

# Gitananda Yoga Association

## eNews: Volume 5:2 August 2019

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### **GYA GET-TOGETHER Fully booked**

Our Annual Mermaid Beach get-together in **October 2019** at Mermaid Beach is now fully booked. If you are interested in booking for **October 2020** please email Murali [muralidharan33@yahoo.com.au](mailto:muralidharan33@yahoo.com.au)

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### **YOGA SADHANA Muralidharan NSW**

My search for the phenomenon of prana as a cosmic energy led me to enrol at an IYTA teacher training course in Sydney in the late 1980s. We had access to a mobile library at the venue where I found some old Yoga Life magazines. One article was titled '*Prana – The Cosmic Catalyst*' where Swami Gitananda succinctly described prana as an energy as well as a substance, further elaborating on the five major and five minor pranas even describing two para-prana Vayus. WOW! I had found something special here and in another Yoga Life article titled '*Life's First Process – Life Begins With The 1<sup>st</sup> Breath*', I had another WOW! Moment where Swamiji summarized the respiratory system with emphasis on the lungs.

Writing to ICYER I received the "Step By Step" correspondence course which led to me taking some introductory visits to ICYER in India and Joining the six-month yoga teacher training course in October 1994. During the course, we learned Hathenas to increase the breath capacity as well as the Pranava Aum; both practises which allow us to activate prana shakti.

In March 2019 whilst at ICYER I discussed with Ananda the possibility of joining him at Matha Gitananda Ashram in Italy on the 21<sup>st</sup> June, unfortunately I was not able to go so instead I left Sydney on 22<sup>nd</sup> July for Las Vegas to share sadhana with some American friends, Rajudev and Doris.

Rajudev has been teaching what he learned from Swamiji for 50 years; starting in Kathmandu where he taught a series of classes and inspired about a dozen students to come to the ashram for the next course. Rajudev was in Swamiji's first class at Ananda Ashram and studied with him for 5 years. In the 1990's he organized annual retreats for students of the Gitananda tradition residing in North America which continued for 14 years. Currently he is retired from accounting which was used as a vehicle to support his classes and personal practice. Having recently moved from San Francisco to

Las Vegas he currently has no students and is not teaching; instead focusing on his personal sadhana.

Doris is a retired realtor and has been to the ashram twice. The first time for the millennium conference where she met me among others, and the second time for a brief stop several years ago to visit while on a tour of India and Nepal. She hosted Ananda on his first visit to the US, and last summer travelled to Canada for Ananda's program for Canadian yoga teachers. Doris and I were born in the same year – 1952, which was the Chinese year of the dragon.

Back to the phenomenon of prana. I shared some profound practices with Rajudev, including insights into Ujjayi, Surya Bhedana and Gaddha Pranayamas – giving me some more WOW! Experiences. Another session started with mantra chanting to raise prana shakti / consciousness and other sessions on bindu dharana – involving bindu nadi – bhrumadhya bindu and ajna bindu – giving me a new perspective on these practises.

Doris prepared many wonderful meals for us and we had Italian, Indian and Vegan downtown in Las Vegas where we visited the Las Vegas Strip and saw the Water fountain and Volcano shows. During my stay with them we visited Red Rock Canyon which has small inland turtles as well as Hoover Dam.

So this is why I fly halfway around the world to India each February joining Ananda; and across the Sydney harbour bridge joining up with Jonn Mumford; then halfway around the world in the opposite direction to the USA to join Rajudev and Doris – in quest of new insights into prana phenomenon and Yantra- the study of name, number and form.

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### **YOGA THERAPY IN INDIA - Amba (Ellie Willson) QLD**

*Yoga therapist Amba tells of her four-month experience as part of a neurosurgical team at Mahatma Gandhi Medical College in India. Her Indian name Amba, pronounced Umba, was given to her by Dr Ananda when it came to him in meditation, it fits her yantra dharma number.*

Having just returned from visiting Ananda Ashram and working with Dr Ananda for 4 months at CYTER, I am attempting to settle back in with the adjustments in culture and way of life.

A little about my trip to India. Why I went: I was trained as a Yoga teacher in 2012 and Yoga Therapist in 2015 and then did further yearlong study in Yoga Therapy last year. My friend and teacher Mukti suggested I could accomplish my goals visiting Dr Ananda. She was right!

It was my first trip to India and I always knew I had to make the journey there to feel the authenticity of teaching this wonderful practise called Yoga. I arrived in Chennai and bused through to Pondicherry and then took the local bus to Mahatma Gandhi Medical College. There happened to be a local bus strike and I had to walk miles on the dusty, rubbish filled road with no footpath. It was Brisbane-hot even though it was winter. I arrived at my guesthouse across the road to local operators who had nothing to do with foreigners previously I don't think. It was quite different to any place I had stayed before but seemed reasonably clean and had a massive padlock on the door to keep me safe. Although I found out later the key was readily available :)

I walked the road and dodged the speeding buses (you have no idea), cattle, goats, autos and two-wheelers to get to the hospital. After trying to communicate to the helpdesk to direct me to the Centre for Yoga Therapy I found a three-room department made up of lecture hall, office and yoga

shala. I attended my first yoga session Gitananda style, teaching medical students which was part of their curriculum. I spent the next four months - six days a week attending talks by Dr Ananda and students and faculty of CYTER, various yoga classes and functions of the university. I began working in the hospital in the areas of Neurology outpatients and transitioned this work to bedside in the wards. The neurologist admitted patients for yoga therapy treatment on a daily basis. I worked alongside the Neurosurgical team as they referred pre and post-operative patients for my care. I attended surgeries and became part of the patient care team. My days were busy and completely rewarding.

Dr Ananda invited me to attend the ashram at ICYER whilst the Yantra program was being delivered and whilst I only visited for a few days I got to meet some of the students and other Gitananda trained teachers from around the world. Ammaji shared her warm spirit and wise advice along the way and Dr Ananda lectured on the complex and fascinating system of Yantra. Participation in chanting, pranayama and asana sessions was also on the agenda. I felt with reverence the respect for Swamiji and the age-old traditions being taught unaltered and practised to bring about health and wellbeing for all. The food and energy experienced in the ashram goes a long way to embody the full feeling of this family-run community, which you become a part of when you enter.

Another extremely exciting time for me were my visits to YogNat: Yoganjali Natyalayam the yoga studio in Pondicherry town offering yoga for homemakers and kids. I visited many times to see the kid's classes which are taught so differently to how I trained to teach children in Australia. These children are quizzed on yoga philosophy and participate in events for yoga. The centre also offers music and traditional dance training. A lovely community where the original children are now coming with their own children for yoga classes.

My time was very strenuous and stressful due to weather, food, conditions and language barrier but it was a very rewarding experience where I found my dharma working hard to support others without any concern for my income. I needed to be reminded to Go lightly, not try so hard, keep it simple and find my grounding here again. Time and space will adjust for me and my life journey will continue as it always has.



**MY YOGA TRAINING AT AN INDIAN ASHRAM****Eric Doornekamp NZ**

This is the story about my stay at *Ananda Ashram* in Pondicherry, South India, The year was 1968. The time 5.30 in the morning. I had spent the night asleep on the upper patio of the *Ashram*. A cool sea breeze wafted through the bamboo rafters from the nearby beach of the Bay of Bengal.....

A bell rang and reminded us it was time to wake up. We started the day with ablutions and a cup of *chai* or herbal Indian tea.

Then we walked to the yoga hall and shrine for worship. This act of devotion was a tribute to the various Deities and respect to the *Guru*, *Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj* and the *Brighu* lineage he advocated. *Puja* or worship plays an important role. *Swamiji* was assisted by his wife, *Meenakshi*. Today this function is performed by their son, *Dr. Ananda Bhavanani*.

Further yoga practices commenced with a series of *Surya Namaskaras* or salutes to the sun. This was followed by *asanas* or postures. The hour-long programme concluded with *Jnana Kriya* relaxation.

After a delicious breakfast prepared by staff of the *ashram* we all helped with the cleaning duties or *karma yoga*. There were also lunch and evening meals. Personal time was allowed from mid-day till 4 pm. Each day consisted of a full programme.

The morning programme was reserved for *pranayama* or breathing, *dhoutis* or cleansing, *mudras* or symbols, mandalas or geometrical designs. *Yantra* or the study of numbers and rhythms. The study of *Sanskrit*, chanting of *bhajan*s or songs. More could be mentioned.

Evening *satsangha* or meetings and *pujas* or worship were conducted by various instructors. At times outings took place to nearby holy sites. Cultural immersion has always played a very big role at *Ananda Ashram*.

*Swamiji* encouraged us to participate fully in all activities. He also wanted us to be independent, saying, "Be your Self and do not hold on to my *dhoti* or loin cloth."

**Note:** I was enrolled in a six-month long teacher training course. It is held every year at the *International Centre for Yoga Education and Research (ICYER)*. It adheres to the tradition of *Classical Rishi Culture Ashtanga Yoga*.

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**NEW ZEALAND ECO VILLAGE UPDATE****Ralph Wallace NZ**

As many of our members and class attendees can attest, the Lotus Yoga Centre has been a hive of activity over recent months as the land around the Centre has been transformed in preparation for the construction of the new Yoga Centre/Community Centre and 25 eco houses to be built on various sites around the new Centre.

All our primary infrastructure goals have been achieved, thanks to an unusually fine Autumn. Activity will now wind back for Winter, in preparation for the installation of services (water, sewage, electricity, and internet) in Spring.

We are still planning for the new Centre to be completed by March next year, with four to eight houses also being completed progressively by that time. With the completion of the new Centre, our excitement will be tempered by the removal of our beautiful old villa. However, we are keeping the garage (the ex-printing press shed), now handsomely reclad in natural timber. It has been converted to a community workshop for the Eco Village. We are also keeping the cottage, which will form part of the eco village. We look forward to sharing our adventure with you on into the future.

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**A HARROWING EXPERIENCE**

**Zigi Georges QLD**

Margo the editor of this magazine, has a deep insight into the workings of our universe, and seems to know just when to contact another aspiring yogini, urging her to share her seemingly private seclusion and isolation. I am always amazed at what comes forth at her urging. Thank you Margo for a totally unexpected contact from the wider yogi world! And ...as for this aspiring yogini, well, I have just been through a personally harrowing experience, and I shall try to convey bits of it.

Yearly, I head for the Australian Alps, for the snow; the icy blast of wind from the South; the numb fingers and toes and gasping breath as one adjusts to the height variation and challenging conditions. Why do I do this, ask my seaside friends, and I often wonder myself. Why leave ones comfort zone and seek challenges?

One facile answer is – because I still can. I can foresee the day when my physical being may be too weak for the challenge. Or, perhaps, I am reverting to my childhood Northern European heritage of snow and wind and cold. Or perhaps Amma knows, she calls me “The snow maiden”. It may be deep wired into my Soul. Whatever, I find extreme weather soothing to my innermost being and easily achieve oneness with the elements, with nature, and soar into dhyana. It is a complete transcendence of my everyday self into something more universal. I become part of all that is, to the very atoms and quarks of life.

This year I invited my friend, Mary (not her real name), who often expressed a desire to re-experience some mountain life of her childhood, to come with me for a week. She was in a period of transition, and readily accepted.

Mary is an aspiring gym yogini, a keen cyclist, life-saver guard on our beach, champion rower, and generally very aware and keen to maintain bodily health. She has an engaging personality and readily chats to anyone, anywhere, anytime, I discovered in the week that I was with her.

This engaging personality talked, non-stop, for two days of the 1,700km I had to drive in the car, at rest stops, and so on. It was quite a challenge to maintain concentration on the road and driving whilst still maintaining some listening to what Mary was saying. Eventually my brain exploded one night, catapulting me to wander through the marvels of ancient Petra caves. That was a healing experience, I regained my sense of inner balance and found that I

could survive the week of Mary with equilibrium. She readily absorbed the slopes of Charlotte Pass and the social life of nights in the highest snow village in Australia.

Mary has now departed for the fleshpots of civilisation; for massages, health foods, health pills, cycling, rowing, grandchildren, boyfriends. However, a part of her enjoyed the relative isolation of Charlotte Pass and the vast expanses of sky, snow clad mountains, and clouds so near that one can almost touch them. I suspect that a part of her absorbed the peace of relative isolation, from her own talking, if nothing else. Perhaps she will seek deeper yogic experiences. Who knows?

Meanwhile, I continue with my snowshoes, striding the snowy Main Range, becoming one with the elements. I know that this can happen sitting quietly on a beach, or in a room, but for me the yen is still for the mountains. My Zen Master friend in Noosa says “all is emptiness”. I understand this form of dhyana, but especially when engaged with the elements. Perhaps one day I shall become a fluff of cloud driven by the winds to partake in the myriad galaxies beyond our known universe.

(The beautiful images below were taken by Zigi).





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### **THE MYSTERY OF YAWNING    Dr Jonn Mumford NSW**

Every aspect of Yoga spoken of in the classical texts has an inner or esoteric aspect, which is not necessarily revealed. The Siddha-Siddhānti-Paddhati describes the Deva-Datta Nadi as one of the principle ten Prana channels in the body, located in the mouth, responsible for knitting of the eyebrows and the function of yawning.

I have been studying the mystery of “yawning” for many years and the first thing to be stated is that learning to yawn on demand is now thought to be the fastest way to reset and refresh your brain – it is the equivalent of pressing “restart” to take the kinks out of your computer! A quick review of current research, minus what I will discuss, is found in a recent short note on Scientific American:

**‘What is it about yawning?’** by Dr. Christine Calder

“A yawn consists of an extended gaping of the mouth followed by a more rapid closure. In mammals and birds, a long intake of breath and shorter exhale follows the gaping of the mouth, but in other species such as fish, amphibians and snakes there is no intake of breath.

**But what’s behind a yawn, why does it occur?**

In the past, people have had many hypotheses. As far back as 400 B.C., Hippocrates thought yawning removed bad air from the lungs before a fever. In the 17th and 18th century, doctors believed yawning increased oxygen in the blood, blood pressure, heart rate and blood flow itself. More recently, consensus moved toward the idea that yawning cools down the brain, so when ambient conditions and temperature of the brain itself increase, yawning episodes increase. Despite all these theories, the truth is that scientists do not know the true biological function of a yawn”

It is true but reading the whole article is well worth your time and you will learn how to do your own experiments with your pet dogs. <https://theconversation.com/what-is-it-about-yawning-98292>

Now my opinion about “cooling the brain” is that all of the theories are correct, and yawning has multiple uses. Specifically, a new concept is popping up about the uses of deliberate yawning to reset and refresh the brain.

***PANDICULATION is the key:***

*Dr. Christiane Northrup M.D. has this to say:  
Use Pandiculation To Heal Your Psoas and All of Your Muscles*

“Pandiculation, or active stretching, is a somatic movement that is typically associated with yawning, especially when you first wake up in the morning. But it is so much more than that. Pandiculation is actually your nervous system’s wake-up call. In fact, it has been called “nature’s reset button” because it prepares your sensory-motor system for movement. And, pandiculation is critical to the proper functioning of your entire musculoskeletal system”. “You can read more than you ever wanted to know on her blog at:

[https://www.drnorthrup.com/psoas-muscle-vital-muscle-body/?utm\\_source=9988964\\_A\\_CN&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=5612&utm\\_campaign=email\\_Newsletter\\_Northrup\\_2018&utm\\_id=5612](https://www.drnorthrup.com/psoas-muscle-vital-muscle-body/?utm_source=9988964_A_CN&utm_medium=email&utm_content=5612&utm_campaign=email_Newsletter_Northrup_2018&utm_id=5612)

**Mark Waldman** Executive MBA Faculty, Loyola Marymount Univ, a neuroscientist, has expressed what I am interested in sharing with you. In a recent emailing he states:

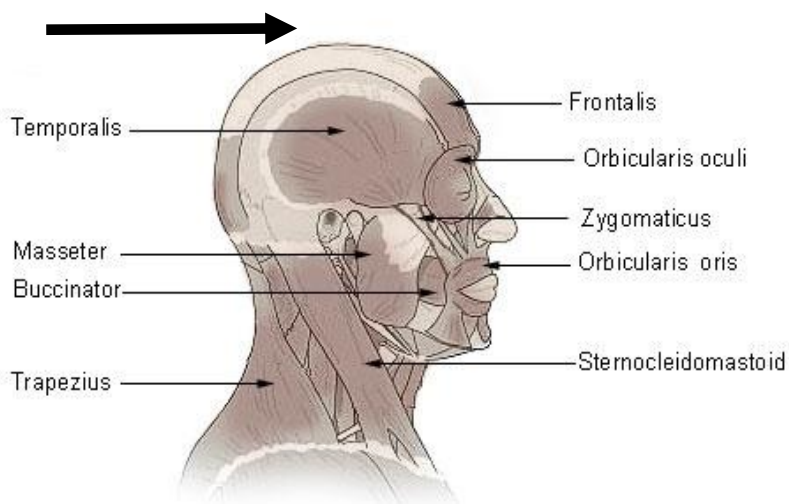
**“We all take relaxation for granted but have you ever tried to define it? It took me about 12 years to research neurological "relaxation" in a variety of journals and books, and when it comes to the brain "relaxation" can be defined as a lessening of excessive metabolic activity. In other words, too much cognitive and emotional “busy-ness.” And as far as the research shows, there is only one biological strategy used by all mammals and birds: yawning! And for physical relaxation: a slow leisurely stretch, like your dog and cat will do when waking up (notice that they will also yawn!).**

**Research shows that excessive mental stress damages the brain in post-mortem studies, and chronic anxiety or depression are stressors that impair brain function. But here’s the problem: different parts of your brain remain active at different times of the day and night, so what is the “right” amount of relaxation, and when should you do it? Answer: every 20 minutes after you’ve been concentrating on a task. Yawning 3-4 times will “relax” your prefrontal lobes – turning down neural activity in the concentration and worry centers. When that happens you’ll feel your mind begin to wander. That’s showing that the default mode network is turning on, and that daydreaming-like state allows the rest of your brain to solve problems nonverbally.”** [www.MarkRobertWaldman.com](http://www.MarkRobertWaldman.com)



So this leaves me with very little to add. Basically it is a simple matter of learning the knack of how to turn, on demand, “Yawns” and more “Yawns” – a knack that is not difficult at all – perhaps a clue about our need for constant resetting and refreshing our brain in these fraught times.

**HERE IS A SIMPLE DIAGRAM OF THE MASSETER MUSCLE**



Many years ago I discovered that slowly opening the mouth and gently massaging the masseter (chewing muscle) while imagining you were yawning provoked a genuine yawn with full involuntary inspiration and the relaxing sensation of everything letting go.

**METHOD ONE**

Start by closing your mouth and while gently feeling on both sides with your fingertips tighten and relax your back teeth and you should quickly feel the masseter contracting. When you locate it start STOP CLENCHING THE TEETH and commence massaging in circle motions with your fingertips while imaging (eyes closed) yourself yawning and as you relax a feeling will arise, i.e. sensation, that you spontaneously want to yawn and give in and fully immerse yourself in the feeling as your mouth widens and a natural inhalation follows with your diaphragm descending.

**N.B. GIVE YOUR WHOLE ATTENTION TO BECOMING AWARE, AS YOU GO INTO THE YAWN, WHAT HAPPENS WITH YOUR EYELIDS, TONGUE, JAW MUSCLES RESPONSIBLE FOR OPENING YOUR JAW, AND THE INSIDE OF YOUR MOUTH AND PHARYNX.**

**REPEAT THREE TIMES WITH FULL CONCENTRATION.**

**Contributions** are welcome for our next eNewsletter, have you a favourite practice, a meditation, a recipe, an anecdote, an interesting story or something you could share with us all?

Please email your contributions to Margo at [margosyoga@hotmail.com](mailto:margosyoga@hotmail.com) for the December edition.

Namaste