

2011 Edition Volume 6 No 3

Namaste Dear Divine Gitananda Sadhak,

Well, as the year draws nearer to a close (at what feels like a cracking pace!), it brings me to reflect on what triumphs and tribulations 2011 has presented me with. I know without a shadow of a doubt that one of the most amazing triumphs would be the honour of visiting Dr. Ananda and his beautiful family at Pondicherry's Ananda Ashram in August, along with members of my treasured Gitananda Yoga family (a warm and wholehearted thank you to Murali for your efforts in organising this trip!). I must admit that prior to my arrival, I had fantasized about what it would be like to one day visit India; but of course, the heat, humidity, and incredibly contrasting way of life didn't exactly feature prominently in this image ... which my fellow travellers can vouch for when I arrived looking like a deer caught in headlights! Within seconds of stepping out of Chennai airport, there were many confronting challenges ahead; adjusting to the traffic's 'horn-happy' hustle and bustle, the profuse sweating, and of course the overwhelming desire to have my three year old son by my side again. Even arriving at the Ashram offered another set of challenges ... like when I leapt out of bed in darkness on the first morning into knee-deep water following a night of heavy rain. But you know what? These trials and 'tribulations' became the key to unlocking the real – somewhat more resilient – me. The switch flicked when my Ashram neighbour, Selwyn, was merrily whistling 'Don't Worry, Be Happy' as he scooped water out of his room using a drink bottle cut in half!

After an initial period of attempted transition, I came to cherish the Ashram's back-to-basics lifestyle which Ammaji fondly likens to a 'camping trip'. I loved the feeling of the earth beneath my feet (except for the common crunch of caterpillars!), practicing Hatha Yoga on a bamboo mat (forget these fancy non-slip designer ones!), having our pranayama class with the delightful Shalini beneath a palm leaf thatched roof, eating Shanti's beautiful food with my hands from metal tins communal-style, hearing the waves thrash on the beach – all in the presence of some of the most warm and inspiring yogis I have ever met (thank you to all who allowed me to huddle beneath your nurturing wings at times – you know who you are!).

Ammaji's words of wisdom during Satsangha were something I waited for with eagerness every evening; and singing Bhajans with the people who quickly became extended family while we awaited her arrival are memories that will never fade.

I knew when I first encountered Dr. Ananda and Gitananda Yoga in 2009, I had stumbled upon a rare gem that would reveal to me the real beauty of yoga (and perhaps even myself – which has not been an easy task), but I never imagined it would open the door to some of the most precious moments and people of my life. The funny thing is that after my Pondicherry stay, I struggled to readjust back to home-life more than I had Ashram-life. Constantly driven by deadlines, demands, duties, life after India presents the challenge of keeping in touch with the lessons and practices learnt – but as Dr. Ananda says, I have learnt to 'do the best and leave the rest'.

As always, thanks to all who have contributed and helped with this newsletter. We love hearing about your journeys – and it will be wonderful to share more together at our next Brisbane gathering with Dr. Ananda in 2012!

Yours in Yoga,
Diana Timmins, NSW (co-editor)

For more about the core concepts of Gitananda Yoga, visit: <http://www.gitanandaaustralia.net/page11.php>

Newsletter Features

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For Dr. Ananda's Books and DVD's, visit
www.rishiculture.org and click on
'Dhivyananda Creations'





Mark Your Calendar Plan to Attend

Friday, November 16th 2012 to
Sunday, November 18th, 2012

Retreat with Dr. Ananda In Brisbane

Selwyn's Ashram Experience *by Selwyn Williams*

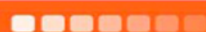
Although I have travelled to many countries over the years I had never been to India and had a long held desire to do so. When the opportunity came up to visit Ananda Ashram this year I was quick to put my name down. One, for the chance to advance my Yoga experience, and two, to sightsee in a country I had read and heard so much about.

So, firstly the country: When our group of four Kapiti Coasters arrived at Chennai airport the first thing we noticed was the rise in temperature. We had left NZ in the coldest part of winter, when snow was falling in places it didn't normally fall, and even though you know it's coming, being hit by that heat, was the first shock to the system. (It was in the high 30sC most of the time we were there). The next shock came when we walked outside. I had read there are 1.2 billion people in India and it seemed like most of them had come to greet us. But no, a sea of faces is the norm here, and I now realise how sparsely populated NZ is.

We found our driver and he drove us to our hotel through the rainy tropical night, some 25 odd kms through the main roads of Chennai. Our next culture shock – the traffic. First, there is lots of it, and everyone seems to be racing. If you are not overtaking, you are being overtaken. Everybody is sounding their horn and our bus is moving past vehicles with barely a few centimetres to spare. Small motorbikes (of which there

are millions) seem to need even less room and 'shoot the gap' whenever they can. There were a few gasps of surprise (and possibly terror) from our crew as huge trucks roared by with the smallest of margins of room. And many had loads that looked less than secure. This set the scene for the rest of our road travels, and eventually we got used to it. In fact I came to appreciate that most of the drivers are highly skilled and are excellent judges of distance. Despite the apparent craziness and lack of road rules, the traffic generally flowed smoothly, (although not very fast) and I noticed little or no gridlock despite the vast number of things on the road. I say 'things' because there are always cattle on the road, even in the middle of town. They seem to know the local 'road code' and don't step in front of vehicles if they toot at them first. The traffic just flows around them. Oxen drawn carts are common place and I was amazed at the loads they were pulling – loaded with bricks or a metre² of roading material was not unusual – very fuel efficient! Pedestrians meander across the roads at will and the Zebra Crossings seemed to be generally ignored by pedestrians and traffic alike. Pushbikes, pushbike rickshaws, motorised rickshaws, scooters and small motorbikes, old cars and new, and trucks and buses of every shape and size vie for any gap they can take. Most trucks had "Sound Horn" written on the back of them, as if the drivers need any form of encouragement! Horns are used almost like echo sounders and there seems to be a code to their use – although "Coming Through!!" seemed to be the most common message. My driver in Delhi, later in the trip, told me you need 3 things to drive in India – good brakes, a good horn, and good luck!

So we had a day in Chennai and did some sightseeing and enjoyed a dip in the hotel pool, and tried out the local cuisine. Very nice. But still hot and sweaty. That evening the Australian contingent arrived and the next morning we were happily on our little bus for the drive down to Pondicherry. A few hours later we arrived at the Ashram, shown our rooms and met up with the other two Kapiti Coasters who had arrived earlier. Next was a shopping trip down to Pondi town where we bought local clothes made from light cotton, ideal for that climate. (Did I mention it was hot?) Many litres of bottled water were purchased - most of which was sweated straight out again (at least our pores should be well flushed).





And mosquito repellent - the local variety seemed to work better than the stuff we bought with us.

After our 10 days at the Ashram we were back on our bus to tour around Tamil Nadu, taking in the magnificent ancient temples. First was Chidamabaram, where the men in the group had to don dhotis' and remove their shirts and shoes to get inside. The women had to cover up, considering the heat I think the blokes got the best deal, much more comfortable. There were no photos allowed inside fortunately! I cannot do justice to these temples here- the beauty, the architecture, the spiritual significance etc. (Google them!) After that we travelled then on to Darasuram and another temple.

We spent the night at a resort where we dined under that stars and frolicked in the pool afterwards. After the long bus ride and fairly plain facilities we had been used to, this place seemed luxurious – it even had hot water and toilet paper! The next day we bussed on to Thanjavur, and more amazing temples. Some complete with resident elephant. (In Pondi we saw an elephant walking down the main street – we later found it at a local temple and it was just being taken for a walk). Then a long ride through the countryside- past fields of sugarcane, rice and other crops and dusty small towns and villages to Thiruvannamalai. Our hotel was a nice upmarket Eco resort on the edge of the suburbs. Another significant temple in the centre of town, which like the others, was amazing. And like the other temples, visitors have to run a gauntlet of market stalls, hawkers and beggars to get through the gates – some negotiated these more successfully than others...

The other site we visited there was the Ramana Ashram which is at the base of the holy Mt Arunachala. After walking through the Ashram, alive with devotees, tourists, peacocks and families of monkeys we made our way (barefoot and sweating profusely, as always) up a mountain path to the cave where Sri Ramana meditated for 17 odd years. It was a most peaceful place with an incredible ambience.

We travelled back to Chennai where we all went our separate ways, most headed home to NZ and Oz. I flew up to Delhi for a few days sightseeing and of course a trip out to Agra to see the Taj Mahal for myself. No trip to India complete without that! There were many things to

see and do in Delhi but the one unexpected bonus was a visit to the house that Gandhi lived in, and died in the back lawn thereof. It is now a museum with hi tech audio/visual displays in many rooms but the room Gandhiji lived in was very simple and as he left it. A bed on the floor, a small writing desk (at floor level with no legs), his walking stick, a shaver, a cup and a few bits and pieces – his entire personal affects which were so little. From this room he walked out the French doors and around the back of the house to go to prayers and was shot there on the lawn. They have built a shrine on the spot and it gave me goose bumps to stand beside it.

The Ashram

We had 10 days in the Ananda Ashram at Pondicherry which was the main purpose of the trip. I had attended inspiring sessions with Dr Ananda Balayoga Bhavanani at the Lotus Centre in 2009 and in Brisbane in 2010 and could not pass on the opportunity to extend my knowledge/experience at his home base.

Up at 5am for Arthi, we did two hours of Hatha yoga, from 6am, another two hours of pranayama/ kriyas and relaxation techniques at 11am, two hours of bajans and mantras at 4pm and an hour or two of satang - (sitting at the masters feet for philosophy) in the evenings. All in temperatures of 36-40 deg C. (ie constantly sweating - no AC - drinking 5 litres of water/day). The accommodation was fairly basic but for those of us used to camping it was more than comfortable enough. Four of us on the rooftop rooms were flooded out during a thunderstorm on our first night there, which was another one of the many challenges we faced - the toilets were another! Mostly the squat variety and toilet paper was forbidden as it blocked the drains. So we had to learn to do things the local way with a bucket of water, which drew reactions ranging from amusement to horror from some of the crew. All sitting and yoga practices were done on the tiled concrete floor – another thing to get used to.

The food was cooked fresh and was simple and healthy but tasted superb and mealtimes were eagerly anticipated. We often had the company of two friendly little dogs and the Ashram cat would often grace us with her presence. Sometimes Dhivya and Anandraj, Dr Ananda's delightful children would join us at mealtimes and play-times – which often ended up with a game of cricket.



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Crows were ever present and little squirrels (or chipmunks?) would scurry around the rooftops and gardens. I observed a snake moving through the thatch roof of one of the huts we used one day but fortunately it disappeared not to be seen again. Red centipedes about 50-75mm long were everywhere and many other colourful bugs could be observed in the gardens. Geckos chirped around our rooms at night and much larger members of the lizard family entertained those on garden duty when we were doing our karma yoga each day.



On Sunday we were taken to Sri Kambliswamy Madam in Pondicherry and witnessed the Guru Pujas at the Samadhi of Dr Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj – an honour and extraordinary experi-

ence. One evening we were taken to the Yoganjali Natyalayam school the Ashram runs in town where we saw around 400 children of all ages being taught yoga and traditional dance.

Our last night was a party. We enjoyed a cultural programme of Bharatnatyam (dance) by girls from the school, while the boys put on a display of advanced yoga asanas accompanied by a group of Classical musicians led by Dr Ananda's impressive Carnatic vocals. A banquet of wonderful food followed and there were speeches and presentations.

The teachings we received were excellent and powerful. Spending time with Dr Ananda and his wife Devasena and his mother, the most amazing Ammaji, and the other wonderful teachers there were very very special. To soak in the extraordinary energy of the Ashram is something I struggle to describe. It was no picnic and we had to put in some effort at times but it was also a most enjoyable time. The results could probably be classed as life changing. I have had a major tuneup. I have lost

weight (and my pores have been well cleaned!) I am more flexible, I have been healed of some niggling health issues. I have no desire for chocolate/cake/junk food/ alcohol etc - habits have been changed and urges burnt. I feel calmer and wiser and motivated to continue the practices we have learnt and to further study. The challenge is not to let it wear off as I slip back into my normal life routines back home. Or I may need to go back...

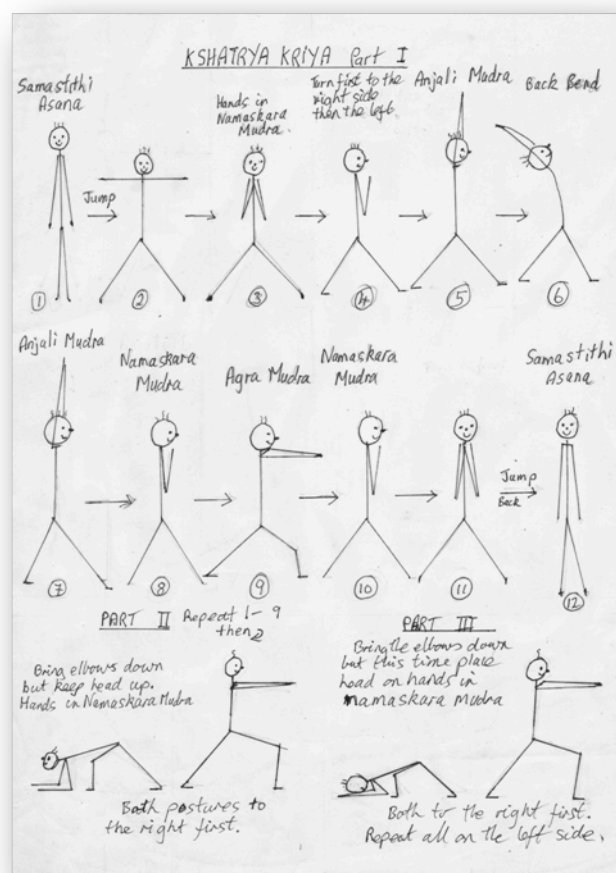
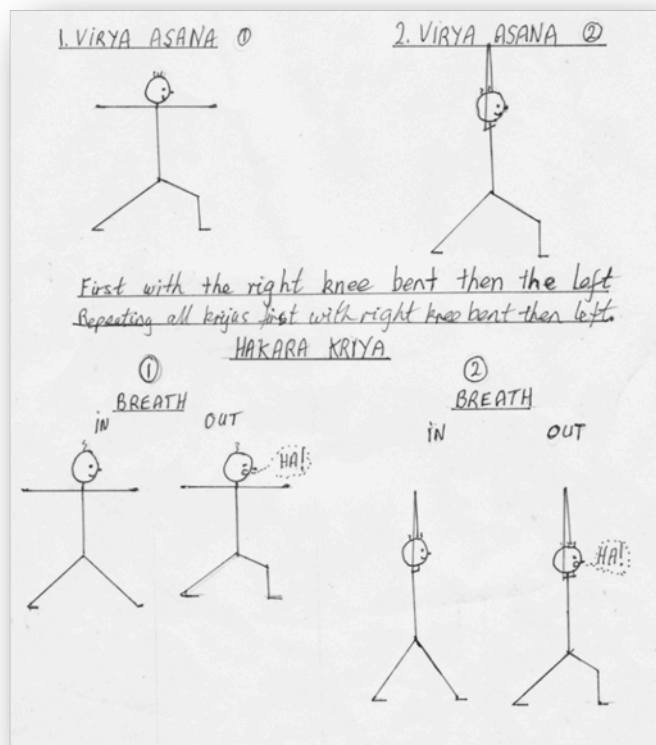




Shat Ripus

by Yogacharini Gowri (Wendy Snape)

The second of the six groups of asanas, mudras, kriyas and pranayamas for help to overcome the ripus (destroyers of the human spirit) is a series of practices to overcome krodha (anger).



INTERACT WITH THE GITANANDA YOGA FAMILY

The Gitananda newsletter is a brilliant forum for us to share stories about our experiences, words of wisdom, or to keep up to date with exciting happenings like weddings and pitter patter of teeny-weeny feet. We will be starting a section called 'Gitananda Yoga Family' for us all to share the joy of such news. Contact muali@gitananda-australia.net with your news.





Coming Home

by Cathryn Doornekamp

Most of you will know that I am a participant in a correspondence course with ICYER – Ananda Ashram. In an article entitled 'Yoga: Step-by-step' that appeared in the June 2011 Gitananda newsletter I wrote of how I came to be enrolled in this course by way of a 'strong calling'. Callings of this nature we must follow if we are to evolve. Allow me to elaborate.

Early this year I had another 'strong calling', this time to go to India to attend a ten-day intensive retreat at Ananda Ashram in August 2011.

My partner, Eric Doornekamp studied *Rishiculture Ashtanga Yoga* with Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri at Ananda Ashram in 1968. And to think that I was only 5 years old then!

As a teenager I had a fascination for India. I also had a knowing that one day I would spend time in an ashram, and not any old ashram.

And so, on the 8th August this year, I boarded a plane in Wellington, New Zealand to connect with a series of flights en route for Chennai, India.

They say to "expect the unexpected" while in India. My first impression of India, landing in Chennai was exactly that. The tarmac was wet and rain was falling!

When we asked the driver who was escorting us to our hotel, if it was the monsoon season, he replied, "No, it is just raining".

At 11.00 p.m. Indian time, the road was a picture of 'organised chaos'. Our driver negotiated the wet conditions with great skill to the chorus of tooting. A mass of trucks, cars, buses, vans, motorbikes, bikes and bullock carts shared the same road along with the cows who wandered across when they felt like it!

I couldn't help but wonder why all these people were out at this time on a Monday evening. Families rode together on motorbikes without helmets and protection from the rain, the women sitting astride in their saris cradling a baby in their lap!

I have to say that India grew on me and I fell in love with the place. My first impression of setting foot in the Ashram was a knowing deep within that I had 'come home'.

A tour of the Ashram that ensued was full of mixed emotions. The deities, shrine and pictures in the main Satsangha hall stirred up a deep sense of familiarity, that of 'connecting with my roots'. Dr. Swami Gitananda's presence was especially noticeable. The energy in the Patanjali Kutir, an octagonal shaped building was akin to that in the Sanctuary back home, only magnified. When I came to be in the hut where *Swamiji* spent the last few years of his life, I was moved to tears of joy. Waves of nostalgia swept over me, as I browsed over the photos in the dining area and lounge, of days gone by.

The only other time that I have had such a sense of 'coming home', was when I flew over the Andes to Cusco in 1996. Both these 'knowings of coming home' were linked to 'strong callings'. These callings can be likened to being drawn to a magnet, a 'calling on a Higher Level'.

Interestingly, this 'calling' to Ananda Ashram, India was stronger than the 'calling' I had to go to Macchu Picchu, South America, where I met my spiritual partner Eric Doornekamp. It was through Eric that I came to Yoga.

In the great scheme of things there is a right place and time for everything. As Dr. Ananda so succinctly says: "*Dharma* is being in the right place at the right time with the right person doing the right thing".

It was indeed an honour to finally meet Ammaji and partake in the teachings from the source in the 'womb' of the Ashram. Life in Ananda Ashram seemed so familiar and I simply melted in to the cocoon of Ashram life. The experience has brought new dimensions to my yoga studies and practices as I go about them with renewed vigour. My heart is overflowing with gratitude for the lifestyle I have come to lead at The Lotus Yoga Centre, New Zealand by way of meeting Eric and the link I have with Ananda Ashram. I consider myself truly blessed to be part of this paramparai (tradition).

I could easily have stayed on and will be going back for sure!

Note to Gitananda Members

AGM minutes will be available soon.



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