

Awake & Ready!

Newsletter of the Ananda Yoga® Teachers Association
Vol. 13 No. 1 • Spring 2008

Playing the Pauses

by Gyandev McCord

Valerie Wint (Toronto, AYTT Nov 2001) once sent me a quotation by the famous pianist, Arthur Schnabel: "The notes I handle no better than many pianists. But the pauses between the notes—ah, that is where the art resides." Interesting, isn't it?

Here's the Ananda Yoga version: "The active poses I do no better than many hatha yogis. But the pauses in the neutral poses—ah, that is where the art resides." Of course, there's art in both, but the pauses are less appreciated, so in this article I'm going to discuss how to "play" them.



Gyandev McCord
Director

Lost Pause

Before I came to Ananda Yoga, I thought pauses were simply welcome "breathers" during my (usually) strenuous asana practice. Yet in Ananda Yoga, I found a gentler practice with more emphasis on the pauses. That didn't make sense to me: "Why pause like that, even after an easy pose? C'mon, let's move!"

Fortunately, I had already come to see meditation as the central technique of all yoga, and I found Ananda Yoga to be a great aid to meditation. So I stayed with it. In time, I came to appreciate the value of the pauses, and I gradually learned how to make better use of them.

Today, however, many yoga teachers pause hardly at all—and consequently students don't understand the importance of pauses. An occasional series of Surya Namaskar is one thing, but I can't help but feel that a continual flow of active asanas throughout most of one's practice is inherently unbalanced. In the language of my last two articles ("The Yin and Yang of Yoga"), it's too much yang.

The Omnipresent Pause

I've come to appreciate that pauses after active asanas (*I'll focus on that shortly*) are not the only yin/yang element of hatha yoga. All hatha practice is about the interplay between activity and pauses, and that interplay

occurs at many levels. For example, consider the following levels of Ananda Yoga sadhana:

Overall Practice

Active (yang)—the entire flow of energization, asanas and pranayama: We energize and relax the body, direct energy and awareness away from the extremities into the spine, and finally, bring energy to the brain.

Pause (yin)—meditation practice.

Energization

Active—"tense with will"

Pause—"relax and feel." Many people are already tensing the next body part while relaxing the last one. That's a mistake, because the relaxation phase—when we are undistracted by the effort of physical tension—is the best time to tune in more clearly to prana.

Asana Routine

Active—From standing poses, to seated & floor poses, to inversions, it's like one long, multi-faceted active pose

Pause—Deep relaxation in Savasana

Meditation Period

Active—the technique (e.g., Hong-Sau)

Pause—the final phase, "true meditation," where one sits without technique and becomes increasingly absorbed in the inner stillness. Ideally, we then enter "The Big Pause": breathlessness.

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Pranayama, Hong-Sau, Kriya Yoga

Active—inhalations and exhalations

Pauses—the spaces between the movements of the breath (Although we breathe throughout the routine, during these techniques the breath is the *primary* focus.)

Active practices help deepen the little pauses, which in turn lead us toward The Big Pause of breathlessness. So we see that pauses are not merely *part* of the practice; they are, in a sense, its *goal*. Now there's a paradigm shift!¹

A Useful Perspective

Swami Kriyananda often emphasizes: "If you want to find peace in meditation, don't just sit there, hoping peace will come. Rather, if you'll meditate *with* peace, with enjoyment of whatever peace you feel, you'll attune yourself to peace, and it will come more easily and more fully. Similarly, if you want to find joy, meditate *with* joy."

Similarly, to experience The Big Pause of breathlessness, we should work with the little pauses along the way—not merely resting briefly, but *playing* the pauses. And if we want to bring energy to the spiritual eye, then we must view the pauses, not as downtime, but as "uptime"—a time to bring energy up to the spiritual eye.

And don't forget: Since our aim is to enjoy the entire process—right?—it's helpful if we honor *both* senses of "play," i.e., we "play" the pauses with a "playful" spirit. So with "playful" in the backs of our minds, let's explore how to "play" the pauses.

Playtime

You may already have a good way, but my exploration began with the thought: "If the aim of my overall asana practice is to prepare me for meditation, perhaps it will help if I treat *every* asana as a preparation for meditation." I began to do each active asana as though it were the *very last* activity before meditation, doing it in such a way as to make it as beneficial for meditation as possible. I ask, "How is this asana preparing me to meditate, and what can I do to enhance that effect?" (That may sound obvious, but I've found a wealth of insight and inspiration in this simple practice.)

Then, right after the active asana, I have a 15-to-30-second meditation (perhaps 60 seconds or even more)—in Tadasana if I'm still doing standing poses, otherwise sitting cross-legged or in Vajrasana. I "play the pause" by

"Play is the only way the highest intelligence of humankind can unfold."

—Joseph Chilton Pearce,
author, scientist, mystic

¹ We could take a still larger perspective: All of life is an active pose that prepares us for death, The *Really* Big Pause, which is done in the *true* Corpse Pose. That's beyond the scope of this article, but check out an excellent audio by Swami Kriyananda on death as "the final exam" of life, at www.anandaindia.org/inspiration/video/kriyananda.html.

Will You Help???

Awake & Ready! needs you to write for an upcoming issue. We seek not only instructional articles, but entertaining and inspiring stories as well. Please share your perspectives with your fellow Ananda Yoga teachers. We'll even help you with the writing.

For more information, please contact Gyandev McCord at gyandev@expandinglight.org. Soon!

sensing the lingering effects of the preceding asana, feeling how they can take me toward meditation, and trying to deepen that effect through an effort of will and feeling.

Each Pose Plays in Its Own Way

For example, in Trikonasana, I immerse my awareness in the energy I feel vitalizing my body, especially my torso. To strengthen the effect, I use the affirmation: "Energy and joy flood my body cells! Joy descends to me!" I exit the pose gracefully, so as not to disrupt that experience. Between sides, I stand in Tadasana and deepen that experience through the use of my willpower and feeling (yang and yin). The yin part is about *feeling* joy, vitality and exhilaration, enthusiastically enjoying them; that simple act of enthusiastic enjoyment increases those qualities. The yang part is about staying concentrated, keeping my mind connected with those feelings, and consciously willing that "sparkling" energy to move into the spine and rise toward the brain. (It's already rising due to the joy and exhilaration, of course, but I want make sure it goes inward also, not just upward.)

I liken this practice to swimming with the current of a river: It's already carrying me, and I swim strongly in cooperation with that current—here, the currents of energy (flow of prana) and consciousness (joy). I then have a head start on the second side: I can align myself even more closely with the psycho-energetic essence of the asana. By the time I finish that second side, I'm sparkling with joyful, upward-surgings energy. I'm ready even for meditation.

Every pose must be worked with according to its own unique qualities. For example, Janushirasana's feeling of relaxed expansion in the torso, the spine, and especially, in the mind, is very different from Trikonasana. After each side, I sit cross-legged, enjoying that openness—and trying to increase it through the use of feeling (enjoying the openness and freedom) and will (staying focused on and connected with those feelings, consciously relaxing energy

(continues on page 10)

Life after Ananda Yoga Teacher Training

One Graduate's Journey through the First Three Years

by Stan Giles

Life after AYTU unfolds differently for each of us. I took AYTU in January–February 2005. This is my story ...

The four weeks of AYTU were genuinely some of the best weeks of my life. Apart from anything else, it was during AYTU that I knew that I was to become a disciple of Yogananda. As far as the yoga was concerned, I just loved the physical exercise, the spiritual aspects of the teachings, and the immense feeling of wellbeing that I had during the program.

No sooner had I returned to Scotland (where I lived at that time) than I injured my shoulder, to the extent that it was difficult to do much yoga without exacerbating the injury. I concluded that Yogananda wanted me to spend more time meditating and less time doing asanas. Whether that is true or not doesn't really matter—it was just the story I told myself. The following month I flew to Italy to take discipleship at Ananda Assisi—my “local” Ananda center.

Getting Started in Scotland

Over the following eighteen months I taught several six-week courses, which I called “Introduction to Ananda Yoga.” As a relative newcomer to yoga practice myself (at the age of 54), I was not particularly flexible. But this was not important at all. In fact, I attracted fat, thin, tall and short, men and women; experienced and total beginners. Each weekly Monday evening class was two hours long. Our yoga/meditation/therapy room accommodated six to eight people for yoga. Class size for the course was usually six, and I had people pay in advance for the six-week course, so that they were committing to the class.

There was not a rigid format, as classes had different needs and different energies (and so did I), but the classes would run something like that shown in “Stan's Scottish Syllabus” (see right). The two hours always just flew by. Teaching was a joy, even when I was having an “off day,”



Since graduating from Ananda YTT in early 2005 and MTT in October 2006, Stan has taught in Scotland and now in India. He is renowned for having masterminded an astoundingly superb talent show by his graduating AYTU class.

and I could always feel the change in the energy of the class as we settled into our practice. I loved the way even the generally reserved Scots really engaged with the joy and energy of chanting—“Door of My Heart” being particularly well received. There was also wonderful feedback from participants—they just didn't want to leave, as they felt so peaceful.

I also held a free 90-minute Friday morning sadhana, where people could just drop in and, if they wished, they could make a donation to a charity called Spirit Aid. Spirit Aid is a Glasgow-based charity that supports children in war damaged and deprived areas around the world (so naturally, the fee for my class was an optional donation). They guarantee that at least 90% of donations reach the point of need, whether in the form of educational materials, medicine or computers; which is the reason that their Glasgow office is a bit shabby. There were one or two regulars, and the class was usually small—just two or three people, but occasionally five or six. And there was some astonishing feedback; one lady regularly felt an angelic presence during her practice; another reported the resolution of a trauma from many years ago. And always

Stan's Scottish Syllabus

Week 1

- General intro to Ananda Yoga—what it is and is not
- Discussion of why we do yoga—what are the aims?
- Brief talk about meditation
- Class which included some asanas, but emphasised teaching the Energization Exercises

Week 2

- More emphasis on the asanas, plus how to meditate

Week 3

- Asanas, plus more pranayama and a brief meditation

Week 4

- Asanas, plus discussion and practice of chanting, plus a brief meditation.

Week 5

- Surya Namaskar class, plus chanting and meditation

Week 6

- 2-hour session with all elements of Ananda Yoga—followed by tea and cake and chat.

there was the feeling of peace filling the room and filling each individual.

Between the six-week courses, I offered Monday evening drop-in sessions. The numbers were generally lower, but students still gave positive feedback, and there was always that peaceful feeling with each session. However I felt that these drop-in classes didn't really work for me as they consumed time and energy that I felt could be better spent elsewhere.

After-School Yoga Classes

Then came the biggest challenge: My friend's 12-year-old daughter wanted to do yoga. She organized five other girlfriends to come along, and we started a six-week after-school yoga class (with written consent from the parents—who also had to pay, of course). They would arrive after school at about 4:00 PM, extremely animated following a 15-minute car journey together. I would lay out six glasses of water and encourage them to have a drink.

Then we would start the class with a game. Each person would pick an angel card and talk about the particular attribute, e.g., unselfishness, peace, courage, self-assurance, friendship etc. They seemed to quite enjoy these discussions. Some of them were very good at the asanas, but their attention span after a long day at school was not so good. And because they were friends, they were inclined to chat and giggle. I tried various strategies to deal with this, including discussing the issue with them, and giving "time out" penalties. But no matter what I tried, there would be outbursts of giggles and restlessness. I just did not feel they were really benefiting from the class as much as they could have. And to be honest, it irritated me. Oh yes, and I learned a bit about not being in control!

Then one evening I had a severe sore throat and could hardly speak. So I gave each of the girls a section of the class to teach. One led the opening chant (with dance accompaniment!), another led the angel card exercise, three of them each presented two asanas, and the sixth led relaxation and visualisation. And although it was not your standard yoga class, they did a really good job. I realised that, despite their restlessness, they had absorbed some understanding of yoga and more than a little of the philosophy. And, of course, it was good for them to take the responsibility of teaching.

Onward to India

I left Scotland in October 2006, spending three months at The Expanding Light, where I took Meditation Teacher Training and Kriya Initiation, and then three months in India. After further visits to Ananda Assisi and to The Expanding Light, I came back to India in October 2007, and am now living in Rishikesh (the yoga centre of the world?) and teaching at the Mother Miracle School (www.mothermiracle.org).

This charitable school was started six years ago by the dynamic duo of Patrick and Shahla; Patrick is an American, and his wife, Shahla, is from Iran. They both gave up hugely successful careers in America to dedicate their lives to helping extremely poor children in the Rishikesh area by providing them with education, play, and unconditional love. They started teaching just a few kids in their own home in Rishikesh, and then, after some major setbacks, were able to rent two unused rooms belonging to the local school. Their absolute focus, their willingness to do whatever needs to be done, their devotion to the children and their absence of ego is staggering. For me it is both a privilege and a spiritual education to be working with them.

What do I mean by "poor children"? Well here's one (not unusual) example. Kishant is a 3-year old boy. His family lives in one room made of wood and black polythene (polyethylene). In the single bed sleep his dad and elder brother. On a few dirty sacks on the dirt floor—not much bigger than a single bed—sleep Kishant (3), his sister(5), his mother, and a small baby.

The youngest children like Kishant come to morning class from 10:30 to 12:30. These young children join the older children (the oldest is 16) for classes from 4:00–



Some of the students at the Mother Miracle School in Rishikesh

7:00PM, Monday to Friday. There are also Saturday and Sunday computer classes and other activities –volleyball, yoga, badminton and other games. Without these classes, these kids would have little or no education and end up on the social scrapheap – maybe begging or stealing. (The clothes they are wearing in the photos were almost all purchased with MMS funds. But perhaps more important is the love which they receive.) The Mother Miracle family has grown from a few students 6 years ago to 85 students last year and is now 170 students. The next step is to purchase land and build a boarding school for 500 students. You can read more about MMS, and how to sponsor a child, on the website www.mothermiracle.org. (You can also see Santa Claus in Rishikesh at www.karmaclear.com/latest/newarticle-xmas-and-new-year-in-india.html.)

Teaching at Mother Miracle

I teach English and The Joy of Music—and yoga, of course. Although kirtan is the basic formula for our evening music classes, we listen to, sing, and talk about all kinds of music. Their favorite song may be “Listen, Listen, Listen,” but “The Sound of Music” must be a very close second. They are learning about music as an energy, and how music creates different feelings in us. They are also learning to stand up in front of their peers and sing. But above all, it’s great fun; the class really is about experiencing the Joy of Music—whether you enjoy singing (in or out of tune), banging a drum, rattling a tambourine, playing just one chord



on the guitar, or drifting off into a deep meditative state (no, not sleep!) during a chant. We also have a few budding pianists and guitarists. I have this seed idea at

the back of my mind that one day we will have the Mother Miracle Kirtan group who will perform at schools and ashrams around Rishikesh, and then further afield—like an

Indian version of the Family von Trapp in the Sound of Music. But I’ll have to leave that up to Yogananda.

From Monday to Friday I teach about 15 to 20 of the youngest students—3 to 8 years old—30 minutes of yoga before their morning class. They have had no previous



yoga experience. I have found it very helpful to have an assistant—partly to help with discipline and partly to help the kids with the asanas. They speak little or no English, and my Hindi, though improving, is far from sufficient to describe yoga postures. But they are fantastic imitators. So I do a pose, take a deep breath, and say, “Breathe in,” and they copy me—and say “Breathe in,” too. The only



problem is that if I turn sideways to better demonstrate a pose—you’ve guessed it—they turn sideways too. Sometimes their attention is better than others. They are poor, low caste, high-energy kids brought up in a culture of pushing, shoving, pinching and shouting. They are also incredibly bright-eyed and loving. I am again learning that I am not in control.



Nor do I really want to be in control. I just want to find how best to give these children a good and enjoyable experience of yoga. We “moo” like cows and “miaow” like cats and roar like lions. Sometimes we walk round in a circle holding hands (that way I can be more in control you see!??) and then I call out the name of an asana which we do together. That seems to work quite well. It’s all one great learning curve and a wonderful, though often challenging, experience. If you have any good ideas about teaching these children, I would really appreciate hearing from you. And if you feel drawn to visit us here, then you will be very welcome.

More Teaching in India

My latest yoga-teaching opportunity came a few months ago when I presented a 45-minute class to about 25 adults in Deradhun (a one-hour drive from Rishikesh). The class ranged from a seven-year-old child to elderly frail ladies sitting on a settee. Not your standard California

yoga class! I was bemused by the fact that I, a Westerner of three years' yoga practice (shoulder injury permitting!), was teaching a group of Indian people, for whom yoga practice and philosophy is embedded deeply in their psyche. After a brief introduction about Ananda Yoga, we chanted Gayatri mantra for five minutes. There followed some seated postures and stretches and a few standing postures for those able to stand. We concluded with a short meditation and three "AUMs."

And there it was again: the peace. I—and most of those present, I am sure—could have stayed there for much longer with that peace. But time was short. We were there to promote Master's Flower Essences also.

I have been using flower essences in my practice as a kinesiologist for 12 years or more and it seems very natural and right to become involved with promoting Master's essences here in India. Master's essences are made according to Yogananda's teachings about the spiritual benefits of different fruits and nuts—e.g., cherries for cheerfulness, tomatoes for mental strength and courage. But it is more convenient—and, I believe, much more effective—to take a few drops of a flower essence than to eat three pounds of cherries, four times a day!!

Lila Devi, a long-time devotee, originated and has been making these essences at Ananda Village under the direction of Swami Kriyananda—thus the direct spiritual connection with Paramhansa Yogananda is maintained. (The spiritual origin of flower essences is one of the most significant factors in determining their efficacy). I am personally finding them extremely helpful as I go through different challenges in India, "fighting the tigers of the mind," as Yogananda describes it in *Autobiography of a Yogi*. There is a lot of very good information about Master's essences on www.yoganandaessences.com and www.mastersessences.com.

So, after 45 minutes of Ananda Yoga, we delivered a two-hour presentation about the essences. After the presentation, as people were leaving, I was sitting on the floor cross-legged when an elderly couple approached. They knelt in front of me, pronammed (i.e., bowed to me with palms together) and put their heads to the floor at my feet. It was overwhelming. These people have such amazing humility. The man went on to tell me that his father had been a disciple of Sivananada—one of the foremost yoga sages in India. It was truly an honor to be greeted this way by someone who has such a yogic pedigree.

And so ... What next, I wonder? Where will this yogic path lead? What will be the next adventure? Your adventures will be different from mine. Your challenges will be different from mine. Wherever this path of Ananda Yoga leads you, I wish you all, my Ananda Yoga family, great good fortune and many blessings. ♦

Stan divides his time between India, Europe and America. If you would like to comment on this article or get in touch with him, you can email him at stan@KarmaClear.com.

Ananda Yoga on the Road

by Gyandev McCord

Diksha and I have the privilege of taking Ananda Yoga—as well as the broader Raja Yoga teachings—out once again this year. We have already led a retreat in Los Angeles, and the annual *Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga Retreat* in Kerala, India was once again very wonderful. There were 28 of us in Kerala, including 10 AYT grad. It's truly a relaxing, nurturing experience, plus a bit of (safe, low-key) adventure.

Our topic for the this year's main U.S. retreats is "How to Know and Trust Your Inner Guidance." It has already been a source of much inspiration for us, as we explore new ways to present this important yogic topic—through the vehicles of meditation and Ananda Yoga, as well as through specific yoga techniques for drawing guidance.

We'll also lead retreats in the following locations over the coming months:

2008

May 2–4 Nashville, TN—"Yoga and Ayurveda"

May 23–26 . Willard, WI (Memorial Day Weekend)—"How to Know and Trust Your Inner Guidance"

July 11–13.. McCall, ID—"Yoga to Magnetize Your Life"

Sept 26–28 . Mount Saint Francis, IN (near Louisville, KY and Cincinnati, OH)—"How to Know and Trust Your Inner Guidance"

2009

Jan 2–4 Rancho Palos Verdes, CA (Los Angeles)—topic to be announced

Feb 8–25 "Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga Retreat" in Kerala, India

May 8–10 ... Chicago, IL—topic to be announced

For information on any of these programs—especially if you have friends near those locations who might be interested—please contact me or visit Diksha's and my new website: WaysToFreedom.com.

Spreading the Joy

If you'd like to create a greater sense of community among your students, as well as "fire them up" for more depth, a weekend retreat near you can be a wonderful experience. If you would like to help manifest a retreat that Diksha and I would lead, please contact me. Our calendar for 2009 is almost full.

Let's give the world a gift, and bring the transforming power of Ananda Yoga everywhere we can.

Feeding the Multitudes

by Kari Burgos

I want to share with you a story about an amazing gift I was given: the opportunity to teach a very large number of students, all in one day. I jokingly refer to it as the day I “fed the masses”—without loaves and fish!

Last summer I was approached by one of my loyal, type A students, about group classes. Do I do them? Would I be interested in teaching at a division managers’ meeting that her company was having? Sensing an opportunity for growth—and to earn more than my monthly income in 4 hours!—I quickly said “Yes!”

A Big Gamble?

I had envisioned a small meeting, with maybe 35–40 people. Oh no. God had *much* more in store for me that day! My student told me that I was to be teaching four one-hour, semi-chair classes (standing and chair poses, but no floor poses)—with up to 50 people in each one. Ack! My mind whirred ... hmmm ... that would be 200 people!!! Double Ack! What had I been thinking????!!!

Then a sense of calm came over me, and I knew it would be okay. I just knew it. Steadfast in my resolve, I pushed forward with the plan, mentally organizing the class content, figuring out what to bring with me. Music or no music? Altar stuff or none? I had queried my students about the general makeup, health-wise, of the group I would be teaching. She assured me that all of her people were young and in great shape. Okay, I thought, that’s going to be easy, no special needs etc.

So, I packed up the car, drove two-and-a-half hours to an Indian casino. Did I forget to mention that this was to take place in a casino, of all places?! As I lugged my gear to the room where I would be teaching, I had to pass slot machines, bars, people nestled up to a clanging machine dropping in money, drink in hand, at 8:00 in the morning. Ahhh, the old days—the pull was palpable.

Getting Set Up

I hurried past temptation to find the classroom. A huge ballroom with high ceilings had been sectioned into quarters via moveable walls, and we were to be in one of the quarters. Looking around at the sheer size of our space, I felt a kernel of panic begin to bloom in my belly. Measured Breathing helped to pull me back and prepare me for what was to come, and I got started setting up my space, altar, music, etc.

Since I had been an unwilling hostage at these corpo-

rate-type meetings in my past, when I had been an Operations Manager in the mortgage banking industry, I was able to empathize with these people. I knew how incredibly boring these meetings are. I’d rather go to the dentist! It was a strange feeling being on the other side of the fence now, as a presenter.

I started the classes by having the students leave their shoes by the door. You’d have thought I asked them to give up their first-born child! This forced open their comfy little “boxes,” and I thought, “This is going to be good”—an opportunity for growth that some may never have had at home.

The classes ranged from 40–50 people each, totaling close to 200. Only three people out of the whole had ever experienced yoga before. I was shocked. These people were from all parts of the U.S., as well as from Paris. I noticed right off that my student’s opinion of their health was much mistaken, or seriously optimistic. The students ranged from young and active, to older and obviously sedentary. I even had two people in wheelchairs, and quite a few others with mobility issues. I had my work cut out for me! I decided to start the class on chairs with

some easy, basic movement warm-ups, then do standing postures and energization. The students never have to get down on the floor.

Meeting—and Overcoming—Resistance

I could sense serious resistance in some of the people. You could see it in their expressions as they entered the room, many of them scared and apprehensive, some even outright hostile. But it was fantastic to see their faces change during the course of the class. First the attitude turned to a mild curiosity, then to a determination to do better than their co-workers next to them. In time, they began to get the idea, and each one began to practice to his or her own level of ability. By the end of the class, it all melted into peaceful calm. I know we’re not supposed to be invested in the outcome of our efforts but, for me it was like plugging into a 220-volt electrical outlet. I was so charged up! I felt huge, expansive and clear.

In one of the early classes, one of the students presented me with a “towel sculpture” of a seal. I was so touched by the gesture that I kept that seal up in the front. To my amazement, when we came back from our lunch break for the final class, there was an entire menagerie of towel animals! Later I learned that this company, which supplies



Kari lives and teaches in Sasn Pedro, California (in the greater Los Angeles area). Her studio is called Inner Harmony Yoga: inner-harmony-yoga.com

linens and hospitality items to hospitals, is known for this talent, which they share with the kids in the hospitals that they service.

I was so touched to have made such a difference in so many lives in such a short time. At the end of the classes, as the students reclaimed their shoes, many of them expressed how good they felt and thanked me profusely for coming. I kept saying, "It wasn't me—it was you." But still, the ego did take some satisfaction in all of this. Hey! I'm still human!!

Aftermath

As I struggled to haul everything back to the car, I looked over at the slot machines again, and kept on

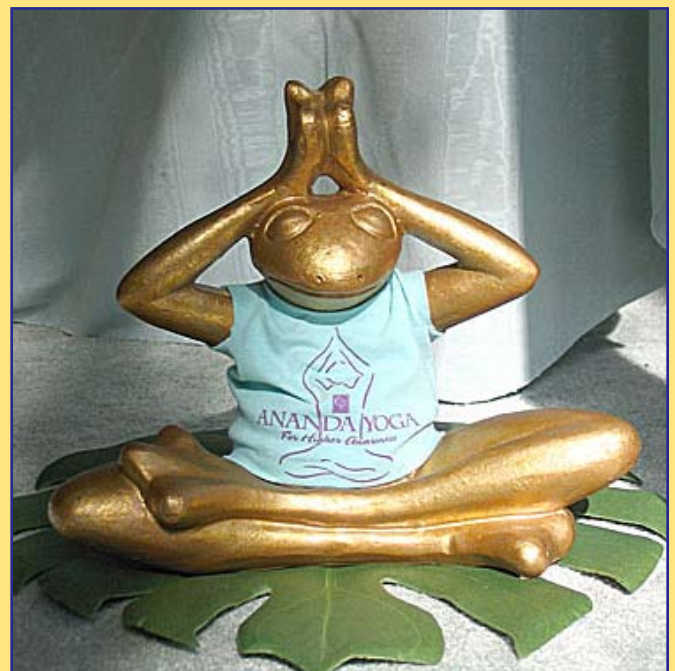
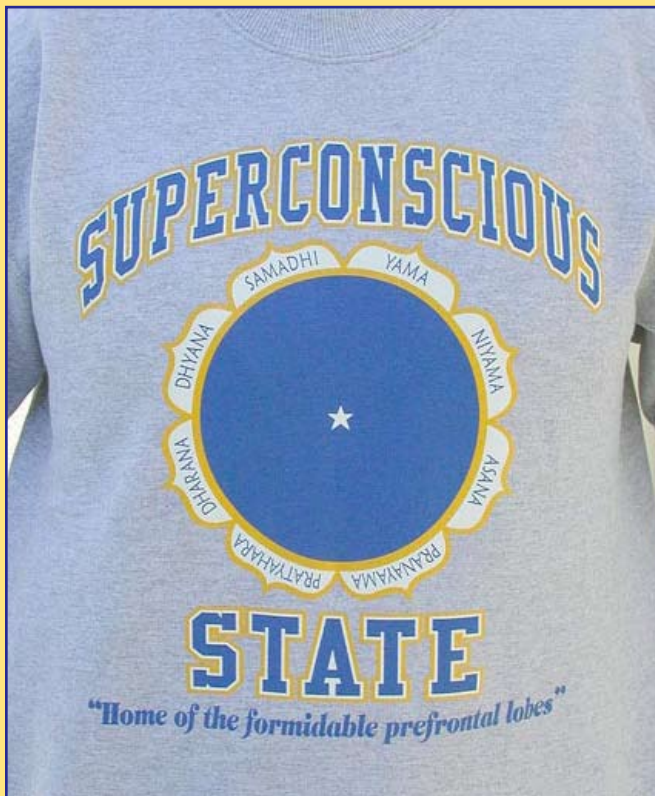
walking. In the afterglow of what had taken place, I was so light and so full that the old "pull" simply didn't exist anymore. Instead what I wanted was an outlet for this amazing surge of energy running through me. I dialed the cell phone furiously, trying to track down a willing ear with whom I could share this experience. As I merged onto the freeway for the drive home, not having reached anyone on the other end of the phone, I popped an Ananda chanting CD into the CD player and proceeded to yammer away to God, my captive audience, the whole way home. "Hey, You got me into this, now You *have* to listen!!"

It was an experience I will never forget—and maybe God won't, either! ♦

Creativity at Play

A playful spirit is right at home in yoga, and that's one thing that Parvati Carol Knight (AYTT, July 2002/ Level 2 2007) has in abundance. In addition to teaching a full schedule of yoga classes as full-time faculty in the Physical Education department at West Valley College in San Jose, California, Parvati has come up with the delightful creations shown here.

The idea for the sweatshirt below came during Meditation Teacher Training: a perfect blend of her collegiate and yoga backgrounds, plus humor. It's easy to mistake it for a basic college sweatshirt, until you look closer



and see that it's all about a *truly* upper-division curriculum! The "petals" are the eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga, and at the bottom is a cute play on words: instead of the prefrontal lobes being the home of the superconscious state, Superconscious State is the "Home of the formidable prefrontal lobes."

Her latest creation (*above*) was inspired when she saw a friend with a frog like this one. "He's doing Parvatasana! Where did you get him? I want one." Soon she had her own and was cutting up an Ananda Yoga T-shirt, sewing it into a frog-sized T-shirt (fortunately, the new design uses smaller artwork!), and "Voilà!"—Frogginanda was incarnated.

Check him out next time you're at The Expanding Light. He likes to divide his time between Gyandev's and Diksha's house, and the T-shirt section of The Expanding Light boutique. Sorry, he's not for sale.

The Blessings of Ananda Yoga

by Barbara Boekelheide

Recently, I agreed to be a substitute teacher for five hatha yoga classes for disabled adults at our local senior center in Sequim, WA. I wondered how they would like Ananda Yoga—and needless to say, I wondered what it would be like to teach that population!

On the first day, I watched the students file in, one by one, each concentrating on their respective destination. One of the students persistently struggled to position her walker so it would fit through the doorway, as another woman towed her portable oxygen tank like a trusty companion on a leash behind her. The remainder of the students had disabilities that were not as physically apparent—from heart disease to osteoporosis. As I watched them, and as their realities dawned on me, my thoughts shifted from an apprehensive “How well will I be able to teach this group?” to “What courage and determination it took for them just to be here!”

I had already know that this was going to be chair yoga, and as the students sat in their chairs, I instructed them to be aware and take note of their breath—my usual preface for Centering in my regular classes. I could hear “Cricket” (so fondly and aptly named) metering her oxygen on demand: “clicking” as she sat upright in her chair, her oxygen being mechanically supplied to her. I thought, “No doubt, Cricket is usually ‘aware’ of her breath.”

We then proceeded to the floor, where these students were best served by having their hips and spine supported. As they struggled to position themselves on their mats, I realized that I had to amplify my teacher’s voice to megaphone proportions as I saw woman straining to follow my instruction because of her impaired hearing. I realized how effortless my life is in comparison to what challenges these people face on a daily basis.

Throughout the session, the students’ willingness was inspiring. They enjoyed relaxing into the gentle, modified poses while letting the silent affirmations fill their consciousness. I encouraged them to release their accumulated tension (they tend to need quite a lot of muscle engagement just to maintain their normal, upright posture), so they could simply enjoy the serenity of peaceful stillness as an expression of Spirit. I prayed that each student receive a peaceful blessing of renewed wellbeing while the class relaxed into the realm of possibility and hope. We all could hear Cricket’s oxygen demands growing less and less—the barometer of our relaxation that day.



Barbara graduated from Ananda YTT in April 2006. She lives and teaches in Sequim, WA (pronounced “squim”) on Washington’s Olympic Peninsula.

Gradually the students appeared to detach from their physical limitations, as I played meditative music to drown out the bingo being played in the far distance at our busy senior center that day.

Yes, I was initially apprehensive about teaching these classes, but the positive comments from my students about the meditative quality of the session highlight why I continue to teach the Ananda way. Within the Divine Blessing of Ananda Yoga, there is a spiritual healing for anyone who participates in the experience. This sustains my students—as well as my own eagerness back to return to the teacher’s role time and time again. ♦

Playing the Pauses (continued from page 2)

into in the spine, and gently “nudging” it upward).

I’ll often do “one-sided” poses twice. The first time helps me tune in to the effects. Then, in the pause afterward, I try to deepen those effects, giving myself a head start when I enter the active pose a second time.

And don’t forget to “play the pause” during deep relaxation. Just lying down and relaxing can be lovely, but it won’t take you far in yoga. Instead, consciously relax the body (tense/relax all at once, or part by part), then concentrate strongly on withdrawing all available energy into the spine. (Without this internalization, Savasana can dissipate and/disperse your energy, taking you toward sub-consciousness.) Then go beyond merely internalizing your energy and awareness: Lift both of them to the spiritual eye. “Played” this way, Savasana is almost an active pose!

“Play is the exultation of the possible.”

—Martin Buber, theologian

When It’s (Almost) All Yang

Of course, we also want to “play” the active asanas, using the power of will and feeling to enhance every moment of the experience. Such nonstop absorption for the entire routine is a challenge to anyone’s concentration span, but it should certainly be our aim. Unfortunately, the physical exertion required by some asanas (e.g., Full Salabhasana, Chakrasana, Mayurasana) can make it difficult to tune in to the subtle energy while doing the asana. In that case, the ensuing pause is our best opportunity to do that via the aftereffects. It’s also a good time to assess how well we did the preceding pose: If we feel agitated or tired during the pause, we probably overdid the intensity or duration, and we need to back off accordingly.

Final Perspectives

The more I’ve explored the pauses, the more I understand how a deeper practice depends on how we blend the active asanas and pauses. It’s not just about longer, stronger asanas, nor is it just about longer, more meditative pauses. If you can be productive in long pauses, great, but “productive” is more important than “long.” It’s all about your degree of vitality, centeredness and upliftment, not the length of time you can stand or sit still. When you feel that you’ve done all you can do in this regard during the pause, move on to the next active asana.

For some asanas and on some days, that may be only 5–10 seconds of pause. At the other extreme, there can be times when a pause turns into a session-ending, hour-long meditation. Giving yourself the space to do either—and

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FINAL ANNOUNCEMENT:

New Ananda Yoga Products

Flashcard Decks

This new, expanded deck includes the asanas that recently received affirmations, for a grand total of 58 asanas. There’s also an “update deck,” with just the 13 additions.

Asana Study Aid CD

This new CD has two tracks: Track 1 takes you through the Sanskrit names, English names and affirmations (in call and response fashion) for the 31 Level 1 AYTT asanas, and Track 2 covers all 56 asanas. (Mayurasana and Dandasana have no affirmations, so they’re not on the second track, but they are in the flashcard deck.)

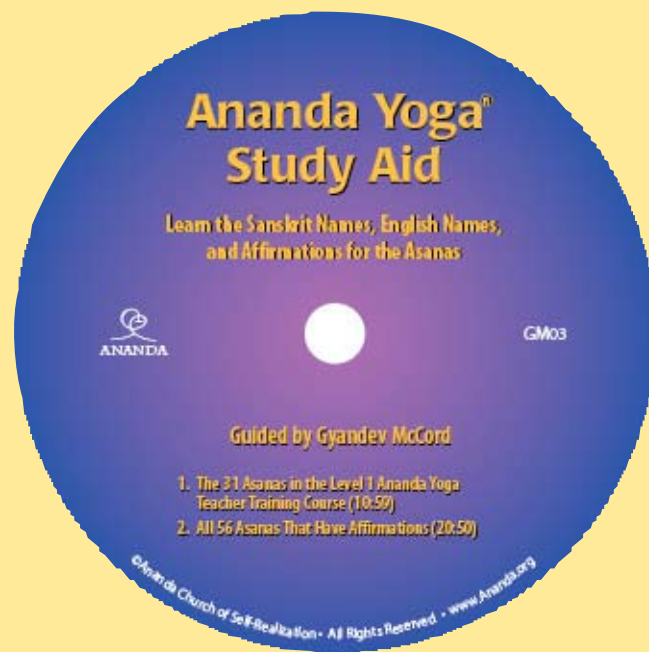
To Order

The cost for flashcards is \$12 for a full deck (25% discount for AYTA members who order six or more decks), and \$3 for an update deck. The CD costs \$10. Add 7.375% sales tax on all California orders. The shipping and handling cost for U.S. addresses is \$2 for the first item, and \$1 for each additional item. Shipping for non-U.S. addresses is \$4 for the first item, and \$1 for each additional item.

Please order through Brook by:

- Sending a check payable to The Expanding Light, or
- Calling with a credit card, or
- Faxing your credit card info

See page 12 for address and phone information.



ANNOUNCING:*New Ananda YTT Certificates*

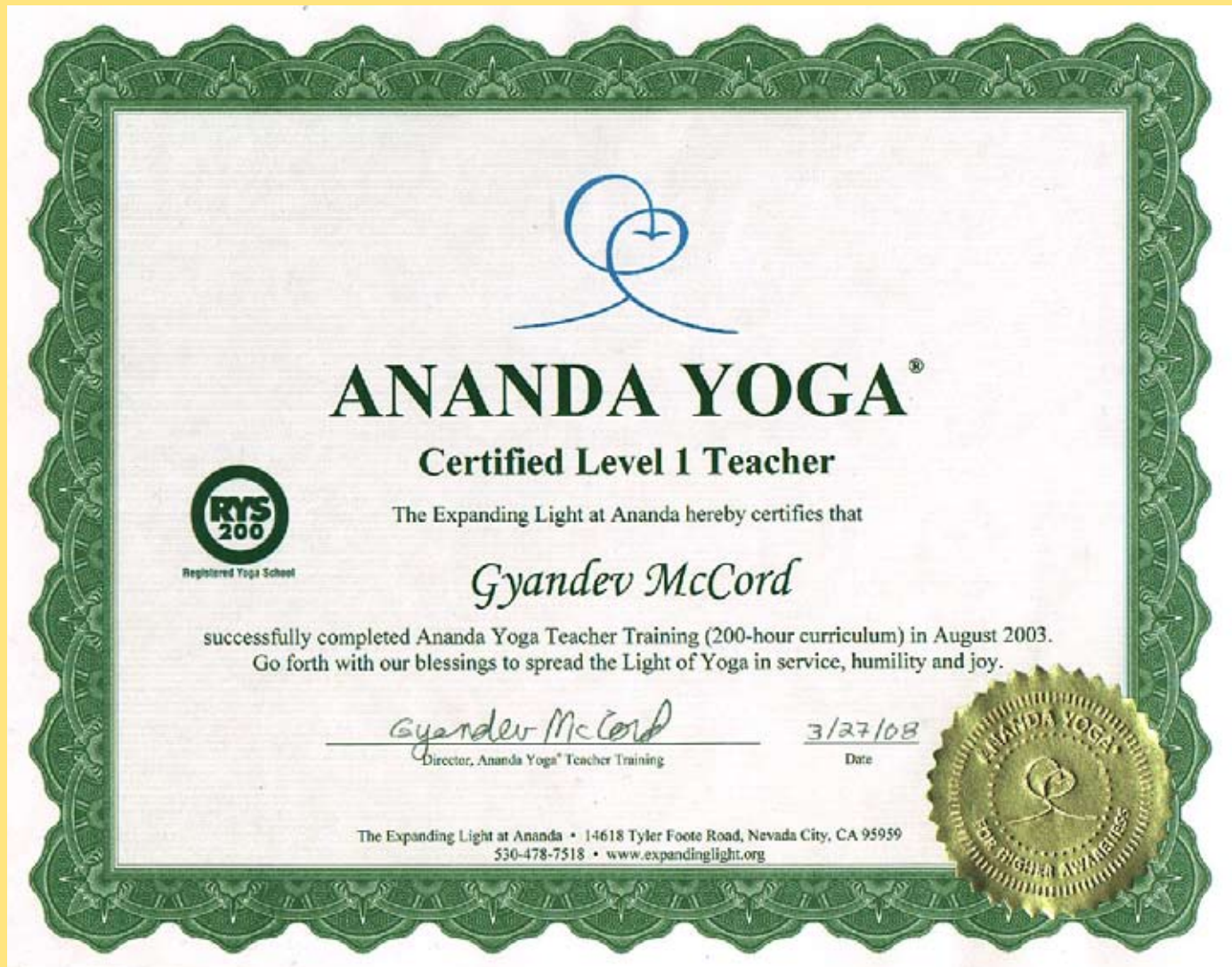
We've just completed a complete redesign of the Level 1 and Level 2 Ananda YTT certificates. Now they even include a special gold foil Ananda Yoga seal ("Ooh, aah!") The first group to receive this certificate was the graduating class of November 2007. A sample of the new certificate is shown below.

Any AYTT graduate can receive this updated version. Just send a check for \$10 (payable to Ananda YTA), along with your graduation date and the exact way you would

like your name to read on the certificate, to:

Ananda Yoga Teacher Training
c/o The Expanding Light
14618 Tyler Foote Road
Nevada City, CA 95959

You may also order with a Visa or MasterCard by phone (call Brook Dunwoody at 800-346-5350) or fax (530-478-7519). If faxing, be sure to include the three-digit security code on the back of your card.



Playing the Pauses
(continued from page 10)

striving to tune in well enough to know which to do—is part of the art of it.

All of this is easier to do than to explain. Suffice it to say that the pauses are precious parts of Ananda Yoga

practice, and well worth the time it takes to explore them more deeply. Don't let restlessness, workout consciousness, or "I only have so much time to do all these poses" deprive you of the fullness of your practice—or the fullness of your students' practice, either.

Let the play go on! ♦

UPCOMING LEVEL 2 HIGHLIGHTS

Ananda Yoga Intensive (July 20–26)

This course is a Spiritual Renewal Week for Ananda Yoga teachers and experienced practitioners. Gyandev will lead you in long practice sessions every day (usually twice a day), integrating asana, pranayama, bandha, meditation and other techniques. You'll also enjoy sharing wisdom and insights with other Ananda Yoga teachers. It's a perfect way to build your magnetism for teaching and practicing Ananda Yoga.

★The Essence of the Yoga Sutras (July 27–Aug 2)

Senior Ananda teachers Pranaba (Bent) and Parvati Hansen guide you deep into the Sutras to find the pearls of Patanjali's insights. Through lecture, discussion and practice, you'll explore Yogananda's unique and penetrating insights into the Sutras, with important applications to your practice, your teaching, and your life. Also, Gyandev will guide you in exploring the practice and teaching of some more-advanced asanas.

Restorative Yoga Teacher Training (Aug 2–5)

Every yoga teacher has opportunities to use restorative techniques—e.g., when a student has an injury or deep emotional release, is too stressed out for normal asanas, or just for a change of pace for your classes. Lisa Mallery Fontaine will share her talented touch with this deeply relaxing and nurturing adjunct to Ananda Yoga practice.

Therapeutic YTT: Knees, Hips and Shoulders (Aug 5–10)

Nicole DeAvilla offers this new YTT in two parts (offered in alternate years), and it's for yoga teachers only. This year, you'll enjoy in-depth asana alignment for protecting the knees, hips and shoulders, plus easy therapeutic exercises for rehabilitating and/or supporting these vulnerable joints. Come deepen your knowledge of A&P and learn to serve your students even better.

AYTA CONTACTS

Level 2 Questions • Membership • AYSutra
 Brook Dunwoody, 530-478-7518 x7088,
 brook@expandinglight.org

Articles for Awake & Ready!
 Gyandev McCord, 530-478-7518 x7081,
 gyandev@expandinglight.org

The Expanding Light
 800-346-5350, 530-478-7518 • fax: 530-478-7519 • info@expandinglight.org

Level 2 Calendar

Please remember that AYTA Members receive a **15% discount** on all Level 2 programs. If you need financial aid, please contact The Expanding Light for an application. All of the following courses earn Level 2 credit; those with "★" are required for Level 2 AYTT certification.

2008

- 5/7–11 Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 6/1–14 ★AYTT Assistantship
- 6/11–15 Ayurvedic Yoga Retreat
- 7/20–26 Ananda Yoga Intensive
- 7/25–8/3 ★Meditation Teacher Training
- 7/27–8/2 ★Essence of the Yoga Sutras
- 7/29–8/3 ... Prenatal YTT
- 8/2–5 Restorative YTT
- 8/5–10 Therapeutic YTT: Knees, Hips and Shoulders
- 8/12–16 Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 8/24–31 ★Advanced Pranayama
- 9/17–21 Yoga to Balance the Chakras
- 10/10–14 Kriya Yoga Preparation
- 10/19–28 ★Meditation Teacher Training
- 10/26–11/23 ★AYTT Assistantship
- 12/14–18 ... Ayurvedic Yoga Retreat for Balance & Harmony

2009

- 2/8–25 Ayurvedic Healing and Yoga in Kerala, India
- 3/13–22 ★MTT (tentative)

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