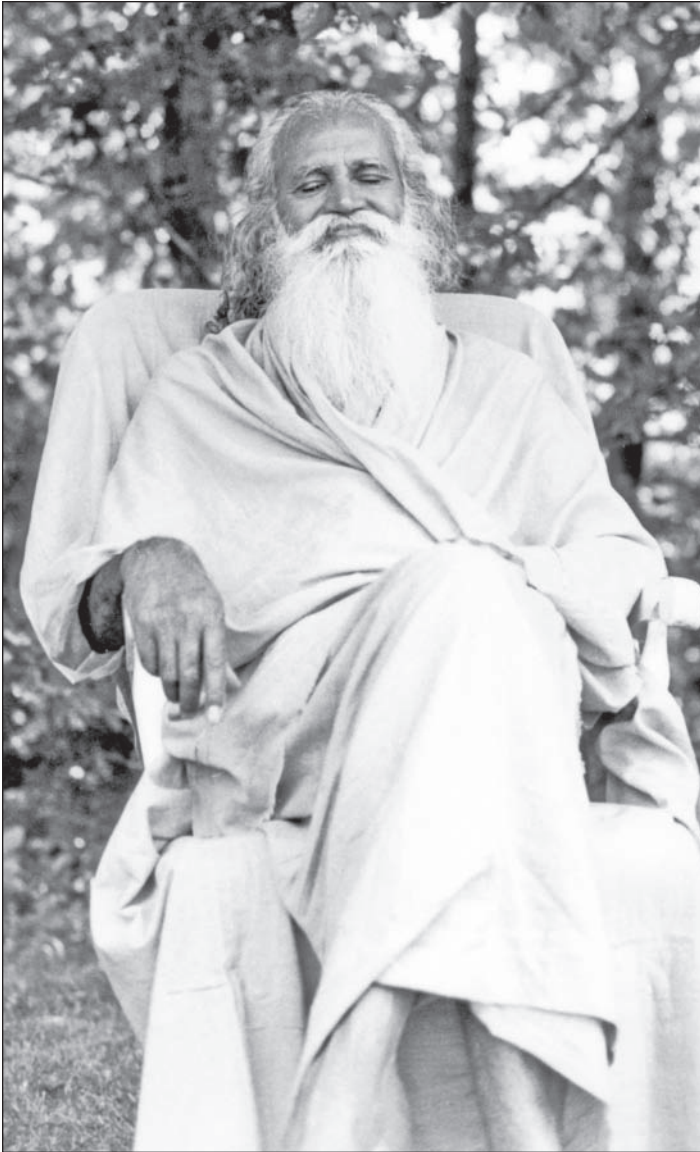


# Integral Yoga Teachers Association Newsletter

Volume XX, No. 4, November 2011



## Choose Peace

*By Sri Swami Satchidananda*

Let us talk a little about *samadhi*. In India, normally if you say, "He has attained *samadhi*," that means he has died and is buried. That is the normal connotation for that term. In a way, *samadhi* is like that. You are dead, yet you are alive. My Master *Sri Swami Sivanandaji* used to sing this song: "When shall I see Thee? When 'I' ceases to be." He was asking this question of the Lord. "Lord, when can I see You? I know that will be when 'I' ceases to be." That means that if the ego or "I" dies, you can truly live.

If the little egoistic "I" goes away from you, you are free from the ego. You are clean, pure. At that stage you are fit to go to heaven, to experience the highest knowledge or the highest truth. That is what we call *samadhi*. This is the essence of all spiritual teachings and practices — it doesn't matter what label they have. One can be a Catholic, a Protestant, a Jew, a Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, or any religion. Even if you don't have any faith at all or don't believe in any organized religion, it doesn't matter. That is not the criteria to have this realization. All you have to accomplish is to see that all selfishness goes away.

Where does the "I" dwell? In ego. Where does the ego live? In the mind. The ego is, in a way, the very source of mind. All developments are part of ego. So the sum total of all these things — thinking, feeling, willing — could be put together under one term, "mind." If the mind gets completely purified, then it's no longer an obstruction to your experience of the Truth. When it is clean and clear, the mind doesn't color the appearance of the pure Self. It becomes a pure reflector for

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# The Goal of Integral Yoga

The goal of Integral Yoga, and the birthright of every individual is to realize the spiritual unity behind all the diversities in the entire creation and to live harmoniously as members of one universal family.

This goal is achieved by maintaining our natural condition of a body of optimum health and strength, senses under total control, a mind well-disciplined, clear and calm, an intellect as sharp as a razor, a will as strong and pliable as steel, a heart full of unconditional love and compassion, an ego as pure as a crystal, and a life filled with Supreme Peace and Joy.

Attain this through asanas, pranayama, chanting of Holy Names, self-discipline, selfless action, mantra japa, meditation, study and reflection.

Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti.  
Ever yours in Yoga,



# Integral Yoga® Teachers Association

*Founder: Sri Swami Satchidananda*

The Integral Yoga Teachers Association is a membership association open to all Integral Yoga teachers. Its mission is to provide mutual support and spiritual fellowship, to share information, to provide inspiration, and to conduct ongoing training and guidance.

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## Letter From The Editor

Namaste! This is my fourth issue as Editor of the IYTA Newsletter. I have been learning a lot about the process of putting together a quarterly mailing. Mostly, I'm learning how much of a mutual effort it is to bring all the pieces together each time. Without Sri Gurudev's grace and the goodwill and help of many people, Yogis and non-Yogis alike, it would not get done.

The "Binding Sutras": For me, Yoga is mostly a do-it-yourself along with others endeavor and process. As we align our hearts and minds with our inner life we attune more to the outer world simultaneously. And that can lead to some pretty amazing things happening within and without. For example, here in Yogaville, over the 25 years of its existence, we have been through many transformations of personality and landscape. But no matter what comes and goes there is a central thread holding the whole process together. And that thread is Sri Gurudev's *sutras* and teachings. I have personally experienced the *sutras* that bind which act also as a center of gravity for all the activity and inactivity here.

In this edition we are sharing a couple of interesting places where the teachings of Sri Gurudev and other Yoga teachers are bringing Yoga practice to settings that are not usually associated with it. A recent article, by Kristina C. on the internet, mentioned some of the questions and challenges of taking Yoga to public schools. "More and more schools are offering yoga as part of their physical education program.

But if you're teaching Yoga in a public school, is it okay to say the *Sanskrit* words such as "om" and "namaste," to hold your hands (and instruct your students to) in the prayer position and to chant?" You can view the rest of this article at <http://www.care2.com/causes/to-om-or-not-to-om-yoga-public-schools-spirituality.html>.



So we are excited to share with you when our own Kumari DeSachy writes of her experiences in an article about sharing Yoga in a prison. She has also put together an inspirational collection of Sri Gurudev's prison teachings, *Bound to Be Free*, which is available at our own Sivananda Hall bookstore and Integral Yoga Distribution.

A new writer for the Newsletter, Lila Wilson, shares with us some of her experiences of teaching Yoga at Integral Yoga's Yoga At School program to the students of James Baldwin High School in Manhattan. Perhaps the greatest frontier is the one right in front of us. The one we are currently facing. If so, then these writers can give us some idea of how they explored their "outer limits."

We hope you enjoy our newest issue of the Newsletter.

Om Shanti, Bharata

# Choose Peace

(Continued from page 1)

the Self to see its own true nature. That is the essence of Yoga. According to *Sri Patanjali*, what is the definition for Yoga? Control of thought waves. *Yogas chitta vritti nirodhah*. *Chittam* is the sum total of mind. *Vritti* is the wave. *Nirodhah* is the absence. So when the *chittam* is freed of the waves or disturbance or turbulence, it becomes crystal clear. That is the *samadhi* state.

## Waveless Ocean

The spirit doesn't have to attain *samadhi*. The spirit is the God in you. The Bible calls it the image of God. Can God ever get disturbed, colored, disappointed? No. The real you, as the image of God, is always pure. The *Bhagavad Gita* says, "I am unborn, undying; I am eternal, never-changing. I am always the same." The Self doesn't need *samadhi*. It is already in that state. It is always the same.

What looks for *samadhi*? The mind or the *chittam*. *Samadhi* means that the mind comes to a tranquil state, like waveless water. A Tamil saint gives this example of *samadhi*; "When I attain, experience the *samadhi*, my mind will be like a waveless ocean...like a lamp without any soot covering it, always eternally brilliant light." Another example he gives says, "My mind should be like the pointer of a scale that doesn't get influenced either by a lump of gold or a lump of clay." The scale simply gives you the weight. It doesn't get excited if a lump of gold is put there. It doesn't want to lean more toward that. It is not influenced by the material, it weighs all the same. That is what we want in a balanced mind.

When would you want to prove yourself to have attained that balanced state? During adversities. When everything goes smoothly, then you are easily balanced. "Ahh, wonderful. I am so peaceful." Fine, but what if somebody comes and says, "Hey, you rogue! What are you doing here?" Your mind should still say, "Ahh, how peaceful I am."

Situations will arise to test you. You may think that you are in a peaceful state and have attained complete tranquility. All of a sudden somebody will insult you. You should still be able to smile at him and say, "Oh yes. That's the way you see me. That's fine. You are free to think any way you want." One person might see you as a rogue. Fine. The other fellow might see you as a *guru*. Fine. If you know who you are, if you have attained the stage of tranquility, nothing should affect or sway you. Once in a village there lived a wise man. He was very peaceful; nobody had ever seen him disturbed. All the villagers said, "Oh, he is such a peaceful person. It's hard to find someone like that."

One fellow became a little jealous and said, "Ha! What kind of peaceful man? You just wait and see. I'll make him angry." So he went to where the wise man was sitting and said, "Hey! *Swami*! What kind of man are you? It looks to me like you're cheating people, presenting yourself as a big *guru*, getting *Guru Poornima* and birthday gifts!"

The wise man didn't react; he simply smiled. So the challenger started calling him all kinds of foul names. Still the wise man smiled and said nothing. Finally the man yelled, "Hey, *Swami*! I'm talking to you! I'm saying all this about you. Don't you want to say something?"

The wise man spoke calmly; "My dear friend, suppose I give you an apple and you say, 'I'm not ready to accept it.' What should I do? Should I throw it out? I'll take it back, is it not so? You want to give something and the person is not interested in accepting it. You won't dispose of it. You will take it back, put it in your pocket and go home. In the same way, you are trying to give me something, but I am not interested in accepting it, so take it back. It's yours!"

## Testing

The equanimity should be tested now and then. It's easy to say, "I'm totally peaceful," but being that way is another story.

Once a *swami* went into a cave and stayed there for almost ten years. He didn't see anybody. People used to come and leave some food for him; and then when they left, he would come and take it. After ten years, one day he decided to come out and meet the people. Everybody came running. "The *swami* is out of the cave now! He is seeing everybody, giving *darshan* to everybody." Thousands came to see him. "*Swami, Swami*, by sitting in the cave these ten years what did you gain?"

He replied, "Years ago I used to be very angry. Even a little thing would disturb me. But for the past ten years, no anger at all. I conquered anger. That is a big achievement."

Someone got up and said, "Swami, how can you remember all that happened for the past ten years? Maybe one day you might have forgotten and become a little angry."

"No, not at all. Not even once did I get angry."

Another fellow stood up. "Sir, it is hard to believe. Are you sure that there wasn't one time when you were angry?"

The *swami* sounded a little impatient. "Absolutely not."

Still another person asked, "Really? Didn't you even feel slightly angry?" The *swami*'s voice roared with anger, "Never! Never! Do you hear me? I totally conquered anger!"

Yes, when there is nobody to irritate you, you are totally peaceful. When there are no pretty girls or boys around, everybody is celibate. When there is no food, you say "I'm fasting." That won't prove that you have conquered the situation. You should have ample opportunities to be disturbed. If such opportunities come and you still remain peaceful, then only you have proved that you have achieved something. Of course sometimes we need a protective,

supportive environment in which to grow strong. But we should never think that we are hiding from the world.

## Make Mistakes

Religion is studied and experienced to learn to be free. If you cannot have freedom in religion, you are not going to have freedom in anything else. Religion is used to free you from bondage. The aim is to be fully liberated. To help you attain that freedom, a *guru* or spiritual teacher will not bind you. He or she can give you some guidelines and some disciplinary practices, but it should not be a bondage.

If you make mistakes, it doesn't matter. Make mistakes and learn. The best teachers are your own mistakes. You learn even faster by your mistakes. Once I was at a conference with the modern great scientist, Buckminster Fuller. He was the Leonardo da Vinci of this age. He stood up and said, "Friends, forget about all the 'Do this. Don't do that' business. Commit as many mistakes as possible, as soon as possible. You'll become great!"

It's true. Every failure is a stepping stone. Remember though that you can't have the same stone for each step. Every time it should be a new stone. That means, don't keep making the same mistake. Learn well from each one. That is the trouble

with many people, they commit the same mistake over and over. Even then, they will eventually learn from that mistake and move on. Experience is the best teacher, and one should learn in his or her own way. That is the reason why we even call this "Integral Yoga." Sometimes I hear people limiting it; "If you don't do such and such, you are not an Integral Yogi." "If you don't do Hatha Yoga, you are not an Integral Yogi." "If you don't learn Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, you're not an Integral Yogi." "If you don't practice a certain amount of pranayama, you're not an Integral Yogi." Whatever you do, you are an Integral Yogi. That's our approach. As long as you want to be a *yogi*, that's enough for me. You choose whatever way you like. All the paths lead to Rome. Even if you take a wrong direction, it doesn't matter. Take it. You will learn something. Don't just stand in the middle doing nothing. That's what is terrible. A good teacher should say, "This is the way I know. It is positively helpful. If you like, follow it."

Suppose you say, "I don't want to go that way. I want to go in the opposite direction." The teacher will say, "All right. Go ahead. Do it."

Then you go in the wrong direction, bump against a wall, and say, "Ahh. I made a mistake. It's the wrong direction. I'll go the other way." That's what experience means. Nature itself teaches us, allows us to make mistakes.

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## Basis of Ethics

*By Sri Swami Sivananda*

Behavior is the conduct of a person upon particular occasions. It is the day-to-day conduct at any given time, at work, at play, alone, in company, at home, at school, in the office, or outside. When someone is polite and courteous, kind and sweet, showing respect to elders, teachers and saints, observing etiquette or decorum, that one is said to be of good behavior. External behavior is not always a sure guide in judging a person's character. It is indeed difficult to assess character. God only knows the heart or the character of someone. An individual makes mistakes in judging the character of another. In judging someone's conduct, the inner motives should be taken into consideration. Each person is a very complex, mysterious being. Sometimes the external mode of behavior may be misleading.

### Basics of Conduct

It has been stated how this purposive and voluntary activity has at its back the spontaneous desire for self-expression. This desire-emotion is the basis of conduct in the fundamental sense of the term. What is at the root of this desire? A sense of incompleteness, of want, a feeling of imperfection and dissatisfaction, which the individual seeks to fulfill through activity. This the *Jiva* feels on account of the severe limitations that yoke one to this finite physical existence and one's own forgetfulness of one's essentially perfect nature. Thus this

*Ajnana* (ignorance) also forms the basis of conduct. When this *Ajnana* is destroyed through Yoga, all activity ceases, as in the case of the *Aptakama* (fulfilled) sage. Therefore *Ajnana* and the resultant feeling of imperfection and want form the basis of conduct subjective to the individual. Besides the external factors having a bearing upon conduct are natural phenomena and environment. But here the activity is more in the nature of reaction than voluntary self-initiated conduct in its primary sense. Through exercise of will, one may refuse to react to these factors. Conduct is 'desire-initiated' and 'will-driven.' Therefore 'desire' and 'will' form the basis of conduct.

### Nature of Conduct

Human and sub-human life too is a process of seeking and self-expression. It is a seeking after freedom from bonds, from wants, from pain. It is a quest after harmony, 'repose,' 'peace.' It is thirst and the search for happiness. By this very search and seeking humankind expresses its inmost nature. The true Self is *Atman*, pure Spirit. *Atman* is self-sufficient, full. Therefore the human being gives expression to this essential quality of being when he or she strives to be above all want. Again Supreme Peace is the inherent nature of Self. '*Ayam Atma Santo*' (this Self is Peace) is the declaration of the intuitive seers. Humankind's endeavor to eliminate

worry and restlessness is an attempt to express this aspect of the Self. Likewise, the Self being the very embodiment of Bliss, the quest for happiness too is self-expression only. '*Anandam Brahmeti vyajanat.*' (Brahman is Bliss, or Brahman is experienced as Bliss.)

Without such self-expression the nature of a thing cannot be understood. Expression thus gives the clue to the inner nature of things. For example, the quality and nature of a plant we find out through its expression in the form of flowers and fruits. In the human this innate urge, this '*Ichha*' or desire to self-expression becomes manifested as '*Kriya*' or activity. This is what constitutes the nature of human conduct. Conduct is voluntary, purposeful activity. Conduct therefore is in the nature of self-expression, a self-expression manifest as active quest of happiness and freedom from want. It connotes a desire for the achievement of a certain end, the fulfillment of a purpose. The nature of conduct is seen to be voluntariness and purposiveness.

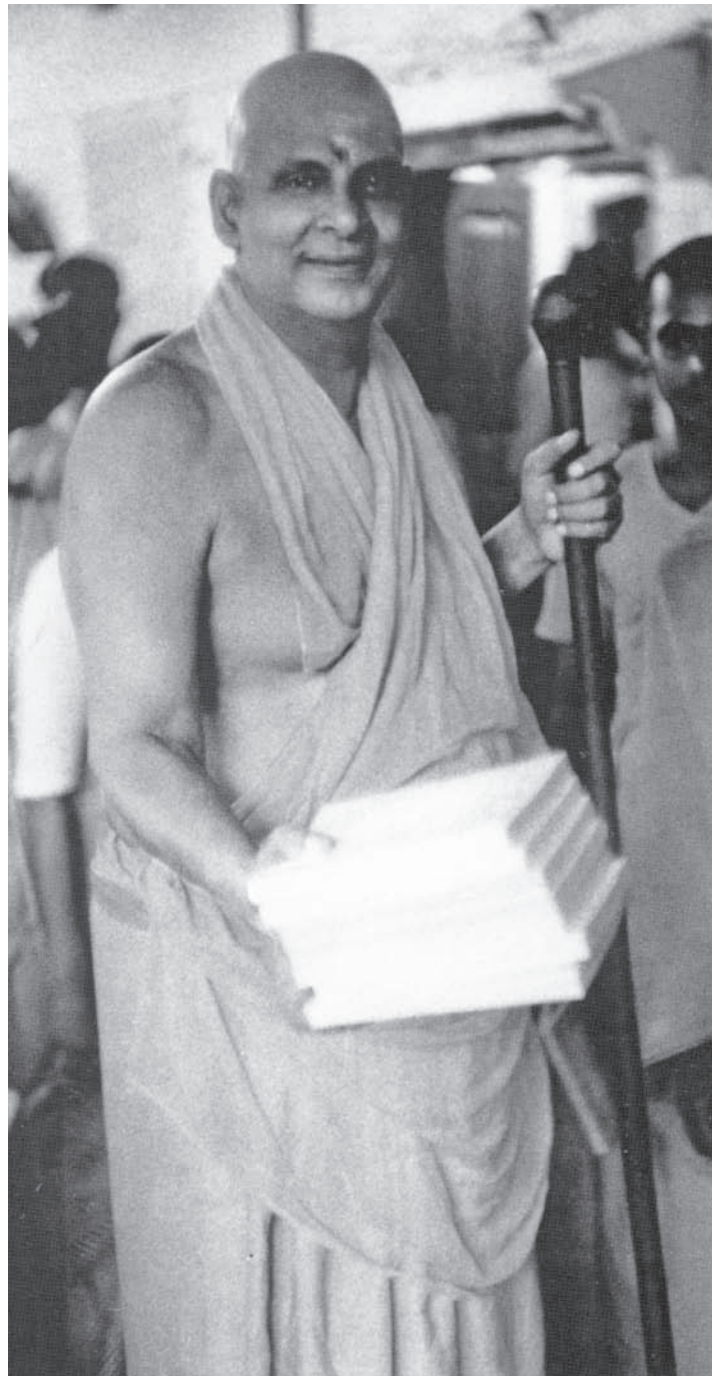
## Ethical Discipline

The very root and the core of all moral discipline is mental purification through refraining from all evil actions and the active practice of virtue. Do good at all times. *Ahimsa*, *Satyam* and *Brahmacharya* (non-harmfulness, truth and moderation) symbolize these processes of avoiding sin, sticking to virtue and self-purification.

All harm arises out of egoism. Ego manifests as ambition, desire and lust. Under their influence humankind indulges in hatred, love, flattery, pride, unscrupulousness, hypocrisy and delusion. You must proceed along the path of virtue. Be determined never to swerve an inch from *Dharma*. The mind has to be carefully trained and the will should be developed and strengthened. Therefore much importance has been laid by the ancients upon *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Shat-Sampat* (restraints, observances, and the six-fold wealth (of virtues to overcome the world)). The mind and will must be exercised and disciplined through deliberate acts of self-denial and self-sacrifice in every-day life. Ethical culture, therefore, demands moral vigilance and right exertion. The development of sensitive conscience and positive admiration for the goodness and nobility plays a great part in finishing ethical development.

To eradicate egoism arising out of *Deha Abhimana* (attachment to the body), think constantly on the foulness and perishability of the body and the pains arising out of the senses. Reject them as evil and mentally rise above them. Dwell upon that which is desirable, elevating and Divine.

Improper action, thoughtless action without discrimination gives rise to all misery. To get freedom from misery, the noble path of virtue, truth and *Sadachara* (ethics or right conduct) is the royal way. Rigidly observe truth and purity in your thought, speech, action, in your inner motive and other conduct. Be loving, tolerant and charitable in your opinion of people and things and in your dealings with others.



In every sphere the individual should strive to adhere to these qualities and to manifest them. Thus this ideal is to be practiced between parents and children, elders and youngsters, teachers and pupils, *Guru* and disciples, friends and friends, leader and followers, ruler and the subjects, nation and nation. To stick to *Sadachara* is difficult, no doubt; mockery, misunderstanding and persecution will have to be faced. Therefore the cultivation of forbearance, meekness of spirit, calm endurance and spirit of forgiveness are of great importance.

Uphold virtue at any cost. For its sake, bear any calumny and return good for evil.

Excerpted from *Ethical Teachings*

# Bhagavad Gita Study

Commentary by Swami Asokananda

## Chapter II Verse 16: The unreal has never existed. The real always exists. The mysterious truth about both existence and non-existence is directly perceived by those with the eyes to see.

Sri Swami Satchidananda has recommended that we conclude all our meditations with a chant from the Isha Upanishad saying: “Asato Ma Sad Gamaya:” “Lead us from the unreal, *asat*, to the real, *sat*.” It is prayer for *viveka*, the capacity to discern the Eternal Reality that is distinct from, yet immanent in, the world of changing names and forms.

The Upanishads inform us of what is unreal: “That which is non-existent in the beginning and in the end, is necessarily non-existent in the intermediate stages also. The objects we see are illusory, though we regard them as real.” The example that is often given is that in the twilight a person mistakes a rope for a snake.

Sri Krishna uses the term “*tattva-darshana*” to indicate people who truly see things as they are. Here is what Sri Swami Sivananda and some of his great disciples say to help us to understand this verse:

Swami Venkatesananda: Life itself is a long dream. We are unable to realize the illusoriness of the external objects because the dream is still on. We resist the awakening influence—like the dreamer of a pleasant dream—and pull the blanket of ignorance over our faces. When it is said: “The world is unreal,” it is not suggested that we are seeing the world where nothing exists. We only mean to say that there is wrong perception: something exists (the Self or God) and we see it as something else (world). The *jivanmukta* is aware of both—the reality and the fact that to the unenlightened the appearance is experienced as real.

Swami Krishnananda: Dream is not an unreal phenomenon; it is a real thing. You cannot ignore it as if it not there; it is there. A dream is unreal only when you wake up: when you

are actually dreaming, it is not unreal. The word “dream” does not imply unreality; it only implies that it is a condition that is transcended by another condition. It does exist; and as long as it is existing in your consciousness, it is a reality for you and will have its impact on you. Anything that happens in the world is also real. But, there is another state above the worldly level, where you will find the whole world vanishes in a second, and the worldly reality is subsumed in another higher reality. The lesser real is not unreal—and yet, you must underline the word “lesser.” Everything is real, but only there are gradations of reality. The higher includes the lower: so we should not go on clinging only to the lower forever and ever, when the higher already includes it and transcends it. Transcendence does not mean negation of something. We are not rejecting some reality and then going to God.

Master Sivananda: The phenomenal universe does not vanish from the vision of the liberated sage. Just as the mirage appears even after the illusory nature of the water is understood, so also, the world appears for a *jivanmukta* even after he has attained self-realization, even after he has clearly understood the illusory nature of the world. But, just as the man who has understood the nature of the mirage will not run after the mirage for drinking water, so also, the sage who is liberated will not pursue sensual objects like the worldly-minded people - though the world appears to him.

Sri Gurudev: The permanent and the impermanent are not completely different. When we say that something changes constantly, there must be something to change. Without that something, there cannot be any changes. Then what changes? The names and forms of the primordial essence, which is always there. The one is always there, but it appears to be many. This basic oneness is what’s real.

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## Discrimination, Equanimity and Service

By Swami Ramananda

At a *satsang* in February of this year, I spoke and led a discussion about three elements of spiritual life: discrimination, equanimity and service. Here are some of the points that were made and contributed, that brought out the complimentary nature of formal practice and bringing the teachings into action.

Discrimination, or *viveka*, is the capacity for discernment that is very potent in freeing us from suffering, cited by Patanjali in the 26th sutra of the second chapter of the Yoga Sutras. One way of understanding suffering is that we suffer when we react to life based on our conditioned way of seeing and

understanding ourselves, our defined identity. We tend to live under the illusion that we are all separate, and that we need to protect ourselves and arrange our lives to make happiness possible.

For example, as long as I subconsciously experience criticism as a threat to my self-esteem, I will likely judge as invalid any criticism that comes my way and feel justified in dismissing it. Thus, I disable my response-ability, my experience of what is actually taking place in the present moment. I unconsciously prevent connection with life and other beings, the very thing that our hearts long for.

Discrimination is the capacity to see clearly and be fully present to life as it is, without seeing through a colored lens. A neutral mind can discriminate between that which may be painful, but ultimately beneficial, and that which has no benefit. Discrimination makes it possible to see where we can assert ourselves to effect change and where we simply need to accept things that are beyond our control.

Equanimity is a useful translation of the word *upekshanam* that is used by Patanjali in the 33rd sutra of the first chapter, implying an ability to maintain balance, even in the face of adversity. Sri Gurudev often used equanimity to describe the unflappable state of mind that Yoga practice makes possible. Gurudev loved to use the compelling example of a surfer to illustrate how we can develop an internal steadiness to such an extent that we would invite bigger and bigger waves, or challenges in life, and take joy in meeting them head on.

Service or *seva*, is both a beginning and an end to the spiritual path. As we begin to practice Yoga, its power to transform our lives is realized when we attempt to integrate it into daily life. At first, this may mean simply trying to keep our peace and respond to life more thoughtfully—but even that is a service to a world that is starved for more peaceful hearts.

Any comprehensive practice of Yoga will include some effort to think of and serve the needs of others as this is where we learn to align our behavior with our true nature. Consider these benefits of service:

- While serving, we are not causing harm to anyone, which may be a real improvement from some things we normally do.
- Through interaction with others, our weaknesses get exposed and our strengths express. We rub and scrub each other.
- We start the process of opening our hearts to others. It is in service that we begin to shift from “me centered” action to “we centered.”
- Service makes obvious the need for practice—for some way to calm and clear the mind and develop the awareness of the present moment that makes it possible to truly consider the wellbeing of others, rather than our own comfort.

Meditation is probably the most effective way to develop this non-judgmental, non-reactive awareness of what is happening, both around us and within us. Only by having this kind of clarity can we discern the difference between the pre-programmed or habitual ways of thinking and the

impulses of genuine compassion that arise from the spiritual self. It is truly a challenge to be present enough to catch ourselves in the middle of rationalizing our selfishness or mentally putting ourselves down, which helps no one.

But with regular meditation practice, where we begin to experience ourselves as separate from our thoughts, it becomes possible to act with more skill. I do not mean that our emotional reactions to life will cease, but our ability to notice them will increase, as well as our ability to observe with clarity those we interact with. This is where our power to change lies first of all, in choosing how to respond to life—to what we see in ourselves and in others—rather than reacting in some automatic way.

For example, when I do see hurt or anger arising in the face of some criticism, I can make a conscious choice to breathe deeply and set aside an initial impulse to shut down or fight. I can choose to listen more carefully to what is being said and be sensitive to the intentions of the person speaking. Are these words coming with a genuine intent to help me grow, or do I detect ulterior motives on the part of this person?

For this reason, maybe meditation creates a more balanced tripod with discrimination and service, as three complimentary elements of spiritual life, each one reinforcing the other.

Equanimity could be considered an outcome of these practices. The more mental steadiness we experience from meditation, the better our capacity for discernment, which in turn improves our ability to serve. Service gives us the opportunity to bring our practice into daily life, exercise our discrimination muscles, and experience a new kind of joy, not from getting, but from opening our hearts and giving.

Swami Asokananda and I once asked Sri Gurudev, as we drove him to the airport, if we should increase the time spent in meditation. He reviewed our schedule and then advised us not to spend more time in formal meditation practice, but to meditate on our service.

The more fully we experience the truth, the more our lives become naturally dedicated to service, as we have witnessed in our own master and countless saints from all traditions. This is why service is also a “hallmark” of advancement on the spiritual path. Service is very easy to start as well since we can transform anything we do into service just by carrying into it the intention to bring benefit to someone. There are many opportunities every day, so no matter how we may struggle one moment, we always have the chance to try again.



## Sincerity, the Way of Heaven

Sincerity is the way of Heaven. The attainment of sincerity is the way of men. He who possesses sincerity is he who arrives at what is right without an effort, and apprehends without the exercise of thought—he is the sage who naturally and easily embodies the right way. He who attains to sincerity is he who chooses what is good, and firmly holds it fast.

—The Doctrine of the Mean, Confucianism

# On Their OM: Yoga for Teens at Integral Yoga's *Yoga At School*

By Erin Lila Wilson

Since I started Yoga, I have grown to be a more confident person. I don't know whether it was because of the breathing, the relaxation, or the physical exercises, but YOGA was definitely the reason. I think a lot of teens have problems associated with anger, self-confidence, overall health, etc., and I have seen improvements in my classmates because of Yoga. I know Yoga has the potential to help lots of other kids going through these same problems.

Jo was tough: 5'11, clad in ripped jeans, a wife beater\* and a do-rag. I knew the moment I saw her she was a teen you would not want to say the wrong thing to. She was failing school, and often cut classes—though when she was in class she was nothing but trouble. This was my first semester teaching Yoga through Integral Yoga's *Yoga At School* program to the students of James Baldwin High School, a transfer school for at-risk students in Manhattan's Chelsea neighborhood. I had never taught teenagers—let alone troubled teens, and I stood like a deer in the headlights as students filed in that first day. I had no idea what I was in for.

As the semester progressed, Jo's behavior became more and more challenging. Half the time she didn't participate, and the other half she purposefully fell out of poses to get laughs from the class, shouted out expletives, and generally did anything she could to distract the rest of the class from my instruction.

One day, about halfway through the semester, she said she was going to the bathroom and did not return the rest of the period. She apparently had had enough of Yoga that day and decided to leave the building. Jo was suspended from school for a day and upon her return, the school social worker and I spoke with her after class. Not just to admonish her behavior, but to see what was really going on beneath the surface of her actions. "Jo," I said, "you are a powerful young woman. Students watch you. They listen to you. You have a strong influence over the class. But you have to choose how you use that power—if you are going to use it for destructive purposes or if you are going to use it to become the best version of yourself." She sat quietly. I saw her tough outer shell start to dissolve and an innocent, vulnerable being began to emerge.

She left without saying much, but something shifted that day. Jo realized Yoga was not just a gym class but a doorway to discovering more in life and more in herself. Gradually her behavior began to change. She stopped talking in class. She practiced the poses. She even became the "OM Queen," and loved to lead the class in chanting OM. By the end of the semester, she was the one scolding other students for disturbing her peace by talking. Today, Jo is in her third year of college, and she told the social

worker at the high school that she still chants OM to calm herself down before a test or when she is feeling stressed. Jo said, "Yoga changed me. I used to be mad hype\*, but Yoga chilled me out. I'm a different person now."

At the end of that first semester teaching Yoga to teens in the public schools, I thought, "If Yoga can transform Jo, it can transform any teen." I knew at that moment I had found my dharma: bringing the practice of Yoga to teens.

Five years and about two hundred students later, we are still teaching Yoga to the teens at James Baldwin High School. Students come for an entire semester, meeting four days a week to take Yoga classes and workshops that adapt the principles of Yoga to real issues teens face today, such as sexual health, non-violence, nutrition, and self-love. The classes take place at the Integral Yoga Institute on 13th Street in Manhattan, so the students have the opportunity to escape the chaos of the school environment and to be embraced by the warmth and calm of the New York Integral Yoga Institute. Just to have one hour of quiet and peace in their hectic lives makes a lasting impact.

Chandra Sgammato, director of Integral's *Yoga at School* program in New York City, and Rehana Ali, the social worker at James Baldwin, created this Yoga program in 2006 for students at Ali's school. Most of the youths in the program come from violent neighborhoods or have chaotic home lives. They have often been victims of physical or sexual abuse—teens who otherwise would not have the opportunity to take Yoga.

I began teaching for the James Baldwin program five years ago. My own Yoga journey began at age fourteen, and my personal transformation as an adolescent inspired me to share the practice with youth. Initially, I was intimidated to work with teens, but the moment I began teaching, something magical was born. Most of the students came into the Yoga class like any other teenager: angry, anxious, depressed, reactive and insecure (though usually not as extreme as Jo). Slowly, though, I began to see changes over the course of the semester.

They weren't as reactive. They weren't as fidgety. The tension in their bodies started to soften. They smiled more. They sat up a little straighter, and their voices became stronger. Kind words replaced expletives. Where there were once walls, windows opened. And at the end of the semester, the 20 students I sent off into the world were not the 20 students who sulked into the door the first day. What an incredible gift to share with young people. Yoga is a gift they can carry with them the rest of their lives. Since I realized this, my life's work has been devoted to fostering similar transformations in teens today.

At the end of the semester when I ask students how they benefited from the program, they say things like "It has helped me grow into a stronger and more peaceful version of myself." "Yoga has helped me to heal myself and forgive others." "I learned how to breathe to control my anger." "I am finally able to just be myself around others." "My relationship with my mother is better." "I am more kind."

Yoga not only has an immediate effect on teens, but also makes an indelible imprint in their lives, long after the course is over. One student, after having taken a semester of Yoga her senior year in high school, decided to go to a holistic health college instead of culinary school. She is now about to complete her Yoga teaching certification. Other students stay connected to the Integral Yoga Institute after their Yoga course is completed and take classes and do Karma Yoga there. Others bring Yoga to their own communities, teaching their friends and siblings, and even inviting their parents to start taking Yoga classes at NY-IYI. Teens living their Yoga in their daily lives and spreading the practice to their communities is one of the greatest fruits of this Yoga program. After all, the world ultimately needs them to be ambassadors of peace in the chaotic world we live in today.

I teach Yoga to teens because I have faith. I have faith in the resiliency of youth and the resiliency of the human spirit, and I believe that if we can open the hearts and minds of our youth, we can open the heart of the world. It is my hope that more and more Yoga teachers will be inspired to bring this practice to a population that so desperately needs it. Investing in the hearts and minds of teens is also an investment in the future of our planet. Yoga is one of the greatest gifts we can give to the next generation.



**Erin Lila Wilson, E-RYT**, received her beginning and intermediate teacher certification through Integral Yoga, her children's certification through Karma Kids Yoga and teaching at-risk teens through the Lineage Project. Erin teaches yoga in NYC to a wide range of ages and populations, and specializes in Yoga for teens and children. She has worked with youth for over ten years, teaching Hatha Yoga and meditation to inner-city teenagers, in schools, studios, and incarceration facilities. She also developed a 30 hour training on teaching yoga to teens, which she teaches through Karma Kids Yoga and also at the Integral Yoga Institute in New York City.

#### \* Guide to teen vocabulary:

1. A "wife beater" is a sleeveless white cotton undershirt that men usually wear.
2. "Mad hype" is teen lingo. "Mad" would translate as "very," and "hype" is short for "hyper" or "anxious."

## A Dilemma

*There was a poor but intelligent man, who was blessed by the Goddess of learning, Saraswati, in a vision. When she asked him what he wanted from her, the man blurted out, "Please ask Lakshmi to give me her darshan."*

*Saraswati was not very pleased! But she decided to play a little trick on her devotee. She requested both Lakshmi and Alakshmi to appear before him. "He is one of My most intelligent devotees," she said to them. "He is the right person to decide which one of the two of you is truly beautiful and alluring."*

*Instantly; the two sisters presented themselves before the poor man, who was taken aback at the sight of the unexpected, uninvited (indeed, unwanted), second visitor. Imagine his dismay when the two Goddesses demanded that he should tell them which one of them was more attractive!*

*His sharp brain worked overtime. While his mind raced, he requested the two Goddesses to walk back and forth before him, so that he could study their form and gait. He was in a dilemma. He knew he wanted Lakshmi's grace and blessing; but what if Her sister should take offence and decide to punish him by latching on to his life?*

*Impatient with walking up and down, the two sisters demanded to know his verdict. In a trice, his wits came to his rescue. "Dearest Mother Alakshmi," he began, "I find You most beautiful and alluring when You walk away from me. And as for You, Mother Lakshmi, Your beauty and charm are irresistible when You walk towards me!"*

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Excerpted from *Formula for Prosperity*, by J.P. Vaswami

# Carpal Tunnel Relief

By Sharon Shankari Stetter

Carpal Tunnel Syndrome can cause tingling, numbness, weakness, or pain in the fingers or hand. Some people may have pain in their arm between their hand and their elbow. The median nerve and several tendons run from your forearm to your hand through a small space in your wrist called the carpal tunnel. The median nerve controls movement and feeling in your thumb and first three fingers (but not your little finger).

The following series can be effective in prevention and treatment of CTS. If the student is already too far progressed in the syndrome, a modification is presented at the end of this description.

The series is actually wonderful for opening both the wrists and ankles.

Photo 1: In table pose, toes turned



under, turn the wrists to have the fingers pointed toward the knees, wrists beneath shoulders [If this is too intense, walk the hands forward until comfortable—Editor].

Photo 2: Walk the knees in toward the



fingers leaving several inches between knees and fingertips, toes are still turned under. Pressing the heels of your hands

to the floor, tuck the tailbone slightly and sit back towards the heels of your feet. You don't have to move too far to experience the sensation in your wrists and forearms, so instruct the students to stop where it feels right. Suggest to your students to breathe into the forearms and wrists, holding the pose for a few/several breaths. To release the pose, come forward.

Photo 3: Flip the hands over, fingers still



pointing towards the knees, pressing the back of the wrists toward the floor. No sitting back to the heels now, instead bring the elbows towards each other so that the arms are perpendicular to the floor, pressing the backs of the wrists to the floor. Hold this pose for a few breaths pressing the backs of the wrists to the floor.

Photo 4: Release the pose by gently



shaking the wrists and sitting back toward your heels with the toes spread and turned under.

Photo 5: Continuing from here:



Bring the hands before the heart, *anjali mudra* (hands in prayer) or *lotus mudra* with the index, middle, and ring fingers separating, and hold this pose (powerful for the feet) for several moments. I will often remind the students that this is a time for *bhakti* practice, bringing forward an intention, taking your mind off the intense sensation in the feet (coming in and out of the pose if need be). I'll also include a definition of *tapas* in this pose, accepting the purification through pain that is experienced but **being careful** to recognize that it is pain that can be breathed through not pain that is injurious. Know your limits.

Photo 6: Coming out of this, lower the



tops of the feet to the floor and sit in *vajrasana* (hero) for several breaths.

Photo 7: From here a stretch to the



front of the feet and ankles can be done by bringing your hands alongside the ankles, lifting the knees from the floor, lifting the heart and chin towards the sky. Hold for a few breaths. Lower back down to hero pose. (see photo 6)

The modification if your student is unable to have the fingers pointing to the knees:

Photo 8: Turn the hands, fingers



pointing away from each other, heels of the hands towards each other, but wrists still beneath the shoulders so there are several inches between the heels of the hands.

Now sitting back to the heels of your feet here, simply have the elbows bend and track/point in the direction of the fingers, pressing the heels of the hands to the floor. Moving on, most students can have the backs of their hands and wrists on the floor, (photo 3) to move through the sequence above. If not, skip this pose and simply have the students spin the wrists (both directions) as they come out of the pose.

The pose of lifting knees from the floor while seated on the tops of your feet (photo 7) coming from *vajrasana* (hero), is also not available to all, but should be encouraged if only for a brief moment. The tops of the feet and fronts of the ankles are difficult places to get to and are a common place for loss of movement and blocked chi/energy flow.

It's a lovely sequence and encourages stillness. Hope it works for you. Peace.

**Sharon Shankari Stetter** was introduced

to yoga in the mid-70's while attending a high school dance class. Her career as an art dealer and raising three children were priority in her twenties and thirtys,



occasionally fitting yoga into other physical pursuits. "Before my 40th birthday it struck me that the things I enjoyed were slipping away from me." It was then that she committed to a regular yoga practice, at the time to heal her body. Today Sharon lives and teaches in Bisbee, Arizona. She enjoys introducing Integral Yoga to students in the US and abroad.

## TEACHER'S NOTEBOOK

### Pranayama

By Swami Ramananda



*Pranayama* heals the *pranamayakosha*, or pranic level, by removing the obstacles that obstruct its natural flow with compassion, attention and a combination of effort and ease.

For example, we know what it feels like to have loving energy flowing in the heart—not a moment of excited infatuation but deep, abiding love and compassion for someone. And we know what it feels like to close down our hearts with anger or bitterness, to protect our hearts from hurt with armor, to feel lonely, cut-off from everyone. This is an example of how subtle energy governed by the senses and emotions, and influenced by physical experience as well, either can be flowing unobstructed or closed down. These conditions that inhibit its flow are powerfully influenced by the practices of *pranayama*.

Through its practice, obstructions are gradually removed and we experience revitalization, a sense of physical and mental energy. But, if we don't address the conditions that cause the *prana* to become blocked, the emotional heart will close down. Then, we fall back into the same problems of *pranic* flow.

The combined benefit of *asana* and *pranayama* practiced under the guidelines of *yama* and *niyama* creates a unique condition of being both relaxed and alert, both strong and at ease. This give us enough stability and awareness to adequately address the challenges of healing the next level—*manomayakosha*, the gross mind, home of the senses and the emotions as well as the instinctual function of mind.

# Yoga, Medicine and Relaxation

*By Dr. Amrita McLanahan*

Janice, a 33-year-old mother of three small children, had a great reluctance to visit a dentist, based on some very unpleasant childhood experiences. Then she read about the use of a Yoga program and its success with dental operations—known to be one of the most feared types of surgery. Determined to be a good role model for her kids, she used Yoga techniques to help herself undergo the work she needed. She then taught simple Yoga techniques to her kids. Now they all have beautiful smiles. In a report entitled “Tension Free Dentistry with Tension Free Patients,” the authors report on the success of such a Yoga regimen. Another report called “Meditation in Dentistry” confirms these findings.

I have found Yoga practices to be the most powerful of all the avenues to achieving relaxation. Yoga is an ancient system for renewing and maintaining health, consisting of techniques addressing the body, mind and spirit. Although some Yoga schools promote certain beliefs, the Yoga tradition itself does not have religious dogma associated with it. You may choose to use its methods to enhance your own spiritual path, but it can also be practiced by anyone, of any faith, simply for its many health benefits. Virtually all stress management techniques now utilized in the West were derived from this Eastern root.

Yoga techniques have been studied extensively, with the varying components providing differing benefits. Research indicates its helpfulness for heart disease, cancer, digestive disorders such as ulcers or hemorrhoids, diabetes, as well as for pain control, insomnia, drug addiction, and a multitude of other problems. Dr. Robin Monro, an English molecular biologist, compiled a 1,500-item bibliography of scientific papers documenting the many medical benefits of Yoga.

Numerous studies have now demonstrated the ability of the Yoga postures to lower blood pressure. Much heart bypass and vascular surgery today is the result of ongoing long-term effects of high blood pressure on the heart and arteries. Since coronary bypass surgery has become such a common major operation in adult American men, a preventive and therapeutic program that can help “bypass the bypass” takes on great importance.

Stress elevates cholesterol directly, and the Yoga postures have, by their antistress effects, been found to lower cholesterol levels independent of dietary change. This is important not only in the prevention of cardiovascular disease, but also in preventing the many types of cancer, such as breast, colon and prostate, that have been linked to high cholesterol levels.

In my exuberant Irish family, New Year’s Eve was always a Big Deal. My father would create a Grand Celebration with bells and whistles, and banana splits with hot fudge, too, spread out for all us six kids and our friends. We then would write New

Year’s resolutions and predict where we would be the next year, since my dad was something of a spiritual Don Quixote, and we moved thirteen times before I graduated from college.

One New Year’s Eve early in my studies of Yoga I was on tour with a group of physicians in India. The others went to bed early. I missed the excitement and comfort of my family’s traditions and began to feel somewhat lonely and glum. I decided to “celebrate” the incoming year by doing the headstand—it has similar benefits to the simpler shoulder stand—to greet the newborn year from a new angle. So at five minutes to midnight I positioned myself upside down and held the position until five minutes into the new year.

One of the physiological changes that occur as a result of the shoulderstand and headstand is a relative shift of blood flow to the brain, along with an equalizing of blood flow to its right and left hemispheres. When I finished the posture, I found that I suddenly had a new “perspective” and felt refreshed and content to be just where I was. In fact, I enjoyed it so much that I have made it my own new tradition, to greet every new year upside down, often in some very interesting locations—including the Golden Gate Bridge! All the Yoga practices can be thus used to more clearly observe our emotional reactions, reduce stress and shift from unhealthy habits of responding to external stressors.

Diabetes is responsible for much of cardiovascular and renal disease. It is also a major factor in peripheral vascular disorders, limb surgery and eye disease. Studies have been able to show that Yoga practice lowers the fasting blood sugar in insulin-dependent diabetics. Many type II diabetics can revert to normal blood sugars with weight loss; a Yoga program can thus have a two-pronged effect to lower blood sugar directly and through weight loss. One specific Yoga posture, the bow, has been evaluated in relation to both types I and II diabetes, and found to be beneficial to both, working by improvement of blood and lymph circulation to the pancreas itself.

Yoga practice has been found helpful for the functioning of other endocrine glands. Physiological and biochemical studies show normalization of glandular function in the thyroid, adrenals and pituitary.

In addition, a Yoga program has been shown to help greatly in maintenance of correct weight. Yoga is able to achieve success where other programs have failed, because its deep relaxation addresses the eating patterns that result from tension and stress. Studies have been able to document that simply by the regular practice of Yoga postures, both overweight and underweight subjects return to their optimum weight.

Although the exact cause or causes of colon cancer remain unproven, chronic constipation has been found by Dr.

Denis Burkitt and others to be associated with disorders of the colon such as diverticulosis and cancer. Regular Yoga practice has been shown to relieve constipation.

Yoga can help your exercise program. Muscle strains, sprains and bruises are disorders that are especially benefited by a Yoga program. Most athletes know the importance of stretching before active exercise.

Both preventive and therapeutic, these *asanas* have the added dimension of immediately feeling soothing, relaxing a strained muscle. Research has confirmed their usefulness in this field.

The Yoga postures are particularly good for persons who have back problems. When performed daily they have been shown to help avoid the necessity of back surgery. Especially beneficial are the forward bends.

Dr. Michael Lerner and I conducted a preliminary study of Yoga for the treatment of systemic lupus and found significant lessening of pain within only one week of practice. Similarly, Dr. Ornish and I observed improvement in heart patients within only a few days of practice.

Our research has also shown, in an ongoing study of lifestyle and Yoga change in the treatment of prostate cancer, evidence of delay in progression and even reversal of tumors. Improved white cell activity after a period of meditation has been documented. White cells act to defend the body against both infection and cancer, so the addition of a Yoga program may act as a preventive and therapeutic agent for the surgical disorders associated with decreased immune activity. One

patient with metastatic (spread beyond the breast) cancer of the breast, unresponsive to conventional approaches, achieved remission by the use of a Yoga program. Yoga has been demonstrated to reduce the anxiety caused by radiation treatment, so it may also serve as a helpful adjunct to other therapies, as a direct immune enhancer.

Specific Yoga postures may feel especially soothing to your individual problem. For example, I recommend more rounds of sun salutation for back and hip problems, and I myself used the child pose to help me pass a kidney stone. The basic principle is to do the full general program, as is comfortable to you, and spend more time in whichever poses give you the most relaxation.

In summary, a Yoga program may be able to help prevent and treat surgical diseases of many types.

*Integrative medical physician **Sandra McLanahan, M.D.**, has for many years been the nation's leading expert on the medical effects of yoga. Executive Medical Director of the Integral Health Center in rural Buckingham, Virginia, she also served for 20 years as Director of Stress Management Training for the Preventive Medicine Research Institute, where she was a crucial part of the research team led by Dean Ornish, M.D.*



*Dr. Amrita (Sandra) McLanahan's book: Surgery and its Alternatives: How to Make the Right Choices for Your Health, is available on-line at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).*

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## Prison Yoga

*By Rev. Kumari de Sachy*

In 1996, I was blessed with the opportunity to serve at the Buckingham Correctional Center, a maximum security prison that houses about 1,000 men.

Perhaps, it might seem odd that I view this activity as a blessing, strange that I've chosen to employ a spiritual term to describe my experience at a prison whose inmates are considered by many to be the dregs of society: murderers, thieves and sexual offenders. However, during my time in prison, I had the golden opportunity to discover the transformative power of Yoga, to see firsthand how the yogic teachings and practices can turn a misguided and troubled human being into a loving and compassionate seeker of Truth.

### An Educational Experience

My adventure at the Buckingham Correctional Center began when I responded to a note that was tacked up to the bulletin board at Yogaville's Sivananda Hall. The note mentioned that one of the state prisons was looking for literacy volunteers. I knew that the prison was about a half hour away. I had already done some literacy volunteering in

Buckingham, and I felt that this would be a good chance to do some community service.

A few days later, I found myself standing in front of a huge building complex, a grim-looking, gray compound, ringed with layers of barbed wire and dotted with signs warning visitors to beware of ferocious drug detection dogs.

Summoning up the courage to enter, I soon had to walk through an electronic detection gate. On the other side of the gate, a guard was waiting to frisk me with a handheld electronic device. After surrendering my driver's license, receiving an identification card, and signing in, I was escorted past control centers where heavy metal doors closed behind us before other heavy metal doors opened to let us pass through.

The air was suffocating and heavy with the smell of industrial detergent and the vibration of rage and despair that I saw reflected in some of the dour faces peering at me as I walked past a large crowd of inmates who were let out into the yard after their afternoon meal. I had never been in a prison, and I couldn't stop thinking, somewhat naively, that it looked just

like in the movies. Every so often, though, an unnerved inner voice kept whispering that this was the real thing. As I walked along the raised sidewalk at the edge of the yard, some of the inmates smiled and called, "Hi, how're you?" Others screamed, "Hey, who are you? Are you a teacher? Can I come to your class?" They all stared. Some of the guards (heavily armed men and women) offered a friendly hello, but others looked as hard and as frightful as the inmates. I could feel unseen eyes peering at me from the guarded towers that loomed imposingly above the complex. Fear and fascination bubbled up from the depths of my being. Repeat the *mantra*. Repeat the *mantra*, prompted a voice from within. I did and, at the same time, managed to retain the facsimile of a smile.

Escorted into the educational wing of the prison, I was introduced to the principal of the Educational Department, with whom I felt an instant rapport. When the principal learned that I had taught college English, he very excitedly explained that they also needed a volunteer to teach a college level fiction-writing class. He looked over my curriculum vitae and immediately offered me the position. I accepted. I learned that this particular class had been part of a prison college degree program and that the program had been canceled because the politicians in power felt that inmates did not deserve the opportunity to receive a college education.

Depending on volunteer teachers, the principal had been able to continue this particular class because the inmates were enthusiastic—and quite talented—and because whenever a teacher left, another volunteer miraculously appeared. Of course, I began to suspect that not only God's miracle, but also God's play was at work in the prison. And I began to realize that I was in for a wonderful adventure. Sure enough, my next surprise came when the principal discovered that I lived at Yogaville. He explained that he had also studied with a spiritual teacher for quite some time and had lived at an ashram for ten years. Even more surprising: fifteen years ago, he and his wife had brought their newborn daughter to Yogaville to be blessed by *Sri Gurudev*!

## The Miracles of Yoga

A week later, when I began teaching the first creative writing class, I was in for some more surprises. First, I found myself alone in a classroom with ten inmates; there was no guard and the door was closed. Admittedly, I was somewhat intimidated, but, at the same time, I felt completely protected. I had the *mantra*, I had the teachings, and I held a mental image of *Sri Gurudev*. Between the *mantra* and *Sri Gurudev*, I felt that I was protected by an impenetrable shield of love and light. At the same time, I had never known any criminals and had never been in a prison. Like a wave, the thought that I was alone with a group of murderers, thieves and rapists periodically flooded my consciousness; yet, once in the classroom, what I saw around the table when I really looked was a group of very vulnerable souls. And my heart opened. Without a doubt, I knew that these men were my brothers and that no matter what evil acts they had perpetrated, they were also entitled to love and compassion. After introducing myself, I announced that I also lived in an institution where we

had inmates, for ashramites are often called "inmates." That broke the ice, and one student, Greg, asked, "Do you live in Yogaville?" Amazed, I tentatively nodded in the affirmative. Warmly and affectionately, Greg declared: "What I love about *Swami Satchidananda* is that when people ask him if he's a Hindu, he answers that he's an Undo." For a moment, I thought that perhaps my mind was playing tricks on me, that maybe because the environment was so foreign, I was mentally fabricating a conversation about things safe and familiar. However, I was brought back to reality by Greg's laughter. He had noticed the expression of astonishment on my face.

Greg explained that he had begun studying Yoga in prison through a correspondence course offered by *Swami Omkarananda*. Also, for years, he had been studying *Sri Gurudev's* books—which he ordered from the Integral Yoga Distribution Catalog (he even knew by name some of the ashramites who worked in Distribution because he spoke to them on the phone from time to time). And Greg even had a spiritual name, *Devdas*, which he invited me to use. What's more, *Devdas* told me that many of the prisoners had joined religious communities, whose members—Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Native American, Buddhist, Hindu—met one evening a week. *Devdas*, himself, belonged to the Buckingham Monastic Community, which had been founded by a Buddhist prisoner some ten years back. Members of this group considered themselves to be monastics, and, while they studied Yoga and Eastern philosophy, their focus was ecumenical, with members coming from various religions and backgrounds. Suddenly, the environment did not seem quite so alien to me. I was combining Yoga and writing, two interests that have been an integral part of my life for many years.

Ever since childhood, I have loved to write and to read good writing. The students in the fiction-writing class shared my interest in and my love of literature. Moreover, I discovered that these men were, in fact, excellent writers and quite professional, some having already been published. One man, who wrote riveting short stories (crime stories), mentioned that his mom was a published poet and had been the first woman professor emeritus in the Virginia community college system. All the men were grateful for the writing class, as it gave them an opportunity not only to express themselves through writing, but also to meet regularly with others who had similar interests and talents. They also loved having the opportunity to communicate directly with someone from outside the prison. That their new instructor was a woman boosted their enthusiasm, adding a touch of femininity to the harsh, often cruel world of an all-male maximum security prison. Although some were a bit shy, all the students were friendly, serious about writing, and eager to make me feel comfortable. (As the weeks went by, the men became very protective and also shared some inside information so that I would have deeper insights into prison life.) When we came to the end of our first class together, *Devdas* invited me to attend a Monday evening meeting of the Buckingham Monastic Community. You can imagine how curious I was at this point.

## The Buckingham Monastic Community

A few days later, I was on my way to the first of many Buckingham Monastic Community gatherings that I was to attend. As I neared the room where the group met, I became aware of a familiar fragrance: frankincense. I began to feel, well, somewhat at home. (I soon learned that the burning of incense was not allowed, but it appeared at almost every meeting, even with the guard patrolling past and peering curiously into the room. One of the men would conceal tiny pieces of incense in a little pill bottle; he carried it in his pocket as though it were the most precious thing on earth.)

This night, there were about eight men in the group. *Devdas* jumped up excitedly to greet me, and he introduced me to the others, all of whom greeted me warmly. During the evening, I learned that, a while back, an acquaintance, a former Yogaville resident, had taught accounting in the prison college program and that he also occasionally attended Buckingham Monastic Community meetings, leading meditation and Hatha Yoga sessions. I also discovered that not only *Devdas*, but two other men had studied Yoga, including *Sri Gurudev's* teachings, for many years. One man, Vishnudas, had been a close disciple of a well-known spiritual teacher. He had studied *Raja* and *Jnana* Yoga and had practiced *Bhakti* Yoga for many years, knew many *mantras*, chants and prayers (in Sanskrit) by heart, and had been doing vigorous *sadhana* (spiritual practice) regularly for many years.

Vishnudas told me, in fact, that before coming to prison, he had been the director of a spiritual retreat center in the countryside outside of Washington, D.C. As he told it, at one point, some young mischief-makers from the city began to come to the center to vandalize, smashing cars and destroying property. Vishnudas' neighbor advised him to keep a gun to scare away the trespassers. At first, Vishnudas rejected the idea, but later, frustrated and fearful, he, unfortunately, took his neighbor's advice.

The vandals came again. Ignoring Vishnudas' verbal warnings, their behavior became increasingly menacing. Vishnudas decided to scare them off with the gun. Brandishing the weapon, he ordered the group of three or four young people to leave his property. They refused to leave, and one young man walked toward Vishnudas as though to take away the gun. Fearing for his life, Vishnudas fired. According to him, he intended merely to wound the boy.

Sadly, the boy died. And even though Vishnudas, himself, took the boy to the hospital and pleaded self-defense, the other boys contradicted his story, and Vishnudas was convicted of murder.

Vishnudas had been in prison for about thirteen years, and during this time, he had had two near-death experiences, experiences that compelled him to dedicate his life to the study and practice of Yoga and the *sanatana dharma* (eternal philosophy) and to share his knowledge with other incarcerated seekers.



Although Vishnudas told me about his background, during my year's time in the prison, I never asked any of the men about the nature of their convictions. I preferred to live in the golden present. If there was to be any judgment on my part, I wanted to judge from my own experience. Of course, I knew that I had to use common sense. I had to remember that probably all of these men had, at least at one time, lost control, going over the line, so to speak, giving over to violence and inappropriate behavior. But I also knew that most of us, whether in this lifetime or another, had harbored violent thoughts and, no doubt, had performed acts that were less than loving. How many of us could honestly say that we had never been guilty of perpetrating physical or mental harm to someone or something?

In any case, ostensibly, I came to teach something to these men, but, really, I always felt like a student. This was a world of its own, a world where I was a tourist. And, like a tourist, I held certain opinions and had preconceptions, but I also felt open to the new experiences one has when traveling in a foreign land. These men had journeyed into realms that, perhaps, I couldn't even imagine. They had horrible stories to tell, yes, of dysfunctional families and self-hatred, drug-taking and alcoholism; but they also had wonderful stories to relate of heroism in the military—in the Gulf war, for example—of supportive and loving families and friends, and of their strong faith in God. Many of their stories were absolutely inspiring. For instance, the story told to me by Mohandas.

Mohandas was a gentle, soft-spoken man, probably in his early forties, who had read most of Sri Gurudev's books, loved Master Sivananda and other spiritual masters, and had been studying all the branches of Yoga for the past twenty-four years—in prison. Mohandas told me that Yoga had completely changed his life. This time, my curiosity got the better of me. I asked him how he came to practice Yoga in prison, and he related the following story.

Mohandas said that when he was incarcerated, he was so aggressive that he had to be placed in solitary confinement. He became even wilder, like a caged animal, and he felt

particular animosity toward the guard assigned to his cell. He really hated that guard. And, before long, he made up his mind to murder him. He wrote to a friend, asking him to figure out a way to send him a weapon. Mohandas waited, completely focused on killing the guard; and, one day, he received a book in the mail from his “friend.” He opened the book, and, in the center of the book, there it was—a knife! He couldn’t wait to use it. He was so excited. He’d probably kill the guard the next day.

In the meantime, Mohandas sat down on his bed to relax. In the past, he had loved to read, but he hadn’t read anything in a long time. So, he glanced over at the book that had contained the knife, and he began browsing through it. It was a book about Yoga. Somehow, it caught his interest, and after four or five hours of reading, Mohandas fell asleep. When he awoke, he felt like a different person. He thought about the knife and, much to his surprise, he had absolutely no desire to use it, no urge to kill the guard. What’s more, he felt strangely peaceful. And that feeling has remained with him for twenty-four years. As he told us in one of our gatherings, Yoga had transformed him completely.

I’ll always remember how, at the Monastic Community meetings, he would sit quietly doing *japa* (repetition of a *mantra*) with the *mala* (rosary beads) that he always wore. And I’ll never forget the meditations and the Hatha Yoga sessions, and all the times we spent together watching videotapes of Sri Gurudev’s *satsangs* (spiritual gatherings). After the first tape, the men begged me to bring one every week. I began to realize that I was a member of a spiritual community, a prison *sangha*!

## When the Student is Ready, the Master Appears

Interestingly, when the students in the fiction-writing class heard about these meetings, one by one, nearly all of them joined the Buckingham Monastic Community. They all seemed to thirst for spiritual community, for ecumenical discussions, and for the Yoga teachings and practices. I can just see the joyful expressions that appeared on their faces whenever I brought them books donated by the ashram and by our Distribution Department. Then came the time when some of the men asked me whether I thought Sri Gurudev might be able to come to visit. I suggested that they send him an invitation. They wrote the invitation with great care, making sure that it was as perfectly written as could be. They were overjoyed when Gurudev accepted the invitation, and, immediately, with great joy and enthusiasm, they began to plan the event.

The group wanted Gurudev’s visit with them to be just like a Yogaville *satsang*. I described the typical *satsang* format, and the men took care of everything else. They wrote questions on index cards, chose the nicest room, put up flyers announcing the program, set up a special chair and a nice glass of water for Gurudev. After several cancellations due to unforeseen circumstances (we continually reminded ourselves of Gurudev’s adage: *make no appointments, you won’t experience any disappointments*), the long-awaited evening finally arrived.

All the writing class students came, all the Buckingham Monastic Community members were there, many other inmates attended, and the principal of the prison school was there, too. In honor of Gurudev, one man read a lovely poem set to music. And just like at our regular *satsangs*, Gurudev was presented with a set of index cards that contained questions for him to answer.

Needless to say, everyone fell in love with Gurudev. After the talk, all the men came up to meet him, and I was so happy and proud to introduce Gurudev to all my friends. Many of the men asked Gurudev for his autograph; some asked him to sign one of his books, others had nothing for him to sign except their caps! One young man began to study Yoga, and after a few weeks, he questioned me about *mantra* initiation, which deeply interested him.

As I mentioned earlier, I’m truly grateful for having been given the golden opportunity to serve in the prison community and to see so directly, in a population shunned by much of society, the transformative power of Yoga working on the prisoners and on me as well. I’ll always remember the time when I led the Monastic Community in silent meditation. The feeling of peace was so powerful that it cut right through any fear I had of sitting in the dark, the door shut, with a group of men whose dreadful actions would make the hardest soul shudder. Then there were the evenings when I led deep relaxation sessions, when my heart opened so wide it almost burst as I watched convicted criminals relaxing on the floor, looking as peaceful, innocent and beautiful as newborn babies. And there was the party that the men gave me, where they brought the healthiest snacks that were available in the canteen, snacks that would be appropriate for a yogi (including herbal tea). Finally, I’ll never forget the love and respect that shone from the eyes of some of America’s most troubled citizens as Gurudev assured them that they could have freedom, inner freedom, in whatever situation they found themselves, whether inside a prison or out on the street. It was this teaching and Gurudev’s previous talks in several prisons that inspired me to write the book *Bound to be Free: The Liberating Power of Prison Yoga*, which was published by Integral Yoga Publications in 2010 and promotes Yoga as a prisoner rehabilitation method.

In closing, let me say that if you have some free time to serve in a prison, whether it be teaching Yoga, teaching an academic subject, volunteering as part of a spiritual group, or volunteering in a particular program, give yourself that golden opportunity. Partake of that miraculous law of nature whereby when you give of yourself, you get back tenfold.

**Rev. Sandra Kumari de Sachy** has been studying and practicing Integral Yoga since 1980. She became a certified Integral Yoga teacher in 1981 and was ordained as an Integral Yoga minister in 1995. She has taught Hatha Yoga, Yoga philosophy and meditation in colleges and universities, in Yoga centers and in prison, and she continues to teach.



# The IYTA Column

By Arvind White

Hari Om! And greetings from the Integral Yoga Teachers Association. We hope everyone is enjoying the transition into Autumn watching the kaleidoscope of leaves change and hover over Mother Earth, and letting the intense heat from this summer wear off.

And wow! What a busy late summer season we've had since our August edition of the IYTA Newsletter. Satya Greenstone once again led an awesome Basic Teacher Training, weaning a new batch of Integral Hatha instructors. Swami Asokananda teamed up with Dijon Carew for another great Advanced Teacher Training just as many devotees dropped by Yogaville for the Mahasamadhi weekend. We had a good participant turn out for *Embracing Conflict through Yoga and Non-Violent Communication* with Bhavani Miller. We had a strong turnout for Durga Leela's *Yoga of Recovery Retreat* and few days later with her *Yoga of Recovery Certification*. Both of her programs received strong, positive reviews and will be back by popular demand. Eliana Baccas and Dr. Dean Lesser's program, *You are Not the Limited Self*, helped its participants re-acclimate with the yogic teachings. Once again, Bharata Wingham lead another jovial *Laugh-A-Yoga Certification* with many giddy participants. We also had good turnouts for the psychologically enriching workshops of *Stress Relief through Deep Relaxation and Guided Imagery* with Julie Lusk whose ideas have been featured on all three main networks, and *Stress Management for Kids* with

our dear Swami Vidyananda and Harini Lender. Kay Hawkins of the American Viniyoga Institute and Dr. Nirmala Limaye, M.D. presented *Osteoporosis, Yoga & Bone Building* which was followed by *Meditation: Quiet Mind – Boundless Spirit* with Rolf Sovik, Psy.D. of the Himalayan Institute. Our Participants from the Split Basic TT, led by our contagiously serene Swami Dayananda and Ram Wiener, cannot wait to return in the Spring to complete their training. Sonia Sivakami Sumar led yet another life-changing *Yoga For the Special Child TT* while Gary Kraftsow returned to our community for another great *Yoga for Anxiety and Depression* workshop. After he finished ATT the previous month, the ever dynamic Swami Asokananda led the *Living Gita Intensive* with an enthusiastic band of students. David "Durga Das" Newman returned with Kirtan College leaving positive musical vibes for the Fall Silent Retreat.

Our beloved Mataji (Swami Gurucharananandaji) leads another Basic Meditation workshop in November, similar to the one presented by the Barsels last January.

Once again it's time to breakout our sweaters and rake some leaves and enjoy the variety of holidays coming around the corner to go with the change of seasons. Goodbye until the crystalizing of winter frost.

Om Sarvamangalam.

Enjoy fresh air and a serene country setting.

## Satchidananda Ashram



## Yogaville® Transforming Lives

Fall 2011 / Winter 2012 Programs

### Evoking Psychological Wellbeing Through Hatha Yoga

Mahadev Carlino  
November 18-20

### Regain Peace & Perspective for the Holidays

Swami Vidyananda  
November 25-27

### Useful Anatomy for Easeful Asana

Leticia Marques  
December 9-11

### New Year's Silent Retreat: Awakening Inner Awareness: Realigning Your Self for the New Year

December 28-Jan. 1, 2012

### Relaxing into Health: Yoga for Preventing & Reversing Disease

Amrita McLanahan M.D.  
January 20-22, 2012

### Yoga Vacation in Puerto Rico

Swami Asokananda & Ram Wiener  
February 25- March 2, 2012

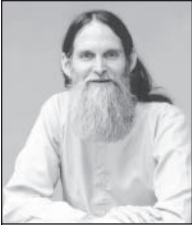


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# Integral Yoga Senior Speakers' Schedules

Please contact local representatives for times, costs, pre-enrollment requirements, schedule changes, etc.



## Swami Asokananda

### Contact

Nov. 4-6, 2011 Workshops in Boulder, Colorado

Padma Habib  
raquelhabib@yahoo.com

Jan. 10-22, 2012 Retreat in Goa, India

Igor Zdanof  
igor108om@yahoo.com

Feb. 25-Mar. 2, 2012 Puerto Rico vacation

arc@iyiva.org



## Swami Ramananda

Jan. 7 - Feb. 5, 2012 Various workshops and satsangs in Buenos Aires, Argentina

Mirabai  
gurudevnet.com



## Satya Greenstone

Mar. 12-25, 2012 Basic Teacher Training, part 1,  
Quinta da Calma, Almancil, Portugal

info@quintadacalma.com



## Swami Divyananda

Dec. 30-Jan. 2, 2012 Yoga Retreat, La Casa de Maria, Santa Barbara, California

Ramdas  
805 705 4703  
pathwaystopeace retreat.com

Jan. 9-24, 2012 Ah India! Tour, Six destinations in INDIA

Sahaja Bonner  
843 769 2269  
yogainfo@holycow yoga.com

Feb. 5-22, 2012 Sacred India Tour, Seven destinations in INDIA

Swami Divyananda  
415 738 9155  
Sacredindiatours.org

# Upcoming Programs at Yogaville

## FEATURED PROGRAM

### **Regain Peace and Perspective for the Holidays**

Swami Vidyananda

November 25–27, 2011

This workshop will be an oasis of calmness to help you start the season connected to your inner steadiness and balance. Yoga, relaxation and a supportive environment will help you feel inner peace and awaken your inner guidance. With that solid center, you can keep your perspective amidst the myriad demands of the holidays. With a combination of theory and practical application of the many teachings in Yoga, we will:

- Explore the ageless philosophy about happiness: where it comes from and how to keep it.
- Be nurtured by daily meditation, Hatha Yoga and the sacred space of Yogaville.
- Support each other to set realistic goals and boundaries for the weeks to come, and the year to come.

Start the New Year feeling better, more like yourself, more in control. It all starts here. You'll be thankful you came this Thanksgiving!

### **Evoking Psychological Wellbeing Through Hatha Yoga**

Louis Mahadev Carlino

November 18–20, 2011

In this experientially focused workshop we will explore aspects of deepening one's experience in Hatha Yoga—the main premise being that as deepening happens so does the experience of psychological wellbeing. Through the practices of Hatha Yoga the following aspects of psychological wellbeing will be explored: conscious relaxation, awareness of Divine Presence, strong life force and the expansion of compassion for self and others.

## November

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| 1–6   | <b>Thai Yoga Intensive II</b> with Jyothi Watanabe   |
| 2–6   | <b>Journey Through Spiritual Materialism to Transformation</b> with Nalanie Chellaram          |
| 11–13 | <b>Basic Meditation</b> with Mataji (Swami Gurucharanananda)                                   |
| 11–13 | <b>The Five Powers of the Yogi: A Mindfulness Yoga Workshop</b> with Poep Sa Frank Jude Boccio |
| 12    | <b>Free Introduction to Yoga workshop</b> with Prajapati Swaine                                |
| 18–20 | <b>Evoking Psychological Wellbeing Through Hatha Yoga</b> with Mahadev Carlino                 |
| 25–27 | <b>Regain Peace and Perspective for the Holidays</b> with Sw. Vidyananda                       |

## December

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 2–4       | <b>Creative Vinyasa Flow Immersion</b> with Dani Vani McGuire   |
| 2–4       | <b>Opening the Golden Present: Discovering Peace, Love, Joy and Bliss in the Present Moment</b><br>with Bhagavan & Bhavani Metro  |
| 9–11      | <b>Useful Anatomy for Easeful Asana</b> with Leticia Marques  |
| 28–Jan. 1 | <b>New Year's Silent Retreat: Awakening Inner Awareness: Realigning Your Self for the New Year</b><br>Presented by senior teachers, with Prajapati Swaine as the Spiritual Director |

## January

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| 13–15      | <b>Basic Meditation</b> with Revs. Paraman and Lakshmi Barsel  |
| 14         | <b>Free all day Laugh-a Yoga</b> with Bharata Wingham  |
| 20–22      | <b>Relaxing into Health: Yoga for Preventing &amp; Reversing Disease</b> with Amrita McLanahan, M.D. |
| 22–Feb. 19 | <b>Winter Basic Hatha Yoga Teacher Training</b>  |
| 27–29      | <b>Breath = Life: A Pranayama Workshop</b> with Bhaktan Eberle                                       |



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