ANANDA YOGA
For Higher Awareness

Awake & Ready!

Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga® Teachers Association
Vol. 10 No. 2 • Summer 2005

PERSPECTIVE

"I am free! I am free!" — Yeah, right.

Have you ever found yourself in an asana, beginning the affirmation, when suddenly the loudest voice in your head was not the affirmation, but an objection: "Who are you kidding? You don't feel that way. C'mon, get real!"

Yeah, me too. The classic example is Utkatasana's affirmation: "My body is no burden. It is light as air." No doubt there have been times when your inner dissenter piped up: "Yes it is! And no it isn't!" How deep can you go when that's happening?!

Gyandev McCord
Director

Recently, I was asked about this by someone who loves to practice affirmation—in or out of asanas. They have been invaluable to her overall health, but she lamented that sometimes disbelief throws a wrench in the works. "What," she asked, "can I do about it?"

Of course, this can happen with all affirmations (not just asana affirmations), as well as with chanting, mantra, prayer, meditation, and positive thinking generally. Fortunately, there *are* some things we can do, and because all these techniques are highly personal practices, different approaches work best for different people. Let's look at a few approaches from the perspective of affirmations.

Full Speed Ahead!

One approach is simply to do the affirmation anyway, with all the belief and energy you can muster, hoping that, on some level of your being, mere repetition of the affirmation will do some good.

In fact, that's not a bad idea. As you've no doubt observed, repetition of any words—beneficial or not—over a long period of time tends to affect your thoughts, actions, and self-image. I recall a friend who one day suddenly realized that, for a long time, she'd often been responding to questions by saying: "I don't know. *I really don't know*." And she realized that, voilá: she had become quite unclear in her thinking and hesitant in her behavior.

It can work in the same way with affirmation, except positively. Even if you don't believe the affirmation, the very repetition can begin to drum it into your subconscious mind. Eventually, your subconscious will begin to feed back to your conscious mind at least part of the affirmation rather than its opposite.

This approach works for some people, most notably those who tend to be optimistic and/or have developed a lot of self-discipline. The down side, however, is threefold.

First, it's a "sledgehammer approach," and many of us are not drawn to that sort of thing. It can feel like we're going against our own inclinations, which can make us rebel against our own efforts to change. Not good.

Second, the results of affirmation come from, not just the words we're repeating, but our underlying attitude. If that attitude runs strongly counter to the words—e.g., "I don't believe this!"—then what we're driving deeper and deeper into our subconscious habit structure may be, not the affirmation, but our disbelief in it. Again, not good.

Finally, this approach ignores the fact that the true power of affirmation comes, not merely from its effect on the subconscious mind (beneficial though that is), but from the fact that it can help us tune into the superconscious, the one source of all lasting change. Mere repetition cannot take us to superconsciousness; that requires a more sensitive, refined, and dynamic effort. To put it another way, we can't sledgehammer our way to God!

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Build Up Your Bank Account

Many of us, therefore, need to find a different approach to "affirmation disbelief." I decided to ask around. A wise man once said: "When in doubt, ask your wife." (An even wiser man probably said, "Even when not in doubt, ask your wife.") So I asked Diksha, who has long worked very effectively with affirmations.

"I've never considered a question like that" she replied immediately. "I don't even ask myself whether I believe the affirmation. I just do it."

Seeing the surprise on my face, she explained: "For the first four years I lived at Ananda Village, I used the affirmations in the book *Affirmations for Self-Healing* exactly as Swami Kriyananda suggests: one affirmation all week, each week. I didn't try to understand them, or ask whether I believed them. I just did them, over and over. And they changed me. I began to feel the power in them, and I wanted to attune myself to that power."

"It wasn't a mental thing," she continued, "analyzing the affirmations and deciding whether I believed them. It was a spiritual thing: feeling God's power behind them, tuning into it, and trusting it, even if I was affirming something that I hadn't yet realized in my life. That trust, that faith, still carries me today. I know from my own experience that that power can help me in any situation, so it's not about believing or not believing a specific affirmation. If it's a higher truth, then it's true whether my mind believes it or not. It's as though I built up a spiritual bank account, a trust account, and I use it to keep going even when my mind isn't quite ready for the affirmation."

How does she choose an affirmation? "I think about what I need, not what I believe. If my heart feels a certain need right now, then I choose an affirmation from Master or Swami for that need, and I go with it. I trust the power, even if there's no outward evidence of the truth of the affirmation. I draw upon my 'bank account' to make it work."

Does this always work? "Usually, but not always," she said. "During one period of time, I didn't want to use any affirmation because my energy was low, my attitude toward life wasn't positive, and my old pool of affirmations wasn't helping me change that. I didn't feel capable of *affirming* anything. Life looked bleak. I knew I had to do something to pick myself up, so I chose a chant that I thought might help: 'O God Beautiful.' I chanted it a lot, and it was okay, but not much happened. Then for some reason, I had the idea to try the Bengali version of the chant ("Hey Hare Sundara"). I chanted just the first two sentences, over and over like a mantra. My energy changed immediately, so I started doing it on a regular basis. Within a week there was a great shift. My joy level was rising again, and I felt great."

It wasn't a mental thing, analyzing the affirmations and deciding whether I believed them. It was a spiritual thing: feeling God's power behind them, tuning into it, and trusting it, even if I was affirming something that I hadn't yet realized in my life.

How does she explain that? "Again, it wasn't about believing or not believing," she said. "It was just about tuning into an energy that would lift me out of the place I was in. I realized that sometimes when you're stuck, it might be from thinking too much, which can block you. So you might want to use an affirmation or mantra or chant from a different language to get you out of that mental rut. After all, we can't think our way to God. By taking you beyond thinking, that other-language chant or affirmation can more easily take you into another vibration, where there's nothing but the vibration itself. The more you can tune into that vibration, the more the vibration can help you change."

Get a Larger Perspective

I next queried Anandi Cornell, a senior minister and teacher at The Expanding Light, and another affirmation aficionado. Her response was just as quick as Diksha's, but altogether different: "You don't believe the affirmation? Then choose another one! Why on earth would you try to affirm something you don't believe?"

Does that mean that we should just give up? "Not at all," said Anandi. "Instead find something you *can* believe—body, mind, and soul—something that touches your heart, something that lifts your whole outlook toward God rather than leaving it at the level of your rational mind."

When I asked how she does that, she said, "When something's not working, it's usually because we're too close to ourselves, too close to our fear, our hurt, our sense of lack. When we're too involved in ourselves, we're living small, in the ego. The solution is to get bigger, more impersonal, so I look for an affirmation that gives me some distance from my problem so I can get a better perspective.

"For example, if I'm really worried about something, my worrying blocks the flow of energy that could solve the problem. Maybe I don't know how to solve it, but God does, and in the last analysis, it's His problem anyway, isn't it? My

AYTA MEMBER NEWS

Thanks, Great Souls

Blessings on several AYTA members who are now working on articles for *Awake & Ready!* We're always looking ahead, though, so if you teach a unique population or have had interesting insights or experiences teaching Ananda Yoga, please consider writing an article about it. For information, contact Gyandev (see page 12).

real problem is to get out of the way and let God handle it. So rather than trying to affirm that the problem isn't even there, or that I know how to handle it—when in fact it *is* there and I *don't* know what to do—I hand it over to Him. I especially like this one from Master (*Praecepta Lessons*, 1934):

> *I relax and cast aside all mental burdens, allowing God to express through Me His Perfect Peace, Love, and Wisdom.*

"I immerse myself in the feeling that it's just about getting myself out of the way so God can come in. It's very freeing, and what's more, it's the beginning of the solution."

"Do you ever feel like you're faking it?" I asked. "Can you really feel that God is doing something about the problem?"

"It's not about trying to convince myself of something, or argue myself out of something else," she replied. "And worrying about whether it's working certainly isn't helpful. Rather, the idea is to get in alignment with something higher, more powerful, more positive. If we can just align ourselves that way, that 'something higher' can lift us out of the space we're in. If you do this enough, you see that it works, and you begin to trust it—then it gets much easier."

I immerse myself in the feeling that it's just about getting myself out of the way so God can come in. It's very freeing, and what's more, it's the beginning of the solution.

"It's like the story of Master asking Swami one day, 'How are you?' Swami wasn't feeling well at all, and hesitated, then began, 'Well …' Master realized where he was heading and cut him off immediately: "That's good!" he said emphatically, leaving absolutely no room for Swami to indulge in the attitude of not feeling well. Swami got the message, and after deciding that he would not give in to the tendency to feel low, he realized immediately that he was feeling better.

"It's strong medicine, but that's what it takes sometimes. We have to get off the level where the problem exists and start to live at the level where the solution exists. Only then is there both an opening and the magnetism for the solution to come into our lives."

So Anandi's approach, which at first blush seemed so different from Diksha's, is strikingly similar

What Would It Feel Like If … ?

Finally, here's a different approach, one with which I've often had success: If I don't believe an affirmation (or a chant, or a prayer, or a mantra), I immerse myself in how it would feel if I *knew* it to be true. After all, it certainly would feel true to Yogananda, or Saint Francis, or Saint Teresa of Avila, so I try to imagine how s/he would experience the affirmation. I suspect it would feel *very* good, powerful, and true. So I try to immerse myself in that feeling as I affirm.

I discovered this many years ago with Master's affirmation for overcoming anger, a nasty quality that had long been plaguing me. It's quite a long affirmation (from *Metaphysical Meditations*, 1932 edition):

> *I make up my mind never again to wear anger on my face. I will never inject the poison of anger in the heart of my peace and thus kill my spiritual life.*
>
> *I will be angry only with anger and with nothing else.*
>
> *I cannot be angry with anyone because the good and the bad both are divine brethren, born of my one divine Father.*
>
> *I will calm the anger of others by the good example of my tranquility, especially when I see my brothers suffering from the delirium of anger.*
>
> *Teach me not to kindle anger and thus devastate the green oasis of peace within me and in others with the conflagration of wrath. Teach me rather to extinguish anger with the torrents of my unceasing love.*
>
> *Heavenly Father, command the lake of my kindness ever to remain undisturbed by the storms of misery-making anger.*

(By the way, if you're a person who worries about using affirmations that contain negatives, check out this one! It's a perfect example of how the words themselves are less important than the feeling behind them.)

I spent a day memorizing and repeating this affirmation, not worrying about whether I believed it, or whether it was a realistic commitment for me. How *could* I worry about it? Belief flew out the window with the very first sentence! Who, other than a master, could believe it? It's a clear indication that another approach is needed.

I felt the affirmation had Yogananda's power in it, so all day long I went deeper and deeper into what it *would* feel like if it were true for me: "How would Yogananda feel while repeating this?" What I felt above all was a tremendous sense of freedom—freedom from the self-torture of "the storms of misery-making anger." It was so expansive, so joyful. I reveled in that freedom, celebrated it. The feeling was so powerful that I wondered if perhaps I'd really attained something via the affirmation. I certainly hoped so.

I didn't wonder for long. The very next day, Divine Mother decided to test my "attainment." Someone did something so outrageous (in my opinion) that I had to leave his presence lest I say something I would really regret. As soon as I made it to the safety of solitude, my blood boiling and my brain bursting, my first thought was intense frustration: "Argh!!! I can't stay angry, because I remember what it was like to be free from anger, and that felt infinitely better than this self-righteous rage could ever feel. If I want to be happy—and I do—I must choose freedom." I immediately went to him and apologized sincerely for my reaction. (As it turned out, what

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What? Fortune Cookies without Cookies?

by Fran Zabica

As soon as a graduated from AYTT, I went home and rented a space so I could open my very own yoga studio: Inner Harmony Yoga in San Pedro, California. I felt very fortunate to be in my own studio from the very beginning, because that enabled me to cultivate an environment that would feel like home to my students.

In fact, what it really felt like was *my* home. As a result, whenever I was waiting for students to arrive for class, it felt like I was waiting for guests in my own home. This had implications, because I was raised in the Croatian culture, where no guest ever leaves your home empty-handed. You might give them a piece of cake, or lemons from the garden, or whatever, but you always gave them *something*. So whenever a yoga class ended and the students prepared to leave, I felt the need to give them something, just as I would if they had been guests in my home. But what could I give them?

Fran lives in San Pedro, California. Shortly after she wrote this article, she decided to sell her yoga studio and take a sabbatical from teaching. She hopes to return to teaching before long.

I struggled with this question for while before a solution emerged. The idea came from the fact that, in the beginning of my teaching, I was tripping over my words rather a lot. (I'll bet you can relate to that!) Often I would have to skip the asana affirmations because the students just couldn't hold the postures long enough for me to say everything I needed to say about the mechanics—what with all my verbal stumbling—and include the affirmations, too. This problem, however, also spotlighted an opportunity: it gave me the inspiration of handing out affirmations at the end of class—and it's something I still do.

The Crystal Bowl of Positivity

When we have finished meditation and healing prayers—which is the way I end my classes—and have closed the class with "Namasté," I raise the lights a bit. Then I walk around to each student with a crystal bowl full of affirmations printed on little slips of paper, and I invite each of them to pick one. Those who have been coming for years must have dozens of affirmations, scattered in their cars, purses and homes. Nevertheless, they always want to take another one home with them.

In creating the affirmation slips, I chose a group of twenty different affirmations from Master [Paramhansa Yogananda] and Swami [Kriyananda]—some were asanas affirmations, and others were not. Inevitably, then, regular students sooner or later get a "repeat" affirmation. So I jokingly tell the students that if they keep picking the same one over and over, Someone is trying to tell them something. One student, for example, was surprised that she always seemed to get, "At the center of life's storms, I stand serene." I think we both realized, however, that given what was going on in her life, it was perfect for her.

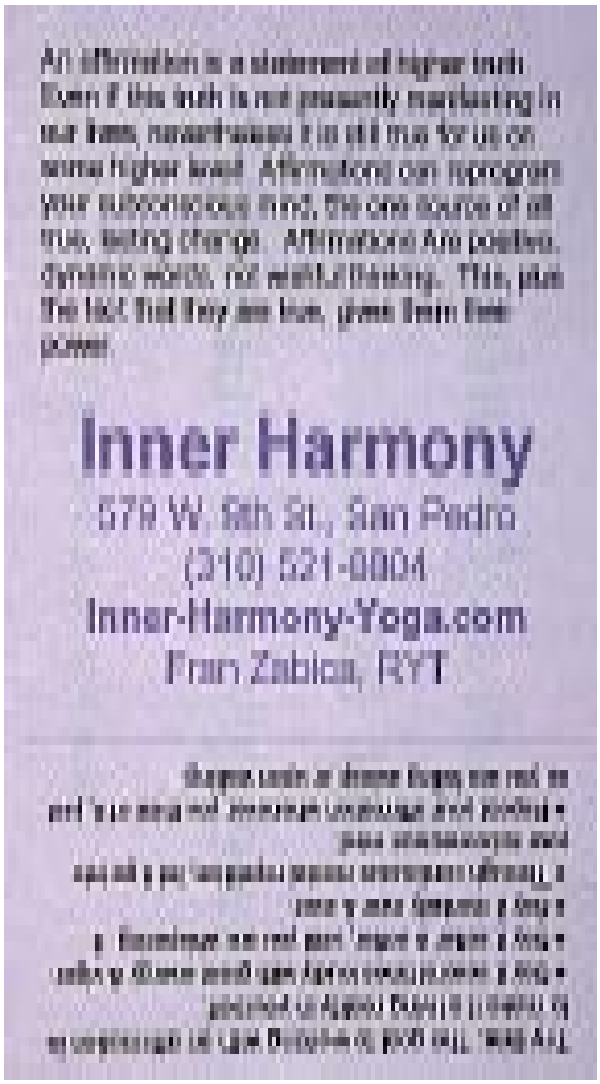
From time to time, I encourage students to memorize their favorite affirmations. I suggest that they choose one for energy and strength, and another for calmness and peace, and have both of them committed to memory, ready to use whenever they need them. I also suggest that they leave the affirmation slips on the table after paying the bill at restaurants, give them to family, friends, hair stylists, etc. Some students use the slips for bookmarks, tape them to their computer monitors, or tuck them in their wallets to find later.

The original versions of the affirmation slips (*see large photo on page 5*) had all the information about affirmations, but they didn't have my studio contact information on them. What was I thinking??!! The newer version (*see smaller photo at top on page 5*) has all of that stuff, so now when students hand them out, it's not only a way to spread positive energy—it's also marketing for Inner Harmony!

Producing the Affirmation Slips

I use a special software program for making business cards, but I create a card that has an affirmation instead of the usual information that's on a business card. The program then prints ten identical "affirmation cards" on one sheet of colored paper. Different such programs work differently, and there are short cuts that come with experience, but that's it in a nutshell.

After I have printed several pages of affirmation cards for each affirmation, I run them through the printer once again to print the other side, which has my studio info plus some helpful general information about affirmations and how to practice them. (Given the small size of the slips, the instructions are *very* tiny—people need to relax their eyes to read them, or get their reading glasses.) Then I cut them on my paper cutter. I suppose I could go to Kinko's and have them cut, but I guess I like doing things the hard way. After they're all cut, I fold them in thirds like a letter, with the affirmation on the inside, and put them in the crystal bowl, ready to find their new homes.



At left are samples of the original version of Fran's affirmation slips, shown at their actual size. Above is an enlargement of the back side of the version she now uses, showing her explanation about affirmations as well as all her studio information. Below is the easier-to-read affirmation format of her current model.

Once You Offer a Benefit …

It's definitely an investment of energy for me to print, cut, and fold about 500 affirmation slips every month. Because of that, I even tried to do away with them at one point. It didn't work, however; all the students wanted them back. So they're an Inner Harmony tradition now.

Some of the students, however, want to know why they are still getting fortunes without the cookies. Maybe I'll add the cookies next year. (Ha!) ◆

More Perspectives on Warm-Ups

Part 2 of a series by Nicole DeAvilla Whiting

After the last issue's article, "The Perfect Warm-Up," I'm sure that you and your students are all happily energizing your way to enlightenment. So I can understand if you might not at first be too interested in more about warm-ups. Still, I think you'll enjoy these additional tips on properly warming up body and mind, plus details of some supine, seated, and standing warm-ups that I often use.

Factors in Choosing Warm-Ups

First, I'll discuss some factors that should influence which warm-ups you choose, and how many you do.

Time of Year

Different seasons of the year have different effects on us. Let's look, for example, at the choice of a pranayama technique for your initial centering. In the summertime you might want to focus more on cooling pranayamas, such as sitali and sitkari. Breath of fire would not be a first choice for hot summer days. Remember: the immediate effect (warming or cooling) of pranayamas continues to affect us long after the practice ends.

However, I'm not talking only about the weather (which I'll get to shortly). Certain times of the year, such as the year-end holidays, have an emotional and stressful effect on so many people that you might say it's in the air, affecting everyone to some degree. So even though it's winter, and one might think of breath of fire, it may be more appropriate to use a calming pranayama like simple belly breathing, then transitioning into even-count breathing.

The yoga postures that follow the warm-up should be chosen with these same considerations in mind, because it's more than just a matter of temperature. For a more thorough understanding of the effect of seasons and times of day on asana choices, look to the science of Ayurveda†.

Time of Day

In the morning, the body will naturally not be as warm as it will be later on in the day, and many people will be especially stiff in the morning. The earlier the practice, the more time one needs with warm-ups. People are ready to get moving in the morning, so energetic warm-ups are usually welcome.

In the evening, people are more naturally warmed up, and are often ready to wind down. Warm-ups that help to release tension and stress accumulated during the day are good to use at this time.

† Dr. Vasant Lad's book, *Ayurveda: The Science of Self-Healing*, is a good place to start. Even better is the Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga Retreat with Gyandev and Diksha in Kerala, India, next February (*see page 11*).

Weather and Temperature

When the weather is cold, it makes sense to warm up thoroughly even if the room is warm (more on this later). Warm weather may permit a shorter warm-up period, but don't forget that all the joints need to be given attention and "oiled," and the blood needs to be flowing through the muscles to insure an adequate supply of oxygen for whatever task may be at hand. In addition, some people's bodies react subtly, or even dramatically, to a *change* of weather. At this time they will tend to be stiffer and need more-thorough warm-ups.

Nicole teaches Therapeutic Yoga and Prenatal/Postnatal 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 mear her home in Marin County, Calif.,and leads an Ananda Healing Prayer group.

You might ask, "If we can control the temperature in the room, does the outdoor temperature really matter?" Yes, it does matter, because that's where students have come from, and their bodies and minds have adjusted to it. Additionally, as Ayurveda tells us, our bodies and minds are affected by the seasons in a way that a mere adjustment to the thermostat won't dramatically change.

The next question you might ask is related: "Since it takes less time to warm up in warm weather, should I turn the thermostat up to make the room quite warm?" The answer is "No," and to understand why, let's take a closer look at what is happening physiologically in extremely cold or extremely hot temperatures.

In extremely cold weather, the blood moves away from the extremities to keep the brain and vital organs warm. The body knows that it is better to risk losing a finger or toe than to lose function of the brain or other vital organs. The body also naturally contracts muscles, sometimes vibrating them (as in chattering teeth or shivering) to generate warmth and keep the blood circulating. It also keeps limbs tucked in close to the trunk to conserve heat. This will still happen in less cold weather, although to a lesser degree. So when a person comes in from the cold, s/he has a lot more to do to get the blood flowing into the extremities and to loosen up the tightness of the muscles.

In warm weather, the body does the opposite: the blood is spread out to the very peripheries of the extremities to help

keep the body cool, especially the brain and vital organs. The muscles are ideally relaxed, so as not to stimulate circulation and potentially cause overheating. So when a person comes in from the heat, the muscles feel loose, yet the blood flow is not yet stimulated, and there is not an abundant supply of oxygen immediately available to the muscles if they are suddenly asked to perform demanding tasks. Furthermore, we still need to thin the synovial fluid and facilitate healthy, active joint movement.

So you see that if the temperature in a room is artificially high, people may think that they are warmed up when they're not. This can lead to unsafe yoga practice, and perhaps injury. Many of the "hot" styles of yoga originated in southern India, where the temperatures can indeed be very hot. People who live in such a climate *without abundant air conditioning* are acclimated to the heat. They are less likely to fool themselves into thinking that they are already warmed up before they begin their yoga practice.

Fresh air is always recommended for yoga practice, for it carries more prana and leads to a clearer mind. If you practice outside, depending on your climate, you will be adjusting not only your warm-ups but also your whole practice to the temperature. For example, I teach an outdoor class once a week (although we go indoors if it is raining or too muddy). Depending on who shows up (some of the students are hardier when it comes to the cold than others), we may also go inside if it is very cold (a relative statement—in Marin County it almost never freezes, but we can get chilling weather from the coastal fogs). So when it's cool, we do a lot of warming up in the beginning, *and* we actively keep the blood flowing for the duration of the class. On the other hand, when the sun is shining down on us in the summertime, we're more interested in finding shade under the big old oak tree than in getting hot and sweaty from a vigorous warm-up.

State of Mind

You may walk into a class with a well prepared warm-up routine for the time of day, year, weather, level and particular needs of your students, and be ready to go with, say, an energizing routine. But then you realize that everyone's uptight because it's Election Day and they are on pins and needles about the outcome. Well, hopefully you will have a calming backup routine in your back pocket. (This actually happened to me on Election Day last November—it was striking how emotional people were that day. I switched gears as soon as I realized what was going on.).

Special Needs Groups

In general, the principles of the cautions and emphasized elements recommended for asanas for any specialized group will apply to the warm-ups as well. For example, seniors need slow, thorough warm-ups with a lot of range of motion for their joints. Pregnant women need to be careful throughout the class (including the warm-ups) not to overheat the body. Children need the fewest physical warm-ups, but they do need some, not only for their bodies but also to help focus their minds and establish good habits for later in life.

Ability Level

Finally, remember that although many warm-ups are suitable for all levels, there are some very good ones that are not appropriate for beginners or those with special needs. For example, when I first started teaching yoga part-time, my other job was as a makeup artist in downtown San Francisco. Before class, I needed a quick warm-up, not only for my body, which had been in high heels and dress clothes all day, but for my mind to shift gears quickly as well. The perfect warm-up for me at that time was to do a handstand against a wall. This immediately got my blood flowing, my mind focused, and energy flowing into my brain. To quickly get a little more movement and range of motion, I would then walk my hands away from the wall and arch my back like a scorpion pose, still using the wall to keep my balance. Then I would contract the abdominal muscles and, with control, come out of the handstand and into downward-facing dog for a few moments. When I stood up, I felt warm, focused, energized, and ready to teach class. I cannot say, however, that I have ever had a class where this would be an appropriate warm-up to teach, though I have had individual students to whom I would suggest this. The moral is: know your students.

Now for Some Warm-Ups

As you know, the centering comes first in an Ananda Yoga routine. I like to use a pranayama for this; think of it as a warm-up for the breath. For beginning students, deep belly breaths (diaphragmatic breathing) can be adequate. Whenever you are going to do another pranayama, regardless of the class level, it is still a good idea to at least start with deep belly breathing even if you are simply having them focus on their breath as they get themselves into their supine, seated or standing position. Then when everyone is aligned and focused from conscious deep belly breaths, you can begin with the pranayama of choice. Remember yoga is about learning how to control life-force energy; *prana* means energy and *yama* means control. Without awareness of the breath and practice of pranayama, yoga postures begin to look and feel more like exercises.

I have two favorite standing warm-ups. When appropriate, I use these warm-ups one after the other. They double as pranayamas for beginning a class. If you want to include a different opening pranayama, you could have your students sit for that pranayama, then stand for the continuation of the warm-ups.

Double Breathing, Palms Touching

If you read "The Perfect Warm-Up," you might not be surprised that the first favorite is double breathing, palms touching. You already know from the last article what great

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things it does for us as a warm-up. What I also like about it is that practically everyone can do it. I use it in healthy backs classes, therapeutic classes, and prenatal/postpartum classes, as well as more advanced classes. I even use it when I substitute teach for a teacher whose classes are normally very vigorous (in which case I give them the vigor they're accustomed to, but still within the Ananda style, complete with affirmations—and everything works just great).

Modified Full Yogic Breath Flow

The second one I like is not quite so universally accessible. It is a modified version of Full Yogic Breath Flow (*see photos at below*) that I do not use for prenatal or for anyone with spinal injuries. I say "modified" because one traditional expression of the Full Yogic Breath Flow is to roll down the spine into a full forward bend, and roll back up again. But here I'm talking about a warm-up version, and after what we've learned about warming up and stretching, you can see that *rolling* down into (or up out of) a full forward bend is not an appropriate way to warm up, even if you have no back injuries or vulnerabilities. Later on, after a thorough warm-up with students who have some asana experience, are relatively flexible (e.g., can at least get their knuckles to the floor with straight legs or with bent knees), and have no contraindications for this Flow, then it would be fine to use in its traditional form. You may have learned another safe version to use as a warm-up.

What I teach is to roll down the spine, one vertebrae at a time, only until you reach your waist. (*See middle photo at left, which shows where to stop.*) Simultaneously draw the abdominal muscles in toward your back to further protect the spine. That's the modification; all the rest is the same as usual: As you go down, you are exhaling, and the palms face down as though, energetically speaking, you are pushing all the air out of the lungs. As you inhale and sequentially roll up the spine; the open palms move upward, close to the body, and face upward or toward your body as though energetically helping to draw breath into your lungs, and life-force up the spine. At the top of the inhalation, allow the arms to move overhead, a little more than shoulder-width apart, lift the sternum slightly, and lift your face upward without jackknifing the neck.

Pause the breath for just a moment before exhaling and repeating the sequence. All through this, the breath should be following a Full Yogic Breath sequence of expanding the belly, then the lower rib cage and finally the upper rib cage in a smooth continuous motion during the inhalation—and reversing the movements with the exhalation.

Circle of Joy

Probably my all-time favorite sitting warm-up is the Circle of Joy; as you know, it can also be done standing. Again, this is one that almost everyone can do, even though some people may need to sit *not* cross-legged, or even a chair. Even the name of this one is uplifting, and it helps students to get into a positive, uplifting, inward state of mind. Be sure that students are sitting upright with straight spines (i.e., natural curves). This awareness of the spine is not only healthy from a physical point of view, but also helps them draw their attention more into their center where they can begin to explore more-subtle energy.

Begin with hands in namasté position in front of the heart center, with deep belly breathing (*top photo at right*). Stay here as long as needed to get your students upright, yet relaxed, centered, and breathing properly.

The first time through, I instruct everyone to breathe naturally as I lead them through each position once, making adjustments—helping tight students to take their arms only as far up or behind as they comfortably can without distort-

ing their posture, and helping flexible students to not hyperextend. When the arms separate between some of the positions, I remind students to feel space between their shoulder blades, and sometimes ask them to feel the energy that is all around them, all the time, ready to be drawn upon.

The next step is to put all of the movements (*see photos on page 8*) into one flowing sequence of breath and movement, harmoniously warming the chest, shoulders, arms while internalizing the mind and connecting with the breath:

1. Inhale and interlace with the opening namasté position.
2. Exhale as the arms go forward (*second photo, page 8*).
3. Inhale as the arms go up (*third photo, page 8*).
4. Exhale as the arms go out to the sides, down, and back.
5. Inhale as the arms move into chest expander (*fourth photo, page 8*).
6. Exhale as the arms reach out and around to the front.
7. Finally, inhale back to the namasté position.

The sequence should flow without interruption. I like to end with at least three deep belly breaths in the namasté position. After the hands come down, it's a nice time to ask your students to watch their breath for a few moments, observing it without any attempt to control it—just observe what it does on its own.

The Joint Oiler

Now we get down to the floor. For many people, just lying down on the floor, stretching out, and breathing is tension-releasing and energizing. Encourage students to put a rolled up blanket or bolster under their knees if they like—it helps relieve low back discomfort and is more relaxing even for some students without back discomfort. Choose pranayamas that are conducive to the supine position, such as, deep belly breathing, Full Yogic Breath, or Even-Count Breathing.

The Joint Oiler is a great one that again nearly everyone can do (a prenatal class would need to do a similar standing version); it is effective as a beginning warm-up for advanced students as well as a great one for seniors or other special groups. Remind your students to periodically take deep breaths to release tension and bring fresh oxygen into their bodies.

1. Begin at the toes and wiggle them. Get as much motion in the toes as possible.
2. Next, spread the toes wide apart and then squeeze them tight together like a fist, repeating several times.
3. Point and flex the feet.
4. Circle the ankles several times in one direction, then in the other direction.
5. The next joint—the knee—is a little trickier. Do not rotate the knee in a circular fashion. Extension and flexion are adequate for warming up the joint and the muscles around it. It is easy to go too far and stretch ligaments unnecessarily if one tries to rotate the knee. So, have your students bring one knee to the chest and hold onto the thigh underneath the knee, then extend (start to straighten) the knee and bend again repeating a few times, not going for a big stretch, just gentle movement. Do the same on the other side.
6. Turn the legs in and out from the hip joints repeatedly. The entire leg moves back and forth—initiate the movement via the hip rotators.
7. Bend the knees with both feet on the floor and do pelvic tilts. For healthy backs, both under-curve and over-curve tilts can be done; otherwise stay with under-curve tilts (i.e., tuck the pelvis) only.
8. Let the legs stretch back out along the floor. Wiggle the fingers, making sure that thumbs do not get left behind!
9. Spread the fingers wide apart, then squeeze them tight like a fist. Repeat several times.
10. Circle the wrists for a while in one direction, then repeat in the other direction.
11. Bend and straighten the elbows several times.
12. Turn the arms in and out from the shoulder (similar motion as in #6 for the hips.)
13. Shrug the shoulders by inhaling and drawing the shoulders up toward the ears, then exhale and draw them down away from the ears. Repeat a few times.
14. Place the arms beside you with the palms down. Gently press the hands into the floor and draw the shoulder blades together and lift only the upper back—not the neck or head—off of the floor, inhaling. Exhale and release down. Repeat a few times.
15. Gently roll your head from side to side. Breathe deeply, exhaling away all tension.

The Joint Oiler "oils" all the joints (i.e., facilitates movement by thinning the synovial fluid) and moves all the major muscle groups. Sounds almost as good as an energization exercise, right? Well, you can guess what I like to sometimes follow this with and/or do by itself: all three phases of 20-Part Body Recharging! Stay on the floor and do these. Then your students will be well warmed up, and they never even had to leave the floor!

Asanas as Warm-Ups—and Cool-Downs

I'd like to leave you with one final thought about warm-ups. Once the body is warmed up, the muscles are prepared to stretch, and we can also start working them to build strength and balance. Many of the yoga asanas do this, simultaneously building strength and increasing flexibility. When working on an asana that focuses primarily on stretching muscles, you will find it beneficial to have worked the targeted areas with strength asanas first. That way you have a good supply of circulating blood, which by the way is not only bringing in fresh oxygen, but is also removing toxins from the muscles and the rest of the body. For example, after doing a series of standing asanas like the warrior pose and side angle pose, the hamstrings and external rotator muscles of the hip will be more receptive to stretches like forward bends and pigeon pose. As the stretching takes place in this type of asana, the body will actually begin to cool down.

So now we come full circle, and we see that stretching is actually a good way to cool down! ◆

INSPIRATIONS

Spiritual Creativity in the Workplace

by Gordana Sarson, Rijeka, Croatia

I would like to share an inspiring experience, through which I learned how to turn an obstacle into opportunity. From November 2004 through February 2005, I worked at a real estate company here in Rijeka. Our boss used the morning staff meetings to present his own spiritual teachings (as none of us was interested in listening to him voluntarily). He spoke so loudly that he was actually shouting at us. Not only that, but the teachings were completely bizarre. For example, he said that we need prana to work at this job, so we should eat ham daily, as prana is most manifested in ham! All of us felt exhausted by starting the day that way, so much so that many of the staff quit their job after only a few days of work.

I needed the job in order to earn additional money to cover some family bills, so I decided to discipline myself to find way to survive. I asked Master (Paramhansa Yogananda) to guide me in turning that obstacle into opportunity.

It was some days until I recognized that Master's answer to my prayer was already there. I had come across his poem, "I Was Made for Thee" (*right*) and copied it as special gift for a friend. I framed the paper with golden and rose colors, and put a photo of Master on it, too. Each time the poem was in my hands, I told myself: "Well, one day 'when I have time,' I will learn it by heart, as it is soooo beautiful."

At work one day, I realized that "one day" had come: it was now. I put a copy of the poem, with Master's photo, in my business notebook, and each morning, when the boss's "spiritual teaching" began, I opened the notebook and tried to memorize a few words from that beautiful poem.

If you could only imagine how difficult it was to concentrate and learn by heart a poem in a foreign language (English; my native tongue is Croatian) while the boss was insisting that all of us look at him as he was speaking. I would simply gaze above my boss's head and tried to see my beloved Master there, and invited Master to join me and help me learn. I put all my love and concentration at the spiritual eye.

Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't. But as Lahiri Mahasaya said in *Autobiography of a Yogi* concerning spiritual persistence, "Banat banat banjay." ("Doing, doing, someday done.") So I persisted, and finally, after a few weeks it really *was* done: I had memorized it all. I celebrated that day with Master, grateful that he had given me the power to succeed.

The more I mentally repeated that beautiful poem, the more I loved its meaning, and each time I discovered even more deep messages. Eventually, my mind began to repeat the poem even without my conscious effort.

Next I felt inspired to include some asanas in the afternoon satsang with the Belgrade (Serbia and Montenegro) devotees, using some verses from the poem. I was overwhelmed with incredible joy as I guided the dear devotees, connecting the asanas to the poem. For example:

Tadasana: "I was made for Thee alone."

Ardha Chandrasana: "My hands were made to serve Thee willingly."

Garudasana: "My voice was made to sing Thy glory."

Padahastasana: "My feet were made to seek Thy temples everywhere."

Ardha Matsyendrasana: "My heart was made to respond to Thy call alone."

Setu Bandhasana: "My soul was made to be a channel through which Thy love might flow uninterruptedly into all thirsty souls."

Savasana: "I was made for Thee alone."

I am so grateful for these experiences. Thank you God, thank you Master, thank you Swami, thank you Ananda, thanks to everyone for everything! Bless you all. ◆

Gordana lives in Rijeka, Croatia and leads an Ananda meditation group in Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro. Swami Kriyananda recently made Gordana an Ananda minister.

I Was Made for Thee

by Paramhansa Yogananda,
Whispers from Eternity, **1929 edition**

I was made for Thee alone. I was made for dropping flowers of devotion gently at Thy feet on the altar of the morning.

My hands were made to serve Thee willingly, to remain folded in adoration, waiting for Thy coming; and, when Thou comest, to bathe Thy feet with my tears.

My voice was made to sing Thy glory.

My feet were made to seek Thy temples everywhere.

My eyes were made a chalice to hold Thy burning love and the wisdom falling from Thy nature's hands.

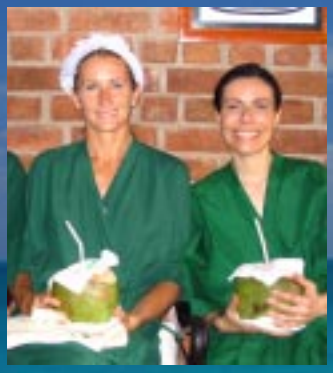
My ears were made to catch the music of Thy footsteps echoing through the halls of space, and to hear Thy divine melodies flowing through all heart-tracts of devotion.

My lips were made to breathe forth Thy praises and Thine intoxicating inspirations.

My love was made to throw incandescent search-light flames to find Thee hidden in the forest of my desires.

My heart was made to respond to Thy call alone.

My soul was made to be the channel through which Thy love might flow uninterruptedly into all thirsty souls.



Ayurvedic Healing *& Yoga Retreat*

with Ananda in Kerala, India

February 9–26, 2006 ❧ Led by Gyandev & Diksha McCord

Enjoy two relaxing, rejuvenating weeks of Ayurvedic healing treatments and Ananda Yoga at Kerala's finest seaside Ayurvedic resort.

Your retreat includes ...

- Group flight and transportation to the Ayurvedic facility
- Personal consultations and Ayurvedic classes with Indian Ayurvedic doctors
- Seven therapeutic treatments in either the rejuvenation program or the purification program
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- Accommodations and three delicious Ayurvedic meals each day
- Evening entertainment of Indian music, dance, and drama
- Guided excursions of cultural and spiritual sights
- The sea, sun, and fun
- Hours toward Level 2 certification for Ananda Yoga teachers

The place

Somatheeram Ayurvedic Resort, a certified Gold Leaf Ayurvedic facility, has been recognized as the best Ayurvedic resort in Kerala for the last four years. It features excellent doctors and therapists; comfortable, clean and well maintained facilities; and exceptionally good food, Ayurvedically prepared.

The setting is lush with palm trees, tropical flowers, and green lawns, terraced down to a point just above the ocean. You'll stay in a traditional Keralan cottage or bungalow, in the midst of a coconut palm grove overlooking the ocean. A short walk brings you to the peaceful, private beach with chairs, umbrellas, and towels provided.

Details

Dates: February 9–26, 2006. Program is limited to 20 people.

Cost: $3900-$4900 (depending on your choice of accommodations). We leave from San Francisco; an optional add-on is available from other cities. Sorry, this program does not offer a 15% discount for AYTA members.

For more information call: The Expanding Light, 800-346-5350 (530-478-7518) or visit www.expandinglight.org/kerala

"I am free! I am free!"—Yeah, right.
(continued from page 3)

he'd done hadn't been so outrageous after all.)

Later I realized: "That's what the affirmation did for me. It didn't dissolve the anger tendency completely, but it did lay anger side by side with freedom, for comparison. The choice was between pain (sweetened with some ego-gratifying self-righteousness) and freedom. How hard a choice is that? If I can stay in touch with my hunger for freedom, it will help me resist the anger temptation. It will motivate me to change my behavior and let go of anger—out of choice."

The affirmation will fan the flames of my aspiration, and that desire will change my thoughts and actions—and thus my experience of life.

This was a revelation that has guided my affirmation practice ever since. Now it really doesn't bother me whether an affirmation feels true for me. What matters is that it resonates with my aspirations, and that it seems attainable—at least by saints, if not yet by me. I just need to do the work that my own desire points me toward. By continuing with the affirmation, I will fan the flames of my aspiration, and that desire will change my thoughts and actions—and thus my experience of life.

Hmmm, There's a Pattern Here

Despite their outward differences, all these approaches to "affirmation disbelief," share an important feature: they're about not getting paralyzed by the question of believability. They're about finding a way to get beyond such a small, problem-oriented perspective. They're about tapping into a greater source of power—whether purely divine or even somewhat egoic—and getting energy moving in a helpful direction. Each one is a "solution-conscious, soul-oriented" approach, and that's precisely why they can work.

So next time you're in Utkatasana, questioning whether your body is indeed "no burden"—or just feeling burdened in your life—try to tune into a higher dimension, or a larger perspective, or a heartfelt aspiration, so that you can indeed feel, in some way, "light as air." ◆

LEVEL 2 NEWS

Level 2 Calendar

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

10/6–16 .....★Meditation Teacher Training
10/16–29 ...★AYTT Assistantship
10/19–23 ...Kriya Yoga Preparation
10/30–11/4 . Deeper into Spirit of Yoga
2/9–26 .....Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga Retreat in Kerala, India (see p.11)
3/10–19 .....★Meditation Teacher Training
3/19–4/1 ...★AYTT Assistantship

(2006 dates below are tentative; please call if you need verification soon. Additional 2006 Level 2 programs are still being scheduled.)

5/21–28 .....Advanced Pranayama
5/25–6/4 ...Yoga of the Heart® *(date is firm)*
6/23–7/2 ...★Meditation Teacher Training
7/2–15 .....★AYTT Assistantship
10/6–15 .....★Meditation Teacher Training
10/15–28 ...★AYTT Assistantship

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