

Gitananda Yoga Australia

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NAMASTE!

This issue:

- Yantra Course
- Five days with Like Minded Sadhaks
- A Saint Comes Marching in
- Snowy Mountains Adventure

YANTRA COURSE - Great News for current GYA financial members

We have been given permission to join Ananda's Yantra Course from Saturday 2nd February 2019 to 22nd Feb 2019.

But hurry, hurry only six weeks to go if you want to join us.

Getting There:

Our group will meet at Singapore Airport on Friday 1st February 2019 and join Singapore Airways Flight SQ528 from Singapore to Chennai. We will be picked up from Chennai Airport and taken to Mahabalipuram where we will stay overnight then take a taxi to the Ashram the following day. (Cost: \$82 each for taxi and overnight accommodation).

There are two options for accommodation during our stay:

Option 1:

Stay at Ashram: Total cost: \$1,650

Includes accommodation, Yantra, Yoga and meals.

Amma said it is like a camping trip where we have all meals included and separate male and female rooms and bathrooms.

Note: We spend little time in our rooms as most of the time is involved with Yoga teachings.

Option 2:

Stay at nearby Guest house: Total cost \$1,960 –

Includes Accommodation, Yantra, Yoga and Meals

If you wish to join this group, contact Murali. You will need to have a current Indian Visa and a non-refundable deposit of \$165 to be deposited into the GYA account

Gitananda Association

BSB 015025

Account 498569383

FIVE DAYS WITH LIKEMINDED SADHAKS:

Unfortunately, our plans to have the 2018 retreat at our spiritual venue - 241 Hedges Avenue (right on the beach) at Mermaid Beach, did not eventuate - as this house now has long term tenants. However, we were fortunate to be able to secure accommodation at nearby Montego Sands Resort.

Dawn had a single apartment, Margo, Jenny, and Murali shared a two-bedroom apartment whilst Zigi and her partner Maris had another apartment in the same complex.

Each day started on the beach - with Surya Namaskar to greet the morning sun. We managed to squeeze into one apartment for pranayama classes and evening practises with Murali; and Margo, Zigi, and Murali shared in taking the yoga classes.

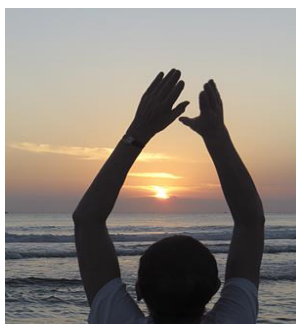


Dinner for six



Dawn, Margo, Jenny, Murali & Zigi

Margo prepared the meals for four of us and on the Saturday evening the whole group had dinner in our apartment and then listened to a lecture by Swamiji. We had the windows all open and the volume up and Dawn said she could hear Swamij's loud booming voice all the way back to her apartment on the other side of complex. Fortunately, no one complained to the manager and hopefully those listening found the lecture as interesting as we did!



Apart from a little rain and wind on some days, the weather was perfect, and we were able to walk along the beach most days. Unfortunately, no dolphins or whales were spotted this year.

Murali

Sunrise on Mermaid Beach

A SAINT COMES MARCHING IN

By Eric Doornekamp

Lotus Centre New Zealand

When I think of the Summer Solstice in New Zealand my thoughts go back to the Northern Hemisphere. In The Netherlands Saint Nikolaas is celebrated on 5 December, which is a great time, especially for children.

The Saint arrives by steamer from Spain, although in modern times it may be in a helicopter. He is accompanied by a number of black Peters. He has a white beard and is dressed in red. He rides a white horse and carries a bag full of presents. This is filled with individual gifts and distributed amongst the 'good' children. They must have been obedient during the year or else they are put in the bag and taken to Spain to be taught a few lessons in right conduct! The children put a shoe or a boot in front of the fireplace overnight. They are expected to sing songs in honour of the Saint's birthday. They leave nice juicy carrots for the horse.

That time of year it is cold, and we used to eat sweets and more expensive items and another delicacy, Banket letter, made in the shape of a child's first name. Speculaas or gingerly spiced biscuits were always my favourites. You will have recognised the similarities with Christmas. Well, 25 December is a relatively mild celebration in The Netherlands. Traditionally, families gather in the local village hall for songs and presents.

During the last few decades or so the American influence has become much more noticeable. The hype of commercialism seems to increase with each passing year but maybe I am just critical nowadays.

Perhaps I should make a point of celebrating both events! Saint Nikolaas earlier and Santa Klaus later in the month. That means I will have it both ways and can appreciate the festivities.

SNOWY MOUNTAIN MIRACLE

Editor's note:

This year we were shocked to learn that our senior intrepid photographic adventurer Zigi Georges had been caught in a white-out in the Snowy Mountains and almost lost her life. Here is her story prompted by my questions.

Q. How long have you been going there, and why?

It has taken a great deal of searching of records to find that I started going regularly to the Snowy Mountains, NSW, Charlotte Pass Village (highest snowfield in Australia) after 2005, when I first went there as a member of the AIPP group (Australian Institute of Professional Photography).

Quite by accident, one cold and drizzly March morning, I stumbled upon the hidden gems of Charlotte Pass Village, namely, *Eucalyptus Pauciflora*, commonly known as Snow Gums. There they stood before me, huge (some 200 plus years old), gnarled, twisted by extremes of weather, but utterly magnificent with their colourful stripes, blotches, blobs and glistening shiny surfaces. Some master painter had anointed these Snow Gums with a technicolour brush to produce retinal haemorrhage. I was smitten. Before this encounter, I had yoga; now I had Snow Gums to contend with as well, mainly in terms of how to convey their splendour in photography!

It is interesting to note that Snow Gums on sunny dry days hide their colours under a cloak of bland grey, which is seen most of the time, as few mortals seek stormy, wet weather conditions to rush outdoors with their camera!



Eucalyptus Pauciflora **Snow gums**

Q. Why did you decide to go out that day?

On that eventful 31 day of August 2018, I was still following the Snow Gum passion, though that had deepened to a love of the High Country and all that went with it. Light flurries of snow and some sleet signalled wet Snow Gums and photography! I had already been out early that morning, and whilst not brilliant, the weather did not seem to be so bad. Normally, I would have gone up to Mt. Stilwell, which was a very familiar area to me. However, a fellow lodger, offered to go out with me to the low side, and I thought that was probably less exposed to any weather that might be heading our way.

Soon after 9am we set out with our snowshoes to head towards Spencers Creek. Slight snow was falling, but otherwise alright. Along the way, I noticed that the Snow Gum bark was wet, and was drawn to go towards a distance clump of trees around Trapyard Creek area. My companion and I parted our ways.

I must have spent an hour or so, wandering around Snow Gums and photographing, not really paying attention to where I was going. Suddenly I noticed my hands had become icy and even pressing the shutter of the camera was difficult and it was snowing fairly heavily now. Where I was, there were not so many Snow Gums anyway, so I decided to head towards my lodgings, Pygmy Possum Lodge.

A sudden whiteout descends.

I started aligning against Mt. Guthrie, heading in a Westerly direction, noticing that I was higher than I should be. I made my way to a lower level and passed what I thought was Wrights Creek, but I could not really see as there descended a sudden whiteout. I continued in a Westerly direction and was glad to find some snow poles and tried to follow them, noticing that I was in a SW direction, but hopefully heading towards the Lodge. I judged these poles to be the route above the sewerage works, so I should not be far from home, 150 metres at most.

Visibility worsened. Snow poles disappeared. Where to now? Then I espied some poles towards my left and I tried to follow those for quite a long time, thinking that this was further from the Lodge than I would have expected. I had no reference points as I could barely see any poles but tried to follow the few I did come across, until they abruptly ended. Nothing all around but a white wall. Could not retrace my steps, as nothing but white was visible. The wind was howling through my ears; goggles still had some visibility. At a distance I perceived a vague outline of a square box and headed towards it, thinking it might provide some shelter whilst I considered my situation. It turned

out to be one of the several pill boxes scattered between Charlotte Pass and Thredbo. No roof, open doorway, but some protection from the 100km/h blizzard!

Lost...

I realise that I am stuck, in fact lost and that I could probably not survive a night in my rapidly increasing cold state. Time to activate my PLB (Personal Locator Beacon). With knuckles of my hand I finally manage to press the red button under its red plastic protective cover, and I perceive 2 green flashes followed by a white longer one. This must be activated, I think, not really convinced that is the case. But there is nothing else to do. Going past 12 noon now as I seek protection from the violent wind against one of walls of the structure. The wind and snow slurries whirl through the open doorway and non-existent roof in an increasing crescendo.

I have no idea what to expect. Will there be a skidoo from the Chalet or what??

Yogic breathing to keep the panic away.

Meanwhile I try to generate some warmth. I stomp around in my snow shoes bashing my poles into the snow and ice inside the three walls, making sharp patterns. I sing Gaudeamus Igitur, about the ravages of death and the need to enjoy life whilst one can. Eventually I run out of stomping and singing. I try to maintain a regular deep yogic breath to keep the panic away. What else to keep the cold away?

I think of putting on my thin Mont down jacket in my backpack. It is SO difficult. I cannot open the backpack waist clip, so I end pulling it around my waist, extract my jacket, lever the outer jacket down one arm, put on the Mont, and eventually succeed having both arms in jackets and zipping up the main coat. Cannot zip the down jacket, but it is better than nothing, I reckon.

A snowshoe strap has come out of its buckle and I futilely try to fix that, but to no avail.

Beginning to feel drowsy...

Next, I find a challenge wrestling with an embedded orange pipe and some hanging insulation wire. I get quite annoyed that the pipe does not yield to my tugs. Suddenly something gives, and I find I can lever the pipe across the open doorway, so I can sit on it, rather than on the snow and ice. I had been shivering, but now start to drowse, almost feeling comfortable. I think of loved ones as I drift along. Suddenly I am awakened by an inner voice telling me that I am not yet prepared to die, not this way, not now.

No one is coming.

What would others do in my situation? Image comes to mind of Richard Mason two years ago building a snow cave and I remember someone digging one outside my window at the lodge. I arouse myself, more deep breathing. I see the afternoon light deepening; still a whiteout and howling wind. No one is coming. I need to do something to improve my situation. Wish I had some tools. It occurs to me that I am fussing with a snow shoe strap, when that could be a tool, for digging and chopping ice, for scraping. I try this with some success.



Snow Shoes

I put chunks of ice in front of the doorway to build a bit of a wall against the wind. I am occupied for quite a while, and the cold lessens. Eventually I realise that this will not really do much for me, and I move towards the back wall that has a tiny scrap of roofing left. I try to create a hole into the ice that might get deep enough for me to crawl into. My yogic breath continues at a steady rate. At least they will find that I tried to help myself. I wonder whether I will end up like Tasmanian photographer Dombrovskis; dying, with my last pictures in my camera. I would have paid a heavy price for them. I continue with my digging and scraping endeavour.

This was a miracle

I am so preoccupied that I cannot believe that I am hearing a voice and see goggles peering down at me. Utter shock, I was not expecting any rescue at all by this stage. Then came disbelief. But the voice said something, and the body with the goggles moved. It hit me, this was a miracle! Dan was followed by Richard whom I recognised, and John. Three people, one of whom I knew, from Pygmy Possum Lodge. A million questions came to mind, but no time to ask them.

After ascertaining that I was able to walk and giving me those, oh so delicious, soft jelly sweets and a drink from Richard's concoction, I was told we had a long way to get home. I was puzzled at that. I had no idea that I had walked 3 km. away from the Lodge, not towards it.

A tough journey back

Rapidly, we set off in a total whiteout and violent blizzard conditions with wind gusts to 100km. Richard was the main navigator with his Garmin, and he had to stop every 10 steps or so to get bearings. We were headed in a straight line towards Pygmy possum Lodge, but there were boulders we had to avoid and deviate up and down snowy slopes, most of the time tumbling into the zero visibility.

We seemed to follow more pill boxes in a northerly direction (so much for my wanting to go West!) until over the final rise we stood facing downward into the Charlotte Pass bowl area. The knowledge that we were close to the Lodge renewed our spirits. Our gallant snowboarder, John, carved a speedy path back to the Lodge as we other three followed at a more leisurely pace. There was magic light through those Snow Gums, but my hands of ice could not extract the camera from my zip coat pocket. Opportunity lost!

Finally, safe

When we got to the Lodge just on dark, we were greeted by flashing lights, ambulance men, police, and other Lodge occupants. Their combined cheer was quite overwhelming. I was whisked off for a health check and Dr. Dan vouched that I did not need to go to Cooma hospital. That was a huge relief. I was dying for a hot shower but had to get hot drinks and some food first-strict order from medicos.

Some reflections

I was not prepared for a blizzard in a relatively unfamiliar area. In my usual haunts I would probably have made it back alone. That said, I am informed that even very experienced skiers have been disoriented in blizzards! An official team had tried to go out there but could not locate me. However, my three brave rescuers were determined to locate me before nightfall and used all their years of mountaineering skills and extensive local knowledge to find me. They deserve awards for bravery, pluck, courage and mountain skills. There is no doubt we all could have died out there.

Days later, after our physical recovery, it was beneficial to go out with people, and later, by myself, to traverse my blizzard driven footsteps. It was a constant amazement to me that I could walk along

loud Creeks, boulders, trees, and not see or hear anything, except the solid wall of white and the roar in my ears.

My survival technique

I had very few resources. I used my snow shoes to hack out ice and stack it to try to build a snow cave, however inadequate it now seems. Did a dance and song routine earlier to keep up some body heat. I was almost constantly engaging in yogic pranayama breathing to keep any panic away and generate some warmth.

I would not be alive but for:

- that PLB beacon and all the search activity generated by it
- the determined team of three with their local knowledge and mountain skills and love for another human in plight
- their locator/direction device: Garmin Etrek 30x GPS unit, and an ordinary compass
- some Zigi sense to stay put, keep active, keep breathing

I shall go back.

And yes, I shall go back again, but infinitely better prepared. I am amazed at myself for keeping panic at bay. Maybe years of yoga did have some benefit after all. My intention is to learn how the reputed yogis could generate warmth in snow. Could they have done it in a blizzard and for hours on end? If so, I would like to learn that technique, and to teach it to others.



My heartfelt thanks to:

- the fourth vital Pygmy Possum member, Michael Stevens, who spent several years convincing me to get a PLB, until I finally did last year, not at all expecting to engage it.
- the team of three who risked their lives in their determination to find me before nightfall, and their successful use of Garmin technology.
- Their loved ones too, who anxiously paced the floor for their safe return.
- all the teams of rescuers activated by that beacon and maintaining watch at Charlotte Pass, Canberra, Jindabyne, Adaminaby, and locations I do not even know about.
- the anxious watchers at Pygmy Possum Lodge.
- my loved ones at Noosa who had to wait by the phone for six hours or so. They were either dreading the worst or were determinedly convincing themselves that, somehow, Zigi would be found alive.

All, absolutely ALL, contributed to keeping my spark of light from being extinguished by the cold fingers gripping my entrails and squeezing shut my heart.

Marcus Aurelius



- *Time is a sort of river of passing events, and strong is its current; no sooner is a thing brought to sight than it is swept by and another takes its place, and this too will be swept away.*

Marcus Aelius Aurelius Antoninus was adopted by the emperor Antoninus Pius and succeeded him in 161, (as joint emperor with adoptive brother Lucius Verus). He ruled alone from 169. He spent much of his reign in putting down various rebellions and was a persecutor of Christians.

His fame rests above all, on his *Meditations*, a series of reflections, strongly influenced by Epictetus, which represent a Stoic outlook on life. Written in Greek by an intellectual Roman emperor without any intention of publication, the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius (AD 121-180) offer a wide range of fascinating spiritual reflections and exercises developed, as the leader struggled to understand himself and make sense of the universe. Spanning from doubt and despair to conviction and exaltation, they cover such diverse topics as the question of virtue, human rationality, the nature of the gods and Aurelius' own emotions.

But while the *Meditations* were composed to provide personal consolation, in developing his beliefs Marcus also created one of the greatest of all works of philosophy: a series of wise and practical aphorisms that have been consulted and admired by statesmen, thinkers and ordinary readers for almost two thousand years. He died in 180 and was succeeded by his natural son, thus ending the period of the adoptive emperors.

- *Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking.*
- *When you arise in the morning, think of what a precious privilege it is to be alive - to breathe, to think, to enjoy, to love.*
- *Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth.*

CONTRIBUTIONS REQUESTED

Your contributions are always welcome for our next eNewsletter, if you have a favourite practice, a meditation, a recipe, an anecdote, an interesting story, a favourite quote, or something you could share with us all please email it to margosyoga@hotmail.com for the next issue due in March 2019.