits of that approach, without compromising the spine.

Want something even simpler? Try virabhadrasana with palms down vs. palms up. Or utkatasana with palms down vs. palms up. Or utkatasana holding the breath as you crouch into phase 1 vs. exhaling into phase 1. Or salabhasana (arms overhead version) with palms down vs. palms facing each other. Again, invite discussion. Little things like this can really help students understand poses from their own experience.

Here's one of my favorite ways to help students tune in: compare the standing backward bend with what Iyengar folks call "warrior 1." (In case it's new to you, this pose is like standing backward bend with a very wide stance and a somewhat different arm position. However, I ask students to hold the arms as for standing backward bend, in order to make the comparison clearer.)

First, I have them do warrior 1 on both sides. I don't talk about a lot of alignment details; I just make sure they know what they're doing. I ask them to feel the general essence of the pose and notice how it affects their energy or state of mind. Then I have them do standing backward bend on both sides, offering exactly the same (minimal) guidance. Then I ask them about the differences. Usually, I'll see light bulbs going on all over the room: "I get it—this pose is about this, and that one is about that!"

Somehow it's often easier to feel the essence of a pose by comparing it with a similar pose. Then students begin to understand better why one might use one pose or the other, and how exactly to tune in to the essence of the pose. (In this particular case, it also invariably deepens their appreciation for the "simple" standing backward bend.)

These are just a few ideas; I'm sure you can think of others. It's an effective way to engage your students as you solidify their understanding of what they're doing and why they're doing it.

### Pranayama

How much emphasis do you give to the pranayama breathing techniques in your classes? If you're just paying lip service to them, you're missing a great opportunity to get your students even more interested in yoga practice.

There are many possible places for pranayama practice in an Ananda Yoga routine:

- As a centering at the beginning of your class.
- Right after Energization to focus the awakened energy.
- After the last standing pose to "change gears."
- After any particularly energizing pose, such as dhanurasana or ustrasana, to focus the energy.
- As part of the deep relaxation, to internalize the mind.
- As the last thing before ending your class.

I feel that the most impactful place is that last location, where the students can practice for a longer time and get deeper into the experience. When they do that, they will be

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## INSPIRATIONS

# “Ugh! I Hate That Pose!”

by Lynn Lloyd

One day, as my students were filing in for their yoga class and waiting for it to start, they began to discuss among themselves the yoga poses that they hated. It was quite a spirited discussion, with people lobbying fiercely for the “worst” yoga pose!

Overhearing this, I suddenly had an inspiration. When they were all settled in and ready to begin, I asked each person to tell me his/her least favorite yoga pose. The diversity was quite wide—the guy who hated anything resembling a forward bend, the woman terrified of backward-bending postures, the student who was struggling with balance poses, the downward dog hater, and even someone who disliked warrior pose and didn’t even see the point of it!

I knew what I had to do. On the spot, I reorganized my lesson plan for the day: I decided to include *all* these dreaded poses. I really took my time with them, giving extra information and instruction on their finer points, giving individual attention to those who were especially struggling



Lynn teaches Ananda Yoga and meditation, and does bodywork, in Mt. Shasta City, Calif.

with (i.e., hated) them. It turned out to be a really great class that the students loved—in spite of their groaning, there was actually a lot of laughter that day. Several students came up to me afterward and told me they had experienced a breakthrough, particularly with respect to attitude!

I think that in the future I shall use this idea again. I did it toward the end of a 10-week series, when the students were already familiar with the basics. It probably would work best for an experienced teacher, since you’ll have to arrange all these poses, right on the spot, into a balanced routine. But if you can make it work, it’s really worth a try. ♦

### Insights into Satya (continued from page 9)

- “Having had many confrontations with dishonesty, it has been made evident (after *much* thought) that the only reason anyone lies is to attempt to control the events of the outside world, due to the mistaken conception of something being ‘wrong’ with himself.”
- “To me truthfulness means being honest with yourself and those around you, and accepting the truth when it is given to you. It is important to me in that I want people to be honest with me and I will give it equally, but usually only when asked for it, because not everyone wants to hear it. When I ask someone to answer a question honestly, I do my best to accept and think about what he or she says, and not get angry. I asked for honesty, and there is a responsibility in that.”
- “I don’t like to come across as ‘phoney’ to my children, and if I do, they call me on it, which is exactly what I want them to do. The most basic truth is Love—it is being connected to all else. The most basic untruth is fear, which is being completely separated from all else. Therefore truth is always bringing us together, to learn to revere all living things. This level of respect is hard to adapt to, when we are used to putting everything ‘in a box.’ This categorization process requires judgment. I was taught to be judgmental to protect myself, but now I realize that self-defense is a form of attack. Sometimes I go round and round with this. My goal is to keep my energy flowing so that it doesn’t become knotted up. ... When you live an untruth, your energy becomes stifled and doesn’t flow

well. I tell my sons that energy continually flows—one way or another. If we don’t release it by being honest with ourselves, it can manifest itself in other ways such as physical or mental ailments.”

Wow! I’m so grateful for this opportunity to learn from others.

### God Is Reminding God

After quoting so many others, I began to wonder, “Do I have something to say about satya, based upon my own reflections and meditations?” I thought for awhile, but nothing came. Then I remembered my original inspiration for writing down all my students’ observations on truthfulness: the wisdom they had shown had in turn reminded me of the higher truth that God resides within each one of us. I remind myself often of this truth, and it keeps sinking in deeper and deeper.

Interacting with people through teaching yoga is such a splendid opportunity to remember to see the divine within everyone. The more I remind others that God resides within them, the more they remind me, too. That works very nicely! ♦

*Erika encourages anyone interested in teaching at community colleges to look into it because, she says, students have really found the course to be a breath of fresh air. Obviously the same is true for Erika! If you’re interested, she would be happy to send you her syllabus, which you could use as a starting point. You can reach her at [jayayoga@aol.com](mailto:jayayoga@aol.com).*



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### LEVEL 2 NEWS

## Upcoming Level 2 Programs

The programs below count toward Level 2 AYTT certification. Note especially:

- *Special Needs Yoga 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 details, please see The Expanding Light's program guide or visit [www.expandinglight.org](http://www.expandinglight.org). The next program guide will be mailed out in early September.

#### 2003

- 8/17–24 ..... **Special Needs YTT**
- 9/28–10/5 .. **Kriya Yoga Preparation**
- 10/12–19 ... **★Meditation Teacher Training**
- 10/19–11/16 **★AYTT Assistantship**

#### Early 2004 Preview

- 1/11–24 ..... **★AYTT Assistantship**
- 4/14–19 ..... **Ananda Yoga & Ayurveda**
- 3/21–28 ..... **★Meditation Teacher Trng.**
- 3/28–4/10 .. **★AYTT Assistantship**
- 5/2–9 ..... **Kriya Yoga Preparation**
- 5/27–6/6 ... **Yoga of the Heart™—Cardiac and Cancer Teacher Training**

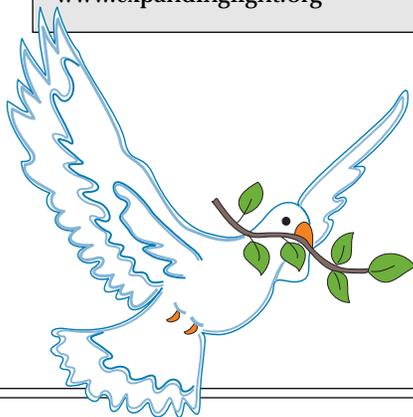
Teaching the Art of Discovery  
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led naturally into a meditative state, and that *certainly* will pique their interest in deeper practices. (Properly done, a long practice should make students feel like meditating, not doing asanas. That's why pranayama practice in earlier parts of the routine should be rather short.)

By the way, we thoroughly explore the practice and teaching of pranayama

techniques in the *Advanced Pranayama* Level 2 program. Until then, please note the importance of building a strong foundation of proper technique in normal breathing before trying more-complicated practices. As with asanas, students too often are eager for the next pranayama technique before they have adequately mastered simpler ones. ♦

*In the next issue, we'll explore teaching advanced asanas.*



## The Expanding Light

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