



Awake & Ready!

Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga™ Teachers Association
Vol. 9 No. 1 • Spring 2004

PERSPECTIVE

Discovery via Challenges

Part 3 of "Teaching the Art of Discovery"

As we go deeper into this series, I now want to offer some broader thoughts about how to refresh your approach to teaching, make your classes more magnetic and rewarding for your students, and increase your own satisfaction and magnetism.

In recent years, I've seen that some teachers let Ananda Yoga slip into being a passive practice, making it so slow, gentle, and/or inward that students become distracted, sluggish, or bored. Sometimes they don't come back, thinking that Ananda Yoga is too gentle and too slow.

I understand how that can happen. As we deepen our own inner experience and seek to share it, it's easy to forget "beginner's mind" and the fact that newcomers to Ananda Yoga—even those with prior asana experience—might not be ready for so inward a practice. The result can be "sleepy-time yoga" rather than "awake & ready yoga." For that matter, even experienced students who *do* understand the inward aspect can sometimes slip into passivity.

The truth is, real Ananda Yoga is *never* passive. Yes, it is slower and gentler than fast-paced, strenuous styles, and it is certainly an inward practice. But there's no reason it should feel *too* slow, *too* gentle, or *too* inward. Ananda Yoga should (in my view) leave one feeling, not only relaxed and inwardly aware, but engaged, energized, and uplifted.

How can we give our students this experience? How can we make the depth of the practice more accessible? Here are two strategies that I invite you to explore:

- In every class, give your students definite challenges at the level(s) they're ready for.
- Work more effectively with the pauses between poses.

The Case for Offering Challenges

First and foremost, I feel that many of us need to give our students more of a physical challenge, taking them to their frontiers of flexibility and yes, strength. This is not about caving in to the "workout yoga" fad. Rather, it's about providing access to the core of Ananda Yoga practice:



Gyandev McCord
Director

working consciously with energy.

For newer students, "energy" can be a mysterious and frustrating concept. In general, the easiest way to help them experience it is through physical effort. Energization is ideal for this—"tense with will, relax and feel"—but challenging asanas offer a similar exertion/relaxation cycle: we exert energy to do the asana, and afterward in a neutral pose we can feel the energy move as we relax the muscles that were engaged. It's a simple, down-to-earth energy experience.

I'm not suggesting that *every* pose should be a physical challenge. I'm saying only that putting out effort is a good way to get energy moving *and feel it*. Such poses also help students build strength and flexibility, and enjoy the "I can do it!" experience. They also give *you* opportunity to practice devising modifications for some of your students. All of this is very good, so long as it doesn't supplant "inward and upward" as the goal of the practice.

Finding the Right Challenge

Of course, "harder poses" is just one type of challenge; we need to find the *right* challenge(s) for each class. There are many possibilities, including:

- **Endurance**—Challenge your students to hold a pose longer without losing a core of relaxation. You could, for example, say, "When your body begins to strain or feel tired, concentrate on your breathing to help sustain both vigor *and* relaxation for a few more breaths." This skill is vital for asana practice: how will students connect with the inner essence of the asana if they exit the pose after only a short time? Besides, this is the beginning of learning a vital life skill: relaxation in the midst of effort.
- **Flexibility**—For example, try holding the active phase of a forward bend for 60–90 seconds—with alignment!—to

(continues on page 2)

IN THIS ISSUE

Discovery via Challenges, by Gyandev McCord	1
AYTA Member News	2
The Joy of Teaching Meditation, by Savitri Simpson ..	3
New Level 2 Program	5
Almost Dwapara!	6
Pregnancy Posture Tips, by Nicole DeAvilla	7
AYTA Contacts	12
Upcoming Level 2 Programs	12



Discovery via Challenges (continued from page 1)

reach that day's "final frontier" of hamstring/hip flexibility. Then enter the relaxation phase and notice the effect: the spine and entire body will feel much more open. Then challenge your students to find a comparable spinal opening with a "normal" active phase—perhaps even just one breath. (By the way, there's no benefit in taking more than 90 seconds: exercise physiologists say that after about 90 seconds of stretching, little or no more stretch will occur. More deepening of the *inner* experience can take place, but increased stretching won't happen.)

- **Balance**—You can do better than just seeing how long students can stay balanced. Rather, guide their exploration of various keys elements of balance: how uniformly distributing weight over the soles of the feet makes the pose more do-able; how maintaining a springy awareness in the standing leg improves balance; or how breathing smoothly and evenly aids balance. All of this fosters a

AYTA MEMBER NEWS

Minor Change in the Level 2 Curriculum

The Essence of the Yoga Sutras (and in 2005 *The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*) has been shortened from seven days to five. This reduces the total hours of required Level 2 programs, giving you more flexibility for electives. Both programs still have the added component of exploring the practice and teaching of more-advanced asanas.

Please Keep Us Posted

Please keep us on your "hot list" of who to inform about any changes in your e-mail or snail mail address. We don't want to lose you!

Have Any Bright Ideas?

We are very grateful that some members have stepped forward lately to write or be interviewed for articles in *Awake & Ready!* We already have some great content for the summer and fall issues.

However, we're always looking for more. So if you teach a unique population, have learned interesting things about practice and teaching of Ananda Yoga, or simply have a good story to tell, please tell us. We'll even help you manifest your article—short or long—through editing it or interviewing you. If we use your article of at least 1500 words—and if you actually write it (i.e., not an interview), you'll get a *free year's membership!* For more information, please contact Gyandev (see page 12).

Free Brush-Ups

If you find yourself on Personal Retreat at The Expanding Light during AYTT, you're welcome to drop in on most classes at no charge. Numerous AYTT grads have greatly enjoyed the experience, and we've enjoyed having them with us. Please contact Gyandev or Lisa (see page 12) in advance if you'd like to do this.

greater sense of discovery and engagement than merely struggling to stay upright.

- **Concentration**—Challenge students to observe and control the workings of the mind during a pose. How long can they stay concentrated on relaxing a particular part of the body, on the breath, on the spine, on the affirmation, or on their mental/emotional reactions to doing the pose?
- **Body awareness**—Challenge them to master simple-but-key bodily movements that take them deeper into a pose. For example, externally rotating the leading hip in *trikonasana* or *virabhadrasana* to create openness in the pelvis without compromising knee alignment. Or creating a dynamic "inside arc" in *chandrasana* by lengthening up through the inside leg and inner side of the spine.
- **Relaxation**—Even this can be a challenge if you guide students to work with body, breath, and mind in a neutral pose to find ever-deeper levels of physical and mental stillness and focus *without* going subconscious.

These and other challenges will engage, energize, and uplift your students as they explore and expand their limits. Again, don't challenge them so much that you lose the central point of the practice—bringing energy inward and upward—but do give *all* your students the opportunity to rise to the occasion. I will even go so far as to say that, without challenges of some kind, it's hardly Ananda Yoga at all.

Does This Fit with Ananda Yoga?

You may be wondering whether this suggestion is really consistent with Ananda Yoga. You may ask:

Question: "But what about safety?"

Answer: Safety is not incompatible with challenging poses. It simply requires more attention on the part of both teacher and student. That attention itself is a wonderful challenge for students—and for us as well, since we must observe students more closely. That often means that we cannot do the poses ourselves, but that's fine since our teaching is not our personal practice—or at least, it *shouldn't* be.

Question: "Isn't Ananda Yoga about relaxation? How can they relax if we are challenging our students?"

Answer: You may, for example, recall Swami Kriyananda's words, "All progress in yoga comes through relaxation of effort." But "relaxation of effort" doesn't mean that we should collapse in a heap because then we can relax more. Swami is calling for "dynamic relaxation": engaging ever more energy, but always with a sense of relaxation. We want "relaxation *in the midst of effort*," not "relaxation *instead of effort*."

True, some poses are about total relaxation (*balasana*, *savasana*, etc.), but most involve effort. Finding relaxation in the midst of that effort frees up energy and builds concentration, taking students to a deeper, more satisfying practice. At the same time, they will be learning a valuable life skill.

The truth is, "relaxation instead of effort" is a dangerous habit, whether in *asana*, *pranayama*, *meditation*, or *life itself*. It causes the atrophy of one of the most valuable tools that we can help our students develop: willpower. Remember Paramhansa Yogananda's maxim, "The greater the will, the

(continues on page 11)



The Joy of Teaching Meditation

by Savitri Simpson

Recently while I was talking with Gyandev, we came upon the question, “What will be the next big trend in yoga in the West?” Without hesitation, Gyandev looked at me with a twinkle in his eye and said, “Surely meditation is involved. It’s even starting to follow yoga into the corporate world. I would love to see more Ananda Yoga teachers riding that wave. Would you be willing to write an article about teaching meditation for *Awake & Ready!*?”

I said “Sure,” but as I considered it a little more, I thought: “This is going to be a very short article! What can I possibly say about it except that it *is* a great joy? I can’t think of any subject I’d rather be teaching. I can imagine no other subject that could possibly offer greater satisfaction to me or give greater rewards to any student who is willing to learn and actually practice meditation.” That’s it! What else could be added?

Since I was drawing a big blank, I decided it might be a good idea to ask our Meditation Teacher Training graduates (more than 200 of them are out there right now) if they’d like to share what it is like for them to be teaching meditation, or if they have stories they could share about their experiences in teaching meditation. This turned out to be a truly inspired idea, because many responded with wonderful clarity and depth.

Before sharing some of their responses, I’d like to thank these folks, both for responding to my call and for all they do out there on the “front lines,” teaching in many different—and sometimes unusual or challenging—situations. Also, because their stories inspired me so much, I felt to write a bit more about my own experiences.

Do It Yourself

I first began teaching meditation as an extension of teaching yoga postures. This was back in 1976, and I was living in Texas. I had visited Ananda for a couple of months in 1975, and I was so lonely upon returning home that I felt compelled to find others interested in yoga or meditation. Since I could find no one at that time in my part of Texas, I supposed I’d just have to start some classes myself. Pretty bold of me, considering I had no training at all!

But it turned to be somewhat easier than I had anticipated, probably because practically nobody in those days, particularly in Texas, knew yoga from yogurt or meditation from medication. No matter how little I knew, I still knew more than they did. So I floundered about, did the best I could, and in the process, met many wonderful truth-seekers, Texas-style.

When I moved to Ananda in 1978, I got a job cooking in the retreat kitchen. Word quickly got out that I had been

teaching in Texas, however, so I was asked to teach at the retreat, too. First it was leading sadhanas, which was pretty easy for me to do at that point. But then came more complicated classes on meditation and yoga philosophy. I remember the first time I was asked to teach a guest, one-on-one, how to do the Hong-Sau technique, I was so frightened that I got sick and was not able to show up. Poor guy! I hope someone else was able to do this for him. But from then on, it got easier with experience.

There was little or no formal training here back in those years. But on the other hand, in a way we *were* being trained in a marvelous way. Swami Kriyananda taught classes almost weekly. In addition, I listened (over and over and over) to the audio tapes of his classes on basic meditation skills and yoga philosophy, took many notes, made outlines and handouts, and studied his lessons and books. I also learned by doing, and learned by my mistakes—finding out what worked and what didn’t work.

As I said in the beginning, it has been a great blessing for me to teach meditation for these many years. I often tell the people whom I am helping to train as meditation teachers, “If you really want to learn how to do something well, volunteer to teach it. For then you really have to apply yourself, not

only to learn the subject, but to figure out how to communicate it clearly.”

This principle is especially true with meditation, which is so experiential. To be able to understand meditation well enough to be able to teach it, you really do have to be meditating yourself. So teaching meditation is highly motivational for your own personal practices—this is very good news!

Feeling Unworthy?

The other side of the coin is that many people I know, who could and should be teaching meditation, don’t, because they feel their own meditation practices are “not good enough.” To them I say: “Even a little practice of meditation will free you from dire fears and colossal sufferings—including the fear that you aren’t meditating well enough to teach it!” [Paraphrased from the *Bhagavad Gita*].

Swami Kriyananda has often told us that the most effective teachers are sometimes those who have perhaps *not* had as much experience in what they are teaching. They are closer to understanding (from personal experience!) what their students are going through in their struggles with taking on a new discipline like meditation. They might be able to empathize much better with them than could an “ancient”

(continues on page 4)



Savitri has lived and taught at Ananda Village and other Ananda communities since 1978. She directs the Ananda Meditation Teacher Training.



The Joy of Teaching Meditation

(continued from page 3)

meditator/meditation teacher, who may have forgotten what it's like to be new to all this!

Please remember that thousands of souls all around you are crying out in desperation for the great life-changing techniques of quieting the mind and opening the heart. Let that thought help you through your fears of inadequacy. Even if you teach only one person to meditate in your whole life, it may very well change his or her life for the better, and he or she may in turn change the lives of untold numbers more.

I can think of many stories about folks whom I've taught to meditate, but one in particular stands out. This was a young woman whom I met in about 1984. She was the mother of four children, the youngest ones being triplet daughters (toddlers at the time), plus she had a demanding full-time job. I had little hope that she could find the time to meditate, but she was (is!) a lovely, intelligent, and energetic person; and she seemed so sincere in her desire to learn whatever I could teach her. Now, some 20 years later, her children are grown and gone from home. She is not only still faithfully and regularly meditating, but she is also helping to lead one of our Ananda Centers and teaching meditation on a regular basis to many people! And two of her four children are now meditators, too!

Enough from me! The following comments and stories from MTT grads will speak for themselves:

Frank Miscione, Tustin, Calif.

I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker providing mental health services to youth in custody in the Orange County Juvenile Hall. About four years ago I started to do a yoga group with each of the two girls units. The group has been largely successful, although there have been periods of fluctuating attendance.

This past year I have introduced guided meditation after we finish doing yoga postures. The meditation lasts for about 15 minutes and it is clearly the favorite part of the class for them. The attendance in class is now more consistent. For background music through out the class I use Swami Kriyananda's "Mantra" CD. The average age of the girls is 16, and they are incarcerated on a variety of charges from misdemeanors to felonies. I feel that the yoga and meditation are useful tools for them for stress reduction, anger management, to help them focus their minds, and to help them make better choices in life.

Rebecca Smith & Douglas Yourstone, Olalla, Wash.

The two of us have been teaching meditation and yoga postures for several years. We teach in a residential alcohol/drug rehabilitation center. All of our students are in early recovery from addictions, and many are still in some state of detoxification. We have found that because these folks are so depleted emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually, they respond quickly and well. Because of this, it's very rewarding when we see dramatic results after just one class.

The meditation program starts off as a formal day class

entitled "Meditation for Relapse Prevention." This is then supported by evening meditation sessions offered before lights out. We even have a "Silent Walking Meditation" on a Sunday afternoon.

The yoga postures classes, "Yoga for Relapse Prevention," are also offered as part of the formal day classes. The yoga class is introduced as an adjunct to the meditation sessions (i.e., "The real reason for learning yoga postures is to enable one to sit for long periods in silence!"), and the meditation is tied into the yoga class by using some modified yoga before the meditation session and encouraging patients to try the whole class. Working with this population of people is both rewarding and challenging.

Sometimes patients attend to simply get out of some other class; they don't take it seriously and can be quite disruptive to others. Every so often, however, the most unlikely looking individual will touch our hearts. After the meditation session when the lights are still off, or quietly coming up after the yoga class, a patient will tell a piece of his or her story (a tale of fear, destruction, and isolation), and then tie it in with how the meditation and yoga postures is helping him or her relax, feel at peace within, or even get a glimpse of his or her long-forgotten "Higher Power."

Rebecca (an AYT grad) and her husband Douglas (an AMT grad) are also in recovery. You can contact them at www.olalla.org.



Susan Wilk, Annandale, New Jersey

I have found teaching meditation to be one of the most rewarding things (if not the most rewarding) I have ever done with my life. As a corporate attorney by day, and a meditation teacher by night, this teaching allows me to touch people's lives in profound ways that, according to them, have changed the way they live their lives.

My "alumni" students tell me they found comfort, peace, release from stress (one even reported release from panic), from using one or more of the techniques that I taught them. Sometimes they mention things that I don't even remember saying, or said in passing. You can't really tell what will touch people in a personal way.

One of the most rewarding classes I ever taught was one given at a counseling center for women who are returning to the workplace after being widowed or divorced. These women were going through incredibly tough times, dealing with lots of emotional pain and stress on many fronts. That pain was so obvious on their faces as they entered the room.

We began with some simple yoga postures to release some tension and to get them comfortable. As the class progressed, it was clear to see that the meditation techniques allowed them to relax, to leave behind—for a few moments at least—their worries and concerns, to get in touch with themselves as spiritual beings, not the humans stuck in the struggles of daily life. Through some guided meditations and some affirmations related to self-worth and value, they reclaimed parts of themselves that had become buried under the trials of their present circumstances. After the two hours we spent



together, their faces were different. Their counselors were amazed, and I felt totally humbled and blessed to be the vehicle to bring some peace to them. Most had not meditated before, but I know they will not leave that practice behind for long. I received no monetary payment for that class, but what I received far outweighed any other form of payment.

Also, I have been teaching for almost three years in an arm of the local hospital, and that has provided a diverse student base. It always amazes me how the classes seem to arrange themselves with a cosmic order, grouping “random” students in a perfect arrangement, where there are common denominators that could not otherwise be explained. In my last session, there were several women whose chronological age would classify them as “seniors,” but their hearts were so young and their souls so open to learn. At first, I must admit being a bit intimidated by those ladies, wondering what I could teach them, when their life experiences seemed to far exceed mine. The rest of the class was comprised of repeat students, one of whom had returned with her husband. What unfolded in the next six weeks was remarkable.

One woman had what is best described as a nervous temperament, a person who would constantly wring her hands and seemed to fret about all the things that *might* happen: snow, deer running in front of the car, etc. Another was an insomniac. Another had vertigo. Yet another was super-skeptical, to say the least. The first week’s homework assignment was, “at least five minutes of meditation per day.”

At the second week’s class, these new students were a little concerned (miffed? disappointed?) that meditation had not yet worked for them, although most admitted difficulty meditating everyday, even for five minutes. By week three, my nervous lady said she wasn’t sure it was working, but she did find about 10–15 minutes of peace after her meditation. (Not working?!) When I drew that to her attention, she glowed. From then on, she was a star, and kept talking about that peace she found every day.

The vertigo woman asked me, “What are you doing to me? I asked my husband, ‘What’s happening to me?’” She said things didn’t upset her as before. She related an experience where she received a call from relatives that they were on their way over for an unannounced visit. She had no dinner prepared, but calmly took something from the freezer. While it was heating, the power in the house went out. Even this did not upset her, which she says was totally unlike her. By the end of the series, she talked about formerly upsetting things that now made her laugh. She even laughed as she told the class about them. In addition, she was able to do some yoga postures, which was not possible for her in the first at class.

The insomniac related sleeping as she hadn’t in years after the fourth class, although that was still intermittent by the session’s end. Not bad for six weeks of practice, especially considering the first three were inconsistent. Anyway, we did a healing prayer/meditation for her one night when she was absent, and that was the first night she slept through in years. One of the students called her the day after class to see how she had slept, and that’s how the results were revealed on both sides. It was moving for all of us.

At week two of the series, one student brought her visiting daughter to class. I was a little concerned about my guest student, who literally could not sit still for two minutes without fidgeting. When I introduced her to the rest of the students, she announced that this just wouldn’t work for her. It would *not* work for her, as nothing ever had before! Okay. I asked her to keep her mind and heart open (noting her crossed arms and legs, with one kicking away). I plunged ahead, and taught the class, confident that if nothing else, she would relax at least a little with breathing exercises. At the end of class, I was truly amazed at the difference in her! She was calm, relaxed and smiling, hugging her mom, literally draped up against her. We had done a guided meditation—which came to me as a divine inspiration, I’m sure—that she said she wished would never end. She said she hadn’t been so relaxed or happy in years!

The last class was very sad for me in the sense that the session was over, and I felt so incredibly blessed to be with these great souls. My “skeptical” student approached me after class and said, “I don’t think this has anything to do with my meditation, but I wanted to ask anyway. I don’t get upset anymore. I don’t even yell at my husband. Could that be from the meditation?” Wowee!!! You bet! One of my veteran students told me she couldn’t believe the difference she saw in these women. The thought of them all still brings tears to my eyes. I know it was what flowed through me that blessed them, and I’m still humbled and awed by it.

(continues on page 6)

New Level 2 Program: Meditation Teacher Training 2

We’re pleased to announce the long-awaited sequel to MTT, which so many MTT Level 1 graduates have been asking for. Savitri Simpson and Diksha McCord will co-lead this 6-day training, which runs July 11–17, 2004 and offers credit toward AYTT Level 2 certification.

MTT2 is designed for both professional *and* personal development, combining the goals of taking both your teaching and your practice to the next level while recharging your spiritual batteries. Topics include:

- Intensive practice of meditation every day
- In-depth work with a variety of meditation-related techniques (e.g., guided meditation, walking meditation, and chakras meditations)
- Troubleshooting your classes, how to be a better teacher, taking students to their next level, answering your students’ questions,
- Finding ways to draw more people to your classes
- Leading experiential workshops for developing intuition.
- How to teach about the chakras and astral anatomy as it relates to meditation

The program will be both a reunion and an enrichment for all participants. It is only for MTT1 graduates.

The Joy of Teaching Meditation (continued from page 5)

Annie Enea, Half Moon Bay, Calif.

I really can't imagine teaching yoga without meditation. Yoga is the perfect precursor for meditation. When I went through the Meditation Teacher Training, I really wanted to teach, but mainly I wanted to get deeper into meditation.

Almost Dwapara!

AYTA has now (almost) fully entered the Age of Energy. Here is the latest news:

Awake & Ready! Has Gone Digital

Welcome to your first digital issue of *Awake & Ready!* (unless, of course, you're reading a printed version, in which case we apologize if optimizing the graphics for onscreen viewing results in poorer printed quality). We hope you like it, and Gyandev welcomes your feedback.

AnandaYoga.org Has Been Upgraded

With the heroic help of The Expanding Light's Bob Stolzman, AnandaYoga.org has now become an excellent resource for those looking for information on Ananda Yoga, with sections on:

- Ananda Yoga and its core elements
- Ananda Yoga Therapy and the principles behind it
- Ananda Yoga Resources (books, CD's videos, etc.)
- Ananda Yoga Teachers Association

It has also become easier to find via internet search engines (so you'll want to link your own site to it). The site isn't quite done yet—the AYTA section particularly needs some work—but it's mostly there, and it's so nice to have it. Go take a look: www.AnandaYoga.org.

AYSutra Is (Almost) the Web

We have found what seems to be the right web host for AYSutra, and we'll soon begin to test it more thoroughly to see whether it can do everything we want. Meanwhile, we'll keep the e-mail version of AYSutra. We'll let you know when the changeover happens.

Are You Digital Yet?

For the few of you who don't yet have internet access, now is the time. (Wouldn't you like to see the *Awake & Ready!* photos in color?!) You don't need to buy a computer or pay for an e-mail account. Most communities have free internet access at the public library (or cheap access at an internet café). You can get a free e-mail account at www.hotmail.com, www.yahoo.com, and other services. If you haven't yet made the electronic leap, prepare yourself by going into bhujangasana and affirming with gusto, "I rise joyfully to meet each new opportunity!" ♦

However, teaching meditation just flowed into my life in wonderful unexpected ways and has continued to do so ever since. In fact I had a contractor build a small yoga/meditation room in our backyard—it was just recently completed. I look forward to using it! It was not something I ever thought about; it sort of manifested out of nowhere and I now have my own temple to use whenever I want and to share with others. I was meditating in a closet before that.

Many people are willing to try yoga but not meditation. Yet I feel sure that if you add a sitting meditation to your yoga class, it will open the door for most of your students to let meditation become a part of their daily practices.

Christie McClelland, San Francisco, Calif.

I am teaching a workshop called "Meditation: What It Is and How To Do It," all around at local San Francisco yoga studios, Pilates studios, and chiropractors' offices, as well as one-on-one classes. I truly love it! I have been sitting for meditation since I was a child of eight, so it seems as natural as brushing my teeth. But to share it with others and see the Light working through them, now there is a gift!



I also teach an 8-week cleanse program, of which meditation is a major part. They get one two-hour training session; we meditate as a group once a week, and students are encouraged to choose an amount of time to commit to daily meditation.

One of the students is a young mother living with her wonderful partner and several roommates on Haight Street in San Francisco. She works long hours, cooking for her family, and is also studying a lot. She has a very busy life and wants nothing more than to be a great mother and a good person. She was able to meditate for only a five-minute section of each day during the program, but she did it! She told me her life is changing. She has always been a happy person, but she comes from a broken family, and her mother died young; so she has many anxieties about raising her child. Through daily meditation, a whole foods diet, and daily exercise she has begun to truly take care of herself and feels less anxiety about her performance as a mother. She says she feels more ease in her soul and is enjoying the craziness of motherhood and partnership in these financially tough times in the city. I also had the pleasure of teaching her "Prenatal Yoga for Fun" while she was pregnant. She was not interested in meditation at that time, although she did feel that being pregnant was very meditative in itself, at times. I am honored to be a part of her journeys to self and love and to see a loving family in action, including this "tuned-in hip mama."

Carolyn Denslow, Seattle, Wash.

I have taught a couple of very short (15-minute) segments on meditation at the end of some yoga classes, for which I was substitute teaching. The regular teachers weren't doing any meditation at all at the end of their classes, and the

(continues on page 10)



Pregnancy Posture Tips

by Nicole DeAvilla Whiting

According to the California Pacific Medical Center's book, *A Guide to Your Pregnancy and Newborn*, "One of the most important contributions to a healthy pregnancy is good posture." The principles of posture for a pregnant woman are the same as for anyone else: her natural curves need to be maintained, and all of the same principles of alignment as discussed in the last article on posture still apply. The trick is that *especially* when it comes to pregnancy, this is easier said than done!

The difference is that a pregnant woman must overcome numerous and ever-changing challenges in order to achieve and maintain good posture throughout her entire pregnancy. These challenges come in the form of physiological, biomechanical, and psychological changes. Furthermore, the consequences of not maintaining proper posture throughout one's pregnancy have many more potential complications than for a person who is not pregnant.

The First Trimester

From the very moment of conception, hormonal changes begin to take place in a woman's body. In preparation for the miracle of birth, hormones carry a host of messages throughout her entire body. An incredible amount of energy is needed to put in place all of the various systems that will support and nourish the baby: placenta formation, increased blood circulation, uterus expansion, milk gland preparation etc. Once all of the systems are in place, the energy expenditure is reduced as each "system" goes more or less on automatic pilot. But until that time, the body's intense preparations for the new child will normally cause a woman to feel very tired. Indeed, for many women the first hint of a new pregnancy that they experience fatigue.

I particularly remember when I first realized that I was pregnant with my second child—well before a confirmation from a test could be made—while I was on vacation in Arizona with my family. All of the sudden I realized why I was so completely content to sleep late, sunbathe by the pool, take an afternoon nap for as long as my first child would possibly allow me to sleep, and be in no hurry to do much of anything. I was very lucky to be where I was!



Nicole teaches Prenatal/Postnatal YTT and Therapeutic Yoga at The Expanding Light. Certified to teach Ananda Yoga in 1984, her background includes sports medicine and chiropractic physiotherapy. She lives with her husband and two children in Marin County, Calif., where she teaches yoga and meditation, and leads an Ananda Healing Prayer group and kirtans.



In case you're wondering whether Nicole is overstating the strain on the lower back during pregnancy, here she is at weeks 30 and 37 of her first pregnancy. Any questions? (Other photos in this article—except savasana—are from week 38, 10 days before her son's birth.)

Other common conditions are feeling overweight and clumsy, morning sickness (ah, if only it had been just in the morning!), more frequent urination, and mood swings. It might seem that the effect on posture, however, at this stage would be inconsequential. Think again. What do we all tend to do when we are tired? We slouch. And for those who are nauseated, think "even more slouching." And as though that were not enough, for some women, their tummies begin to relax and retain more fluid—they even find it hard to snap their pants at a time when they think they should not be showing yet. They become very self-conscious, which psychologically can result in—you guessed it—more slouching!

Now this is not to say that this will happen to all women. Many will keep their good posture with no problems during this time. Of course there are also those who will keep their same old bad posture at this time!

This is why we want to encourage good posture right from the very beginning. First of all, it is not going to get any easier. The postural muscles need to be working correctly so that they will be in tone (and have a good habit established) *before* they take on the added work of supporting the weight increase that is on its way.

Correct posture also improves respiratory function. Being able to breathe well and fully will increase the amount of oxygen she is receiving during a time when there is an increased need, which can also help fight fatigue and, to some extent, lessen nausea.

Standing upright also makes one feel and look better. Working on having good posture in their standing and seated asanas right from the beginning will be very helpful. While in a prenatal class there is naturally a lot of emphasis on gentle stretches and opening in the pelvic area especially, the value of strength asanas is not to be underestimated. It takes a lot of strength not only to support the weight of the growing baby, but to give birth, and to hold and nurse a baby. The stronger the back, deep pelvic, and abdominal muscles, the easier it will be to maintain good posture during pregnancy, and after birth as well. So this is a perfect time to practice

(continues on page 8)

Asanas to Help Improve Posture during Pregnancy

Tadasana will usually need to be modified, sooner or later, by placing the feet wider apart. This will help with balance as well as comfort when the pelvis begins to shift and the baby gets heavier.

Standing asanas in general will help improve posture if you, as the teacher, make it a priority to constantly watch and correct for posture. If you do any balance asanas such as vrikasana (tree pose, at right), make sure your pregnant student has a wall or chair nearby to help her with balance if needed. Do not forget to teach her the affirmation, “I am calm, I am poised,” as she will need it in the months ahead—and as a mother, quite frequently!



The **chest expander** (left), with the fingers interlaced behind, lifting chest and hands, is a great one for strengthening the muscles of the thoracic spine and opening up the chest area. Encourage deep breathing from the belly during this exercise.



Table pose with variations, such as extending one leg and lifting it to horizontal—and/or the opposite arm also—will help keep the back muscles strong and tone the abdominal muscles that will be supporting an ever-growing baby.

Cat/cow pose (below) will also help strengthen the abdominal muscles. Tell your students to hug the baby as they arch the back up and firmly pull in the abdominal muscles. If your pregnant student is having some low back problems, the cow movement (bending backward on the inhalation) should be skipped; otherwise it can be done carefully if you make sure that your student does not overly hyperextend her back. A student in her last trimester should go very easy on the cow position, or even skip it unless you are confident that she is strong enough to support the weight of her baby without compromising the lower back. It is a great pose for the deep pelvic muscles also, so it is worth trying to do when it is appropriate.



Pregnancy Posture Tips (continued from page 7)

the poses listed in the sidebar “Asanas to Help Improve Posture during Pregnancy.”

I remember one day when the constant low-grade nausea (which I experienced for the entirety of both my pregnancies) was making me walk “less than tall” and had me in a less-than-ideal mood. Out of the blue, my one-year-old son began saying, “Happy. I’m happy.” It was such a wonderful thing to hear. It jolted me out of my cocoon of focus on the feeling of nausea and reminded me just how happy I really was! I unconsciously stood up straighter and began to focus on feeling happy instead.

Here is where Ananda Yoga affirmations can be indispensable! Using imagery and words that keep the mind more positive will help to correct posture under these circumstances. And conversely, the better posture will help increase one’s sense of well being as well as a positive outlook.

Another note on the psychological aspects of the first trimester of pregnancy (and sometimes beyond): keep in mind that not all pregnancies are planned, even among married couples. So sometimes a bit of psychological adjusting may be going on as well. Even a planned pregnancy can come with its own set of fears: what is happening to my body, without my control? will I be a good mother? will the baby be healthy? And for some, a long-fought-for pregnancy will carry with it the fear-thought: “will it last?”

This may seem to be going a bit beyond the bounds of “tips for pregnancy posture,” but it is a potential reality (although I suggest that you do not bring it up), and having a sensitivity to this possibility can be helpful. Again Ananda Yoga affirmations, plus your ability to project that your classes are a safe and nurturing environment for all, will be indispensable aids for your pregnant students. Couple this with helping them maintain good posture throughout their pregnancy, and you will be giving them an enormous gift.

The Second Trimester

Moving into the fourth month of pregnancy, many women begin to feel more energy than they did during the first trimester. For most women, if they had morning sickness during the first trimester, it will now be gone. And they are definitely “showing” by the second trimester. Now is a good time to reinforce the strength needed for good posture.

The abdominal muscles, which certainly are stretching during this time, also need to stay strong, as do the deep pelvic muscles. If these muscles are not strengthened, the weight of the baby will pull a woman into a swayback position, which will cause back pain. In addition, the more toned a woman’s muscles are before giving birth, the easier it will be for her to get her body back into shape afterward—and to withstand the postural demands of holding and nursing a baby. It is also important to keep the upper gluteals strong to support the sacroiliac joint, which will soon be loosening up (along with other joints) from the hormone aptly named “relaxin.”

As for checking posture from a teacher’s perspective, we do just as we would normally do: start from the feet and



work our way up. The points of alignment remain the same: the center of the ankle joint, knee, hip, shoulder joints and the ear should be in a vertical line. Be especially diligent in checking for hyperextension in all joints. As the hormone relaxin begins to take effect in a woman's body, hyperextended joints become even more vulnerable to injury due to increased elasticity. In addition, there will be a general tendency for the lumbar spine to hyperextend from the pull of the weight of the growing uterus and baby. Also, the weight of the breasts as they enlarge may cause rounding of the upper back. Both of these can cause various back problems. With the weight of the growing uterus, baby, and breasts, it takes more strength to support good posture—all at a time when good posture is increasingly important for preventing injuries and helping one stay as healthy as possible.

Balance may become more of an issue at this time as well. Generally speaking, the more active a woman is while pregnant, the easier it will be for her to adjust to an ever-changing center of balance. Less active women may find that their bodies are hard to balance because they have not been keeping up with the changes in a timely manner through activities that would naturally require balance. They are also more susceptible to being dizzy. During standing asanas, have them stand near a wall or chair, as needed.

Third Trimester

Now the fatigue tends to return. The growing baby usually causes mom-to-be to get up at least once a night for a run to the bathroom, and staying comfortable for a good night's sleep becomes more of a challenge! All of the postural challenges from the second trimester continue, perhaps more acutely for some, and a few additional ones arise, too.

For example, the breasts are taking on extra weight (approximately 3 pounds). Increased blood flow to the breasts to aid in the production of the milk, plus growth of the milk glands themselves, contribute to enlarged breasts. This extra weight demands stronger muscles to prevent slouching forward. Again, the regular practice of good posture can prevent slouching, as the muscles daily get a little stronger from the increased effort. As I mentioned, slouching can also be due to the psychological fact that a woman may feel self-conscious about this new shape of her body. As always, creating a safe nurturing atmosphere in your class, while encouraging good posture, can alleviate these potential feelings.

The average weight gain in a normal pregnancy is 22–35 pounds. Imagine beginning a weight training program. Your trainer straps some belts around you and begins adding one pound of weight each week into these belts. You must carry these weights with you, 24 hours a day. Even if you choose not to work out one week (perhaps you were too nauseated, or your two-year-old child was keeping you up for several nights

(continues on page 10)

Other Positions during Pregnancy

When **sitting cross-legged**, make sure that your pregnant student is well supported with props as necessary. For example, have her sit on blankets or cushions to elevate her hips (feet on the floor) if she is unable to maintain the natural curves in her back without them. She may need support under her knees to prevent straining them or to keep poses such as the butterfly from being too intense. (Remember that the hormone relaxin can make it easier to overdo stretches.)

Twisting asanas should be done gently, without squishing the baby! Correct posture will help prevent squishing: keep the spine in its natural curves in any spinal twist. In some positions (e.g., ardhha matsyendrasana; see below), keeping the spine perpendicular to the floor during the twist will be impossible, so the student can lean back and still maintain the natural curves in the spine. Then the baby will have plenty of room, and correct alignment can be maintained. Note also the foot of the bent knee is well forward of its usual position, which also gives the baby more room.



Savasana should be done on the pregnant student's left side (so as not to put undue pressure on the vena cava, which runs to the right of center in the abdomen). Look at her from the back and check that her spine is supported in a straight line. She will need a pillow or blanket to support her head and thus keep her neck in line with the rest of her spine.

She will also need a support (folded blanket or cushion) between her legs (or in the version pictured below, under a bent top knee) to prevent hip and/or low back strain. This is a standard technique for anyone with hip or lower back pain/strain. When the knees rest together in this position without a prop, the top femur is not parallel to the floor; this angle puts pressure on the lower back and pulls on the outside of the hip. Although for most people this pressure is slight enough to not be a problem, those with lower back and hip problems will be sensitive to it. Since pregnancy both loosens and puts pressure these areas, she needs support from the knee to at least the ankle to keep the femur in a more neutral position and thus eliminate that stress on the lower back and hip.

Additionally, as the baby grows, the student will need a blanket or pillow under her belly to support the weight of the baby without strain. Another nice addition is a set of folded blankets and/or cushions in front of her chest to support her right forearm at shoulder level (elbow remains at her side and is bent). This keeps the top shoulder from rounding forward as it naturally tends to do when one is lying on one's side.



Pregnancy Posture Tips (continued from page 9)

because she had a fever and earache), your trainer will nevertheless continue to add a pound a week to your regime. You can now begin to understand the challenge imposed simply by the gain of weight during pregnancy. It can be either a difficult challenge or an opportunity to get in really good shape. With my first child, I was probably the strongest I have ever been, because I kept up with the “weight training program” throughout the entire pregnancy! During my second pregnancy, the loving demands of my toddler made me unable to repeat the same feats of strength.

Final Thoughts

No matter how much I learn about the science behind how a child is conceived, grows, and is born, the entire event seems to me even more miraculous when I consider the additional knowledge about all that is happening for both mother and child. Pregnancy is a beautiful, hopeful time. There are many complications and disappointments that can happen at this time as well. And as I’ve described, it certainly is physically demanding.

As yoga teachers, let us be informed, but not intimidated, by the pregnancy process. If a pregnant student walks into your class, try not to let your first thought be something like, “Oh, my, I hope I can remember what the warning signs for premature labor are.” Instead take the attitude that you are being blessed to be in the presence of one of God’s newest creations. Feel further blessed that you have been given the opportunity to serve both the mother-to-be and this new child about to be born. With this attitude, pray for guidance, take one step at a time, and feel the blessings for serving, through yoga, during this special time.

And don’t forget to have good posture yourself! ♦

The Joy of Teaching Meditation (continued from page 6)

students were eager to learn. It went well.

I regularly teach yoga at a health club and have been leading my classes in a few minutes of meditation after the deep relaxation at the end of each class. Once in a while I have offered to teach a simple meditation technique to anyone who wants to stay after class, and each time several students have stayed. Gradually my students have been getting more and more interested in meditation. I now have more than twenty people interested in taking a meditation class, which I am offering in a few weeks. I don’t know what the actual attendance will be, but it is encouraging to see so many people open to the idea of meditation and wanting to learn! Most of them tell me they have a lot of stress in their lives, and that is why they want to start meditating.

A few months ago, one of my students told me that his friends tell him he is much calmer and more relaxed than he

used to be. He tells them it is “yoga and meditation” that has changed him.

Susan Hayes, Meadow Vista, Calif.

I have found that teaching meditation to my yoga students has helped me teach Ananda Yoga more effectively. Before I took Meditation Teacher Training, when I would teach Ananda Yoga, I could barely get any of my yoga students to sit quietly for five minutes of meditation following savasana. After I began teaching meditation in April 2002, I noticed that the students who learned to meditate would now willingly stay for fifteen minutes of meditation at the end of the yoga classes.



Maria Laffenburger, Williamsville, New York

This is my story about teaching meditation in a very simple way. I had a patient named Rosie who was very independent. Because of her failing condition she had to be admitted to a nursing home. She was dying. Fear overtook her and she continuously cried to the staff not to leave her. Everyone was distraught at hearing her cries, because often they were too busy to comfort her. I stopped in to see her, and she cried bitterly for me not to leave. As we talked I realized that all she needed was to make a connection to the God that she had always believed in. I very simply taught her to focus on her breath and say a short prayer over and over. The prayer we chose was, “Lord Jesus, be with me.” As I left her room, I heard her softly muttering over and over, “Lord Jesus, be with me.” Two days later, Rosie died peacefully.

Final Thoughts from Savitri

There were inspiring stories, weren’t they? I’m sure there are many more similar stories out there, but I think that’s enough for now.

We’d love to have *you* join us in one of the next Meditation Teacher Training courses June 20–27 and October 10–17. The summer course tends to fill up quickly, so do plan ahead and call soon. MTT is a required course for Level 2 Ananda Yoga Teacher certification, but we’d much rather you think of it in terms of the great joy teaching meditation can bring into your life and into the lives of all those with whom you come into contact.

By the way, this year marks the birth of MTT Level 2. Please see page 5 for details.

If you have questions or concerns of any type, I would be most happy to talk to you at any time. Or if you know anyone who you feel might really benefit from learning to teach meditation, let me know their name(s) and I’ll contact him or her to discuss the possibilities. Here’s how to reach me: Savitri Simpson, Ananda Meditation Teacher Training Director, 14618 Tyler Foote Road, Nevada City, CA 95959, (530) 478-7560 X7019, e-mail: savitri@ananda.org.

Joy and blessings to you always! ♦



Discovery via Challenges (continued from page 2)

greater the flow of energy!” The more we exercise willpower by putting out energy—with relaxation—the stronger our willpower becomes. To build willpower, Yogananda prescribed, “each day, do something you haven’t done before,” and “each day, do something that you didn’t think you could do.” Sounds to me like he’s in favor of challenges!

Question: “Will students have an inner experience if they are constantly straining?”

Answer: “Strain” is to be avoided, but “exertion” is helpful (although even exertion shouldn’t be constant). I’m simply saying that we need a balance, and that some of us have gone too far in the direction of inwardness without energy.

Someone once asked Jack Nicklaus, the greatest golfer ever, how he would train a youngster to become a great golfer. His answer: “I would first teach him to hit the ball *hard*. Finesse and control can come later.”

Translation into the teaching of Ananda Yoga: if we first help students increase their energy and *feel* it (while staying safe), that will open the door to subtler aspects of the practice. Only with energy can students go inward and upward. Taking them inward without energy leads them downward into subconsciousness, not upward into superconsciousness.

The Pause That Truly Refreshes

Now let’s turn to the pauses between poses, because this is one area in which it’s especially easy for students to be left behind. Here are two common-sense suggestions for keeping them “on board”:

1. *The newer the students, the shorter the pauses.*

Newer students can quickly lose focus during pauses because “nothing is happening” (as far as they can tell). Their minds wander and their energy scatters or dissipates—restlessness and boredom soon follow. We can prevent this simply by engaging them in another asana before they drift off—without shortening the pause so much that we create a vinyasa (“flow”) practice instead of Ananda Yoga.

How long should pauses be? In *The Art and Science of Raja Yoga*, Swami Kriyananda says to pause “at least as long as one has held the pose, and longer if the heart has been so activated that it takes more time to return to its normal rhythm.”

However, we also need to keep in mind that over the past couple of decades, Western (especially American) culture has become pathologically restless. People now are addicted to constant change and have pitifully short attention spans.

We’ll be better able to keep new students engaged if we use shorter pauses, say 5–6 breaths (20–25 seconds), or even 2–3 breaths (8–10 seconds) after poses that require minimal physical recovery (e.g., garudasana, janushirasana). In time, as they learn how to do work with energy, we will be able to lead them into longer, more-productive pauses.

In the end, the duration of a pause must be guided by your “feel” for the students rather than by any outward rule. Newer students will use the pause mainly for physical recovery; that doesn’t take long. Experienced students may benefit from a longer pause to internalize the effect of the preceding pose and re-center in the spine; even they will benefit from shorter pauses now and then, however, because it can keep them from “drifting” and help them feel more energy in their practice. In either case, try to begin the next pose before students can slip into restlessness, distraction, or passivity.

2. *Give students appropriate guidance during pauses.*

Our instructions during pauses also need to be tailored to the students. Experienced students might respond well to instructions such as “integrate the effects of the pose” or “draw the energy into the spine.” New students, however, may find such instructions vague and/or frustrating because they don’t yet feel the effects or the energy; then instead of helping them center their energy in the spine, the pause will allow the energy to scatter or dissipate. They may do better if you have them

focus on the bodily sensations instead.

For example, ask them to “consciously relax the muscles that were working in that pose.” Or call their attention to particular body parts, such as, “Notice the sensation of ‘release’ in your shoulders. Feel that sensation moving inward to your spine.” Students will soon begin to perceive the release of energy that underlies muscular relaxation. (By the way, this will happen sooner if you teach them Energization.)

Whatever your wording, the important thing is to accomplish the purpose of the neutral pose: help your students stay focused, integrate the effects of the preceding pose (to whatever degree they can), and prepare for the next pose.

Finding the Balance

I confess to feeling trepidation that some teachers will take these suggestions too far and begin teaching “workout yoga” instead of Ananda Yoga. Please keep in mind that these suggestions are intended only to push the pendulum back to center for those for whom it has swung too far in the direction of “slow, gentle, and inward.” You might already be doing what I’ve suggested here, but I believe that it will prove helpful to many Ananda Yoga teachers.

Also, I’m not saying that “slow, gentle, and inward” is wrong. It’s perfect for some classes—one can be slow, gentle, and inward without being passive. I merely want to point out that Ananda Yoga also offers more-challenging possibilities on many levels. I encourage you to guide your students’ exploration of those possibilities so they can experience the dynamic, transforming essence of Ananda Yoga.

If you have any insights to offer on the fine art of challenging your students, or making the best use of the pauses between poses, please tell me about them. Perhaps we can share your ideas in a future issue. ♦

“Taking students inward without energy leads them downward into subconsciousness, not upward into superconsciousness.”



AYTA CONTACTS

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

Lisa Powers
The Expanding Light
530-478-7518 ext. 7087
lisa@expandinglight.org

Maria McSweeney
Co-Director, Ananda Sacramento
916-361-0891
maria@anandasacramento.org

Bent Hansen
Dean of Students, Ananda Univ.
530-292-3024
deanofstudents@
anandauniversity.org

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

*I radiate love and goodwill to
AYTA members everywhere!*



LEVEL 2 NEWS

Upcoming Level 2 Programs

All the programs below count toward Level 2 AYT certification. Note especially:

- *Deeper into the Spirit of Yoga* (May 23–28, Oct 31–Nov 5), with Diksha McCord. A powerful, asana-oriented experience of Ashtanga Yoga and other aspects of the *Yoga Sutras*, with concrete examples of how to bring the *Sutras* into your classes.
- *The Essence of the Yoga Sutras* (July 25–30—note that this program is now five days, not seven). Dive deep into the *Yoga Sutras* under the guidance of Jyotish and Devi Novak, Uma Meshorer, and Gyandev McCord. You'll also explore the practice and teaching of more-advanced asanas, including sirshasana (headstand).
- *Advanced Pranayama and the Subtle Body* (August 1–8), with Gyandev, Savitri, and Uma. Explore the practice and teaching of a wide variety of powerful pranayama techniques—including mudras, bandhas, and some unique hybrid techniques—and learn how they fit into an effective Ananda Yoga practice. You'll also go *in depth* into the teaching of the Energization Exercises.

AYTA Members now receive a **15% 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 or e-mail 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. If you did not receive the new program guide in March, please call 800-346-5350.

5/5–9 Kriya Yoga Preparation	7/25–30 Prenatal YTT
5/23–28 Deeper into the Spirit of Yoga	7/30–8/2 Postnatal YTT
5/27–6/6 ... Yoga of the Heart™—Cardiac and Cancer YTT	8/1–6 Yoga to Awaken the Chakras
6/13–18 Therapeutic Yoga	8/1–8 ★Advanced Pranayama and the Subtle Body
6/17–20 Restorative YTT	8/15–20 Adapting Asanas for Physical Limitations
6/20–27 ★Meditation Teacher Trng.	10/6–10 Kriya Yoga Preparation
6/27–7/10 .. ★AYTT Assistantship	10/10–17 ... ★Meditation Teacher Trng.
6/27–7/2 ... Sharing Yoga w/Children	10/17–30 ... ★AYTT Assistantship
7/11–17 Meditation Teacher Trng. 2	10/31–11/5 . Deeper into the Spirit of Yoga
7/25–30 ★Essence of Yoga Sutras	

The Expanding Light

14618 Tyler Foote Road
Nevada City CA 95959