

Sadhaka

The Yoga Mandir Student Newsletter

Director's message



WE STEP INTO Term 3 with a new Studio. The original Studio 2 where Yoga Mandir first opened, is about to undergo demolition to make way for re-development at the site. Likewise for adjoining Studio 3. Fortunately we have been able to lease more space immediately beside Studio 1, which has now been transformed into the new Studio 2.

Whilst having enough space to practice in is important, *Sadhaka's* main focus is on the inner aspects of yoga practice. From this perspective, the poses are tools with which we can study and transform our mind. Asana practice has the power to transform our minds from reactive to observational modes, and to allow us to see the limitations of our repetitive habitual tendencies (*samskara*) that blind us from what is really hap-

pening in the moment. The discipline of a regular practice cleanses our minds of our disinclinations.

In this issue Emma Wiadrowski describes her internal journey within led practice classes to illustrate the mental challenges and rewards of asana practice. The insights we learn on the mat then serve to empower us to manage life's ups and downs when we get off the mat. Peta Keaney illustrates how her practice helps her through a 3-day walk that stretches her mind and body outside their usual parameters.

Unfortunately Peta will be leaving the *Sadhaka* editorial team after this issue. She has taken on new responsibilities at The Yoga Centre in Redfern, Sydney, where she also teaches. We thank her for her generous contribution to this newsletter and wish her the very best for the future.

We are pleased to announce that Kylie Elliott has taken over the role of office manager whilst Caroline Plunkett reduces her office responsibilities to focus more on teaching. Caroline will continue to oversee Yoga Mandir's training programs. The role of office manager is invaluable in bringing the community at Yoga Mandir - including staff, teachers, local and distance students and our presence in the broader society. Caroline has played a pivotal role for 2.5 years as office manager and we are grateful for her commitment to Yoga and the Institute.

Alan Goode

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How Yoga Changes Us

by Peta Keaney

The light that yoga sheds on life is something special. It is transformative. It does not just change the way we see things; it transforms the person who sees. It brings knowledge and elevates it to wisdom.

- BKS Iyengar: 'Light on Life' pxxi.

'Yoga has the power to change us'. We hear this a lot. But how does yoga change us? I know yoga makes me feel good and that when I do it I feel 'happy' - but how does this translate into longer term change in the way I live my life?

Recently my husband and I walked the Milford track in New Zealand. Fiordland is directly in line of Antarctic winds and this summer was very cold and wet. We were warned to be prepared for any weather as it is always variable. We were lucky. Day One was fine. We walked 16 kilometres along the banks of a crystal clear mountain-fed river with spectacular mountain glimpses in the background. Day Two was cool. Perfect for climbing. We climbed to the top of the McKinnon pass ascending 700 metres in the morning and descending 900 metres in the afternoon. The ascent was awesome and majestic. We climbed above the tree line into the alpine heights, amongst alpine lilies, alpine daisies, kias (alpine parrots) soaring overhead, freezing clouds sweeping up the mountain side. The views were stunning. Rugged snow-capped mountains rose out of avalanche scarred glacial valleys deep below. It was wild and wonderful. We knew we were alive. The effort was effortless – here were instant rewards. My senses were alert and outward. There was so much to see, hear, smell and feel.

Day Three though was a different matter - 21 kilometres along the valley floor to Milford Sound along monotonous rainforest track. It was raining solidly throughout the morning. My rain jacket had seen better days and I was soon cold and wet. The back pack was heavy on my aching shoulders. My feet hurt. It was an endless trudge. And to make it worse, a sand-fly bite on my wrist was itching like crazy under my rain jacket, sending currents of itch up and down my arm. I was full of grumpy self-talk and self-pity as my aversion to this wretched walk mounted. There was no stunning scenery to capture my attention and take my mind off the effort now. Now I had to manage the effort using my inner resources.

Luckily, that's exactly what yoga builds in us – inner resources. When we go to the mat we practice mental focus and observation. We practice quietening the senses (the lips, the tongue, the eyes, the jaw, the skin on the face, the breath). As we do this mind (*manas*) quietens. The busy mental/emotional chatter stills and mind steps into its role as 'the sixth sense' – taking on its perceptive function. We move from 'thinking, classifying, analysing' to 'feeling and perceiving'. We pay attention. We start to see more clearly what's happening in this moment and the next. With the senses soft, and the breath and the mind calm and quiet, we find we can be present with intensity without being tense; we can experience 'effortless effort'. We practice keeping mind soft and clear when faced with demanding or intense situations (eg when we first attempt a handstand, or push up into a backbend or hold long timings) – so we can act and respond calmly and clearly rather than 'reacting' under the influence of tension and men-



tal/emotional confusion. And the more we practice this on the mat the more this way of behaving becomes second nature to us and spills over into our day to day lives off the mat.

Early in our yoga journey we learn to notice what's happening in the body, what's happening in the breath and the quality of our mental/emotional state. And over time, as we come back again and again to our practice, we notice our broader behavioural tendencies, our likes and dislikes and the way our mental/emotional state impacts our experience. We start to 'see' ourselves better.

Having a regular yoga practice also builds self-discipline. The repeated exercise of will-power in going to the mat builds inner fortitude and self-belief. We become more confident in our ability to stick with what's not always easy, to take on demanding tasks and face fearful situations. This makes us more able to cope with the discomforts and challenges of day to day life because we've practiced dealing with them on the mat.

So here I was on Day 3 of the Milford Track and I had a choice to make. I could give full rein to the rising tide of mental/emotional stress - *'my shoulder can't take much more of this', 'I'm so uncomfortable in these wet clothes', 'I'll never make the 21 kilometres', 'I'm exhausted', 'if I don't scratch that itch I'll go crazy', 'why did we do this stupid walk!'*. Or I could exercise self-discipline, release the mental tension and step back into a quieter, calmer place.

I decided to treat the walk like it was a yoga pose. Once I'd made that decision the rest came easily. As I quietened the senses, softening my face and coming gently into my breath, the mental/emotional clamour stopped and the intensity of the discomforts receded. A deeper level of calm and clarity took over. Each step became doable. This moment was okay, and the next moment was okay. I was able to be in the present even with its discomforts. The itch from the sand fly bite dissolved away because my mind was soft and broad, rather than caught up in the sensation. My energy level improved as I stopped worrying about how I was going to cope with the remaining kilometres. As I moved into my breath and broadened my awareness I was able to connect with the rhythm of my steps. Instead of each step being an effort each step seemed to generate more energy for the next. With the help of a little lunch I powered home over the last 10 kilometres with rhythm, almost enjoyment!

Of course Milford was hardly a life threatening situation – it was just a long walk! But for me it was a good example of the impact of my yoga practice on how I am in life. Because I practice yoga I am gradually changing. I am getting better at noticing my behaviours and tendencies, I get that my mental emotional state influences what I experience, I am more able to quieten *'manas'* and move into a state of mental quiet and greater clarity. I am getting better at 'responding' rather than 'reacting' to difficult situations. Small steps on a long journey!

Peta teaches at The Yoga Centre in Redfern.



Led practice and leading practice

by Emma Wiadrowski



A number of years ago I found myself attending early morning led practice sessions as a prospective leader, wide-eyed and very nervous. The led practice program was just commencing in the Institute, and until that time I had given the prospect of being a leader little thought. While becoming a leader was daunting at first, the program provided ample opportunity to learn from and watch the other leaders, and there was always a 'buddy' in the room providing quiet support. With time the nerves subsided, and being part of the program allowed me to see the value of led practice as both a leader and participant in the room.

Practicing in a led class is very different to the experience of a regular class. With no instruction the room holds a different quality. There is stillness, but not emptiness. Imagine the group balancing and extended in *vrksasana*; or moving, as one, in and out of standing poses. There is a certain energy and a quiet momentum in the group. To an individual this atmosphere can be influential, compelling. Though the space and quietness that a led practice provides can so easily be filled by the reactive and opinionated mind. And for this reason led practice is challenging.

To overcome these aspects of mind, I often set an intention for my practice. Maybe I'd focus on something I was working on in the body at that time or hold a focus on the breath. At times I would aim to touch on what I had recently (re-)discovered in class. Some days all that was evident was that I was not capable of focusing my practice at all. Those sessions dragged. My capacity (or lack of capacity) to apply myself was often very clear.

The challenges of a led practice are opportunities for further self-study and learning. To me it was always very apparent when a leader moved differently to what I was accustomed to, maybe they moved between standing asana faster than I would, or set the pace of the sequence in a different way. At times I would find myself reacting to these differences. It's easy to notice aversion, and while it's not a 'nice' reaction, it always teaches me something about my own habits and tendencies, likes and dislikes.

As a leader you come to know your own habits. In the beginning I looked very closely at my presentation of asana and worked on my capacity to deliver a well-timed sequence. I quickly found the quirks and comforts that I carried with my practice — '*Why didn't I hold Virabhadrasana 2? Did I really need to move mid-pose or look down to check that my back foot was turned in?*' Many of these behaviours would have been unnoticed if it wasn't for leading.

Leading a led practice will very quickly ask that you to bring a greater awareness to your practice of asana. Potentially of even greater value, is being led through a sequence where there is uninterrupted space to observe yourself. While you may not always like what you see, it is a learning opportunity, an opportunity you won't often receive in a class environment full of instruction.

Emma teaches at Yoga Mandir

Book review – *Mindful Yoga, mindful life*

by Martine Peters

I was handed this book and somewhat taken back, the book cover did not appeal and looked clichéd. I was a little hesitant to read it and if it had not been a recommendation the book may never have been selected.

Appearance can mislead and it was a good lesson one should not prejudge the worth or value for it may not reflect what is inside.

Although I at first thought this to be a sit-down story with a cheesy cover, I quickly realised that the author drew on many years of yoga study and presented a modern approach to the classic 8 limbs of Yoga and the 8 fold path of Buddhism.

Charlotte Bell takes us through her journey to mindfulness speaking candidly of her struggles with her own "monkey mind".

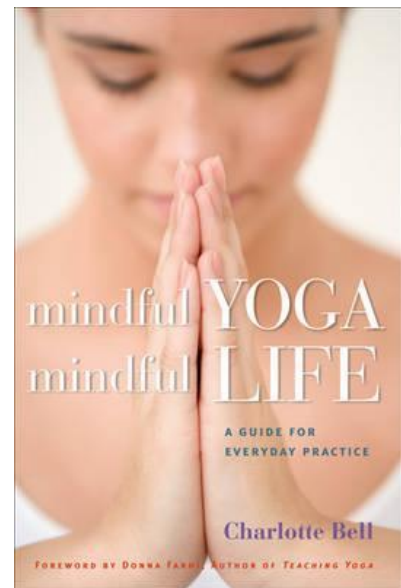
Her book is filled with personal stories of her life on and off the mat, bringing alive her journey, her meditation practice and connection with family.

She offers exercises (Reflections) at the end of each chapter that one can practise, as well as practical advice on how to make stillness an integrated part of your day.

This book kindled aspirations in me to discover a deeper, kinder, more accepting yoga aspirant.

It provided a reminder, in gentle practical ways to bring awareness into my every day, in living greener, in setting goals, finding the extraordinary in the ordinary and being a little more creative.

Maybe I enjoyed this book for her personal melodic writing style, regardless I am thankful I went beyond the cover and found her writing of great value.



Martine teaches at Yoga Mandir

Community program and announcements

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

Mid-term lecture

On Saturday 22 August, Alan's mid-term lecture is titled **Integrating layers of experience**: What is the importance of the Karmandriyas and the Jnandriyas? Why are they essential to practice? The 1-hour talk starts at 6pm in Studio 1.

Social media

Yoga Mandir has recently joined Facebook and Instagram. Like us and get updates.

Social event

The social event this term will be a talk by Alan accompanied by slides reflecting on more than 30 years of attending classes at the Iyengar Institute in Pune. Alan will discuss Iyengar's unique contribution to the field of Yoga.

It will take place between 6pm and 8pm on 5 September, 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.

The Social Events Committee is also seeking extra volunteers for the committee to plan and run social events. Please contact the office to register your interest:

office@yogamandir.com.au.

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.