Celebrating a Retreat with Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani

'Yoga, the Antidote to Stress'
28 – 30 March 2014
New Zealand

Dr. Ananda pictured with retreat participants at Tatum Park, Levin, New Zealand.
Namaste. This special edition of The Lotus released with the March 2014 newsletter pays tribute to a get together with Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani 28th – 30th March 2014.

Dr. Ananda arrived in New Zealand on 27th March with great gusto on the first leg of his tour 'down under'. I had the privilege of attending his retreat 'Yoga, the Antidote to Stress' along with fourteen New Zealanders and seven Australian members of the Gitananda Yoga Association of Australia.

The programme was launched at the Lotus Yoga Centre on Friday 28th March at 1.00 p.m. A mihi whakatau (traditional Maori welcome) took place on the front lawn of Whare Ora to welcome Dr. Ananda and guests.

The official opening of the retreat was held in the Sanctuary behind the Centre. Dr. Ananda shared his musical talents, accompanying us on the mridangam drum for mantras and bhajans. The acoustics in the octagonal shaped Sanctuary loaned themselves well to the occasion.

The venue for the three-day retreat was the lovely Training and Conference Centre at Tatum Park, Levin. The dining room was bubbling with enthusiasm that night as twenty-five kindred souls converged to feast. Dr. Ananda blessed the meal and then everyone joined in unison, chanting the “Om Tat Sat Krishna Arpanamastu” mantra, creating a warm sense of togetherness.

The chefs, Chris and Lillian Bramley, deserve special mention for pampering our taste buds with healthy, nutritious food made with such tender care. It was a pure delight to be greeted by them at meal times.

The weekend schedule was busy and comprehensive. Topics covered by Dr. Ananda included an introduction to Yoga, as an Antidote to Stress, Yoga as Life, Chikitsa, Mantra, Tantra and Yantra. These were complemented with practical sessions in jattis, asana, pranayama and deep relaxation. Throughout the weekend, Dr. Ananda expertly referred back to many of the concepts imparted in his opening talk.

The retreat provided a wonderful opportunity to be reunited with Gargi and Max, the newly-wed Ashram couple who are expecting a bala yogi in June. Gargi completed the fortieth annual International Yoga Teacher Training Course at Ananda Ashram in 2009 and is a yogacharini in the truest sense.

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We first met in 2010 while in Brisbane at Dr. Ananda's weekend retreat, which coincidentally, was entitled “Yoga: Moving from Distress to De-stress”.

**Cathryn and Gargi**

It was also a delight being reunited with Australians Julia and Lyla Ballinger, and Kathy O'Sullivan all of whom I'd spent time with at Ananda Ashram in India on two separate occasions in 2011 and 2013.

Highlights of the retreat included learning about the patho physiology and yogic approach to stress. One never tires of listening to Dr. Ananda. His charming way of captivating an audience along with his ability to reinforce the most abstract of concepts in a concrete way with analogies, metaphors and imagery, must surely rank him amongst one of the most talented speakers.

Sunday afternoon came around all too quickly and before we knew it we were gathered for the certification ceremony. It is always an honour to receive Dr. Ananda's blessings. One feels so humble being in the company of such a learned soul. He is undoubtedly an excellent role model of the full potential one can achieve from adhering to yoga as a way of life.

Dr. Ananda deserves a big applause for the delivery of yet another highly successful retreat 'down under'! He shared of himself so freely, showering us with an abundance of joy, love and pearls of wisdom. We were truly nourished on all levels; physical, mental and spiritual.

A big heart-felt 'thanks' is due to Murali and Ann-Maree for their amazing organisational skills in making the retreat happen. Others helped in a myriad of ways to bring it together. Not to mention all those glorious Gitananda members whose presence made it possible.

Following the retreat, some of us had the good fortune of accompanying Dr. Ananda on sightseeing trips to Stonehenge, Hongoeka Marae, Southward Car Museum, Nga Manu Bird Sanctuary and Te Papa. It was a great privilege sharing time with Dr. Ananda in this way. We couldn't have asked for better weather - the powers that be delivered hot sunny days!

All too soon, on the 3rd April, we were waving Dr. Ananda off from Wellington Airport on the next leg of his journey to Adelaide. We are still bathing in the afterglow of Dr. Ananda's visit, treasuring lots of special memories. Page 11 features some photos taken during Dr. Ananda's post retreat outings.
About Dr. Ananda

Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani is the son of the illustrious Yogamaharishi Dr. Swami Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj, one of the greatest yogis to live in the last century and Yogacharini Meenakshi Devi Bhavanani, a renowned writer and yogini.

A blessed tour Down Under

by Dr. Ananda Balayogi Bhavanani

Blessed are those who live a life of Yoga, for they are constantly in a process of conscious evolution, in the now. The potentiality of each and every student manifests in the eyes of their teacher, and those who are blessed to be teachers of this Yoga life, are indeed the most blessed.

When such teachers are blessed with students who love them, the teachings and Yoga; then they are triple blessed and when they can with sakshi bhava (an attitude of passive witnessing) experience the eternal teachings of the universe flow through them, nothing more can be experienced than the greatest cosmic bliss.

Anandam paramanandam satchitanandam!

Every cell of my pancha kosha is recharged fully after this tour 'down under' as all of these quadruple blessings manifested in fullness during the past three weeks with my dearest and most loving Yoga family.

Everything good happens only with the blessings of the Divine, and when Swamiji and Ammaji are there in my heart, mind and soul – what else do I perceive to manifest in my life but love, beauty, grace and joy that had not existed earlier in my consciousness!

Thank you to each and every one of you, my dear kangaroo and kiwi yogic aspirants, who made this such a wonderful learning trip for me.

I have truly begun to realize the vastness of this universe and others and am 'now' perceiving even more clearly so many parts of the universal jigsaw puzzle that were veiled by my ignorance earlier.

May we all grow and glow in Yoga!
Message from Ammaji

Ananda has returned safely from his tour of Australia – New Zealand, all aglow from the love he received and sincere Sadhana he underwent during his three weeks there. As he said, he “caught fire” again and has renewed his energy and his dedication to purpose. I sometimes think sincere students give more to the teacher, than the teacher gives to the student! Good students elicit from the teacher’s soul, all the precious gems he has stored deep in his heart’s treasure chest. Teaching is removing the sparkling gems once more from the locked vault and bringing them into bright sunlight, allowing the light to play with their colour and fill the soul with delight. Hence, the great necessity of teaching – sharing all the precious gems of wisdom one has collected over the lifetime otherwise the teachings become like beautiful, precious gems which lie buried in a dark vault, never to delight human heart and eye.

Ananda has discovered this, and hence, he has stabilized himself in ease as being a great teacher. May we all find that teacher – Guru within and cherish and respect that inner place. Swamiji always said: “I am here not to create disciples, I am here to create Gurus, humans who may be “A light unto themselves as well as a beacon to all seeking souls. Therefore, seek diligently your own salvation. This is your Swadharma.” Perhaps you will relish these thoughts: I hope so – think so – and thus share them with you!

A Fruitful Retreat

By Robyn Moore, NZ

I have been attempting to bottle pears this week, so that in the midwinter, we can unbottle something delicious from our garden, a happy reminder of this summer of abundance. If there was just one thing I could bottle from our weekend in yoga with Dr. Ananda, it is the incredible lightness of being that I was to encounter more than once during our relaxation practices.

For many years, yoga has been a part of my daily life, but I have to admit to only in the past decade, realising the true power of relaxation postures such as savasana (the basic, supine, pose). Savasana at the beginning of your yoga is a powerful way to begin to filter out negative energy and let go the tensions of the day, so you can enjoy more of the clarity of mind, strength, stretch, and peace enabled by your postures. At the end of your practice, relaxation settles body and mind, allowing the healing energy of your yoga postures to flow and be absorbed.

My memorable experience with relaxation came on the third day. We had come to a state of ease, both with our group and with ourselves, through the days of practice in asanas (postures held), pranayamas (breathing practices) - our blissful morning aarthi (chanting) would be something else to bottle - and mudras (gestures promoting coordination of the breath, among other things). One of our final learnings was an introduction to kaya kriya, a dynamic relaxation. Its aim is to create mindful harmony, releasing physical tensions your body is holding. We began with a 6 count breath while lying supine. We moved on to coordinating breath with the movement of our limbs and head. I was to notice the differences in breathing (to lower, mid and upper lung) that the movements brought. It was an unaccustom-
ed feeling of absolute weightlessness in my upper body that I'd like to bottle. It came once we had performed all our dynamic movements and we entered that stillness, that peaceful consciousness that signifies to me the essence of the relaxation posture. Despite having experienced a delicious sense of rest in relaxation before, I had never felt this lightness. For two days after our wonderful weekend, my body was slightly heavy. On the third day, I felt invigorated in both mind and body. I have since incorporated this practice into my relaxation, though not daily. I find it powerful in an altogether different way from savasana.

With gratitude to all involved in bringing Dr. Ananda to our shores. My particular thanks go to Eric, my teacher for 4 years in Classic Yoga, and to Cathryn, who worked tirelessly and always with smiles, to bring us this inspiring and potent event in yoga.

Feedback from Retreat Participants

Challenges always lie in wait when one embarks on a yoga workshop weekend. The programme that Dr. Ananda guided us through was no exception. The challenges given however were tempered with life enhancing insights. Heady stuff but presented by Dr. Ananda with clarity and a logic that resonated. How lovely that was! I am left with much to reflect on and just hope that what I have not been able to retain, will continue to hover in my subconscious ready to access when needed.

Dr. Ananda, in his first session gave a description of our Reptilian, Mammalian and Cortex body systems and of their functions as understood by both scientific research to date and understood from within the yogic framework of knowledge. Two disciplines that are increasingly showing to be complementing one another and enhancing knowledge in important respects. Throughout the sessions which followed, this framework provided a foundation which provided a useful structure for applying the knowledge he shared with us. I found it gave cohesion to all the aspects of yoga he had us consider, practice and reflect upon to enhance our understanding of yoga as an antidote to stress. Dr. Ananda had us resonating with the ahhhs...ooms...eess...ums and ohms of it all! Pranayama, the mudras, the bandhas. Seeking of balance – the simplicity, the complexity of it all, helpfully discussed and practised together.

The sessions were spiced with humour, with memorable anecdotes which I have carried away with me. Anecdotes which could be enjoyed by my grandsons in a yoga session that we shared together when they stayed with me recently.

1. “Do your best, leave the rest.”
2. “It is not a bad thing to be given the odd 'kick' in the backside. That propels you forward. It is the 'kicks' in front that propel you backwards!”
3. A yoga teacher: “I told you not to bite like the snake but I didn't tell you not to hiss!”... i.e. connecting our reptilian actions with the understandings and skills of our mammalian and cortex systems. My grandsons could clearly
understand the connection – action, reaction, responsibility/objectivity (ones ability to respond appropriately). In the overall picture and given yoga understandings, a formula which can effectively be applied as an antidote to stress. Understanding the violence and stress that exists in our society today, (self harm, harm to others), becomes complicated to explain to children but such an example is helpful.

Gathering with fellow yogis and yogins not met before, joining together as one, the sharing of experiences, knowledge and understanding, the gift of Dr. Ananda to guide and enlighten us on the never ending yogic journey of discovery – all components contributing to a valued weekend. Special thanks to those who gave of their time and energy to help prepare and organise this rewarding workshop.

Aum Shantih, **Anne Purchas**, NZ

What I was looking to get out of the retreat came on the Friday night. The rest of the teachings from the wonderful elucid Dr. Ananda, deepened and broadened my understanding of that Friday moment.

Being in a retreat situation with a lot of people you do not know is a prime opportunity to observe yourself; sometimes with judgement, other times at a distance, but always having an opportunity to practice the teachings we were receiving.

At the end of the retreat, I felt fortified on many levels to go back into my routine and keep going forward on the yoga path. Many blessings were received by everyone and that energy resonated around us.

Thank you, **Yolanda Price**, NZ

This was my first yoga retreat and I must admit I was a bit apprehensive as I wasn't sure exactly what to expect. I knew others attending the course had experience in such things and I felt I didn't want to stand out in my lack of knowledge. However, these feelings were quickly put to rest as my co-attendees were lovely caring people who made me feel most welcome.

I had heard so much about Dr. Ananda and what a wonderful person and teacher he was. My expectations were exceeded. He inspired me with his amazing depth of knowledge and ability to put complex concepts into everyday language that was easily understood by a novice like me. What struck me particularly about him was his sense of humour and his loving non-judgemental nature. He shared many wonderful teachings and words of wisdom over the weekend. One that has resonated with me is “Do you best, and leave the rest”.

Thanks to Dr. Ananda and all those involved in bringing him here to the Kapiti Coast. I feel very privileged to have met such an amazing teacher and a wonderful group of people in the yoga family.

**Claire Williams**, NZ
How fortunate we have been to have Dr. Ananda in NZ for the Tatum Park retreat. The opportunity to be taught by one so knowledgeable is a treat indeed. His ability to explain yoga concepts and to correlate them to modern medical science (and vice versa) is amazing. He communicates in such a down-to-earth manner with plenty of humour, so the information is easily absorbed. And to be in his presence and enjoy his warmth and energy is uplifting, especially when combined with the wonderful group of participants who made the weekend such a success.

Thanks to our Aussie mates who made the journey over, thanks to locals who came along (and a special thanks to the organisers). And finally a huge thank you to Dr. Ananda for making time in his very busy schedule to come all the way 'down under' for this retreat.

Selwyn, NZ

Namaste dearest Cathryn,

A few words from mum and me: “A big thank you to our NZ Gitananda family for a top drawer retreat. 'Tis food for the soul being surrounded by such wonderful folk and immersed in the Gitananda teachings. Lyla congratulates you also on the beautiful octagonal space you have created at the Lotus Centre”.

Yours in Yoga, Julia Ballinger, AUS

Dear Cathryn,

Colin and I were very excited to visit your lovely country for the first time, combining the very special weekend with Dr. Ananda and our yoga family with a driving holiday (and yes we had good weather!)

I think we were all sad when the retreat ended and are now looking forward to the next one. Thank you for making us so welcome,

Om Shanti, Col and Louise Sharman, AUS
On my recent visit to Wellington for the yoga retreat with Dr. Ananda at the helm, I wish to say a big thank you to all the New Zealand crew who made this event such a success. Thanks go to Ann-Maree and Cathryn for doing such a wonderful job of organizing the event and ensuring that all went smoothly, to the caterers for the delicious food provided and to the ladies and gents who provided their vehicles to chauffeur the visitors from Australia to and from the different venues.

Dr. Ananda, Murali and I were warmly welcomed on arrival from Sydney by Selwyn and Cathryn who very kindly took us sightseeing to Mt. Victoria lookout where we had all round views of Wellington. The weather was clear, sunny and warm, conducive for a perfect vista, especially of the “lungs of Wellington”.

Mt. Victoria Lookout, Wellington

Onwards to Paraparaumu, we were dropped off at our respective accommodation. It is an ambient little township with long stretches of coastline and empty beaches. I can understand why people love to live there. Selwyn and his lovely wife Claire hosted a superb dinner at their house where we were able to meet some of the New Zealand attendees.

We visited the Lotus Centre, home to Cathryn and Eric, where we were greeted with a traditional Maori welcome which was an experience to behold. Following morning tea, we strolled through the peaceful grounds up to the sanctuary which is exactly that. Set above the trees, we were able to sit in a circle and listen to some wise words from Dr. Ananda. Thank you Cathryn and Eric for providing an insight into the wonderful work you do there for the good of all.

The highlight of course was the retreat at Tatum Park with Dr. Ananda as guest speaker. His words of wisdom will stay with us for a long time and we appreciate how he has given of his precious time to visit us in this part of the world. The feeling left at the end of it all was clarity and the determination to continue along the path of wisdom in search of peace and harmony with all people we come into contact with but more importantly to seek freedom from the long cycle of reincarnations. I don't know whether it was my change of attitude but I found all New Zealanders to be so friendly during my travels in the north island at the end of the retreat. Smiling faces everywhere, what a perfect world it would be if only we remembered.

To end, on behalf of the Australian attendees, we are grateful for having had the opportunity to gather as a Yoga family and it was a pleasure to reunite with members we had previously known and to meet new friends.

Love in Yoga, Jenny Lloyd, AUS

The retreat was a fun weekend full of wonderful new medical information from Dr. Ananda to support the ancient knowledge that Swamiji taught me 30 years ago.

Aum Shantih, Kalyana, NZ

Aum Shantih, Kalyana, NZ
I’m sure most people present at the retreat would agree it was a very special event, even divine. For many of us it was a reunion, meeting up with old yoga friends, maintaining relationships. There were new faces who brought their unique contribution, joining our yoga family. Each time we meet up with Dr. Ananda we see a deeper practical synthesis between yoga knowledge from his lineage, and medical knowledge from his formal training. He makes it relevant to us with his wise and insightful talks, and all the more meaningful because of his self-effacing good humour, fun and laughter.

**Anthony Britton, NZ**

After a hectic two months of settling into a new teaching job, I didn't really have much time to anticipate the forthcoming yoga weekend. During the two weeks preceding the retreat, I had some industrial problems to sort out at school, had to re-apply for my job, had my cat given away by my neighbours to their friend who lives 50 km away, miraculously managed to track him down via Facebook, and when I went to pick him up, had my car crashed into by the unwitting 'catnapper', who subsequently would not admit liability for the damage. In the wake of this, the retreat beckoned as an inviting oasis.

On Thursday evening, we gathered at Selwyn and Claire's beautiful home for a shared meal. The loving atmosphere was indicative of what we were to experience, as we renewed friendships and made new ones. This and the powhiri for Dr. Ananda, Murali and our Australian visitors at the Lotus Yoga Centre the following day was a fitting start to the weekend and reflected the careful planning and dedication of the organising team – Ann-Maree, Cathryn and Selwyn.

Peace, love, serenity – these were the feelings that I experienced over the weekend as we gathered for the various sessions – hatha yoga, relaxation, mantra, tantra, yantra and satsangha. It meant so much that everyone was on the same wave-length, and it was possible to connect with the other participants without even having to try. Dr. Ananda's wisdom and good humour were pervasive and I also had the opportunity to have several enjoyable conversations with him.

It was a few days later when I saw a photo of us all in the Sanctuary at the Lotus Yoga Centre that my heart was filled with love at the sight of our kindred spirits. I was surprised at the depth of my feelings and my experience of 'ananda'. Special thanks to Eric for making this weekend possible through his long association with Ananda Ashram in Pondicherry.

Arohanui **Valerie Andrews, NZ**

Divine Ananda. Thank you for gracing us with your presence on our home ground. We are truly blessed to be the recipients of your teachings.

We eagerly await your next visit, 'down under' in 2017. May the great *rishis* shower you with a multitude of blessings. Aum Shanti, Shanti Aum. Cathryn
Photo Gallery Post Retreat

Stonehenge, Carterton

Hongoeka Marae, Plimmerton.

Southward Car Museum, Paraparaumu.

31st March – 3rd April 2014

Nga Manu Bird Sanctuary, Waikanae.

Te Papa Museum, Wellington.

A view of Wellington from Te Papa Museum.