

Sadhaka

The Yoga Mandir Student Newsletter

Editor's message



THE YEAR is already coming to the usual frantic end. We usually struggle to juggle numerous work and family commitments over the Festive season and summer school holidays, in the months ahead.

In January Alan will be conducting another Otford Residential Retreat. It will provide attendees with the unique opportunity to immerse themselves in the practice of Yoga for 5 days.

I gingerly enrolled for my first Otford retreat in 2012, not knowing how I would manage 5 days of intensive Yoga as I was still recovering from a back and hip injury. Until then I had never attended a Yoga retreat of any sort, either.

One of the most common lessons in my Yoga practice is that opinions do not reflect reality, and in this case it turned out once again to be true for me. Not only did I manage to endure 5 days of Yoga practice, I left the retreat invigorated, not depleted! My practice continues to challenge my assumptions and expectations, usually to show me how my mind sets unnecessary barriers that limit my true potential. From this perspective I strongly encourage each and every one of you to make the simple commitment to attend the next retreat, casting aside your pre-conceived apprehensions and expectations – in doing so I think you will find it a more refreshing experience.

In this issue Heike Bingel shares her experience at Otford. She provides several accounts of how the change of pace during the retreat provides the space to contemplate and focus on Yoga practice, both on and off the mat.

Also in this issue, Karla Sperling reiterates how opinions can differ from reality, and how Yoga practice can reconcile these differences, in her article on *malasana*. Finally Shyama Chatterjee reviews *Bringing Yoga to Life* by Donna Farhi, a book that has inspired me for nearly as long as I have been practising Yoga. It provides a very personal and down-to-earth account of how our daily life can be enriched when we integrate our Yoga practice into it.

I plan to be at Otford in January and hope to see you there!

David Leong

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Food for thought

by Heike Bingel

I enjoyed the Yoga Mandir Retreat held at Otford, NSW in January 2014.

Alan Goode conducted the event. For five days we met at set times for *pranayama* and *asana* classes. The retreat centre provided us with wonderful vegetarian food based and prepared on *Ayurvedic* principles.

The luxury of this retreat truly lies in the fact that one can concentrate on Yoga practice and allow oneself to relax into new experiences, because for a limited time we are free from the daily routines and demands that so often determine our life.

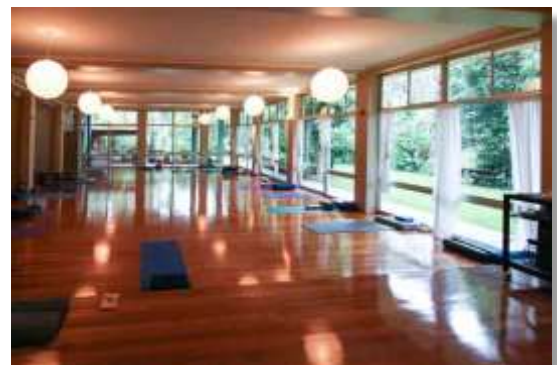
Our training hall was filled with daylight, the air in the valley saturated with humidity and heat. The sound of insect music accompanied us. Cicadas had emerged in thousands from their underground dwellings to release energies in a constant rhythmical chorus. This year's population spike was attributed to the unusually warm winter, which prompted the insects to emerge earlier and in greater numbers than normal.

Preparing myself for class, lying in *supta bad-dhakonasana*, I remember thinking that what we experience and how we interpret and respond to what we see, hear and feel is influenced by the mood with which we enter a given moment, and therefore is subject to change. If my mood changes, the experience may also change. Had I been in an angry or unsettled emotional state, the relentless sound of cicadas could have easily become annoying.

Another unfamiliar sound of grinding steel augmented by the valley walls announced itself - a coal train on its way to Newcastle. More trains travelled through the valley over the following days and their sound waves would be integrated into our routine, and at times not noticed at all.

Our evening Yoga class ended at 6pm. Dinner time was at 6:30pm. A slight growl in my stomach would announce that food was an appreciated diversion. Every day at lunch and dinner time, the scent of cinnamon, star anise, coconut, coriander and turmeric would guide the way to a wholesome eating experience.

But perhaps the more significant experience for me, was removing myself from the 'buy two, get one free' mentality that surrounds and draws us out of ourselves in modern life and moving to-



wards a deeper appreciation and enquiry into my own nature through the practice of Yoga.

Yoga is a patient teacher. The practice of Yoga movements teaches me to pay attention to how and where to place my arms, shoulders, and legs. I try to find that perfect point of balance in *parivrtta ardha chandrasana*. Again and again I am in the pose adjusting until I am more stable. With more stability comes calmer breathing and a moment of focused balance that feels good. I understand that with regular practice this process becomes less difficult.

The retreat has a pleasant intensity. I am removed from daily distractions and engage in disciplined practice of *asana* and *pranayama*. In this form of Yoga practice, the body is our most immediate teacher. To reach balance in *ardha chandrasana*, I go through trial and error. Small careful adjustments are required, some adjustments cannot be forced. My right shoulder feels stiff and sore at times, but has gradually improved in mobility over the last 12 months. Years of neglect cannot be fixed in a day.

Asana practice teaches me to observe, adjust and concentrate. Gradually the repetition of this process seems to trickle into other areas of my existence. Without being caught up in excessive self-observation, I seem to become gentler with myself, less volatile, less defensive. I somehow feel more connected with me.

Heike is a student at Yoga Mandir

The next residential retreat at Otford will be conducted by Alan from 3-8 January 2016. Attendance is open to all students from Foundation practitioner level onwards. Bookings are made online and close on 4 December. See <https://www.yogamandir.com.au/program/january-retreat-nsw> for more information.



Viparyaya, malasana and memories

by Karla Sperling



Karla is an external trainee teacher at Yoga Mandir. She teaches Iyengar Yoga at the Moore Street Yoga Room, Austinmer, NSW.

One of the *asanas* I find most difficult is *malasana*. Until recently I believed that I knew why: extensive past knee injuries prevented me from doing deep knee bends. Then one day, I noticed that I did not have knee pain while doing the *asana*!

Viparyaya means "a mistaken view, which is later observed to be such, after study" (*Light on Yoga*, Glossary p. 464). Realising that I had formed a mistaken view based on past experience led me to ask a new question in my practice. What caused this mistaken view and what is the real reason for my difficulty?

Iyengar (*Light on Life* pp 143-144) distinguishes between two types of memories: those of the mind and those of the intelligence. Memories of the mind are based on past likes, dislikes and desires. They bypass intelligence and generate turbulent consciousness.

I realized that memories of the mind were directing my experience of *malasana*. Memories generated by mind were giving me information about knee injuries, various unpleasant surgical procedures, pain, suffering etc. But these memories were unreliable. None of them had anything to do with *malasana*! Actually, I wasn't really having an experience of *malasana* at all. The preoccupation of mind, with thoughts about my knees, was a distraction.

Iyengar tells us that memory based on intelligence comes from a different place. When the mind approaches intelligence for guidance, the mind goes against the current of memory, allowing the senses to commence an inner journey, making memory subservient to consciousness (*Tree of Yoga* p. 63). Here, memory can be relied upon to provide more accurate information.

Applying the concept of *viparyaya* to my practice of *malasana* is leading me to approach the *asana* in a different way. The knowledge that it's not a knee problem hasn't solved the difficulty. But it's allowed me to make progress in identifying and overcoming real obstacles.

Book review – *Bringing Yoga to Life: the Everyday Practice of Enlightened Living*

by Shyama Chatterjee

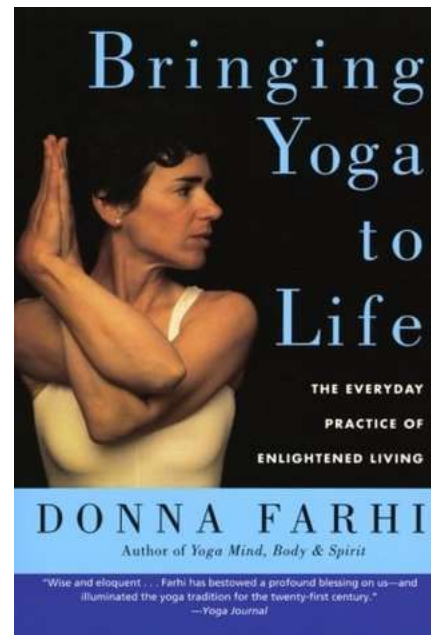
Donna Farhi is an internationally renowned Yoga teacher based in New Zealand who has been teaching Yoga since 1982, and the author of 4 well regarded books, including *Bringing Yoga to Life*. The depth of her knowledge and experience is immediately apparent in this book, yet it is communicated in a refreshingly personal and accessible style. In fact quite early on the author manages to excite the reader with the enormous and life-changing potential which Yoga offers – “to shift seemingly intransigent negative patterns and to awaken the body, mind and heart to other possibilities...” (page 4). One is then intrigued to read on to explore this journey of discovery of Yoga as a life practice.

The book begins by identifying a starting point for this journey, providing some context, and establishing our motivation for practicing Yoga. While we come to Yoga for many different reasons, some more superficial than others, Farhi explains that by clarifying our *intention* we open the way to living our life more joyfully, and ultimately come to recognise the true relationship between our Yoga practice and our life. This book does not provide photos or illustrations depicting how to perform the Yoga postures perfectly, it is a different species of book. What it does provide however in Part 2 is the means of attaining insight and therefore progress towards self-awareness based on the 8 limbs of Ashtanga Yoga as proposed by Patanjali.

Throughout the book Farhi never loses sight of her aim of showing the reader how Yoga practice can be made relevant to daily life, and one way she seeks to achieve this is by applying the 8 limbs of Ashtanga Yoga to everyday life. Their relevance becomes apparent when we recognise that Yoga can go beyond mere physical gymnastics, and show us how to clarify our intention and find our true self, thereby facilitating greater peace and connectedness with others in our life. But the path to enlightened living is not necessarily an easy route for many of us, being potentially fraught with numerous problems and obstacles, which Farhi explores in Part 3.

In all likelihood, most readers will be able to relate to at least some of the physical, mental or emotional challenges that one faces when embarking on this journey of self-discovery and awareness which committing to a regular Yoga and meditation practice is ultimately about. The insights drawn in the book from Farhi's experiences with her students over the years are particularly telling in illustrating how factors such as inertia, skewed perception, self-loathing, deeply entrenched pain, and the impact of strong emotions can become roadblocks. However if we are able to overcome such obstacles and forge ahead with our practice, we are able to develop greater awareness and compassion to both our own blind spots or weaknesses, and those in others.

As a student of Yoga for several years, it was particularly intriguing to approach the practice of Yoga from the perspective of an experienced teacher, and quite an eye opener to understand that even an advanced and accomplished teacher such as Farhi has her own doubts and insecurities which she candidly shares with the reader. I personally found the author's personal anecdotes of her interactions with her students and their dilemmas over the years to be particularly enjoyable. With such far reaching and profound themes explored in great detail, it may be easy to get lost at times, or at first glance to really understand how the individual themes explored fit into the overall larger discourse. I found this easier to do after finishing the book. But in her quest to illustrate



how our Yoga practice can dismantle our false sense of separation from others which lies at the root of much of our suffering, Farhi not only succeeds but also gently convinces the reader to join her in this quest.

Shyama is a student at Yoga Mandir

Community program and announcements

<https://www.Yogamandir.com.au/program/community-program>

Mid-term lecture

On Saturday 14 November, Alan's mid-term lecture is titled **Considering Samyama within our practice**. The last three limbs of Yoga are woven together to form a single thread. Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi, as understood in Iyengar Yoga. The 1-hour talk starts at 6pm in Studio 1.

Social event

The social event this term will be a film featuring an inspiring interview between two of the world's great spiritual masters, the Dalai Lama and BKS Iyengar.

It will take place between 6pm and 8pm on 28 November, in Studio 1. A shared meal will precede the talk. Feel free to bring family members and friends along with a plate of vegetarian food to share with others.

Updates and further details can be found on the website's Social Events page:

<https://www.yogamandir.com.au/program/social-events-program>.

Scholarship program

To date two scholarships have been awarded for students to attend the Otford Retreat. One scholarship has been awarded for a student to attend the 4 day Early Morning Intensive. To donate, apply or find out more, please visit

<https://www.yogamandir.com.au/program/scholarship-program>.

Book reviewers needed

We are hoping to include book reviews in future editions of *Sadhaka*. These will generally be easy reading rather than reference material that will require a long time to digest. Books will be supplied. If you love reading and writing we'd love to have you write a book review; please email sadhaka@yogamandir.com.au if interested.



Hippeastrum in spring

David Leong