

Awake & Ready!

Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga® Teachers Association
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PERSPECTIVE

Getting the Point

Have you ever reached a point with your sadhana—or in your teaching, or in anything else from which you seek fulfillment—where it just wasn't giving you what you wanted? Did you think, "What's wrong; why isn't there more joy"?

Of course you have. Everyone has. But what can we do about it? I'd like to share with you a couple options that have helped me on a number of occasions—including a recent one that spurred me to write this article. The good news is, they're easy.



Gyandev McCord
Director

None of My Business

When I'm stuck, I sometimes let it go for a while, thinking it might work itself out. If it doesn't, I often tinker with my practice: longer meditations, different pranayamas, fewer asanas, more chanting, shorter meditations, harder asanas, more Savasana, etc.

Occasionally this works. "Letting it go" has worked remarkably well for me over the years with machinery—amazingly, mechanical things often "fix themselves"—and sometimes with sadhana, too. And tinkering with my sadhana, making little "technique tweaks," can once in a while produce changes that seem to get me moving again.

Overall, however, this is not a great strategy. Granted, sometimes we're experiencing such a "karmic bomb" that waiting for our practice to improve is about all we can do. But too often it's just a waste of time—and haven't we wasted enough time already? And the problem with technique-tweaking is that it often doesn't address the cause of the problem, which therefore resurfaces later.

It's far better when I realize that the real operative factor is my attitude, and that often my attitude has been wrong: I've been doing my sadhana based on what I get out of it. And while we can't avoid *some* of that attitude—why else would be practice?—we risk defining our practice in terms of whether it pleases us, instead of whether it pleases God. This is "merchant consciousness."

Here we come to that central principle of karma yoga:

nishkam karma, action without desire for its fruits. As much as we want to experience divine bliss, eternal love, fathomless peace, and all that other good stuff, they are none of our business. Why? Because they are the fruits of spiritual practice—and the fruits of all action are God's business, not ours. As Sri Krishna told Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "You have no right to the fruits of your actions. Your only right is to action itself." In other words, our business is what goes *into* our practices, not what comes *out* of them.

I used to hate this idea. "Why act at all, if I can't influence the outcome?" Confessions of a control freak.

Now, however, I find this idea very freeing. It's the reverse idea—"the fruits of our practice are up to us"—that's painful, because then when we compare bliss, love, etc., with what we actually experience, it can be utterly discouraging: "I can *never* do that!" Now that's pain.

Greater minds than ours have had the same thought. In the *Gita*, after Krishna gave Arjuna the teachings of yoga, and told him of its sublime qualities—complete mental tranquility, sense-transcendent bliss, immunity to every sorrow—Arjuna's responded: "But Krishna, I do not experience those high states. My mind is so restless, chaotic, powerful, obstinate—it's like trying to master the wind!" (Who among us cannot relate to that?!)

Krishna's response was: "True, that's the nature of the mind. But you *can* master it—by sadhana and by dispassion." Dispassion, in part, toward the results of your

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Getting the Point

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own sadhana. Why worry about something that's none of your business in the first place? Let's think instead: "Yes, I never *can* do that, because it's not my job. My job is only to make a quality effort; the results are up to God."

What a relief! So when I'm dissatisfied with my practice, ask myself, not "What am I not getting?" but "What am I not giving?" It's usually quite easy to find an answer, and to make a helpful correction, such as:

- *Be more fully present*—Letting the mind roam among all my projects, obligations, and fantasies is *not* a spiritual practice. A quality effort begins with staying engaged with what I'm there to do.
- *Be enthusiastic*—Do I look forward to my practice, or has it become dull routine? Let me make each asana, breath, or kriya an experience to savor, rather than simply "counting down" until the practice finally ends.
- *Practice with gratitude*—Here I am, practicing techniques that can set me free. Might I not practice with gratitude to God, the source of those techniques?
- *Be self-giving*—The lover seeks to please the beloved, not himself. What a beautiful attitude for sadhana!—How can it help but draw God's grace and companionship?
- *"Prime the pump"*—Do I bring into the practice whatever I can manage of the states that I seek—practicing *with* whatever joy, or love, or peace I can manage, and eagerly anticipating even more of those states? This is a powerful application of the law of magnetism to spiritual practice: the more you can be like that which you seek, the more you'll be able to experience it.

All these are very down-to-earth matters. We can manage them if we're willing (granted, that is sometimes a big "if"), because they are *our* business.

AYTA MEMBER NEWS

Running on Empty

We've had a good run lately, as many of you have offered articles for *Awake & Ready!* We even had a backlog of articles for a while. Now, however, the backlog is gone, so please HELP! If you teach a unique population or have had interesting insights or experiences teaching Ananda Yoga, please help make *Awake & Ready!* even better by writing an article about it. We can help you manifest it—short or long—through editing it or interviewing you. If we use your non-interview article of at least 1500 words, you'll get a *free year's membership!* For more information, please contact Gyandev (see page 12).

Missing Us? There *Could* Be a Reason!

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 from the AYSutra list!

We Don't Have to Be Alone in This

Understanding what *is* our business is worth a lot, but if we stop there, we can depend too much on personal effort. Yes, personal effort is important, but unless we're very advanced spiritually, we need help from additional sources.

Herein lies the importance of *satsang*, spiritual companionship (literally, "fellowship with truth"). Being with like-minded, spiritually sincere people can uplift you, even without you doing much; their magnetism will help increase your own magnetism. And if you add to that your own conscious efforts, the result is even greater.

How to find satsang? It's easy for those of us who live in an Ananda community, but what if you live elsewhere? How can you find people who not only understand where you're coming from, but whose very presence can boost your spiritual efforts? This, in part, is what the Level 2 AYTT programs are about: opportunities to draw upon magnetism of a group with whom you already have much in common.

Parvati (Carol) Knight of Boulder Creek, Calif., wrote me recently about her experience last year in Level 2 programs:

"The Level 2 courses have been inspiring, not just because of the course content, but because of who's in the class with you. The fellowship of other AYTT graduates really enriches the courses.

"One of the things I enjoyed most about the *Yoga Sutras* course was the afternoon practice sessions that were only for AYTT grads. Yes, we learned new postures beyond those in Level 1, but the greatest thing was being able to practice with other AYTT grads, most of whom had been actively teaching. As a teacher, it's always a delight to get to be a student. *With attunement to the Ananda style of yoga permeating the room, and no resistance to the teachings, the environment encouraged a deep, fulfilling practice for students and teacher alike. What a joy and blessing to practice along side other teachers of Ananda Yoga!* [italics hers] And I think, what a relief for you, Gyandev, to teach an aligned group of aspiring yogis/yoginis.

"The experience of practicing in an aligned, attuned environment has me looking forward to two more courses this summer: the *Advanced Yoga Intensive* and *Practical Insights from the Bhagavad Gita*."

It's more than relief for me, actually—it's a special joy and privilege, and I, too, look forward to both programs.

We've never offered anything quite like the *Advanced Yoga Intensive* (June 19–24) : a practice-oriented program in which all participants will be experienced in Ananda Yoga—most will be AYTT graduates—and seeking to go *way* deeper into their practice. It will feature long practice sessions emphasizing, not only techniques and practices, but, above all, those two special ingredients: right attitude and the power of satsang. I have a feeling that those five days will be memorable.

If you're longing to take your practice to the next level, I hope you'll come. Let's go deep together. ♦



The Perfect Warm-Up

by Nicole DeAvilla Whiting

What does it mean to “warm up” the body? It means preparing the body to perform physical tasks efficiently with a minimal risk of injury. Scientific studies have provided evidence of the importance of warming up the body to prevent injuries. Without warming up physically, the body will perform poorly, and be at increased risk of injury. It’s like trying to start an old fashioned car without warming it up: it sputters and dies. It is like trying to cook a pancake on a skillet that is not warmed up yet. It takes a long time to get your result (a cooked pancake to eat), and by the time it finally is done it will be dried out and tough. It is like ... okay, so you get the point.

Warming up for hatha yoga has an additional purpose: to prepare the mind to be centered, calm, and focused. A distracted mind prevents the practitioner from reaping the deepest psychological and spiritual benefits from yoga practice. It also prevents one from paying attention to the body as it sends out signals of distress which, if unheeded, can bring about injury.

Asanas as Warm-Ups

So we know that we should warm up at the beginning of our yoga practice. Then why not just use stretching asanas as our warm-ups? After all, isn’t stretching what runners and other athletes do before their workouts?

True, many athletes are doing exactly that. However, a recent study conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) concluded that stretching before an activity does not prevent injuries. A *New York Times* article that reported this study last spring went on to discuss why stretching alone does not warm up the body sufficiently for physical activity. “Warming up, which typically means raising the body temperature enough to send the blood flowing through the muscles, requires more intense activity than stretching.” The article quoted Dr. Stephen B. Thacker, a CDC author of the study, “If you put on your sweats and simply start stretching, your muscles are not necessarily warmed up.”

Then why do so many people continue to stretch before physical activity as a warm-up? After all, the above study is not a cutting edge discovery; it was a compilation of many studies done over nearly sixty years. It seems that pre-workout stretching is simply one more example of a popular activity that even the “experts” once touted as the thing to do

for injury prevention and peak performance—and people are slow to change their beliefs despite evidence to the contrary. The original theory of stretching being a good way to warm up was just that: a *theory* that became popular before being tested. It reminds us that the mere fact that “everybody’s doing it” does not make it true or a good thing to do. This brings to mind some words from “Truth Can Never Die,” one of Swami Kriyananda’s songs: “Oh, never mind if men are wrong, so long as they agree!”

In fact, the current vogue to warm up by stretching is actually backwards: we need to warm up in order to stretch! Or to put it another way, it’s best not to stretch a cold muscle. In fact some experts cited in the above article recommend stretching *after* aerobic activity rather than before. Most experts seem to agree that some stretching is beneficial for athletic performance, but there is still disagreement as to how much is needed.



Nicole teaches Therapeutic Yoga (July 10–15) and Prenatal/Postnatal YTT (July 17–22/22–25) 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.

Good Things Happen When You Warm Up Properly

What makes a good warm-up? If we can understand the physiological mechanisms of warming up the body, then we will understand why stretching is not how we want to start—and we will also be able to understand what we need to do to warm up properly.

Stimulation of Circulation

The most important function of warming up is the stimulation of the circulation of blood throughout the body. With the start of muscular contraction, the heart rate rises, thus increasing circulation. (Interestingly, even just

the thought of performing a muscular contraction will cause the heart rate to rise, so some authorities hypothesize that the increased heart rate is the result of psychic stimuli acting on the medulla oblongata.) This brings oxygen and other fuels to the muscle cells, which enables the cells to continue working (contracting)*. As the fuels are “burned” in the cells, about 25% of the energy released is used for muscle contraction; the other 75% of the energy is released as heat.

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* Muscle cells can contract for a limited time without the help of fuels from the bloodstream, since some fuels (ATP and glycogen) are already stored within the cells.



The Perfect Warm-Up

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Warming up also gives the blood vessels in the muscles time to dilate and thus increase the blood flow, making a greater supply of oxygen available to the muscles for more-demanding exercise. When the oxygen supply for the task is inadequate, the muscles cannot perform at their optimal level; in addition to diminished muscle strength and/or endurance, there is a greater risk of injury and muscle soreness.

Synovial Fluid

Adequate warm-ups also stimulate the synovial fluid in the joints. Synovial fluid is a viscous (“thick”) fluid within a joint cavity. It provides protective cushioning and lubrication within a joint. It also brings nutrients to joint tissues that have no direct blood supply. The amount of water in the joints goes up and down with exercise and rest. If joints are stretched suddenly, even the fluid does not fill all the space and the lining may jump into the vacuum formed, which is how people “click” their finger joints.

“Cartilage has no blood supply,” explains P. Z. Pearce, MD, a sports medicine expert quoted by the Group Health Cooperative at www.ghc.org. “When you move your joints, the cartilage soaks up the synovial fluid inside the joint like a sponge” This action draws more water and nutrients into the capsule. Moving a joint through its full range of motion is thought to be the best way to activate the production of synovial fluid from the synovial membrane and increase the flow of nutrients into the capsule. In addition, waste products are released out of the capsule through the synovial membrane.

The stimulation of synovial fluid is especially important to older individuals and those whose injuries have resulted in a decreased flow of synovial fluid. After age 35, synovial fluid becomes thinner and we produce less of it, says Dr. Pearce. Also, many older individuals tend to become less active and therefore, are not maintaining the health of their joints as well as they could.

Breathing

Breathing is an important element in the warm-up process. The muscle contraction and release during deep, conscious breathing stimulates circulation, making fresh oxygen available to the muscles. Relaxed, deep breathing also calms the mind and reduces muscular tension. Muscles can perform more efficiently when we are breathing diaphragmatically without excess tension. Thus pranayamas are an excellent way to begin warming up.

Concentration

The warm-up process also serves to focus attention and enhance concentration. The warm-up period is a good time to evaluate and address one’s physical and/or mental tensions. Yoga warm-ups should prepare not only the body, but also the mind and the intuitive self, coordinating them to ensure maximum benefit from yoga practice.

The Value of Pauses

As mentioned above, warming up stimulates the body by carrying needed oxygen to the muscles via the blood. As we move into more demanding asanas, even more oxygen is needed, so our breath and heart rate naturally increase. When muscles are asked to perform beyond their normal capacity (which is necessary to build stronger muscles, though taking this to excess will cause injuries),

the metabolic process that takes place during this effort puts the muscles into “oxygen debt.” When the muscles rest after the effort ends, the “debt” is paid off as more oxygen is delivered; this helps prevent muscle soreness. When we pause after an asana until the breath returns to a normal rate, oxygen can then reach the muscles, which not only fuels subsequent muscle activity in the next asana, but helps prevent muscle soreness by paying off the oxygen debt in a timely manner.

Of course, this is also a time for bringing the energy deeper into the spine and to experience the gross and subtle energy benefits of the asana. However, care must be taken not to rest too long, or else the “warming up” effect—as well as concentration, perhaps—will be lost.

An Ideal Warm-Up Routine

What are the main requirements for a good warm-up routine? Well, it should:

- Activate all of the major muscle groups, thus warming up the muscles and stimulating the circulation.
- Move all the joints in the body in order to stimulate the synovial fluid.
- Involve conscious use of the breath to increase the efficiency of the exercises as well as to calm and center the mind.
- Take into account the time of day, weather, temperature, and one’s state of mind, as all of these factors influence the body.
- Accommodate special needs groups (seniors, pregnant women, etc.) via custom-tailored warm-ups.

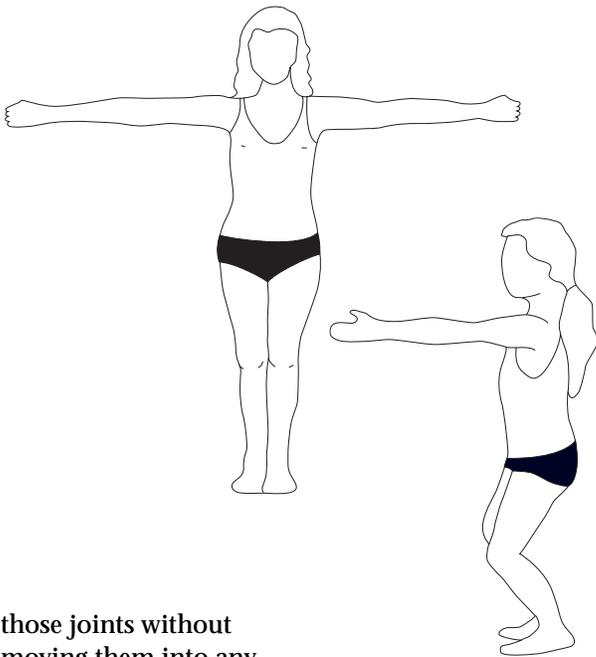
The Energization Exercises are ideally designed for these needs (in addition to all their more-profound benefits). Let’s take a closer look to see why.

After the opening prayer, which focuses the mind and opens one up to the spiritual aspects of the practice, the EE’s

To warm up by stretching is actually backwards: we need to warm up in order to stretch! Or to put it another way, it’s best not to stretch a cold muscle.



begin with “double breathing, palms touching.” The strong pranayama immediately brings in fresh oxygen that will be needed for warming up the body. It efficiently eliminates toxins by emptying the lungs of old, stale air from the lower lobes to make room for more fresh air, and thus more oxygen. In the meantime, muscles throughout the entire body are being contracted in a low-medium-high fashion, followed by a high-medium-low-full release. This is then repeated several times. This action efficiently stimulates the circulation without requiring the muscles to overwork before being properly warmed up. Concurrently, many joints are being flexed and extended, which stimulates the synovial fluid in



those joints without moving them into any extreme positions. Not a bad start at all!

The EE's continue to work up and down the body, so that every major group of muscles is activated and all the joints are moved. The physical energy is moved up the spine several times throughout the sequence, which helps us tune into the life-force and bring it inward and upward. This prepares us to do likewise (inward and upward) with the energy during our asana practice.

Since the muscles are never held in tension for a long period of time, applying the motto, “Tense with will, then relax and feel,” gives time for oxygen replenishment to the muscles as they alternately contract and relax.

Also, whenever the heart rate and/or breath are greatly sped up during the EE's, there quickly follows an exercise that helps bring both back down naturally, while continuing with the warm-up. For example, running in place, which increases the heart and breath rates, is immediately followed by the fencing exercise, which (a) does not demand as much oxygen, and (b) is coupled with the

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INSPIRATIONS

The Gift

by **Korelle Hendee, Rushford, MN**

I wanted to meditate, honestly I did.
So I went to the pond and closed my eyelids.
A full moon was rising up over the trees.
My soul was uplifted, and my heart filled with glee.

I sat on a bench with my spine calmly erect.
The night was so peaceful and weather perfect.
As I chanted softly the song, “Life is Sweet,”
The breeze in the trees started flowing through me.
I took a double breath in and tensed my body tight,
Then exhaled all my tension to the air of the night.

I inhaled deep and let all the air out,
I paused in the middle, all with even count.
Then I settled my mind with natural breathing,
Turned my attention inward, away from the evening,
Where bullfrogs were croaking and crickets chirping,
Some deer were grazing and a raccoon quietly lurking—
All around me life was doing its thing
While I concentrated on breathing and meditating.

With mantra and breath rising up and down my spine,
The calming effect became intensely sublime.
While anxious thoughts tried their very best
To distract me, annoy me, and cause me unrest,
I simply gathered them like a bunch of balloons.
Letting go, I watched them disappear into blue.

Some people think meditating is a mind gone blank
Like the time I ran my head into the end of a plank.
So it's hard to explain to my friends who don't know.
To understand you have to feel the upward energy flow,
The opening heart and expansion of the mind,
The day-to-day changes helping you become more loving and kind.

Sitting in the silence, so sweet and so still,
There's just nothing better than this Divine thrill.
After sweet silence, I get a glimpse so clear:
I'm not here, nor there, but everywhere.
I draw that peace deep into my spine
And keep it upheld in my spiritual eye.

Closing with invocation and healing prayers
To loved ones and Soul friends in need everywhere,
To bow to my teachers for showing me the way,
To Master's Guidance and God's loving light ray.



The Perfect Warm-Up (continued from page 5)

highly efficient double breath, so it eliminates any oxygen deficit quickly and brings the breath rate back down. Another example of this is after Uddiyana Bandha (stomach recharging): the breath wants to quickly “catch up,” and the repeat of double breathing, palms touching immediately following it calms the breath down effectively—not by mere rest, but by controlled breathing.

The EE's become especially dynamic and effective as a warm-up when the other motto, “The greater the will, the greater the flow of energy,” is applied. As the energy flows, blood circulation is stimulated and the joints become well “oiled.” A half-hearted effort will result in a less warming warm-up, but done properly, there will be no question as to whether your body is warmed up or not when you have finished the EE's.

It sounds like these exercises must have been designed by a master! And of course, they were. Yogananda once said that if you were on a deserted island and had no other techniques but the Energization Exercises—and if you practiced them—you could reach enlightenment.

Just imagine—a warm-up so perfect that it enlightens you!

Energization in Your Classes

Now I know that some of you are saying, “Warming up with the EE's might be good advice for me personally, but I don't think my students at the yoga studio—let alone my gym yoga class—will go for them.” My response is, “Have you tried it? If you do it with enthusiasm, make it fun, and really get them participating, you may be pleasantly surprised to find a positive reaction.”

“But then,” you continue, “what about people with injuries, who should not be doing things like twisting their lower back like an old-fashioned washing machine, or pregnant women who should not be practicing Uddiyana Bandha and perhaps a couple other of the EE's?” My response is that the EE's are like any other asanas or exercises, in that you may need to adapt certain ones for a particular person's special needs. For example, Yogananda said to apply low or medium tension to an injured

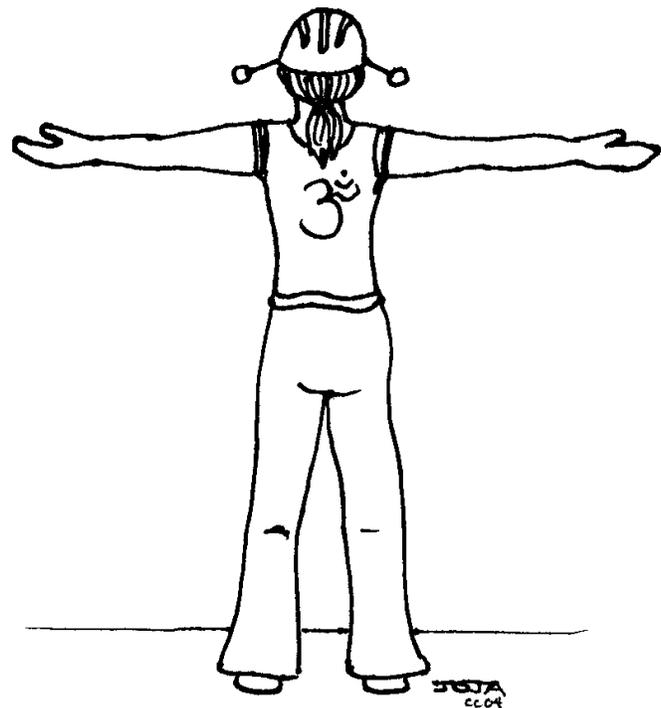
area. Or if any tension at all would be painful or uncomfortable, one can use no tension at all: just mentally send energy to that area, visualizing it flowing there.

In the meantime, I urge you to consider using at least a few of the EE's as part of a warm-up routine for your students. Double breathing, palms touching is a great one that even your most athletic students will be able to relate to, as will some of your more delicate ones. Skull tapping and scalp massage are always fun to do. Some of your own favorites would be good ones to try as well. Uddiyana Bandha is a traditional, but often forgotten, hatha yoga technique. When you explain its abdominal toning, digestive, and reproductive organ benefits—not to mention the subtle energetic benefits—your students will

happily churn away as you encourage them to bring that energy inward and upward!

Remember, by not introducing your students to the EE's, you may be denying them not only a great warm-up routine, but an opportunity for Enlightenment! ♦

A half-hearted effort will result in a less warming warm-up, but done properly, there will be no question as to whether your body is warmed up or not when you have finished the EE's. It sounds like these exercises must have been designed by a master!



When you just can't master mirroring...

by Jennifer Oja, AYTT 11/2004



Can You Teach Ananda Yoga in a Fitness Center?

by David B. Ramsden, RYT

Ever since I began to teach Ananda Yoga, I'd managed to stay away from fitness clubs. It seemed to me that Ananda Yoga would not be well received in these mainstream clubs. However, all that changed last year when the Northwest Fitness Complex here in Portland contacted Ananda Portland in autumn 2003, asking for a yoga instructor.

I actually wasn't too keen on getting the job, so in the interview I told them that I wasn't interested in power yoga, or the so-called ashtanga yoga that isn't Patanjali's, or any other aerobic form of yoga. I informed them that I teach a more gentle and inward style. But they were open to that, since their last yoga instructor had been too hard for most of their members to follow; she usually left students out of breath and exhausted. In addition, the Complex tends to draw an older crowd, and the manager felt they might welcome my style.

The interview was full of questions, but with my training and experience, I was hired the next day to teach two morning classes a week. Their previous yoga classes had been only an hour, which I felt was too short to include all the elements of a good class, so I insisted that the classes increase to seventy-five minutes. The managers consented—my first victory in the fitness club arena!

Reality Check

The Complex is pretty standard. As you walk in, you see several people on treadmills—they appear to be dying, but distracting themselves from their dire condition by watching TV or reading a book. The loud music playing just outside the yoga room is the same music played in most fitness clubs: it pounds the ever-present musical theme of, “Beat your body! Beat your body!”

The yoga room has nice wood floors, but the walls are surrounded with mirrors, weights, and chairs, with no wall space at all for asanas. Worst of all was the temperature: they keep it at 61 degrees because it is mainly used as an aerobics classroom, a practice that is typical for most health clubs.

I quickly saw that, even though the yoga students had been with the previous instructor for eight months, they had been given (or had absorbed) very little instruction on how to do any of the postures correctly. They had just been following along at her rapid pace—and since she said she was “teaching yoga,” they believed they were now accom-

plished yoga students. Not so! I'm still not sure what they had been doing, but it appeared to have been some sort of aerobic movement. Some of the students had loved it and were wondering what style of yoga I was doing. I told them it was a classical style of yoga, and they said they once had an instructor who did yoga a bit like that. I wanted to tell them

that their last teacher was not teaching yoga at all, but I decided to let them think it was just another style. (I've since learned that here is a high turnover in yoga instructors for fitness centers, and it tends to confuse students when they see so many different styles.)

All this meant that my first two classes had to be “back to basics.” Through these, I quickly gained the respect of my students for my knowledge of yoga. I could actually provide clear instructions on how to get into and out of each posture, with safety tips, etc. How novel! But even though they appreciated and benefited from that knowledge, they still wanted a challenging routine for their bodies. So in the third class, I led them through a difficult routine, just to let them know they could be challenged in this style.

After two weeks, I felt a bit frustrated. The studio was still cold. Some students still

thought yoga was supposed to be aerobic. That awful, loud, pounding music was still playing. And I still had a difficult mix of students: seniors, stiff younger students, persons with strength but little flexibility, and a few overambitious students who wanted challenging postures regardless of whether they could safely get into and out of them. Not an easy group. I was beginning to wonder whether I could pull it off.

Then things began to change. After two weeks of trying everything I could think of to get management to turn up the heat, I finally got them to keep my classroom at 67 degrees. I was also able to get them lower the volume of the music in the main room during my classes. Two more substantial victories for my Ananda Yoga classes!

Going into my fourth class, I realized I needed to offer a way that they could see their evolution as yoga students. I needed an approach that was within the Ananda style, but also satisfied this diverse group whose primary goal was bodily conditioning. So for the next two classes, I began to establish a basic routine of yoga postures that would facilitate that. It's a format that I still use.



David lives in the Ananda Portland community. He teaches nine classes each week—six at Ananda's Portland Mandir and three at Portland's Northwest Fitness Complex.

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Can You Teach Ananda Yoga in a Fitness Center? (continued from page 7)

Finding Out What Works

As students arrive, I have blankets and ties at every station. I bring my own props, because as with most fitness clubs, this club has very few—just some 3/4" foam mats that give good padding for knees, but not much else. The Complex sells yoga mats, and most students bring their own.

I always start right on time—allowing latecomers to enter the classroom quietly—with listening to the breath and noticing where tension is in the body. Then we do 2–3 simple pranayamas, followed by several easy and centering warm-ups with shoulders, upper body, and neck—all while seated cross-legged (or, for some, in a chair). We do the arm position of the eagle pose (often with a strap) and other simple stretches, an easy cross-legged twist, and a basic sideways stretch. We often do the Circle of Joy and a few Energization Exercises as well. Finally we work with the neck and the jaw. The warm-ups are slow, inward, and focused. There are many, many warm-ups to choose from, so it's not hard to keep them varied and interesting. [Editor's note: See Nicole DeAvilla's article, "The Perfect Warm-Up," in this issue.]

Of course, I have to adjust this routine to stay within the students' ability to sit comfortably. Most students have no idea how to sit, so it's very important to teach them how. Even then, if you keep them sitting for very long, it will not be enjoyable. I try to choose sitting warm-ups that can be done easily in a chair, so seniors and inflexible students can participate fully. Not everyone can sit cross-legged, but—wouldn't you know it?—some students who should use chairs don't want to use them.

In preparation for standing asanas, we increase the intensity with some standing warm-ups. For example, we do circles with one leg while balancing on the other leg. Or we

extend each leg to the front, back, and side, then raise the knee and go into a tree pose as a warm-up (so that later when we do the softer version of the tree pose, they'll be practiced and won't be a bunch of swaying trees). I sometimes use a few classical asanas as warm-ups, too.

After a few energetic standing warm-ups, I begin a basic Ananda Yoga routine with standing poses. Since they have been worked out via the warm-ups, they are better able to relax and move more inwardly into the pose. I often do a standard set of postures: Ardha Chandrasana, Padahasthasana, Backward Bend, Vrikasana, Trikonasana, etc. (I don't often use the Sanskrit asana names with these students.)

Next, we do one round of Surya Namaskar—slowly and with a focus on alignment. I like this sequence because there are so many variations. If you know how to present it, almost anyone can do it—yet there are also difficult variations to satisfy the Type-A's. (Speaking of variations, one thing that always amazes me is that, even though I give alternative ways to do a posture, every student—even the most unlimber and sickly of the bunch—wants to try the hardest way. It seems they feel that, if they're not doing something heroic, they're not really exercising. I don't mind them trying, but I'm always alert to postures that might hurt them. Improper alignment of neck, spine, or knees is something that should not be overlooked; it must be corrected as soon as you see it.)

Next come the seated and floor postures: Janushirasana, Rajakapotasana, cat/cow, Balasana, Sasangasana, etc. We don't do "major" inversions like Sarvangasana, because there is no good wall space (wall-to-wall mirrors and prop storage) and there are too many levels of students. Besides, only one or two are flexible enough to do inversions safely, and I have too little time. I am sure that some of the inflexible over-achievers would throw their bodies up into positions that they shouldn't be in at all. If I had better wall space, I could at least do legs-up-the-wall pose with pillows under the buttocks. I know inversions are central to Ananda Yoga, but fitness centers make it a bit difficult. Anyway, no one has seemed to care.

We end with a deep relaxation for about eight minutes.

Helping Fitness Students Understand the Core of the Practice

I vary the routine from class to class, but we always work on the alignment of the basic poses. I myself haven't perfected any of them yet, so I know it takes time—and patience—for students to learn proper alignment. The reward, however, is that they go deeper into yoga practice. They begin to see the inward, and not just the outward, form of hatha yoga, and the power it has to transform their lives.

I always use the asana affirmations. I find that students invariably appreciate them wherever I go. Often students will

*I always use the asana affirmations.
I find that students invariably
appreciate them wherever I go.*

★ WANTED ★

Your Marketing Ideas

Have you created a new flyer or brochure? a new ad? a new business card? a new "something else" that you use to promote your classes?

Or has a newspaper or magazine article been written about you?

Whatever it is, please send Gyandev a copy so we can include it in the collection that we show to everyone during the last week of AYTT.

We might even have space to print some particularly noteworthy ideas in upcoming issues of *Awake & Ready!*



ask for a list of the affirmations, so I make them available on my web site (www.yogaforjoy.com)—attributing them to Ananda Yoga, of course. [Editor's note: Many Ananda Yoga teachers sell the flash cards to their students. AYTA members receive a discount on a purchase of six or more decks. Please contact Mary Weber at 800-346-5350 to order.]

I kept the pauses short at first because the concept was new to this group, but I never leave them out completely; they're just too important to the overall practice. Most fitness students don't understand the purpose of a pause; they think it's a waste of time. They are Type-A and want to move. So to avoid losing them during the pauses, you have to keep them busy—if not physically, then mentally. For example, during the pause, I'll remind them, "Put equal weight on both feet," or "Breathe from the lower lungs," or "Roll the shoulders back and down."

Also, I have to be careful not to teach something that the students aren't ready for; otherwise, it can cause a bit of trouble. For example, a fitness club class might not respond to an instruction to "feel the effect of the pose," because many just aren't able to feel it yet. I believe that the key is to guide them into what they should be observing during the pause. After about twelve classes, they finally begin to enjoy the stillness between the postures. (Patience, I've found, is the key to teaching Ananda Yoga to this group.) The pauses become invaluable not only for helping students feel what's happening inside and re-center themselves, but for avoiding injuries to older, inflexible bodies that may otherwise be trying to play catch-up with younger, more-athletic students.

Assisting Students—A Valuable Skill

Of course, adjusting students is an important aspect of being a good yoga teacher. But how to adjust them is always a question. For example, if a person is doing Adho Mukha Shvanasana in correctly, it may be due to any of several factors: insufficient shoulder/arm strength, limited flexibility in the hips or shoulders, tight hamstrings, or simply lack of body awareness. The Complex doesn't use medical questionnaires, so like all yoga teachers, I must rely on my observation skills—and ask questions if necessary. As long as a student is not in a dangerous position, there's no need to rush in and assist. Trying to bring a person physically deeper into a pose may do more harm than good.

Normally I sometimes model and sometimes adjust, but recently I had two non-yoga-related accidents that put me on crutches for quite a while. I couldn't practice or even demonstrate poses for the students. But by using students as models and talking them through the asanas, I managed to miss only one week of classes. And as I concentrated on ways to adjust the students, they came to love the adjustments. As in classes

everywhere, many new students have no idea what their bodies are doing; they rely on the instructor to help them, and will feel neglected if left alone.

"I Rise Joyfully to Meet Each New Opportunity!"

One thing I have learned in this class is the need for strengthening postures. Often hatha yoga is considered to be merely a means for gaining flexibility. But flexibility without strength leads to a poor yoga practice—and quite possibly, to injuries. I have been in classes where the challenge and strength of yoga is missing. And I've seen that fitness club students will not stay around long without it.

Is Ananda Yoga challenging enough for a fitness club? Just take a half-hour class with Gyandev, and you will see it

provides ample challenge. If you provide them with a bit of challenge, they are more ready to relax and enjoy the postures. (Of course if you are going to provide the challenge, then you must keep up your own private practice to gain the strength yourself. For me, doing asanas, Energization Exercises, and walking provides all the strength training I need.)

I still have to choose my words somewhat carefully on occasion—for example, I know that I have a few fundamentalist Christians in my class. However, I have never heard of a complaint about anything I have said. And although I don't change the wording of affirmations, I am careful to explain them when necessary. Given a context for understanding them, students are much more receptive. I must admit that I go out on the limb at times as I continue to teach the broader yoga principles behind hatha yoga. But I feel that we must teach what we are inspired to do, else we ourselves will lose touch with our own divine presence.

How are my classes doing?

I added a Saturday class about eight months ago, and the staff and owners often attend my classes. I have a very good core of people coming to all of the classes. But the best part is that they are beginning to understand and appreciate the virtues of Ananda Yoga. ♦

A Long-Range Bulletin

In 2006, The Expanding Light plans to offer a week-long program for yoga teachers from other traditions who would like to learn how to teach Ananda Yoga and enter Ananda's Level 2 certification track. To enter the program, the teachers will have to be RYT 200 or RYT 500 with Yoga Alliance. If you know anyone who would be interested, please contact Gyandev (see page 12) so he can send the information when it becomes available later this year. Thanks very much.

Most fitness students don't understand the purpose of a pause between asanas; they think it's a waste of time. They are Type-A and want to move. So you have to keep them busy—if not physically, then mentally.

Update: Teaching Ananda Yoga in a Public School

by Susan Brochin

In the Fall 2003/winter 2004 issue of *Awake & Ready!* (available in the archives at www.AnandaYoga.org), Susan wrote an inspiring article about her teaching of Ananda Yoga in public schools. At that time, she was about to embark on a seven-week series, funded by a Jeannie Ritchie grant, in which she would instruct other classroom teachers in how to integrate yoga into the classroom. Following is her report on that series and on some wonderful subsequent developments.

Our classes began right before the holiday break in December 2003 and continued until the second week in March 2004. We met whenever it was convenient for the teachers. Looking back, it was a great success, in terms of both how much the teachers enjoyed it, and how much they have integrated it into their classrooms since that time.

Before I describe what we did, I should note that I had some qualms about training “yoga teachers,” some of whom had never before practiced yoga—and at that, training them in just 14 hours! But I knew that they were not actually going to be yoga teachers as much as do some postures with their kids, bringing certain aspects of yoga into the classroom. I gave them way more than I knew they would use. Several of them, though, did have a yoga practice, and those were the ones who had more of an interest and desire to use the techniques. As it has turned out, many of the teachers who stayed with me afterward for yoga classes have used the techniques more. In addition, our Physical Education teacher has gone on to take more training, and has used yoga more in her own program as well.



Susan lives in Mountain View, Calif. In addition to teaching at her school, she teaches at Ananda's East West Bookshop, Ananda Palo Alto, and Fit from the Core fitness center.

Following the Program Flow

In the first class, the teachers received an Ananda Yoga session for themselves, so they could have a point of reference. We spent the next five weeks on pranayama, exploring different postures, and ways to introduce and teach them to their students. There was ample time for questions and discussions.

We needed to address many pragmatic issues for schoolteachers who want to offer yoga to their students, so we devoted fully one-half of a session to such topics as:

- How to deal with questions from parents
- How to work with a child who prefers not to participate
- How to set up the classroom for yoga
- Practicing outdoors vs. indoors
- Sequencing
- How to fit yoga into an already overcrowded and demanding schedule

It was important not to forget the teachers themselves. So each week, no matter what, they were given at least a ten-minute guided deep relaxation. For many it was their favorite part, since all day long, teachers give out to others without receiving back.

The main thing with this type of training is, of course, follow-through. So many new ideas are introduced, and there is already a huge menu of things we need to and want to do with our kids. So there's a lot of potential for yoga to get pushed aside. But I'm happy to report that I still get frequent reports of successful yoga sessions with students.

Rounds Two, and Three, and ...

A few of the teachers did not want to stop yoga, so we set up an eight-week series just for them. The group was small and very enthusiastic.

In the autumn of 2004, we repeated the seven-week series with six very enthusiastic teachers from all over the district. We had fourteen hours of class time over the seven weeks: one hour each week was devoted to bringing yoga into the classroom, and the other hour was devoted to the teachers' own practices.

To Learn More about Teaching Yoga to Children ...

Susan will be a special guest teacher in the Sharing Yoga with Children program, June 26–July 1 at The Expanding Light. She'll share what she's learned, both about teaching yoga to children and about bringing yoga into public schools, and she'll lead you through routines that she has found to work well with children.

In addition, program leader Nitai Deranja, who founded the Ananda Schools and now directs the high school at Ananda Village, will share with you the wealth of wisdom he's gained from many years of teaching children. The program is all about applying the yoga teachings—*raja* and *hatha* yoga—to childhood education and development.



We were able to have in-depth discussions about the benefits of yoga practice, both for our students and for ourselves. One significant day was spent gaining an intuitive understanding of how our energy, attitude, and response to the students impacts the classroom climate. In the evaluations of the class series, several teachers mentioned this session as having the most practical impact on their teaching and relationships with students.

The Ball Keeps Rolling

In the latest reports from Oak Knoll, the grant school, yoga is now an integral part of the Physical Education program, and several teachers are including yoga practices in their curricula.

In the autumn of 2004, we also piloted a six-week "Introduction to Middle School" class for our new sixth graders. One of the components was coping with stress, and we incorporated yoga as one of the modules. My middle school asked me to make a yoga video for this (rather than leaving my home classroom to do demos in each of the other eight classrooms). Do you remember from my earlier article a boy named Ted, who was so enthusiastic about and dedicated to his yoga practice? Well, we used Ted as the star of the video, and it was shown to all nine classes at the school. It was quite a success!

In addition, the yoga club at the middle school is going strong. Ted still comes to yoga club and is quite committed to his yoga practice. He confidentially informed me that his nickname among the very peer-conscious eighth grade is "Yoga Ted," and he seemed proud to have earned that.

But Ted isn't the only one who comes. The yoga effort has resulted in a very committed group of students who regularly attend the yoga club. Also, there is a young man in the club—a son of a fellow yoga teacher from another tradition—who enjoys the club so much that, each week, he brings with him more potential yogis and yoginis. We are running strong at 8–10 kids per session.

All of this has been a very exciting journey for me. With adults in our yoga classes, we often have ongoing relationships and learn about the impact of yoga on their lives. But with children—whether we're teaching them in regular school classes or teaching them yoga—it's only occasionally that we hear about what happens to them as time passes. Nevertheless, we know from our own yoga experience the value of these teachings and techniques, and we know that as we plant this little seed of yoga in those young bodies, they cannot help but be impacted positively in their lives. In my estimation, the potential benefit from sharing yoga with children is great, and I feel very blessed to have had these opportunities. ♦

INSPIRATIONS

A Little Miracle

by Lisa Holliman, Seattle, WA

One day last summer in the Ananda Seattle Yoga Day Camp, we received a new student named Maya. Sometimes parents sign their children up for camps without the child knowing much about the camp, and this was the case with Maya. She had simply wanted to come to our camp because of a friend's recommendation.

The first words that Maya said to me, "What is yoga? And I am Jewish, and I will not bow to anyone." I was a little stunned at this from a six-year-old, but I replied, "It's okay. At our camp, you won't have to do anything that you feel uncomfortable with."

As the days passed, she sat in our "circle time" and shared many stories about being Jewish, and teaching all of us Hebrew. And at our yoga sadhana, although she did eventually participate, on the first two days she tried to pull other students away from their practice. I tried

everything, from having her help lead, to having her help me with the mats, to having her ring the meditation bell. As the week proceeded, she would either fall asleep during yoga, or do a couple of postures and go outside before we were finished.

During the second week, Maya began to soften. After the visualization, I had the children write in their journals about their experiences. Maya was very gifted, and she loved this part of the program; she always wanted to share what she wrote. So I began to have her help me with passing out pens and journals after our sadhana.

As the second week went by, she stayed in yoga more often, and actually began to love that time together. She even wanted to lead the class in Warrior Pose. After sadhana on the next-to-last day of the camp, I invited the children to write something in their journals, to share tomorrow at the next day's end-of-camp celebration with all the parents. While I was walking around the room, just watching them writing, I looked down at the open book on Maya's yoga mat. The title of her poem was. "God, God, God!"

I was so surprised, I almost began to cry. I knelt down by her, looked her in the eye, and said, "Maya, did you know that Paramhansa Yogananda wrote a poem with that very same title?" She was so proud the last day of camp, that she stood up in front of the whole crowd reading from her journal, saying how much she loved the Ananda Yoga Day Camp, and how much she loved God!



**LEVEL 2 NEWS****Upcoming Level 2 Programs**

AYTA Members receive a **15% discount** on all Level 2 programs, which more than pays for your membership. If you need financial aid, please apply; call or e-mail The Expanding Light for an application.

Advanced Yoga Intensive (June 19–24)

Take your practice to the next level via advanced techniques of Ananda Yoga—from more-challenging (or just different) asanas, to powerful pranayamas/bandhas/mudras, to more-dynamic meditations. Led by Gyandev McCord, this program is all about longer, deeper practice, including many techniques briefly covered in other Level 2 programs.

Prenatal YTT (July 17–22) • Postpartum YTT (July 22–25)

Nicole DeAvilla helps you explore the safest, most effective, most helpful, most enjoyable ways to teach yoga to women during and after pregnancy. These comprehensive trainings include illustrated teaching resources, as well as Nicole's extensive experience with both the practice and teaching of prenatal and postpartum yoga.

AYTA CONTACTS

For Membership Questions:
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Practical Insights from the Bhagavad Gita (July 31–August 6)

Immerse yourself in the timeless wisdom of the Gita under the expert guidance of Jyotish and Devi Novak (Ananda's spiritual directors), and Uma Meshorer. You'll explore Yogananda's commentaries on the Gita, and how to apply it to your daily life. You'll even get ideas for how to present ideas from the Gita to your students. Also, Gyandev McCord will guide you in exploring the practice and teaching of some more-advanced asanas.

Level 2 Calendar

A "★" indicates a program that is required for Level 2 AYTT certification.

- 5/4–8 Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 5/26–6/5 ... Yoga of the Heart®
- 6/16–19 Restorative YTT
- 6/19–24 Advanced Yoga Intensive
- 6/23–26 The Joy of Sanskrit I
- 6/26–28 The Joy of Sanskrit II
- 6/26–7/1 ... Sharing Yoga with Children
- 6/23–7/3 ... ★Meditation Teacher Training
- 7/3–16 ★AYTT Assistantship
- 6/10–15 Therapeutic Yoga
- 7/17–23 Meditation Teacher Trng. Level 2
- 7/17–22 Prenatal YTT
- 7/22–25 Postpartum YTT
- 7/31–8/6 ★Practical Insights from the Bhagavad Gita
- 8/7–12 Yoga to Awaken Chakras
- 8/7–14 ★Advanced Pranayama
- 10/19–23 ... Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 10/6–16 ★Meditation Teacher Training
- 10/16–29 ... ★AYTT Assistantship
- 10/30–11/4 . Deeper into Spirit of Yoga

Special Notice

If you'd like to attend one or both "The Joy of Sanskrit" programs, please register by May 15 if possible. We need to know that we have enough students before Dhananjaya can buy his airline tickets for the flight from India.

The Expanding Light

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