



Awake & Ready!

Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga® Teachers Association
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PERSPECTIVE

Finding Bliss Beneath a Coconut Canopy

Freshly back from an absolutely splendid experience at Ananda's first annual Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga Retreat in India, I can't resist sharing some impressions and insights. My wife, Diksha, and I led two fabulous weeks at the Somatheeram Ayurvedic Beach Resort near Trivandrum, the capital of Kerala in southwestern India. Consistently been voted the best Ayurvedic resort in Kerala,



After an Ayurvedic treatment—awake and ready, all parts fully oiled. Hey, it's hard work co-leading the Kerala retreat!

Somatheeram is a tropical paradise situated on the shores of the Arabian Sea: coconut palm trees everywhere, shading the clean, beautifully kept grounds. Winter days are warm (shorts and sandals, day and night) and somewhat humid, perfect for Ayurvedic treatments. And everything about Somatheeram is designed to facilitate a healing experience.

Making It Your Own

Day #1, 7:00 A.M.—We arrived last night and, after being greeted with fresh watermelon juice (ahhh!), immediately went to bed. This morning I feel no jet lag at all. Could it be the soothing lullaby of the ocean waves, serenading me all night long?

I walk down the grassy slope from my cabin to the beach overlook to energize prior to meditating. Beautiful music is coming from the nearby fishing village below and to my left—sweet and haunting Indian music, very devotional, and yet it's somehow non-Indian as well.

I notice a steady trickle of people, mostly women in brightly colored saris, walking in ones and twos, pilgrim-like, from the village to a place just behind the palm trees to my right. They disappear for several minutes, then reappear and walk back toward the village. What is it? A Hindu shrine? Whatever it is, it's obviously special to them.

I later learn that the shrine is Christian, and the music came from a church. Twenty percent of Keralans are Christian, including most of this fishing village. As the days go by, the Westerners Diksha and Gyandev meet dark-skinned Indians named Peter, Matthew, Thomas, Shirley, and Sophia. Somehow, this “mix-up” makes me feel closer to them; maybe they feel it, too.

Invariably, when something is transplanted to a new culture, the new hosts “make it their own,” changing it according to their own nature. Keralans have done this with Christianity, and Westerners are doing it with Yoga. The question is not *whether* there will be changes—it's inevitable—but *how* it will be done. Will it be according to the new hosts' best traits, or not-so-good traits? The Keralans added to Christianity their own quiet, innocent, deeply personal devotion. It's beautiful. I don't think that Westerners are doing as good a job with Yoga, but it's newer to us,

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Each of us received a blessing—and the traditional “dot” on the forehead—in a special welcome ceremony on our first day.

Concerns over what others think? Or is it our discrimination, sincerity, and intuition? Will we use the practice to strengthen habits that we really should be changing, or will we use it to help make those changes?

Take, for example, the creative, “can do” attitude of Americans, which Yogananda praised. When “can do” translates into an optimistic, committed attitude toward Yoga, it’s great. But when it leads to a superficial approach that glosses over the subtleties, it’s not helpful. Similarly, the creative spirit can lead to a powerful, dynamic fit between an individual and the yoga techniques. Or it can, and often does, lead to change merely for the sake of change, or to create a new “style” to be marketed, but without the guidance of wisdom—and therefore without lasting benefit.

Fortunately, individuals can do what cultures usually do not: practice discrimination, step by step. Rather than bending something new to fit into—and perhaps reinforce—

and there’s always hope.

Ultimately, however, the real question is not what the culture does, but what individuals do. For example, as each one of us makes Ananda Yoga our own, which of our traits shape the process? Is it our habits? Desires? Restlessness? Comfort zones?

AYTA MEMBER NEWS

Congratulations, Nicole

Nicole DeAvilla (see page 7) has been named to the Prenatal Yoga Standards Subcommittee of Yoga Alliance. This committee is tasked with developing standards for the training of Prenatal Yoga teachers. Teachers and programs meeting those standards will be able to register with Yoga Alliance. Way to go, Nicole!

Keep ‘Em Coming

We have a few excellent articles lined up for future issues of *Awake & Ready!* We always need more, however, so if you teach a unique population or would like to share your insights or experiences—great or small—teaching Ananda Yoga, please consider writing an article about it. For information, contact Gyandev (see page 12).

our pattern of likes and dislikes, we can continually ask, “What does it *need* to be?” Then we can listen for the answer coming from deep inside.

Swami Kriyananda has often remarked that Mozart’s greatness lay in the fact that he seemed always to ask the question, “What does the music *need* to be?” rather than “What do I *want* it to be?” He would *listen for* the music rather than try to create it egoically. When we apply that idea to Ananda Yoga, God has a chance to enter our practice and help us make it the best it can be. Then our yoga practice will take us where we really want to go.

Memo to myself: Observe my own practice more vigilantly. Watch for areas where habit, lethargy, or lack of mindfulness takes precedence over discrimination, inspiration, and a sense of eager, attentive, sensitive exploration.

Discovering a New Level of Relaxation

Day #2, 3:00 P.M.—I’ve just had the first of my daily interviews with an Ayurvedic physician. After a detailed examination, he “diagnosed” my Ayurvedic constitution and designed a Rejuvenation Therapy treatment program for me. Now I’m into my first session, tailored to the diagnosis.

It’s very different from any massage I’ve had. Two sweet young men, trained Ayurvedic therapists, simultaneously work on me. They definitely get a workout, though they don’t press hard unless I request it (and I do). At one point, one uses his feet to massage from my fingertips down to my toes in one long, smooth stroke! It’s truly a unique, healing massage.



With my therapists, Unni and Sumesh

They use copious amounts of herbally medicated oil in the massage. Have you ever started to sauté vegetables and thought, “Oh yuck, that’s waaaay too much oil!”? That’s what this is like, except now *I’m* the vegetable, and I *like* that much oil. It feels—and smells—absolutely delicious and luxurious. They massage it into my entire body, even my hair.

The daily post-treatment ritual begins with green coconut milk, fresh out of the coconut, on the veranda of the Treatment Center. Then I lie in the hammock in front of our cottage for an hour or more, underneath the coconut palms (see photo on page 1). It takes me a few days to realize that it’s better not to read, journal, or do anything “productive” after the treatments. It’s more healing and relaxing just to watch and listen to the ocean below, and think of God. After an hour, the oil has soaked into my skin, and it’s okay to shower. Except I don’t really want to shower now, because my



skin feels so good just the way it is.

In the second week, I have a rice pudding massage. No kidding: They put cooked herbed rice in a poultice, dip it in fresh milk, and massage me all over with the poultice. At first it's just wet and cool, but after a bit there's a thick rice-pudding foam all over me. I am Slipperiness Itself, sliding all over the massage table. It's fun and it feels great, but what a mess! Well, the therapists are the cleanup crew, so it's fine by me. We finish with a refreshing bucket shower using herbal water. My skin feels soooo cool and refreshed.

Diksha remarks one day: "You're really relaxing! At home, you never allow yourself to relax." I realize that she's right, and how therapeutic—and rare!—true relaxation is. And I don't know whether there's a connection, but I notice that my toenails—hers, too—are growing at about five times their normal rate. Hmm. Something is going on here. Maybe I could get used to relaxation.

Memo to myself: Don't wait until next year's trip to Kerala to relax. "Relaxation in the midst of effort" isn't just about Ananda Yoga practice; it's about life!

The Spirit of Seva

Day #7, noon—The remarkable Somatheeram staff are everywhere, dressed nicely in color-coded uniforms so guests will know whom to ask for help: groundskeepers in gold, housekeeping staff in light blue, Ayurvedic therapists in indigo (women) or white (men), restaurant waiters in white shirts and ties, etc. You can get help—even an appointment with an Ayurvedic doctor—at any hour of the day or night.

I marvel at how much can be done with cheap labor, and I find myself wishing, "If only we could have a staff this size at The Expanding Light."

But it's neither their numbers nor their attire that makes the biggest impression; it's their serviceful attitude. A sincere and radiant smile greets me throughout the grounds. It seems as though it's their great pleasure to host and serve us.

One might wonder, "Are they just looking for tips?" While they certainly don't refuse tips—no one in India does, to say the least—it is apparent that it's not about money at all. Nor is it about the practice of *seva* (service to others). No doubt they are trained to be serviceful, but it's obvious to me that, although they may be working at their jobs, they're definitely not *working* on their attitudes; they're just being who they are, and I think it really is their great pleasure to host and serve us. That's true *seva*, and it's beautiful to see.

Memo to myself: Next time my energy is dragging on the



The beautiful lawn where we have our morning and afternoon sadhanas, plus some Ayurveda of the classes. It's just as inviting in real life. (The light-colored background is the beach.)

job—or worse yet, I find myself in the clutches of the dreaded Unwillingness Monster—I want to remember the bright spirit of the Somatheeram staff. I can do my job happily—or not—and it's a lot more fun if I do it happily!

Sadhana

Day #13, 7:30 A.M.—Morning group sadhana on the lawn under the coconut trees, looking out over the Arabian Sea. (Well, *they're* looking out over the sea; as leader, my back is to the ocean. Sigh.) The weather, the quiet, and the lush grass—plus the absence of insects—makes an outdoor sadhana ideal.

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Here we are in action, viewed from a side angle (heh, heh).

Yoga for the Artist

by Jillian Cook

Imagine this scenario: you are standing on an empty stage before 800 people; your stomach is awash with butterflies, which flutter up to and encircle your heart; your throat is dry, paralyzing your speech; your brain cells feel numb, blocking any reason or memory of why you're in this situation and what it is you're meant to say. Horror upon horror, you look down and realize you have no clothes on and are completely naked, standing before this expectant audience.

The above is a familiar nightmare to actors—one that interrupts a night's sleep, usually before an Opening Night performance. Anxiety dreams are familiar to many of us in stressful times, but with the anticipation of a "performance," this can bring a double dose of anxiety to an actor, singer, dancer, musician and all those involved in an artistic discipline.

As Yoga practitioners, we have many choices to help and relieve our anxiety symptoms: asanas, pranayama, relaxation, meditation. These ancient techniques are also very beneficial to the work of the artist. I use the word "artist" in its broadest and fullest sense, but I'm focusing particularly on the work and experience of the actor because that is my particular career field. I have been a professional actor for over twenty years, appearing on stage, television, film and radio. My first love is theater. I like the cooperation and trust one has to build with the director and other cast members as we rehearse a play, then take the next step of presenting it before a live audience—an experience that is different with every performance because there is a different group of people in the theater each time the curtain is raised.

The Artist Becomes a Yogi

During the last ten years I have been fortunate to be a member of the acting ensemble of The Shaw Festival, and for the last two years I have been sharing my Yoga practice with fellow company members: actors, singers, musicians, directors, designers and stage managers. The Festival is situated in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada, about a 90-minute drive from Toronto and a 20-minute drive from Niagara Falls and the American border. The Shaw Festival's mandate is to produce plays written by the English playwright, George Bernard Shaw, plus other plays written in his lifetime by his contemporaries. G.B.S. (as he's often referred to) lived a long life: 1856–1950. He was a free thinker, a supporter of women's rights, and an advocate of equality of income. His plays deal with politics, religion, relationships, morals, and

human behavior, and are celebrated today for their ongoing social and political resonance, brilliantly depicting events and eras that still shine vividly in the present time. He was a strict vegetarian and never drank spirits, coffee or tea. (And, who knows, maybe he did Yoga to reach the age of 94!)

At the end of the 2004 season, I received a professional development grant from the Festival towards taking a yoga teacher training program. I wanted to deepen my knowledge and practice of Yoga, to teach it safely and with integrity.

More importantly I was eager to learn about applying the philosophy and practice of Yoga to the work of the artist. Yoga has the unique ability to clear an actor's mind while preparing his or her body for the demands of the work. It's especially beneficial to young actors because it helps them access that particular state of consciousness where creativity can flourish unencumbered. Even the famed Russian actor/director Konstantin Stanislavsky, father of "Method" acting, included Yoga in his acting training.

As I was exploring the internet for Yoga schools, The Expanding Light came up, and I remembered that Anaya Farrell (a fellow actor) had taken AYT. Then one of the teachers at The Yoga Studio in Toronto, where I was taking classes, mentioned that she had heard good things about Ananda Yoga. After talking to Anaya about her

experience at The Expanding Light, I decided that would be perfect for me too.

The Yogi Re-Enters the Theater

After the wonderful training I received in AYT, I felt full to the brim with joy, ideas, and inspiration, and excited about sharing all that with my fellow thespians.

Rehearsals for the eight-month season began in March, and after people had had time to settle into their rehearsal schedule, I began teaching two 90-minute Yoga sessions per week on Wednesday and Saturday mornings. The Festival underwent a major renovation two years ago. Included in the renovation were three new large rehearsal rooms, and my class was given the use of one of them. We also received monies to purchase, mats, blankets, straps and blocks, so we had the luxury of practicing in a beautiful, bright and well equipped space.

Most of the participants were new to Yoga, so my training at The Expanding Light was a perfect way of introducing them to Ananda Yoga. As part of our training and develop-



Jillian teaches Ananda Yoga to actors, musicians, stage crew, and others at The Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada.



ment as actors, we have a head start when it comes to body awareness. At the Festival we take movement, voice, and singing classes (with professional coaches). We also know the Alexander Technique—a subtle technique of realignment popular with people in the arts for its ability to improve stamina, flexibility, and relaxation, as well as to improve the way the body is used.

“Body awareness,” though, can sometimes get in the way, especially when the ego is uppermost. There is a dichotomy with acting. The actor’s “muscle” involves energy, focus and concentration. You have to “step up to the plate” the moment you step onto the stage, and you need to be supported by a relaxed and open body, connected breath, and a willingness and awareness to share the stage with your fellow actors. Your job is to tell your character’s story as part of the world of the play; the more available and accessible your senses are to you, the clearer your work will be to the audience.

The vocabulary we use to deepen our Yoga practice and teaching echoes the techniques and goals of the actor: be in the moment, be present in the here and now, use the breath to connect and harmonize the body and mind, learn how to move in rhythm with the breath, use mindful awareness without becoming lost in the mind, center the breath to relieve stress and calm the nervous system, send awareness to the spine to tap into energy.

Through the regularity of the classes and people’s attendance, we were able to establish a wonderful group dynamic as we explored the asanas and pranayamas. I made each class different; planning to some degree but also waiting to see what the needs of the class would be on a particular day. I find “intuiting” to be challenging and risky—some days I would want to hang on to my “blueprint” (and still do). The ongoing learning process of being able to trust my instincts is still a challenge, but the experience that I’m writing about here taught me an important lesson in receiving and responding to the class needs.

Addressing Performers’ Special Needs

As the season progressed, the company’s workload increased. At the full height of the season, there were eleven productions playing, spread between three theater spaces, with performances running from Tuesday through Sunday. As it was then, Monday is the day off, and we traditionally call that “our dark day”—the lighting board rests on the seventh day! Actors are cast in two shows, so on the day before the Yoga class, they may have done a matinee and an evening performance—the curtain coming down around 11 P.M. Very

likely they would have a matinee at 2 P.M. the following day, so the 10 A.M. Yoga class would focus on accommodating a variety of needs: waking up and energizing the body; releasing stress and tension to obtain a quiet mind; removing outside thoughts to begin the shift from last night’s show to the arrival of the next one; preparing the body for warming up the voice. (Alternate nostril breath is excellent for the voice, and Simhasana [Lion Pose] energizes the vocal chords and stretches the facial muscles.)

Participants also had specific needs. From the orchestra, the violin, viola and cello musicians loved the asanas that opened up and stretched their shoulders, chest and arms:

Standing Backward Bend, Janushirasana, Dhanurasana, Matsyasana, Parvatasana. The accordion player began the classes with a sensitive lower back, aggravated by the weight of his instrument. Over the six-month series of classes, his back strengthened with the help of Bhujangasana, Paschimotanasana, Salabhasana, and Ustrasana, with many Balasanas for recovery and rest. The same also for the lighting and set designers, who spend a lot of time at their computers and drawing boards, or sitting in the theatre while the long process of adding scenery, costumes and lighting takes place in the technical rehearsals. Actresses who had to wear four-inch high heels kept the backs of their legs stretched with Adho Mukha Shvanasana.

Seasonal respiratory ailments and allergies were also a concern for some people in the class. Niagara-on-the-Lake has a flourishing wine industry, as well as several large orchards and fruit farms. The vineyards and the orchards employ

many offshore workers during the summer months, and the industries are a major contributor to the local economy. In the spring, the beautiful cherry and apple blossoms increase the pollen count, and with the spraying of insecticides, the allergy sufferer’s symptoms are sorely aggravated. I’ve seen actors who never had allergies before suddenly develop them when they move down to this corner of Ontario. There is nothing worse than having to go on stage with a dripping nose, itchy eyes, and a wheezing chest. But the show must go on! Antihistamines can make one slightly doozy, and they also dry out the vocal cords—two side effects you don’t need when you have to remember lines and speak them.

I put together a series of asanas and breathing exercises that I thought would be of benefit to folks with seasonal allergies. For a couple of classes, we “experimented”—with varying results. For instance, I thought Nadi Shodhanam Pranayama would be useful, but that’s true only if your nostrils and nasal passages are not clogged! We included asanas that would help to open, expand and strengthen the

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The “other” Jillian, playing in “The Royal Family” at The Shaw Festival in 2003.



Yoga for the Artist (continued from page 5)

torso—chest, shoulders, neck and lower back: Ardha Chandrasana, Virabhadrasana, Standing Backward Bend, Bhujangasana, Setu Bandhasana, Ardha Matsyendrasana, Jathara Parivartanasana. I encouraged long, smooth inhalations and exhalations to promote the intake of more oxygen and improve breathing capacity.

The “allergy experiment” didn’t totally eliminate the allergies, and some asanas were more useful than others depending on the person’s particular symptoms. Still, the “volunteers” concluded that Yoga practice, along with a balanced diet, relaxation to ease stress, and the aid of modern medicine, could make allergy season a bit more bearable.

Energization and Affirmations

We began each class with the Energization Exercises; people also incorporated them into their own specific warm-ups before a performance. I recently returned from performing in a play in Regina, Saskatchewan (on the Prairies in mid-Canada), where I introduced the Energization Exercises to the cast I was working with. They became our “warm-up of choice” before rehearsals and performances.

As my teaching gained experience with The Shaw Festival Company, I began to introduce affirmations into the classes. Affirmations that particularly resonated within this environment were “I am free, I am free”; “Nothing on earth can hold me!”; “I am Master of my energy. I am Master of myself”; and the longer affirmations for Sun Salutation and Savasana. I am still feeling my way through the use of affirmations, but I know from my own practice and from observing others that there is a desire to incorporate this aspect of Ananda Yoga into the instruction to expand the spiritual dimension and elevate the focus beyond merely the physical and mental benefits of Yoga.

Tying It All Together with the Chakras

The Shaw Festival season runs from April to November. If an actor is cast in one of the plays that runs the entire eight months, it becomes a challenge to find ways of keeping the acting work fresh for each performance. This calls for a disciplined and concentrated physical and mental energy. With this in mind, I thought it would be both interesting and useful to introduce the concept of the chakras.

Essential to an artist’s creative process is imagination, which can become even more potent when coupled with curiosity. In the early stages of rehearsals, before lines have been memorized and the “blocking” (the actor’s movements on stage) has been worked out, we take time, often a couple of days, to read and discuss the play. This is an important

beginning. We’re laying the foundation for our work.

In addition to the director and cast, also present will be the stage managers, the designers (lighting, sound, scenery, costumes), and our vocal and movement coaches. Because we’re working on plays written in another century, and often placed over 100 years ago, it’s helpful (and fascinating) to read about and discuss what was happening in another time and place; to ask questions about how people lived day to day, how much things cost in relation to how much they earned, what the social mores and morals of the day would be, and how these reflected themselves in human behavior. It is, in fact, a history lesson.

As a company of actors who have worked together on a number of productions, we have established a trust so that delving into a more esoteric way of thinking is not so strange or “off the beaten track.” Thus, hearing about the astral spine and the chakras became just another element to be explored, something you can begin to experience yourself through Yoga and meditation—and can, perhaps, trigger an idea about the character you’re portraying.

With this in mind, and guided by Section 4 of the AYT Manual, I sequenced the routines so that with each class we used specific asanas and pranayamas to focus on an individual chakra. For the last class,

Alex, one of the participants and a musician, brought along his cello and we would chant AUM using a specific note as we offered our energy to each of the seven chakras.

An acting teacher once told me, “Good, honest acting comes from the heart.” Just becoming aware of the vision of the fourth chakra can help open actors up to the joy and love in their work, and strengthen their belief in themselves as artists.

A longer Savasana became a priority during the week of Openings. I liked the way one of the actors described her deep relaxation experience: “I let my ego go on a holiday.” Finishing the classes with meditation brought people to that place of just “being”; a chance to find quietness and peace before the brain cells would be called upon to reach into the memory bank for the correct lines to say (often in a particular accent), and the movement that the body would need in order to adjust to a character’s costume.

Through my own experience, observing others, and listening to the feedback I’ve received about the Yoga classes, I’m keen to delve deeper into “Yoga for the Artist.”

The practice of Yoga is a valuable resource for an actor to add to their “toolbox”. It encourages self-knowledge and nourishes the creative process. It also helps to quell fears and anxieties that expose themselves in an attack of nerves—or in an unwelcome nightmare. ♦

Photos in this article are by David Cooper, provided courtesy of The Shaw Festival, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario.

We began each class with the Energization Exercises; people also incorporated them into their own specific warm-ups before a performance.



Prenatal Yoga: Are You Ready for the Good News?

Part 1 of a 2-Part Series by Nicole DeAvilla

It's in the news: prenatal yoga is a great choice for mothers-to-be. Researchers from Cincinnati Children's Hospital and Medical Center, and Gunasheela Surgical and Maternity Hospital in Bangalore, India collaborated on a research project (published in *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, April 2005) that showed that practicing prenatal yoga helped to improve birth weight, reduce pre-term labor, and decreased other complications.

This means that more and more pregnant yoga students are going to be coming to our yoga classes. Are you prepared?

Seeing the Spectrum

To help you prepare, I'm going to outline three likely "prenatal scenarios" that you might encounter in your teaching—Hey, gents, this means you, too!—and offer some guidance for handling each situation.

Situation 1: A new student drops into your class or signs up for your series of general yoga classes. She just happens to be pregnant. Will you (a) turn her away? (b) welcome her, but be afraid to have her do anything? or (c) have her join the class, making adjustments as needed for her circumstance?

Situation 2: You did so well with the first situation that student in Situation 1 has told all of her pregnant friends about you. They want you to teach them a "just for prenatal" yoga class. Should you (a) figure that since what you did worked for one student, the same program should work for six students? (b) Laugh and say, "Are you crazy?" or (c) decline and say you need more training to teach a specialized class?

Situation 3: Now let's say you get pregnant. Well okay, I said this article was for guys too, so let's instead say that your most advanced woman student gets pregnant. She has been practicing inversions, full backward bends, and other advanced asanas. She has no complications with her pregnancy. Her health care provider has given her full approval to exercise. She wants to continue her yoga practice as usual. Her practice has been so important to her that she cannot



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

imagine changing it, except for perhaps a few minor common sense adjustments for size, etc. Are you prepared to advise her, and what exactly will you say?

The Changing Prenatal Universe

Ready or not, I believe that sooner or later you will find yourself in Situation 1—or perhaps it's already happening to you. It was not all that long ago when women were told that they should not exercise when pregnant, and that they should eat enough for two people. Well, if you weren't around to notice, you can imagine the effect that advice had: It kept a lot of pregnant women out of our yoga classes. Luckily we are moving into the Dwapara age, and slowly we are becoming a bit more enlightened. The word is out now: not only is exercise okay for pregnant women, but they are being *encouraged* to exercise. And as for eating for two, as appealing as that may have sounded to some of us, that is out the door. Most women are advised to eat only about 300 extra calories a day—and even then, not until the second and third trimesters.

Now that the first notable scientific study to look specifically at the effects of yoga on pregnancy outcomes has been published—and shows that not only is yoga safe, but it also helps to improve birth weight and decreases pre-term labor—even more women will be looking to yoga for prenatal health for themselves and their baby. Not all women will be able to find a prenatal class in their area, or at a time that works for them. And even if they do find a prenatal class, many women

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

will want more yoga than the typical once-a-week offering of a prenatal class. The result? Some pregnant women will come to “regular yoga classes.” So ...

Situation 1

... We come back to the question of what to do for the pregnant woman who comes into your regular class.

First of all, as long as a prenatal student's health care practitioner has given her the okay to exercise, there is no need for you to panic. There are some contraindications (as there are in all stages of our lives) to exercise during pregnancy that would be determined by her healthcare provider before giving the green light to exercise. You will find that, with some background knowledge, plus a lot of common sense, together you and your student will be able to modify her practice to ensure that it will be safe for her and her baby. See “Prenatal Exercise Precautions” (below) for warning signs to look out for. In general, have her take it easy, and always err on the side of caution whenever something questionable comes along.

Prenatal Exercise Precautions

- Do not squish the baby!
- Stop when fatigued.
- Do not exercise to the point of increased body temperature.
- Monitor breathing. A pregnant woman should always be able to talk comfortably.
- Do not do sit-ups past 45 degrees.
- Stop if vaginal bleeding occurs (call health care provider).
- Be aware that, occasionally, exercise may stimulate uterine activity or initiate possible complications. If there is any question as to whether uterine activity is simply practice contractions—called “Braxton Hicks contractions”—versus premature labor or other complications, then have the student lie down on her left side and rest comfortably. Usually this will be all that is needed. If troublesome symptoms continue then, she should contact her healthcare provider.)

As a starting point, see “Prenatal Yoga Tips” (page 9). Memorizing these tips—or keeping them handy to refer to—will help you deal with the unexpected prenatal student. If you do have one or more pregnant women taking your class, then you should refer to one of the books that are recommended below. Taking a prenatal yoga teacher training course will of course prepare you most thoroughly. I recommend this for all teachers—men and women—as part of

their continuing education, whether or not they intend to specialize in prenatal yoga.

Are there times when you should turn away a prenatal yoga student? If you are indeed teaching Ananda Yoga, then you should not find it difficult to accommodate a pregnant woman in your class. However, if you happen to be teaching yoga in a hot environment, and/or aerobically with heating pranayamas and asanas (which, speaking personally, I hope you are not), then it would not be appropriate to have a prenatal student in your class. A pregnant woman's body temperature is already elevated, and if she becomes overheated, both she and the baby will be medically at risk. Other dangers from a fast-paced or vigorous class can be injury from falling (balance is an issue throughout pregnancy), or compression on the abdomen. If you teach a hot and/or fast-paced, challenging class, you should explain to the pregnant student that there are other styles of yoga that she could try, and best of all, try to steer her to a prenatal yoga class if one is available in her area.

Situation 2

Now let's consider Situation 2: a prenatal yoga class. First of all, don't fall into the erroneous trap of thinking that what works for one pregnancy will work for other pregnancies. Each pregnancy is unique. Women themselves are often surprised about how each of their own pregnancies differs from the others—sometimes dramatically.

Second, when a class is called Prenatal Yoga, it is commonly assumed that the class will focus on the very specific needs of the prenatal student. Whereas in Situation 1, the yoga is being adapted or modified to accommodate a prenatal student, in Situation 2 the yoga practice will be one that specifically nurtures and caters to the special needs and circumstances of prenatal students. Both approaches are valid. We just need to be clear about what we are offering.

So, it makes sense that if you are going to cater to the particular needs and circumstances of a specialized group—prenatal in this case—then you are going to need additional training. Can you train yourself on your own? Well, it was not that long ago that most of us in the prenatal yoga field had to do it that way. Now however, there are many good training programs available. There are more books available as well, although many of them have conflicting viewpoints. A good course with an experienced instructor will help you to understand the information that is out there and can give you the best up-to-date information.

And guess what? I just happen to teach one at The Expanding Light! Ananda's *Prenatal Yoga Teacher Training* is July 16–23, followed immediately by *Postpartum Yoga Teacher Training*, July 23–26.

Auxiliary Questions

Now some of you may be wondering: If an experienced yoga teacher has practiced yoga during her own pregnancy, does that qualify her sufficiently for teaching in this specialty area? The answer is, quite simply, no. It is certainly an advantage to have done so, but as mentioned earlier, each pregnancy is unique, and one needs to be trained for the

🌀 Prenatal Yoga Tips 🌀



1. To **prevent dizziness**, keep your head lifted while in a forward bend position.
2. You may need to be close to a wall or have a chair near to help you with **balance**. Your changing body requires constant adjustment. A regular yoga practice can help you avoid balance problems.
3. Although one generally should **not eat before practicing yoga**, it may be necessary to eat a small amount of food

(perhaps crackers) to prevent indigestion and/or morning sickness. Additionally some women may need to be sure that they have a high protein breakfast with complex carbohydrates (such as eggs and whole wheat toast) **to prevent or lessen morning sickness and/or dizziness** before a morning class. Find out what works for you, and be observant: your needs may change at different points throughout your pregnancy.

4. The growing baby and uterus stretch the abdominal muscles. If those muscles begin to widen too far apart at the midline of your abdomen, then extra care should be taken to prevent straining or tearing them during exertion. Keeping your abdominal muscles strong safely through yoga practice is the best prevention. Check for **muscle separation weekly**—your healthcare provider or prenatal yoga instructor should be able to instruct you on how to do this.
5. After the first trimester (or sooner if it does not feel right to you), **avoid lying on your abdomen**.
6. **Avoid positions that put pressure** on the baby/abdomen or make you feel **uncomfortable** in any way.
7. **Do not practice yoga in a hot room or overexert yourself** and overheat your body in any way. It is not healthy for you or your baby.
8. Relaxin, the hormone that is present at elevated levels during pregnancy, **will loosen your joints**. Relaxin helps the pelvic joints to be able to widen and prepare your body for giving birth. Be careful not to overstretch your muscles or ligaments or to hyperextend your joints to prevent injuries, especially in the last trimester when the effect is greatest coupled with the weight of the baby.
9. If you find that your **legs cramp** when you point your feet, then flex your feet instead. Standing up can alleviate a cramped calf muscle.

10. As your baby takes up more space, you may find practicing the **pranayamas** more difficult. Discuss this with your teacher so that she can help you make adjustments that will be beneficial for you.
11. If you are new to yoga, pregnancy is **not** the time to learn many of the **classical inversions such as headstand and shoulderstand**. For some, pregnancy inversions may be contraindicated and should be avoided altogether. However, for many women, there are some partial and some supported inversions that may be beneficial. Ask your prenatal yoga instructor or healthcare provider what is right for you. If you are already proficient in inversions, then discuss with your healthcare provider and an experienced prenatal yoga teacher whether the circumstances of your pregnancy warrant avoiding or continuing (with regular re-evaluations) your inversion practice.
12. **Lying on your back** for short periods of rest in between asanas during approximately the first half of your pregnancy should not be a problem. After the baby gets larger you will start to want to lie on your side for these short rests. This helps to ensure that the weight of the baby is not pressing on the arteries behind the uterus and thus help maintain maximum blood flow for mother and baby.
13. After the first trimester, you should **practice Savasana** (deep relaxation) on your left side. There is a major vein that runs along the right side of our bodies. Lying on your left side therefore allows for maximum blood flow during deep relaxation. Use props to support your body (and the growing baby!) comfortably.
14. Some days you **may not feel like going to yoga class** because you are too tired, you have mild morning sickness (which can be at any time during the day), or you just do not feel like your usual self. **I encourage you to GO!** Most women feel much better after their yoga class, finding some if not all of their symptoms relieved.
15. Although most women can begin yoga practice at any time during their pregnancy, you should check with your healthcare provider **before beginning** yoga or any other form of exercise.



Yoga is a great way to feel fit and healthy for your body, mind and soul during your pregnancy and is one of the best ways you can prepare yourself for the birth of your baby! Enjoy.

many possible situations that may occur.

Well then, on the other hand, can someone who has not been pregnant before teach prenatal yoga? With proper training, definitely, yes. There are many great, well trained prenatal instructors out there who have not been pregnant and who are teaching great classes. And unfortunately, there are also teachers who have been pregnant before and have little or no training in prenatal yoga, and their classes are well, shall we say, inadequate and probably unsafe.

A prenatal class offers much more than techniques for a healthy pregnancy and delivery. It has a special *bhav* (a Sanskrit word meaning mood, or vibration). Mothers-to-be find that the camaraderie of others like themselves is highly beneficial. Many develop friendships that last a lifetime. Pregnancy is a very special time in one's life, and it is wonderful to have others around you for support and sharing. A prenatal yoga class is probably one of the healthiest venues for such support!

Situation 3

This brings us now to Situation 3: the advanced student who is now pregnant. Can it be as easy as telling this prenatal student simply to carry on as usual, and listen to her own body and make adjustments as necessary? Or does one need to bring out a long list of "never do" asanas and pranayamas?

If only life were so simple as to be able to choose one or the other! I think that what is important to understand here, is that the potential for what can be done by an advanced yoga practitioner during a healthy pregnancy is wide open.

However, one must be guided by certain principles and knowledge about the physiological changes that take place during pregnancy, and their far-reaching effects. The growing size inside a woman's body is not the only factor that affects her yoga practice. Just about every aspect of her life is chang-

ing at the same time, including eating, sleeping, eliminating, and the following:

- She will tend to get dizzy in forward bends, getting up from the floor to sitting and/or standing, etc.
- Her balance can be affected.
- As the pregnancy progresses, her abdominal muscles become more stretched out and are thus more susceptible to strain and tears.
- Her ligaments and joints are looser, which makes her more susceptible to strains and sprains.
- Her growing abdomen ought not to be compressed.
- The increased blood flow elevates her body temperature, and can raise her blood pressure.

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

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

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

I'll take you through this example next time, in the second part of this article. ♦



Ayurvedic Healing & Yoga Retreat

with Ananda in Kerala, India

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

“The best vacation I’ve ever had!” — AYT grad Lan Gluckman

Savor two relaxing, rejuvenating weeks of Ayurvedic healing treatments and Ananda Yoga at Kerala's finest seaside Ayurvedic resort—and receive Level 2 credit, too. Start thinking about it now, because participants will need to register by September 15, 2006. For more information please contact The Expanding Light at 800-346-5350 (530-478-7518) or www.expandinglight.org/kerala.



Finding Bliss Beneath a Coconut Canopy (continued from page 3)



AYTT grads Joan Gosling, Lan Gluckman, and Mary Joe Bowling model their newly acquired Indian clothes.

From the start, the group has really been “into” the sadhanas—two hours in the morning and, when they’re not extending their post-treatment relaxation period, an hour and a quarter in the evening. The sadhanas are not physically intense—“intense” isn’t really what one is looking for during this experience (although we certainly feel a bit of it when we drive on the Indian roads during our two day-long excursions)—and they have a two-fold purpose:

- To support the Ayurvedic treatments by relaxing and harmonizing body and mind to make us more receptive to them
- To bring in the spiritual dimension (since Ayurveda focuses more on the physical and psychological)

It’s impossible not to see the effect that sadhana has had on our group. It’s been both energizing and bonding for the group, and very uplifting for the individuals. Day by day, their inner glow increases, and I can see their awareness and spiritual commitment deepening. Even for those who had prior meditation experience, it seems as though India is opening them to a whole new dimension of their practice.

And the effect has spread to the Somatheeram staff, who watch us with interest whenever they’re nearby, as though trying to absorb some of what we’re doing. These are Indians, after all, and spirituality is in their very bones. Even if they don’t practice themselves—and I imagine that most of them don’t—they appreciate its value. One of the senior staff told us that they feel a difference in themselves and in the retreat atmosphere because of what we’re doing; they can feel the blessings. That’s what this entire experience has been: a blessing for all of us.

Memo to myself: This is what I need to do more in my own sadhana: concentrate on feeling the blessings that come from making an effort. Even the not-so-good days have blessings if I will just open myself to them.

Re-Entry Reality

Now that I’m back to my normal flow of life, I mustn’t let this fabulous experience slip away in the face of a long to-do list. My “memos to myself” seem to be a good way to keep it fresh and keep the benefits flowing. I just need to remember.

There’s much more I could have mentioned: delightful evening entertainment (including classical Bharatanatyam dance), incredible food, special cultural day trips, custom-tailored Indian clothes at bargain prices, etc.—but I hope you have at least an idea of what the experience is like.

And in case you’d like to have more than just an idea, next year’s Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga Retreat will be February 8–25, 2007, with an option to continue on to Delhi for Yogananda’s Mahasamadhi Celebration and the first-ever Worldwide Kriyaban Retreat. You will be able to get full details soon at www.expandinglight.org/kerala. ♦

AYTT Staff on the Road

In the coming months, Gyandev and Diksha will lead a number of Ananda Yoga programs in various parts of the world. If you live near any of the locations listed below—or if you know someone who does—please support this outreach effort by attending or recommending the event.

All the programs listed below are weekend retreats or longer. For information, please contact Gyandev (see page 12).

April 28–30 Lancaster, Kentucky (central KY),
“Yoga to Awaken the Chakras”

June 2–4 Willard, Wisconsin (west-central WI)—“Yoga to Awaken the Chakras”

Aug 27–Sep 8 Assisi, Italy—“Yogic Insights into Christianity”

Sept 29–Oct 1 Toronto, Ontario—“Yoga for Health and Healing”

Oct 6–8 Chattanooga, TN—“Yoga for Health and Healing”

Oct 13–15 Dallas, TX—“Yoga for Health and Healing”

Feb 8–25, 2007 . Kerala, India—“Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga”

Special note: Are you willing to help make an Ananda program happen near you in 2007? It’s a wonderful way not only to serve, but to give your spiritual life a boost. A weekend retreat, a day-long workshop, even a half-day workshop—if you’re interested, please contact Gyandev soon, as some 2007 dates are already taken.

**LEVEL 2 NEWS**

Summer 2006 Highlights

★Advanced Pranayama (May 21–28)

Explore some of the most powerful techniques in yoga: breathing techniques, bandhas, mudras, special hybrid techniques, plus Energization in greater depth and detail. Led by Gyandev McCord and Savitri Simpson.

Advanced Yoga Intensive (June 18–24)

Take your practice to the next level with more-challenging asanas, powerful pranayamas, bandhas, and mudras, and longer, more-dynamic meditations. Led by Gyandev McCord, this program is all about longer, deeper practice with two 2.5-hour practice sessions (or longer) each day.

The Therapeutic Use of Asana (June 25–30)

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

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

In honor of Swami Kriyananda's landmark new book, *The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*, this course is being offered for the second year in a row. Immerse yourself in the timeless wisdom of the Gita under the expert guidance of Jyotish and Devi Novak (Ananda's spiritual directors), and Uma Macfarlane. You'll explore Yogananda's commentaries on the Gita, learn how to apply it to your daily life, and get ideas for presenting Gita concepts to your own students. Also, Gyandev McCord will guide you in exploring the practice and teaching of some more-advanced asanas.

AYTA CONTACTS

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The Expanding Light
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2006 Level 2 Calendar

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

5/10–14 Kriya Yoga Step 2:
Preparation

5/21–28 ★Advanced Pranayama

5/25–6/4 ... Yoga of the Heart®

6/15–18 Restorative Yoga Teacher
Trng.

6/18–24 Advanced Yoga Intensive

6/25–30 The Therapeutic Use of Asana

6/23–7/2 ... ★Meditation Teacher Training

7/2–15 ★AYTT Assistantship

7/16–23 Prenatal YTT

7/19–23 Balance Your Core Energy

7/23–26 Postpartum YTT

7/27–30 The Joy of Sanskrit—Level 1

7/30–8/1 The Joy of Sanskrit—Level 2

7/30–8/5 ★The Essence of the
Bhagavad Gita

8/6–12 Meditation Teacher Trng—
Level 2

10/13–22 ... ★Meditation Teacher Training

10/18–22 ... Kriya Yoga Step 2:
Preparation

10/22–11/4 ★AYTT Assistantship

11/8–12 Awaken to
Superconsciousness through
Yoga

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