

# Saraswati River Yoga Newsletter

Editor: Judith Lockard

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## Theme of the Month

Astanga Yoga: The Eight Limbs.

*Only a saint knows a saint. Only a snake knows the leg of another snake*

Tamil proverb

Yoga means union or relationship-The goal of yoga philosophy and yoga practice is to have a personal experience of being one with or of *being* the Highest. Further, the intent is to experience that Oneness in the life in which one is currently embodied.

The Yoga Sutras are the fundamental principles of yoga philosophy as well as a manual for the practice of yoga, as spoken by Patangali in the ( ) century bce. In the second book on practice the first sutra says that the practice of yoga entails the acceptance of pain as the help for purification, the study of spiritual books and the surrender to a supreme being

In his explication of Patanjali's sutras Shri Swami Satchadananda says "The nature of the mind is to run after pleasure. Acceptance of pain and the practice of self-discipline leads to ultimate happiness and a steady and strong mind while interacting in the world. He asks us to imagine that the mind is like a wild horse tied to a chariot, the body is the chariot; the intelligence is the charioteer; the mind is the reins; the horses are the senses; the self; or True Self, is the passenger. If the horses are allowed to gallop without reins and charioteer the journey will not be safe for the passenger. So, although control of the senses and organs bring pain or discomfort in the beginning it eventually ends in happiness. Happiness here is not pleasure or satisfaction but being in a steady, personal experience of being joyfully connected to all that is.

One cannot understand the One that is beyond the mind by merely thinking. Only when you transcend the mind can you understand it. As we hear so often in class; we can hear things, study, use our imagination but nothing can equal experience.

If we remain tied to 'I, me, mine' the ego, the possibility of becoming one with the Highest is limited. Only through surrendering control over everything in our experience can we transcend the image of self that we all cherish. No one

does this willingly or without pain. It cannot be done as a strategy to gain something. Only when the pain of struggling for control has outstripped the imagined pleasure of acquiring it can we actually surrender. Then we are willing to say, from the heart, “Oh all right! I give up! Have it Your way.”

the 2nd Sutra in book 2 The obstacles to samadhi are: **ignorance, egoism, attachment, hatred and clinging to life in the body.**



**Ignorance** is regarding the impermanent as permanent, the impure as pure, the painful as pleasant and the non-self as the Self. Like the frequently used story of the man frightened by what he took to be a snake lurking in a dark corner When it was exposed to the light of wisdom it was revealed as a rope Just so all that we see with our minds and senses in this world, and take to be reality, all that changes, is but a rope perceived as a dangerous snake.

**Ego** as Satchadananda says when we mistake the power that sees (our higher self) with the instrument that sees; the body/mind. The ego is the reflection of the true Self on the mind. The two appear to be the same but one is the original and one is just a reflection.

**Attachment** is forgetting the source of true happiness which is within us and thinking that it comes from something outside of us Aversion is the obverse of this

By the practice of the 8 limbs of yoga impurities dwindle away and there dawns the light of wisdom, leading to discriminative discernment.

**Clinging to the body**-Fear of death is the most intense manifestation of the human experience of being separate from the universe and of confounding the real with the unreal. If we experienced ourselves as One and not separate there could be no fear of losing the identity of being separate-easier said than done, I say!

One way of thinking about the 8 limbs is as steps to taking that leap of faith.

**Yamas**-a moral and ethical code; a guideline for living a life that expresses the relationship of union with all of the universe; non harming, non stealing, truth-telling, continance, non hoarding (or greed)

**Nyamas**-the observances that express the relationship with the highest- purity, contentment, acceptance of but not causing pain, study of spiritual texts and surrender to the highest good

**Asana**-the exercises for being in relationship to one's body

**Pranayama**- the exercises for being in relationship to one's breath

**Pratyahara**-the experience of non-reactivity to the interaction/including repression of reactivity of the senses with the manifest reality

**Dharana**-one-pointed attention-(first step of meditation)

**Dhyana**-meditation

**Samadhi**-experience of being one with the Highest (or everything)

Much of what we do at the center allows us to experience directly the eight limbs and I'm sure over time you have seen incredible benefits from all of these practices. Perhaps one that is less frequently discussed, although it is an inevitable outcome of practicing yoga, is the path to spiritual

liberation. The opposite of liberation could be seen as the attempt to control.

## Control

A friend recently said that the primary issue in life as far as he could figure out was control. At first I resisted this. It seemed too simple or uni-dimensional and perhaps you will find it so. But it has led me to a useful inquiry and to think about the 8 Limbs of Yoga practice and what they provide. As a younger woman, I certainly struggled with controlling the outer circumstances in my life; career, family of origin, husband, and ultimately children. None of my control projects worked terribly well even though I tried ever subtler and more sophisticated strategies; controlling by actively trying not to control, for instance. The upshot was a long, slow and extremely painful lesson in giving up controlling everything outside of myself while maintaining my engagement with the people and circumstances that were around me. Along the way, in spite of me, some wonderful things also happened, none of which had I planned nor would I have seen the value of, without the lessons in giving up control. Many spiritual, intellectual and social factors played a part in this process. At some point along the way I was introduced to yoga philosophy, which reinforced and expanded my ideas about surrender and leading a Spiritually centered life. After the excruciating pain of giving up on protecting and guiding my children and coming face to face with the possibility of the worst that could happen I was able to let go, but only when I saw that my control attempts had become a part of the problem.

Lets look at the 8 limbs and see them as a training syllabus for the spiritual leap of faith to go beyond ego or a sense of oneself as separate from the universe. They are like an owners manual for the mind, body and spirit or Higher Self. Not only do they train us to give up the illusion that we are a separate entity from the manifest reality that

we think of as the universe separate from ourselves, practicing the 8 limbs also enables us to experience the vehicle for that transformation-our body and mind. I used to think I had to transcend the mind-whatever I thought that meant-but going beyond the mind means transcending the limitations of the mind while taking the mind with you.



My son is a skydiver-something which is definitely part of my letting go journey. He has described to me in detail the fairly long and rigorous training program he had to engage in to be certified to solo. When I think about the process of giving up all control, not just of the results of my hopes and fears or the circumstances of my life, but of everything, managing my image in the world, even my image of myself, even the need to keep generating thoughts at all it is breathtaking and it bears a metaphorical resemblance to the leap of faith required to jump out of a plane. The 8 limbs are the steps or training manual for creating the possibility of surrendering control to that degree. Of course they are not just the training they are the experience as well. As we often hear, yoga is self-reflexive; it provides that which is required. i.e. the flexibility, strength and balance to do triangle pose are cultivated through doing triangle pose. When I tune in to my thoughts I find that the vast majority, now that they are no longer predominantly focused on controlling others and outside circumstances, are centered on maintaining my image in the world and even more significantly my image of myself to myself.

Now I've been working on this for quite a while, so many of my youthful illusions about myself have bitten the dust. Long ago I learned never to say, "Well, I'd never stoop *that* low' because sure as god made those little apples I'd find myself doing whatever it was the very next day. I also have come to accept that there is very little that happens in the world that, under the right, or perhaps I should say the wrong, circumstances I am not capable of. So, I've gotten down to the less obvious and perhaps more devious level of image tending. I have an ongoing internal dialogue that is designed, if I am completely objective about it, to maintain a structure that is Judith, a never-ending story whose sub-title would be *This is the kind of person I am, These are the thoughts I have, the things that concern me, the way I AM.*

So what is it or to whom am I telling this story? I believe it is my mind constantly reinforcing its image of itself. And what is it that my mind is so very eager to do or better still to avoid? If I look with clarity at this process it is really that my mind is terrified that if it isn't these characteristics that it has created and labeled ME than it is nothing, amorphous, without substance, merely the site for some electric magnetic events.

Back to the skydiving. The prospect of leaping into that space, of surrendering even for an instant the experience of 'I, me, mine' is so literally terrifying that only a rigorous system of self discipline, serious contemplation of spiritual ideas and a history of working with meditation could possibly prepare one for such a leap into the void.

Lets look at the 8 limbs and see them as this training syllabus for the spiritual leap of faith to go beyond ego or a sense of oneself as separate from the universe They are like an owners manual for the mind, body and spirit or Higher Self. Not only will they train us to give up the illusion that we are a separate entity from the manifest reality that we think of as the universe separate from ourselves, They also enable us to experience the vehicle for that transformation-our body and mind. I used to think I had to transcend

the mind-whatever I thought that meant-but going beyond the mind means transcending the limitations of the mind while taking the mind with you.

To be a bit more concrete, let us return to the metaphor of the skydiver (I do like to talk about my son as you may have noticed). Say that he is going to be a pilot for his own skydiving school as well as a skydiver himself. Not only must he learn to use his body and think differently about the process of stepping out side of the safety of the plane and trusting himself, the parachute and the winds. He also needs to know everything about the way a plane operates and how it interacts with the control tower that gives it permission and direction for flight and to be an expert on weather and flight patterns in the area and the rules of air traffic. In a vaguely similar way the 8 limbs of yoga give us an experience of knowing our bodies, how they work, their strengths and weaknesses, and our minds, its patterns and limitations, and the rules of interacting with ourselves and our environs in a conscious way Combining that with a the practice of meditation we may come to dare to enter the realm of egolessness and give up control.



Asana of the Month:

### Astavakrasana

Astavakra or eight crooks was the name of an ancient sage. He was the preceptor of Sita's father King Janaka of Mithila. After being cursed by his father while he was still in his mother's womb, he was born deformed and bent in eight places. Thus he was named Astavakra. But fear not. Later on his father blessed him and removed the curse, after which he was no longer bent and deformed. So there is hope for the rest of us that we will one day walk right or even

upright again. Astavakrasana is one of those asanas that can bring a sense of humility to even the most experienced yogi. simultaneously It can give the feeling of levitating and dragging the dead weight of our bodies around with us. Unlike the closely related pose of bakasana (crow) where the whole body seems poised as if to spring into flight, astavakrasana has a more cthonic feel. In astavakrasana you can feel very much tied to the earth. The structure of the asana with its relation to bakasana suggests that we should be soaring. And yet there is definitely a feeling that our weight is pulling us down. Yet when mastered, this asana does take on more of the feeling of levitating.

This asana suggest a wonderful metaphor for life. When we are busily engaged in the worldliness of the world but somehow are still called to rise above it to a more spiritual way of living, our bodies can feel like an awkward heavy weight. No matter how much we struggle against it, our attachment to the world will always pull us down. Well, until we have developed the skills to slowly, or quickly, disentangle ourselves from the materiality of our being.

How to practice Astavakrasana.

Many of the warm up asanas for this pose are the same as for konasana.

You could start by sitting as if you were practicing konasan

Next bring the right leg over the right shoulder from behind.

Unlike konasana where the fingertips pointed out place the palms flat with the fingers pointing straight ahead.

Next bring the left leg up so that the left ankle crosses over the top of the right foot.

Flex the right foot to hold the left foot in place.

Bring a slight bend to both of the elbows. Press down into the hands while lifting the seat off the ground. Apply moola and uddhyana bandhas if you know them.

Pitch the shoulders forward until the chest is parallel to the ground.

Straighten the legs keeping the right are caught in a scissor lock.

Gaze forward and breathe.

Bring a slight smile to the face. This will actually help to support the asana and lighten the body.

The Gayle interview! Part II



By Juliette and Holly Glidden

Q How was your life different before yoga?

A. Oh night and day! my life was a struggle! Now I enjoy life.

Q Ok Zen Pop quiz, what was your face before you were born?

A. Huh? What, okay, The Sun!

Q There's a man with his hands and feet bound together hanging onto a tree by his teeth on a branch over a cliff. Then a man comes up and asks him to give a teaching. What would you do if you were the man on the tree?

Q. Don't hesitate. She who hesitates loses!

A. Ok! I would take a risk and give him the teaching!

Q Are there any parts of yoga you find difficult?

A. Well... a regular meditation practice is hard for me. There are phases where I'm committed then when I'm not. Extending my yoga practice into the outside world and being true to the heart of yoga when I'm not in yoga class is a great challenge but one worth having.

Q. I'm glad to see you streamlined the center's boutique. Are there any fun products that you will be adding to the store?

A. I want to add selling Chai and chai masala packets. There's an amazing woman in Princeton who makes great chai masala. And she is putting two kids through college by herself so it would be great for everyone to support her.


Q. Yoga is supposed to transform your life how has it changed yours?

A. I am much happier with myself.

Q. Will you be teaching more classes any time soon?

A. Hmm everyone keeps asking me that...I have a lot to do first. Then I'll see. Not for six months so I can get the center settled and exciting things underway.

Q. I know you are a very good baker. Will you offer any muffins or cookies at the center? I'd come to class more often if there were cookies.

A. I would love to sell my organic chocolate chip cookies but I would have to find out about health laws, because I want to do a juice bar too. 

Q. Are you getting any fan mail yet?

A. I have gotten no fan mail! Can you believe that? This is most disappointing.

Q. Don't worry, it will be coming soon!

Q. Has working here been at all stressful?

A. Yes in a good way. There is satisfaction here.

Q. What is your favorite goddess?

A. Durga

Beauty Contestant pop quiz

Q. If you could change anything in the world what would it be?

A. If I could change anything in the world, it would be that everyone would have beautiful white beaches outside their front door.

Q. What's your idea of a perfect date?

A. Well of course its with me and Jude Law. He was in the movie Cold Mountain. We would make a good meal and eating out by a campfire.

Q. If you were stranded on a deserted Island and you could only take one yoga book and do one yoga practice what would it be?

A. The book would be Light On Yoga and the yoga practice would be Shavasana.

Q. Gayle, thank you very much for your time and for sharing your thoughts and feelings with us and the community. And thank you Brighton for being here too!



## CHAI CHAT

Hello again folks, and much shanti. I hope you are all safe and well. Here's the news that's fit to print...

Hope Blaythorne is again searching for a nanny for her delightful Christjean-Does someone know someone who knows someone who knows someone? (When I grew up we called that Jewish Geography; now it's called networking). Speaking of knowing someone, Gayle Berkery is looking for a very skilled dog trainer. Congratulations to her and wonderful Brighton. At 5 month's he has just graduated from 8-week kindergarten training. His proud momma says that he got through it by the skin of his teeth. Literally! Apparently he kept stealing the other puppies toys. Do dogs get time out?

Alisa Rose and family are off for their annual trip to Florida. Alissa, the way I hear it, I'm not quite sure if this trip is a "fast" ie: short trip, OR if this is a "fast" ie: detox trip?

Jean Gardner will be heading West to visit her sister in California. Surely her sunny disposition will brighten even that Sunshine state.



Gee Annie Schwantes-I missed you in class all those months you were rehearsing and performing. And now that I have the joy of your presence again, I hear you are leaving to perform

in CATS. Purrfect for you but I'm one sad kitty who will miss you.

Cory Nowlin, another proud pup owner is leaving his beloved pet for the first time this Labor Day when he goes to Maine. Apparently he had a heart to heart with his canine friend and explained it has just been too long since he has gone on a bike trek. I am not sure if this is true, but sources say his pup held no sympathy and muttered something like "Tuff".

Denyse Corelli-Nucio is heading to Oregon for her 'family fix'. Gotta say it again Denyse, How'dya do it--- one gorgeous lifestyle and environs to another.

Barbara and Bill Cole-Kiernan also consider themselves fortunate. Spending a month in the Berkshires, Barbara told Gayle, who told me, that she has been having one adventure after another. Apparently she fell in the water laughing so hard when she spotted a sunfish sailing mid-lake with a German Shepherd as second mate. Was it wearing an orange life vest? Now THAT would be funny.

As the old tune goes, see you in September. Meanwhile, whether at home or away, take time to treasure a good friend, a good book and of course, a good cup of chai.

*Chai Chat Lady*



## Conscious Cooking

By Gayle Berkery

Bring this dish to your next barbeque and even the most devout carnivores will be singing the praises of tofu!!!

Grilled Tofu with Sweet Ginger Marinade

- 1 package of firm tofu
- \_ cup soy sauce or tamari
- \_ cup water
- \_ cup dry white wine or mirin
- 1/3 cup sugar
- \_ cup dark sesame oil
- \_ oz. Dried shitake mushrooms (optional)
- 1 \_ tsp. Dry mustard
- 2 tbsp. Grated fresh ginger
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed with the side of a knife

Slice the tofu into slabs 1 inch thick. Place in a colander and drain for 15 minutes. While the tofu is draining, prepare the marinade. Combine all the ingredients in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes.

Place the tofu in a nonreactive pan. Arrange the slices close together in the bottom of the pan or stack in layers if necessary. Pour the hot marinade over the tofu, being sure to cover all tofu with the marinade. Cool, then cover with lid or seal tightly with plastic and refrigerate.

The tofu will hold for a week or two in the refrigerator, as long as it's sitting in the marinade in a well-sealed container.

Tips: Make sure you use firm tofu, it handles easily and holds up well on the grill. For best results, marinate the tofu for a full day before grilling.

## Upcoming Events & Announcements

Check lobby for flyers and details!

Please check the Lost and Found for items left behind.  
All items will be donated to Goodwill on September 15.

There will be a sign-up sheet in the center to gauge what the interest would be for Pre-Natal Yoga, Kids Yoga (2 sessions: ages 8-12 and ages 13-17) and Yoga Classes on Friday night.

Please look for it and sign up if you are interested

**NEW CLASS**  
**Kameshwari Vidya**  
**Thursday at 6:30**  
**CHECK IT OUT!**

**Meditation and Satsang**  
with Kirin Mishra  
*2nd & 4th Thursdays 7:30 – 8:30*

**Kid's Yoga ages 3 -7**  
with Alisa Rose  
Friday 5:00 - 6:00pm

## SRYS 4th Anniversary Party



Nov. 13

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### SARASWATI RIVER YOGA

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