



# Awake & Ready!

Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga® Teachers Association  
Vol. 11 No. 2 • Summer 2006

## PERSPECTIVE

### *A Birthday Present —in Reverse*

Recently at Ananda Village, we hosted two extraordinarily inspiring events: Swami Kriyananda's 80th birthday celebration (May 19–21), and the Joyful Arts Festival (June 8–11). It was an incredibly uplifting time, full of satsang, sadhana, classes, music, drama, fine arts, and a lot of joy. It was lovely to connect with the many AYT graduates who came for these events.

Adding to the upliftment was the launch of Swami's new book, *The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*, in which he explains Paramhansa Yogananda's penetrating commentaries on the Gita. I'm thrilled to see this book, mostly because of its content, but also because I'm often asked to recommend a version of the Gita. I've never had a good answer, feeling that the other versions I'm aware of are "not quite it." Now at last I can make an unequivocal recommendation: This is it! Judging from the testimonials it has received from authorities in the field, people outside of Ananda are similarly impressed. (By the way, special autographed, limited-edition copies are still available. Call Crystal Clarity at 800-424-1055 for details.)

Far more impactful for me than any of these events, however, was simply the experience of *seeing* Swamiji. The fruits of a lifetime of complete dedication and surrender to God and guru are now, more than ever, evident: he simply glows with divine joy. Being around him even just a little bit, it becomes clearer than ever that the divine search is what life is all about. The radiant joy and vibrant awareness one sees in his eyes and feels in his presence make a more eloquent statement than words could ever do. I'm sure that those of you who were here will agree.

#### The Long-Hoped-for Gift

And believe it or not, there was something more—a relatively minor something, to be sure, but a lovely lift for Ananda Yoga teachers.



Gyandev McCord  
Director

A few years ago I asked Swami if he would consider giving affirmations to some new asanas. He didn't have time then, as he was writing *Conversations with Yogananda*. Right after finishing the book, he went to India to begin Ananda's work there, and with all the work of getting started (including shooting 235 television shows in one month!), there was clearly no time to consider asana affirmations.

Recently, when he completed *The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*, I thought to ask again. After all, he would be taking a breather, right? Ha! Now he's working even harder to build Ananda's work in India, he's trying to found a new Ananda community, a hospice, an orphanage, and the Yoga Institute for Living Wisdom (where teachers would be trained to offer the Education for Life system in their schools, something that India is very ripe for), and more. He was just as busy the spring while at Ananda Village, and now he's plunging into his next book (it concerns Yogananda's commentaries on the Bible) while going to Italy to teach and to launch the Italian version of *The Promise of Immortality*. Eighty years old and *still* no one can keep up with him!

Yet as if to underscore that boundless energy that has always characterized him, just after his birthday, Swamiji surprised me by giving *us* a present: he incorporated into Ananda Yoga twelve more asanas and affirmations. In this issue and the next, I'll share them with you.

I had asked Swami to consider these particular asanas, having regularly practiced them and concluded that they fit wonderfully into Ananda Yoga's "inward and upward"

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## A Birthday Present—in Reverse (continued from page 1)

approach. He agreed completely. They range from easy to challenging, and from standing poses to seated/floor poses to inversions. All in all, they're wonderful additions to the Ananda Yoga family.

This article is not the place for detailed instruction in these asanas—besides, you probably practice, and perhaps teach, many of them already—but I do want to offer a few thoughts, especially to explore some inner aspects of the poses and help you tune in to the affirmations, since they are so valuable in unlocking the essence of the poses and teaching them effectively. So without further ado, and in no particular order, let's begin:



### Prasarita Padotanasana— Wide-Stance Forward Bend

One of just about everybody's favorite forward bends, this is Padahastanasana's wide-stance sibling. It can be done with hands on the ankles (pictured above) or with hands/forearms on the floor. Either way, it's a wonderful release for the spine and hamstrings. (If you rest your hands on the floor, be sure that you're not impeding the lengthening of your spine.) It also opens the hips and pelvic region in way that Padahastanasana doesn't.

More important, however, Prasarita Padotanasana is very calming for the mind, almost like a soothing hot bath that you would like to relax in for a long time (provided you have no contraindications, of course). Hence the affirmation: "I relax and cast aside all mental burdens."

Ahhhh ...

### Gomukhasana—Face of Light Pose

Most Westerners call this the Cow's Face Pose, since the Sanskrit word *go* is commonly translated as "cow," so *gomukha* means "cow's face." But how on earth does the pose suggest a cow's face? Of course, asana names aren't crucial, but still ...

However, in *The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*, Swamiji points out that, in ancient Sanskrit, the word *go* meant

## AYTA MEMBER NEWS

### Rising to the Occasion

Several great souls have taken the heat off *Awake & Ready!* by writing articles. As a result, the next issue of *Awake & Ready!* is already covered. We always need more, however, so if you teach a unique population or would like to share your insights or experiences—great or small—teaching Ananda Yoga, please consider writing an article about it. For information, contact Gyandev (see page 12).

### Website Glitch

It seems that our most recent update to the online directory of Ananda Yoga teachers went awry, and some of you weren't listed (and some past grads who haven't renewed their AYTA membership *were* listed). It should be fixed as you read this. We apologize for the error.

"light," as in "inner light." That translation sheds new, um, light on many things. For example, one often reads in the Indian scriptures about disciples to whom the guru gives a cow or two. The disciple is supposed to go away and multiply that gift into a hundred or a thousand cows, then bring the cows back to the guru. What is that all about? Does the guru want to go into the dairy business?

Not at all. If one translates *go* as "inner light," it makes perfect sense: The guru gives the disciple a bit of inner light through initiation into some technique (mantra, meditation technique, etc.). The disciple then goes away to practice the technique, and thereby expand his or her inner light. When that is accomplished, s/he comes back to the guru with all that light. It's not that the disciple then gives that light back to the guru; it's that by multiplying that light, s/he has become ready for the next step.

This ties in well with Gomukhasana. When one's shoulders and hips are loose enough to do the pose reasonably comfortably (using props, if needed), this simple asana brings a feeling of strength and light. That can give radiance to the face, but in my experience, the radiance originates in the heart chakra. A

feeling of great power comes to the heart—not power to do this or do that, but rather the power of expansiveness, freedom, and absolute fearlessness. There's even a sort of exhilaration in that fearlessness.

Why would fearlessness bring power? Because fear paralyzes our energy, which





causes us to shut down psychically, and even physically. But when the heart (the psychic seat of fear in the body) is open, energized and expanding, fear cannot gain a foothold. Our natural power is freed.

The affirmation says it all: “Free in my heart, I live without fear.” So in Ananda Yoga, we’re using the “light” translation of *go*: Gomukhasana is the “Face of Light Pose.”

Give it a try.



### Parighasana—Gate Pose

This asana (pictured above) is both energetic and opening. It looks easy—and it *is* easy—but there are important subtle aspects to it as well. It resembles Ardha Chandrasana in some ways (or more precisely, Ardha Ardha Chandrasana—the one-armed version of the pose). In both asanas, one emphasizes lifting *up* and over to the side, keeping the underside of the rib cage long and open, rather than putting all the emphasis on bending sideways as far as possible.

Unlike Ardha Chandrasana, however, there’s an added hamstring stretch in Parighasana, and the overall action of the legs is quite different. As we actively lift with both legs rather than using the legs merely as a base for the upper body—and then continue that lift via the action of the upper body, just as in Ardha Chandrasana—there’s a palpable feeling of lightness, of delight, of almost dancing. It’s as though energy were dancing up the spine. The affirmation fits it perfectly: “Waves of joy surge up my spine.”

(By the way, you can gaze straight ahead, or rotate to look upward. But don’t look at the hand if that would cause the neck to move out of alignment with the rest of the spine.)

### Bakasana—Crane Pose

As I’ve sure you’ve noticed, not many arm balances are “officially” part of Ananda Yoga (in the sense of having an affirmation). Until now, the only one has been Mayurasana (Peacock Pose), which few people seem to practice. (I feel it’s

a mistake not to try Mayurasana, or at least Ardha Mayurasana. It powerfully energizes the third chakra and stimulates *agni*, your “digestive fire.” It’s also fun, and easier than it looks—see *The Art and Science of Raja Yoga*.)

Now we have Bakasana, too (see *photo below*). For years I relegated it to my physical workouts (i.e., not my sadhanas), not only because it didn’t have an affirmation, but because, like many arm balances, it felt like mere gymnastics. In fact, the way it’s often taught—lifting the legs and upper body so strongly that one seems almost to be lifting up into a handstand—it *does* enter the more-gymnastic realm. No doubt that version has its benefits (arm, shoulder, and abdominal strength, concentration, balance, etc.), but it never did—and still doesn’t—feel like it belonged in Ananda Yoga. It simply isn’t about “inward and upward.”

Some years ago, I began to explore the less-gymnastic version pictured below, in which the legs rest on the backs of the arms. The arms still have to work to keep the body light on its foundation (the hands), but this version is not especially strenuous once you get the hang of it, and it gives a much deeper stretch to the lower spine, courtesy of the laws of physics. The only pose (among those with affirmations) that gives a comparable stretch to the lower spine is Pavanamuktasana (Wind-Freeing Pose), and even that doesn’t give as deep a stretch as this version of Bakasana.

In addition, Bakasana is an inversion. Though it’s not an extreme inversion by any means, it brings a powerful, expansive-yet-contained energy to the vishudha (fifth/throat) chakra. As you know, this is the center of peace, calmness and expansion in the body. When we practice Bakasana until it’s no longer is a struggle (it’s not hard to get to that point, by the way), we can relax enough that we become aware of the released spinal energy gathering in the cervical center. It doesn’t go outward from there, as though trying to accomplish something; rather, an ever-expanding reservoir very still, very silent energy accumulates at that chakra. The phrase “potential energy” comes to mind. “Powerful” comes to mind, too.

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# Teaching Yoga in the Public Schools

by Megan Roberts

Some of you will remember Susan Brochin's stories of bringing yoga into a public school. (See Vol. 8 No. 3 and Vol. 10 No. 1 in the Awake & Ready! archives at [AnandaYoga.org](http://AnandaYoga.org).) Perhaps you thought, "Okay, but she was already a teacher at that school. How can I start teaching yoga in a public school when I'm not a school teacher?" Megan Roberts has some answers for you.

This article is about my journey of being able to teach yoga in the public school system. What's so special about that, you may wonder? I think there are several things that make it special:

- I actually call it Yoga (not just Stretching).
- I teach a regular 30-minute class once a week for the entire academic year.
- I teach it during regular school hours, as part of their curriculum.
- I'm not a volunteer! I'm funded in part by three school organizations: the school itself, the Parent-Teacher Association, and the Student Assistant Team (a group of teachers who identify at-risk students and get them involved in positive activities).

I'd like to share some details with you, as well as ideas for how you might consider working with the schools. But first, I'll give you a little background information.

I live in Maine, the land of brief, beautiful summers and long, cold, dark winters. (For the benefit of international readers—and geographically-impaired Americans—Maine is the state in the upper right-hand corner of the United States. It borders on Canada.) Although it's a hard place to live, the combination of family generations, the people, the beauty, and my stubborn heart make it the place I call home.

After growing up in Maine and attending college in New Hampshire, I headed west and spent the next twenty years living in New Mexico, California, and Colorado while working in the ski industry. I've always been an athlete, interested in the body and how it works with the mind and spirit. I have a teaching degree in Physical Education, although I've never used it to teach traditional Phys Ed. This background and overuse of my body made Yoga a wonderful fit, and I received my AYTT certification six years ago.

We have millions upon millions of trees in Maine, but only 1.2 million people. I live in Farmington, in southern Maine. Although Farmington has just 7,000 people, it's the county seat and the "big" town for the area. I have a small, one-instructor (me!) yoga studio in the downtown business district, and it's called, not surprisingly, Megan's Yoga Studio.



Megan graduated from AYTT in May 1999. Each week, she teaches one class at Cape Cod Hill School in New Sharon, ME, and five classes at Megan's Yoga Studio in Farmington, ME. She also teaches for various local groups and retreats.

## How I Ended Up in School Again

The energy and momentum for my school project started in 2001 when a teacher friend, with whom I ride bikes, asked if I'd come to her fourth-grade class (that's nine- and ten-year-old students) and teach them Yoga for four classes. I said, "Sure!" The classes went well.

I could tell you that I did that in order to get some yoga volunteer experience, which would look good on my resume for my future plans to teach yoga in schools regularly. But that isn't how it happened. I'm not nearly that organized and future-oriented! It was a latent goal that evolved naturally. So here's my first suggestion—several, actually—for how to get started in a school when you don't have a teacher connection such as I had:

★ Get someone interested. Consider going to a school and offering at no charge a yoga class or a breathing and relaxation class as a special presentation or as an after-school special, either to the students or the teachers or both. Also, find out if any of your current yoga students are teachers; s/he might be that connection you need. ★

I've found that smaller, less funded schools with lower income students are easier to become a part of, are more receptive to grants, and have the students that can really benefit. Here's another idea:

★ Get to know a specific teacher, and if you don't "connect" with him/her, keep volunteering with other teachers until you

find a good fit with one who will work with you. ★

As it worked out with me, a teacher in the seventh grade asked if I'd come to her school's "Celebrating Health" day. Then a fifth-grade teacher asked me to teach a one-time yoga class for her students. All this gave me some experience, and I found that I wanted to do it on a more regular basis.

## From Occasional Volunteer to Paid Regular

During the summer of 2004 I became better acquainted with Kate, one of my yoga students, who is a teacher in a small school just outside of Farmington. This school has 52% of the students qualifying for the school lunch program (indicating a lower-income population), and Kate had a particularly challenging fifth-grade class. As we talked more and more, we realized that this is the class that could really benefit from having Yoga weekly.



I presented the idea to the principal, and she was very receptive. I'm sure it helped that she is also one of my yoga students, and has experienced firsthand the benefits of yoga. A lot of principals are interested, though, especially if you are going to do the work to get it going. These fifth-graders needed to learn some skills to combat their anger, frustration, and general lack of discipline and guidance. Kate and I were both full of positive energy for this project, which is a major requirement to create excitement and positive energy in others.

I do a lot of volunteering in my community, but I knew this commitment would need funding, and that I would need income from teaching the students if I was to make my life work. So here is another suggestion:

### ★ Open your mouth! ★

I started talking to friends and others about this project we wanted to do, letting the energy take it where it may. Friends gave suggestions on who is a good grant-writer in town and might be willing to help. They also told of various grants we might apply for. My neighbor up the hill a bit—whose cows sometimes get loose and came dangerously close to squishing my flowers—was particularly interested. She wanted to know when we were going to start. I told her we were currently looking for ways to fund it, and she wrote out a check for \$1,000 on the spot! (It won't always go like that, but if you get the information and energy out there, many surprises can result.)

I started teaching the very next week. At first, we put yoga in the once-a-week activity period. We just moved the desks to the side of the room and started.

Kate and I learned a lot during the first few yoga classes! In balancing poses, the students immediately purposely unbalanced themselves, crashing into each other! In fact, with every pose they managed somehow to be overly engaged with their buddies or kicking others. They were generally unruly, and Kate was ready to give up, thinking it just wasn't going to work. I convinced her to continue, and also to make some changes.

### Refining Our Approach

First, we checked the gym schedule and picked a time it was empty, which was in the morning instead of late after-

noon, when they were already fried. Then we used some of the money to get each student a yoga mat. We emphasized that this was their space, and they weren't to step off their space—ever! Next we dimmed the lights. We slowed everything down and talked to them more about how this was different from recess or Phys Ed class, and what the purpose of the class was.



*Megan in action, leading the students.*

The kids got calmer and better each week. It was really wonderful to see them not only enjoy it, but to benefit from the asanas and pranayamas. Kate and I look back on those first classes and wonder what we were thinking, having them do it in the classroom and diving right in. Silly us! A good learning experience. So here are some additional suggestions for you:

★ Make sure you have adequate space. If you don't have mats and it's a gym or floor space, use removable tape to make a "mat" space for each of them.

Explain to them beforehand just what you as a group are trying to accomplish. Keep making changes until you find what works best with your group. ★

### The Value of Feedback

After a few months we surveyed the students to get their reactions. Some commented that they used the breathing techniques before tests or when they were stressed and nervous. Others mentioned that they used the techniques

"instead of hitting my brother." One said that "at my baseball games, I did the tongue thing" (i.e., Sitali Pranayama). Other technique times included "When I was trapped in a snowbank", and "I feel like if I'm mad and I do yoga, I feel better." There isn't space here to list all of the positive words they used in the survey, but it was clear that they were experiencing concrete benefits and ways of improving their lives—and they knew it.

Beyond their usefulness in teaching the kids, the surveys were very beneficial in obtaining our

grant: proof of benefits! So here's my next suggestion:

★ Give a simple survey to any school group that you teach. Get feedback on how it made them feel, how it



*Calm, poised, and ready for anything!*

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might help them in their studies or overall school experience. ★

The initial gift took us through the end of the calendar year, which is midway through the school year. Kate and I wrote a grant to MBNA's "Maine Excellence in Education Grants Program," which encourages experiential activities with children, especially children who might not otherwise get the chance to experience the activity. (MBNA is a financial services company.) This was to fund the yoga class until June. We made up a budget that included eye pillows, an end-of-the-year celebration with Indian and healthy foods, and a special class during an activity day for any student in the school who wanted to participate—oh yes, and money for my services as well. We included a letter of support from the principal and also from the teacher, Kate, as well as the earlier survey results.

We were very happy to receive about 75% funding, and as it worked out I had to miss a few classes when my father was dying, so we had all we needed. The students were very enthusiastic about the eye pillows, which also served as another tool to keep them in their own space and focusing inward. They also were excited about being allowed to take the pillow home with them at the end of the school year. We gave another survey at the end of the year to both the students and the parents. Not surprisingly, very few parents

responded, but the ones who did offered enthusiastic support. The students were all positive and we felt that teaching yoga in Kate's fifth-grade class was a great success.

This year I have again been teaching to Kate's students, and the school itself—as well as the Parent-Teacher Association and the Student Assistant Team—again helped to fund the program. I also applied to the same Grants Program for funding, but MBNA was bought out by Bank of America, and unfortunately the Grants Program has been eliminated. However, I heard that our local bank—Franklin Savings—sometimes funds community projects, and through the bank I received a smaller amount of funding which allowed me to continue the teaching.

As I write this, the school year is drawing to a close, and again the response was terrific. The students verbally expressed their love for yoga, and they shared it more with their friends and families. By the time the next school year comes, I'm sure I will have found a way to continue this vital and successful teaching—one way or another! So here's my final suggestion:

★ Never give up! ★

I hope this helps for anyone interested in teaching in the public schools, or if you are a teacher wanting it in your school. If you would like more information, or a copy of the student survey, or even the grant itself, please contact me at [yogski@localnet.com](mailto:yogski@localnet.com). ♦



# Ayurvedic Healing & Yoga Retreat

## with Ananda in Kerala, India

February 8–25, 2007 ✨ Led by Gyandev & Diksha McCord

*"The best vacation I've ever had!"* — AYTT grad Lan Gluckman

Imagine: two relaxing, rejuvenating weeks of Ayurvedic healing treatments and Ananda Yoga in the seaside tropical paradise of Kerala's finest Ayurvedic resort—with Level 2 AYTT credit, and an optional add-on to Yogananda's Mahasamadhi Celebration at Ananda Delhi. Rates from \$4150. Register by September 15, 2006. For more information please contact The Expanding Light at 800-346-5350 (530-478-7518) or [www.expandinglight.org/kerala](http://www.expandinglight.org/kerala). Or write [diksha@expandinglight.org](mailto:diksha@expandinglight.org).

*I loved the resort, I loved the people, I loved India. I loved the whole experience. I added a new dimension to my life.* — AYTT grad Joan Gosling



# Prenatal Yoga: Are You Ready for the Good News?

Part 2 of a 2-Part Series by Nicole DeAvilla

In Part 1 of this article (Winter 2006, vol 11, no. 2), Nicole discussed how to handle three “prenatal situations” that you might encounter in your teaching: (1) a new, pregnant student drops into your general yoga class, (2) a pregnant student and her pregnant friends ask you to teach a prenatal yoga class, and (3) an advanced student of yours becomes pregnant. We’ll pick up by repeating her last few comments pertaining to scenario 3:

Even for an advanced practitioner with no complications, a practice will definitely need to be modified. However, the degree of modification, as well as what is appropriate even to attempt, will necessarily be determined on a case-by-case basis. And even that needs to be looked at on a day-to-day basis.

Obviously, then, I cannot give you exact parameters that will enable you to handle every instance of Situation 3. However, the more knowledge you and your student have, the more you will be able to make good choices together.

What I can give you, however, is a real-life example of what one teacher’s prenatal practice looked like. My goal is to demonstrate the range of possibilities in a healthy prenatal practice. This is important, because it’s easy to get so caught up in all of the cautions and potential problems that we can become fearful and contractive, and that is definitely not what yoga is about!

## A Case Study: Me

She happens to be me, and I preface the description with this caveat: I have never taught nor even considered teaching most of the advanced postures that I practiced to other prenatal students—not even those with experience. Then why do I include some of them here? It’s to demonstrate the range of possibilities in a healthy prenatal practice. We can all get so caught up in all of the cautions and potential problems that we can become fearful and contractive, and that is definitely not what yoga is about! I hope the following will *not* be a template for prenatal yoga practice, but instead be an inspiration for a healthy, expansive, and safe practice.



Nicole teaches Therapeutic Use of Asana and Prenatal/Postpartum YTT at *The Expanding Light*. Certified to teach Ananda Yoga in 1984, her background includes sports medicine and chiropractic physiotherapy. She teaches yoga and meditation near her home in Marin County, Calif., and leads an Ananda Healing Prayer group.

## Chakrasana? During Pregnancy?

Chakrasana had been a very important posture for me in my practice for a long time before my first pregnancy, as it alleviated the chronic upper back pain I had been experiencing for years. This made it important for me to continue with this asana for as long as was possible during my pregnancy. I was fortunate to be able to practice it throughout the entire pregnancy. I was able to do this because (a) I was quite flexible to begin with, (b) I had a dance background, so I had a very good sense of balance, (c) I have always been quite strong physically, (d) I experienced no discomfort in doing it, and (e) it just felt right. The accompanying photos were taken ten days before my son’s birth.

Before becoming pregnant, I was able to walk my hands to my feet in Chakrasana. As the baby became bigger and stretched my body and added weight, I adjusted the position by bringing my hands and feet farther apart from each other (see photo below).

Many women who have regularly practiced Chakrasana before becoming pregnant may find that they need to stop practicing this asana at some point during their pregnancy. If the stretch is too much, the added weight too heavy, the stance widening too far to be stable—or if it just doesn’t feel right for any reason—then one should stop practicing Chakrasana for the remainder of the pregnancy.

It is all relative. Whether an advanced asana such as a one-legged Chakrasana (see photo next page) is appropriate or not depends on the woman’s yoga practice *before becoming pregnant* as well as on the status of her current pregnancy. The vast majority of women would not and should not be doing this asana while pregnant. It would not be appropriate to teach it in a prenatal class. However, it may be appropriate for a few individuals’ personal practice. This is true for many of the more-advanced asanas.

Before becoming pregnant, I would practice this asana additionally with either the opposite or same arm extended

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## Prenatal Yoga: Are You Ready for the Good News? (continued from page 7)



into the air. At some point during the pregnancy, I chose not to continue to practice those variations, due to balance challenges and the potential risk of falling. I remained comfortable and steady with the variation pictured.

If a woman has not been regularly practicing Chakrasana with ease before her pregnancy, she should not practice it at all during her pregnancy. The risk

of straining or pulling a muscle, or coming out of the asana without adequate control, is too great.

### Relaxin and the Hips

Upon hearing of the loosening effects of the pregnancy hormone *relaxin*, which is present during pregnancy in up to ten times its normal amount, many women look forward to more limber bodies, reaching toes that were previously elusive, bending into new shapes and squatting effortlessly. Alas, these women are mostly disappointed.

For me, an asana like Hanumanasana (*see photo below*) felt just as intense as always. I had one student (a limber dancer), who waxed poetic about how easy and wonderful positions like Hanumanasana were during her pregnancy. I think her experience was more the exception than the rule.



The loosening effects appear to me to be more in the joints themselves than in the muscles. From my experience, the muscles are minimally if at all affected. Relaxin softens the ligaments in the pubic area to facilitate enlargement of the birth canal. That's why asanas in which muscle length is at the fore won't really change that much when relaxin is present. (Note: Ligaments elsewhere in the body are also softened, and relaxin has other effects that are not muscu-

loskeletal, e.g., softening the cervix, and promoting the formation of new blood vessels.)

Joints throughout the body become looser and thus less stable. The reduction in stability can make it easier to lose control and go too far in an asana and cause an injury. A woman who was already loose-jointed before pregnancy must especially take precautions not to injure her joints. Asanas to strengthen the hip area will be particularly good as well as certain modifications of some asanas. (See "Hip Strengtheners" on page 9.)

### A Love Affair Interrupted

Most pregnant yoga students absolutely love restorative yoga positions. Oddly enough, these were the ones that I had to give up! The relaxation in most prenatal restorative positions would put my sacroiliac (SI) joint out of commission. I would come out of these poses with a stabbing pain at one of the SI joints with every step that I would take. Fortunately, it would go back into place fairly soon on its own. Though I craved practicing the restoratives, I had to give them up during both of my pregnancies. I have come across only one other student whose body reacted in the same way.

### Prenatal Yoga Controversies

You should be aware that there are some controversial issues in prenatal yoga. And unless some substantial research is done (don't count on anything anytime soon), they will most likely remain controversial. Inversions, twists, and lying supine are among them. A thorough look at all of the controversies would be another article all together. For now I will mention my viewpoints on a few of them.

As far as inversions are concerned, everyone (I think) would agree that during the last six weeks of a pregnancy full inversions (i.e., poses in which the pelvis is fully inverted) and in some cases partial inversions should not be practiced at all. At this time the baby is beginning to settle into position for birth. The downward pull of gravity at this time plays an important role in properly positioning the baby for birth. (However, if the baby is in a breech position—i.e., the head is not down—then supported inversions may actually be advised by the health care practitioner, in hopes of shifting the baby into the proper position.) Additionally there is the obvious danger of falling out of an inversion and the potential of injury to the mother and/or the baby. Wall support and spotting by a teacher can help to alleviate this.

However, some people recommend against inversions anytime during pregnancy. Inversions such as Shoulderstand and Headstand were not an important part of my yoga practice at the times that I was pregnant, so I did not practice them. I did occasionally demonstrate them briefly in the non-prenatal classes that I was teaching while I was pregnant, but I never teach the classical inversions in a prenatal class. However, I do teach Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose in a few different supported variations (*see photo, page 9*).

During the last six weeks of pregnancy, as mentioned before, I do not teach inversions that fully invert the pelvis,





and in the last few weeks I avoid teaching even partial inversions of the pelvis in forward bends, etc.

I believe that twisting, as long as the spine and the abdomen are not being compressed, can be healthy to practice. The twists can relieve back tension as well as help stimulate digestion, which

tends to be sluggish during pregnancy.

Lying on one's back for short periods of time in a yoga class is safe during pregnancy. If a woman has circulation problems in that position, then of course it should be avoided. I give women the option of lying on their sides or their backs for the short rests between asanas. For deep relaxation, I have my prenatal students lie on their left sides (to minimize pressure on the vena cava), or give them the option of resting in a restorative asana, such as the Princess Pose (*below*).



### Remember the Big Picture

Pregnancy is a wonderful time. It can be a doorway to positive spiritual transformation, not only for the mother, but for the father as well. Ananda Yoga is naturally suited to a prenatal practice. For one thing, the inward focus helps to facilitate a positive transformation into motherhood. For another, the affirmations become tools for working positively with the challenges of pregnancy, labor, delivery, postpartum, and motherhood—plus everyone really likes the affirmations and my students do tell me they use them during labor. Third, the pacing of the postures is conducive to a safe practice. And fourth, the meditative aspect is also appealing and helpful to pregnant women, who will appreciate it if you offer meditation at the end of your class as well.

As yoga teachers we want to foster and nurture the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health of the pregnant student. We must keep in mind that, just as there is

(continues on page 10)

## Hip Strengtheners

1. From Table Pose, extend the left leg out in back, keeping the leg parallel to the floor and keep the foot flexed with the toes pointing down to the floor, so that the pelvis and lower back stay level (*see photo below*). Hold for a few breaths, then bring the leg down. Repeat on the other side.



2. From Table Pose, lift the left knee, keeping it bent, out to the side at a right angle, attempting to keep the foot as high as the knee (*see first photo below*). Hold for at least one breath. Then, on an exhalation, extend the leg as straight as possible out to the side, and hold for a few breaths (*see second photo below*). Bend the knee to set the leg back down. Repeat on the other side.



## Prenatal Yoga: Are You Ready for the Good News? (continued from page 9)

much to be joyful about pregnancy, there are many concerns and fears as well. As with most fears, the more we educate ourselves, the more we can rid ourselves and others of fear. The practice of yoga is ideally suited to centering and calming the expectant mother. As yoga teachers, we can help to facilitate this. Diaphragmatic yogic breathing and the affirmations are particularly powerful. In fact, the Ananda Yoga affirmations seem to be designed for prenatal yoga! In another article I plan to share with you just how effective they are for prenatal yoga.

### Positive, Energetic and Enthusiastic!

So, how ready are you for the good news about prenatal yoga? I hope your answer is—or will be soon—something like the answer that one of my daughter's (Raquel's) friends gave to Raquel (though it was an answer to an entirely different question):

Friend: Yes.

Raquel: Are you sure?

Friend: Positive.

Raquel: Are you really sure?

Friend: I am positive.

Raquel: Are you positive, energetic and enthusiastic?

Friend: Yes, I am positive, energetic and enthusiastic! ♦

### RESOURCES

Article: "Pregnancy Posture Tips", Nicole DeAvilla Whiting, *Awake and Ready!*, Spring 2004, Vol. 9, No. 1

*Positive Pregnancy Fitness*, Sylvia Klein Olkin (When I was first learning about prenatal yoga, I would keep this book in the classroom and refer to it on the spot with my prenatal students.)

*Preparing for Birth with Yoga*, Janet Balaskas

Website for general information about pregnancy: California Pacific Medical Center, [www.cpmc.org/pregnancy/](http://www.cpmc.org/pregnancy/)

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## A Birthday Present—in Reverse (continued from page 3)

This greatly surprised me when I first began to feel it. I had thought that the spinal stretch was quite enough to make the pose beneficial, but now I see that that's just the beginning. The affirmation emphasizes the higher dimension of the experience: "The silent power of the Infinite expands within me."

All in all, it's a lovely pose, and like Mayurasana, it's easier than it looks.

### Parsvotanasana—Side-Stretching Pose (a.k.a. Pyramid Pose)

Like all the forward bends, Parsvotanasana (pictured above right) is primarily about opening the spine. (By the way, it's



sometimes written Parshvotanasana, since the "s" is pronounced "sh.") And although all forward bends have some active aspects, Parsvotanasana is especially active. The legs, for example, feel even more active than in symmetric forward bends like Padahasthasana and Prasarita Padotanasana, because here they're doing different things: In addition to lengthening along its back side to permit the pelvis to tip forward, the front leg also sweeps weight back onto the rear leg so the upper body can fold forward over the front leg. It's as though the lower body is getting itself out of the way so the upper body can fold forward more easily.

This forward-folding action of the upper body is central to the pose. Opening the spine is not just about relaxation. Too often, people miss the point in Parsvotanasana and passively curl the spine and head down in hopes of touching the forehead to the knee. But Parsvotanasana is really a metaphor for *actively* offering oneself into the divine flow. We need to cooperate with that flow, not just be carried along by it. Divine surrender is not about giving up!

How does this enter into the pose? First, instead of curling the torso toward the leading leg, you tip the pelvis forward and constantly lengthen the torso with the breath: actively with the inhalations, releasing with the exhalations. The direction of the pose is not just "down toward the leg," but "down and forward *along* the leg."

Second, true self-offering means holding nothing back—expressed in Parsvotanasana by keeping the arms behind you, either holding opposite elbows, or holding opposite wrists, or ideally, in Anjali Mudra (which helps direct energy through the ever-opening spine to the brain).

There's no great striving here, but there *is* a sense of active surrender. *Self-offering* is one term for it; *cooperation* is another—cooperation with the ever-present flow of divine grace, the only thing that can take us where we truly want to go. Yes, we relax into that divine flow, but we also swim with the current.

The affirmation catches all those elements: "I offer myself fully into the flow of grace."



## Baddha Konasana—Bound Angle Pose

Here is another one that I'm sure you know, either its upright or forward-bending variation (*both pictured below*), or the supine variation (Supta Baddha Konasana). Although each variation has its own distinct qualities, one *shared* quality is more important: Each facilitates a deep opening of the inner thighs and the entire pelvic region. (The forward-bending and supine variations make this opening a bit more intense, especially the forward-bending variation.)

When we don't feel secure in who we are, and aren't sure whether we can deal with or adapt to whatever comes our way, we tend to protect ourselves. Often this expresses as tension in the pelvic region and inner thighs, as if we're squeezing ourselves down to make a smaller target for life's inevitable blows. Since we never stretch these areas outside of asana practice, such tension can easily become chronic.

Baddha Konasana helps us open these areas, removing the physical reinforcement for the attitudes of insecurity, uncertainty and protection. There's still work to be done to break the habit of overprotecting ourselves or closing off from life, but when we can remove the physical reinforcement supplied by the associated chronic tension, it's easier to do that work. (By the way, we can make the opening even



## Getting the Word Out

A number of serviceful AYTT grads are helping Ananda Yoga "get out there" by facilitating programs in various parts of the world with Gyandev and Diksha. For example, this spring witnessed highly successful weekend retreats in Kentucky and Wisconsin.

If you live near any of the locations below—or if you know someone who does—please support this outreach effort by attending or recommending the event. For information, please contact Gyandev (see page 12).

- Aug 27–Sep 8 ..... Assisi, Italy—"Yogic Insights into Christianity"
- Sept 29–Oct 1 .... Toronto, Ontario—"Yoga for Health and Healing"
- Oct 6–8 ..... Chattanooga, TN—"Yoga for Health and Healing"
- Oct 13–15 ..... Dallas, TX—"Yoga for Health and Healing"
- Jan 5–7, 2007 .... Los Angeles, CA—"Magnetism for Success"
- Jan 18–21 ..... Los Angeles, CA—Gyandev will present at the first-ever Symposium on Yoga Therapy and Research, sponsored by the International Association of Yoga Therapists
- Jan 27 ..... Fresno, CA—"Exploring the Bhagavad Gita through Asana"
- Feb 8–25 ..... Kerala, India—"Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga Retreat" (see page 6)
- March 17 ..... Boulder Creek, CA—topic to be announced

### Will You Help?

Are you willing to help an Ananda program happen near you in 2007? It's a wonderful way to magnetize your own classes—and get re-inspired in the process. A weekend retreat, a day-long workshop, even a half-day workshop—if you're interested, contact Gyandev soon.

more active by pressing the soles of the feet together, which opens the pelvic region and inner thighs even more.)

The affirmation fits beautifully: "Secure in my Self, I accept whatever is." ♦

*This article will conclude in the next issue with a discussion of the other six asanas and their affirmations.*

**LEVEL 2 NEWS***Summer 2006 Highlights***The Therapeutic Use of Asana (June 25–30)**

This is a prerequisite for most future therapeutic Ananda YTT programs. From anatomy to alignment to higher awareness, you'll explore asanas from the inside out—and then back inside again. Led by Nicole DeAvilla.

**Prenatal/Postpartum YTT (July 16–23/July 23–26)**

Learn not only key points of safety and asana modification, but how to use Ananda Yoga to help expectant and new mothers with many of the common difficulties (physiological as well as emotional—plus the element of spiritual change) surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. Led by Nicole DeAvilla.

**★The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita (July 30–Aug 5)**

Immerse yourself in the timeless wisdom of the Gita under the expert guidance of Jyotish and Devi Novak (Ananda's spiritual directors), and Uma Macfarlane—with the inspiration and insight of Swami Kriyananda's landmark new book, *The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*. You'll explore Yogananda's commentaries on the Gita, learn how to apply it to your daily life, and even get ideas for presenting Gita concepts to your own students in ways that work. Also, Gyandev McCord will guide you in exploring the practice and teaching of some more-advanced asanas.

**Meditation Teacher Training Level 2 (Aug 6–13)**

Take your teaching to the next level: deepen your personal practice, gain new teaching skills, and explore with other teachers what works and what doesn't—from content to marketing to emerging trends.

**AYTA CONTACTS**

Membership & AYSutra  
Brook Dunwoody, 530-478-7518 ext. 7088,  
brook@expandinglight.org

Articles & Level 2 Questions  
Gyandev McCord, 530-478-7518 ext. 7081,  
gyandev@expandinglight.org

The Expanding Light  
800-346-5350, 530-478-7518  
info@expandinglight.org

**Level 2 Calendar**

Please remember that AYTA Members receive a **15% discount** on all Level 2 programs. If you need financial aid, please contact The Expanding Light for an application. A "★" indicates a program that is required for Level 2 AYTT certification.

- 6/25–30 ..... **The Therapeutic Use of Asana**
- 6/23–7/2 ... ★**Meditation Teacher Training**
- 7/2–15 ..... ★**AYTT Assistantship**
- 7/16–23 ..... **Prenatal YTT**
- 7/19–23 ..... **Balance Your Core Energy:  
Yoga for the Chakras**
- 7/23–26 ..... **Postpartum YTT**
- 7/27–30 ..... **The Joy of Sanskrit—Level 1**
- 7/30–8/1 .... **The Joy of Sanskrit—Level 2**
- 7/30–8/5 .... ★**The Essence of the  
Bhagavad Gita**
- 8/6–12 ..... **Meditation Teacher Trng—  
Level 2**
- 10/13–22 ... ★**Meditation Teacher Training**
- 10/18–22 ... **Kriya Yoga Step 2:  
Preparation**
- 10/22–11/4 ★**AYTT Assistantship**
- 11/8–12 ..... **Awaken to Supercon-  
sciousness through Yoga**

**2007**

- 2/8–25 ..... **Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga  
in Kerala, India (see p. 6)**
- 3/16–25 ..... ★**Meditation Teacher Training**
- 3/25–4/7 ... ★**AYTT Assistantship**

*The Expanding Light*

14618 Tyler Foote Road  
Nevada City CA 95959  
www.expandinglight.org