

Gitananda Yoga Association

eNews: Volume 5:3 December 2019

WELCOME To the December issue of ENews for 2019.

Murali has been working with our designer to make improvements to our website. Please take a moment to click on the link <http://www.gitananda-australia.org/> and have a look. There is information about the 2020 Yantra Course and Annual Get-together, also scroll through the photo archives. You may even find yourself there.

Fees for 2020 will be due in March so please check whether you have paid your **fees for 2019**. This is especially important if you hold office or are a teacher listed on our website.

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GYA GET-TOGETHER 2019

Muralidharan Trevor Fox

In October, eight likeminded sadhaks gathered at diamond head beach resort Broadbeach/Mermaid Beach. We were looking for, and found, a suitable venue with a large swimming pool and garden at our back door and a roomy lounge room for our indoor practises. Greeting the morning sun with *Vedic surya namaskar* gave us all a natural healing/soothing sun bath; how fortunate are we to have access to these profound practises. Following the morning session, we walked along the beach foreshore recharging with negative ions.

11am started with pranayama followed by Ananda's chakra DVD. The better the pronunciation of the Sanskrit *bija* sounds the better the result, so we followed *mantra laya* sounds on the DVD.

Yantra session – in 1997 Dawn's son David had an adventurous journey thru the amazon wilderness and our Yantra calculations confirmed (amazingly) that David was in a 5-cycle year in 1997. Another session was spent practising a seated version of *alu loma viloma prakriya*, polarizing as well as building up a pranic energy reserve. More walking along the beach and shopping at organic markets. Evening meals were all cooked with love and at the conclusion of the 5 days sadhana, the comment was made that our yoga retreat was a wonderful stress buster.



Pranayama session on the poolside lawn

Gowri (Wendy Snape)

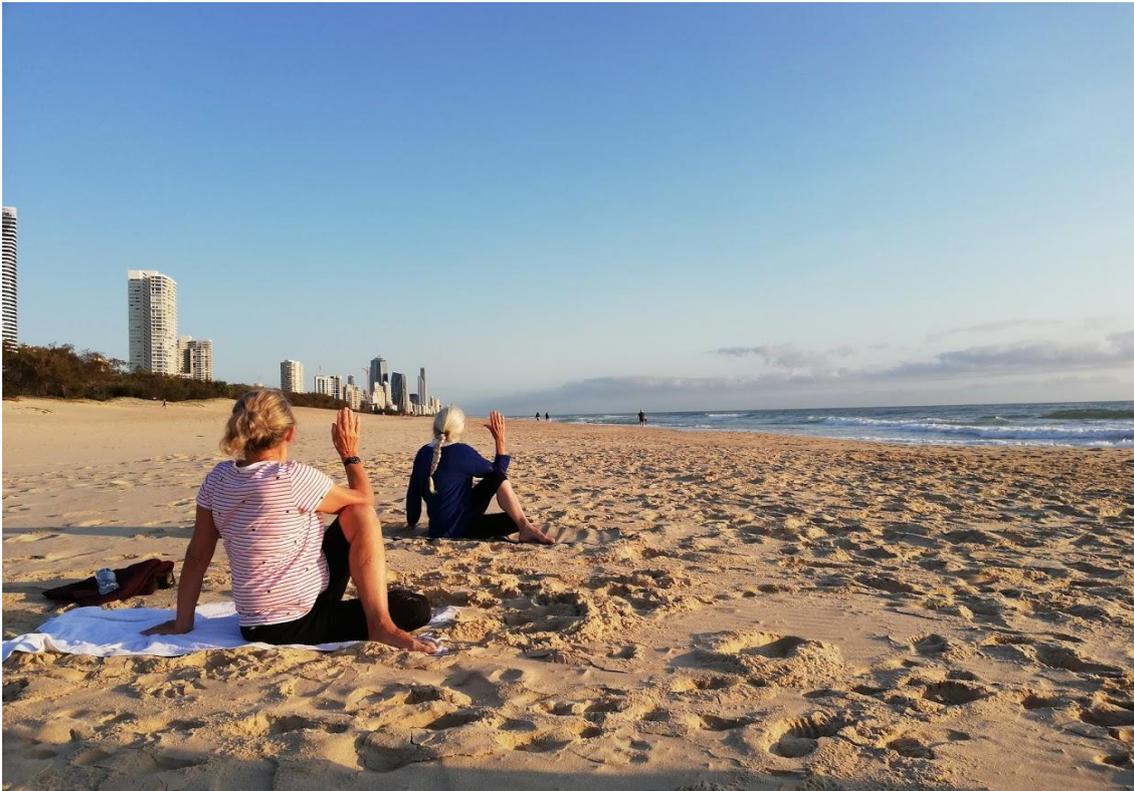
In October 2009, seven GYA members arrived at the beautiful BreakFree Diamond Beach Resort, Broadbeach/Mermaid Beach on Gold Coast for our annual retreat. Jenny came from Newcastle, Margo and Heather from Brisbane, Murali and Dawn from Sydney, Zigi from Noosa, Gowri (Wendy) from Cooktown, and Maratana arrived on Saturday, from Bellingen. Some of us shared a three-bedroom villa overlooking the resort pool and others stayed at nearby Montego Sands.

During our five night stay we kept pretty much to the I.C.Y.E.R. schedule: *Surya namaskars* and Hatha yoga on the beach at sunrise, pranayama on the poolside lawn mid-morning; lunch followed by Karma yoga and free time 'til 4p.m. For our afternoon practices with Murali we revised some advanced pranayamas and mantra Laya practices using Swamiji's DVD and revisited our Yantra studies. We swam in the pool, enjoyed the hot spa, took long walks along the beach and jointly prepared all our own meals.

The retreat was a great success because we are now well acquainted and able to work as a team using our particular skills. The extra time allowed for the powerful higher practices, was much appreciated and everyone felt refreshed and restored at the end of the retreat. The BreakFree resort proved to be an ideal location with the beach 2 to 3 minutes' walk away, Pacific Fair Shopping Centre 5 to 10minutes away and a Catholic Church just around the corner and so GYA have booked the same place for our retreat next year.



View from our back door



Yoga on the Beach - Wendy & Heather

YOGA SADHANA - Personal experience of Gitananda Yoga

India 1969 -1970 Zigi Georges

Fifty years ago... in New Zealand...life as I understood it, ended for me. Heart ceased beating; brain starved for oxygen. Pronounced clinically dead. Lying in a doctor's surgery, the minutes ticked on 1...2...3... 3.30...4...until suddenly there was breath and oxygen once more surging into the brain. During the 3 to 4 minutes, my consciousness found itself above the scene observing various rescue attempts, before it was drawn to travel through a dark tunnel into a blinding source of light. Through the light I perceived two illuminated figures looming towards me, emanating such Love and Peace that I felt I had at last arrived home. But their smiling heads were shaking, and I heard a voice intoning, "it is not your time yet", and in that instant, I was once more thrown into so-called reality, gasping for breath through a painful, heaving chest.

That was my first experience of anaphylaxis to penicillin. The doctor said I was lucky to be alive, but I did not feel alive, not at all. Some mysterious thread had broken within me, so that whilst I was physically moving around, I had no motivation, no will, to do anything at all. After a month of bed rest, the physical weakness departed, but I still could not find any will for living.

In desperation, I resigned as a Lecturer from Waikato University, cancelled my PhD research scholarship, abandoned my husband and enrolled in a Dip. Librarianship course at Wellington University, where I was offered a position to set up a Library in the Cook Islands, at the end of the Course. This appealed to my humanitarian instincts.

During the following months, I managed this project, but an internal vitality was broken. I kept seeking a solution. In my wanderings, I came upon some ancient yoga books in the depths of Wellington University Library. I read these books with great scepticism, but started some of the practices, breathing, Asanas and so on. After a while I began to experience strange inner phenomena that I could not comprehend. Was I driving myself crazy with all this? The yoga books did stress that a Teacher was needed, but where was I to find one, in Wellington, 50 years ago?

When the student is ready...

Then, one windy, wintry day, whilst walking around the wharf at Wellington, I beheld what seemed like a mirage! Coming towards me was a whirl of blinding orange hue through which appeared a large, amply bearded person clad in orange robes and sandals. I could not believe my eyes. Then came the thought, was this a mirage or a real yoga teacher, or what? The books did say that when a student was ready, the Teacher would appear. Could this be IT? As we drew closer, I summoned up considerable courage and asked this mirage:

"Excuse me, but do you happen to be a yoga teacher?"

"Yes, I am" replied a deep, sonorous voice. Wow, this was for real! Not a mirage! I

continued,

"Could I do yoga with you?"

"Yes, you can!"

"Where?"

"India!" came the reply.

Whoa! I paused. I had never imagined going to India. A few more questions and answers established that I was talking to Dr. Swami Gitananda and that an International Yoga Teacher Training course was starting in Pondicherry, South India, in October 1969. After these few words, we parted. I walked around stunned.

Some weeks later I decided upon a course of action: I cancelled my projected job in the Cook Islands, and prepared to fly to Madras, India, to join the six-month yoga course. So simple! My life was going into the unknown, but I was ecstatic about it. Some inner connection had been made! Fragile, but, Yes – to India! But, but...what if all this was just a figment of my imagination? I had no means of physically contacting this orange robed person. After some agonising, I threw these doubts aside and determined to go to India, no buts or ifs. I distributed all my belongings to worthy causes. I was going to India, no matter what, and I was not coming back. I was going to adopt a yogic life and had no further need for possessions. My path was set, onwards!

Life in India -

Being an utter novice to both yoga and India; the cultural shock that awaited me was beyond my wildest nightmares or my most ineffable dreams. Devastating beauty and utter misery awaited me, in haphazard succession, but often together! I offer this cautionary advice to anyone contemplating a single person trip to India – do thorough research before taking the first step, even in 2019! Although many distressing conditions have ameliorated since 1969, there is still much to consider, i.e., the mode of travel, the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat, the different cultural norms, your own medical conditions, and so on. Armed with cultural knowledge, you will be better prepared than I was to handle the total assault on all the senses upon arrival.

Walking the phalanx of beggars at Madras Airport was my first heart-wrenching challenge, followed by the heart-stopping taxi drive to Pondicherry through the utter traffic chaos. How anyone survived was beyond belief! The taxis mingled with Tata trucks, other cars, rickshaws, bicycles, elephants, bullock carts, dogs, not to mention the variety of colourful people sauntering on the road under the blazing Indian sun.

Arrival at a concrete structure that housed Ananda Ashrama, 1/1 Vazhudavoor Rd, Pondicherry, was a welcome relief from the noise and heat and crowds on Indian streets, even though it was situated next door to an open-air butcher shop! I was shown into a concrete bunk room, with outside floor toilet facilities and a shower with cold water only. Then I was informed that Swami Gitananda was away on business for a week or so, and I was left to my own resources. Hence, I had time to explore the sights and sounds of downtown Pondicherry. I discovered Sri Aurobindo Ashram and other aspiring yogis at the Indian Coffee House. The ocean off the French Quarter was magnificently inviting. Later, I found other beaches that seemed to be used for morning ablutions only.

After witnessing several births and deaths on Pondicherry streets, I acclimatised; I adapted and strolled around with the nonchalance of a native born Indian. Except, I had blond hair and fair skin that marked me as a Caucasian wherever I wandered. This produced many comments, stares, and

some embarrassing situations. I was never alone on Indian streets, even in out of way side-alleys, there were beggars crying “Maa”.

Yoga Ashram Life

Eventually, Swamiji arrived and yoga ashram life began. We had a strong contingent of Americans gathered by Rev. Richard Stair from various corners of Kathmandu in Nepal. There were many Indian males, several Indian females, and various odd bods like myself. Class times were 6am, 9am, 3pm, with rest and Karma Yoga tasks in between, ending with 7pm Satsang, basically a question and answer sessions with Bijans and chanting. Seaside yoga was once a week. Every month started with extensive internal cleansing routines-salt water drinks, enemas and fasts combined with various breathing techniques. The rest of the Course was in line with the” Correspondence Courses in Yoga” as outlined in the **Yoga Samya** book by Dr. Swami Gitananda.

For me, it was fairly easy to go through the Yama and Niyama aspects, followed by Hatha yoga, Raja Yoga and Jnana Yoga. Since I had come to India to specifically understand the inner experiences I had started in Wellington, I soon found myself drawn to Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi. Within 2 weeks of practices, I found myself going into trance like states, experiencing psychic sounds, out of body states, astral travel and other phenomena with increasing frequency. An incredible upsurge of devotion for everyone and everything became part of my daily experience. Swamiji guarded my body during the psychic experiences, but did keep reminding me, and others, not to get caught up in them. I continued on, with ever more pranayamas and visualisations.

It was not until we visited Jnana Ashram in December 1969 at Wadancheri in Kerala that I was led into the deepest meditation that I had yet experienced. Jnana Ashram surroundings conveyed an external sense of space, peace and tranquillity that morphed into inner space and tranquillity. Swami Atmananda’s exposition of Vedanta was a powerful mind tool with which one could detach from outside attractions and observe one’s own thought processes arising and falling, with equanimity.

Back at Ananda Ashrama, Swami entered upon the deeper aspects of Laya Yoga, gave us Sara Kriyas, Jnana Kriyas, Oli Mudras and Bandhas, raising of Kundalini and other aspects of Tantra Yoga. Phew! Very soon I was almost totally lost to the outer world, just continuing the practices day and night. I hardly slept. I did not need much sleep as I had ample energy provided by the various breathing techniques and opening of psychic channels. Day and night I floated on clear silvery waters, washed by warm golden waves, having lost all desire for external distractions.

I was definitely not an accurate recorder of external life in the Ashram during the six months I was there. Others can do that much better than I. Frequently, Swamiji, in a Van, drove us around to various temples where I simply collapsed onto the floors, absorbing all the different vibrations into the very DNA structure of my cells. I was experiencing ecstasy, but people were always rescuing me from odd corners when it was time to move on. Some more grounded moments were spent in the Office, helping Swami with typing up notes and other clerical work.

Then there were the many colourful Indian celebrations we had the honour to attend, with many garlands, loads of food and people always so happily smiling and enjoying life. There was the other

side too when one visited the villagers huddled in soaking huts during the monsoon. But somehow, the most squalid of conditions did not seem to dampen their spirits.

It seemed to me that Swami was bringing yoga to the people, and the people to yoga. The lesson I gathered was that Yoga is a part of life, not just the idea of a hermit isolated in the Himalayas. That too, but it had to be lived. Many ashramites expressed dissatisfaction with ashram maintenance and food, and there was the matter of stolen passports. These were difficulties that took time and energy to resolve. I floated above all of that, only catching occasional glimpses of it.

However, I did have one niggle: Swami was always berating Westerners for every difficulty under the sun. I could not quite swallow that, since it was the Westerners who made up most of the class numbers and who were the mainstay of financially supporting the Ashram. Way back in those years, where would the ashram have been without the support of Westerners? It is pleasing to note in 2019, that the Ashram now encompasses a wide section of the Indian community, both adults and children, in its wide and varied activities. Yoga is big enough for both East and West!

Course Conclusion, April 1970

I had come to India because I had lost some inner momentum, inner will to live. Had I regained it? Well, yes! I had now travelled through many dimensions of existence, had acquired an enormous number of inner experiences, along with a bucket load of techniques for achieving these experiences, and a realisation that to continue further, I would need to leave India. Why?

1. I needed time to assimilate, integrate all the experiences, to understand them in a wider context than just my internal travels. Had I changed? Yes, but how, I needed to find out. The Ashram, at that time, was not conducive to the space and peace I needed. After all, it was a Training School, not a Himalayan retreat cave. Swami agreed.
2. I had arrived in India weighing about 60 kilos of flesh, blood and bone; I was leaving weighing about 45 kilos of bone, zero muscle and very thin skin covering the bones. I was one of those not well adapted to Ashram diet of rice and lentils.
3. Further, unless I was prepared to become a wandering, begging sadhu, I needed money to live, and this was easier for me to acquire in the West, than as a foreigner in India.
4. Finally, I had promised my husband that if he were to come to India, then I would go with him to France. He did arrive during the last month of the 6-month course. However since I did not wish to go through yet another cleansing experience, I left, with the promise to meet him at his parent's place in Basel. I had intended to stay, I still wanted to stay in the India that I felt to be my spiritual home.

I left India at the end of April 1970, armed with a Yoga Teachers Certificate, not anticipating the trials and tribulations I would encounter in my quest for peace, space, greater understanding and integration. But that dear sadhaks... is another story

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A Christmas Story Reprinted from ***The Lotus Newsletter December 2011***

Editor's Note – The following story: ***Teach the Children***, intertwines symbology with the 'old meaning of Christmas'. (Author unknown)

I just finished the household chores for the night and was preparing to go to bed, when I heard a noise in the front of the house. I opened the door to the front room and to my surprise, Santa himself stepped out from behind the Christmas tree. He placed his finger over his mouth so I would not cry out. "What are you doing?" I started to ask. The words choked in my throat, and I saw he had tears in his eyes. His usual jolly manner was gone. Gone was the eager, boisterous character we all know. He then answered me with a simple statement "TEACH THE CHILDREN!"

I was puzzled. What did he mean? He guessed my question, and with one quick movement pulled a miniature toy bag from behind the tree. As I stood puzzled, Santa said "Teach the children! Teach them the old meaning of Christmas. The meaning that now-a-days Christmas has forgotten." Santa then reached in his bag and pulled out a **FIR TREE** and placed it in front of the fireplace. "Teach the children that the pure green colour of the stately fir tree remains green all year round,



representing the everlasting hope of mankind. All the needles point heavenward, making it a symbol of man's thoughts turning toward heaven." He again reached into his bag and pulled out a brilliant **STAR**. "Teach the children that the star was the heavenly sign of promises long ago. God promised a Saviour for the world, and the star was the sign of fulfilment of His promise." He then reached into his bag and pulled out a **CANDLE**. "Teach the children that the candle symbolises that Christ is the light of the world. When we see this great light we are reminded of Jesus who fills our lives with light." Once again he reached into his bag and removed a **WREATH** and placed it on the tree.



"Teach the children that the wreath symbolises the real nature of love. Real love never ceases, like God's love which has no beginning or end." He then pulled from his bag an ornament of **HIMSELF**. "Teach the children that I, Santa Clause symbolise the generosity and kindness we feel during the month of December." He then brought out a **HOLLY LEAF**. "Teach the children that the holly plant represents immortality. It represents the crown of thorns worn by our Saviour. The red holly represents the blood shed by Him." Next he pulled from his bag a **GIFT** and said, "Teach the children that God so loved the world that HE gave us HIS only **SON**... We thank God for His very special gift." "Teach the children that the wise men bowed before the Holy Baby and gave **HIM** gifts of gold,

frankincense and myrrh. We should always give gifts in the same spirit of the wise men." Santa then reached in his bag and pulled out a **SUGAR CANE** and hung it on the tree. "Teach the children that the sugar cane represents the shepherd's crook. The crook on the staff helps to bring back lost sheep to the flock."



He reached in again and pulled out an **ANGEL**. "Teach the children that it was the angels that announced the glorious news of the Saviour's birth. The angels sang 'Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace and good will toward men.'" Suddenly, I heard a soft tinkling sound, and from his bag he pulled out a **BELL**. "Teach the children that as the lost sheep are found by the sound of the bell, it should ring to guide us to God. The bell symbolises guidance and return. It reminds us that we are all precious in the eyes of God."

Santa looked back and was pleased. I saw the twinkle in his eyes as he said: "Remember, teach the children the true meaning of Christmas and do not put me in the centre, for I am but an humble servant of the One that is, and I bow down to worship HIM, our LORD, our GOD."

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FIND PEACE IN YOUR YOGA by Max Storm

One of the magical gifts of yoga
 is that whatever you apply to yourself to improve on in your practice
 will be applicable to the outside world as well.
 So, as you learn to focus your mind in yoga – your focus will improve at work.
 As you become more patient with yourself and others in yoga,
 you will become more patient at home.
 As you become more joyful in yoga you will be more joyful wherever you go.
 Imagine becoming a better person and getting a healthier body as a side effect.
 Remember, if mastering yoga postures were enough to transform us into spiritual masters,
 then people would be flocking to the athletes in Cirque du Soliel to seek spiritual advice.
 The physical asanas alone do not necessarily make us happier,
 more spiritual or more content human beings.
 But when one is inspired by an intent to transform and from this intention we breathe,
 then the mind quietens and the energetic heart centre begins to open.
 When this happens, grace happens – change happens.
 The yoga postures and breath are tools to rebuild ourselves.
 The goal is not to tie ourselves in knots – we are clearly already tied in knots.
 The aim is to untie the knots in our heart.
 The aim is to untie with the ultimate, loving and peaceful power
 within ourselves and the universe.

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Contributions are welcome for our next eNewsletter, have you a favourite practice, a meditation, a recipe, an anecdote, an interesting story or something you could share with us all? Please email your contributions to Margo at margosyoga@hotmail.com for the March 2020 edition.