

Living Yoga Newsletter

January 2005

Vedic Chanting Course

An introductory course has been planned consisting of 4 Monday evenings. This is a great way of really learning some chanting and experiencing what it has to offer without the huge commitment of the foundation course. We will start on Jan 31st, so enroll now and get chanting. Its a great way to drive out the January blues.

BWY Foundation

We have finally scheduled this to begin on 7th March. This course is for any interested students who wish to learn some more. It is certainly not just for those that wish to go on and train as a teacher, but if you do, it is becoming a standard pre-requisite for the British Wheel Diploma course. It will run on Monday evenings about once a fortnight, with 2 additional one-day workshops, lasting a total of about 9 months, with a break in the summer. Please contact us for a brochure if you are interested, and pass this on to anyone else you know. This will be followed by a teacher training course for those that wish to continue.

Pregnancy Update

The ante-natal classes have been developing and will continue this term on Thurs mornings. Gail also offers a "preparing for birth" evening as part of the package involving partners. These have been great fun!

The Yoga of Relationships - a Summer Retreat

Holland House is a lovely retreat centre at Cropthorne near Pershore. This retreat is from Friday evening on the 10th June until Sunday afternoon on the 12th. We shall be looking at Yoga and relationships. One meaning of the word Yoga is quite literally "to link" and thus Yoga can fundamentally be defined in terms of relationship. We will consider our relationship with ourselves, our relationships with others and our relationship to something greater. It is often said that the measure of our Yoga is the quality of our relationships in these 3 areas. Also, in response to requests on the last retreat, we shall be introducing some posture workshop sessions aimed at tuning up some key asana. These shall be light hearted, but should help to work on some aspects of technique.

Monday Masterclasses

The masterclasses were great last term and so we are continuing this term with 3 more. The dates are Monday Jan 17, Feb 21 and Mar 14. Each has a theme and gives an opportunity for a longer practice and some exploration of the theme. This term we will focussing on downward dog, shoulder stand and pratiloma (a pranayama technique and practice concept).

Dave & Gail welcome you back to the New Year of Yoga!



We hope you have had a good Christmas and are looking forward to the New Year and new horizons. We often find that the first few months of the year can be quite difficult as the winter lingers on. In nature, winter is a time of restriction and dormancy. Maybe this is something we might observe also in our own lives by maintaining a new discipline or regime. In Yoga the term tapas means exactly that: some practice, restriction or discipline that helps to purify the system and generate some energy for reflection and growth.

āsana focus: ardha utkatāsana

half squat posture



Some postures seem to be about flexibility, others about letting go, or perhaps a meditative quality. The word utkata means fierce or powerful and this posture requires us to embody that quality of power, or sakti. To stay in this posture with good breathing, or maybe chanting, requires strength, stamina and a sense of resolve. The open chest and upright torso suggests engagement with the world.

This is a great posture, but one that always

brings a groan from most classes. It is not the easiest to hold it is true, as many burning thighs will testify! But this is a relatively safe and accessible posture that develops power and stamina. It also stimulates the system and generates heat in the body (good tapas!). It can be used in sequences with forward bends and full squats, and thus it is very versatile in its application. As a posture to wake you up and get the body going in the morning (in every sense) it is excellent.

As this is an asana that exemplifies strength and stamina it is worth reflecting on these two qualities in our practice. People often associate Yoga with flexibility and whilst it is true that many postures require unfamiliar levels of flexibility, many also demand strength and stamina. The appropriate balance of these three is critical and this should be reflected in practice. The person who is hyper-flexible, but weak, risks serious injury or problems from unstable joints and over-stretched tissue. Equally a person who is muscle bound with limited flexibility may find they also suffer pain and problems from their limited mobility. Back pain may commonly be caused either by muscular weakness and an inability to support the body adequately, or from excessive tightness restricting the body to a poor posture. Stamina is also an important factor in having the ability to cope with the demands of a busy life: the ability to repeat a movement 6 times is often a good test. We all have different body types and natural characteristics, and often have to work at the areas in which we are less favourably blessed. Where are your priorities?

Focus on the Yoga Sutra:

kāyendriyasiddih asuddikṣayāt tapasah

Through certain disciplines and moderation of lifestyle, the removal of impurities allows the body to function more efficiently (YS 2.43)

The concept of tapas is fundamental to the practice of yoga and this sutra indicates the benefits that can result from effective tapas. The sanskrit word tapas quite literally means “to make hot” and this is an important idea: we heat the system up in some way to help eliminate impurities (think of a sauna). Like many ideas in Yoga, this needs to be considered on a number of levels. The most obvious means of tapas is physical: physical postures can generate heat in the body and this helps the elimination process - it is OK to get hot and sweat a bit in Yoga practice, you don't have to automatically throw open the windows!

To consider tapas simply on this level is however, to almost miss the point. Tapas can be any discipline that you observe that generates some energy and promotes cleansing and positive change. Traditionally it is often about setting some boundaries and restricting ourselves in some way. A most basic tapas involves food: giving up coffee, or observing some restriction in diet, such as no wheat, would be simple examples. Or it may be about moderating our lifestyle or activity, or observing a particular practice for a set length of time. Here the tapas may be as much psychological as physical: the mind may bubble and get a bit “hot” as it reacts to the discipline. This really points to the deeper levels of tapas where it provides the fuel for reflection and change.

Through effective and thoughtful tapas in our lives the impurities in the system, both physical, energetic and psychological, may be reduced. The system becomes leaner and more efficient. In this sutra it suggests that we attain more control and resilience in our physical body and our senses become sharper.

Without any quality of tapas in our practice, it is likely to be dull and ineffective, without any bite. At the opposite end of the scale, too much tapas can make us “hot headed” and show itself as agitation or anger. Tapas is not simply about generating energy, it must be tempered with appropriate containment and sensitivity. There are already enough Yoga hotheads out there!